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The Crucifixion of the Lord in Three Iconographic Poses: Biblical-Patristic Accents Rendered by Artistic Particularities

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Abstract

In the Orthodox Church, the worshipper is spiritually notified of the pictorial attire of the holy place. The faces of the saints, painted according to an extremely precise canonical ordinance, serve as models for the Christian who wishes to continually improve his life, zealously assuming the necessity of spiritual struggle. In the iconographic aspect, a distinct place is occupied by the scenes that reproduce moments from the life of the Saviour. Among these without a doubt, the fullest of drama is the fresco or the icon of the Crucifixion of the Lord. The present study aims to highlight the way in which the iconographer transposes the evangelical truth of the Crucifixion of the Lord in colours and touches - the final, terrible moment of His earthly life. In order to correctly “read” the icon of the Crucifixion, I also used some patristic and hymnographic “keys”, which help the mind and heart to discover the greatness of God’s love, Who “so loved the world that He gave His only Son” (John 3, 16) to sacrifice, in order to heal man from the severe consequences of the adamic fall: evil, disease, and death. I gave some examples by analysing three iconographic variants of the Crucifixion of the Lord, emphasizing their theological and artistic particularities and trying to highlight the message of this icon for the man of the beginning of the third millennium: Christ ascends the Cross without guilt, willingly, to heal us from loneliness, personal anguish, and social dramas, opening the perspective of eternal life to mankind in His light and joy.

Keywords

icon, Crucifixion of the Lord, Holy Fathers, hymnography

I. The Crucifixion of the Lord according to the accounts of the Holy Evangelists

In the stages of Christ's redemptive work, His Crucifixion represents the moment of greatest pain that He suffers for the deliverance of mankind from the punishment of sin. The Holy Evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke and John relate this final moment from the earthly life of Christ.

The road to Golgotha begins with unimaginable humiliations and torments, which the Lord receives after being taken "from Anna to Caiaphas", then from Pilate to King Herod, and again to Pilate. Brought again before Pilate the governor, the latter tries to save Him, presenting the terrible robber Barabbas and Jesus the well maker to the people. Troubled and manipulated by the instigators of the Temple, the crowd chose Barabbas, and they asked Jesus to be crucified (Matt. 27, 22; John 19, 15). To appease the people, Pilate commands that Jesus be severely beaten. The soldiers mock Him: they make Him a crown of thorns, slap Him, clothe Him in purple, proclaiming Him "king of the Jews" (Matt. 27, 27-30). In this case, by "Ecce Hommo", Pilate believed that he would soften the hearts of the people. He presented Him to the crowds, who demanded His crucifixion. St. John recounts Pilate's new dialogue with the Saviour, suggesting that the Roman governor was trying to find a guilt in Christ that would justify, at the very least, His condemnation to death. Pilate was terrified and he could hardly control himself, as the Jews stubbornly repeated their main accusation against Jesus: "He said He is the Son of God". But pressed by the bloodthirsty crowd, Pilate can do nothing! The Jews used a decisive argument: "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend" (John 19, 12). Pilate decides to sentence Him to death.

In connection with Pilate's surrender, St. Luke points out that "they shouted out: Crucify, crucify Him!... But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed" (Luke 23, 21-22). The Lord is beaten, spat upon, mocked, humiliated. St. Mark the Evangelist gives details about these tortures (15, 14-20): "And they struck his head with a reed, and spat upon him, and they knelt down in homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak, and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him". And St. Matthew the Evangelist writes that the soldiers

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“stripped him and put a scarlet robe upon him. And they spat upon him, and took the reed and struck him on the head” (Matt. 27, 26-28. 30).

He followed the road to Golgotha. St. John the Evangelist records: “and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called the place of a skull, which is called in Hebrew Golgotha” (John 19, 17). On the way of the Cross, the soldiers “came upon a man of Cyrene, Simon by name; this man they compelled to carry his cross” (Matt. 27, 32). Also, on the way of the Cross, in the context in which the Lord was lamented by the faithful women of Jerusalem (Luke 23, 27-31) Christian tradition records the presence of a pious woman, Veronica. She comes and wipes Lord’s face with her veil, as it was full of blood and sweat. Thus, the Lord leaves now His icon to the world, not made by human hand (Acheiropoieta), which becomes a model for His icons, which were to be painted later. “St. Veronica’s Veil” is the icon that adorns the top of the royal doors of the churches.

At that time, crucifixion was a deeply degrading way of punishment, taken over by the Romans from the East. Death on the cross was slow and in terrible pain, which the crucified one - because of vinegars given to him - felt in all its horror. Since ancient times, it was considered a “cursed death” (according to Jer. 21,23 and Gal. 3,13), and it was applied to the great evildoers. Specially trained teams of soldiers executed it with maximum brutality. The crucifixion took place on a wooden cross.

The Crucifixion of Christ happened the same way. Jesus was crucified on the Cross by fixation with nails, piercing his hands and feet. Usually the crucified were completely undressed, and their clothes were given to the executioners. The Saviour was stripped naked by the soldiers, and His garments were divided by lot. In the opinion of most of the exegetes, he was left with a scar around his thighs. John 19,23 indicates that there were four soldiers who crucified Him. Pilate’s deeds account that the Saviour was crucified with a crown of thorns on his head. Above the crucified sat a table with his fault written on. Above His head, the Synoptics say it was written, “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews” (Matt. 27,37; Mark 15,26; Luke 23,38), and St. John the Evangelist mentions the inscription: “Jesus the Nazarene, the king of the Jews” (“I.N.R.I.”; John, 19, 19).

When He was crucified there, He was not the only one condemned. There were also two evildoers, who were crucified, one on the right hand and the other on the left. St. John states this: “(...) with him two others(were crucified) one on either side, and Jesus between them” (John 19, 18). St.

Matthew (27, 38), St. Mark (15, 27) and St. Luke (23, 32-33) also note this. The crucifixion took place at the third hour of the day (9.00 a.m.).

St. Luke the Evangelist says that Jesus prayed for His executioners: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23, 34), thus proving His unspeakable, divine love for men. The synoptics also show that many people passed by and blasphemed Him, alluding to the false testimonies brought against Jesus during the trial. Even the chief priests and scribes, still insatiable with the blood and suffering of the Lord, also mocked Him, saying: “He saved others; let Him save himself” (Luke 23, 35), thus denying His power to work miracles. St. Luke shows that only one of the robbers was associated with the blasphemies of the people. The other robber rebuked the first one, saying that they were guilty of the sins they had committed, acknowledging His innocence. Moreover, he acknowledges that Jesus is the Messiah and asks Him to remember him when He comes into His Kingdom. The Saviour answers, showing that He has forgiven him and will receive him into Heaven (Luke 23,43).

St. John the Evangelist (19, 25) relates a special episode. Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the other myrrh-bearers approached the Cross; Saints Matthew and Mark detail that, at first, they looked from afar. But after the crowds have dispersed, they approached the Crucified. Seeing His Mother under the Cross, the Saviour bade her good-bye: “Woman, behold your Son!”; and he says to St. John, “Behold your mother!” Thus, the Lord entrusts His mother to John, the beloved apostle¹.

¹ About this episode, here is a sensitive interpretation: “Here we find another spontaneous indication of the place, not only physically, of John who is (again, not only physically) «right next to» Jesus. At John there is a very precise mention of the four women’s names standing by the Cross, and in a very significant way, they are symmetrical to the four soldiers who shared Jesus’ garments. Four soldiers, four women: Jesus ‘mother, his mother’s sister, Mary, Cleopas’ wife, and Mary Magdalene. Through this symmetry, perhaps we are urged to consider the group of four women as a presence of mercy and pity in relation to the group of four soldiers representing rigor and cruelty. But we say it again, we would be mistaken if we attributed the mentioned structure, perfectly inserted in the life and organicity of John’s text, to a deliberate or abstract ordering intention of the Evangelist. He is fully present in what he sees and in what he says. And now comes that extraordinary moment when, from the height of the cross, Jesus embraces in one and the same look «his mother, and the disciple whom he loved» (19, 26). And he utters a word that represents His ultimate will for the two of them. He tells his mother: «Woman, behold, your son!», then to the disciple: «Behold, your mother!» (19, 26-27). We might immediately think that Jesus, with one last ges-

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The synoptic evangelists specify that from the sixth hour (12:00) it was dark. When it began to light up, the Lord began to cry out: “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” (Mark 15, 34). Those present believed that He was calling Elijah, who according to the Jewish conception was to come before the Messiah. The Saviour then asks for some water: “I thirst”. Saints Matthew, Mark, and John show that someone in the crowd soaked a sponge in vinegar and, placing it on top of a hyssop, gave it to Him. After taking the vinegar, St. John tells us that the Saviour said: “It is finished” (John 19, 30), in the sense that with the crucifixion the salvation of the world was accomplished. St. Luke shows that the Saviour cried out: “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!” (Luke 23, 46), then He bowed his head and “He breathed his last”.

The Holy Gospels also record that the centurion, who was entrusted with the supervision of the Crucifixion of the Saviour, whose name is also known, by tradition - Longinus - seeing His demean our behaviour and post-mortem facts, said: “Truly this was the Son of God” (Matt. 27, 54); or, elsewhere, he said: “Certainly this man was innocent” (Luke 23, 47).

Because Passover was coming and the crucified could no longer remain on the cross, Joseph of Arimathea, “a good and righteous man”, who “had not consented to their purpose and deed”, but “was looking for the kingdom of God” (Luke 23, 51-52) went to Pilate and asked for the body of the Saviour. Pilate could not give him the body without first officially finding Him dead. As the two robbers had not died, the whistles of their feet were crushed, an act that quickly brought them death. The Lord had died, and yet to be convinced of this, one of the soldiers pierced His side with his spear and “at once there came out blood and water” (John 19, 34). Blood and water are the signs of the real death of the Saviour and the foreshadowing of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. This was followed by the descent of the Lord’s body from the Cross, its hasty preparation and burial, stages that conclude the terrible day of the Lord’s Crucifixion.

ture of tenderness toward His mother, wants to provide a protective presence for Him after He has departed: therefore, He entrusts her to the one He loved, whom He knew he was closest to her”. - pr. dr. André SCRIMA, *Comentariu integral la Evanghelia după Ioan*, Humanitas, București, 2008, pp. 369-370.

II. Patristic words about the Crucifixion of the Saviour

The most proper, attentive, precise, and profound interpreters of the Lord's Crucifixion are the Holy Fathers. Over the centuries, they have analysed the spiritual fruits that the Sacrifice of the Lord on the Cross has brought to history and humanity. In the fact of the Crucifixion, the supreme and sacrificial, infinite divine love meets the utmost human wickedness! Through His Crucifixion, the Lord extinguishes wickedness from men. And it begins with His own people, the one whom He taught and healed, but also the one who condemned Him. St. Ephraim shows that all the mockery of the Lord is returned to those who made up the "chosen people". Through inhuman gestures to Jesus, the Jews lose this divine "choice", becoming the nation of "serpents and vipers" (Matt. 23,33), as the Lord had prophesied of them not long before. In connection with the humiliating manner in which the sentence of the crucifixion of the Lord was put into practice, St. John Chrysostom points out that for the elders of the Temple and for the crowd thirsty of blood a mere raising of a man on the cross was not enough (as they saw and perceived Christ) already crushed by beatings and the burden of carrying the wood on the road to Calvary. They wanted more: a long, gloomy and frightening spectacle that would satisfy their bloodlust. It was, in fact, the spiritual drama of Jesus' contemporaries, which also illustrated the primitivism of society and the moral decay in which the world found itself during the Lord's earthly life. St. John writes:

“when they had stripped Him, they took His garments, and sat down and watched Him, when He should die. And they divide His garments among them, which sort of thing is done in the case of very vile and abject criminals, and such as have no one belonging to them, and are in utter desolation. They parted the garments, by which such great miracles were done. But they wrought none now, Christ restraining His unspeakable power. And this was no small addition of insult. For as to one base and abject, as I said, and the vilest of all men; so do they dare to do all things. To the thieves at any rate they did nothing of the kind,

but to Christ they dare it all. And they crucified Him in the midst of them, that He might share in their reputation².

Moreover, St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the general psychotic state in which the crowd was. To increase the “delight” of the crowd, the executioners exaggerate so much, as in no other case (or extremely rarely!) did they do it. Beaten, crucified, robbed, Christ - they thought! - was not punished enough. For this reason, in the state of deep physical pain in which He was, the Lord must endure the last forms of extreme wickedness, which the surrounding crowd - among whom were some who had been counselled, comforted, encouraged, and even healed by Him!!!- throws them at him, full of hatred. St. John thus describes that picture:

“But nevertheless not even here does their contumely stop, but after having stripped and crucified Him, and offered Him vinegar, they proceeded still further, and beholding Him impaled upon the cross, they revile Him, both they themselves and the passers-by; and this was more grievous than all, that on the charge of being an impostor and deceiver He suffered these things, and as a boaster, and vainly pretending what He said. Therefore, they both crucified Him publicly, that they might make a show of it in the sight of all; and therefore, also they did it by the hands of the soldiers, that these things being perpetrated even by a public tribunal, the insult might be the greater”³.

However, the Saviour does not react as the crucified always did. He does not shout at those around him, he does not offend anyone, he does not accuse anyone of anything. He does not show injustice, although he lives the supreme injustice! His attitude was completely taken over by the thousands of martyrs who followed His death. Nor have they ever offended anyone, although martyrologies record the unimaginable torments they have been subjected to because they worshiped their True God. To this wise and holy attitude, we, the Christians of today, are also called by the speech of Saint John Chrysostom, who teaches so:

² Sfântul IOAN GURĂ DE AUR , *Scrieri. Partea a III-a: Omilii la Matei*, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 23, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1994, p. 974.

³ Sfântul IOAN GURĂ DE AUR , *Omilii la Matei*, p. 975.

“But do thou, O man, when you hear these things, and see your Lord bound and led about, deem present things to be naught. For how can it be otherwise than strange, if Christ bore such things for your sake, and you often cannot endure even words? He is spit upon, and do you deck yourself with garments and rings, and, if you gain not good report from all, think life unbearable? He is insulted, bears mocking, and scornful blows upon the cheek; and do you wish everywhere to be honoured, and do you not bear the reproaching of Christ? Do you not hear Paul saying, Be imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ? 1 Corinthians 11,1 When therefore any one makes a jest of you, remember your Lord, that in mockery they bowed the knee before Him, and worried Him both by words and deeds, and treated Him with much irony; but He not only did not defend Himself, but even repaid them with the contraries, with mildness and gentleness. Him now let us emulate; so shall we be enabled even to be delivered from all insult. For it is not the insulter that gives effect to acts of insult, and makes them biting, but he who is little of soul, and is pained by them. If you are not pained, you have not been insulted; for the suffering from injuries depends not on those who inflict, but on those who undergo them. Why do you grieve at all? If a man has insulted you unjustly, in this case surely you ought not to grieve at all, but to pity him; if justly, much more ought thou to keep quiet”⁴.

Regardless of the age in which they live, Christians are called to apply these parables of living the ascension through humility in their lives, according to their spiritual measure, of which the Saviour spoke in the parable of the publican and the Pharisee (Luke 14, 11; Luke 18, 14).

St. Ephraim the Syrian also interprets the deep mystical meaning of the wood of the Cross, resembling the “green wood” of the divine nature of the Saviour Christ:

“Lord also said: «For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry? » (Luke 23, 31). He likens to green

⁴ Sfântul IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Omiliile la Evanghelia după Ioan*, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești* (serie nouă), vol. 18, Basilica, București, 2019, pp. 396-397.

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wood His divinity, and to dry wood those who have received His gifts. The green wood bears fruit, this word being a witness: « for which of these do you stone me? (John 10, 32). If I suffer so much, though you have not found sin in Me, who among you will see Me as a sinner? (John 8, 46) and invent a pretext to get Me, the more you will not suffer yourself! Or by the green wood he designates Himself because of the miracles He did, and the dry wood names the righteous without virtue. They ate the fruit of this green wood and rejoiced under its foliage; after which they hated him and destroyed him. So, what will he do with the dry wood, which has not even a bud, that is, the simple righteous who do no miracles?”⁵.

The “green wood” is the Lord Himself, Who makes “the dry wood of the cross” fruitful. He gives it the sap of life, and thus the Cross becomes Holy and life-giving. It becomes a repellent of evil, death, and the devil. From instrument of torture, the Holy Cross carried by Christ to Golgotha becomes the Altar on which the Lord sacrifices himself, “for us and for our salvation” as we confess in the Creed.

Crucified on the Cross, the Lord not only has no primitive human reactions but miraculously pulls the worst of the wicked out of the boiling of general hatred. It is about the thief who glimpses in Him the One Who can forgive and rehabilitate him, even in the last moment of life. It is the thief who asks the Saviour to remember and forgive him (Luke 23, 42). The Lord takes with Him in Heaven the one who - until then - had been worthy of the deepest abysses of hell and gives him the heights of Heaven; He reopens the Heaven to people with a thief, a “human key” suitable for the door guarded until then by cherubs with fluttering swords, since the expulsion of Adam from Heaven. Saint Theophilact of Bulgaria urges Christians to think deeply about it:

“And you, for this, marvel! For as a victorious king, returning from victory, brings the best of the prey things, so the Lord: plundering the devil’s best vessel, he brings him with Himself, returning to the first homeland of man - Heaven. For not only

⁵ Sfântul EFREM SIRUL, *Imnele Păresimilor, Azimelor, Răstignirii și Învierii*, Deisis, Sibiu, 1999, p. 76.

He who was God was in heaven, but He who took the speaking and thinking human soul, and was with the mind in Heaven, and He descended in Hell with the soul; and by saving the thief he showed what he had said before: that after he had bound the strong, he would seize his vessels”⁶.

The Lord impoverishes the devil with a soul that was doomed to hell because of the iniquities committed in life. He wins the thief for Heaven, who repented of his evil deeds and thus shows that salvation is possible for any sinner who renounces his sin and returns to God.

The apotheotic moment of Christ’s bodily death is foretold by His words, which come in a crescendo that creates a heavy tension. His cries, full of the pain of the body tormented by physical blows and the pain of the soul torn by the wickedness of His sons, uttered in the ancient Hebrew language, were not understood by those present. Saint Theophilact writes about this frightening moment:

“And he uttered the prophetic word in the Hebrew language, «Eli, Eli, lama sabahtani», to show that He does not oppose the Old Scripture. And what he says «why hast thou forsaken me? » (Psalm 21,1), he says it to show that He was Man indeed, and not an imagination, because man naturally longs and sighs for life, being a lover of life. So, as He shuddered and grieved before the Cross, showing the fear that is naturally in us, so He now says «why hast thou forsaken me? », showing our natural love of life, because He was truly Man and in all things like us, except sin. And some understand these words: that the Saviour, as if imagining the Jewish people, says: « Why have you forsaken, O Father, the people of the Jews, to commit so great a sin and to perish? ». And the Saviour says this as one who was of the Jews - «Why hast thou forsaken me? », meaning «Why have you left my nation, my people as to make so much evil?». And not understanding what He said, because they were simple and unlearned about the prophecies, the people thought that he was

⁶ Sfântul TEOFILACT AL BULGARIEI , *Tâlcuire la Evanghelia de la Luca*, Pelerinul Român, Oradea, 1999, p. 219.

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calling Elijah, for not all the Jews knew the prophecies, as even now, perhaps, not all Christians know the Gospels. And he gave Him vinegar, that he might die before the prophet Elijah came to help him. For this the others say, «Let us see if Elijah comes to save Him. » that is, «do not cause Him to die, so we may learn if Elijah helped Him»⁷.

Incomprehensible and tempting, those around them are indifferent to Christ's death. But, through divine economy, the moment when the Lord gives His spirit is accompanied by completely unusual powerful celestial and earthly phenomena. Those who had asked the Lord for a miracle now have several miracles, of which the Synoptic Holy Evangelists relate in detail (Matthew 27, 51-53, Mark 15, 38, Luke 23, 44-46).

III. Hymnographic expressions about the Lord's Crucifixion

This most holy, great and unique event in the history of humanity salvation is commemorated annually during the Holy Week, also called "Holy Passion", on "Good Friday", and every week of the year, on Friday. Good Friday is a clear reminder of what happened about two thousand years ago, near Jerusalem, on the hill called Golgotha: the bodily crucifixion of the Son of God Who became man "for us and for our salvation", Who brought us the "good news", the Gospel, having at its core the teaching necessary to obtain salvation. "Good Friday" is the holy day, in which the whole of Christendom celebrates

“the holy, saving, and awesome Passion of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ. For us he willingly endured the spitting, the slapping, the humiliations, the insults, the mocking, the purple robe, the reed, the sponge, the vinegar, the nails, the spear, and above all the Cross and death”, as the Synaxarion of the day mentions⁸.

⁷ Sfântul TEOFILACT AL BULGARIEI , *Tâlcuirea Sfintei Evanghelii de la Matei*, Sofia, Bucureşti, 2002, p. 462.

⁸ *Triodul*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, Bucureşti, 2010, p. 615.

A first hymnographic testimony, which presents the series of the Passion of the Lord, quasi-historically, but also ecclesiastically, with some of their meanings, is the “Synaxarion” from “the Holy and Great Friday”. It begins with the scenes of bringing Jesus to the bishops Anna and Caiaphas, continuing with His confrontations with the procurator Pontius Pilate and describing the beatings and blasphemies brought to Jesus in detail, the way of the Cross and the Crucifixion. The “Synaxarion” is a historical-hymnographic document of the 13th-14th century, important for its antiquity, for the authorship of the author (Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos) and, especially, for the concordance of the account with the Holy Gospels. A first example of what the Holy Gospels record (John 19, 34-35) is enlightening in this regard:

“One of the soldiers, to please the ungrateful Jews, stretched out his spear and thrust Christ into the right bank, and immediately blood and water came out; water to see that He was Man, blood to see that He was above man. Or another explanation: blood because of communion with the divine Sacraments, and water because of Baptism”⁹.

One of the most beautiful and complete “decipherments” of some mystical meanings related to the moment of the Crucifixion of the Lord is also found in the “Synaxarion of the Holy and Great Friday”:

“It must be known that the Lord was crucified on the sixth day of the week, that is, on Friday, for the reason that at Creation man was made on the sixth day. He was crucified at the sixth hour of the day, because at this hour, as they say, Adam stretched out his hands and took fruit from the forbidden tree and died. For this, the man had to be recreated at the same time he was crushed. He was crucified in the garden, because Adam also broke the commandment in the garden of Heaven. The bitter drink that Christ tasted foreshadowed Adam’s eating. The slaps showed our release. Spitting and dishonest behaviour with Him showed our honour. The crown of thorns, the removal of the curse, the purple cloak, the royal clothing, instead of the leather

⁹ *Triodul*, p. 617.

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clothes. The nails, the complete stillness of our sin. The cross, the tree of Heaven. The impaled rib foreshadowed Adam's rib from which Eve was made, through which came the breaking of the command. The spear shows that it removes the sword of fire from me. Water from the rib is the icon of Baptism. Blood and reeds show us that Christ gave us the old homeland, in red letters."¹⁰

Although it is a developed allegory, this text brings clarifications regarding the theological-mystical meaning of the great act of Crucifixion. Here, on the Cross, the Sacrifice takes place, and man and the world are completely changed. Speaking of these mysteries, Father Stăniloae called the act of redemption performed by the Saviour a true re-creation of the world through grace.

From the many hymn texts written by the great holy poets of the Church, in honour of the Saviour's Sacrifice on the Cross, we have selected a few from several worship books. The troparion on the fourth tone testifies the incomprehensible humility of the Lord's mind and the cosmic and eternal value of His Sacrifice: "Thou hast redeemed us from the curse of the Law by thy precious blood. Nailed to the Cross, and pierced by the spear, thou hast produced immortality in abundance for mankind, O our Savior, glory to thee!"¹¹. The text is also called "The Troparion of Proskomedie", because it opens the order of preparing the Holy Gifts for the Holy Liturgy - Proskomedie¹².

The following verse is illustrative of the way in which the Lord was judged and unjustly condemned: "The unjust judges have already dipped their pens in ink, and Jesus is sentenced and condemned to be crucified.

¹⁰ *Triodul*, p. 617.

¹¹ *Triodul*, p. 620.

¹² *Liturghier*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2012, p. 117. See a detailed analysis of Proskomedie at: pr. prof. dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Spiritualitate și comuniune în Liturgia ortodoxă*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2004, pp. 176-215, pr. prof. dr. Petre VINȚILESCU, *Liturghierul explicat*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1972, pp. 114-139, pr. prof. dr. Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica specială pentru Institutetele teologice*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1985, pp. 250-258, Jean-Claude LARCHET, *Viața liturgică*, Doxologia, Iași, 2017, pp. 255-320, pr. dr. Lucian PETROAIA, *Liturghierul, tezaur de cultură și spiritualitate ortodoxă. Studiu asupra edițiilor în limba română (teză de doctorat)*, Editura Arhiepiscopiei Dunării de Jos, Galați, 2014, pp. 244-271.

The creation suffers seeing the Lord on the Cross. O Good Lord, who suffered in the nature of the flesh for my sake, glory to thee!”¹³. The text states that the fruits of the Lord’s Sacrifice are given to us humans, He suffers that we may no longer suffer sickness and death. About the way Christ assumes the sufferings unimaginable even for the heavenly powers, St. Roman the Melodists sings:

“Giving salvation to the humble and carrying His cross on his shoulders, as a trophy of victory, He went out to be crucified and to crucify the one who hurt us. Thus, He filled all that was useful to us and ran voluntarily to death and gave his face to spits that the seraphim do not bear to look at, for they cover their faces with wings. Contemptuous of shame, he wanted to put on a disgraceful garment for Adam to rejoice”¹⁴.

The New Adam “rejoices” and restores the Old Adam. The work of man’s salvation, so profound, real and wonderful, is accomplished in the very body of the Lord, in which the “first fruits” of human nature are assumed, which He took fully through the Incarnation and Birth of the Blessed Virgin. The heavenly powers also tremble at this mystery of salvation.

The hymnographer sings about the Holy Cross and its role in the work of salvation:

a) “O Christ our God, Who for the common resurrection of the human race didst accept voluntary crucifixion, and by the pen of the Cross didst stain Thy fingers with blood as with ink of royal purple, and in Thy love for mankind didst as King affix Thy signature to the document of our remission: Disdain us not who are in distress and again are far from Thee, but have pity upon Thy people who find themselves in evil circumstances, O Long-suffering One. Arise Thou, and do battle with those who fight against us, in that Thou art almighty”¹⁵.

¹³ *Triodul*, p. 620.

¹⁴ Sfântul ROMAN MELODUL, “Imnul Pătimirii Mântuitorului”, in: *Imnele Pocăinței*, Trisaghion, Iași, 2006, p. 165.

¹⁵ *Mineiul pe septembrie*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2003, “...And now, at Praises” - day 13, p. 201.

b) “The length and height of the Cross is equal to heaven! For it sanctifieth all things with grace divine. In it are the barbarian nations vanquished. In it are the scepters of kings made firm. O divine ladder, whereby we ascend to the heavens, exalting Christ the Lord in hymns!”¹⁶.

Through His Passion, the Saviour fully identifies himself with the Cross¹⁷, which he assumes and exchanges from the weapon of His torturers, in His sacrificial altar, in the holy “column” which unites heaven and earth, and in the weapon with which Christians fight against the devil.

The culminating moment of the Crucifixion, liturgically evoked on Holy Thursday, in the “The Holy Passions Gospels” is illustrated by a text of great theological synthesis:

“Today he who hung the earth on the waters is hung on the tree. The King of Angels is arrayed with a crown of thorns. He who dressed the heavens with clouds is dressed with a false purple. He who in Jordan set Adam free, received slaps. The bridegroom of the Church is transfixed with nails. The son of the Virgin is pierced with a spear. We fall down before thy passion, O Christ. Show us thy glorious resurrection!”¹⁸.

This text is the work of St. Joseph the “songwriter” or – according to others - of St. Cosmas the Monk¹⁹. It is sung after the reading of the Fifth Gospel, when the Holy Cross is removed from the Altar and placed in the middle of the church, for the worship of the faithful.

About the sufferings on the Cross and the terrible humiliations endured by the Saviour, Saint Roman the Melodist writes again:

“They gave vinegar to the Source of the sweetest, they also gave gall to the One who rained manna in the wilderness and water from the stone sprang to them. The one who with the reed

¹⁶ *Mineiul pe septembrie*, “Stichera at Praises” - day 14, p. 216.

¹⁷ Pr. lect. dr. Lucian FARCAȘIU, *Teologia inmogației praznicelor împărătești ale Mântuitorului Iisus Hristos. Studiu liturgic-istoric*, Editura Universității “Aurel Vlaicu”, Arad, 2012, p. 387.

¹⁸ *Triodul*, p. 612.

¹⁹ Pr. prof. dr. Petre VÎNȚILESCU, *Despre poezia inmogației din cărțile de ritual și cântare bisericească*, Partener, Galați, 2006, pp. 269 and 299-300.

was beaten over the head, with the reed signed the expulsion of the opponents. Naked on the cross, he laid bare his enemies to life, mocking and laughing at them with the dead and the living together. He was taken down from the cross, wrapped in a shroud, and entrusted to the tomb, so that Adam might rejoice”²⁰.

Here the type- anti-type game is well deciphered: the bitter water from Marah (Exodus 15, 23-25), which the ancient Jews always drank of and thirsted for, and Christ, “the living water” (John 4, 1-30), Who brings eternal life to those who drink from Him, the Source of eternal life.

The tender and painful dialogue between the Blessed Mother and her beloved Son, when He was on the Cross, is best highlighted in the text of “The Lord’s Lamentations” in verses like this: “Seeing Thee, O Word, pierced with nails upon the Cross, Thy Mother was wounded in her soul with the nails and arrows of bitter grief”²¹ or this one: “O, My God and Word, my Joy, how shall I endure thy three days in the tomb? Now is my heart thorn in pieces by a mother’s grief!”²². We know very little detail about this dialogue from the brief accounts of St. John the Evangelist (19, 25-27). Rather, this dialogue - really impossible in the conditions of the crucifixion - was carried by the Lord, with His Mother, on the wave of the heart and a heart-breaking pain of the Son - because His Mother was forced to witness those atrocities and of the Mother - who could do nothing to save his Son²³.

About the fruits of the Sacrifice of the Lord on the Cross, the hymnography is full of theological expressions of great beauty, from which we have selected two verses:

a) “You announced the glad tidings of peace, and proclaimed deliverance to the captives by Your Cross, O my Saviour. By Your rising You put the one who held them to shame, showing him to be poor and naked”²⁴;

²⁰ Sfântul ROMAN MELODUL, “Imnul Pătimirii Mântuitorului”, p. 165.

²¹ *Triodul*, p. 658.

²² *Triodul*, p. 655.

²³ About the text of “The Lord’s Lamentations” and, in particular about this dialogue between Mother and Son, I resorted to the study of the undersigned, pr. lect. dr. Lucian PETROAIA, “«Les hymnes des stances»: références historiques, coordonnées théologiques et beautés hymnographiques”, in: *Teologia*, 81 (4/2019), pp. 123-141.

²⁴ *Octoih*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2003: Sunday, Tone1, First Canon, Ode 5, stichera 2.

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b) “The tyranny of death has been condemned through the Tree of the Cross; by Your condemnation, O Lord, to an unjust death. Thus, the prince of darkness lost the battle and has justly been cast out”²⁵.

According to the hymnographer, these fruits of the Lord’s Sacrifice and Resurrection are: overcoming hell, shaming the demons, killing death, delivering those who have fallen asleep long ago and kept in the depths, healing people of fear and filling them with the glory and power of the Resurrection.

IV. The Crucifixion of the Lord in three iconographic poses

This part of the present study aims to show in practice how the Orthodox icon of the Crucifixion of the Lord succeeded in synthesizing the evangelical truth of the event itself. Also, how it caught many of the patristic and hymnographic expressions related to this moment of the Redemption work performed by the Lord. It also shows how it has the capacity to amplify in the worshiper’s soul the spiritual state of adoration of the Son of God Who sacrifices himself for us with his body. I chose this approach, as the guidelines of the iconographic “canon” regarding the painting of the Crucifixion of the Lord scene from the Interpretation, are quite brief²⁶. To fully illustrate this major concern that iconographers have had over the centuries in connection with the icon of the Crucifixion, I will attempt a brief theological analysis of three Byzantine icons that have served as a model for many generations of Church painters.

IV. 1. “The Crucifixion of the Lord” from the Monastery of Daphni (Athens, 11th century)

Daphni Monastery was built in the 6th century on the site of the former temple of Apollo near Athens. Placed under the protection of the Theotokos and dedicated to the “Assumption”, the existing monastery church dates back to the Komnenos dynasty (11th century) - the period of maximum flowering of Byzantine art. However, it underwent several subsequent

²⁵ *Octoih*, Sunday, Tone 8, First Canon, Ode1, stichera 1.

²⁶ DIONISIE DIN FURNA, *Erminia picturii bizantine*, Sofia, București, 2000, pp. 115-116.

repairs and additions, until its complete reconstruction and restoration, which began after 1880 and lasted for several decades. The interior is embellished with highly refined mosaics by Byzantine craftsmen. Due to its invaluable patrimonial-spiritual value, since 1990 the Daphni Monastery has been part of the UNESCO patrimony.

The “Crucifixion” scene in this monastery, made in the mosaic technique, has some particularities. The whole scene is artistically developed on a golden background. This background fits into the overall note of the interior, but also creates a sweetening effect on the viewer. The body of the Saviour has a certain grace: it is elongated and beautifully rendered and has no traces of blows. The face of the Crucified is quiet, gentle, and fearless. Only His well-defined circles - a sign that the iconographer was a monk, living in the “agrypnia” of the Byzantine monasteries of the time - show something of the suffering He accepts for us. “Blood and water” gush forth from the Saviour’s rib, describing a wide arch. According to the word of St. John Chrysostom quoted above, these two elements foreshadow the Sacrament of Baptism and the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Streams of blood flow from the Lord’s feet, descending on Adam’s head, the only “unstudied” element - even grotesquely rendered - in the whole scene.

The Theotokosis dressed in blue-purple, the edges of her garment being bordered with gold. This garment also emphasizes her royal lineage (being of the tribe of David), but also her spiritual imperiality, as Mother of the Son of God by body, Who becomes man through her. Her face, haloed by grace, bears the seal of a noble, controlled, assumed pain. In her left hand, which is approaching her face, she holds a small mahram, which she gathers her mother’s tears in. With her right hand she shows her Son to the worshiper, Who sacrifices Himself for us. Her standing position emphasizes her dignity and spiritual beauty. An extremely interesting detail: she is barefoot, a sign that she is in deep and unspeakable pain.

Saint John the Evangelist, seated to the right of the stage (to the left of the Lord) has a face overwhelmed with pain. His sincere youth makes him live the suffering of the Lord extremely empathetically. With his right hand he shows his Lord, and with his left he holds his garment, which prefigures the mantle of the Evangelist, which he will wear with dignity and sacrifice, until his passage to heaven. Although the top of the icon has been destroyed by time, the wings of two angels can be seen who,

above the Cross, strengthen the Lord in the moments of maximum bodily suffering.

IV. 2. “The Crucifixion of the Lord” from the Monastery of the Hosios Loukas (Greece, 11th century)

This monastery was founded at the end of the 10th century and the beginning of the 11th century, in honour of Hosios Loukas, also called “the Young” or “the New”, a great ascetic man from the first half of the 10th century, a hermit in the Elikonas Mountains from Corinth. In the 12th-13th centuries, the monastery also served as a place of worship for Western monks and in the 18th-19th centuries as a military garrison.

The scene of the “Crucifixion of the Lord” is placed in the narthex of the church, in a frieze of mosaics that represent the Passion of Christ. It is identified by a title written above the Cross in large, mixed characters in Greek and Latin: “H CTAVPQCIC”, meaning “Crucifixion”. The body of the Lord is stretched out on the Cross, which is a support and has a secondary role, that is why it is slightly undersized. His face is smooth; his eyes are closed, and a deep peace has settled on his face. The abdomen is well defined. Four streams of blood flow from His hands and feet, and blood and water gush from His right, stabbed rib.

The Mother of God is at the right hand of her Son. Dressed in dark purple maphorion and in a sticharion of the same sifted colour, the Blessed Virgin holds her hands tightly on her chest, a sign of the great pain she is experiencing; with her right hand she gently tightens the covering of her head under her neck. From her clothing it also draws the attention the imperial tassel that she wears and her belt of a faded grenade. The nobility of her face is enhanced by the fine halo around her head and the expression of pain on her face.

St. John stands to the left of the Lord. His facial expression shows pain that cannot be contained; his face is astonished, this state being also reproduced by the slight arching of the head supported with the right hand. The garments, full of pleats and folds and disorderly, suggest the fast and full of excitement events before the Crucifixion.

The Lord addresses the two secondary characters with words caught in two writings. The first is to His Mother: “ΙΔΟΥ ΤΟΗ ΥΟΗ ΚΟΥ” – “Behold thy son!” And the second is to the disciple: “ΙΔΟΥ Ν ΜΙΤΝΡ

Сω” – “Behold your mother”. The two microtexts in the icon, in fact acronyms, are based on the short dialogue between Christ, His Mother and His disciple, recorded by St. John the Evangelist (19, 26-27).

An interesting detail of the icon is the presence of the two stars in the Crucifixion scene, above the Lord’s head: the night one (moon - on the right side of the icon, top) and the day one (sun - on the left side of the icon, top). This detail is reminiscent of the cataclysms that occurred after the Saviour died, phenomena of which the Holy Gospels also testify (Matt. 27, 51-52; Mark 15,33; Luke 23, 44-45). The hymnographic text of “The Lord’s Lamentations” tells about the sun and moon as “raisonneures” of the moment of the Crucifixion, which states: “The sun and moon grew dark together, O Saviour, like faithful servants clothed in black robes of morning”²⁷.

IV. 3. “The Crucifixion of the Lord” from the “Pantokrator” Monastery (Holy Mount Athos, 14th century)

The Pantokrator Monastery is the foundation of the great Byzantine dignitaries Alexius and John, being built in the mid-fourteenth century. It is one of the Athonite monasteries most helped by Romanian princes and rulers. The interior painting is also made in the 14th century. The iconostasis is adorned with an icon of the Crucifixion of the Lord, which has some particularities.

The scene is made on wood, and the dominant colour is gold. The body of the Saviour is rendered long and is presented with finesse and great decency. The wide-open hands and their well-defined tendons impress. The detail is reminiscent of the torture of the outstretched hands, at the crucifixion: the arms of the crucifix were practically disarticulated, to ensure a good nailing of the body on the cross. Singing these scenes, the hymnographers recall the “stretches of the hands” which the Saviour also suffered. But here the hands of the Lord are supported, symbolically, by two angels or seraphim, rendered miniaturistically and positioned near the places where the two nails are stuck in His palms. The face of the Lord is slightly hidden in accentuated peripheral tones around the head.

²⁷ -, *Prohodul Domnului*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2018 – troparion second part, p. 52. More exegetical-hymnographic details on the theme, at pr. lect. dr. Lucian PETROAIA, “«Les hymnes des stances»: références historiques...”, pp. 123-141.

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On the ends of the horizontal arm of the Cross, the Theothokosis painted in a medallion (to the right of Her Son) and in another medallion Saint John the Evangelist (to the left of the Lord). Of small proportions, the two characters are full of mourning, their inner state being suggested by the bowed position of their heads and the garments of mourning.

The characteristic of this icon is identified in its upper part. The final upper part of the vertical arm of the Cross, which is stavroform, provides enough space for the representation of the Cross of Christ, in the centre, with a small altar in front, which is the cloak of the Lord full of blood. The four nails which the Lord was crucified with are placed on it; on either side of this small cross there are painted: the spear the Saviour was pierced with and the sponge the vinegar was given to him with. To the right and left of this representation there are two characters, in a deep bowing position. It may be Adam and Eve (suggestion given by their simple garments) or Emperors Constantine and Helen, who have gathered all the relics of the Lord's Crucifixion, as in a chest of holy treasure. Thus, saved then, for the most part, these testimonies of Calvary have arrived - some! - until today.

V. Conclusions

This approach proves that, throughout Christian history, iconographers have managed to translate into fresco, mosaic or other support (wood, glass, etc.) the evangelical account of the historical fact of the Crucifixion of the Lord, with redemptive fruit for all mankind. It is a form of saying in colour what the Holy Gospels say in words. For this reason, iconographers are also called "zoographers" because they "write" in the icon aspects of the earthly life of Christ.

It is amazing how carefully the craftsmen knew to paint the icon of the Crucifixion using the interpretations of the Holy Fathers in the scriptural text and given the theological nuances that the texts of the Orthodox hymnography bring to the theme. For this reason, the great frescoes and icons of the Crucifixion at the beginning of the second Christian millennium have become normative and serve as models for the entire subsequent thematic iconography. The study of the three iconographic hypostases of the Crucifixion of the Lord can open the perspective of a broader and more careful approach, with examples from the patrimony of all the Orthodox

Churches and, of course, from the Romanian iconographic treasure. The common points and elements of iconographic composition belong to the scriptural background and the patristic base of the icon of the Crucifixion. The distinctive elements and particularities of each icon are related to the cultural context and local Christian traditions, but also to the theological-artistic capacity of the iconographer, to take over, synthesize and render - in a special way - some biblical-patristic details.

We must also emphasize the fundamental and paradoxical feature of Orthodoxy, which does not perceive the Crucifixion as the end point of the work of world salvation. In Orthodoxy, the Crucifixion of the Lord and the death of Christ with the body know the apotheosis through His Resurrection from the dead, “the resurrection of our resurrection” and “the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (I Cor. 15, 20).