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The Saints – Disciples at the School of Christ - Sight in Non-Sight -

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Abstract

All the Saints were disciples at the school of Christ. Those in the Old Testament, who were disciples at the school of the non-incarnate Logos, a preparation for the divine economy by type, those in the New Testament who partook with the Word of life, Christ, the incarnate Logos, and those in Church history to this day, all were disciple in the school of Christ. It was not an apprenticeship only through teaching, but it was and is an apprenticeship through imitation. The ways in which God appears in Old Testament history and His sight by the man fallen through disobedience are only “derogations” in order to prepare man for partaking with God, partaking lost in Heaven by falling. All the Saints have a sight of God in non-sight, a secret revelation, a hidden one. The Christians of the early communities imitated the Old Testament prophets and the Apostles who were models of holiness. There is this consciousness of the Saints unity around the Mystery of Christ or within the Mystery of Christ, for which the ages have been made. The knowledge of God in nature is a step that must be overcome for deification. The knowledge of God by sight transcends the knowledge of God in nature without annulling it, but includes it, being infinitely richer than it.

Keywords

Saints-disciples, the school of Christ, the Old Testament, the New Testament, the sight in non-sight

I. Introduction

All the Saints were disciples at the school of Christ. Both those of the Old Testament, who apprenticed at the school of the incarnate Logos, a preparation for the divine oeconomy by types, and those in the New Testament who have shared in the Word of life, Christ, the incarnate Logos, and those in the history of the Church to this day. All of these have been disciples at Christ's school. It was an apprenticeship not only through teaching, but also through imitation. The saints imitated the life of Christ, assumed it, and made it the life of their lives to perfection. In union with them Christ took image in them, making them the sons of the Father in the likeness, that is, in grace, which He is in the flesh.

The question of the Teacher's sight is raised at the school of Christ, and in the discipleship of the Saints at this school of salvation, precisely because the sight of God is often correlated to the salvation, perfection, and deification of man. The sight of God in the light supposes experience and union. It represents the last stage of man's perfection. But do we find this sight of God only in the New Testament, when people have been able to see God incarnate in Christ, or is it a constant in the economy of salvation? All man's preparation at the school of Christ leads to this last deifying and glorious act of God's sight.

Starting from the statement of Saint John the Evangelist: "No man has ever seen God" (I John 4, 12), on the one hand, and "we shall see Him as He is" (I John 3, 2), or "the Word became flesh" (John 1, 14), on the other hand, Eastern theology has distinguished between the being of God, which is unknowable, and the energies of God, by which God communicates to us, deifying us. So by "the sight of God", the Church Fathers always understood not a sight of the divine essence, but of the light of God's glory. The fundamental distinction they made is that between created and uncreated, and not simply between sensible and intelligible, according to the Platonic model. In Christianity there is an indissoluble relationship between praxis and theoria so that knowing the mysteries of God requires praxis. "Being cleansed at the top by the working philosophy (...) and having his mind penetrated by the Holy Spirit with the rays of divine sight", St. Gregory the Theologian was able to identify the *kinds of prophecy* that

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St. Maximus interprets in *Ambigua*¹. God's sight is accomplished in His uncreated energies where man's personal communion with God takes place.

II. The Sight of God at the Patriarchs and Prophets

After falling into sin, people experience the knowledge of God in a fragmentary, and sporadic way, and according to their ability to understand, although this experience is a real one. Thus, after the fall of man into the sin of disobedience, God “walks” in Eden in “the cool of the day” (Genesis 3, 8), and the first people heard the “sound” of God and even had a dialogue with God. But they hide from the “presence” of God because the fall from communion with God makes Adam and Eve no longer able to stand before God, before His shining face. Thus, the fall from communion with God means a fall from life and implicitly a fall from the knowledge of God that can only be achieved in the sanctity of life as a living and loving communion. But the One who walked in Eden in the cool of the day was none other than God. The Trinity or a certain Person of the Trinity? The Fathers of the Church² agree that the One who “walked” in Eden is the One through whom all things were made, that is, the incarnate Logos, the second Person of the Holy Trinity. So, the Archetype “spoke” with the one who was created in His image, Adam being created in the image of the Son who is the image of God the Father. The first man called to the sight of God through holiness was Adam in Eden, where the foundations of the school of holiness have been laid.

¹ Sfântul MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, II, 81, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 80, transl. Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1983, pp. 208-209.

² TEOFIL AL ANTIOHIEI, “Trei cărți către Autolic”, II, 22, in: *Apologeți de limbă greacă*, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești* vol. 2, transl. Pr. Prof. Teodor Bodogae, Pr. Prof. Olimp Căciulă, Pr. Prof. Dumitru Fecioru, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1980 p. 311; Sfântul IRINEU DE LYON, *Demonstrația propovăduirii apostolice*, XII, Editura Patmos, Cluj Napoca, 2008, p. 34. See for the idea that the Logos was walking in Eden: William R. SCHOEDEL, “Theophilus of Antioch: Jewish Christian?”, in: *Illinois Classical Studies*, 18 (1993), pp. 279-297; Robert M. GRANT, “Theophilus of Antioch to Autolycus”, in: *The Harvard Theological Review*, 40 (1947) 4, pp. 227-256.

The ways in which God appears in Old Testament history and His sight by the man fallen through disobedience are only “derogations” in order to prepare man for partaking with God, which was lost in Heaven by falling. At all the Saints we discover a sight of God in non-sight, a revelation in secret, an apparition in concealment.

“To each of the holy fathers He appeared in the manner that pleased Him and was best for them—in one way to Abraham, in another to Isaac, another to Jacob, another to Noe, to Daniel, to David, to Solomon, to Esaias, and each of the holy prophets - in one way to Elias, in another to Moses. As He pleases, He diminishes Himself by some embodiment, and transforms Himself to come under the eyes of those who love Him, manifesting Himself to those who are worthy in an inaccessible glory of light, according to His great and unspeakable love, and by His own power”³.

God tells Abraham to leave the land where he lived and go to the land He would show him (Genesis 12, 1-3). So, He asks him to leave what he knows and sees, in order to believe and hope what he does not see and does not know as sensory knowledge. Abraham accepts this experience of knowledge by faith (Hebrews 11, 8) God offers him, thus preferring the unseen to the seen, the future to the present, the eternal to the temporary. This experience of knowledge by faith does not require precision in expressing the place where Abraham will move, the land where God called him to live. This land where he will dwell was revealed to Abraham by God in “mind” according to the virtue of his holiness tested by faith⁴. In Scripture, God first appears to Abraham (Genesis 12, 7). The expression “God appeared” is not used to refer to any biblical character up to Abraham, such as Adam, Abel, or Noah. This revelation of God to Abraham does not mean the sight of God’s being, but is part of

³ Sfântul MACARIE EGIPTEANUL, “Despre înălțarea minții”, VIII, in: *Omiliile duhovnicești*, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești* vol. 34, transl. Pr. Prof. Dr. Constantin Cornițescu, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1992, p. 317.

⁴ Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, “Omiliile la Facere”, XXXI, 3, 6 in: *Scrieri*, partea I, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești* vol. 21, transl. Pr. Dumitru Fecioru, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1987, pp. 399, 405

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an apophatic-existential experience of knowledge as God's descent into Abraham⁵. In the place where he was entitled to the sight of God, Abraham builds an altar, dedicating the place to God as a holy place (Genesis 12, 7). In fact, Abraham realizes this liturgical mediation of communion with God through prayers and sacrifices of thanksgiving, every time he places the tent in a certain place, foreshadowing the tabernacle of witness and the liturgical mediation of the Church. Abraham was renamed by adding an "a" because he knew God as superior to the creation and rationality of the world, thus becoming a researcher of nature, wise and loving of God⁶. This is the change that discipleship produces by faith in the school of the incarnate Logos.

The theophany of the Mamre oak was not perceived in the first Christian centuries as a theophany of the Trinity, but as a theophany of the incarnate Logos, a fact that also emerges from the contextual reading of the biblical account in Genesis 18⁷. In the context of the Aryan struggles, St. Athanasius the Great emphasizes the Christological character of the views through which God reveals himself to Abraham and Jacob, saying that if anyone says that Abraham and Jacob did not see the Son, but the unborn God or a part of Him, be anathema⁸.

The vision of God by Patriarch Jacob (Genesis 32, 22-31) totally changes his perception of life, his mind becoming a mind seeing God, thus intuiting the temporality of life. As a result, he chooses to live in tents to permanently indicate the desire for a higher state, for a complete "instability" in the conditions of this world, through a settlement with all the hopes of life in it. This is an example to all who wish to become saints⁹.

⁵ Sfântul IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, "Omiliile la Facere", XXXII, 2, in: *Scrieri*, partea I, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești* vol. 21, p. 410.

⁶ Sfântul CLEMENT ALEXANDRINUL, "Stromate", V, 1, 6, in: *Scrieri*, partea a II-a, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești* vol 5, transl. Pr. Dumitru Fecioru, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1982, pp. 315-316.

⁷ Sfântul IUSTIN MARTIRUL ȘI FILOSOFUL, "Dialog cu iudeul Trifon", LVI, in: *Apologeți de limbă greacă*, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești* vol. 2, pp. 154-155; Sfântul IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, "Omiliile la Facere", LVIII, 3, p. 250-251

⁸ Sfântul ATANASIE CEL MARE, "Despre Sinoade", XXVII, 15-16, in: *Scrieri*, partea a II-a, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 16, transl. Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1988, p. 140

⁹ Sfântul CHIRIL AL ALEXANDRIEI, "Glafire la Facere", V, in: *Scrieri*, partea a II-a, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești* vol. 39, transl. Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Editura

Although the Saints saw God - they had a real experience with Him - they saw him in different ways without understanding that they saw the being of God. Jacob also was shown the un-incarnated Logos in the form of a man who fought with him and blessed him (Genesis 32, 24-29). And Jacob gives the name of that place where he “fought” with God, *Peni’el* meaning “the face of God”, because he saw God face to face and his soul was saved. (Genesis 32, 30). The sight of God’s *face* is closely connected with holiness and salvation, Jacob being entitled to such a vision - which is a derogation of God - a display of the incarnate Logos.

The Christians of the early communities imitated the Old Testament prophets and the Apostles who were models of holiness. There is this consciousness of all Saints unity around the Sacrament of Christ or within the Sacrament of Christ, for which the ages have been made too.

“In the Old Testament, however, it is observed that only the Patriarchs and Prophets of the Israelites had the state of enlightenment and deification. (...) However, we read in the Old Testament that until Abraham there was a consciousness of the state of enlightenment and deification. Abraham himself was a seer of God, that is, he came to deification. This is clear. Therefore, for the time before Abraham we have elements from the Hebrew tradition (which show that) enlightenment and deification also existed in the ancestors of Abraham, for example, in Noah. This tradition of enlightenment and deification, is transmitted. It doesn’t come out of nowhere (...) This backbone, which is the tradition of enlightenment and deification passed down from Prophet to Prophet, is also the essence of the Orthodox Tradition: the transmission of experience, enlightenment and deification from generation to generation. (...) Therefore, we see, that the essence of the Orthodox Tradition is not the book of Holy Scripture, but is the successive transmission of this experience of enlightenment and deification from Adam to the present day”¹⁰.

Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1992, p. 185

¹⁰ Pr. Ioan ROMANIDIS, *Teologia patristică*, transl. Ion Marian Croitoru, Editura Bibliotheca, Târgoviște, 2012 pp. 48-49.

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The principles of God's sight were the same in the Patriarchs and Prophets, as they concerned the work of the mind and the heart. When the mind is simple, emptied of all meaning, being covered by the divine light, it remains in the "abyss" of the divine light without looking out. Being in motion, the mind becomes motionless when it is covered by the divine light, because after passing through what is seen and thought, it reaches those it does not understand and cannot comprehend. Thus, the mind moves within them and returns to them motionless, living in the life above life¹¹. Such a man is above all-natural sight, acquiring eyes above nature. It is a stable movement of the mind, the mind rest of any works.

Like the patriarchs Abraham and Jacob, Moses is entitled to an intense experience of God centred on the appearances at Horeb and Sinai. In fact, the whole life of the Saints is a continuous and apophatic experience with the God of their salvation. Moses' experience of knowing God at Horeb, when the bush was on fire but it was not consumed by it, requires a very clear distinction between theophany and angelophany, a distinction that is related to an implicit view of the created-uncreated relationship. Although Scripture states - in the first phase - that the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in Horeb in a fiery flame coming out of a bush that was burning, yet it was not consumed (Exodus 3, 2) – in the second phase – Scripture shows that when Moses approached, "the Lord" was the One who cried out from the fire and spoke to Moses showing him that the place where he stands is "holy ground" (Exodus 3, 4-5). He also told him that He who speaks to him is "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob". And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God (Exodus 3, 6). The Fathers of the Church¹² identify the angel from Exodus 3, 2 with the incarnate Logos who is called "Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace" in the messianic prophecy of Isaiah 9, 5. So, the One who appeared to Abraham and Jacob, also appeared to Moses, and He is the incarnate Logos.

In the life of Moses, St. Gregory of Nyssa emphasizes the theophanic nature of sight and the essential coordinates of its experience:

¹¹ Sfântul SIMEON NOUL TEOLOG, "25 de capete gnostice și teologice", 17-18, in: *Filocalia* 6, transl. Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1977, pp. 55-56

¹² Sfântul IUSTIN MARTIRUL ȘI FILOSOFUL, "Apologia I", 62, in: *Apologeți de limbă greacă*, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești* vol. 2, p. 67; "Dialog cu iudeul Trifon" LIX, LX, pp. 160-162.

“After he had passed some time in this kind of life, the history says an awe-inspiring theophany occurred. At high noon a light brighter than the sunlight dazzled his eyes. Astonished at the strange sight, he looked up at the mountain and saw a bush from which this light was flaming up like a fire. When he saw the branches of the bush sprouting up in flame as if they were in pure water, he said to himself, «I will go and see this great sight» (Exodus 3. 3). As soon as he said this, he no longer received the marvel of the light with his sight alone, but (which is most astounding of all) his hearing too was illuminated by the rays of light. The light’s grace was distributed to both senses, illuminating the sight with flashing rays and lighting the way for the hearing with undefiled teachings. The voice from the light forbade Moses to approach the mountain burdened with lifeless sandals. He removed the sandals from his feet, and so stood on that ground on which the divine light was shining”¹³.

Sinai is considered a culmination of the knowledge of God in the Old Testament. Moses’ experience fully reveals to us the antinomic character of the knowledge of God who is sometimes seen (Exodus 24, 10-11), and sometimes unseen (Exodus 33, 20-23). But the sight of God means Moses’ “contemplation in the Spirit”¹⁴. It is clear that no one has ever seen God as He is (John 1,18), and that Moses saw the “glory of God” (Exodus 33, 19.22), that is, he knew God in His uncreated works. But the God whom Moses saw and experienced on the mountain is none other than the incarnate Logos, who shows His “glory” in the Spirit. Thus, Moses experiences the glory of the Word, the Logos in the Spirit as a foretaste of the Kingdom inaugurated by Christ through Incarnation, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension. This experience means transfiguration - Moses’ face shone because God spoke to him (Exodus 34, 29) - and it means sharing in the glory of God.

¹³ Sfântul GRIGORE DE NYSSA, “Viața lui Moise”, in: *Scrieri*, partea I, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 29, transl. Pr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, Preot Ioan Buga, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1982, p. 20

¹⁴ Sfântul VASILE CEL MARE, “Despre Sfântul Duh”, XXVI, in: *Scrieri*, partea a III-a, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești* vol. 12, transl. Pr. Prof. Dr. Constantin Cornițescu, Pr. Prof. Dr. Teodor Bodogae, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1988 p. 77.

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The revelation was made not only through deeds and words, but also by images. Following the footsteps of the theologian Alan Richardson, Father Stăniloae speaks about the inner relationship between word and image, the meaning being predominantly in the word, and the form in the image, without the two being mutually exclusive. Starting from these premises, Stăniloae shows that:

“Most acts and words of Revelation have the form of images, but the images are not without *logos*, and the content of some acts. Almost any word of Revelation is an image-word, a plasticized meaning, and the acts of Revelation are real acts, but acts that take on a plastic form and expression, as they touch the seen world and are acts with a meaning”¹⁵.

To understand this problem, he uses two explanations: a) the kinds of images which God reveals himself through and b) the way in which images are born in the mind of the Revelation organ under the divine influence. Through these he wants to demonstrate their subjective-objective character in relation to the myth that expresses an “objective void”¹⁶.

Specifying the explanatory limits of the conception of the Anglican theologian Augustin Farrer, the one who discovered the importance of images as means of Revelation, Stăniloae shows that revealed images occur at the “meeting point between spirit and seen form”. The image is only “the form of appearance of the spirit through a seen form” because man being “embodied spirit” does not have the capacity to perceive and express “the spirit in its purity, but only through the screen of a seen form”¹⁷. On the other hand, the divine spiritual reality cannot be perceived and rendered by man, in itself, man being an embodied spirit. This requires an apophatic theology of silence, and negation, which is free of images. Stăniloae discovers several categories of Revelation images: a) ontological, the real and definitive abode of the divine spirit in a seen form - the humanity of Christ; b) the transient appearance of God in His uncreated energies in a seen form in the Old Testament (cloud, pillar of fire, presence in the ark of the Law, in the book of the Law, in the tabernacle of the Law). This is

¹⁵ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Revelația prin acte, cuvinte și imagini”, pp. 360-361.

¹⁶ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Revelația prin acte, cuvinte și imagini”, p. 361.

¹⁷ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Revelația prin acte, cuvinte și imagini”, p. 362.

a presence through energy, all of which have the character of “shadows” compared to the image of Christ’s humanity, being “anticipated projections of a divine reality to come”. In the images of the Old Testament, God discovers “a project to be accomplished in the future, a project of historical perfection” that led to Christ, whom “the purpose of prophetic, inconsistent images of shadows” ceases in and all being overcome in the “hypostasis of reality”. Christ gives “a real character to the image of God” while we have described Christ in words, His real image, the central and definitive image of Revelation, maintained through icons and Mysteries in the conscience and life of Christians¹⁸. The fundamental, real and definitive image of Revelation is the Person of Christ.

Stăniloae offers an explanation regarding the organ of revelation that recognizes the divine presence in objectively realized images, while talking about the role of subjectivity in recognizing the objective reality of images. Taking the visions of Isaiah 6 as a study model, he shows that in these visions or images “all the concrete forms that cannot exist in divine spirituality and that the organ of inspiration brings from its world of occupations, readings, preoccupations of the social environment in which he lives” are subjective¹⁹. “Spiritual sight” shapes the spirit of the “seer” by imprinting its air and provoking an assembly of memory in him and the organization of the most appropriate forms for its expression, which is also done through an effort of thought. Stăniloae explains it:

“We can now return to the real, definitive images of Revelation such as the stages of Jesus Christ’s existence, or to the still external but transient images of Revelation to see their connection with human subjectivity. The human spirit must try a modelling in their relations with it, and on their part, in order to perceive them as images of the divine reality. Thus they extend into human subjectivity, and a connection is made between their external reality and the interior of the seer; that is, they are not purely external. If they remained purely external, they would not be perceived as forms of the divine presence. (...) The difference between the definitive or transient outer images of Revelation and the purely inner ones is that the former can be shown to others, or are seen by others. If not by all as images of divinity, at

¹⁸ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Revelația prin acte, cuvinte și imagini”, pp. 363-367.

¹⁹ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Revelația prin acte, cuvinte și imagini”, p. 368.

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least as real external forms. Their formation does not occur in the inner subjectivity of a man. But without a subjective openness one does not see in these images what is above the natural frame. Thus, the knowledge of God in the external and historical reality is an inner view, through faith, and is not rigidly imposed on anyone”²⁰.

Moreover, Stăniloae raises the question of the objective character of the visions background and shows that he experiences himself in those moments, empty of all his contents of ideas. He realizes that what he sees is not the result of a combination of his soul and mental contents, and thus the spiritual pattern appears to him as something different from all he is. He experiences this state as a state of passivity, since the force which the evidence of a pattern is imposed with is an imperative force, the experience of the objective character of the visions background being accentuated. So “objectivity goes so far that the image or the suite of images, acquires a kind of autonomy in the spirit of the seer, although on the other hand everything happens inside him. There is an objectivity in subjectivity here, it is something that transcends the boundary between subjectivity and objectivity”²¹. Staniloae’s effort to explain in detail the mechanism of visual images and the subjective role of the seer seeks only to demonstrate that essentially the Gospel is not mythology and cannot be reduced to the personification of nature forces, since its centre is the Person of Christ, the real and definitive image of Revelation.

III. The School of the Cosmos. The Model of the Saints and our Discipleship

Saint Maximus shows that by ascending the mountain and entering the darkness where God was, Moses enters the formless, invisible and

²⁰ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Revelația prin acte, cuvinte și imagini”, pp. 369, 372

²¹ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Revelația prin acte, cuvinte și imagini”, p. 373. Staniloae develops some ideas of Emil Brunner’s conception on biblical images, also showing his limits. He considers that neither the notions should be opposed to images, as philosophers or theologians of demythologization do, nor the images should be opposed to notions, as some Protestant theologians do. His opinion is they should be joined by uniting the cataphatic with the apophatic (p. 377).

incarnate life, surpassing creation. Thus, he acquires a spiritual knowledge “shaped” according to the Archetype. He experiences and descends from the mountain having imprinted on his face “the grace of the glory he shared with”²². The prophets truly partook of the glory of God because they lived according to Christ, and confessed Him not only by word but also by life and example.

This experience of Moses - like all others - is not an experience that leads to confusion between God and the creature, but an experience in which God “descending” to His creation, gives it the possibility to share in His holiness through the holy man, as a foretaste of the future. Glory does not identify with the being of God, nor is it separated from Him, but it is a manifestation of the being through Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Through these images of God’s revelation, man rises to the knowledge of His Mystery, and deepens into the knowledge of God’s plan with humanity and the cosmos. This deepening of man in the sense of the creation willed by Him is realized through the Logos, Who is not only the Creator and Saviour of the world, but also its preparer together with the Spirit in the experiences of the Old Testament Saints.

That is why the Apostle Philip also asks the Saviour to show the Father (John 14, 8) thus ascending from the exact Image and Seal of God the Father, to the Archetype. The invisible being of the Father was also in Christ who is the image of the Father being. The sight of Christ means the sight of the Father, being higher than any view that even the prophets and Moses had on Sinai, a mountain which God descended on in the form of fire²³. But seeing God is more than theoretical knowledge of Him. “Therefore, this sight is not knowledge. (...) And not only should this not be considered knowledge, but it should be considered far above any knowledge and any view through knowledge”²⁴.

²² Sfântul MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua* II, 15, p. 117.

²³ Sfântul CHIRIL AL ALEXANDRIEI, “Comentariu la Evanghelia Sfântului Ioan”, IX, in: *Scrieri*, partea a IV-a, transl. Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2000, pp. 851-852.

²⁴ Sfântul GRIGORIE PALAMA, “Cuvânt pentru cei ce se liniștesc cu evlavie ; al treilea dintre cele din urmă. Despre Sfânta Lumină”, 17, in: *Filocalia*, vol. 7, transl. Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Rămâne, București, 1977, pp. 285-286. “This light is so different from the light of knowledge that the light of knowledge resembles a candlestick shining in a dark place, and this mysterious light resembles the skylight that illuminates the day, that is, the sun” (18, p. 288).

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Therefore, the knowledge of God in nature is a step that must be overcome on the path to deification. The knowledge of God by *sight* transcends the knowledge of God in nature, but without annulling it, this includes it, being infinitely richer than it. He talks about the positive role of knowing God in creatures by emphasizing the close relationship that exists between gnoseology, anthropology, and cosmology. The whole Patristic theology is reiterated through it, which testifies the inner relationship between the cosmic and the historical aspect of the divine Revelation. Also starting from the revelational model, it testifies the inner relationship between cataphatic knowledge and apophatic knowledge, both included in the existential one, in which the cosmos is seen as an indispensable framework and stage of the deification of man and himself, through man united with God.

“That is why even before the Patriarchs, the Prophets and the written Law, it called the human race again and returned it to God, showing the Creator to those who had not come out of natural knowledge like the Greek sages. (...) Who, by looking with his mind at all this, and at how each of it persists in itself, but harmonizes wonderfully with the others, will not know as from an icon and as from a work caused God? And who, knowing God this way, will regard Him as any of the caused things or of those in His image? He will thereby also have the knowledge of God out of negation. So, the knowledge of creatures has brought the human race back to the knowledge of God before the Law and the Prophets. And now it returns again. For almost everyone, that is, all who do not obey the Gospel precepts, owe the fact that they have no other God but the Maker of this world only to the knowledge of creatures”²⁵.

Starting from everything seen in the world, from the harmony and rationality of the world, man has the possibility to glorify the Creator, raising the mind towards Him. The rationality and harmony of the world contribute to the strengthening of man’s faith in the Creator through the admiration and spiritual *contemplation* of the cosmos.

²⁵ Sfântul GRIGORIE PALAMA, “Cuvânt pentru cei ce se liniștesc cu evlavie ...”, p. 322.

St. Maximus shows that:

“... from the wise contemplation of creation, we deduce the reason that enlightens us regarding the Holy Trinity, that is, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. (...) For the creation itself cries out through the creatures in it, and announces its cause to those who can hear with the mind, glorifying it in a triune way, that is, revealing God and the Father and his unspeakable power and divinity, or His only begotten Son and the Holy Spirit. These are the unseen of God, seen through the understanding of the foundation of the world”²⁶.

Melchizedek is an example of contemplation that transcends the world even though he used in the process of perfection. The natural way of God’s revelation finds its maximum correspondence in the lives of the saints who knew God by contemplation of His creation. The saints climbed the steps of creation to reach the knowledge of the Creator and overcoming creation, without leaving it, they united with the Creator in grace, thus being deified.

“Thus I take it that it is probably not from time and nature, subject to which the great Melchizedek reached his natural end, that it should be said of those who have already transcended life and reason, that the divine Word justified him but from and through those things –I mean, virtue and knowledge –he deliberately changed what he is called (...) If he deliberately preferred the virtue of nature and of all those things that are in accordance with it through the good choice of the dignity that is within his power, and transcended by knowledge all time and eternity, deliberately in his contemplation making everything that is beneath God after himself, abiding in none of those beings in which he beheld any limit, the divine Melchizedek opened his mind to the divine, unoriginated and immortal rays of the God and Father (...) then it follows that it was not from natural and temporal properties, in which father and mother and genealogy, and beginning and end of days are included, which things having passed beyond he is completely released from them,

²⁶ Sfântul MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua* XIX, 13, pp. 65-66.

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that he is named but from divine and blessed characteristics, after which his form has been modelled, to which neither time, nor nature, nor reason, nor mind, nor anything else that can be circumscribed can attain (...) Alone being such, he is preserved in the Scripture, as equally having become according to virtue first beyond matter and form (...) and according to knowledge transcending everything that is subject to time and eternity. For it is not denied that such temporal being began through generation, nor that knowledge of them limps along the divine route with the intellect. [So his possession of knowledge that transcends this] is perhaps signified by his having neither beginning of days nor end of life. And so transcendently, hiddenly and silently, and to speak briefly, unknowably, after every abstraction from all beings at the level of mind he enters into God himself, and made and transformed wholly to the whole"²⁷.

IV. Conclusion

Thus, the saints disciples in the school of Christ, imitating the life of Christ and adorning themselves with virtues. But they also discovered Christ in the cosmos by exercising the cosmic vocation and by ascetic and mystical relation to the created world and to the meaning of matter. The cosmos becomes a school for them and a ladder through which they learn and ascend to union with God in grace. The saints not only experience union with God in the cosmos, from here on out, but relate to the cosmos as an environment where they can discover divine reasons through contemplation. At the same time, both in the school of Christ and in the school of the cosmos as a creation of the eternal Logos, the Saints learned the mystery of transfigured matter, the new heaven and the new earth, a sight unseen as a foretaste of those who will be fulfilled at the end of history and of the current face of the world. They testified in Christ the sight in non-sight of the meanings of history, cosmos, and man, and of the spiritual dimension of matter, of the unmistakable presence of God in it, and of the mystery of transfigured matter.

²⁷ Sfântul MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, II, 29, pp. 139-141.