

THE WRITTEN WORD

ESSENTIAL FACTOR IN PROMOTING THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

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Abstract

In Christology, the conception that Christ is the Logos has been important in establishing the doctrine of the divinity of Jesus Christ and in admitting that he is truly God and truly Man, the Son glorified in the Trinity, as set forth in the Chalcedonian Creed. The concept derives from the exordium of the Gospel of John (the English language uses 'word' for λόγος, but in the theological discourse it often remains untranslated).

Keeping the tradition of the Holy Apostles, inspired by the incarnate Word in Scriptures, the Holy Fathers of the Church, even under the domination of the worldly spirit and of passions, showed theological virtuousness in Christology and became themselves hall-marks of the Word they glorified, printed and imprinted in the heart of Christianity through the mission of the Church that fulfils His mission, that of making Him known to the whole world as the Word of God through the Eucharistic Sacrifice, through the Holy Mysteries, through preaching the Gospel and the new Law (imprinted in the heart as once in the stone of the Tables of the Law).

Jesus Christ remains the same, as person and teaching. His activity cannot be separated from His teaching. Orthodoxy remains faithful to the true Christological teaching; it does not dilute the Saviour's divinity in inconsistent terminologies or add innovative aspects. His teaching must make us aware of the contemporary ministration of the world, as He would have done it, ignoring the theological interpretations that appear or will appear.

Keywords: logos, light, word

1. Introduction

Today more than ever, the Church of the third millennium has to face not only the hardships of the times, marked by false beliefs of Neopaganism and Neognosticism, but especially '*the spirit of the world*', of the end times, of which we are warned by Holy Scripture, as well as by the dogmatic writings of the Holy Fathers. It seems that these are not the '*times of the Church*', but the times of *the worldly demon*, of speed, of total disinterest in the classical values of the Church, of its teachings and mission, based mainly on the Word of God.

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The estrangement from the Church and its Spirit is in fact an estrangement from the Holy Spirit; of the providence of God the Father and the guidance of the Word of God.

The man of so-called modern times seems to ‘trample’ deliberately the Word of God, Whose Warning is very clear: “*You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live*” (Exodus 33.20). We can dare to resemble God, as Father Stăniloae argues, to the unique meaning of personal salvation, of the true accomplishment of the identity of the human person to which all Christianity aspires: “*Logos or the Word of God was in the world from the beginning on the one hand through the reasons of things, that are images created and supported by His eternal reasons, on the other hand, through human persons, who, in their living rationality are the images of His own hypostasis, created to consider the reasons of things in a dialogue with the divine personal Reason*” [1].

‘Logos’ is thus a term originating in ancient Greece and is usually translated by word, speech, discourse, exposition, argument, reason, or intellect. The very dynamic character of the sense confers on the translation of *logos* an aura of mystery, mysticism, subject, principle, and person. Therefore, Christianity’s understanding of Logos refers to the divine-human Person (the Incarnate Word through kenosis) of our Saviour Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Holy Trinity; the spiritual understanding of Holy Scripture (that is, the Incarnate Word in Scriptures); the reasons of all things or *logoi* of creation; the worship of divinity based on the celebration of the Holy Eucharist as Eucharist of the Word of God, and the mission of the Church through today’s preaching.

The conception of philosophy concerning Logos as an interior, but also an exterior act of speech, then followed by the Judaic conception concerning Divine Reason, make Logos express and identify in Christianity with the second Person of the Holy Trinity, with the Son, the Archetype, “*the ontological principle of the whole creation that cannot be contained by any creature, through His ontological revelation*” [2].

Where there is no Law, there is no sin, says the wisdom of our people, fully aware of the meaning of Saint Paul the Apostle’s words: “*I would not have known what sin was except through the law*” (Romans 7.7). And the Law was given through the Word in order to destroy sin. Partaking in His plenarity is not an easy thing to do; our spiritual ascension resembles that of Moses, thirsty for the Tables of the Law, prefiguring the Word Who would become incarnate by assuming human nature, just as the letter of the Law assumed itself the matter on which it was written. The breaking of the Tables of the Law that carried the Word becomes the symbol of the descent into death. The second writing represents the Resurrection through which we will abide in the eternal tabernacle, assumed by the Word in the Spirit and Truth of the Church and of the Mission of His Church.

That is why Origen considers that Logos is ‘*polymorphous*’, dissipating in all thinking beings according to the capacity of each to ‘*receive*’ as Mystery of eternity, through His revealing function and *efficient cause* [3], through which the whole creation *imitates* Him. Thus, for Origen the Word becomes a distinct

Person of the Holy Trinity that deifies man through grace, rescuing him from the irrationality into which he had fallen [4], in order to glorify God as Intercessor between the Father's simple and absolute unity and the diverse, polymorphous, dynamic multiplicity of rational beings. The Incarnate Word is indeed the Son of God according to essence, the Image of the One who begot Him, Christ, the Son of Man, Supreme Reason, Archetype, Guide, Liberty, Love, Mystery, Revelation: "*For He had to create Himself as us in an unchanged manner, accepting, for his incommensurate love of people, to become His image and symbol and reveal Himself from Himself; and through Himself, the revealed One, to guide the whole creation towards Himself, the One completely hidden, and offer people, with love for them, through the divine work in the body, the obvious signs of the infinity which does not reveal itself, hidden beyond everything and impossible to be understood or named by any of the existences in any way*" [5].

Referring to Christ, Saint Paul the Apostle resembles and identifies Him with the image of God through the use of the noun 'μορφή', identifying the Person of the Son in the Trinity, whole in Himself and for Himself [6]. The Lord Christ Himself referred to this ontological and consubstantial unity, saying: "*I and the Father are one*" (John 10.30; 17.22), or "*Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father*"... "*I am in the Father and ... the Father is in me*" (John 14.9-10). On the equality in dignity and honour He said: "*He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father Who sent Him*" (John 5.23, Matthew 10.40, Luke 10.16, John 13.20).

Keeping the tradition of the Holy Apostles, inspired by the incarnate Word in Scriptures, the Holy Fathers of the Church, even under the domination of the worldly spirit and of passions, showed theological virtuousness in Christology and became themselves hallmarks of the Word they glorified, printed, and imprinted in the heart of Christianity through their mission. On the one hand, they defended the Christological dogma with apologetic and missionary skill; on the other hand, they raised it to the highest degree of reason and discernment in the heart of the human person in preaching this fundamental teaching of Christianity.

Christ, the Son of Man, is thus "*eternal with God the Father..., Who is unchangeable..., because God's nature is fixed in His own goods and His constancy in what exists is unabated*" (Saint Cyril) [7].

Referring to the teaching on the incarnate Word, it is worth reminding ourselves about the aspect of love, communion, and communication that the Logos includes in the human person. He becomes the principle of Christian communication and communion: "*In the past, God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe*" (Hebrews 1.1-3). The Word is "*Spirit and life*" (John 6. 63), revealing to us His dynamic, creative [8], and saving character.

Therefore, God remains invisible, but becomes visible through Christ. When the Son of God became incarnate it became possible to see Him. This is revealed through Moses, who, before the Incarnation, saw only God's back parts (Exodus 33.13-23), whereas at His Transfiguration on Tabor he saw His face. It follows that the spiritual ascension on Mount Sinai and the Tables of the Law were a prefiguring of the 'humanitarian' mission and of the incarnation of the Logos through the expression that God wrote them with His finger and through the whole account of the divine event. The episode prefigures the Birth from the Virgin (through the purity of creation) and the entire saving work through the incarnate Word. Subsequently, under the defence of the grace acquired subjectively in Christianity through the objective salvation brought by Christ the Word, man is fully restored by following the divine will [9] through the commandment of love, in complete communion of agape: "*If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.*" (John 14.23) The dynamic force of the Word becomes a means of rational, real communion and communication through grace of the Christian feeling that people share love by grace [10]. Through love, we are "*recreated in such a way that seeing God combines with the torrent of the supplicant love towards Him*" [11], and the way of the Christic mission of the human person is definitely invigorated.

It is the moment in which all of us partake in the Word of God. We fathom Him and know Him from the Scriptures, we engage ourselves on the way following "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (John 14.6), we pray in the communion of love of the divine cult and in turn we share the mysterious One, in the Christian missionary way, becoming the vocal hallmark of the Word [12] in the Spirit and Truth of the pure prayer assimilated in the personal intimacy that fills us with the heavenly Liturgy, beyond the present reality [13], in the Mystery of the Kingdom of the Word of God [9, 12].

2. The word of the Scripture or God – the Word in Scripture

The Scripture is the Word of God. When the priest reads the word of the Scripture, he speaks in the name of God, reading the very words of God; he is the chosen vessel through which the Word of God is heard.

The Holy Scripture or the Bible is the principal book of Christians, in which is "*the Word of salvation*" (Acts 13.26), "*the Word of eternal life*" (John 6.63; Philippians 2.16), "*the Word of God*" (Luke 3.2, Acts 4.31, Ephesians 6.17), the One Who is glorified in the Trinity. This is the reason why Scripture expresses the mission of the Christian Church to be preaching the word of God, because the teachings of Holy Scripture do not grow old, just as the Word of God remains forever; these teachings are eternal and useful for salvation in all times and places: "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away*", says our Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 24.35). The Word Himself confesses that the Holy Scripture carries the Word: "*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in*

righteousness...” (2 Timothy 3.16)

In Scripture we find expressions that attest to this truth, which confers today on the mission of the Church the authority of Scripture and of the Word of God. We can strongly affirm that the mission of the Church is a divine-human work through which, as if from an ever flowing source, all humanity can partake in the plenitude of the grace springing from the Word of God in Person, according to its free will. The mission of the Church is entrusted to Christ in Person for the salvation of the human race, and the first step of this mission consists in highlighting the word of Scripture through preaching, as a hallmark of the Word of God in Person.

Holy Scripture is the book of the Church. The Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, chose and established the books that form the Bible, which contain the teaching inspired by the Holy Spirit for salvation. Holy Scripture is a precious treasure of the Church and only the Church can explain it without erring. Also, Holy Scripture represents one of the two main forms through which was transmitted the divine truth revealed to us humans by God Himself, through Moses and the prophets of the Old Testament, and then in a complete way through the Son of God Who became man, our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Church carries out its holy mission with watchfulness by “*preserving and transmitting the genuine meaning of the Scripture*” [14]. Without theoretising the Scriptures or trivialising their importance and divine origin, without ignoring the practical side of the word of the Scripture, the Church presents the word of Scripture in its apostolic mission, helping the faithful to understand the profound meaning of the truths revealed in Scripture by experiencing them. This explains the massive presence of Holy Scripture in the worship and pastoral-missionary work of the Church. On the altar of all Orthodox churches there are always two inseparable realities: the Gospel and the Eucharist, Christ the incarnate Logos and Christ the Lamb Who takes away the sins of the world [15].

3. God’s Word in worship

Scripture as divine word is the ever flowing spring of today’s services, through which the Church starts its chief mission, beautifully illustrated in the parable of the sower. Working continuously in the vineyard of the Lord, the divine worship of the Church is the first step of the mission of the Church. It sows the word of God in the souls of the faithful, not only so that all that hear can receive Him and receive Him abundantly, but also that we can all partake in the Lord’s Supper.

During all our services we listen to readings from the Holy Scripture. When we enter the church we make the sign of the Holy Cross, we prostrate and kiss the Holy Gospel, and when it is read, we kneel. Through the Holy Gospel and through the entire Holy Scripture, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself speaks to us in Church and is present with us to the end of time. During the Holy Liturgy the *Epistle* is read, that is, parts of the epistles of the Holy Apostles and the *Gospel*, that is, accounts of the life, teachings, and miracles of our Lord Jesus

Christ. Good Christians read the Psalms with devotion, as prayers and hymns to the glory of God.

The divine public worship is the way through which, as sociologists nowadays would say, we learn to socialise, to know one another and help each other on the way to salvation. However, it is not a simple socialisation, because through the cult we learn, we grow spiritually, we evangelise ourselves (without using this word in a polemic way), we are fulfilled spiritually and mutually through the mission of the Church of God's Word, in full communion with Him, our Head.

Through the services of the Church we all become soldiers of His divine mission, enrolled in the army of the Word and ready for action like the wise virgins. The Liturgy of the Church becomes thus the Liturgy of serving with, through, and of God's Word as the Apostle tells us: "*In the beginning was the Word*" (John 1.1).

Just like the Scripture from which it is inspired, the divine cult breathes God, being the same, *theopneustos* (literally, "breathed by God"). Thus, God's word is always penetrator in the depth of being (Hebrews 4.12) and fruitful (Isaiah 55.10-11).

God's words are applicable today, just as when they were first recorded a long time ago, through the mission of the cult and mission of the Church today. History does not repeat today. What repeats refers to our sins that make us affirm that history repeats. The cult's role is to permanentise the mission of the Church, of stopping and changing time, because the Liturgy of the Word is the Liturgy of divine time, where there is no Judean or Greek, man or woman, but all are one in Christ serving the Lord.

4. The Tables of Moses as symbol of the Word and Church's mission

The Law (of Moses) has had a special importance in the word of the Scripture. Mount Sinai is the place where Moses talked to God, and it prefigures Tabor and the work of the Holy Trinity as it is presented by Saint Basil the Great: "*From the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit.*" The action involves the One Who reasons, the One Who works, but also the One Who accomplishes, hence the value and the Trinitarian meaning of the mission of the Church. Just as the Tables of the Law were written by God Himself (Exodus 31.18), in the same way the mission of the Church is written by God's finger on the solid stone of the confessing Church. The mission of the Church today, prefigured in a certain way by the Tables of the Law, manifests an incommensurate "*care so that the Orthodox faithful partake in the unearthly beauty and in all the spiritual benefit of the divine Word*" [16].

As a result of the mission of the Church, "*the clergy and the faithful of the Romanian Orthodox Church have always known the revealed truth which is to be found in the Holy Scripture, particularly through the Holy Liturgy (...) in the churches and monasteries in all the Romanian lands. The liturgical books, more than twenty, which are an important source of the Holy Tradition, have always*

offered the faithful numerous and ample parts of the Holy Scripture under the form of evangelical pericopes, readings from the epistles, and paremias. In the Church, during the Holy Liturgy, Christians have discovered the word of the Holy Scripture, as well as the truths of faith included in the Holy Tradition, grouped in an assembly in which the expression reaches perfection and the prayer raises the spirit to the complete and just understanding of the Christian truth which has modelled and marked forever the soul of Orthodox Christians.” [17]

5. Analysis

The mission of the Church is thus crowned by the power of the Word Who becomes for us all, as the Psalmist says, “*a lamp to my feet*” (Psalm 118.105) on the blessed way to salvation. We could say through the words of our great theologian that “*The Son and Word of God has revealed Himself through words, in His work of approaching people so as to raise them to Him, up to the incarnation, resurrection and ascension as man. The Scripture renders what the Son of God continues to do with us in this position of perfect God and man, thus the Scripture explains Christ’s present work.*” [1, vol. 2, p. 54]

The words or word of Scripture, of the Fathers speaking from Scripture, the word of the divine cult and of the ones who lived a Christian life, the word of today’s missionary preaching and of the mission of the Church in its plenarity represents undoubtedly a window towards ‘*the spirit that gives life*’, towards the Source, towards the Word in Person, Who is *Logos* and *Light*. Consequently, the Word addressed to human understanding is the true Light, too. The Church has the mission to illuminate the faithful through the Word who is the Light of the world. Hence, the Scripture becomes the Liturgy of the Word for the one who reads it, and then it illuminates and places him on the way to personal salvation, under the crown of divine grace.

Scripture and the Eucharistic Liturgy represent in Orthodoxy the heart of the life of the Church, the matrix of Christian experience and the beginning of the mission of the Church [18]. The divinity of the Eucharist and of the Holy Liturgy represent the supremely manifested form of the philanthropy of the Son in His mysterious Body – the Church, and this is the reason why the Church focuses its mission on its living members, having its life centred on Christ, Who becomes for us the first purpose of our Christian life. Christ the Word introduces us to the Church, restores us through the same Church, and marks us as God’s sons in grace through the Eucharistic sacrifice. Thus, the encounter with Christ is as real as His presence in the Eucharist.

The mission of the Church today makes our encounter with Christ as Word of God to be real, personal, and mystical. It also ensures our union and unity in God the Word, Who is unique and unitary. As a consequence, the ecumenical engagement of the Orthodox Church must take into consideration this uniqueness but unity in Christ through His Church, illuminating humanity, just as the word of God is “*the true light that enlightens every man*” (John 1.9).

The Liturgy of the Word is the mystery of fulfilment in Christ and with Christ, which transcends what is human, engaging it in the boundless dialogue with God the Word, acknowledgment of “*the past saving deeds of Christ, which produce an ensurance of His present saving work in the one that believes, and a gradual growth of eternal life in him. In the present saving work is exerted a transforming power of Christ on the man who believes*” [12, p. 89].

In the divine cult – centred on the Eucharist of the Word – man is crowned by the Creator of all visible and invisible things as the Master of all creation, word of the Word, denoting here the missionary, prophetic, and grace value of the human person, ensuring in eternity the Christian missionary word, dynamised and immortalised by the Word of God confessed and fulfilled personally. Partaking in God the Word involves the worthiness of our deeds, “*so that we reach the unspeakable place of the feast and rejoice through mysterious songs in union with the ones who celebrate the spiritual feast*” [19].

Today the Christian mission acquires extremely intense and dynamic connotations and qualities. We become the successors of Saint Peter the Apostle, who urges us to preach and defend the Word in today’s secularised society (Romans 1.18-24). Today man becomes the slave of false ideas, making the True Word a god, or an extraterrestrial, sometimes of Buddhist origin, other times of Incan or Mayan origin, or who knows where from, a god ready to destroy the entire planet in a bet with the other gods from his hidden planet. This morbid mysticism separates God from creation and isolates Him in non-existence, under the pretext of a new religion, called science, so that we no longer have the divine providence, the cosmological and eschatological plan of creation, but a pure neopagan defragmentation of the whole of reality. Psychologically assaulted by false information, terrorised in a psychedelic way through ‘*sound*’ as a surrogate for the true *Word*, humanity can find the spiritual support it lacks only by following the way of the saints, covered in the jewels of God’s Word.

Two thousand years ago, Saint Paul the Apostle – the steadfast stone of faith – gave us a serious warning concerning the times in which we are living. However, the gates of hell will not defeat the Church of Christ, as the Lord Himself tells us: “*on this rock [that is, Peter’s confession of faith] I will build my Church, and the gates of hades will not prevail against it*” (Matthew 16.18).

We can assert assuredly that only in the Church and through the Church is God’s Word heard in today’s contemporary and secularised world. Scripture seems to reinforce the mission of the Church in today’s secularised world through the word from the Word. Its missionary, prophetic, evangelical, and eschatological character is profound. The world is invaded by the diabolical lie (people’s words) in a vicious circle, similar to a nightmare from which it is difficult to wake up, persisting in sin, thus standing against the Holy Spirit.

Although God the Word is present in everything that surrounds us, in what we see or do not see, today’s humanity is incapable of seeing Him because “*Having eyes, do you not see? Having ears, do you not hear? Do you not remember?*” (Mark 8.18) and “*faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God*” (Romans 10.17). If the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, the lack

of fear of God and total ignorance represent the eternal death of the soul in the Gehenna of fire.

Today, the Lord's army stands firm against all evils. It is well-organised and solid. It looks with humbleness and complete faith to God the Father, under the guiding Light of the Word, its head. The angels and the Saints watch, together with the Apostles; the bishops teach and bless in Spirit and Truth, fulfilling the Word of God; the priests mirror with their life the blessed presence; the deacons confess and the whole people partakes in this, so that the body of the Church is alive, so that forever "*let anyone with ears hear.*" All Christians, from the highest to the lowest, from Bishop to people, become the keepers of the great mystery, of "*the mystery hidden from all ages and unknown to the angels,*" forever obeying God's Word.

Christ's pedagogical role stands out particularly, the Word being educator par excellence. He is the Son of God, the Word, but also the Son of Man, the Creator before time and within time of the history of humanity, a divine-human history.

6. Conclusions

The destiny of man is only one: serving God the Word, obeying the voice and the mission of the Church. There is no other destiny, and the ones who trample on it, trample on themselves. As temples of the Word, having supper with the Lord, we are continually obliged to emphasise the Saviour's humanity to the same extent in which we glorify divinity, because we are created by divinity and in humanity we are deified.

Hence, in writing about the teaching on Logos, the Holy Fathers were more than conclusive in the profession of faith: "*Following the holy fathers, we teach with one voice that the Son [of God] and our Lord Jesus Christ is to be confessed as one and the same [Person], that He is perfect in Godhead and perfect in manhood, true God and true man, of a reasonable soul and [human] body consisting, consubstantial with the Father as touching His Godhead, and consubstantial with us as touching His manhood; having become like us in all things save sin only; begotten of His Father before the ages according to His Godhead; but in these last days, for us men and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to His manhood. This one and the same Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son [of God] must be confessed to be in two natures, unconfusedly, immutably, indivisibly, inseparably [united], and that without the distinction of natures being taken away by such union, but rather the peculiar property of each nature being preserved and being united in one Person and subsistence, not separated or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son and only-begotten, God the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets of old have spoken concerning Him, and as the Lord Jesus Christ has taught us, and as the Creed of the fathers has delivered unto us.*" [20] The Sixth Ecumenical Council completes this definition with what was necessary to confute the monothelites: "*one and the same Christ our Lord the only-begotten*

Son of two natures unconfusedly, unchangeably, inseparably, indivisibly to be recognized; we likewise declare that in him are two natural wills and these two natural wills are not contrary the one to the other, but his human will follows and that not as resisting and reluctant, but rather as subject to his divine and omnipotent will” [21].

Through its mission, the living Church joins thus the divine eschatological plan and the apostolic mission as direct witness of Christ, becoming at present that mother nave which carries not only Christ, but also the victory of Christ over the worldly demon, according to the Lord’s words: “*Rejoice! I have overcome the world*” (John 16.33).

The Church Itself is a divine miracle, yet the miracle does not work through itself, but first summons, just as ‘one flower makes no garland’, but it takes a whole missionary process during the spiritual ascent leading to the Kingdom of God. The good order of things in Church is accomplished through discernment and the experience that comes with age, not through an individualist enthusiasm lacking a prior purification of passions of the one who desires to teach others. In all we must look towards Christ, the humble model, for the law of spiritual growth in His Church.

Let us therefore fulfil the word of the Church through the Word, its head, so that His body should fill us with the spiritual words of Christian mission, nurtured from the words of Holy Scripture, from the public divine worship, from the Tables of the Law, from the present preaching and from Holy Tradition, where the Word was prophesied and through which the prophecy was fulfilled.

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