

“*Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*”

By Protopr. Michael Voskos*

This phrase, which was first formulated by Origen¹, is often found in the works of Saint Cyprian of Carthage, and appears *verbatim* in his 73rd *Letter*². It expresses the unity of ecclesiology and soteriology characterizing the patristic teaching regarding the Church. It clearly states that salvation is this very Church, and that the Church is salvation in itself³. Without Christ’s redemptive work –and Church is the enduring

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1. “*Extra Ecclesiam nemo salvatur*” (Origen, Ὁμιλ. εἰς Ἰησοῦν Ναυῆ 3, 5, PG 12, 841B).
2. “*Salus extra Ecclesiam non est*” (Cyprian, Ἐπιστ. 73, 21, CSEL 3, 2, 795). Cf. Ἐπιστ. 4, 4 (CSEL 3, 2, 476-477), 52, 1 (CSEL 3, 2, 617), 55, 24 (CSEL 3, 2, 642-643) and 74, 7 (CSEL 3, 2, 804-805): “*ut habere quis possit Deum patrem, habeat ante ecclesiam matrem*”, and also *De unitate Ecclesiae* VI (PL 4, 503A). There is abundant bibliography on this matter; we only site here the most important relevant studies: C. Romeis, *Das Heil der Christen außerhalb der wahren Kirche nach der Lehre des hl. Augustin*, Druck und Verlag von Ferdinand Schöningh, Paderborn 1908; L. Capéran, *Le problème du salut des infideles* I, Grand Seminaire, Toulouse 1934; Y. Congar, *Ausser der Kirche kein Heil. Wahrheit und Dimensionen des Heils*, Hans Driewer Verlag, Essen 1961; J. Korbacher, *Ausserhalb der Kirche kein Heil? Eine dogmengeschichtliche. Untersuchung über Kirche und Kirchenzugehörigkeit bei Johannes Chrysostomus*, Max Hueber, München 1963; Fr. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response*, Geoffrey Chapman, London 1992.
3. «Ὡς γὰρ τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ [τοῦ Θεοῦ] ἔργον ἐστὶ, καὶ τοῦτο κόσμος ὀνομάζεται οὕτω καὶ τὸ βούλημα αὐτοῦ ἀνθρώπων ἐστὶ σωτηρία καὶ τοῦτο Ἐκκλησία κέκληται» (Clement of Alexandria, Παιδαγωγός I 6, PG 8, 281B). Cf. G. Florovsky, Ἁγία Γραφή, Ἐκκλησία, Παράδοσις, transl. D. Tsamis, [Ἔργα 1], P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki 1991, p. 51: “All the dogmatic force and significance of this aphorism lie in its tautology. Outside the Church there is no salvation, because salvation is the Church, because salvation is the revelation of the way to those who believe in the name of Christ. This revelation is found only in the Church. In it, as in the Body of Christ, in its divine-human organism, the mystery of the Incarnation, of the ‘two natures’ that are

presence of Christ's redemptive work in the history of the world— there is no salvation: «εἰ γὰρ διὰ νόμου δικαιοσύνη, ἄρα Χριστὸς δωρεὰν ἀπέθανεν»⁴. The Incarnation of the Word of God makes the deification of man possible, and deification is realized within the Church – the treasury of grace and the ark of salvation. Salvation is impossible away from the divine grace and the activity of the Holy Spirit. The Church, as the manifestation of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, is the way of salvation for the whole world, the way of the latter's transformation into the world of God. This is absolutely irrefutable. However, not all people belong to the Orthodox Church – the true Church of Christ. This raises the question of the possibility and manner of salvation for the unbaptized – those who do not belong to the Orthodox Church.

The question of the salvation or damnation of specific individuals is related to God's last judgment; therefore, any definitive answer on our part would be completely wrong and unjustifiable. We could talk about the path to salvation that has already been revealed and its limits; still, based on the faith and life of the true Church, we cannot and are not allowed to prejudge God's eschatological judgment – to set limits on His love, compassion, and mercy. Thus, Saint Cyprian's position is absolutely correct and necessary; from the moment we call it into question, we run the risk of relativism; therefore, we should correctly understand it. This proposition does not dogmatically exclude the salvation of those who are outside the Orthodox Church's canonical boundaries, especially since this decision would go against God's will, «ὃς πάντα ἀνθρώπους θέλει σωθῆναι καὶ εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν ἀληθείας ἐλθεῖν» (“who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth”)⁵. The issue of salvation is one that belongs entirely to the jurisdiction of the merciful God. We have no right to decide who will be saved and who will not; in such a case, it would be as if we were claiming for ourselves the role of God as judge. This particular statement tells us with absolute clarity the following: a) that the true Church of Christ is the only place where

inseparably united, is continually realized. Revelation fully exists in the incarnation of the Word – in the revelation not only of God, but also of man”.

4. Gal. 2, 21.

5. 1 Tim. 2, 4.

the possibility and the means of salvation truly exist, where salvation is potentially a reality for every believer, because the Church is the Body of Christ, and, as such, it is the preeminent place of communion between God and man; b) that the Orthodox Christian cannot be saved outside the life of the Orthodox Church. The conscious rejection of the Church by an Orthodox Christian constitutes an outright, conscious rejection of the possibility of salvation which the Church offers him.

The phrase “*extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*” means that no other historical organization outside the Church directly possesses the means of salvation⁶; “it means [...] that the regular and ordained bearer of the conditions of salvation is the Church”⁷. It is therefore not aphoristic, but pedagogical in nature⁸. It indicates what the true path to salvation is, not who is saved and who is not. It also indicates that outside of the faith and life of the true Church, no other safe path to salvation exists. However, no one could ever rule out the fact that God can act in ways unknown to us for the salvation of mankind and the world, to make people partakers of Christ’s redemptive work, where the conditions for this exist, as he acted in a special way for the salvation of those who

6. “The saying *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* should not be misinterpreted. This dictum, which was correctly formulated in order to repel heretics and prevent the Church from being divided, does not exclude the government of all history from the triune God. However, according to this axiom, no other historical organization, apart from the Church, can guarantee that it possesses the means of salvation directly” (N. Matsoukas, *Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ αἵρεση στοὺς ἐκκλησιαστικοὺς συγγραφεῖς τοῦ Δ΄, Ε΄, ΣΤ΄ αἰώνα*, P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki²1992, pp. 300-301). Cf. N. Matsoukas, *Δογματική καὶ Συμβολική Θεολογία Β΄. Ἐκθεση τῆς ὀρθόδοξης πίστεως σὲ ἀντιπαράθεση μὲ τὴ δυτικὴ Χριστιανοσύνη*, P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki²1988, p. 425 ff.

7. Chr. Androutsos, *Δογματικὴ τῆς Ὁρθόδοξου Ανατολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας*, Astir Publications, Athens²1956, p. 267. Cf. Chr. Androutsos, *Συμβολικὴ ἐξ ἐπόψεως ὀρθόδοξου*, Vas. Rigopoulos Publications, Thessaloniki³1963, p. 81.

8. It is characteristic that the works of Saint Cyprian are primarily anti-heretical and anti-schismatic in nature. They are not addressed to non-Christians, but to those Christians who have cut themselves off from the ecclesiastical unity of faith and love, with the aim of making it clear to them that they have abandoned the safe path to salvation. For Saint Cyprian, as well as for Saint Ignatius of Antioch (*Smyrn.* 6, 2, BEΠΕΣ 2, 281) and St. Irenaeus of Lyon (*Ἐλεγχος καὶ ἀνατροπὴ τῆς ψευδωνύμου γνώσεως Δ΄ XXXIII* 7, PG 7, 1076AB), schisms and heresies are primarily a sin against the virtue of love and philanthropy; those who are joining such groups bear heavy responsibility for their actions. On this, see Fr. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, p. 20 ff.

lived before Christ's coming⁹. Such a thing would mean for us to deny the doctrine of God's freedom, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence¹⁰, as well as the catholicity of salvation in Christ¹¹. It is true that the Fathers of the Church adhere to the axiom "*extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*" and do not discuss ways and means of salvation for people outside the ecclesiastical path¹². However, by doing so, they are attempting to anticipate God's judgment in the Last Days, especially for those who have never heard the Christian message or for those who find themselves outside the Orthodox Church for reasons that are not solely their own fault. Before God's tremendous Last Judgement, there is no certainty that could be possibly stand by itself. Few are those who, one

9. On this, see Chr. Androutsos, *Δογματική τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἀνατολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας*, *op.cit.*, p. 269, note 2; Chr. Androutsos, *Συμβολική ἐξ ἐπόψεως ὀρθοδόξου*, *op.cit.*, pp. 81-82; Io. Karmiris, *Ὁρθόδοξος Ἐκκλησιολογία*, Athens 1973, p. 195 ff.; Io. Karmiris, «Ὁ καθολικὸς χαρακτήρ τῆς σωτηρίας», *Ἐκκλησία/Ecclesia* 56, 15-16 (1979), pp. 324-327; Io. Karmiris, «Τὸ πρόβλημα τῆς σωτηρίας ἐν ταῖς θρησκείαις», *Ἐκκλησία/Ecclesia* 58, 23 (1981), p. 503; N. Matsoukas, *Δογματικὴ καὶ Συμβολικὴ Θεολογία Β'*, *op.cit.*, p. 427. Panagiotis Trempelas is cautious about this, not because he considers this view to be incorrect, but because we do not have "clear and categorical assurances and information from the sources of divine Revelation", nor is there any relevant official ecclesiastical ruling. Moreover, as he himself emphatically points out, no one knows how God will dispense His mercy (P. Trempelas, *Δογματικὴ τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας*, vol. 2, Adelfotis Theologon "O Sotir" Publications, Athens 1979, pp. 346-347).

10. "Human beings have no other means or way to attain salvation; but it would be a grave heresy if this were also true of God Himself, the giver of existence, of life and of salvation itself" (N. Matsoukas, *Δογματικὴ καὶ Συμβολικὴ Θεολογία Β'*, pp. 426-427). The Roman Catholic Church, which in the past had overemphasized the dogmatic character of this proposition, even elevating the condemnation of non-Roman Catholics to a dogma of faith (Council of Florence, 1442), has now reached the point of excommunicating the Jesuit cleric Feeney, because he insisted that no non-Roman Catholic could be saved. (Fr. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, *op.cit.*, p. 3 ff.). Cf. *Rom.* 11, 33-36: «Ἵθι βάθος πλοῦτου καὶ σοφίας καὶ γνώσεως Θεοῦ! ὡς ἀνεξερεύνητα τὰ κρύματα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀνεξιχνίαστοι αἱ ὁδοὶ αὐτοῦ; τίς γὰρ ἔγνω νοῦν Κυρίου; ἢ τίς σύμβουλος αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο; ἢ τίς προέδωκεν αὐτῷ, καὶ ἀνταποδοθήσεται αὐτῷ; ὅτι ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα» ("Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! 'Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?' 'Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them?' For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen").

11. See Io. Karmiris, «Ὁ καθολικὸς χαρακτήρ τῆς σωτηρίας», *op.cit.*, p. 324 ff.

12. J. Korbacher, *Ausserhalb der Kirche kein Heil?*, *op.cit.*, p. 214.

might say, have already been judged eschatologically in this life – the saints of our Church. All the others await God’s mercy¹³. Therefore, the discussion of other paths leading to salvation is out of question. We do not have the luxury of seeking in our theological thinking ways of salvation outside of faith in Christ and the life of the Church, which exist in parallel to the ecclesiastical path to salvation. In any case, this by no way implies certainty of damnation for all those who did not follow this path. The Church judges, where necessary for the salvation of the faithful, only within its own boundaries, that is, the limits of its faith and life, leaving to merciful God any judgment outside its own canonical boundaries, in accordance with the words of the Apostle Paul: (“What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside” («τί γάρ μοι καὶ τοὺς ἔξω κρίνειν; οὐχὶ τοὺς ἔσω ὑμεῖς κρίνετε; τοὺς δὲ ἔξω ὁ Θεὸς κρίνει»)¹⁴. Moreover, we should not forget that the breath of God, and thus also the Church’s mystical presence as God’s communion with creation, breathes throughout all creation. The world exists because God created and continues to sustain it; it is destined to become God’s world, to be transformed into the Church. Far from any notion of pan-ecclesiasticism, which would mean a denial of the Church’s historical presence and the ecclesiastical path to salvation, we ought to recognize

13. “It is still unknown to us what will happen when we finally abandon this material and temporary body” [Archim. Sophrony (Sakharov), *Περὶ Προσευχῆς*, The Stavropegic Monastery of St John the Baptist, Essex Gr. Britain 1993, p. 110].

14. *1 Cor.* 5, 12-13. See a characteristic passage from one of A. Khomiakoff’s articles: “she acts and knows only within her own limits; and (according to the words of Paul the Apostle...) does not judge the rest of mankind, and only looks upon those as excluded, that is to say, not belonging to her, who exclude themselves. The rest of mankind, whether alien from the Church, or united to her by ties which God hat not willed to reveal to her, she leaves to the judgment of the great day. The Church on earth judges for herself only, according to the grace of the Spirit, and the freedom granted her through Christ, inviting also the rest of mankind to the unity and adoption of God in Christ; but upon those who do not hear her appeal she pronounces no sentence, knowing the command of her Saviour and Head, ‘not to judge another man’s servant’ (*Rom.* xiv. 4)” [A. Khomiakoff, “Essay on the unity of the Church”, in: W. Birkbeck (ed.), *Russia and the English Church during the last fifty years*, vol. 1: Containing a correspondence between Mr. William Palmer, fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, and M. Khomiakoff, in the years 1844-1854, Rivington, Percival & Co., London 1895 (repr. 1969), pp. 194-195].

this cosmic dimension of the Church¹⁵. The whole world is a place of God's activity, and is thus connected to the Church, which strives to receive it and transform it into a new creation. Mankind is under God's providence; therefore, it is connected to the Church, which prays for its salvation¹⁶. After Pentecost, the Holy Spirit naturally remains and acts in

15. Based on the cosmic dimension of the Church and the universality of salvation in Christ, many theologians have sought to ecclesiastically establish the possibility of salvation for non-Christians. Ioannis Karmiris speaks of the Church's broadening boundaries: "... As the Church, the ark of salvation, is expanded, it encompasses the whole world, mysteriously extending to non-Christians, who, distinguished by their active faith in God, become 'close to the Church through the blood of Christ', joining themselves internally, spiritually, and invisibly with her and, more broadly, becoming invisible members of her. Thus, not only Christians, but also "Gentiles" become "heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus" (Ephes. 3, 6) through his Church, even though the manner that the Holy Spirit's saving grace is mysteriously and ineffably transmitted to those outside the visible Church is unknown: «ὄπου θέλει πνεῖ, καὶ τὴν φωνὴν αὐτοῦ ἀκούεις, ἀλλ' οὐκ οἶδας πόθεν ἔρχεται καὶ ποῦ ὑπάγει» ["(it) 'blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going'"] (John 3, 8). For indeed, the wills, methods, and ways for the salvation are unexplored, by which the Spirit leads those who are receptive to salvation to God" (Io. Karmiris, «Ὁ καθολικὸς χαρακτήρ τῆς σωτηρίας», op.cit., p. 324). Nikolaos Matsoukas states in this regard that "everything is potentially Church and is called for sanctification. The boundaries of the Church, as a historical organization with depth and breadth, sometimes are contracting (for defensive reasons), sometimes are expanding (the extension of Christianity to ecumenical dimensions, in accordance with its nature)" (N. Matsoukas, Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ αἴρεση, op.cit., p. 300). Nikolaos Nisiotis speaks of a broader sense of participation of all humankind in the Church on the basis of Christ's cosmic work, and of different degrees of participation in the Church („Die Zugehörigkeit zur Kirche nach orthodoxem Verständnis“, op.cit., pp. 385-387). As far as Roman Catholic theology is concerned, we should mention Karl Rahner's view about anonymous Christians. See Karl Rahner, „Die anonymen Christen“, in: *Schriften zur Theologie*, vol. VI, Benziger Verlag, Einsiedeln – Zürich – Köln 1968, pp. 544-554 and K. Rahner, „Bemerkungen zum Problem des ‚anonymen Christen‘“, in: *Schriften zur Theologie*, vol. X, Benziger Verlag, Einsiedeln – Zürich – Köln 1972, pp. 531-546. For the relevant arguments of Roman Catholic theologians and the ecclesiological or non-ecclesiological foundation of the salvation of non-Christians, see Fr. Kantzenbach, „Die ekklesiologische Begründung des Heils der Nichtchristen. Problematische und verheißungsvolle Wege und Tendenzen in der neuesten römisch-katholischen Theologie“, *Oecumenica – Jahrbuch für ökumenische Forschung* 1967, pp. 210-234.

16. «Πάντα μὲν οὖν τὰ ὄντα μετέχει προνοίας, ἐκ τῆς ὑπερουσίας καὶ παναίτιου θεότητος ἐκβλυζομένης· οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἦν, εἰ μὴ τῆς τῶν ὄντων οὐσίας καὶ ἀρχῆς μεταλήψει» (Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *Περὶ τῆς οὐρανόθεν ἱεραρχίας* Δ' I, PG 3,

the true earthly Church, making the believers participants in the Christ’s redemptive work. The possibility of truly participating in the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit within the context of the present world exists only in the true Church on earth, in its faith and life, which is the only sure path to salvation. However, this does not mean that the Holy Spirit is confined within the canonical boundaries of the Church, since it is omnipresent and fills everything¹⁷. From our own perspective, we can say where the presence and action of the Holy Spirit is certain, where the supreme holy path can be found. However, we are in no position to say where the action of the Holy Spirit, the action of the Triune God, is absent. It is impossible for us to explore the judgments of God; thus, any search for salvific paths outside the revealed ecclesiastical one is impermissible. However, as much impossible as this might be, it is equally impossible to rule out the possibility that God may act as He sees fit for the salvation of man and the world. God is active everywhere – if a world does exist, it is because God provides for it and governs it; nevertheless, He mainly acts through the Church¹⁸. This does not imply

177C).

17. “Although the Holy Spirit constitutes the Church and acts in its life, the Spirit of God is not limited to its boundaries, nor is it its exclusive property. The Holy Spirit is omnipresent: “ὅπου θέλει πνεῖ, καὶ τὴν φωνὴν αὐτοῦ ἀκούεις, ἀλλ’ οὐκ οἶδας πόθεν ἔρχεται καὶ ποῦ ὑπάγει” (John 3, 8) [...]. The Holy Spirit is active throughout God’s creation, even if not everyone is fully aware of this. It is therefore the duty of believers to recognize the presence of the Spirit wherever they discern its fruits” [«“*Ελθέ Πνεῦμα Ἅγιον: Ανακαίνισον πᾶσαν τὴν κτίσιν*”. Μία ὀρθόδοξη θεώρηση – Πόρισμα τοῦ Συνεδρίου Ὁρθοδόξων καὶ Ἀνατολικῶν Ὁρθοδόξων μή-Χαλκηδονίων Ἐκκλησιῶν: Ὁρθόδοξη Ἀκαδημία Κρήτης, 25 Νοεμβρίου – 4 Δεκεμβρίου 1989», in: G. Laimopoulos (ed.), *Ἐλθέ, Πνεῦμα Ἅγιον, Ανακαίνισον πᾶσαν τὴν κτίσιν*, Tertius Publications, Katerini 1991, pp. 198-199].

18. Commenting on the first chapter from St. Maximos’s *Μυσταγωγία*, Fr. Demetrius Staniloae characteristically states the following: “St. Maximus draws a precise parallel between the Church’s activity, which concerns its members, and God’s activity in the world. Of course, the latter is also exercised through the Church. God’s activity through the Church upon its members is a strengthened form of God’s action in the world. With this enhanced action, the world becomes better and more active. The Church always remains an image of the divine Archetype, because it is presented as the visible medium and through it, in a way, the invisible energy of God is enacted [...] Christ does not do for the Church a work different from the work that God does for the world, but rather perfects it, starting with a small circle of people, with the intention of

that we could possibly limit God's action within certain boundaries; it reveals where the possibility of true participation in Christ –the way, truth, and life– lies. Within the dogmatic and canonical boundaries of the Orthodox Church lies the fullness of grace and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the fullness of life in Christ, the fullness of truth, the true unity and catholicity.

There is only one sure path to salvation – that of ecclesiastical faith and life, which leads to the mankind's deification. The Church calls on everyone to follow this path of deification. However, for those who do not follow it –and it is not certain that they themselves bear sole responsibility for this choice–, perhaps Orthodox Christians, who by their way of life obscure the saving message of Christianity and Orthodoxy, bear much greater responsibility –he does not judge, but leaves the whole matter to the mercy of the All-good God, who not only does not condemn those outside its canonical boundaries, but He also prays for their return to the path of truth and their salvation. The whole life of the Church, especially its Liturgy and prayers, serves the salvation of the whole world; it serves its transformation into the world of God and the eternal movement of creation toward God, the creator of all things¹⁹. The Church as a historical community with its faith and life and as a manifestation of the Last Things on earth exists and functions for the salvation of the whole world, because it represents the manifestation of the authentic

extending this enhanced form of his work to all of creation" (St. Maximos the Confessor, *Μυσταγωγία*, transl. Ign. Sakalis, Apostoliki Diakonia, Athens 21989, pp. 110-111, note 17). Cf. P. Evdokimov, *Η Ὁρθοδοξία*, Vas. Rigopoulos Publications, Thessaloniki 1972, p. 170: "The Holy Spirit blows wherever it pleases", but it mainly 'rests' on the Son's humanity, on the Church".

19. "[...] This earthly, visible Church is the divinely willed and divinely given instrument and center of salvation in Christ and of the reunification of the entire human race with God" (Io. Karmiris, *Ὁρθόδοξος Ἐκκλησιολογία*, p. 185). Cf. N. Nissiotis, *Die Theologie der Ostkirche im ökumenischen Dialog. Kirche und Welt in orthodoxer Sicht*, Evangelisches Verlagswerk, Stuttgart 1968, p. 153: „die Welt besitzt jetzt ein konkretes Mittel der Gnade: die Kirche“. It is worth mentioning in this context that the Roman Catholic Church also expressed this position at the Second Vatican Council, having characterized the Church as “universale salutis sacramentum” (“Gaudium et spes” 45, Denzinger, op.cit., p. 1319). Cf. Fr. Richen, „Ecclesia ... universale salutis sacramentum“. Theologische Erwägungen zur Lehre der Dogmatischen Konstitution ‚De Ecclesia‘ über die Kirchengemeinschaft“, *Scholastik* 40 (1965), pp. 352-388.

world, revealing it renewed in the light of the Kingdom of God. It is not a place for the mechanical achievement of individual salvation, but the mystery of the divine Economy for the salvation of man and the world, which was revealed in Christ in the context of human history and exists as a historical community with a specific faith and life, not to exclude but to serve the salvation of the whole world. The Liturgy of the Church, both as a sacred service performed in the temple and as a general ascent to God, has universal dimensions; it encompasses the entire world. All people are invited to participate in this general ascent, yet not all of them respond to this invitation²⁰. The prayers of the Church’s saints and the love expressed through them are also taking on cosmic dimensions at their highest level²¹. Then, in the heart of the praying person, “the sufferings of the whole world are accumulating; it prays with a broken heart for everyone and for everything”. Its love encompasses everything; then, “it sympathizes with all those who are deprived of the glory of God”. Its repentance “becomes repentance for the whole world, for all people”²². This is the love that transcends all boundaries and becomes infinite, like the love of God, for that love which, between personal salvation and the salvation of one’s brothers, prefers the latter’s salvation²³. K. Papapetrou wonders how it is possible

20. On this subject, see f. Demetrius Stanisloe’s Introduction in Maximos the Confessor, *Μυσταγωγία*, p. 73 *et seq.*

21. “Both his personal prayer and liturgical prayer are taking on cosmic dimensions” [Archim. Sophrony (Sakharov), *Περὶ Προσευχῆς*, *op.cit.*, p. 240].

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 220, 227, 240. Cf. Ol. Clément, «Πλησιάζοντας τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία», in: L. Zander – N. Berdiaeff – Ol. Clément, *Τρία δοκίμια περὶ Ὁρθοδοξίας*, Christianiki Henosi Epistimonon, Athens 1962, p. 75: “By becoming more orthodox, we will help humankind and, in general, God’s creation to be transformed into the Church, the Orthodox Church, that sacred place where the divine and the human, the uncreated and the created, are united and through their union reveal and glorify the Holy Trinity”.

23. «... ἡπόμην γὰρ αὐτὸς ἐγὼ ἀνάθεμα εἶναι ἀπὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου, τῶν συγγενῶν μου κατὰ σάρκα» (*Rom.* 9, 3). The experience of this boundless love is the criterion of true holiness. One can refer to many saints who reached the heights of such a shocking experience of pain and anguish for the salvation of the whole world. However, we will refer only to the contemporary example of Saint Joseph the Hesychast. Saint Joseph writes in one of his letters: “Who would be close to me to hear my prayers, the sighs of my heart; to see the tears I shed for my brothers? All night long I pray and cry out: either save your servants, Lord, or wipe me out too; I don’t want Paradise!” (Ger. Joseph, *Ἐκφρασις Μοναχικῆς Ἐμπειρίας*, Philotheou Monastery,

that the presence of sinful people, who constitute the visible Church, can have a special significance for the salvation of the world²⁴. The answer is not that difficult: The presence of specific people –those who have been baptized in the Orthodox faith– is not particularly important for the salvation of the world – but rather the saving truth and experience of the Orthodox Church, which is expressed –there and to the extent that it is expressed– by them²⁵. Accordingly, the transformation of the world is necessary for it to be saved. This can be accomplished through the Mysteries of the Church and the latter’s wholly sanctifying energy, as well as through the presence of the saints – those who throughout their lives have become living witnesses and bearers of the ecclesiastical truth and experience. For the Church’s universal consciousness, the present world will exist as long as the Holy Spirit’s sanctifying action through the Church, and the struggle and prayers of the saints, who struggle for deification, continue unabated. The salvation of the world is indeed accomplished through the Orthodox Church, and woe to those Orthodox believers, clergy and laity, who become a cause of scandal²⁶ and of obscuring the role of Orthodoxy as the surest path to salvation.

The problem of the salvation or perdition of people, whether baptized or unbaptized and not belonging to the Orthodox Church, will be definitively resolved only in the Last Days, at the Second Coming, when the final determination of the boundaries of the Church will be made by the Triune God, the Lord of the universe. And then, in the final judgment, according to the relevant narrative of the Lord himself in the *Gospel of Matthew*²⁷, it will be revealed who were Orthodox Christians in name only and who, based on the law of conscience, approached the life of Orthodoxy without being Orthodox, without even being Christians.

Hagion Oros ³1985, p. 233).

24. K. Papapetrou, *Über die anthropologischen Grenzen der Kirche: Ein philosophisch-theologischer Entwurf zum Thema Simul iustus et peccator aus orthodox-katholischer Sicht*, Lutherisches Verlagshaus, Hamburg 1972, p. 108, note 175.

25. As Saint Sophrony (Sakharov) once again so aptly points out, “the loss of the God’s true knowledge – that was given to us through Christ and the Holy Spirit – would mean irreparable damage to the whole world” (*Περὶ Προσευχῆς*, *op.cit.*, p. 234).

26. «οὐαὶ τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ ἐκείνῳ δι’ οὗ τὸ σκάνδαλον ἔρχεται» (*Matth.* 18, 7).

27. *Matth.* 25, 31-46.

Then all the false Orthodox Christians will be judged and condemned by those who lived and acted according to the law, by those who lived and acted by following Christ’s teachings. Only then will it be revealed which of the Orthodox believers were true members of the Church and which of those outside the Orthodox Church belonged to it through their way of life²⁸.

28. “[...] Many seem to be within the Church, but in reality, they may be outside of it, just as many others appear to be outside of the Church, yet they perhaps belong internally and invisibly in it, according to the merciful and righteous God’s pleasure, whose will and salvific ‘dispensations’ are unfathomable” (Io. Karmiris, *Ὁρθόδοξος Ἐκκλησιολογία*, *op.cit.*, p. 198). The same author elsewhere refers to “Christians by deeds” («Ὁ καθολικὸς χαρακτήρ τῆς σωτηρίας», *op.cit.*, p. 327). Cf. the passage from a discourse written by St. Gregory the Theologian, that we’ve already quoted: *Λόγος* ΙΗ΄ 6, PG 35, 992B.