

Reflecting on Life and Death

Questions such as *what is life, what is death*, have and will continue to trouble man's conscience as long as the phenomenon of earthly life exists. The present issue of *Theology* brings together a number of papers by various specialists in related fields, who seek to bring together theological, medical and psychological perspectives on life and death.

As far as life at the human level is concerned, we can approach it on three levels: *life as biological life*, *life as spiritual life* and *life as eternal life or the divine Kingdom*. From the perspective of the Orthodox Church, biological life, i.e. man as body and soul, is the consequence of God's creative act. It is a reality that places us in direct contact with "the One who is". Man, according to Holy Scripture, is the "image" of God: "in man God makes his Self-portrait (...) because by building man «in his image», God repeats himself in us" (Saint Sophronius Saharov); "human nature has been made partaker of all the goodness of its Archetype" (Saint Gregory of Nyssa). On a second level, the *human image* can share in the *spiritual life* which is initiated in man in the ecclesial-sacramental way through Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Communion. Through the mysteries/sacraments of initiation man's life becomes an ecclesial life:

"as a member of the Church, writes St. Justin Popovich, man lives by grace the Life of the Holy Trinity and the Trinitarian Life lives by grace in man. The Christian becomes the dwelling place and temple of the Holy Trinity, and the Holy Trinity becomes his home".

Finally, on the third level, the *human image*, which has become the Church, can share life in the fullest image - life as salvation, or as eternal

and full communion with the Triune God. Human life itself becomes a kingdom or reality that cannot be questioned by any lack, by any suffering, by any death.

In the balance with the notion of life is the word *death*. Death was not built/created by God and appears, within the *very good* created reality, through the freedom of the creature. Death came about through the choice of the angel and then man to refuse love/communion with God. Lucifer wanted to be like the *One who is without and against the One who is*. His attempt resulted in his falling from authentic being and narrowing the scope of his own existence. The devil was and is the first creature to experience death. So, the first meaning of the notion of death is *spiritual death or the autonomization of the creature from God*. The second meaning of death is *the separation of the soul from the body*. The body and the soul are parts of man:

“after the death of the body, observes St Maximus Confessor, the soul is not called simply the soul, but the soul of man, the soul of any man. And the body, after death, is not called simply the body, but the body of any man, even if it corrupts and dissolves into the elements of which it is made”.

Saint Gregory of Nyssa emphasizes that the decomposition of the body does not mean its total disappearance, for the elements into which it decomposes bear the indelible stamp of the soul that animated them. The third meaning of the notion of death refers to *eternal death*, i.e. the state of creatures (angels and men) who will reject the love/life of the Holy Trinity at the Last Judgement.

The studies in this issue of *Teologia* aim to deepen and contribute at least in part to reaching and partially unraveling the mystery of life and death. We entrust to print the conclusions reached by the specialists who sign the studies in this volume on the *Phenomenon of Death in the Age of Biotechnology*, in the hope that they will be a starting point for readers who wish to know points of view on life and death.

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