

Man as “Whole” in Orthodox Theology and Life (Response to the Challenges of the Digital Age)

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Orthodox theology, as a commentary and interpretation of the ecclesiastical faith and experience, cannot exist without bearing witness to man. Nowadays, more than ever before, the mutual connection and interdependence of faith in God with what concerns man and *his way of life* is timely and sought after. This is because we have already entered and are marching *the century of anthropology*, of the theology’s re-engagement and special interest in man and the challenges of our times. The most important of these are the unprecedented digital, virtual reality, the challenge of the digital man, as well as the new issues raised and the problems occurring due to the rapid and unpredictable developments and even unknown applications of new technologies.

Our age brings humans against great and substantial issues and problems of their lives. Man is now becoming *a problem as a whole*; the current crisis is predominantly anthropological, a crisis of man’s identity. Theology, through the life and centuries of accumulated experience of the ecclesiastical community, provides a framework for interpretation and response, with a complete and verified answer not only to the crucial question of *what man is*, but also to the question of what *man really wants to be*, what he *wants to continue to be* and, finally, how *can human culture be preserved* today?

The following pages attempt to present in detail and document theologically the reality of man as a “whole” in Orthodox theology and

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life, aiming for the specific hermeneutical approach to be the basis for responding to the challenges of the digital age.

According to the testimony of the Holy Scriptures, man's nature is two-sided; it consists of two components – harmoniously united, but different in nature: the material and the spiritual, the body and the soul. Both highlight human existence as a psychosomatic unity, strictly distinguished from God on the ontological level¹.

According to the Church Fathers, man was created «ἐξ ἀμφοτέρων»², of spirit and matter, and is understood as psychosomatic entity. Man is «διπλοῦς», as he consists of «ἐκ ψυχῆς καὶ σώματος»³. The soul, is ineffably and inscrutably united with the body, without soul and body being mixed and without being confused, and the two are one man⁴. The soul is the God's breath, and has accepted the body as its companion; it is an intangible and incorporeal substance and energy, simultaneously created with the body and thus created by nature. It is rational, that is to say, it is characterized by logic and self-will and is receptive of God's grace. The soul is unchangeable to the body and its being, while the body is changeable by nature; what the body is seeking, it's acting like this through the soul.

Man is not his soul, nor his body; nor is he the mere sum of his constituent elements, but the «ὅλον αὐτοῦ»; he is a psychosomatic entity and unity⁵. Theology supports the simultaneous birth of soul and body in man and the importance of their coexistence. The biological principles marks man's psychosomatic birth; he is psychosomatic from the very first moment of his existence, his fertilization and conception, since “the body

1. See Gen. 2, 7. See N. Bratsiotis, *Ἀνθρωπολογία τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης I. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὡς θεῖον δημιούργημα*, Athens 1967, p. 50 et seq.; St. Kalatzakis, «Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ Θεός». *Ἑρμηνευτικὴ ἀνάλυση τῶν περὶ δημιουργίας διηγήσεων τῆς Γενέσεως*, P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki 2001, pp. 359-364.

2. Gregory of Nyssa, *Περὶ τῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου κατασκευῆς* 29, PG 44, 236.

3. Maximus the Confessor, *Μυσταγωγία* 7, PG 91, 685.

4. See Symeon the New Theologian, *Κεφάλαια γνωστικά καὶ θεολογικά* 2, 23, SC 51, 78.

5. See [Athanasius the Great], *Περὶ τοῦ κατὰ κοινὸν ἄνθρωπον ὑποδείγματος*, PG 26, 1236. Similarly, modern biology considers that the “whole” of man exceeds the sum of the parts of which it is composed, since it possesses new emergent properties and new functions.

and the soul were formed simultaneously and not one first and the other later”⁶. Besides, even for the Word incarnated, Christ, it is confessed that the substantiated unification of the divine nature with the human one have taken place «ἐξ ἄκρας συλλήψεως», «ἐξ ἄκρας ὑπάρξεως»⁷. This explains why respect for the man’s integrity is required in all phases of his life.

Body and soul coexist harmoniously and constitute a singular human existence, the concrete human being, who is «σύννοδος τῶν συναμφοτέρων καὶ διαμονὴ καὶ συνοίκησις»⁸. This is why, according to St. Gregory Palamas, “man is not called the soul alone, nor the body alone, but the *synamfoteron*”⁹. Following the same line of thought, the Apostle Paul exhorts: «δοξάσατε δὴ τὸν Θεὸν ἐν τῷ σώματι ὑμῶν καὶ ἐν τῷ πνεύματι ὑμῶν»¹⁰.

The Church Fathers have adopted the same biblical anthropology; they stay away from any dualistic view of man. In their approach, man’s materiality and corporeality, who is body and soul together, is affirmed and glorified, while their separation means man’s disintegration. After all, “man is not a disembodied spirit... A disembodied soul is nothing but a spirit, and a soulless body is nothing but a corpse”¹¹. Therefore, man is not only a spiritual being, in which the material aspects of human existence are underestimated or neglected, but a single psychosomatic unity and totality, considered in a unifying or, as it is called, “holistic” way, since it has «ἐν ἑαυτῷ πάντα τὰ μέρη τοῦ ὅλου»¹².

Therefore, body and soul constitute man, who recapitulates the whole universe within himself¹³. Man is «ὁ ἐν μικρῷ μέγας», a perfect «μικρόκοσμος», representing the whole creation; he is a partaker of

6. John Damascene, Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως 2, 12, PG 94, 921.

7. John Damascene, Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως 3, 12, PG 94, 1032.

8. Meletius the Monk, Περὶ φύσεως ἀνθρώπου 31, PG 64, 1288.

9. See Gregory Palamas, Προσωποποιΐα, PG 150, 1361.

10. 1 Cor. 6, 20.

11. See G. Florovsky, Δημιουργία καὶ Ἀπολύτρωση, Ἔργα τ. 3, transl. P. Pallis, P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki 2004, p. 12.

12. Methodius of Olympus, Περὶ Ἀναστάσεως, ΒΕΠΕΣ 18, 160.

13. See P. Nellas, Ζῶον θεούμενον. Προοπτικὲς γιὰ μία ὀρθόδοξη κατανόηση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, Harmos Publications, Athens 2000, p. 29 et seq.

the *whole world*¹⁴ and is the one who interprets the whole world. In the references of the Fathers, we can discern the realization of the physiology of the unified psychosomatic man, directly connected to God and the whole creation¹⁵. What is particularly striking is that, according to modern biology, in every human cell there potentially lies the whole man, and each and every one is an embodiment of the *whole* man and at the same time a cell of humanity, since it carries within it the whole humanity¹⁶.

In an appropriately documented way and from the outset, Orthodox theology argues that is primarily interested in the salvation of the whole human being; this is the cure for the diseases caused by the gravest and most common disease of all human beings-sin. The entire hagiographical testimony and the patristic interpretation of man and his salvation has been from the very beginning “holistic”. When we speak about salvation, we mean that man should be able to live complete, integral, whole in his existential potential, in true communion and relationship with his Creator, with the other human beings and in a perfect and integral natural environment¹⁷.

First of all, we should note that the special *privilege* given by the “*in the image*” («κατ’ εἰκόνα») ¹⁸ of man’s creation, as well as the salvation of human nature in Christ, are not limited to man’s mind or soul, but are related to his entire existence. The Word of God became flesh wishing

14. See Gregory of Nyssa, *Περὶ τῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου κατασκευῆς* 16, PG 44, 177-180; Gregory the Theologian, *Θεολογικὸς Β΄, Περὶ θεολογίας* 22, PG 36, 57.

15. Indeed, every believer contains within himself the whole world, all people without exception. Even when one prays “*Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me*” («Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ ἐλέησόν με»), he spontaneously prays for everyone else, because he knows that he cannot live, does not exist, nor is saved and enter heaven only by himself.

16. The modern conception of man, in the context of –among others– Biology, Developmental Psychology and Evolutionary Neuroscience, leads to a new view of the natural combination of the biological substrate with the human psyche and the version of man as an unbroken “*whole*”.

17. See A. Keselopoulos, *Ἄνθρωπος καὶ φυσικὸ περιβάλλον. Σπουδὴ στὸν ἅγιο Συμεὼν τὸ Νέο Θεολόγο*, Domos Publications, Athens ²1992, p. 15.

18. *Gen.* 1, 26; 27; 5, 1; 9, 6. For the interpretation of the “*in the image*”, see V. Tsigkos, *Ἄνθρωπος, ὁ ἐν μικρῷ μέγας. Ὅψεις ὀρθοδόξου ἀνθρωπολογίας*, Ennoia Publications, Athens 2019, p. 52 et seq.

to renew man and offer him the possibility of salvation as existential wholeness, unity and completeness¹⁹; according to the St Gregory the Theologian's well-known dictum, what is not received cannot be saved: «τὸ ἀπρόσληπτον καὶ ἀθεράπευτον»²⁰.

The perfect human nature's reception by the Word implies perfect healing, complete salvation of soul and body, real salvation of man as an entity. A direct anthropological consequence of Christ's saving work is that in the life of His Church, through its *manner* and *means*, the whole man, and not a part of him, is truly renovated and saved. The dimension of the salvation of the whole man is expressed in the hymnographer's affirmation: «καὶ ἔσωσας ὅλον με τὸν ἄνθρωπον»²¹.

The incarnation of the Word of God resulted in the *whole* of Christ being able to unite with the whole of man, with each and every one for his personal salvation. From the moment that God fully became man, He offers to the latter the possibility of fully being in communion with Him²². Moreover, according to the Church Fathers, man is a «θεοειδής» and «θεόπλαστον» creature, is a «ζῶον θεούμενον», «κεκελευσμένος θεός»; he has the vocation and the destiny, the innermost inclination and the deepest desire, the perspective and the possibility of becoming a god by grace, of participating in the eternal life of God²³. This is accomplished by the full integration of man as a whole (soul and body) into life in Christ through the Holy sacraments of His Church.

The Man himself confesses that «ἀπὸ τῶν πολλῶν μου ἁμαρτιῶν ἀσθενεῖ τὸ σῶμα, ἀσθενεῖ μου καὶ ἡ ψυχή»²⁴. Indeed, all passions create

19. Symeon the New Theologian, Ὑμνος 15, SC 156, 294.

20. Gregory the Theologian, Ἐπιστολὴ 101, Πρὸς Κληδόνιον πρεσβύτερον κατὰ Ἀπολλινάριου, PG 37, 181C-184A; John Damascene, Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως 3, 7, PG 94, 1012; V. Tsigkos, Περὶ χωρησις. Θεολογικὸ περιεχόμενο τοῦ ὁροῦ καὶ οἱ ἐφαρμογές του κατὰ τὴ Δογματικὴ τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας, Ostrakon Publications, Thessaloniki 2023, pp. 255-256.

21. Εἰρμός δ' ὡδῆς κανόνος Ὁρθοῦ Τετάρτης β' ἡχου. See Παρακλητικὴ, Fos Publications, Athens 2000, p. 94.

22. Symeon the New Theologian, Ὑμνος 50, SC 196, 170.

23. See, among others: Βασιλείου Καισαρείας, Εἰς τὸ πρόσεχε σεαυτῷ 6, PG 31, 212; Γρηγορίου Θεολόγου, Εἰς τὸν Μέγαν Βασίλειον, ἐπιτάφιος 48, PG 36, 560 and, Εἰς τὸ Ἅγιον Πάσχα 7, PG 36, 632.

24. Τροπάριον Μικροῦ Παρακλητικοῦ Κανόνος.

significant disorders in the human psyche. Therefore, someone could be in position to correctly and effectively approach the question of carnal health, sickness, healing and ultimately the salvation of man via the function of the mental life.

Of course, he also needs to cooperate with God and to work with the aim of saving the whole of his existence, dedicating entirely himself to God: «ἐξ ὁλοκλήρου θῆσαι ἑαυτοῦς τῷ Θεῷ ψυχῇ τε καὶ σώματι»²⁵ or, as the Canon of request says, «ὅλη ψυχῇ καὶ διανοίᾳ, καὶ καρδίᾳ καὶ χεῖλεσι δοξάζω». According to the First Commandment, he should «ἀγαπήσει Κύριον τὸν Θεόν του ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδίας του καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ψυχῆς του καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς διανοίας του»²⁶. According to the words of the Abbot of Geronticon, in order for man to follow the path to his salvation, he should first have demolished his whole old self, so that he can build the new one: «εἰ μὴ τὸ ὅλον κατέστρεψα, οὐκ ἂν ἡδυνήθην ἑμαυτὸν οἰκοδομῆσαι»²⁷.

The believer strives with all his spiritual effort to reach salvation, his union with God by grace; «καὶ τότε ὅλως τῷ Θεῷ οἰκειωθείς ἐκ τούτων ὅλος ἐνοῦται καὶ αὐτὸν κατὰ πρόσωπον βλέπει»²⁸. That's why he is exhorted to completely unite himself with the whole God: «ὅλως ὅλῳ ἐνωθῇ τῷ Θεῷ»²⁹, in order for the *whole* man to be saved. However, it is a source of great astonishment and an incomprehensible wonder that the little man, according to our perception, can claim to carry within himself “the *whole*” of God³⁰.

Indeed, the whole Christ comes and is united by grace to the whole believer. The «παράδοξον θαῦμα» and, at the same time, «μέγα μυστήριον» of the Christ's grandeur and the inexpressible charity is that He Himself comes into the heart of the believer. The “formation”³¹ of Christ takes place «ἐνδον ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ ἡμῶν», which means that this

25. Cf. *Ephes.* 5, 2.

26. *Mark* 12, 30.

27. Alonios, *Sayings* β'; see *Γεροντικόν*, Astir Publications, Athens ³1981, p. 20.

28. Symeon the New Theologian, *Ῥυμος* 27, SC 174, 290.

29. Symeon the New Theologian, *Κατήχησις* 6, SC 104, 30.

30. See Symeon the New Theologian, *Ῥυμος* 30, SC 174, 352.

31. Cf. *Gal.* 4, 9.

"formation" is a universal, existential event. As it is well known, for the ascetic tradition the heart is the center of the human being, the source of his energetic powers, of his intellect and will, the point from which he originates and towards which the whole spiritual life tends³². Thus, the loss of the heart constitutes a loss of the possibility of man's salvation. Thus, the loss of the heart constitutes a loss of the possibility of man's salvation.

In the life of the Church the whole man, body and soul, in his overall unity, wholeness and completeness, is entirely renewed and saved. This means that man's communion with God requires the existence of a "*total relationship*" («*όλικῆς σχέσεως*»)³³ with Him, a complete relationship involving the whole of human being. Man as a whole is grafted in the Church and is called to mobilize his soul, body and mind, his entire existence; therefore, he is saved as a single psychosomatic existence. Thus, it is understood that life in Christ constitutes a universal reality and salvation is "*total*" («*ολική*»)³⁴, that is, it is complete.

It is an undisputable truth that we know the empirical states of life only with total (physical and mental) participation and immediacy of action. The grace of God sanctifies and saves men, in their entire existence; «*όλοτελείς, καὶ όλόκληρον τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ σῶμα*»³⁵. God's word is addressed to the whole man, it concerns the fullness of his psychosomatic dimension, just as salvation concerns the *whole* man.

The one who fails and commits sinful acts is far from God as a single psychosomatic existence. Similarly, the man in Christ is also close to God and experiences His grace as a single psychosomatic existence. For this reason, believers are exhorted: «*δῶμεν ἑαυτοὺς τῷ Κυρίῳ ἔξ όλοκλήρου, ἵνα όλόκληρον αὐτὸν ἀντιλάβωμεν*»³⁶. Thus, salvation is a state of total, general transformation of man. In the gifts of the Holy Ghost, the *whole*

32. VI. Lossky, *Ἡ μυστικὴ θεολογία τῆς Ἀνατολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας*, transl. (Greek) St. Plevrakis, Thessaloniki 2007, p. 238.

33. Symeon the New Theologian, *Ἠθικός* 5, SC 129, 96.

34. See N. Matsoukas, *Οἰκουμενικὴ Θεολογία*, P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki 2005, p. 200.

35. *1 Thes.* 5, 23.

36. Maximus the Confessor, *Λόγος ἀσκητικός* 43, PG 90, 953.

man is claimed to participate and his whole existence is saved. And because in man the body is indissolubly united with the soul during his life, the *whole* man is saved and deified by grace, while the nature of his components remains intact.

The whole body participates in the path to salvation and receives God's grace, since it is the most important thing that man possesses; it is an irrevocable, charismatic gift of the Creator to his creation. The body is rightly called the "*temple of the Holy Ghost*" («ναὸς τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος»)³⁷, and man as a member of the ecclesiastical body is called to put on the "*whole*" Christ (in "*all*" of his flesh)³⁸. Hence, the contempt or disdain for the body or, more generally, the rejection of materiality, as well as the exact opposite, the deification of the spiritual element, have no place in Orthodox life and tradition. In it, as it is attested by the perfect glorification of the human body with the honoring of the sacred relics of the saints, this is a natural consequence of its own faith and theology.

Health requires the appropriate "orchestration" of man's inner world and mental disposition, as well as his relationship with his fellow men and nature. The Church tradition adds another dimension to this approach: the direct and personal relationship of man with God, who abundantly offers his grace to man. When man is united with God "*both spiritually and physically*", he enriches his life with divine grace, becoming "*triune*" by grace, consisting of the body, soul and the divine Spirit, which he has received³⁹. Man receives the Divine grace as a gift, constituting an irreplaceable third "*constituent part*" of his being. Thus, man, in a way, is "*becoming triune*", which means that he reveals his completeness, *wholeness* and catholicity.

All the above are vividly experienced in the divine worship of the Orthodox Church, which has a "*holistic*" character. In its holy sacraments, and especially in the Divine Liturgy, which is the most all-embracing thing the Church possesses, and constitutes the *summation* of the Divine

37. 1 Cor. 6, 19. It should be noted that Christ did not condemn and annulled the flesh per se, but the sin «ἐν τῇ σαρκὶ αὐτοῦ»; Eph. 2, 15.

38. See Symeon the New Theologian, Ὑμνος 15, SC 156, 292.

39. See Symeon the New Theologian, Κατήχησις 15, SC 104, p. 228.

Economy’s whole sacrament⁴⁰, the believer praises and thanks God not only with his mind, but also with his heart and body, i.e. with his *whole* being. In the liturgical life, as in repentance, exercise, prayer, fasting, the whole body participates, with all its senses, functions and energies.

In the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, shortly before the believer receives the Holy Mysteries, repeating the blessing of St. Chrysostom, he states: «ἀγιάσόν μου τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ τὸ σῶμα, τὸν νοῦν καὶ τὴν καρδίαν, τοὺς νεφροὺς καὶ τὰ σπλάγχνα, καὶ ὅλον με ἀνακαίνισον... καὶ τὸν ἀγιασμόν σου ἀνεξάλειπτον ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ ποιήσον»⁴¹. The receivers of even the least portion of the Holy Sacraments receive unto themselves the *whole* Christ, and are united with *the whole* Christ: «ἐγὼ δὲ ὁ ἐλεεινὸς ὅλον Σου τὸ σῶμα τολμῶν δέξασθαι, μὴ καταφλεχθεῖν»⁴². When man receives the Lord’s Body and Blood and is united with Christ, he becomes “*whole*” Christ: «Θεὸς ὅλος κατὰ χάριν ὁ ἄνθρωπος γίνεται»⁴³.

“*Whole*” in this context means the whole man in his existential wholeness and at the same time every single one individual – with no exception. According to St. Symeon the New Theologian, «Μέλη Χριστοῦ γινόμεθα, μέλη Χριστὸς ἡμῶν δέ, καὶ χεὶρ Χριστὸς καὶ ποῦς Χριστὸς ἐμοῦ τοῦ παναθλίου, καὶ χεὶρ Χριστοῦ καὶ ποῦς Χριστοῦ ὁ ἄθλιος ἐγὼ δέ; κινῶ τὴν χεῖρα, καὶ Χριστὸς ὅλος ἡ χεὶρ μου ἔστιν... μέλη ἅπαντα ἐνὸς ἡμῶν ἐκάστου μέλη Χριστοῦ γενήσονται, καὶ Χριστὸς ἡμῶν μέλη»⁴⁴. After the Holy Communion, the believer, by thanksgiving, wishes that this “*food*” will enliven and completely renovate him, «εἰς πάντας ἀρμούς, εἰς νεφρούς, εἰς καρδίαν»⁴⁵. We are dealing here with man’s complete incorporation into the ecclesiastical *way of life* in Christ.

The harmonious coexistence of body and soul is also evident in other sacramental manifestations of the Church. Indeed, a large number

40. For more details, see V. Tsigkos, *Δογματικὴ τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας*, Ostrakon Publications, Thessaloniki 2022, p. 400 et seq.

41. *Εὐχὴ ἀκολουθίας τῆς θείας Μεταλήψεως*. The prayer is handed down under the name of Saint John Chrysostom. See *Ἱερατικόν*, Apostoliki Diakonia Publications, Athens 1987, p. 187.

42. *Blessing of the Holy Eucharist office*. See *Ἱερατικόν*, *op.cit.*, p. 194.

43. Symeon the New Theologian, *Κεφάλαια θεολογικὰ καὶ πρακτικὰ* 3, 59, SC 51, 98.

44. Symeon the New Theologian, *Ὑμνος* 15, SC 156, 288.

45. *Blessing of thanksgiving after the Holy Communion*. Βλ. *Ἱερατικόν*, *op.cit.*, p. 113.

of blessings and requests are not limited to the man's soul, but they are also related to physical goods and refer to his wholeness, as the following phrases are often repeated: «εἰς ἱάσιν ψυχῆς καὶ σώματος», «εἰς σωτηρίαν ψυχῆς καὶ σώματος», «Ἄγγελον εἰρήνης, πιστὸν ὁδηγόν, φύλακα τῶν ψυχῶν καὶ τῶν σωμάτων ἡμῶν»⁴⁶. Christ is the «ἰατρὸς τῶν ψυχῶν καὶ τῶν σωμάτων» and the Church is above all a spiritual infirmary and «ἰατρεῖο»⁴⁷.

Far from impermissible and condemned distinctions or contemptuous downgrades of one of man's two components, the Orthodox tradition approaches him as a single psychosomatic entity, since God the Word also become man, «ἵνα καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα σώσῃ, καὶ τὴν σάρκα ἀθανατίσῃ»⁴⁸. This means that the body participates in the salvation of the soul, which is a psychosomatic state.

In the same way, at the Second Coming every soul will be united with its body and man will now participate as a psychosomatic unity and wholeness. The coexistence of man as a co-presence of "matter" and spirit will be a reality until the anticipated resurrection, where it is expected that bodies will be completely imperishable and renewed⁴⁹. It is precisely this central position for the salvation of the "whole" man that strengthens the faith of believers not only in the immortality of the soul, but also in the resurrection of the body, since they expect «ἀνάστασιν νεκρῶν καὶ ζωὴν τοῦ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος».

For a long time now, it has been widely accepted that the evolution of technology is an unavoidable reality; it is the fate of our time in the sense of an irreversible course, an inevitable state of affairs, which has changed man's perception of God and consequently his attitude towards creation, matter, and even his own body. One of Late Modernity's most challenging

46. Αἰτήσεις θείας Λειτουργίας ἁγίου Ἰωάννου Χρυσοστόμου. See *Ἱερατικόν*, *op.cit.*, p. 91.

47. See indicatively: John Chrysostom, *Εἰς τὸν Ἰωάννην* 2, 5. For more details, see V. Tsigkos, *Χάρισμα καὶ θεσμός στὴν περὶ Ἐκκλησίας διδασκαλία τοῦ ἱεροῦ Χρυσοστόμου*, Ostrakon Publications, Thessaloniki 2016, pp. 198-201.

48. Gregory the Theologian, *Λόγος εἰς τὰ Θεοφάνεια*, εἴτουν *Γενέθλια τοῦ Σωτῆρος* 38, 13, PG 36, 325.

49. See *1 Cor.* 15, 42-49. See Symeon the New Theologian, *Ἠθικός* 1, 3, SC 122, 204.

aspects we’re experiencing is that with artificial intelligence (AI) experts are trying to create an intangible reality. This, it seems, does not care and does not involve man as a “whole”; it deprives him of his body, soul, and God, by recreating a new man and world, which will live based on different precepts.

AI’s workings are not similar to those of natural intelligence. It can arguably have countless, and mostly amazing applications and possibilities; it might extend to unexplored and unimaginable areas and actions to help man for achieving more things, without being able to replace him. For this reason, it needs feedback and meaning, repentance and inspiration from man, from all the things that define his inner life, spiritual constitution, historical existence and magnificent prospects. It is possible that AI seeks to “mold” man; it is absolutely certain that it cannot ignore him.

AI “belongs to the future, but it is not the future, for it can put it in danger”⁵⁰. Nowadays, it is undeniably interwoven with our lives and tends to become man’s spiritual essence. Many perceive AI as a tremendous opportunity, a wonderful tool and a valuable means of creating great possibilities and applications for humanity⁵¹, but equally great, unknown and incalculable are the dangers of reckless technological development when technology, instead of being man’s servant, it becomes his master⁵².

50. See St. Ramfos, «Τὸ πέρασ καὶ τὸ ἄπειρο τῆς νοημοσύνης», ἐφημ. *Ἡ Καθημερινή/Kathimerini*, 9 Ἰουλίου/ July 9, 2023, p. 31.

51. As it has been pointed out, AI, if put “by its user at the service of our humanness and self-awareness, it will always have the inexhaustible wealth of our inner life in front of our eyes”. See St. Ramfos, «Τὸ πέρασ καὶ τὸ ἄπειρο τῆς νοημοσύνης», *op.cit.*, p. 31.

52. For example, if automated disinformation spreads even further, it will be possible to destabilize democracy worldwide and start interfering in elections and decisions of people and governments. Many experts are clearly and legitimately concerned about how AI will affect the information ecosystem and our access to safe, reliable, and of high-quality information. Also, the expanded use of AI applications raises issues of privacy, data security, discretion and transparency. The use of AI functions is synonymous with the accumulation of huge amounts of data, increasing the risk of cyber-attacks and leaks. The issue of intellectual property rights is also related to the training of the AI platform. Apart from that, the automation of operations and processes is also expected to inevitably lead to restructuring and a rapid reduction of jobs and skills required, which will ultimately have direct and widespread impacts and consequences on people and society.

Increasingly, it is said that if AI takes the wrong path or if no limits and regulatory frameworks are set, it will create intractable problems for everyone; therefore, we need acting together to avoid this eventuality⁵³. The pressing question of our time is whether AI and its various applications will contribute to man's dehumanization, lead to his self-deification, or ultimately produce a superhuman who will live selfishly alone, rooted in narcissism and self-referentiality. The immediate result of this will be the debasement, alienation, diminution of the value and image of man as a *whole*.

It suffices here to mention a few indicative issues of AI's ethical dimension. Various views are expressed on the benefits that will result from its applications and the risks arising from them. For example, to what extent does a thinking machine ultimately mean a loss of control and power of the human being, the restriction or abolition of personal freedom and the alteration of human rights? Equally crucial is the challenge and the question of how far the virtual reality and the digital environment, in which communication presupposes the existence of the body, not as a presence but as a tool for use, depreciates and ultimately devalues body and matter in general, for which the Incarnation of the Person of God was made?

Any subject about man and his life is inexhaustible and truly presents a great mystery. Orthodox theology, as it possesses a deep knowledge and has experience of man and his relationship with the Other, others and his environment, at the beginning of the third millennium has already been called upon to bear witness⁵⁴ and to bring out the elements with which it will attempt to articulate its own discourse, in order to confront and deal with a new state of affairs experienced by the whole planet, with serious

53. On this point, Isaac Asimov's remark is pertinent: "The saddest thing in life at this moment is that Science accumulates knowledge much faster than society acquires wisdom".

54. As the Encyclical of the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church (Crete 2016) characteristically decides: "The fact that 'τὸ πολίτευμα ἡμῶν ἐν οὐρανοῖς ὑπάρχει' (Philip. 3, 20), it does not annul, but strengthens our testimony in the world" (Proemium).

issues and dilemmas, related to a completely different perception of God and man and *his way of life* from the one it has expressed over time.

It should be noted that the effort of theology can be successful if it “makes alive its tradition”⁵⁵, attempts to understand man “*from within*”⁵⁶ and is accompanied by presenting positive and verifiable proposals in the context of a serious, responsible, sober and creative dialogue, conducted with knowledge of both the contemporary man and the knowledge and experience of the Fathers of the Church, for the benefit of man for whose sake it exists. Undoubtedly, the answers theology might give cannot be derived solely from the latter’s tragic historical journey, but above all and before anything else from the eschata, since it projects the vision and expectation of the *new creation*⁵⁷, the prospect of salvation, and the divine redemption of man for grace.

Man’s wholeness and integrity, which are unceasingly shaken to the core in our days, are inextricably linked to the wholeness of his being, to the salvation of the “*whole*” man, which the Church has been evangelizing for centuries. The latter remains consistent in preserving the uniqueness and sanctity of human life and the integrity of man. Therefore, in response to the challenges of the digital age, the Orthodox theology’s historic mission and constant quest is to contribute, as it has already done throughout its centuries-old journey, to the creation of a more *human, participatory, and relational* culture⁵⁸.

In other words, this can be realized when theology succeeds in articulating the vision of a *different way of life* of the we, for all and for everything, a *perichoretic* interpretation of all the actions and manifestations of man as a “*whole*”, who is in a state of participation, friendship, communion, *total* relationship with God, with all his fellow human beings and his natural

55. See John Metropol. of Pergamon, *Ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ ὁ σύγχρονος κόσμος, ἀνάπτυπον*, Kozani 1991, pp. 18-19.

56. Besides, the Greek Fathers also gave the “testimony of the Catholic faith of the whole Church, because they told us ... from within the Catholic fullness”. G. Florovsky, *Τὸ σῶμα τοῦ ζώντος Χριστοῦ. Μία ὀρθόδοξος ἐρμηνεία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας*, transl. Io. Papadopoulos, Patriarchal Foundation for Patristic Studies Publications, Thessaloniki 1981, p. 55.

57. See 2 *Pet.* 3, 13.

58. See *σχετικά* V. Tsigkos, *Περιχώρησις...*, *op.cit.*, p. 337 et seq.

environment. Undoubtedly, such a culture will respect and care for man as the exceptional creation, “beloved of God” («ἡγαπημένον τοῦ Θεοῦ»)⁵⁹, which depicts its Creator and aims to fit within it the person depicted, i.e. “the archetype” of man, the God-Man Christ in His charismatic body, the Church, and through it “the whole” man and all the matters that are relevant and important for his life.

In the many and varied challenges of the digital age, Orthodox theology is called -among other things- to remain consistent in maintaining the sanctity of human life. Consequently, it should reinterpret, and highlight the value of man as a “whole”, as a psychosomatic unity and wholeness in a communion of life, freedom, love and harmony with himself, with God, with others and with the space where he lives and moves. If man denies his “wholeness” (all that constitutes him, his body, soul, heart, emotion, consciousness), he transforms the immediate, personal and psychosomatic *communication* and reduces it to a virtual reality. In this way, he tarnishes the dowry he has received with κατ’ εἰκόνα; he is truncated, denying himself his dignity, his freedom; he loses his salvation and integrity, corrupting his physiology as a human being in relation and communion with everyone and everything, since everything can now be done anonymously, impersonally and intangibly through the applications of the intelligent machines.

Orthodox theology has an inescapable responsibility and an imperative duty *to go out* to the world in order to meet and understand modern man, reach “his ears and heart with its voice”⁶⁰ and present to him *in its own way* the “whole” of its ecclesiastical experience as a transmission of the “treasure”⁶¹ of faith and authentic life in Christ. It is precisely this testimony of her spiritual heritage, covering more than two millennia, that constitutes her irreplaceable, invaluable and extremely necessary and beneficial offer and ministerial concern for contemporary man’s earthly life and eternal destiny.

59. See Ἀκολουθία τῆς Θ’ Ὁρας.

60. See the speech of His Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I to the clergy and monks of the Holy Metropolis of Austria and the Hungarian Exarchate on 23-9-2023.

61. See 2 Cor. 4, 7.