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Church, community and theandric institution

Abstract: The founding of the Church was a gradual yet unified process. As a communion between the human and the divine, the Church begins with the Incarnation of the Word of God, unfolds through His death, resurrection, and ascension, and continues with the descent of the Holy Spirit. It culminates at the Parousia, when Christ will return in glory to judge the living and the dead, and God will be "all in all", the fulfillment of perfect love. The visible dimension of the Church, brought to fullness at Pentecost as described in Holy Scripture, is revealed through Christ's express act in communion with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1–4). The Church's historical manifestation begins on the day of Pentecost, through the descent of the Holy Spirit, the gift of tongues (glossolalia), and the apostolic preaching of Peter. This led to the baptism of the first believers, who formed the initial Christian community (Acts 1:13–15; 1 Corinthians 15:6).

Keywords: Church, communion, community, spirituality.

1. Introduction

In the beginning, before all things were created, there was the love of the Holy Trinity, of God the Father towards the Son and the Holy Spirit. The trinitarian, timeless, eternal love "came to light", outside the divine Being - ad extra, through the grace or uncreated divine energy, gave shape to all existences in general and especially to man created in the image and likeness of God, with Christ the divine Logos Incarnate (Genesis 1,26-27). Man, through the fall into sin, broke away from God, heading slowly but surely towards non-existence, towards death. But God's love for fallen man intensifies, reaching its maximum degree with the Incarnation, Death on the Cross and Resurrection of Christ, the Son of God Incarnate, in order to save or redeem man from the deplorable state into which he fell, "for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Discovering this theandric reality, Saint John the Evangelist in the first words of his Gospel says: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was from God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1), "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the Only Begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

2. Church community and theandric institution

By church was understood both the place of worship and the communion and community as the reality of union with Christ, of the faithful, who are incorporated through the Holy Mysteries, starting from baptism, as members of the sacramental theandric organism.

Pentecost constitutes the extension of the Trinitarian communion in the life of the Church, due to the redemptive work accomplished by Christ, so that the faithful may share and participate in the life of eternal communion of the Holy Trinity.

If objective salvation was achieved through the incarnation, the life of obedience, the crucifixion, death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord, salvation proper is accomplished only through the indwelling of Christ with His body in the faithful.

How is this possible?

Through the work of the Holy Spirit, the body assumed by Christ, having become transparent, unites with our earthly body. Thus, the Church was born.

The descent of the Holy Spirit is the act of transition from the saving work of Christ in His personal humanity to the extension of this work in other human beings. Thus, through the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, Christ lays the foundation of the Church in His body, invisibly.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, did not become man for Himself, but in order to extend salvation as divine life in men from His body. This divine life, extended from His body, is the Church, which came into being visibly on the day of Pentecost.

The Church is the community and the theandric institution, at the base of which lies the entire divine Revelation and the work of salvation accomplished by Christ, who is in a continuous relationship with men, the members of His mystical Body, through the Holy Spirit. The foundation of the Church, achieved gradually but unitarily, begins with the incarnation of the Son of God, when "from the Holy Spirit and from the Virgin Mary" (Luke 1:29-38) the union of the human with the divine is hypostatically accomplished in Him. From the incarnation, the communion of man with God is total. Man, and God are united in the Person of Christ, a union deepened ever more intimately through His sacrifice and resurrection from the dead, acts through which the human nature assumed by Christ is freed from corruption, sin and death and deified, sanctified to be elevated to God its Creator. *"As a communion of people with God, the Church begins with the Incarnation - being therefore an extension of the Incarnation and is objectively founded by Christ on the Cross and in His Resurrection from the dead, and as a concrete, visible community of people with God, the Church enters history at Pentecost"* (Dumitru Radu, 1987, 380).

Through the Incarnation, sacrifice, Resurrection and Ascension, Christ shares with His humanity the One and the same Holy Spirit who is co-existent with the Father and the Son, the Spirit of communion, holiness and unity. The Holy Spirit from the day of Pentecost, when the Church enters history as a community and communion of human persons with God the triune in Persons, descends continuously uniting with Christ, extended and present in the Church, all those who live in his mystical Body and sacramentally appropriate the fruits of the Redemption. The visible aspect of the Church accomplished at Pentecost as described by the Holy Scripture appears through an express act of Christ's relationship with the Holy Spirit, the Church being founded on the foundation laid by Christ and the Apostles: "And when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting...And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:1-4). "The Holy Spirit descends upon each Apostle individually and upon all together to highlight the model of trinitarian communion, which holds together the diversity of persons with the unity of nature, in the light of an ontology of love" (Dumitru Popescu, 2005, 240). The Church's entry into history, on the day of Pentecost, as a concrete communion and community of people with God, was achieved through the descent of the Holy Spirit, followed by the special charism of speaking in the spirit or glossolalia and by the sermon of the Holy Apostle Peter culminating in the baptism of the first Christians, who form the first community of the Church, the first Christian society (Acts 1:13-15; I Corinthians 15:6). *"The Church is a Pentecost in humanity, which lasts forever. Founded now, the Church is that stable, unshakable environment because it is the Body of Christ, of the manifestation and work of the uncreated divine energies within humanity, incorporated in Christ, which the Spirit brings to the Church"*, (Dumitru Radu, 1978, 82).

The Church is the theandric community and institution, the mystical Body of Christ extended and expanded in humanity, the fullness of Him who fills all in all (Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4-6) through the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:11-12). Christ, the Head of this Body, shares with the members of the body, the Christians, through the Holy Mysteries, the true Life: the resurrection, in the grace of the Holy Spirit. The great mass of Christians, in the Church, constitutes the public priesthood, or the people of God (I Peter 2:9-10; 5:1-3), which together with the special priesthood invested with the power of the Holy Spirit through apostolic succession (John 20:21-22), forms the theandric community in which Christ works through the Holy Spirit.

The Church encompasses and unites all that exists or is destined to encompass all that exists: God and creation. The Church is the life and love of the Holy Trinity poured out into humanity, through Christ in the Holy Spirit, or the communion of several persons in the same divine life (Nicole Chițescu, 1958, 156). Only in the Church is the adoption and union of people with Christ realized, in the concrete community of human persons "consecrated" by the Holy Spirit, in

which God the Father shares by grace with those who unite with him through the Sacraments, the fruits of the salvation achieved by Christ. As a community and communion of human persons with the persons of the Holy Trinity, in Christ through the Holy Spirit, the Church shares in the life of the Father, which gives it the Trinitarian aspect, and the Christological aspect of the Church, the mystical Body of Christ, and the pneumatic one reflected in the sanctification and transfiguration of the lives of believers.

3. The life of the Orthodox Church - communion with the Holy Trinity

In its being, the Church is imprinted by the Triune God, being the outpouring of divine love, because it has its beginning, middle, and end in the Person of the Incarnate Son (John 1:14; Col. 2:9; Acts 4:12), the One of the Trinity who suffered for us, in whom the love of the Father descends into the world as he confesses in the hierarchal prayer: "That they all may be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us, that the world may know that you sent me. And the glory which you gave me I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one" (John 17:21-22). As the reality and presence of the love of the Holy Trinity poured out graciously, the Church has a theandric character, comprising two aspects: one objective-divine that does not depend on the believers (the Church-divine institution) and another subjective-human, the Church-communion of the believers, established by Christ in the Holy Spirit. Overall, the Church is an establishment that "theandric" and sanctifies the entire creation, through horizontal continuity: the apostolic succession, the Holy Mysteries (which extend and actualize Christ within its framework), but especially through the incorporation of the believers into the historical spiritual body of Christ. *"The Church is therefore a sacramental community of together supplicants and confessors of the faith by all its believers through the priest or bishop and together with those who are works of the mysteries of God (I Corinthians 4,1)"* (Dumitru Radu, 1978, 94). As visible organs or as a special priesthood of apostolic succession of the invisible Priest Christ, who continues in history His threefold ministry, namely, to teach, sanctify and lead all humanity to salvation. Therefore, Christ extends himself in a visible way through the priesthood of the Church, continuing the supreme work of deification of man through unceasing union with God. In its structure, the Church is a sacramental theandric community, because it forms the concrete community of people with God, with Christ present in it through the grace of the Holy Spirit, in which they are united and sanctified through the Holy Mysteries but also through the services performed by it. "The Church is a framework and a divine power that is always made available to people through the liturgical sacrifice and the mysteries established by God as means of grace and through this it is in the highest degree an institution" (Dumitru Stăniloae, 1955, 277).

As a communion and community of people with God, the Church depends on Christ and the Holy Spirit, on their presence in the members of the Church. Christ assumes and deifies human nature in the unity of His Body through the Incarnation, Sacrifice, Resurrection and Ascension. The extension of the risen Christ in us and our sanctification takes place in the Church through all that Christ does in her for our salvation acquired as members of His mystical Body. Therefore, *"the Holy Spirit relates to persons and makes them open up in the charismatic plenitude of gifts, in a personal way"* (Paul Evdokimov, 2004, 122).

The relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit in the Church is inseparable; but Christ and the Holy Spirit have different roles, therefore the Holy Apostle Paul attributes one and the same work sometimes to the Son, sometimes to the Holy Spirit. Grace, charisms, adoption, good works, salvation, eternal glory, all manifestations of the divine life are reported sometimes to Christ, sometimes to the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit is not separated from Christ, nor Christ from the Spirit. The Spirit rests upon Christ. It is only where Christ is, and Christ is only with the Spirit. But the Spirit is not confused with Christ, neither to the detriment of Christ with truth, nor to the detriment of the Spirit as the breath of life" (Dumitru Stăniloae, 1967, 105). Thus, in the Church all people are destined to unite with the deified humanity of the Savior, in the fullness of the grace that descends into it, as the life of Christ, shared by the Holy Spirit. The close relationship between the economy of the Son and the Holy Spirit, in the act of salvation, is dictated primarily by the unity of being,

which shares with humanity the triune love through the Incarnate, sacrificed and Risen Christ. *"The Son incarnates from the Holy Spirit and is at the same time the Treasurer of the Holy Spirit, of His gifts... He does all His work in the Spirit. ... By HIS Spirit Himself He resurrects and ascends to the right hand of the Father; an ascension not only spatial but filling of humanity assumed by the glory of the Spirit and passage to the supreme state of likeness with the Father. All the acts of Christ are visible signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, in the light of the Spirit we become aware of them and through them of Christ"* (Constantin Galeriu, 1983, 675).

The Holy Spirit must always be considered as the Spirit of Christ, so it must not be seen in any way separated from Christ. "The image of a Christ in heaven and of the Holy Spirit in the Church is false, because it does not take seriously the unity of the Persons of the Trinity" (Dumitru Stăniloae, 1997, 130). The connection between Christ and the Holy Spirit is essential, for the Son has the Spirit as the basis of the unity of being, and the connection between Christ and man is filial, not essential, being realized in the grace of the Holy Spirit: *"The Spirit, because it is of the Son, will also accomplish in others the adoption... The Spirit of God the Father, gives life, the adoption of those brought into existence and sanctifies it, is proper to the Son"* (Cyril of Alexandria, 1994, 126). The gracious union of man with Christ is realized by the Holy Mysteries. The Holy Mysteries are the real means by which humanity partakes of divine goodness, they pour out saving grace, they are the spiritual food of the faithful. *"The Church is embodied in them like the limbs in the heart... The Church is transformed in them, because the strongest prevail, just as iron thrown into fire is transformed into fire, not fire into iron, and just as iron red-hot in fire appears to us truly as fire, and not as iron, because the properties of iron are completely absorbed by those of fire, so it is with the Church of Christ: if someone could grasp it with their gaze, they would only see the very body of the Lord, in that it is united with Him and that it partakes of His body"* (Nicolae Cabasila, 1989, 87). The Holy Spirit descended to Pentecost, sent by Christ from the Father, is the One who actualizes and personalizes Christ in the interpersonal connection realized in the Church, through the Holy Mysteries in each believer (I Cor. 6,11; 6,19).

4. In the Church, Christ unites with people through the Holy Sacraments

Through the Church in the Holy Sacraments, people have access to the saving life of Christ, which is shared in a visible form to man. Thus, we can say that the Holy Sacraments are the means chosen from creation by which Christ communicates to those incorporated in Him the invisible grace of the Holy Spirit, or even Himself in the Mystery of the Eucharist. "The sacraments are therefore holy works, 1) instituted by Christ, which, 2) under a visible form, 3) share with us the invisible grace of Christ, or Christ Himself in His saving actions, in order to make us sharers in the perfection of His humanity, or in salvation" (Dumitru Stăniloae, 1956, 4). In the Church through the Holy Sacraments, Christ, having entered our human condition, is co-present in us through the Holy Spirit, working with us through the grace of union with the divinity: "for in him all fullness was pleased to dwell" (Colossians 1:19). Thus *"the Church is a communion through the sacraments, it is founded on them, it is circumscribed by the sacraments, but it is also their performer. The sacraments belong to the Church as its acts, or more precisely as acts of its Head, Christ"* (Dumitru Radu, 1987, 120). The Holy Sacraments as encounters and experiences with Christ anchor the Church in the profound ontological unity of Christ, developing in its members' the grace-filled transformation accomplished by Him through His sacrifice and resurrection. All this shows that *"as sacramental as the Church is, so ecclesiological are the Sacraments"* (Dumitru Stăniloae, 1981, 193).

Man becomes a member of the Church through Baptism (John 3,5; Acts 16, 14,15;16, 33), sealed by the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Chrismation, but full union with God takes place through the Holy Eucharist. This complex process is not a formal and juridical, contractual one, but is a concretization of the will and personal faith, manifested by the infant at baptism through the godparents, who become his spiritual parents, this faith is the one that urges us towards baptism, towards the reception of God, being in fact a tension of the grace present in human nature (John 6, 44). The quality of membership in the Church acquired through the Sacraments of initiation: Baptism, Chrismation, Eucharist, is dependent on the relationship with Christ in the Holy Spirit, on

the encounter with Christ in all the Holy Sacraments and on the gradual growth in Christ, through active participation in the life of the ecclesial body. As a member of the Church, man is inserted into the life of communion of the Holy Trinity reflected in the church community, being a priest-servant- of the "liturgy of creation", consecrated with the seal of Christ, with the sanctifying power of his general or communal priesthood, thus glorifying through the Church God Who clothes him with heavenly power.

The quality of membership in the Church acquired through Baptism and Chrismation has as its finality the real and total reception of God through the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist. If through Baptism and Confirmation Christ unites with man through the grace of the Holy Spirit, in the Holy Eucharist Christ offers Himself with His Body and Blood to man. Union with Christ through the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist is complete, because now man receives not only grace but also the Source of grace, Christ Himself. *"In the Eucharist, man reborn in Christ and strengthened by the Holy Spirit is no longer united with Christ who is born and dies for our sins, but with Christ who dies at the end of His activity, in order to rise to eternal life"* (Dumitru Stăniloae, 1997, 57). The Eucharist is the sacrament of unity. The true life of the ecclesial community is the "eucharistic" one, because we were created as stewards of the sacrament of life, which Christ, God, brings into our being (Alexander Schmemmann, 2001, 40). So in theology maintains that: *"through the Eucharist, the Church is not only a eucharistic community, but a universal, catholic sacramental community, which implies the unity of faith, the Episcopate with apostolic succession in grace and faith, and the fullness of Christ's life in the Holy Spirit, shared through the Mysteries of the Church that have at their center the Holy Eucharist, as Sacrifice and Mystery, perfecting the work of the others, and being the Empress of all Mysteries"* (Dumitru Radu, 1987, 296). The Holy Eucharist summarizes the entire saving work of Christ, but at the same time the entire Church, its entire community that expresses itself as a gift and sacrifice, brought to the divinity together with Christ through the grace of the Holy Spirit. In Christ, through the Church, man, the world and creation are presented as a "cosmic liturgy and service", in which everything is a "game" of love, communion and perfection, from which grows and flourishes the fragrance that sanctifies and fully realizes the image of man, making him like God, through tasting the "Holy of Holies", to the eternal praise of God the Creator, Savior and Sanctifier.

The Church, the Body of Christ, as a theandric community and institution, hierarchically organized, exercises Christ in the world in all the fullness of his saving economy. Man, incorporated into the Church, into the Body of Christ, into the ecclesial community, through Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist, has the power to participate in the bond of communion with the sacramental grace priesthood in the saving sacrifice accomplished in and by Christ. The faithful as members consecrated and sanctified by the priesthood of Christ actively participate in His sacrifice and resurrection, the ultimate and supreme form of humanity, they are together stewards with the priesthood of the Church, of the saving mysteries, certainly at the level of their investiture as a general, royal priesthood (I Peter, 2,5,9-11) but not in isolation, but together with the priest or bishop who represents the current visible reality of Christ the Hierarch or High Priest. The collaboration between the special priesthood of bishop, priest, deacon, and the general priesthood, the faithful, is fully realized in the mystery of the Holy Eucharist. The community of the Church in the Holy Eucharist is expressed as a gift and sacrifice in which the clergy and the faithful, the whole Church, unite with Christ by receiving Him truly through the communion of His Body and Blood.

The Church is the only theandric institution of the salvation of man and the sanctification of creation, because outside of it Christ is not present with the fruits of his economy (resurrection, sanctification, perfection), outside of it there is no Holy Spirit, because outside of it there is no sacramental priesthood that actualizes him through the Holy Mysteries, outside of it there is no word of his teaching, there is also no theandric unity of the economy of his person that nourishes and sustains the epectatic ascendancy of the salvation and perfection of man. Only in the Church does man born of "water and the Spirit" (John 3:5), baptized and sacramentally strengthened through all the other Holy Mysteries, have the possibility of permanence and actualization of the virtuality of his deification accomplished by Christ. Expressing this reality, the Theology of the

Holy Fathers confesses that the Church has preserved their teaching unaltered, is the only theandric saving reality, in which everyone is relationally united with God the Holy Trinity, therefore Clement of Alexandria says: *“there is only one Virgin Mother and I like to call her the Church”* (Clement of Alexandria, 1982, 190).

The salvation of people is achieved only through their incorporation and growth in Christ, as members of His Body, the Church (I Col. 1:24, Rom. 8:17; Gal. 6:15). Through the Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension, of the Son of God, it is the foundation of our salvation, a salvation that becomes actual or personal through His dwelling in us, with the body carried by Him, resurrected, exalted and fully pneumatized, transfigured, perfected, transparent. This dwelling is realized in the Church, the theandric institution and community, in which the work of salvation of Christ in progress through the grace of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12,3), is actualized by people. The Holy Apostle Paul connects the intimate encounter with Christ with the Sacrament of Baptism. "To be baptized into Christ" (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27) or "in the name of Christ" (I Cor. 1:13; Matt. 28:19), in fact means incorporation into the mystical Body of Christ, and this incorporation is a participation in His soteriological work, both as beneficiaries and as sharers and co-workers with Him, in order to truly receive the purification from sin (ancestral or personal) and to be integrated into the new life, of resurrection, as the Holy Apostle Paul also expresses: "Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried with Him through baptism into death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too should walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:3-4).

5. The attributes of the Church

Based on divine revelation, the Second Ecumenical Council (Constantinople, 381) decided that the Church is: One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic (art. IX). The qualities of unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity are the consequence of the theandric constitution, as the Body of Christ, extended over the centuries, which presents it as the only divine-human institution founded for the salvation of man. These qualities are realities of pneumatological Christology manifested soteriological.

The qualities of the Church: unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity, are the consequence of its theandric constitution, as the Body of Christ, extended over all spaces and times, which presents it as an institution in the highest degree for the salvation and sanctification of man and all creation.

The unity of the Church resides in its quality as the mystical Body of Christ, because “all things were made through Him and for Him” (Col. 1:16). Through His sacrifice, Christ became “Head of the Church” since all men belong to Him as members of His body, He being “the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:22-23). The foundation of the unity of the Church is the presence of the same sacrificed and resurrected Body, permeated by the fullness of the Holy Spirit, in all the members of the Church.

The unity of the Church also consists in preserving the same dogmatic faith as an expression of the presence and plenary work of Christ in the Church. Dogmatic faith and the totality of the Sacraments form a whole (Eph. 4:4-6).

The holiness of the Church is the holiness of Christ Himself. Its sanctification was achieved through the Sacrifice of Christ, through which God restored communion between Himself and men, because in His wisdom, reconciling justice and love, He decreed their salvation through the incarnation and sacrifice of His Son, founding the Church. In it, a continuous process of sanctification of men takes place. “Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her by the washing of water with the word. And that He might present the Church to Himself in splendor, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25-27). In essence, the Church is holy, because its Head and Founder, the Savior Jesus Christ, is holy; because in her dwells and works the Holy Spirit until the end of the age, who pours out upon her the sanctifying Grace through the Holy Mysteries, because her purpose is to sanctify the faithful; because her teaching is holy and because she constitutes the mystical Body of the Lord.

The Catholicity of the Church is the attribute that defines her in a plenary manner, including synthetically internally and externally her theandric being. The catholic Church is the divine-human body of Christ, in which communion and community sustained by the trinitarian love, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, are one in Christ, in the whole earth, in which Christ is all in all (Eph 1, 23). Therefore, the attribute of the Church: Catholicity encompasses the other attributes: unity, holiness and apostolicity. The Church expresses itself through catholicity, both in the sense of theandric community but especially as the fulfillment of Christ extended in history in the fullness of the grace of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12:12-13, Col. 1:19), concretized as unity in diversity, as the union of the parts with the whole, as the presence and work of Christ in the entire Church, His mystical Body, with many members that preserve in their distinct economy the unity of the body, as a manifestation of the local Church in the Universal Church.

Apostolicity is the attribute that shows that the Church has preserved the entire and unchanged teaching of Christ, that it is the plenary expression of the apostolic Tradition, as communicated by the Holy Apostles as visible organs or special priesthood of apostolic succession of the invisible Priest Christ, who perpetuates in their priestly ministry His threefold ministry for the salvation of men and the sanctification of creation.

Apostolicity through its two aspects: apostolic succession and apostolic Tradition, shows that the special priesthood instituted by Christ with the power of the grace of the Holy Spirit (John 20:21-23) belongs to the very sacramental nature and apostolic mission of the Church as the mystical Body of Christ, which it carries out as a permanence of the threefold ministry of Christ, from Pentecost to the Parousia.

The Church is a theandric missionary institution, of the highest degree, because in it Christ is present and active, for the service and salvation of people and the sanctification of creation. The missionary work of the Church springs from the mission of the Incarnate Son (teaching, sanctifying and leading), from the mission of the Holy Spirit present in a continuous Pentecost in it, fulfilling the plan of God the Father for the salvation of man. Therefore, through the mission of the Church, God "wills that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (I Tim. 2:4). At Pentecost, the Church enters history to transmit and mediate to those who believe in Christ the saving grace, sent by God the Father through the Son Incarnate in the Holy Spirit, so that they may know the life-giving truth, or Christ Himself, to whom His entire economy bears witness. This fact is shown by Him in His answer to Pilate: "I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice" (John 18:37). The apostles and their successors, members of the special priesthood, endowed with grace, as "witnesses of the Truth" (Acts 1:8) but also as members of the mystical Body of Christ, transmitted the gospel of salvation to the entire world, as the work and presence of Christ in His historical continuity in the Church.

5. Conclusion

According to Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition, the criteria by which we define and identify the true Church are:

1. the teaching of the one faith - unity in the same faith,
2. the presence and work of the priesthood of apostolic succession founded by Christ - unity in the same priesthood,
3. the sacramental presence and work of Christ - unity in the same Holy Mysteries.

All these criteria show that the Church is one and consequently unique. Ecclesiastical unity has an interior aspect achieved by Christ with each believer through the grace-filled priesthood of apostolic succession, through faith and worship, through the Holy Mysteries and all the performed ecclesial work.

The relationship between Christ, the Priesthood, the Holy Mysteries and the believers is proof of the presence and work of the Church in the world. This presence is complete only in the Church, which has remained One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic.

The Church is one and unitary through the real presence of Christ who gives it the divine quality and authority in matters of faith and leadership.

In **conclusion**, the theme "*The Church: Community and Theandric Institution*" remains deeply relevant today. In an era marked by autonomy and secularization, the Orthodox Church offers contemporary humanity the saving answers and transformative means necessary for salvation and sanctification. Only through the Church, as the mystical Body of Christ, animated by the grace of the Holy Spirit, nourished by the Holy Mysteries, and rooted in the divine truth revealed in and through Christ, can modern man come to understand and fulfill the mystery of his existence: holiness and divine perfection.

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