

Some Distinctive Features of Eastern Christian Spirituality

*Dr. K. P. Aleaz**

In this paper an attempt is made to identify some important features of Eastern Christian Spirituality. The first section indicates the significance of worship as a source and expression of spirituality. Essence—energy distinction related to human knowledge of God is discussed in the second section. The third section is on human participation in the energies of God. The Eastern understanding of deification is analysed in the fourth section. The fifth section focusses upon the apophatic nature of theology. Image of God in the context of Fall is the subject matter of the sixth section. The seventh section deals with a theology of creation as well as the insight of human solidarity with creation according to Eastern Christian thought, and our concluding findings are indicated in the eighth and the last section.

1. Worship as a Source and Expression of Spirituality

In Eastern Christianity worship is considered both a source and expression of theology and spirituality.¹ It is in the liturgy of the church, in its structure and rhythm, in its ineffable and celestial beauty, the joy and peace in the Holy Spirit, the experience of the kingdom and the true manifestation of the new creation redeemed by Christ are reflected.² In the liturgy the historical and the eschatological dimensions of the divine economy are joined in an inseparable whole.³ The community of worshippers spreads its arms to include all the faithful, the whole humankind and the whole creation while it bows down to worship the creator.⁴ Also the whole of the human person and all the human senses are involved in Eastern Christian worship, not merely the ears and the brain. This is in line with the principle of incarnation.⁵ Human person needs a regular excursus into non-rational expression of his/her deeper yearnings and feelings and Eastern worship provides opportunity for this. Music, colour and smell as well as gestures and actions are used to express the non-rational element in worship.⁶ In the Eucharistic Worship of the Orthodox we in Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ, are entering into the presence of God the Father. There we stand face to face with God without any protecting veil. This sense of being in the presence of the Holy Trinity with the angelic hosts dominates the eucharistic service.⁷

In the Eastern understanding worship is an end in itself; it is not a means to achieve anything. The dominant mood of Eastern worship is self-sacrifice, being caught up in the once-for-all and eternal sacrifice of Christ.⁸

* *Dr. K. P. Aleaz* is Professor of Religions at Bishop's College and Dean of Doctoral Studies, NIIPGTS.

In faith, in love, in obedience, in hope, without reservation, without asking for anything in return, He said, 'Father, into thy hands I commit my-spirit'. That was the perfect sacrifice not propitiatory, not appeasing an angry God, not gaining surplus merit for others, but a simple, faithful, loving act of self-immolation. This is sacrifice—the highest expression of love. One gives oneself (and not a substitute) to Him who is all—in love, in joy, in faith. This should be the dominant mood of worship, not merely the contemplation of the worthiness of God, but the joyous act of losing oneself in loving self-surrender to that worth of God. The Eucharist is the act in which the church is caught up in freedom, love, joy and self-surrender into the once-for-all and eternal sacrifice of Christ. It is neither repetition nor mere memorial.⁹

It is such an understanding of worship which is an authentic expression of Eastern Christian Spirituality.

2. Essence-Energies Distinction Related to Human Knowledge of God

The Orthodox Christian tradition draws a distinction between the essence, nature or inner being of God, on the one hand, and His/Her energies, operations or acts of grace, life and power, on the other.¹⁰ Eastern spirituality, liturgy and thought always affirmed the possibility of communion with God accessible to every Christian in the life of the Church. But this accessibility does not include the very essence of God.¹¹ According to Gregory of Nyssa, in speaking of God, when there is question of His/Her essence, that is the time to keep silence, and when it is a question of His/Her operation, a knowledge of which can come down even to us, that is the time to speak of His/Her omnipotence by telling of His/Her works and to use words to this extent.¹²

According to Dionysius the Areopagite, in His/Her transsubstantial existence, through His/Her own principle or property, though God is unknowable and inscrutable, this does not mean that God is far removed from the world; rather God abides in the world in His/Her creative emanations and beneficial providences, in His/Her powers and energies.¹³ That the essence—energy distinction in God does not imply a division or separation is the view of Gregory Palamas.¹⁴ The essence signifies the whole God as He/She is in Himself/Herself and the energies signify the whole God as He/She is in action. Wholly unknowable in His/Her essence, God wholly reveals Himself/Herself in His/Her energies. But this in no way divides His/Her nature into two parts as knowable and unknowable, rather only signifies two different modes of the divine existence namely in the essence and outside of the essence.¹⁵

In the view of Eastern Christian Spirituality the union to which we are called is neither hypostatic as in the case of the human nature of Christ, nor substantial as in that of the three divine Persons. Rather it is a union with God in His/Her energies, or union by grace making us participate in the divine nature, without our essence becoming thereby the essence of God.¹⁶ In deification we are by grace or energies all that God is by nature, save only identity of nature. We remain creatures while becoming God by grace, as Christ remained God in becoming human person by the Incarnation.¹⁷ An aspect of the divine energies is that of the uncreated light in which God reveals and communicates Himself/Herself to those who enter into union with Him/Her. This light may be defined as the visible quality of the divinity, of the energies or grace in which God makes Himself/Herself known. This light reveals itself to the whole human person. It fills the intellect and the senses and at the same time surpasses them.¹⁸ Eastern saints have very frequently been transfigured by this light and have appeared resplendent like Christ

on the mount of Transfiguration. Most of the Fathers such as St. Gregory Nazianzen, St. Cyril of Alexandria, St. Maximus, St. Andrew of Create, St. John Damascene and St. Symeon the New Theologian who speak of the Transfiguration point to the divine and uncreated nature of the light which appeared to the apostles.¹⁹

The light seen by the apostles on Mount Tabor is proper to God by His nature : eternal, infinite, existing outside space and time. The transfiguration was not a phenomenon circumscribed in time and space; Christ underwent no change at that moment, even in his human nature, but a change occurred in the awareness of the apostles, who for a time received the power to see their master as He was, resplendent in the eternal light of His Godhead. The apostles were taken out of history and given a glimpse of eternal realities.²⁰

The transfiguration becomes a possibility for the disciples of Jesus as well, through the inward light of divine energies. Eastern Spirituality considers the divine energies or the uncreated deifying grace as the divine fire or light. According to St. Gregory Palamas a person who participates in the divine energy himself/herself becomes, to some extent, light. He/She is united to the light and by that light sees in full awareness all that remains hidden to those who do not have this grace.²¹

3. Human Participation in the Energies of God

The uncreated divine light is the very divinity of Christ shining through His humanity. If Christ is truly God, this light is authentically divine. The same Christological framework makes it inevitable to distinguish between the transcendent essence of God and His/Her energies. The humanity of Christ, 'enhypostasized' by the Logos, is penetrated with divine energy, and Christ's body becomes the source of divine light and deification. Deification or communion between divinity and humanity does not suggest a confusion of essences. But at the same time there is real communion between God and human person, and real deification—not by essence but by energy.²² According to the entire patristic thought, knowledge of God implies 'participation in God', i.e., not only intellectual knowledge, but a state of the entire human being, transformed by grace and freely co-operating with it by the efforts of both will and mind.²³ So the point is

In the tradition of the Eastern Church there is no place for a theology, and even less for a mysticism, of the divine essence. The goal of Orthodox spirituality, the blessedness of the Kingdom of Heaven, is not the vision of the essence, but above all, a participation in the divine life of the Holy Trinity; the deified state of the co-heirs of the divine nature, gods created after the uncreated God, possessing by grace all that the Holy Trinity possesses by nature.²⁴

Human person possesses a natural property of transcending oneself and reaching the divine through the purification of the whole being. In the natural state, a person is in communion with God and enjoys a direct knowledge and experience of God.²⁵ Gregory Palamas for example developed an experiential concept of our knowledge of God. Theology primarily is not a conceptual exercise based on 'revealed premises' but an expression of true Christian experience.²⁶ In the entire life of a person in the Church he/she is called to participate in divine life and this participation is also the true knowledge of God.²⁷ God is totally inaccessible in His/Her essence and human person in deification can become God only 'by grace' or 'by energy'. Affirming the absolute transcendence of God is only another way of saying that God is the Creator *ex nihilo* : anything which exists outside of God exists only through His 'will' or 'energy', and can participate in His/Her life only as a result of His/Her 'will' or 'grace'.²⁸

Christ's humanity enhypostasized as it is in the Logos and thus having become truly God's humanity, did not become 'God by essence'; it was penetrated with the divine energy through the *circumincessio idiomatum*—and, in it, our own humanity finds access to God in His energies.²⁹ The patristic tradition stands for a God-centred humanism where deification does not suppress humanity but makes human person truly human.³⁰

4. The Eastern Understanding of Deification

Maximus the Confessor points out that the doctrinal basis of human person's deification is to be found in hypostatic unity between the divine and the human nature in Christ. In Jesus there is a 'communication' (*Perichoresis-Circumincessio*) of the divine and human 'energies' because the man Jesus is God hypostatically :

En-hypostasized in the Logos, Christ's humanity, in virtue of the 'communication of idioms', is penetrated with divine 'energy'. It is, therefore, a deified humanity which, however, does not in any way lose its human characteristics. Quite to the contrary. These characteristics become even more real and authentic by contact with the divine model according to which they were created. In this deified humanity of Christ's, man is called to participate, and to share in its deification. This is the meaning of sacramental life and the basis of Christian spirituality. The Christian is called not to an 'imitation' of Jesus—a purely extrinsic and moral act—but, ... to 'life in Christ' through baptism, Chrismation, and the Eucharist.³¹

Those who are 'in Christ' share the 'communication' of the divine and human energies, but with a difference. They are only human hypostases and consequently they are united to God not hypostatically, but only 'by grace' or 'by energy'. Humans are God (Jn 10.34) not by nature or by relation but by divine grace.³² It is not through one's own activity or 'energy' that a person can be deified as in Pelagianism, but by divine 'energy', to which one's human activity is obedient. Between the divine 'energy' and the human activity there is a 'synergy', of which the relation of the two energies in Christ is the ontological basis. But there is no confusion of the divine and human natures in a person just as there cannot be any participation in the divine essence by human person.³³ This is the theology of deification which we find in Gregory Palamas also : "God in His completeness deifies those who are worthy of this, by uniting Himself with them, not hypostatically—that belongs to Christ alone—nor essentially, but through a small part of the uncreated *energies* and the uncreated divinity... while yet being entirely present in each".³⁴

In deification human person achieves the supreme goal for which he/she was created. This goal which was already realized in Christ by the unilateral action of God's love, represents both the meaning of human history and a judgement over human person. It is open to human person's response and free effort.³⁵ Eastern Christian thought does not think about salvation in terms of the individual soul returning to its Maker. Rather it is visualised as a gradual process of transfiguration of the whole cosmos, culminating in deification in Christ of the members of the church as representatives and spokespersons of the entire creation.³⁶

Through Christ's humanity, deified according to its hypostatic union with the Logos, all members of the Body of Christ have access to 'deification' by grace through the operation of the Spirit in Christ's church.³⁷ In the church and through the sacraments our nature enters into union with the divine nature in the hypostasis of the Son, the head of his mystical body. Our humanity becomes consubstantial with the deified humanity, united with the person of Christ.³⁸

The work of Christ and of the Holy Spirit in humans is explained thus : “This is the unfathomable mystery of the church, the work of Christ and of the Holy Spirit; one in Christ, multiple through the Spirit, *a single human nature* in the hypostasis of Christ, *many human hypostases* in the grace of the Holy Spirit”.³⁹ It is the Holy Spirit who recreates our nature by purifying it and uniting it to the body of Christ. He/She also bestows deity i.e., the common energy of the Holy Trinity which is divine grace, upon human persons.⁴⁰ It is through the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Trinity dwells within us and deifies us; confers upon us the uncreated energies, its glory, and its deity which is the eternal light of which we must partake.⁴¹ In the theology of the Eastern Church, the person of the Holy Spirit, the giver of grace is always distinguished from the uncreated grace or energy which He/She confers. Grace is uncreated and by its nature divine. It is the energy or procession of the one divine nature; it is divinity in so far as it is ineffably distinct from the essence and communicates itself to the created beings deifying them.⁴² Within the church the Holy Spirit imparts to human hypostases the fullness of deity after a manner which is unique, ‘personal’, appropriate to every human person as a person created in the image of God.⁴³ Regarding the Holy Spirit it is further stated thus :

The power of love communicated to the soul by the Holy Spirit, although distinct from His divine hypostasis, is not a created effect, an accidental quality whose existence would depend upon our created substance, but an uncreated gift, a divine and deifying energy in which we really participate in the nature of the Holy Trinity, by becoming partakers of the divine nature.⁴⁴

The path which Christ, the divine Person took, was that of a descent towards created being and taking upon himself of our nature. If that is so the path of created person has to be that of ascent, a rising up towards the divine nature by means of union with uncreated grace communicated by the Holy Spirit.⁴⁵ For reaching union with God which is the vocation of the created being, it was necessary to break through a triple barrier of sin, death and nature. Christ has set aside each of these barriers; the barrier of nature by his incarnation, the barrier of sin by his death and the barrier of death by his resurrection.⁴⁶ The incarnation and deification correspond to one another; they mutually imply one another.

By virtue of the distinction between the divine essence and the divine energies, we are able to affirm the possibility of a union between a human person and God called deification excluding any pantheistic identification between the two. Because human person participates in the energies of God, not in the essence, there is union, but not fusion or confusion. Although ‘oned’ with the divine, human person still remains human person.⁴⁷ Energies are not intermediary between God and human person, a ‘thing’ or gift which God bestows on His/Her creation. On the contrary the energies are truly God *Himself/Herself*, yet not God as He/She exists *within Himself/Herself*, in His/Her inner life, but God as He/She communicates Himself/Herself in outgoing love. He who participates in God’s energies is therefore meeting God Himself/Herself face to face, through a direct and personal union of love, in so far a created being is capable of this.⁴⁸ According to Eastern thought, in the Eucharist human person participates in the glorified humanity of Christ, which is not the ‘essence of God’. The essence—energy distinction is well maintained in the theology of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is Christ’s transfigured, life-giving, but still human, body, enhypostasized in the Logos and penetrated with divine ‘energies’.⁴⁹ Eucharist represents the glorified humanity of Christ; as Christ’s humanity has been transformed into glory through the cross and Resurrection, the bread and wine are being changed and deified by the operation of the Spirit.⁵⁰

Deification is an eternal progress into the inexhaustible riches of divine life. It is a progress through which, in Christ, human person recovers his/her original relation to God and grows into God from glory to glory.⁵¹ Deification's use by the Orthodox tradition was based on the theology of the 'image of God' within personality, and its various equivalents, i.e., upon a theocentric idea of humanity which cannot be adequately expressed in Western categories of 'nature' and 'grace'. Deification points to communion with God and that communion is one's destiny since the individual's creation is according to God's 'image and likeness'.⁵² Christian life in the church is interpreted as a foretaste of deification :

The deep spiritual *askesis* or discipline, of daily dying to ourselves and being born anew in Christ by the Spirit, has to be practised by all Christians, whether living in a monastery or not. Theosis is a continuing state of adoration, prayer, thanksgiving, worship and intercession, as well as meditation and contemplation of the Triune God and his infinite love. This life of participation in the life and worship of the church and the 'inner liturgy of the heart' constitute a foretaste of theosis, for every Christian, as he walks his pilgrim way through life.⁵³

5. The Apophatic Nature of Theology

Christian theology for the East is always a means; a means to attain union with God or deification. There are two possible theological ways. One, that of cataphatic or positive theology, proceeding by affirmations and the other apophatic theology proceeding by negations. The only way which is fitting with regard to God who by His/Her very nature is unknowable is the latter which finally leads to total ignorance.⁵⁴ "All knowledge has as its object that which is. Now God is beyond all that exists. In order to approach Him it is necessary to deny all that is inferior to Him, that is to say, all that which is. It is by *unknowing* (*agnawisia*) that one may know Him who is above every possible object of knowledge".⁵⁵ We should remember here that the goal of apophatic theology is not God as object, but God as subject or union with God. Moses' entering the darkness and so seeing God within it is compared by Eastern Fathers to the apophatic way of theologising. According to the Cappadocians for example, if the first theophany Moses received was in the burning bush (Ex. 3.1-4.17), there was a spiritual growth in his life to experience God in 'thick darkness' (Ex. 33.17-23), that is, in the total negation of any perception, physical or intellectual.⁵⁷ This darkness is the inherent incapacity of created nature to penetrate the essential mystery of God. This veil of darkness which hinders the vision of God's nature has a salutary function.⁵⁸ Also, it is interpreted that the rock which hid Moses' complete vision of God and thus saved him from fatal exposure to a total vision of God was Christ. The incarnate Christ acts as a veil that hides from humans any intellectual knowledge of the essential nature of God. He is the saving curtain which covers the window of any rational comprehension of God.⁵⁹

God's essential being is hidden from all created beings. God can only be worshipped not conceptually conceived or verbally described. God cannot be the object of any theological discovery.⁶⁰ God is understood as a Mystery. A mystery is something that is revealed for our understanding, but which we never understand exhaustively because it leads into the depth or darkness of God.⁶¹ Apophatism of the Eastern Christian thought is an expression of that fundamental attitude which transforms the whole of theology into a contemplation of the mysteries of revelation. Theology is the spontaneous and thankful praise of God; it is our experiential relationship with God. It is the worshipful experience of the Triune God and

compassionate love for humanity and the whole creation.⁶² There is an eternal self-emptying or *kenosis* of God (Phil. 2.4-8) and therefore self-negation of discourse becomes fundamental to genuine theology; and this is why Eastern Christian tradition's apophatic approach to God transcends the conceptual and the verbal.⁶³ According to Indian thought as well as Eastern Christian thought, theology is a mode of being, theology is participating in being. The ultimate concern is not to think about being but to be in being.⁶⁴

We should note that unknowability leads to union, to deification. Dogmas of the church are antinomies, but deification enables a change of heart and mind helping us to attain to the contemplation of the reality which reveals itself to us as it raises us to God.⁶⁵ Apophatism signifies the following existential attitude which involves the whole human person : "There is no theology apart from experience; it is necessary to change, to become a new man. To know God one must draw near to Him. No one who does not follow the path of union with God can be a theologian. The way of the knowledge of God is necessarily the way of deification".⁶⁶

Christian spirituality is integrally related to the self-emptying silence, for which the self-emptying of Christ is the inspiration.⁶⁷ The first level of God-language is apophatic silence. Silence as the apophatic negation of words and concepts about the mystery of God is the cornerstone of Eastern Christian spirituality.⁶⁸ Conceptual theology falls short of the experience of truth that it really holds, the experience of truth as sustained by the silent roots. Access to the silent roots is through the self-emptying, life-giving space of freedom granted to us in Christ.⁶⁹

The second level of God-language is the language of economy (*oikonomia*). *Oikonomia* or 'home rule' is based on the method of self-limitation and accommodation on the part of God in incarnation and consequently *oikonomia* becomes the method of *theologia*.⁷⁰ The language of economy is integrally related to experience of God and deification :

The core of the language of economy is experience—experience of the incarnate Son of God. Ultimately this experience eclipses all language. Between theology and economy, between the apophatic reality of the triune God and the 'raw fact' of the incarnation, the connection link is not discourse, but the experience of divinization...The concern to speak about God (*theologeîn*) is totally eclipsed by an overriding concern for 'becoming God' (*theologesthai*). This involves not only the transformation of our inner qualities and attitudes, but transfiguration of our physical reality as well.⁷¹

6. Image of God in the Context of Fall

In Eastern Christian thought the image of God is the essence of human person while 'likeness' points to the ethical being of human person. If the image constitutes the original bond between God and human person, the likeness represents the freedom of the individual to realise the potentialities of the image.⁷² If 'image' signifies human potentiality for life in God, 'likeness' points to the realization of that potentiality. The image is that which a person possesses from the beginning, and which enables him/her to set out on the spiritual way; whereas likeness is that which is attained at the end of the journey.⁷³ The following is further stated :

Sometimes the Greek Fathers associate the divine image or 'ikon' in man with the totality of his nature considered as a trinity of spirit, soul and body. At other times they connect the image more specifically with the highest aspect of man, with his spirit or spiritual intellect, through which he attains knowledge of God and union with him. Fundamentally,

the image of God in man denotes everything that distinguishes man from the animals, that makes him in the full and true sense a *person*—a moral agent capable of right and wrong, a spiritual subject endowed with inward freedom.⁷⁴

The image constitutes what is distinctively human. It means the whole human being in relationship with God. It is the outcome of the boundless love of God. It is expressed primarily in the face to face relationship of human person with Creator, necessarily bound to Him/Her, but retaining free will.⁷⁵ The image is the synthesis in a person of all his/her spiritual, intellectual, conscious and unconscious operations as the first creature of creation. It is the image that sustains a person as a created being, and makes him/her in the fallen nature still responsible for sin. The image can be sterile, spoiled or reduced to silence. But still God preserves it essentially in human life, a life though condemned to death. In a person the image of God is not recreated, it is only renewed, healed, fulfilled and perfected through Christ.⁷⁶ The Orthodox tradition though takes the fall seriously, does not however believe that it resulted in a 'total depravity', such as the Calvinists assert. According to it though the divine image in human person was obscured, it was not obliterated. A person's free choice has been restricted but not destroyed.⁷⁷

The Eastern tradition considers evil as having entered the world through the will. Evil is not a nature, but a condition. The nature of good is stronger than the habit of evil. This is because the good exists, while the evil does not exist, or rather it exists only at the moment in which it is practised.⁷⁸ Evil is only the absence of good and compassionate prayer can eliminate it as light can eliminate darkness.⁷⁹ Evil has its origin in the freedom of the created order.⁸⁰ If the good nature of human person strayed from its creator, it could only have happened through its capacity for inner self-determination. Eastern thought understands the fall of human nature as the direct consequence of the free self-determination of human person who voluntarily subjected himself/herself to this condition.⁸¹

According to Eastern thought the inheritance of Fall is an inheritance of mortality rather than sinfulness, sinfulness being a mere consequence of mortality. Sin remains a personal act and inherited guilt is impossible. The wrong choice made by Adam brought in passion, corruption and mortality, but not inherited guilt.⁸² Eastern tradition does not interpret original sin in juridical or quasibiological terms, as if it were some physical 'taint' of guilt, transmitted through sexual intercourse.⁸³

Eastern theologians have pictured human person in terms of a trichotomist scheme : spirit (or mind i.e., *nous*), soul and body. This trichotomism is directly connected with the notion of participation in God which is the basis of anthropology.⁸⁴ The spirit represents the ability which human person possesses to transcend oneself in order to participate in God. It implies the unity of the composite nature of human person as it faces the ultimate destiny in God and in the world. It also signifies the freedom of human person which can either fully develop if it finds God or becomes defective if it submits itself to the body.⁸⁵ The spirit has to be united with the heart the centre of the human being.⁸⁶ The spirit finds its sustenance in God, the soul feeds on the spirit and the body lives on the soul. Such was the original ordering of our immortal nature.⁸⁷

The spirit is the highest part of the human person. It is that contemplative faculty with which a person is able to seek God. It is the principle of conscience and freedom. It is the seat of human person, the seat of human hypostasis which contains in itself the whole of human nature namely spirit, soul and body. This is the reason the Greek Fathers identify the spirit with

the image of God in human person.⁸⁸ Sometimes the Greek Fathers describe human nature as the union of soul and body, in which case the spirit is understood as a superior faculty of the reasonable soul, the faculty by which human person enters into communion with God. Spirit is the image of God, being dynamic and changing, is always inclined by the will towards an external end. It is the spirit as the image of God which puts human nature into a personal relationship with God.⁸⁹

7. A Theology of Creation and the Insight of Human Solidarity with Creation

According to Eastern Christian thought, while essentially unchangeable, God is becoming the creator of the world in time through His/Her 'energy'. The ideas of created things in God are dynamic and intentional and their place is not in the essence but in the energies of God. The divine 'willings' are the creative ideas of things, the *logoi*, the words; the words of creation found in Genesis and Psalms.⁹⁰ The *will* of God is ontologically distinct from the *nature* of God. Creation is an act of the *will* of God, which means that God remains absolutely free to create or not to create and remains transcendent to the world after creating it. Whereas it is by *nature* that the Father generates the Son and this generation is indeed beyond time.⁹¹ In the Biblical concept of creation, absolute divine transcendence and freedom is maintained in the act of creation. The divine providence which gave being to the world through the *logoi* maintains it in existence giving total freedom to the world's own created dynamism. Every created thing has its point of contact with the Godhead and this point of contact is its idea, reason or *logos* which is at the same time the end towards which it tends. The ideas of individual things are contained within the higher and more general ideas, as are the species within a genus. The whole is contained in the Logos, the second person of the Trinity who is the first principle and the last end of all created things.⁹²

By creation *ex nihilo* God makes room for something which is wholly outside of Himself/ Herself; He/She sets up the 'outside' or nothingness alongside of His/Her plenitude. *Nihil* means here simply that 'before' creation nothing existed 'outside' of God. Or rather that this 'outside' and this 'before' are absurd, since it is precisely the creation which posits them.⁹³ Creation is the work of will, and consequently is not co-eternal with God. That which is brought from not-being into being cannot be co-eternal with that which exists always and without origin.⁹⁴ The self-sacrifice of God, the self-emptying of God, is involved in the ongoing process of creation and this understanding is shared by other religious traditions as well. The loving, sacrificial involvement of God manifest in the incarnation is implicit from the first moment of creation. The paradox of Christ making the whole creation his *body* by the kenotic act of dispossessing the self sets the paradigm for the Christian approach to creation.⁹⁵ As per the Orthodox thinking history in its larger sense is 'enfolding' in the being of the church because the body of Christ is inclusive of all and stands in the presence of God on behalf of all creation.⁹⁶

It is the humanity together with the material creation that constitutes the ultimate image of God. We may have to strive for a vision in which the material creation becomes 'my Father's house' (*oikos*) and 'my body' (*soma*). The exhortation of Orthodox mystics was to love the whole creation in order to understand the mystery of God in created things.⁹⁷ Apart from tears of repentance there is another level of tears in the spiritual tradition of Eastern Christians namely the tears of compassion, tears of compassionate love for God's creation. Christian theology is unable to spell out what it is that links the human person as the image of God to the rest of creation. It only says negatively that human beings are created in the image of God

while animals and plants are not so created. But at the same time Christian faith affirms that all things visible and invisible come from the same source, the Creator God. The limitations of theological speculations are overcome by a compassionate heart. A compassionate heart discerns the deep ligaments of divine love that unite humanity with the rest of creation.⁹⁸

Eastern thought upholds the mediatory role of human presence in creation. Humanity's vocation is to be the mediator (*methorios*) or the frontier being mediating between the material and the spiritual, between the secular and the sacred, between God and creation. Eastern reflection of God-world-humanity relationship is rooted in a positive view of created reality as the expression of God's goodness, love and will, and in the truth of incarnation of Christ who is the archetype for the mediatory presence of humanity between spirit and matter, between God and creation.⁹⁹ Human person is not only a frontier being but also a 'microcosm', a microcosm because he/she unites in his/her hypostatic existence, the intelligible and sensible aspects, the spiritual and material aspects of creation.¹⁰⁰

8. Conclusion

The following are the findings of our above discussion : (a) Worship is considered as an authentic expression of Eastern Christian Spirituality. The community of worshippers spreads its arms to include all the faithful, the whole humankind and the whole creation. Also, the whole of human person, all the human senses, are involved in Eastern Christian worship. In the Eucharistic worship we in Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ and following him in his self-sacrifice, are entering into the presence of God the Father. (b) A distinction is made between the *essence*, nature or inner being of God, and His/Her *energies*, operations or acts of grace, life and power. If God is unknowable to humans in the former aspect, He/She is knowable to them in the latter aspect. In the view of Eastern Christian spirituality the union to which we are called is neither hypostatic as in the case of human nature of Christ, nor substantial as in that of the three divine Persons; rather it is a union with God in His/Her energies, or union by grace. An aspect of the divine energies is that of the uncreated light in which God reveals and communicates Himself/Herself to those who enter into union with Him/Her. (c) The humanity of Christ, enhypostasized by the the Logos is penetrated with divine energy, and Christ's body becomes the source of divine light and deification. Christ's body was penetrated with the divine energy through the *circumincessio idiomatum* and in it our own humanity finds access to God. The goal of Orthodox spirituality is such participation in God. In the entire life of a person in the church he/she is called to participate in divine life and this participation is true knowledge of God. (d) The doctrinal basis of human person's deification is to be found in the person of Christ. En-hypostasized in the Logos, Christ's humanity, in virtue of the 'communication of idioms' is penetrated by divine 'energy'. It is therefore a deified humanity. In this deified humanity of Christ, human person is called to participate and to share in its deification. This is the meaning of sacramental life and the basis of Christian spirituality. Those who are 'in Christ' share the 'communication' of the divine and human energies, but with a difference. They are only human hypostases and consequently they are united to God not hypostatically but only 'by grace' or 'by energy'. (e) It is the Holy Spirit who recreates our nature by purifying it and uniting it to the body of Christ. He/She bestows deity i.e., the common energy of the Holy Trinity which is divine grace, upon human persons. Within the church the Holy Spirit imparts to human hypostases the fulness of deity after a manner which is unique, 'personal', appropriate to every human person as a person created in the image of God. (f) In

the Eucharist human person participates in the glorified humanity of Christ, which is not the 'essence of God'. The Eucharist is Christ's transfigured, life-giving, but still human, body, enhypostasized in the Logos and penetrated with divine 'energies' through the operation of the Spirit. (g) It is apophatic theology that leads to deification. It is by *unknowing* (*agnawsia*) that one may know God who is above every possible object of knowledge. The veil of darkness which hinders the vision of God's nature has a salutary function. God can only be worshipped, not conceptually conceived or verbally described. Apophatism is an expression of that fundamental attitude which transforms the whole of theology into a contemplation of the mysteries of revelation, into a mode of being, into participating in being. God-language whether it is apophatic silence or the language of economy (*oikonomia*) in incarnation points not to discourse but to the experience of divinization. (h) Image of God in human person indicates either the totality of his/her nature, considered as a triunity of spirit, soul and body or the highest aspect of human person, his/her spirit or spiritual intellect, through which he/she attains knowledge of God and union with Him/Her. Though the divine image in human person was obscured by the Fall, it was not obliterated. Evil is only the absence of good and it has its origin in the freedom of the created order. Fall is understood as the direct consequence of the free self-determination of human person. The inheritance of Fall is an inheritance of mortality rather than sinfulness, sinfulness being a mere consequence of mortality. (b) The ideas of created things in God have their place not in the essence but in the energies of God. In creation *ex nihilo, nihil* simply means that 'before' creation nothing existed 'outside' of God. Or rather that this 'outside' and the 'before' are absurd, since it is precisely the creation which posits them. Creation is the work of God's will and consequently is not co-eternal with God. That which is brought from not-being into being cannot be co-eternal with that which exists always and without origin. The exhortation of Orthodox mystics was to love the whole creation in order to understand the mystery of God in created things. Apart from tears of repentance there is another level of tears in the spiritual tradition of Eastern Christians namely tears of compassionate love for God's creation. Humanity's vocation is to be the mediator (*methorios*) or the frontier being mediating between the material and the spiritual, between the secular and the sacred, between God and creation as well as to be 'microcosm' that unites in one's existence, the intelligible and sensible, the spiritual and material aspects of creation.

REFERENCES

1. John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology. Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, New York : Fordham University Press, 1983, p. 115.
2. Alexander Schmemmann, *Church, World, Mission. Reflections on Orthodoxy in the West*, New York : St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979, p. 139.
3. Nikos A. Nissiotis, "The Importance of the Doctrine of the Trinity for Church Life and Theology" in *The Orthodox Ethos* ed. by A. J. Philippou, Oxford : Holy Well Press, 1964, p. 67.
4. Paulos Mar Gregorios, *The Joy of Freedom : Eastern Worship and Modern Man*, Madras : CLS, 1986, p. 9.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
10. Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, London : Mowbrays, 1979, p. 27.

EASTERN CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

11. John Meyendorff, *The Byzantine Legacy in the Orthodox Church*, New York : St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1982, pp. 31-32.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Georges Florovsky, *The Byzantine Ascetic and Spiritual Fathers. Vol. 10 in the Collected Works*, Massachusetts : Nordland Publishing Company, 1987, p. 211.
14. Georges Florovsky, *Bible, Church, Tradition : An Eastern Orthodox View, Vol. 1 in the Collected Works*, Massachusetts : Nordland Publishing Company, 1972, p. 117.
15. Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, *op. cit.* p. 28, Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, London : James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1957, p. 70.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 220-21.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 243, 224, 219-20.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 222-23.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 219-20, 224, 243.
22. John Meyendorff, *The Byzantine Legacy in the Orthodox Church*, *op. cit.*, p. 190.
23. John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology. Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, *op. cit.*, p. 140.
24. Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, *op. cit.*, p. 65.
25. John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology. Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, *op. cit.*, p. 140.
26. John Meyendorff, *The Byzantine Legacy in the Orthodox Church*, *op. cit.*, p. 173. For a detailed study of the thought of Palamas cf. also John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas* (trans. by George Lawrance), Beds : The Faith Press, 1974.
27. John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology. Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-78.
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 163-64.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 164.
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
36. Nicolas Zernov, *The Church of the Eastern Christians*, London : SPCK, 1944, pp. 53-54.
37. John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology. Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
38. Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, *op. cit.*, p. 181.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 170.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 171.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 172.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 213-14.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 215.
46. *Ibid.*, pp. 135-36.
47. Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
48. *Ibid.*, pp. 168-69.
49. John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology. Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 204-5.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 225.
52. John Meyendorff, *The Byzantine Legacy in the Orthodox Church*, *op. cit.*, pp. 159-60.
53. Georges Tssetis, *Orthodox Thought : Report of Orthodox Consultations organized by the World Council of Churches 1975-1982*, Geneva : WCC, 1983, p. 83.
54. Eugeny Lanpert, "Theological Communication and the Certainties of Belief" in *The Orthodox Ethos*, *op. cit.*, p. 223; Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
55. *Ibid.*
56. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
57. Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-31; K. M. George, *The Silent Roots. Orthodox Perspectives on Christian Spirituality*, Geneva : WCC Publications, 1994, pp. 4-5.
58. *Ibid.*
59. *Ibid.*, pp. 5-7.
60. *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.
61. Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18.
62. Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
63. K. M. George, *The Silent Roots. Orthodox Perspectives on Christian Spirituality*, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 3. cf. R. Panikkar, "Indian Theology : A Theological Mutation" in *Theologizing in India* ed. by M. Amalados, Bangalore : TPI, 1981, pp. 32, 34.
65. Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
66. *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.
67. K. M. George, *The Silent Roots. Orthodox Perspectives on Christian Spirituality*, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
68. *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 58-59.
69. *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
72. Nikos A. Nissiotis, "The Importance of the Doctrine of the Trinity for Church Life and Theology" in *The Orthodox Ethos*, *op. cit.*, p. 50.
73. Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, *op. cit.*, pp. 66.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
75. Nikos A. Nissiotis, "The Importance of the Doctrine of the Trinity for Church Life and Theology", *op. cit.*, pp. 48-49.
76. *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.
77. Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, *op. cit.*, p. 80.
78. Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, *op. cit.*, p. 128.
79. K. M. George, *Silent Roots. Orthodox Perspectives on Christian Spirituality*, *op. cit.*, p. 65.
80. T. Paul Verghese (Paulos Gregorios), *Freedom and Authority*, Madras/Delhi/Lucknow : CLS/ISPCK/LPH, 1974, p. 90.
81. Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology. An Introduction*, New York : St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1989, pp. 135-36.
82. John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology. Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, *op. cit.*, p. 145.
83. Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, *op. cit.*, pp. 80-81.
84. John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology. Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, *op. cit.*, p. 141.
85. *Ibid.*, p. 142.
86. Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

EASTERN CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

87. *Ibid.*, p. 128.
88. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
89. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
90. John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology. Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, *op. cit.*, p. 225; Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-98.
91. John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology. Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, p. 129.
92. *Ibid.*, p. 134; Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, *op. cit.*, p. 98.
93. *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93; Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology. An Introduction*, *op. cit.*, p. 54.
94. Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, *op. cit.*, p. 93.
95. K. M. George, *The Silent Roots. Orthodox Perspectives on Christian Spirituality*, *op. cit.*, pp. 30, 34, 44.
96. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
97. *Ibid.*, pp. 37-39, 56; Nicholas Arseniev, *Mysticism and the Eastern Church* (trans. from German by Arthur Chambers), New York : St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979, pp. 52-53.
98. K. M. George, *The Silent Roots. Orthodox Perspective on Christian Spirituality*, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-67.
99. Paulos Gregorios, *Cosmic Man. The Divine Presence*, New Delhi/Kottayam : Sophia Publications, 1980 (Also New York : Paragon, 1988); *The Human Presence. An Orthodox View of Nature*, Geneva : WCC, 1978; K. M. George and K. J. Gabriel (eds.), *Towards a New Humanity. Essays in Honour of Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios*, Delhi : ISPCK, 1992.
100. John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology. Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, *op. cit.*, p. 142. For an interpretation of human person as both microcosm and mediator as per the writings of Maximus the Confessor cf. Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator. The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, Lund : C.W.K. Gleerup, 1965, 2nd Edition, Chicago and La Salle, Illinois : Open Court, 1995.