

## CHAPTER V

### Sainthood: An Applied Theology

*In all religions, man searches for God but in Christianity God searches for man.*<sup>1</sup>

Sheikh Abdel-Baset summarizes the Orthodox Christian Faith and its Theology in one sentence. This theology teaches and exemplifies that God is not separated from His indwelling in His creation. He is in His *Theurgy* among His people. The *Logismoi* of God (Theology) is a *Theurgy* of habitation, healing, revealing, loving, caring, having mercy, raising from the dead, feeding, crying, touching, bleeding, blessing, multiplying, sweating, praying, temptation and obedience. In fact He is the Initiator of the creation of man and the seeker who saves and uplifts the fallen man through the course of His continuous habitation in His Creation.

The wise Muslim sheikh has set a gulf between Christianity and all other religions and cults, a gulf that identifies the uniqueness of Christianity among the many philosophies and theologies<sup>2</sup> which we examined in the previous chapter. It is a gulf between theory and praxis, a gulf between dead theology and a Living theology, a gulf between a false and a true and real theology.

Although God stays the same regardless of the people's views, some religions and cults have adopted and studied a false theology teaching their private views about God which have distorted the meaning of theology. Theology for them becomes a study, a science, set of words, and possessors of degrees in theology became theologians. Theology becomes a theory and a profession. It dies.

Among the Orthodox Christians, however, theology has been known in its *Praxis*, its *Theurgy* and practice. It is an applied theology. It is a Transcendent search, the coming down, the Incarnation and Inhominaton, the dwelling among His people, the God who became clearer (*Tajalla*)<sup>3</sup> on Mount Tabor, the Labor of Love through the Crucifixion,

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<sup>1</sup> Abdel- Baset Abdel- Samad, a dominant Sheikh in Egypt who is known for his beautiful chanting of the Qur'an (the tajweed). The quotation was taken from *Aqwal Khaleda fi l-Injeel (Eternal Sayings from the Gospel)*, Deacon Jean Shameei (الشماس جان شمعي), 1998, p. 98.

<sup>2</sup> I believe that the Incarnational Christian Theology is the definition that renders to theology its true meaning and understanding. It is the inspiring theology of knowing and mingling with God. All other theologies are but philosophies created by man.

<sup>3</sup> Transfiguration is the English translation of the word Tajally in Arabic *μεταμόρφωσις*, "transformation, transforming, from *μετα-* (*meta-*), "change" + *μορφή* (*morfe*) "form" in Greek. The Arabic meaning is more

the Hope given through the Resurrection, the Ascension and the pouring of the Holy Spirit upon His Church.

The Incarnation of the Word has revealed that sainthood is an applied theology. The Saint – Son of God - sanctified the flesh when He took on the human nature. He sanctified water when he went into the river of Jordan. He sanctified food and all natural products by consuming them. He sanctified all earthly passions, desires and human feelings when he took them on and endured them. He sanctified everything by partaking in it.

This explains the gulf of difference between the Old and New Testament understandings. It is through this actual entry of God into the world that the Orthodox Christians believe that the saint-man gets his life, his true role, his dynamism. Through the Incarnation the saint-man is made to transcend to a unique level of sainthood, a ministerial sainthood that is organically linked to the Incarnated Saint and thus the ministry of sainthood is actually the practice of theology.

### ***Sainthood is Alive in the Assembly, the Church***

Indeed, we have discovered in the previous chapter that sainthood is an applied theology. It is in the accomplished works done in the Name of Jesus Christ. As such, it is seen that Orthodox Christians speak another kind of theological language that is based on providing a ministry of love towards the neighbor and enemy.<sup>4</sup> When we look at the ministry of the saints we are struck by the fact that they were already called saints just by being included in the assemblies (churches) without any proof of deeds. Did not Paul the Apostle call the brethren who were assembled in Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi and Colossi saints<sup>5</sup> before they performed any miracle and while they were still waiting for his guiding and catechetical letters?

St. Paul's criteria for calling a person "saint" is that he is a member of the Christian assembly, a member of the Body of Christ. This is the entry of the person into

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applicable and meaningful than the Greek and English words because God does not change forms; He is Unchangeable, but He made Himself clearer to the witnesses who could not afford to look upon Him with their natural eyes on the Mount of Transfiguration.

<sup>4</sup> In fact, the Orthodox Christian should call no one his enemy. He should have no enemies. Though the other calls him enemy, he should always love him and consider him a neighbor.

<sup>5</sup> In sequence, Rom. 1:7, 1 Cor. 1:2, Eph. 1:1, Phil. 1:1 and Col. 1:2.

sainthood, reciprocally like the entry of the Incarnate God into his world. In such movement a person will become a sanctifier as His Master, and his life will become a ministerial life, full of non-stopping actions towards mankind. From the moment that man accepted Jesus Christ as his God and Savior, and becomes a partaker of His sacramental life, he is called saint. Therefore, sainthood's deeds are but the fruits of the plants of this body and are not considered as personal deeds and heroism. They are but actions of love and the urge to honor and glorify the Name of God.

Apart from the Church, the faithful cannot be called saint. Sainthood will not have a role without Jesus Christ. This explains the silence of the other religions. They cannot recognize sainthood, although some of their faithful visit the shrines of their righteous and martyrs, and they might even visit and pray to the Christian saints. The Assembly of Believers in the Trinitarian God in its complete cycle of liturgical and sacramental life is the place which produces sainthood and manifests it to the world. The members of this Assembly are united together by the bond of the Holy Spirit<sup>6</sup> through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and the Head of the whole Body.

So do Christians strive for sainthood? Do they deserve this title because they were heroes of Faith and because of their deeds as individuals? Why then do they strive all their life to live a life of virtue, righteous and ministering love to others?

Orthodox Christians do not strive to become saints. Sainthood is embedded in their nature and it was awakened through their Faith in the Trinitarian God and participation in the Mystical Sacramental Messianic Ministry. They are called saints in plural as members of the body of Jesus Christ. Each member should live a holy life as a worthy witness of this participation. It is to witness to and to fulfill the duties of the name saint that is the proof of his love to his beloved who has already gracefully sanctified him.

Thus St. Paul defined and gave sainthood its intended purpose of being. It is the outcome of the actions and the dynamism of the Trinitarian God. It is God as "Being-In-Act" who abides in man and who let man mingle in Him, allowing him to become a saint. For this reason the Church, the Assembly, recognizes and canonizes individual as

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<sup>6</sup> The Bond of the Holy Spirit is the bond between the members who are the Temples of the Holy Spirit.

saints while they are asleep, in the hope of the Resurrection, as proofs of the work of God among His Creation.

The saint-man became a living saint through the Living God in the Assembly where he may sanctify others and may be recognized as a saint by the same Assembly. This is not a personal honor but an act of glorification for God the Saint. His and the Assembly's works are done in the Name of God, and all the healings, miracles, acts of virtue, etc. are but the works of God through the saint-man.

Yet sainthood is still embedded in the human nature of those who do not believe in the Trinitarian God. They remain the creatures of a God who is hidden. Their sainthood remains asleep until they recognize their true role in the Assembly of Jesus Christ, the place of sainthood as an applied theology.