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Sanctity, the “forgotten vision” of the Christians today

“Now therefore you are no more strangers and foreigners,
but co-citizens with the *saints* and members of the household of God.
You, too, are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets,
Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone,
in Whom all the building fitly framed together growth unto a *saint* temple in the Lord,
in Whom you also are co-built for an habitation of God through the Spirit”
(Ephesians 2:19-22).

“If someone considers the departure from here [= History] as damage,
this man is never perfect on the faith”
(John Chrysostom, “Homily on the Candiemas, the Mother of God and Simon”,
in *P. G.*, t. 50, col. 809).

The theme is an attempt to reflect on our experience in using (at first sight) unusual methods in the approach of delicate question. This question is linked to the main ontological perspective of the life and existence of Christians today — and not only — within the History.

At the same time, the aforementioned target subject has usually at least some remote knowledge of so-called *Christians Spiritualities*, and such originally technical terms as *spirituality*, *moral(istic) Christian life*, *mysticism*, *metaphysics*, *esoterism*, *moral purification*, *meditation*, *pietism*, *emptiness*, have become an integral part of Christian religious vocabulary and Ecclesial life.

The other side of the coin is that *sanctity*, which is relevant to Christianity in general and every Christian in particular, remain an unexplainable mystery to those, who do not have an “institutional relationship” with the Trinitarian God...

However, in the present paper, I have tried to avoid the temptation of making cheap comparisons between sanctity as real, eschatological life and the fictive religious life of so-called spirituality, very welcome nowadays in the Christian milieu, but one cannot deny that the technique of comparative positioning may sometimes produce surprisingly illuminative results.

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First of all, it is necessary to say a few introductory words about the sanctity itself. When the unsuspecting reader studies the Holy Bible, he reads a passage, a speech addressed by God in an *exhortative* and *inviting* – and not in an *obliged* or *obligatory* – way to man: “Be yourself saints, because I am saint” (1 Peter 1:16). And then one will

reasonably wonder: to what degree is this true, that is, to become saint like Him? To what degree is this possible? He is saint, because He is God. We, men, not being gods, can we become truly saint? And moreover what He is *exclusively* can it be instilled in us and how? Sanctity is a category of the Kingdom, a feature of the *Eschata*. Can it become a feature also of men, who are still part of History? These are some questions, and not the only ones, posed before this open call of God to us all. Since this call touches the heart of ontology and theological anthropology, it is worth examining, from a personal interest, some of its aspects.

The word “sanctity” or “saint” refers to a reality totally irrelevant and unrelated to our time, to our culture and the anxieties of modern man. Indeed, in a global society of multiple challenges, such as the modern one, which faces as its more serious problems the financial crisis, the increase in the unemployment rate, the intense social problems, and is dominated by the anxiety of increasing the per capita income, to talk about saints and sanctity is a *challenge*, if not a *calling* to laugh about and sneer at. Thus, the *biblical feature of life* of the saint, as participant of the Resurrected Christ and citizen by anticipation of the Kingdom of God, has slid on the margin of the life of human society but also of the Church, and sanctity has become a “forgotten vision”.

The forgotten sanctity

It is indeed a “forgotten vision”, because it once existed, for this is what inspired our culture, for our people lived with the saints and they drew from them their mission in life, for they were the heroes, the great champions and the “famous stars” of their time. Nowadays, only the names of saints are left and people do not know about the life of the saints whose names they bear, and they prefer now to *individualistically* celebrate their own personal birth day and not the memory of the saints. And this tendency is common first and foremost among Christians, despite the biblical and fatherly experience of *communion with the saints*, “as co-citizens with the saints and [thus] members of God’s household” (Ephesians, 2:19). In such a time of confusion and disorientation, what can one tell about sanctity? His word will fall flat... But how can one not talk about something, which is so basic and fundamental in the life of Christians? Because, if we forget sanctity, the only things that we can found after this within the Church are nothing else that our identification with the world and the direct consequence of this identification, the secularization of the Church and its transformation in something as the “present century” (2 Timothy 4:10, John 18:36-37, Romans 12:2), which gives birth to the modern problem of Christians, the *Eonism** (see below, p. 11-12).

The misunderstood sanctity

However, nowadays sanctity is not only forgotten; it is also misunderstood, when it is a subject of discussion. Indeed, in the minds of people, the notion of sanctity seems to be associated with moralistic and psychological criteria. If someone is virtuous, if he discusses always about God or is charismatic and demonstrates abilities which people lack, then he is considered a “saint”, and vice versa, namely, if someone shows a flaw in his personality or in his behavior, then he cannot be considered a “saint”. Or if someone

does not exhibit supernatural powers one way or the other, the thought that he could be a saint baffles us.

This common but very misunderstood view of sanctity poses some basic questions, when we examine it in the light of the Holy Bible and of our faith.

1) If sanctity consists first and foremost in respecting the moral principles, then why the Pharisee was criticized by the Lord, while the Tax Collector was vindicated in the well-known parable (Luke 18:10-14)? We tend to call the Pharisee a “hypocrite”, but in reality he did not lie when he claimed that he faithfully observed the Law and that he applied as a faithful Jew every task asked by God. Moreover, he did not lie when he qualified the Tax Collector as a “sinner”, because the Tax Collector was an unfair person and a violator of the moral rules. Why then does the Tax Collector serve as a model of man for Christ leading to sanctity and not the Pharisee?

2) A similar question results from the use of the term “saint” by Apostle Paul in his letters. When he addresses himself to the Christians of Corinth, Thessalonica, Galatia, Paul calls them “saints”! But later on, in these letters he mentions many moral flaws of these Christians, which he harshly castigates. How is it that the first Christians are called “*saints*”, while it is certain that their daily life does not conform to the commands of their faith itself? Would anyone today think of calling “saint” one of these Christians?

3) If sanctity is linked to supernatural charismas and thaumaturgy, then we could seek it and find it also outside the Church. Can *sanctity* exist outside the Church? Moreover, to what extent is sanctity evaluated from any supernatural charismas that impress men? Apostle Paul told to the Corinthians impressed by people with supernatural acts: “If I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, *I am nothing*” (1 Corinthians 13:2). The Lord had said also that to command a mountain to move is possible, “if you have faith as well as a mustard seed” (Matthew 17:20-21). But this is not by itself a demonstration of sanctity, this is *nothing*, says Paul, if there is not the presupposition of love, that is, something that *any person can have*, without exhibiting any thaumaturgical abilities. Thaumaturgy and sanctity are not identical, and do not necessarily co-exist.

4) Similar questions result from the association of sanctity with unusual and “mystic” psychological experiences. Nowadays, many follow the Oriental Religions to meet dematerialized “gurus”, that is, people of extraordinary self-discipline, exercise and praying. The Church does not consider them saints, however deep and supernatural their experiences may be, and especially however great their virtue may be. Thus, the question posed previously comes finally back: *are there saints outside the Church?* If sanctity means what the people think (virtues, moral life, supernatural charismas, supernatural experiences etc.), then we have to accept that there are saints outside the Church and from this point of view there are more *outside* the Church than *within* Her... If we want to claim that sanctity is possible only within the Church, then we have to seek the reason of sanctity beyond the aforesaid criteria, namely, beyond the virtues, the moral perfection and the supernatural powers and experiences. So let’s see how the Church perceives sanctity.

Sanctity, as a Gift of personal relation and as an Ecclesial experience

The Greek term “*aghios*” (a{gio}) has an interesting history. The root of this Greek word derives from “*ag-*” (a{g-}) with many lexicographical derivatives and the

profound meaning of this root derives from the verb “*azesthai*” (a{zesqai), which means the awe before a mystical and terrible power (Aeschylus) as well as the respect for the bearer of this Power (Homer). Thus, in ancient Hellenism, sanctity is associated with power, with what Otto calls *mysterium fascinatorum et tremendum*, namely, what causes *attraction* and *fear* at the same time.

In the Old Testament, the Semitic word, translated by the Seventy Interpreters (Septuagint) as “saint”, is *gôdès*, akin to the Assyrian word *kuddushu* meaning “to cut, to separate”, to distinguish radically, to purify, to purge away (hence its association with “saint” (a{g-io”) and “pure” (aJg-no;”), with purity). Saints things are those that one distinguishes radically them from the others, especially in the worship, and devotes them to God.

Thus, the Holy Bible transcends the psychological and religious importance encountered in ancient Greeks (the awe, the *fear*, the *respect* to a superior power) and associates the notion of “saint” with the *absolute otherness [alterity]*, the *absolute Other*, fact which leads the Holy Bible in associating the “saint” with God Himself, the absolute transcendence with relation to the world. Only God is *saint*, and every sanctity derives from Him, only from Him and from the personal relation with Him (cf. “Saint, Saint, Saint is the Lord Almighty” [Isaiah, the prophet of the sanctity of God]). Therefore, in the Holy Bible, sanctity is identified with God and not with man or holy things, like in ancient Hellenism, and, in the Fathers of Church, sanctity is identified with person(s), with the Holy Trinity, with which the Fathers identify the three “Saint, Saint, Saint” of Prophet Isaiah.

Sanctity for the Christian faith is not man-centered (anthropocentric), but god-centered (theocentric) and does not depend on the moral feats of man, however great these may be, but on the glory and the grace of God, *on the degree of our personal relation with the personal God*. Therefore, Church considers that sanctity is not the individual property of any person, however “saint” one may be in one’s life, but it is a *matter of our personal relationship with God*. God sanctifies at His own discretion any person He (the *Sanctifier*) wishes, without the sanctification being dependent on anything else but only the free will of the person sanctified (the *sanctified one*). St. Maximus the Confessor (6th – 7th cent.) points out that people only contribute their free will, without which God does not act. The human endeavor and exercise does not entail our sanctity, since these can turn out to be “rubbish” (Philippians 3:8) and utterly worthless. Our endeavor and exercise reveal the disposition and extent of our free will. Nothing else.

In Christian faith, this identification of sanctity with God Himself results in its association with the glory of God. Sanctity means God to be glorified by all the people-world. It is not strange that the request of Sunday prayer is nothing else that to “be sanctified your name” (Matthew 6:9). If we take into account that this prayer is *eschatological*, that is, it refers to the final state of the world, it is clear that what is sought in this Sunday prayer, in “Our Father” (Matthew 6:9-13), is that all people-world glorify God, is the moment to come when all people will say along with the Cherubim what the prophet Isaiah saw and heard in his vision: “Saint, Saint, Saint is the Lord Almighty, the whole earth is full of Your glory” (Isaiah 6:3).

Therefore, sanctity means participation (the Greek patristic “*methexis*”) and communion in the sanctity of God. Besides, this also means “*theosis*” (deification-divination). Any sanctity relied on our virtues, on our any morality, on our qualifications,

our exercise etc., is anthropocentric and totally unrelated to the sanctity of our Church. Therefore, there is no other sanctity than that of God, and the saints do not have their own sanctity, but they participate in the sanctity of God. This means that in Church there are saints only in the sense to “be sanctified”: “For their sake I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may *be sanctified* in truth” (John 17:19), of those who received the uncreated light, the glory and the uncreated grace from God Himself.

After have seen the notion of sanctity itself, it is time to see its link with other parameters and the Ecclesial experience. In the Lord’s Prayer, the character of which is clearly eschatological, it is surprising that exactly after the request “be sanctified your name” is followed by “the Kingdom come”. Many researchers of theology believe that, in fact, these two requests mean the same thing. *Sanctity* and *Kingdom of God* are not only closely interrelated, but one could also say that they are identical. What we request from God in the prayer “Our Father” is His Kingdom to come to the world, *so that all people and the whole Created*, the “whole Earth” (Isaiah 6:3), to glorify and to recognize as saint only the saint God, and to *participate (methexis-deification)* in His sanctity and glory. *Sanctity* and *Kingdom of God* supplement and explain each other. Sanctity is not understood without the Kingdom of God and the participation in the sanctity of God. Thus, sanctity becomes an equivalent quality for God (by nature) and for man (by grace). And it is God Himself who makes this quality same and equivalent.

In interpreting the request of the Sunday prayer “the Kingdom come”, st. Maximus the Confessor writes: “The Kingdom comes; that means, this is the **Holy Spirit**”. In the Bible, the coming of the Kingdom is associated with the coming and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Acts of the Apostles 2:18). It is not without importance that, according to the Bible and the Church Fathers, the Holy Spirit is always associated with the *sanctification* of the world. Because He brings the Kingdom of God to History and within the world, for this reason He sanctifies the world. Therefore, the Holy Spirit Himself is also associated with something else: *the constitution of the Church*. Because, it is indeed the Holy Spirit Who forms the Church, and with this element the group of our approach comes to an end:

Sanctity – Kingdom of God – Holy Spirit – Church

The sanctity and the deification (*theosis*) of the saints must be set in this ensemble! Outside this ensemble, there is no sanctity, according to the Theology of the Holy Bible and the Fathers of Church. But this reveals a new given in our issue.

Sanctity, as Iconism of the Kingdom

Given that the sanctity and the deification of people and the world are understood within this fourfold frame, st. Maximus sees without any doubt the Kingdom of God and the deification of saints as an eternal extension of the Divine Liturgy, and the Divine Liturgy as an *icon of the Kingdom of God* in created space and time, that is, in History. The *notion of icon* is crucial in Christian theology. It does not mean only the icon of Christ and the icon of the saints we worship and venerate in our churches, but it also has generally the meaning of *Iconism*.

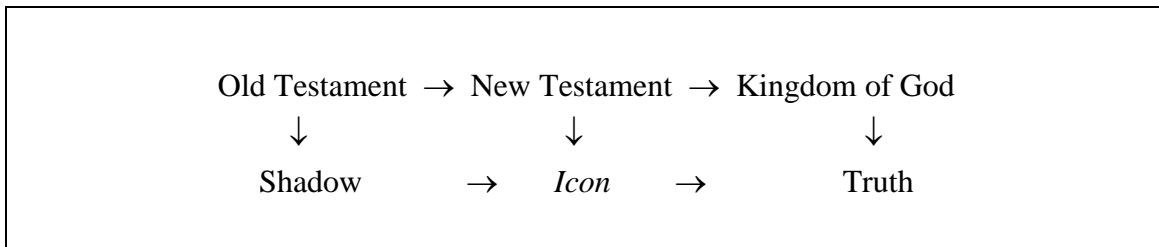
First of all, the Church exists within History, as the Kingdom of God which is “already here and not yet”, as an *iconic reality* of the world to come, to “mirror” (cf. 1 Cor 13:12) the *Eschata* in History. This was the experience of the Ecclesial body during the first three Christian centuries with their waiting for Christ’s coming in glory and to be in existence by “beholding the glory of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18). Here the Church body functions as a “mirror”, because it reflects realities of the future which come to the present. The Church as an “icon of the Kingdom” is an “icon of the *Eschata*”, of the end times that are coming, which is introduced into History. This may be better understood by means of an example or rather an experience each one of us has from one’s childhood years and from school. We used small mirrors inside the classroom, deviating the sunrays, which streamed through the windows and directed them towards the faces of our schoolmates. The sun that appeared on the mirror hindered the gaze of the schoolmates in the same manner in which they gazed at the sun that shone in the firmament. Our example apparently involves two distinct suns: the sun of the mirror and the sun of the firmament on the same time. It is, however, one and the same sun, that of the firmament, the rays of which are reflected by the mirror and introduced inside the classroom. The sun is of course one and unique, the real one is that of the firmament. But the sun that shines on the mirror is also equally real, only it does not exist within the mirror, but in the firmament. The mirror, by its presence and its properties, simply contributes to the penetration of the sun inside the classroom and enables it to shine directly and straight onto the eyes of our schoolmates.

If this example can indeed convey other ontological realities of life and of the Kingdom, we could say that we have here, in a manner of speaking, the *notion of icon*, the fact of *Ontological Iconism*. This is what the Church is doing and professes to do. Indeed, the Church exists and perdures as an icon, that is as an iconic reality that introduces the Kingdom amid humanity, and the *Eschata* into History, the eschatological future into the historical present. If this becomes understood as underlying every attempt at eschatological orientation, then by definition we can be agreeing that the Church always wishes to be the *icon of the eschatological Kingdom*. For this reason, the Kingdom “is at hand”, the Kingdom is approaching (Revelation 22:20). Not only we are heading towards the *Eschata*, but the Kingdom is nearing and is coming close to us. Here, there is a double motion. The present is moving towards the future but the eschatological future too, regardless of the historical present, is moving towards the present. For this reason also, when we discuss about the sanctity attempted by Christians, it is fundamental and crucial to make known the iconic *character* of the Church in order to be able later on to associate it with the eschatological perspective of man and the all Created.

At this point, the subject of today’s speech becomes particularly important. What is the meaning of sanctity, when viewed as *iconism of the Kingdom of God*, as experience and anticipation (first glimpse) of the *Eschata*? The saints become *gods by grace* and *iconize* the Kingdom of God. But what does it mean that they “*iconize*” and how is this associated with our daily and historical experience?

Everything inside Church is *iconism*. Apart from the holy *icons* that we have within our churches, *iconisms* are the acts, the actions (of moving) and the persons of holy worship, as well as the Divine Liturgy itself. St. Maximus calls “icons” all that as well as everything that has happened and happens in the historical life of Church since the time of the New Testament. To demonstrate the ontological relation between the Old

Testament, the New Testament and the Kingdom of God, he makes the following correlation and the following correspondence:



Everything is *icon of what is to come*, “a *shadow* of what is to come” (Colossians 2:17) and “type of the future” (Romans 5:15), which will be the *truth* of what is *iconized* in History. Therefore, the truth lies in the future, in the Kingdom of God. So in the historical life of the Church, everything is *icon of what is to come*, *icons of this truth*. The saints narrated in the icons of the Church are not “photos” of their historical forms (for this reason the icons do not depict the saints as they were in their historical life), but as they (will be) are in the future, according to the Church’s inspiration, bathed in the uncreated light and in the glory of the golden background. The bishops in the Divine Liturgy are icons of Christ, as He (will) comes to His Kingdom. Monasticism, in its structure and its perspective, also constitutes an icon of future situations. The honor of saints – and not our personal birth day – is an icon of our future communion with them. (It is now necessary to refer in parentheses to something directly related to the matter in question: When did the Christians celebrate and when do they celebrate their personal name day: In their personal birth day or in the memory of the saints whose name they bear? The sanctity of the saint whose name we bear is birth in the Kingdom. For this reason, the day of the *historical death or martyrdom* of the saint – and not the day of his biological birth – is the day when a saint is celebrated, because it is the day of his *birth in the Kingdom*. While the remembrance of our biological birth, the celebration of our anniversary is birth in History and the fallen Created, namely, the historical space and time that keeps us far from the communion with God. Therefore, the priority given today not to the honor and the *communional* memory of the saints, but to the day of our individual birth, the day of our anniversary, represents to all those who are Christians a form of betrayal of the sanctity and of the Kingdom, and a triumph of History and the fallen Created). Consequently, all symbolisms and the actions of Divine Liturgy are *icons of the last days*, *icons of the Eschata*. And here it is worth noting that we do (must) not have symbolisms of colors or symbolisms of forms and actions referring to our historical or naturalistic experience, but they refer only to the eschatological reality of the Kingdom.

The fact that everything in Church is *icon* of the Kingdom does not mean that it is not real, that it is fantasy, but these icons participate in the reality and the truth of the Kingdom. It was first written in the Holy Bible, before being examined in more detail by the Fathers of the Church and before being systematized by the Ecumenical Councils that after the incarnation of the Son of God and after that He became a person of History, what happens since then around His person, *iconizes* His final, eschatological presence in a real and not imaginary manner. Thus, while the sanctity of Christ and of God will be apparent in His Kingdom, its iconism in this life already participates ontologically in the *truth of what is to come* (cf. John 14:19-20).

But what is then the difference between the *icon* and the *truth* of the Kingdom? Apostle Paul gives the answer in the follow phrase: “But we have this treasure in jars of clay” (2 Corinthians 4:7), and in other one: “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; *then* (= *Kingdom*) we shall see face to face” (1 Corinthians 13:12). This is what John wants to say when he writes that in the Kingdom of God “we shall see Him (God) as He really is” (1 John 3:2). In other words, anything *holy*, whether thing or person, in the present condition of Church is fragile like the jars of clay by the power of *evil* (Romans 12:21; cf. 3 John 11), still acting in History, is “enigmatic”, susceptible also of bad interpretation, contestation or/and reject – like *mirror* and like an *enigma* (1 Corinthians 13:12) – and lives wishing His final manifestation “as He really is” (1 John 3:2).

In this world and in the present situation of the world, saints live intensely wishing to see the Kingdom *hic et nunc*, they are not content with their present situation. They are vulnerable to evil and human weaknesses, but they struggle to a greater extent, always more and more, and they suffer and experience more than any other the necrosis and the death that still arouses the whole Created. The more they realize that they are icons of what is to come, the more they shift and transfer their sanctity beyond their self, they leave it “to pass through the *original*”, as has written st. Basil of Caesarea, and they rely not on the psychological and subjective event but on the ontological event, not on their emotion, but on the truth that their sanctity is an *icon* participating in the reality and refers to the “*archetype*”, the only Saint. This is the great Mystery of Iconism. It is its reference of our being to the “*original*” Saint. Without this iconic experience, sanctity through History becomes man-centered, anthropocentric, and false for the Kingdom, but also for what the sanctity itself professes it to be. By experiencing the iconism of the Kingdom, the saint experiences love, which is the one thing he will seek, according to Apostle Paul, when this faith and its impressive thaumaturgies and the human moral feats will be suppressed in the Kingdom of God (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:8-13).

Sanctity, a common vision of Christians

We attempted to make a trip to sanctity, this largely “forgotten vision”..., but a “forgotten vision” which many Christians today, regardless of confession, apparently or not apparently, seek it and wish to understand and conquer it. Let’s point out here concisely the main points of the things written with respect to sanctity, but this does not mean that all of them have been presented.

1. Sanctity is not identified with the feats of our moral and individual exercise, or with supernatural experiences of any form, for one may meet all these outside Church and Christ, sometimes to a greater degree and extent.
2. Sanctity is a natural quality unique to God, and the saints do not possess their own sanctity, but they participate in God’s sanctity only to the degree that He seeks and wants.
3. Sanctity is given by God as *participation* (*methexis*) in His life itself, and this occurs only in Christ, who “sanctifies Himself for us” (John 17:19).
4. Sanctity is instilled in us in the Holy Spirit, Who is the Spirit of sanctification, is also the Sanctifier, and, according to the Holy Bible, He performs the *instillation* of this sanctity (cf. John 14:15-26; 15:26; 16:7-11, 12-15). Furthermore, because of the Holy Spirit’s special mission, sanctity in the Economy of our salvation occurs when the Church

becomes a body and *iconizes* the Kingdom of God, which the Holy Spirit brings and introduces to History.

5. According to the Holy Bible and to the Church Fathers, sanctity is clearly expressed as iconism of the Kingdom, the saints are *icons* – and not originals or archetypes – of the sanctity of the only Saint. The more these saints are real saints, the more they refer to the archetype, denying the glory, which belongs only and unique to God. This glory shines many times and is revealed under the form of signs and wonders, as they occur in the New Testament (cf. Acts of the Apostles etc.). All these are acts of God, “uncreated energies of God”, as characterized by st. Gregory Palamas (14th cent.), and they occur only when He wants so. But there are also saints who are unknown to us; many of them may have walked or walk among us, content with offend/insult or denying their sanctity. For this reason, the Church has established the solemnity of All Saints’ Day, of unknown and known saints, and it is no wonder it occurs on the first Sunday after the Monday of the Holy Spirit. Only the *coming of the Kingdom of God* (Luke 12:32-53; Hebrews 10:32-59; Revelation 22:20) will reveal to us in glory the complete Communion of Saints. And

6. Finally, as regards the first question, whether it is possible for us, human beings, to become saints, the answer is finally that we can become not only saints, but also gods!, for “Christ became man [*incarnation*] for us to become ourselves gods [*deification*]” (St. Gregory of Nazianzus the Theologian – 4th cent.). Therefore, God’s original speech “Be all of you saints, because I am saint” (1 Peter 1:16) is a real speech and our common *iconic* vision. And He delivers it to us from His Kingdom, from the place we are heading for and from the place that He comes from. Consequently, the feature of the Kingdom and our complete communion with God is sanctity, our future condition, the feature of the eschatological communion, the personal way we commune with God and with each other. God Himself is and exists as *communion*, “God is *love* (= *communion*)” (1 John 4:8. 16), sanctity being the feature of the Three Persons of the Trinity. For this reason, the *call of sanctity* addressed to us all is to “become saints”! (1 Peter 1:16). And through this perspective of call itself and to make easier the access to the *road of the saints*, the Kingdom itself “sends” to us saints, the living saints of our Church (prophets, apostles, fathers, martyrs and our holy brethren), who already live in the Kingdom, such as the Resurrected Christ, and for this reason they can – linked with the Uncreated (One) – be alive also in History, not as a return to it, but as participants in the reality of the Kingdom, they enter in History with the Kingdom, and thus we may commune with them as a model and, thus, we may live in their perspective, in the perspective of the sanctity. This is also why we celebrate their memory and not the memory of our birthday, confirming like this also the First Christians’ *modus vivendi*: “Memory of a saint is imitation of this saint”. So, on this sanctity we built our *eschatological identity*.

All these mean that sanctity is not for few people but for all of us. No special place or way is required to be sanctified. What is required is to empty ourselves from self-confirmation, from our ontological self-fullness and our self-admiration and self-glorification, something not so easy, that is, from something the Bible and the Fathers of the Church call *self-love*, *selfish* [*philautia*] (2 Timothy 3:2), apparent and not apparent. Our era scorns sanctity, for this era fosters in countless ways self-love and selfish egocentrism. This fatally leads our civilization to self-destruction (cf. the ecological-environmental problems, a form of collective self-love). Only the *common vision of sanctity* will save our world, a sanctity which means to be and live in the last days and in

the Kingdom *not yet and already here*, from now on and from History, to live the Kingdom, as says st. Gregory Palamas, “*here and from now on, without letting death determine your relation with It*”. And finally the common vision of a sanctity, which means to drop the *anchor* (Hebrews 6:19) of the ship in the *Eschata* and in the Kingdom, while the ship sails through the endless sea of History and the Created. And then, however much the ship knocks about in the open seas of History, the anchor will firmly keep it in its perspective.

Christ is Risen!

Aeonism or Eonism

Aeonism, as a neologism, derives from the Greek word αἰών, *aeon* (Eng. Aeon, Eon – century). First of all, the word “*aeon*” describes a space or a period of time. In this perspective, there may be some derivative notions in Greek such as “*aeono-haris*”, one that eternally graces, but also *one that graces* (cf. the interpretation of the compound word “*hydro-haris*”) *with the century*, with its *integration* and its *exhaustion* in the dimensions of the (current and historical) century, something that is directly related to the term *aeonism* in question.

The term *aeonism* was coined for the theological literature and theology, when the notion “aeon” (= the given historical period of mankind, the historical period as part of the created) coincides with the History itself, the created itself and its historical period in its present (fallen) form. This is evident in the patristic threefold distinction in:

“*Pre-aeonic [Pre-eternal, Age-long] — History — Last Days-Eschata*”.

Indeed, the patristic concept of “*pre-aeonic*”, “pre-eternal”, “that which occurs before the century”, identifies automatically the “century” with the “History” (the period of Divine Providence, the *Divine Economy*), while the Last Days, the Eschata, are defined as “beyond the (historical) time”, as “beyond the (current) century”, so it is used in the plural in the Greek translation of the Bible [“*eis tous aeonas ton aeonon*” – “forever and ever”] (Romans 1:25 and Philippians 4:20).

Therefore, the term derives from the secondary meaning of the word “aeon” and expresses an existential approach and an outlook on life associated with the “current century”, the History, the historical time and, theologically, with the fallen world, the fall, the fallen human condition and the fallen created. And yet, aeonism is directly related to a peculiar attachment to the “fallen created” (*extrinsically luminous*), which becomes independent of the communion with the “creative *Uncreated (self-luminous)*, God the Creator, and exhibits a dynamic *ontological self-fullness* before Him.

In its new sense, this theological neologism denotes the mentality of people who certainly believe in God, but are unable (Ephesians 2:2) to make God *Almighty*, that is, the “centre of their lives” (Abbot Dorotheos). This fact (Matthew 13:22; Mark 4:19) leads to the consequence of an “*heterocentric perspective*” (rejection of God in the transcendence and in “what is to come” [Acts 26:22]), which takes (2 Cor 4:4) man away from God “for having loved this present world” (2 Tim. 4:9) and traps him by placing him (Luke 20:34) in the dimension of “this world” (John 18:36-37). This is a category and a “*intra-creational*” perspective, i.e. of containment and introversion to what is (now fallen) created, – becoming *Religion*, which is a *permanent spiritual slavery* within this created and – forgetting its *eschatological orientation* (Ephesians 1:21, Hebrew 6:5 and 11:20; 1 Tim. 4:8; Tit. 2:12), which is based on the standard (Romans 12:2) [*civitas terrena*] “this present world” (**worldly eschatology**), or giving a dominant lead **in this**

century (“this Century”, “this present world”) against the **future century** (the “future century” [Ephesians 1:21]). A typical example of *mentality of personal aeonism* are the words of Apostle Paul to his disciple Demas: “For Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present century [world], and has departed for Thessalonica” (2 Tim. 4:9-10), who totally believed in God and was clearly equal to the Apostles, but finally abandons the *ministry [diakonia]* of Christ and the purpose of Church in History, precisely because he loved by priority, if not exclusively, “this *present world*” (2 Tim. 4:9). In other words, aeonism is above all an *ontological entrapment and restriction of man in the world, history and nature*, placing him on an *aeonistic* course without any eschatological substance. It is an aeonistic way of existence, as a way of life at the expense of the eschatological perspective of man.

Finally, in the context of the truly indistinct aeonism, especially within the Church and much more in the dimension of the world, we can discern a scaled *mentality of collective aeonism* that gets stronger and prevails in the Church, if it does not get a theological and pastoral attention, which tends to become a *Church aeonism* when the mentality is *embodied*. And it’s a proven fact that *Church aeonism* does not let ontologically or institutionally space for the advent of eschatology. It wishes to be vindicated solely in this present time and this present century and world with its own resources, aiming at aeonistic supports and thus directly resulting in an ontological and ecclesiological *heterocentrism*. And *Church aeonism* gets stronger and instills the Ecclesial body, then the Church, despite being Church, will remain as such only superficially, but it will actually become an *aeonistic Church*, i.e. it slips in the *aeonistic form* “of this present world” (*conformism*; cf. Rom. 12:2 and 2 Tim. 4:9), and is altered switching from an ontological category to an aeonistic category fostering dubious aeonistic visions, whatever this may entail about to what is to be done for its life, its existence in History and its Ecclesiology.

In short, from the theological approach to this concept, *aeonism* refers to man’s vision and consideration of the “current century”, as if this century had an *ontological self-fullness*. Its visible symptoms are apparent in events such as when the priorities of the present world overshadow the sole priority of the Kingdom. In other words, *aeonism* is an emphasis on the sufficiency of the “current century”, which exists as a “shadow of what is to come” (Colossians 2:17) and “a type of him that was to come” (Romans 5:15), and its conversion to an “ontological centre” of History and human life, changing God from an “ontological center” and primary and archetypal member of a mutual interpersonal communion into an epithematic area and a religious worldly idol.