THE VIRGIN AND THE SPIRIT. A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

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Abstract:The present article tries to analyse the connection between the Holy Spirit, the Comforter and the Inspirer of the Church, and the Virgin Mary, the Full of grace, the Mother of Christ. The Bible itself contains some similarities and theological convergences between the third Person of the Holy Trinity and the Theotokos. These similarities allow us to establish a intimate bond between the prayer of the Virgin in the Church and the presence of the Spirit in it.

Keywords: Virgin, Spirit, protection, prayer, virginity, inspiration, mother

The Orthodox feast of the Protection of the Most Holy Mother of God ("Pokrov" in rus., "Acoperământul Maicii Domnului" – in rom.) celebrates the power of Theotokos to shadow and preserve the humanity in a state of sacrifice and resurrection. The dignity of the Mother of God on the right side of the heavenly Throne of her Son means together an ocean of love towards humanity and the hymn of praise brought to God by men.

The sacred and divine bond between the Holy Spirit and the Mother of God is obvious in all the history of salvation. Fruit of the blessing of the Comforter, the Virgin, the holy child, was kept in a state of purity and holiness by the Holy Spirit, all her childhood and youth. The state of virginity and continuous prayer is a gift of the Spirit. When the General of the celestial armies, Archangel Gabriel, came to announce her, that she will give birth to God, the angel greats her: "Hail, Mary, full of grace", showing the divine intimacy between the Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit. Then, when she asks how it is possible to give birth to a baby from virginity, the archangel answers: "the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will shadow you". All her life, the Mother of heavenly love worked the humble joy of the Spirit. She was present at Pentecost, when the Church of Christ, that is His Body, was born in the world, among the Apostles. In this Descent of the Spirit, Christ became interior to every baptized believer in the name of the Most Holy Trinity.

In the heaven, at the Throne of the glory of God, the Mother speaks incessantly with the Holy Spirit, imploring him to heal all the pain of the world. Every tear of the human kind passes through the eyes full of heaven of the Mother of God, and arrives in the heart of the Trinity, where all the tears from all the faces are wiped out.

This holy connection between the Comforter and Theotokos has saving effects in the work of the Son to sanctify the world. The Holy Spirit is the Cover, the Protection of creation from the Genesis: "the Spirit was walking above the waters" (Gen. 1.2), meaning that – in the words of Saint Basil the Great – he was "warming and giving life to the waters, as a hen warming her chicken". So the Virgin of the tears is a cover and a protection, a shadow of salvation and a support, a loving and life giving warmth for the entire creation.

We say in one of the most common prayers of the Church: "My hope is the Father, my refuge is the Son and my protection is the Holy Spirit, Most Holy Trinity, glory to Thee" (the prayer of Saint Ioanikios). This holy protection is brought by the holy prayers of the Mother of God, through the vigil of the Virgin for the Church.

The Holy Spirit is the Guide of the entire universe toward its vocation in the Kingdom of God. And the Mother of God is the "Hodegetria", the Directress, the Guide to her Son, listening all the prayers of the world and hiding them in the infinite heart of Christ.

The Holy Spirit is praying for us "with wordless groans" (Romans 8, 26), healing our helplessness, in order to see the heavens of love, and the Mother of God is the incessant suppliant for every each of us, the heart of a mother at the Throne of the Trinity, healing diseases and listening the sufferance of the world[1].

The Holy Spirit is called by Christ himself "the Comforter" ("Parakletos"), the "Episkopos" of the hearts, as in the prayer: "Holy, search – "episkepse" and heal our iniquities, for thy name", and the Holy Virgin is the comforter to all in pain and illnesses.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of fruitful virginity, the spring of grace, and the Mother of God is the fruitful Virgin who gave birth to the Son of God, the "full of grace"[2].

Therefore, the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church and the work of the Mother of God are divinely interconnected and fulfilling themselves. Nobody can receive the Holy Spirit if he (she) doesn't give birth to Christ in his heart, nobody can give birth to Christ in his heart without the mystical work of the Spirit. Nobody can love the Theotokos without being carried on the wings full of light of the Spirit. No man or woman can receive the scent of holiness without having a heart of a mother, and no man can carry God in his heart without the tearful prayers of the Virgin.

This is happening because in the heart of the Holy Mother are kept, like in a river bed of light, all the tears of the world, when she saw her Son crucified. All her pain became love full of grace when she saw him resurrected, in the overflow of the Spirit over the history.

The Holy Virgin is a spring of love, because she fulfils in her heart all the painful love of the man undressed of grace and all the longing of God to unite with us. Her mercies flow toward humanity without waiting confirmation, but incessantly flooding the sweetness of love from her motherly heart.

The entire universe, pregnant with God, beholds his mother and learns how the fill itself with the light that rises from the eternal One. The humanity enters the mysteries of history and learns the Eucharistic becoming of matter into energy through grace, as a birth of the kingdom without death.

We see a little virgin and we understand the greatness of the love of God. We look to a woman and we learn the unspeakable wisdom of the Trinity. We see a fragile human being and we understand beyond tears how much a creature can rise through love. We kiss with our soul a baby, and we are disciples at the theological cathedra of the ages. Her silence is more priceless than all the words of this world.

For the greatest power of the universe is the life giving love, the self sacrifice. And the greatest light in the world is the power to love an eternity those who killed your baby.

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[1] For an extensive analysis of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the early Church prayers: Boris Paschke, *Praying to the Holy Spirit in Early Christianity*, Tyndale Bulletin, 64:2 (NA 2013).

[2] For a deeper extension of the Orthodox Tradition on the Holy Spirit, see John Oliver, Giver of Life, *The Holy Spirit in Orthodox Tradition*, Paraclete Press, January, 2011 .

If we are friends of Theotokos all our life, we will find her waiting us in the heaven, soothing our passage from darkness to light, recognising in our eyes the look of her Son that we wanted and missed all our life.

In the Orthodox Church, the supra-veneration accorded to Theotokos is a unique manner of love and worship for the Mother of God[3]. The Christians feel her prayer to the Throne of the Saviour and her intercession as not only Mother of God, but Mother of the Church, that is the Body of Christ. That is why in the icons, Theotokos is always with the divine Child in her arms, and this icon of the mother keeping in her arms the Divine Child is the most encountered and famous icon in orthodoxy. In addition, there is a multitude of miracle working icons in all orthodox space with the Theotokos.

The orthodox believer feels the comforting presence and prayer of the Mother in all his/her life. Many cannons are composed in her honour, and the chants of the Church are always containing hymns of praise to the Mother of God. The invisible divine bond between the Mother and the Child, due to Christ's divine foreknowledge, is transmitted to all the people. Christ knows all the Virgin`s concerns and desires, and fulfils them out of his love for her. This fact is proved by the miracle of Canna of Galilee.

Jesus and his Mother were invited to attend a wedding in Canna. There, out of unknown reasons, the wine was over. Mary doesn't plead for the grooms, doesn't ask anything, and just says: "They have no more wine".The intimate and infinite love between the Son and the Mother means that every thought of her passes through his mind and heart, out of his divinity. And he cannot live without fulfilling his mother's wish. Although his time wasn't there: "My hour has not yet come" (John 2, 4), Christ overthrows the eternal plan of God's salvation for the mankind out of love for his mother. So powerful is her heart, that Christ cannot pass her need. She doesn't plead, she only says to the servants: "Do whatever he tells you". This is the eternal legacy of the Mother: she looks and points to her Son, and says to the world: "Do whatever he tells you". And Christ turns the water into wine, showing the Eucharistic nature of love (love transforms everything), the mystical substance of marriage and the connubial dimension of the bond between human being and the Groom, God.

The young poet Richard Crashaw (1613-1649), being asked, among other students to write an article on the wedding of Canna, wrote only few words: "*Nympha pudica Deum vidit, et erubuit* – The virginal water met its Master and blushed" and won the contest[4].

This infinite bond between the Son and the Virgin is the Spirit, who is upon Christ, and inspires him to save the world through word and blood.

The intimate connection between the Mother of God and the Holy Spirit is yet to be discovered. For instance, the inspired saints of the Church were always in love with Theotokos. The lovers of the Virgin are often visited by the Holy Spirit and vice versa. The Gospel of John, where the deepest significance of the Incarnation was revealed, is written by the disciple who received the divine Mother and took care of her after the death and Resurrection of Christ. From her, John found the peaks of theological abysses and the reality of the Logos, the Word of God who became Man for our salvation.

[3]For a meaningful insight into the spirituality of Romanian Orthodox Church, see Pr. Mircea Cristian Pricop, *Ortodoxie, Etnicitate şi Identitate europeană*, Editura Arhiepiscopiei Tomisului, Constanţa, 2012.

[4]*The Complete Works of Richard Crashaw*, edited by Alexander B. Grosart, two volumes (London: printed for private circulation by Robson and Sons, 1872 & 1873).

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