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THE BAPTISMAL SPIRITUALITY OF SAINT MARK THE ASCETIC

SUMMARY OF THE PHD THESIS

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Key words: Saint Mark the Ascetic, Baptism, Syrian spirituality, Messalianism, the work of grace, the heart, the liturgy of heart, the Holy Fathers, dispassion, fall, prayer.

The present work – *Baptismal Spirituality of Saint Mark the Ascetic* - aims at highlighting the role of spiritual teaching crystallized in the 4th and the 5th century, on the background of important spiritual and dogmatic turmoil. Saint Mark the Ascetic is an exponent of these spiritual teachings concerning the importance of the Baptism as foundation of spiritual life, as opposed to the challenges coming from the charismatic movement of the Messalians, which emphasized individual experience and claimed the re-creation of a paradisiac-eschatological means of existence, disregarding any form of organization and authority to the detriment of ecclesiastic spirituality in general, and of Baptism and Eucharist in particular, as well as to the detriment of any form of asceticism. An authentic Christian life as revealed in the teaching of the author whose importance we are emphasizing must include both dimensions of spirituality: the ecclesiastical spirituality, with its real, complete, non-symbolic meaning, and the personal spirituality. These two dimensions combine in a synergetic effect to achieve the work of perfection we are called to witness and which has an everlasting value and an outstanding importance in the efforts to renew the Christian life.

Through Baptism that restores the Face of God within our souls, Christ dwells in us and gives us the earnest of the spiritual gifts which we renew through the fulfillment of the commandments, into a whole new life after we symbolically died to sin and resurrected with Christ, thus receiving freedom from sin and death as its consequence. Guided by the experience of the Holy Fathers, among which Saint Mark the Ascetic is included, we are called to be delivered from ignorance, forgetfulness and laziness, in order to strengthen our righteous life, to be released of passions and gain virtues, flowing to perfection and deification with the help of the Church, the laboratory of Resurrection. This happens even more nowadays, when the postmodern secularized societies either reject transcendence due to a rational-utilitarian vision upon man, or suggest a false spirituality in which the psychological individualism attempts to replace the act of true faith as a surrogate for the authentic Church.

Chapter I of the present work underlines the context of the Syrian spirituality, as a testimony of Christian tradition belonging to Syrian language, in addition to Greek and Latin tradition. The Syriac Christianity has developed as a form of Judeo-Christianism, an important role in this respect having the influences of the Essenian ascetic Judaism. As enthusiasm towards asceticism was one of the features of Syriac Christianity, extreme encratic or gnostic forms of manifestations were reached, although the Syrian spirituality call for asceticism was addressed not only to the chosen ones, but to everyone, thus developing through delimitation from various forms of Gnosticism.

Another feature in comparison with the Greek and Latin Christianity is the tendency to individualism, singled out by the developing of the anachoretic asceticism as opposed to the community asceticism, which was regarded as an exception. During the period of generalization of the community asceticism, individualism is expressed by the fact that human beings wanted to find a proper method of living in their way to perfection, with a focus on personal experience and prayer, to the detriment of Holy Sacraments and of institutional aspects of Christian life. Also, the Syriac spirituality is characterized by the use of symbolism, with tendencies of literal rendering of symbol, in the sense that the religious image and the physical action are inseparable; this led to a striking similar physical behavior on the part of the Syriac believer, who attempted to physically experiment the truth of faith in Christ the Savior's redemptive work of restoring human nature before the Fall. The encratic influences played an important role, as the Encratism implied all believers should be involved in an ascetic life, which in Western Christianity and later in the Syriac one will be limited only to the monks. According to the early findings of the researcher, Baptism was performed on those who would give up the idea of marriage or would put an end to an ongoing marriage. The baptismal and pneumatological experience, which considered earthly marriage to have no meaning, was seen as a spiritual union between Christ and the believer and it resulted in the dividing of the believers in two: the "upright" – married lay people, who work and ensure their salvation by obeying the commandments, in particular the lesser commandments from "*The Book of Steps*"; and the "perfect" who were fulfilling the major commandments and were practicing celibacy, poverty, and refused to work leading a life of prayer while wandering through the region. Their wandering apostleship was going to come into conflict with the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

The Christian asceticism was practiced inside the Christian community by an ascetic group, true spiritual elite of Church which inherited the classical asceticism. The members of the elite known as "*Sons and Daughters of the Covenant*" accepted chastity after Baptism and

lived with their families leading a life of asceticism and prayer. They understood Church as an ascetic and charismatic paradise between Eden and eschaton where one could enter through Baptism and Eucharist, in a mystical wedding which anticipated the eschatological one. This Covenant had become a stage of passing to priesthood or monasticism, and after its termination the ascetic life will continue in a classic ascetic setting, as shown in the canons of Rabbula.

Another common practice during the primary period of Church is that of the agape, maidens living in a spiritual union with the ascetics, under the same roof. Because of the exaggerations similar to those of the Messalians, namely men were living together with women, this practice was condemned in the 4th century by the councils (Council of Nicaea in the 3rd canon) and by the Fathers of Church, such as Blessed Jerome, Saint Cyprian or Saint John Chrysostom. Also, the 4th century represents the transition from the pre-monastic Christian asceticism to the actual monasticism, which constituted a genuine spiritual challenge to Christianity in terms of a relaxation of the moral and spiritual exigencies due to the installation of Church into the public space; another challenge was represented by the ascetic and charismatic radical groups from Mesopotamia, North Syria and Asia Minor founded outside the institutions and hierarchy as a reaction to the transition that also took place in Syria following the patterns of the Nicene Church. These groups despised labour, holy sacraments and liturgical prayers.

These charismatic trends have taken other forms in the regions of Asia Minor and Constantinople. Here, the beginning of monasticism from Armenia, Galatia, Pontus and Cappadocia are related to Eustatius of Sebasta, who brought forward his strict asceticism as a movement of charismatic renewal of the Institution of Church. He also declared celibacy and absolute poverty as necessary conditions; Eustatius isolated himself from the Church clergy and rejected the Holy Sacraments performed by the married clerks who lived in mixed communities, encouraging instead an apostolic, charitable, and social life. Although among his admirers, Saint Basil the Great was deeply aware of the pre-Messalian errors of the Eustatian movement. He succeeded in keeping the ascetic movement within the limits of obedience towards the church hierarchy, maintaining the focus not on celibacy and purity, but on the community exigencies of evangelical and apostolic life, on poverty and service, considering the authority of God's word as foundation of his asceticism and spirituality. He also insisted upon Church unity, considering monasticism as part of the general body of Christianity. Mediation and conciliation between asceticism and church, enthusiasm and

discipline that he managed to accomplish represented a source of inspiration for the Byzantine monasticism, as well for the Benedictine synthesis of the West.

The Messalian movement is actually the charismatic, fluid and enthusiastic movement that originated in Mesopotamia and spread to Syria and Asia Minor, disturbing the Church and drawing upon itself the condemnation of the Fathers and Councils due to the focus on prayer and sensitive experience of the Spirit, the rejecting of sacraments, of hierarchy, labor and any form of institutional organization. The Messalian movement was meant to be an alternative to the classic monasticism. Its teachings, especially those referring to the Holy Baptism are challenged by Saint Mark the Ascetic in his work "*Response to those who doubt the Holy Baptism*". Philippe Escolan suggested two methods of analyzing this particular movement: as a heresy strictly delimited from Church and as a tendency of Syrian monasticism. The latter method is also mentioned by Epiphanius of Salamis and can also be found in the writings of the 20th century, with J. Labourt, John Meyendorff and others who were aware of the existence within monasticism of a reaction to the tendency of integration from various charismatic movements, which believed that salvation could be achieved by means of an *ascetic* method provided by them.

The theoretical cornerstone of Messalianism is represented by the concept that the Holy Spirit received at creation had been lost after the Fall and had been replaced by Satan; it is not Baptism, but constant prayer that can banish the Devil, restore the Holy Spirit and lead to impeccability. The followers of Messalianism pretended to see the Holy Trinity with their physical eyes or claimed that their soul transformed into godly nature and they could actually feel the descent of the Holy Spirit; they considered their dreams as revelations and thus identified themselves with the prophets, apostles or even Christ. The coming of the Holy Spirit was considered the moment of acquiring impeccability, which would release them from constraints and moral, sexual or social divisions, as a reward for the ascetic life. As concerning the Baptism, they considered that it had no power of eradicating the roots of evil or to give the Holy Spirit, which could be achieved only by means of enthusiastic prayer.

According to Saint Mark, Baptism is perfect but it cannot invest with perfection those who do not fulfill the commandments. Baptism offers perfect cleansing of sins, and nothing evil remains inside the human being because this is the moment when we receive God's perfect gift. To the Messalians, the baptism with "Holy Spirit and fire" as a result of persistent prayer has the power to banish the demon and to offer the Holy Spirit; the fire alludes to the visible shape of the Spirit, which they claimed to see entering inside the body as a flame, the symbol of the true baptism, as opposed to the Baptism practiced in Church. This is not an

original conception, because in the Syrian tradition the Baptism received in Church was associated to Fire and Spirit, just as Saint Ephrem stated that “fire is the symbol of the Spirit” and that during baptism one is “covered in fire and spirit”. The novelty resides in the fact that the Messalian heretics considered this baptism with fire and spirit as distinct from that of the Church, as well as their belief that salvation is related to the charismatic manifestations. Despite the fact that the importance of spiritual experience is present in the Byzantine monasticism in different periods of time, such being the case of Saint Symeon the New Theologian, who considered spiritual experience as qualification for priestly service, yet problems occurred if spiritual experience tended to diminish the effectiveness of sacraments.

Due to the focus on physically felt spiritual experience which tended to put in a shade the sharing of the grace in Church’s Sacraments and to situate itself above them, the label of Messalian was to be used long after the condemning and official eradication of the heretics. Another element which notified the coming of the Spirit was represented by the trances, the random and agitates movements of the Messalians because of which they were called the Enthusiasts.

The Messalians were also criticized because of their refusal of any activity and their living of charity, as they considered themselves the real poor spiritual people whom the Gospel spoke of. The refusal of any activities led to the tragic condemnation of Alexander Akimetes, the founder of the akimitei monasticism and the promoter of continuous doxology. In his work “*A History of the Monks of Syria*”, Theodoret of Cyrus recalls the Egyptian monks who worked in order to praise their Master. They would not only earn their food, but would also help the poor and the strangers. Thus, Theodoret assumes the responsibility to prove that others have understood poverty in a different way from the Messalians, hoping to correct the wrong perception of a too austere Syrian monasticism, by conferring it the Greek measure and equilibrium.

The final part of this chapter includes a presentation of the progress of the Messalian movement, beginning with the first testimonies of Saint Ephrem Syrus and Saint Epiphanius of Salamis as well as the following ones belonging to Theodoret, Philoxene de Mabboug, Saint John Damascene or Fotios. We also mention the condemnations uttered by local Councils of Antioch, Side, Constantinople, and Alexandria and the laws issued by Theodosius II on 30th of May, 430, by the Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus from 431 which referred to the conviction of the heretics and of their *Asketikon*. It is worth mentioning that the councils refused to accept their dishonest repentance, mostly because of their well-known habit of denying and taking false oaths. Theodoret’s telling about Adelphius’ testimony or the

council letter from 426 written by Amphilochius, Vernian and the bishops of Pamphylia after the Council of Constantinople represent examples in this respect. The council letter from 426 explained that the refusal of repentance was due to the fact that even though the heretic teaching was convicted, the heretics would continue making the same mistakes, yet other Fathers, such as Saint Cyril of Alexandria adopted a merciful attitude towards them. Even though officially convicted, they were found in the 5th century Cappadocia, then in Antioch during the time of Patriarch Severus, who was to reject the work “Testament” written by Lampetius, and also in other regions as a result of disciplinary measures taken by John of Ephesus, in the 6th century on the entrance to the monasteries.

A totally different situation occurred in the Persian Empire. Here the canonic measures taken by the ecclesiastical authorities have entered much later, at the end of the 5th century, due to the fact that the relations between the church hierarchy and imperial authorities were different from those from the Byzantine territory. Thus the vitality of Messalianism grew much stronger. For example, when Joseph of Arbela announced his retirement as a hermit, his decision was considered the result of Messalian influence. The patriarch wrote him in this respect, while his successor requested that a teacher from the school of Nisibis be hired to protect the children from the attacks of the heretics, the Messalians included. At the end of the 6th century a Council presided by Mar Ezekiel was convoked in 576 against them and another one in 585 held by Mar Jesuyahb in order to fight against the vagrancy of the monks, also considered a Messalian practice. Accusations against Messalianism were brought in the 7th and the 8th century, according to Thomas of Marga’s statement, while another Council against Messalianism was convoked in 790 and was presided by Timotei I. beyond real fact however, one must mention that in the course of time Messalianism had been used as a motive to accuse the monks who wanted to claim their independency from papacy or in cases of monks envious on the asceticism practiced by other monks.

At the foundation of the radical asceticism, which was also a characteristic of Messalianism, there lied the desire to achieve nonsuffering, to acquire charism by means of various ascetic methods. Thus it was not the role of Church and Sacraments that was denied, but rather their importance to the spiritual life, as the ascetics considered that the *perfects* did not need the Sacraments, because the ascetic methods were sufficient. The issue exposed by Messalianism is considering the very conception about the devil. To the Messalians, the devil exists in every man and it is substantially united with the soul as a result of the Fall. However, the soul is liberated from the evil at the moment of the arrival of the Spirit, as a result of assiduous praying. Nevertheless, the ecclesiastical authorities considered the Messalians were

possessed and the danger posed by them was even greater by the fact that they denied not only the effectiveness of Sacraments, but also the work and the importance of Church in general.

Chapter II describes the life and writings of Saint Mark the Ascetic, as much as it is known from his work and from external testimonies. First one must say that his writing do not offer details regarding persons or personalities not related to the Bible and the circumstances connected to his life are few. “*A Letter to Nicholas*” addressed to his desired son Nicholas, reminds him that he was welcomed with parental love by no one else but Saint Mark at his arrival in Ancyra. After a while, the author recalls that he was parted only with the body, not with the heart to go into the wilderness. Thus one can understand a generally accepted fact that Saint Mark is the one to welcome Nicholas, which means that he was the abbot of a Monastery in Ancyra, Galatia. From there he retired into the wilderness, to the true followers and servants of Christ. He urges Nicholas to remember the blessings received from God when during a trip with his mother to the Holy places in Constantinople he and other two people survived a terrible storm, while the rest of the travelers perished into the water. Although Saint Mark was elderly and Nicholas was a young man whom he offered his parental teachings, it has to be mentioned that the beginnings of his writings do not coincide with his retirement. This can be concluded from the content of some works, which show the participation of other friars to these discussions, as well as from the work “*Response to those who doubt the Holy Baptism*”, which is composed in the form of conversations.

The works attributed to him, namely *A Letter to Nicholas* and *On Fasting*, were definitely written in the period of his withdrawal to the wilderness, as it results from the ascetic content, the piety of the discourse concerning this way of living, and last but not least the testimony given by the author. Despite the fact that Saint Mark had been an abbot and had a vast experience in ascetic life, when he retired into the wilderness he spoke about himself as being a beginner. Kunze states this is not surprising considering that Saint Mark had lived in a period when anachoretic life was considered superior to life in monasteries. Moreover, he mentioned different places suggesting that he travelled to Asia, while the withdrawal to wilderness is located in the desert of Judah. J. Quasten also locates Saint Mark’s withdrawal in the desert of Judah, after describing him as a disciple of John Chrysostom and a contemporary with Saint Nil the Ascetic and monk Isidor Pelusiotes, based on Nicephorus Callistus testimony in the work “*History of Church*”.

It is important to mention the background of the period in which Saint Mark lived, namely the most significant events that took place: the Council of Nicaea (325) as a past event, the memory of the nicaean symbol, the designation as Patriarchs given to the 318

Fathers from Nicaea, a title used by the Cappadocian Fathers; the teaching about the divinity of the Holy Spirit and Holy Trinity, fully formulated and acknowledged. Thus, according to Kunze, one can state that Saint Mark's activity had unfolded in the last quarter of the 4th century and the first half of the 5th century. Given the fact that the memory of Saint Mark is best preserved in the Lavra of Sabbas, and also that his belief has an eastern character, Kunze considers that these data are sufficient to place the author in the Syrian desert rather than the Egyptian one, and identifies him with Mark the Anachorite presented by John Moschus in his *"Spiritual Meadow"*. On the other hand, H. Chadwich's hypothesis identifies Saint Mark with an abbot of a monastery from Tars, who had been accused by Severus of Antioch of being a follower of Messalianism and of dyophysite Christology. This idea has been rejected by Otmar Hesse, who also thought that the concept of *"unification after hypostasis"*, attributed to Saint Cyril of Alexandria in his controversies with Nestorius and often mentioned in the work *"On the Incarnation"*, had actually been written between 390-430. The treatise *"About Melkidesec"* suggests that Saint Mark would have lived in Egypt, one of the oldest Syrian manuscripts mentioning the name of "the Egyptian" and claiming that Saint Mark lived in the 4th and 5th century Egypt. An argument for dating the work *"On the Incarnation"* before the third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431 is the fact that Saint Mark does not use the attribute *"Mother of God"* – *Theotokos*, a term he would surely have used if the work had been written after the Council. One can also reach to the same conclusion as Plested who disagreed to Grillmeier's affirmation according to which Saint Mark would have accused the Origenist Christology on the background of anti-origenist conflicts from 399-400. There were also contested Gribomont's arguments which placed the work *"On the Incarnation"*, and implicitly the life and work of Saint Mark in the 6th century Palestine.

The second part of Chapter II recalls the most important external testimonies about Saint Mark the Ascetic. These demonstrate his significance on one hand, and his influence on those who were familiar to his writings, on the other hand. This aspect is completed in the final chapter of the present thesis. First it should be mentioned that Saint Mark was acquainted to Evagrius writings (†399) and Macarian Homilies dated at the end of the 4th century and the beginning of the 5th century. The first manuscript containing the writings of Saint Mark is a Syriac one from 534. Quotes from his writings such as *"On the Spiritual Law"*, *"Concerning Those Who Imagine That They Are Justified by Works"*, *"On Repentance"* and *"A Monastic Superior's Disputation with an Attorney and Discussion with Fellow Monks"* can be found in the Teachings of Ava Dorota of Gaza, whose work was dated around 540-560 or even two decades later. In 571, Abraham of Kashkar, the founder of a

monastery on Mount Izla, asserts that St Mark is one of the most important Fathers of Christian monasticism, next to Saint Anthony the Great, Arseny and Isaiah and includes in his monastic rules three quotes from St. Mark's *"On the Spiritual Law"*, and *"On Those Who Think They Are Made Righteous by Works"*. Babai the Great (cc. 569-629) evokes Saint Mark's *"Response to those who doubt the Holy Baptism"*, written against the Messalians who denied the necessity of Baptism and emphasized the importance of prayer. Another eight writings of Saint Mark commented by Babai the Great and Abraham bar Dasandad are evoked in *"The Catalogue of Books"* by Ebedjesu. The authority of Saint Mark is invoked in the 7th century by Saint Isaac the Syrian, as well as by Simon de Taibutheh and Dadiso Qatraya. The writings of Saint Mark are also evoked by Thomas of Marga, according to which Saint Mark would have lived in the desert of Nitria, at the end of the 4th century. Among the Greek writers who were inspired and used quotations from the writings of Saint Mark we can mention Saint Maximus the Confessor, Saint John Climacus (570-649), Saint Isaiah the Sinaite (the end of the 7th century); Saint Theodore the Studite (759-826) mentioned Saint Mark among the spiritual teachers, before Isaiah, Barsanuphius, Dorotheus and Isihie. In the short *Chronicon* written by George the Monk he is remembered as a disciple of Saint John Chrysostom, next to Proclus, Palladius, Theodoret, Nil, Isidorus Pelusiota. Later, Photius (810-895) in his Library performs a review of Saint Mark's works, mentioning at first eight of his writings, and adding at the end the ninth work – *"Against Melkisedec"*. In 965, Nil of Rossano copied the *"A Monastic Superior's Disputation with an Attorney and Discussion with Fellow Monks"*, placing it at the beginning of a collection made up in order to edify the Italo-Greek monastic community from Calabria. Saint Mark's writings passed around in the form of collections starting from the 7th century. In this respect, one can mention a file of patristic writings under the title of *"On the Incarnation"* which offer a list of Saint Mark's works among which: *"On the Spiritual Law"*, *"Concerning Those Who Imagine That They Are Justified by Works"*, *"On Repentance"*, *"On Baptism"*, *"A Monastic Superior's Disputation with an Attorney and Discussion with Fellow Monks"*, *"A Letter to Monk Nicholas"*, *"Against Melkisedec"*. Around 850, the work *"On the Spiritual Law"* was copied and translated into Latin by an Irish monk for Saint Gall Abbey. Scotus Eriugena (810-877) also researched this particular work.

In the 10th century, Saint Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022) receives from his spiritual father as symbol of divine guidance the writings of Saint Mark the Ascetic: *"On the Spiritual Law"*, *"Concerning Those Who Imagine That They Are Justified by Works"*. In the next century, the Byzantine monk Anthony Mellisa made up a collection of teachings and

thoughts significant to spirituality, using quotes from “*On the Spiritual Law*” and “*On Repentance*”. In the same period, seven of the writings of Saint Mark are mentioned in Paul Evergetinos’s (†1054) four-volume collection. In the next century theological literature, Saint Mark is mentioned by Patriarch John IV of Antioch, who evokes him among the authors of books inspired by the Will of God, such as Dorotheus, Cassian, Isaac, Ephrem or John Climacus. Furthermore, Nicephorus the Solitary quotes from “*A Letter to Nicholas*” in his “*A Discourse on Sobriety and the Guarding of the Heart*”. All the same, Saint Gregory the Sinaite (1255-1346) speaks about the giant of laziness and neglect, mentioned by Saint Mark next to ignorance and oblivion, the three major giants of sin, as he calls them. Also, Saint Gregory explicitly refers to Saint Mark when he talks about the work of the Holy Spirit which we received through Baptism. Nicephorus Callistus alludes to Saint Mark twice, as a disciple of John Chrysostom and in relation with the numerous writings elaborated before turning to ascetic life. Moreover, his teachings are mentioned in “*Method of Callistus and Ignatius Xanthopoulos*”.

Year 1531 marked the beginning of a rising interest in the West towards Saint Mark’s work, when Johann Setzer published “*On Spiritual Law*”. This will be revealed by the interfaith conflicts between the Protestants and the Catholics, who tried to defend their own misconduct based on the teachings of Saint Mark. The Protestants considered that Saint Mark’s emphasize on the importance of godly grace in spiritual life was identical to their own theological vision concerning grace, as opposed to the praiseworthy deeds of the Catholics. These disputes resulted in the introduction of Saint Mark in an index. Even the editor of his works in the Greek Patrology has appropriated the negative assessment made by Cardinal Robert Bellarmin. Later on, the Roman-Catholic perspective changed to the point where they tried to present an exponent of their teaching. This attempt however failed.

In 1782 in Venice, Nicodemus the Hagiorite elaborated and published an anthology of ascetic and mystic texts known as *Philokalia*. The editing of this collection contributed to the highlighting of Saint Mark’s importance to spirituality, as it included three of his writings: “*On Spiritual Law*”, texts 200, “*Concerning Those Who Imagine That They Are Justified by Works*”, 226 texts and “*A Letter to Nicholas*”. Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae in the first volume of his work “*Romanian Philokalia*” also added Saint Mark’s “*Response to Those Who Doubt the Holy Baptism*”. According to Fr. Stăniloae, the content of this particular work is a genuine cornerstone for many Eastern manifestations of ascetic and mystic life, even if it is not included in the Greek edition.

The third part of the second chapter presents the writings of Saint Mark bringing up several editions where they are included. Thus, ten writings are contained within the “*Greek Patrology*”, namely:

I. *On the Spiritual Law*;

II. *Concerning Those Who Imagine That They Are Justified by Works*;

III. *On Repentance*;

IV. *Concerning Holy Baptism or Response to Those Who Doubt the Holy Baptism*;

V. *A Letter to Nicholas, with an appendix: Nicholas’s Response to Mark*.

VI. *Neptic Chapters*, including 26 texts and two questions and answers. This one is not genuine, as it is actually an anthology consisting of Maxim the Confessor’s sentences as well as the *Homilies* attributed to Macarius of Egypt.

VII. *A Monastic Superior’s Disputation with an Attorney and Discussion with Fellow Monks*;

VIII. *The Mind’s Advice to its Own Soul*;

IX. *Concerning Fasting*, a piece of work that appears in a Syriac manuscript under the name of Marcian;

X. *On Melchisedek*;

XI. *On the Incarnation: A Doctrinal Treatise Addressed to Those Who Say That the Holy Flesh Was Not United with the Word but Rather Partially Clothed It, Like a Coat. Because of This, They Say, the Person Wearing the Garment Was Different from the Garment Being Worn*. This work is not found within the Greek Patrology, but it has been published by A. Papadopoulos Kerameus and inspired by a manuscript from Jerusalem, in the 18th century.

At the end of this chapter, we present the manuscripts containing Saint Mark’s works, from which it can be easily observed their dissemination throughout the Romanian monasteries.

The third chapter discussed the baptismal spirituality of Saint Mark, namely its Christological, pneumatological and ecclesiological character, within the background of the 4th and 5th centuries. The first part of this chapter underlines the Christological character of the baptismal spirituality. As K. Ware observed, if the importance of Baptism as a foundation of spiritual life is generally acknowledged from a theoretic point of view, little is known about the implications concerning its application into practice. This is also stressed by Jean-Claude Larchet when speaking about the personal free calling to perfection of each and every one of us, by the godly grace of the Holy Spirit, a fact which was plainly asserted by Saint Mark in his work “*On Holy Baptism*”. Another one to discuss the importance of this issue was Plested.

To Saint Mark, Christ's entire life is a progressive awareness, much like the discovery of the grace received through Baptism, because no one can find out more than what they are given through Baptism, no matter how hard they struggle against their unfaithfulness or no matter how deep their belief is. And Christ is found out throughout Baptism. He, as a perfect God, gave all those who have been baptized the perfect grace of the Spirit, which does not receive any additions, but it is revealed and showed to us according to the commandments, thereby increasing our faith "until we all reach the unity of faith" (*Ef.* 4, 13). Therefore, anything that we can bring Him after having been born again, has already been seeded inside us by Him. Through Baptism, Christ dwells inside our hearts. But because He cannot be felt, we may say that Christ is hiding inside us without being seen, in a kenosis state. However, even in this state He can offer us the power to resist temptations and accomplish the good which cannot exist outside God, for God is the beginning, the middle and the end of any good work. The accomplishment of the commandments will eventually reveal Christ to man, because the cleansing of the temptations and the acquirement of virtue makes people more aware of Him. On the other hand, Christ makes His presence felt and seen much more in our being, through God's work.

The second part of this chapter highlights the teaching about the importance of baptism, considered from the perspective of the fall of Adam, and repeated in the fall of each of us. If the Messalians taught that every human possesses at birth a demon united with the being, and inherited from Adam's damnation, the doctrine according to which nature is bad in itself, through creation, cannot be accepted in the true Christian conception. As God's work, Nature is good, while the sin has come from outside and it is not known to Nature. Thus, the Messalians claimed that the experience of Evil is due to Adam's sin, namely if Adam had not committed the sin, we would not have experienced the temptation of evil (*προσβολης*). In this respect, Saint Mark replies: „not having the experience of the temptation of evil is a feature of an unchangeable nature, and not of the human nature. We are the same as Adam. So it was meant for Adam to be like us and for us to be like him. Therefore, let the first man tell you whether his nature was changeable or unchangeable when it comes to evil and that he did not disobey the commandment due to nature necessities, but because sheer pleasure of will. And if he had the capacity to listen to Satan's temptation, but also the power to resist, the same thing happens in our case.”

The bad thoughts were considered remains of Adam's sin after the Baptism, specifically those roots which in Messalian conception could not be eliminated through Baptism. Saint Mark speaks about these bad thoughts from the perspective of Orthodox

doctrine: „ but because you reckon that bad thoughts are not ours, but come either from the sin of Adam, from Satan himself, or that they are the temptation (προσβολης) of Satan, we will state that the sin of Adam, Satan and the temptation of Satan are three different things, even if their starting point lies in the temptation. Satan is the hypostasis of the Devil himself, who have tried to work his temptation even on the Lord. The sin of Adam is represented by the disobeying of the commandments by the first man. The temptation of Satan is the revealing of a bad thing in the exclusive form of a thought (μονολόγιστος εμφάνεια πράγματος πονηρου). Thus, the devil has the power to reveal the sinful meanings of a newly emerged thought in its exclusive form, in order to tempt us from within, giving it the opportunity to tilt either towards what it wants or towards God’s commandment, as the two possibilities are opposed. Therefore, if we love it, we immediately think about the revealed thing and our consciousness focuses obsessively upon it; if on the contrary we hate it, our thought cannot linger, as we hate the temptation itself.”

Adam had the temptation, which is not considered neither a sin, nor uprightness, but rather the symbol of free will, which differentiate the believers from the non-believers. As a conclusion, Saint Mark asserts that temptation is not a sin. For although it shows us the things in the plain form of a thought, we have received from the Lord the power of spiritual work and we have the authority to judge at the very first emergence of the thought and discern whether it is a harmful or a useful thought. We have the power to deny or receive the thoughts. Therefore the thoughts do not multiply out of necessity, but out of pleasure. Nevertheless, accepting the bad thought and the sinful thought do not represent Adam’s legacy, but our own free will. Instead we inherited death, which has its origin in breaking the commandment and which means enragement from God.

This teaching inspired Saint Isihie to define the four stages of sin: first the temptation (the attack), secondly the coexistence of our thoughts with the evil ones, thirdly the consent, and fourthly the fact or the sin. Despite all the tests, despite the impressive imaginary arsenal and the complex phantasmagoric scenario displayed by the demons, their power is limited and indirect. Demons can be fought against and banished by resisting the thoughts they suggest, by asceticism and developing the art of judgment, by the guard of mind and prayer. In this respect, Saint Mark’s advice is: „ always be above the thing that depend of senses and be close to God through hope. For in this way, sometimes looking aside without intention, you will discover the Lords and the Rules through the attacks on you (δια των προσβολων) which they will engage in. But if one can overcome the bad thoughts through prayer and faith, one

can receive the grace of God; he who has not overcome the sins representing the cause, cannot escape the bad thoughts.”

Saint Mark asserts that “three things have happened to Adam: the temptation through higher arrangement, the breaking of God’s commandment through disbelief and death by the right judgment of God, as a result not of the attack to divine economy, but of disbelief. We inherited only the death of Adam, for the plain reason that we could not make the dead alive, until God has come and made us all alive. The first emergence of the thought is through the arrangement, just as we have the power to listen or not, according to our free will. However, the sin of thought lies in our free will.”

According to Saint Mark, death is not only the separation of the soul and body, but also a separation of the entire being, body and soul together, from the Living God. Death means the loss of eternal life (πάντες τῆς αἰδίου ζωῆς ἐκπεπτώκαμεν – we all have lost eternal life). K. Ware notices this particular thing, and states that the true sense of death inherited from Adam, as understood by Saint Mark and other Fathers, is parting from God and the privation of true life in Him. The growing decline of man into sin due to the separation from God is described by Saint Mark as follows: “when man was separated from the light of heaven once and for all, he was corruptible adherent to the forces of evil, trusting more in mistake rather than truth; by choosing the very evil, the serving of idols seemed pleasant, the search for pleasures was attractive, the greed was desirable, the sin was richer, the anger was more productive, the snake was more confident, but man was at times astonished or uncertain, not aware of the future and confined within the present. The arrival of our Lord has been our only chance to be delivered from this state of death.

Saint Mark refuses to believe that those baptized are still subjected to Adam’s death with no personal blame „for if we consider that death inherited from Adam is given as a consequence of other than our own disbelief, it is obvious that we lessen the importance of the coming of Christ; also the sacrament of Baptism is not perfected once the baptized are still kept under the death of their forefather, with no fault of his own.”

Why then are we subjected to death if we have been delivered from it by Lord’s coming, by His Death and Resurrection which we receive through Baptism? Firstly we cannot be held in death with no personal blame. Secondly, due to the fact that we are unable to always fulfill the commandments and that we owe to perform good deeds every day, what would we give to God in return for all the bad things that we have done? Any superfluity of virtue we would add today, it is a result of negligence rather than a right to retribution. Or, as Father Stăniloae states, maybe there is no man who no longer sins after baptism. That is why

the death of those baptized, though it may happen to be only a death as a surrender to God and resistance to sin, it is often mingled with a death of the committed sin. Secondly, the death which manifests a certain resistance towards sin is also a death of the sin, not only a death as surrendering to God. Thirdly, according to Saint Mark it was the sin that gave the Incarnation the character of Kenosis; it also gave the cross the bloody atoning character, and resurrection was given the character of victory over death. Should there have been no sin, then we would have an incarnation, a cross and a mystic resurrection, in the sense that the created must receive God inside himself (incarnation), to pause from activity and its characteristics (death) and come back to life to an exclusively spiritual activity (deification). The Logos would have been the forerunner in this case. Therefore, the mystery of Christ has been arranged from the beginning of time and the world has been created on the basis of a specific structure. Nevertheless, the sin has altered its execution. But beyond the sense of redeemer imposed by the sin, His incarnation, death and Resurrection have a mystic meaning as well, thus they must be repeated by all living beings.

As Fr. Stăniloae asserts, even after Baptism, our body created by God, as a structure of manifestation for the soul, bears the traces of the original sin and it is connected to a cosmic nature that carries the remnants of the Fall and the diminishing of spiritual life. Its destruction can be but a condition for its renewal, or for its rise to a structure untouched by sin. If in baptism we accepted death to sin, with the death of our being as an offering to God we must pass away into a new death that symbolizes not the permanent death, but a surrendering to God together with Christ. Thus Christ no longer dies mainly for the sins of those baptized, but symbolizes the sacrifice as submission to God. We also should be part of this kind of sacrifice. Surely, death is part of this sacrifice, along with all the other sins before baptism or those that people may commit. According to Saint Maxim the Confessor, he who received baptism will no longer pay the sins by death, but will be using death as a doom of sin, in order to transcend to the everlasting spiritual life. The Saints that have spent their earthly life courageously enduring sufferings for truth and justice liberated their own nature from death as a doom of sin and they used the weapon of death against the sin, following the example of their leader, Jesus. The sin used death as a weapon for destroying the flesh of those who were committing Adam's sin. Even more, the nature will use death to destroy sin, for those who do righteousness through faith.

In order to better understand Saint Mark's teaching, the third part of this chapter describes the teaching about Baptism as it appears in the writings of the Fathers from the 4th and the 5th century. Peace installed by Constantine has led to a series of changes including in

the Sacrament of Baptism. One of the major changes was the decline of the authentic catechumenate, which in that time requested a six-week period of preparation for the real conversion, during the Lent. Because of the constant change of the political and social setting after the reign of Constantine and especially after Theodosius, people hesitate to convert to Christianity out of logical reasons. And because the forgiveness assured through Baptism could only be obtained once, except for a period of post-baptismal repentance known as “canonical penitence”, there was a widely spread tendency to postpone the process of baptism as much as possible, in order to guarantee the ultimate salvation.

This tendency has prompted the Holy Fathers to take action against it, like Saint Gregory of Nyssa did in his work *“Discourse against Those that Delay Baptism”*. If at the beginning the preparation period of catechumenate was regarded as very important, and was extended up to three-year period, subsequently to the Constantinian period the Church was obliged to accomplish in a much shorter period of time what it used to be done in a longer period, which determined the preparation to continue after the baptism. Thus the Church had to re-think the catechumenal process, which eventually disappeared because of the increasing number of baptized children. The rituals performed prior, during and after Baptism receive certain elements which had been kept secret, the so-called Arcane Discipline, due to hostility against Christianity, in order to be perceived as solemn and for the candidates to be aware of the importance of their act.

All these determined a reorganization and reinterpretation of the rituals, which used to be part of the period of catechetical initiation to the mystagogy after baptism. Hence, to Saint Cyril of Jerusalem the rite of initiation becomes for the candidate a dramatic ritual of reliving the redemptive events the Savior had experienced. He states that our death and resurrection occur as result of an imitation of the Savior’s actual death and resurrection, for the likeness of his death, as Saint Paul asserts. Saint Cyril speaks about the baptism with blood received by the martyrs during persecutions, as opposed to the baptism with water received in times of peace. He advises that the vessel should be cleansed in order to receive more grace, as forgiveness of sins is equally offered to everyone, but the grace is delivered in accordance with one’s faith and worthiness. Consequently, he who is baptized receives the godly grace, the freedom and power from God to struggle against the hostile powers, just as our Savior was tempted after Baptism and then He began to preach the Gospel. In the same manner, he who is baptized must resist if he desires to announce the Gospel.

The Apostolic Constitutions mention the symbol of Baptism in relation to the death of the Son [cf. Rm. 6, 3]: water represents the place of the tomb, the oil stands for the Holy

Spirit, the seal stands for the cross, and the chrism represents the confirmation of confession. The immersion is death with Christ, while the exit out of the baptismal water is the resurrection together with Christ. The same is shown in the prayer of sanctification, namely that he who is baptized dies and comes back to life with Christ, thus being dead to sin and alive to righteousness. Also, the Constitutions speak against those who receive the baptism from the heretics, against those who are baptized the second time, and also against those who refuse the baptism or delay it, with specific reference to the baptism of small children.

For Saint Basil the Great, we all promise to love God most and foremost, through our re-birth from above (In. 3, 3), from water and Spirit (In. 3, 5). He that has made this promise must fulfill all the commandments, in order not to deny the grace of the Kingdom and to be worthy for it, from the moment he was born from water and Spirit. Due to the fact that we have damaged within us the very God's face by which we have been created, we need to be born again in order to divest of old self and dress us in the new man, by the face of God who have created us (cf. Col. 3, 9-10) . He who is baptized into the death of our Lord should be dead to the sin, so that he may live on with the heart, the word and deeds, by God's grace and by its teaching. Just like Christ died for us and came back to life never to die again, all the same if we are baptized into Christ death we must be dead to the sin. Thus, Baptism means "redemption for the enslaved, forgiveness of mistakes, death of sin, rebirth of soul, enlightened clothing, unbroken seal, cart to heaven, generating the Kingdom of Heavens, grace of adoption". Saint Gregory of Nyssa asserts that the day of Baptism received in the Easter Day, is the day of Salvation. According to our custom, we call the strangers to be adopted, to receive God's grace and to be cleansed of sins. Saint Gregory of Nazianus elaborates a long and impressive list of arguments, saying that this enlightenment (the Sacrament of Baptism) represents: "the radiance of the soul, the transformation of life, the conscious commitment to God; the Illumination is the aid to our weakness and the renunciation to the flesh, the following of the Spirit, the fellowship of the Word, the improvement of the creature, the overwhelming of sin, the participation of light, the dissolution of darkness; the Illumination is the carriage to God, the dying with Christ, the bulwark of Faith, the perfection of the Spirit, the key to the Kingdom of Heavens, the change of life, the removal of slavery, the loosing of chains, the remodeling of the whole being (which is us); Why should I go into further detail? Illumination is the greatest and most magnificent of the Gifts of God".

John Chrysostom announces those who prepare for the baptism that they stand before the desired days of spiritual weddings are lying ahead, and the days of the great and praised

enrollment into the spiritual struggles, as the baptized are like soldiers preparing for war. Baptism is the tomb and the resurrection, in which we divest of our old clothing defiled by sins and we dress in the new one, cleansed in holy waters. Baptism also buries the old man and brings back to life the new one, built by the face of the Creator. As concerning the gifts of the Baptism, he emphasizes the necessity of baptizing children, saying that those who used to be enslaved are now free citizens of the Church. Those who used to be in the shame of sins, are now into audacity and justice. And they are not only free, but also saints; not only righteous, but also sons; not only sons, but also inheritors; not only inheritors, but also brethren of Christ; not only this, but also joint inheritors and members of Christ, and also Church; and not only Church, but instruments of the Spirit. “Blessed is God, the only one who can perform miracles.” Have you seen that the gifts of Baptism are numerous? Many think that the only gift is forgiveness of sins, however we have been counting ten of them. That is the reason why children are being baptized, despite the fact they are pure. Through Baptism they receive holiness, justice, adoption, inheritance, fellowship, they become members of Christ and a dwelling place for the Spirit. Therefore, from the moment of baptism we are honored to receive Christ inside us. The present of divine grace within us is shown when we accomplish good deeds. Moreover, what we have been given, God will not take back, unless we are negligent with His gift. Each of us is obliged to go back to the beauty and radiance we had at the time of baptism, which we can regain if we wish only through honest repentance after baptism.

To Theodore of Mopsuestia, Christ clearly shows that he created Church as expression of heavenly things. Thus those who belong to the Church family are also familiar to heavenly things, while those who are strangers to Church are obviously strangers to heavens as well. By the gift of Holy Baptism we escape the slavery of the usurper (τύραννος) to which all our kind, beginning with Adam, have been subjected. We become body and member of Christ by being reborn through Holy Baptism, which also offers us fellowship with Christ. We become attached to Christ as the body is attached to the head [cf. I Cor. 12, 27]. Theodore of Mopsuestia names Baptism the face of the rebirth, as he considers that the true birth, the second one, will reveal itself after resurrection, thus bringing us to the state we were deprived of through death. Here we receive the expression of adoption and the harvest of God, but not adoption in itself and the plenitude of grace which we will be given after resurrection. According to him, the fact that the baptized is without clothes symbolizes the naked and shameless Adam (cf. Fc. 2, 25), and also the denial of death which clothes the man like a garment. Through Baptism and divine grace, the baptized converts into someone else, made

up of an immortal, incorruptible and immutable nature, instead of the mortal, corruptible and mutable one. However, the other self cannot be expressed until resurrection, when by the work of the Holy Spirit both the body and soul become spiritual, not subject to change. As concerning the gifts of the Holy Baptism, he asserts that by uttering the name of the Holy Trinity it is revealed who offers the blessings of baptism: “new birth, renewal, immortality, incorruptibility, impassibility, constancy, deliverance from death, slavery and all evil, enjoyment of freedom and participation in future and sublime benefits.” The Holy Spirit is offered as fruit at Baptism, as hope for the benefits that will be fully given at resurrection; also, the adoption is final through baptism, but is accomplished only through resurrection.

The fourth part of the third chapter presents Saint Mark’s teaching regarding the Baptism, emphasizing its efficiency and effects, as it results from Saint Mark’s works. The spiritual description of Baptism together with its importance and effects, based on the testimonies from Scripture and on his experience, lead to a negligent presentation of the liturgical elements, as if insufficiently known, and to a focus on the spiritual dimension with implications in authentic living. To Saint Mark, Baptism offers perfect cleansing of the ancestral sin, freedom and grace to obey the commandments; as opposed to the Messalian idea that Baptism does not fully cleanse Adam’s sin and it does not guarantee the receiving of the Holy Spirit. According to the Messalians, in the humans soul coexists the Holy Spirit and the devil, which has substantially united with each soul after the Fall. Prayer is the only method that can deliver us from evil, hence the denial of the efficiency of Baptism and other holy sacraments.

Baptism is perfect, but it does not complete those who do not fulfill the commandments. Through Baptism we bury and come back to life together with Christ, and the baptized is – like Adam – part of creation and he is placed in the heaven of Church, having the freedom to eat from the Tree of Heaven, that is to love those who are baptized in church. Through Baptism, Christ dwells in the heart of the baptized who receives the Holy Spirit together with the Father and the Son. He urges those who oppose, as lovers of pleasures and vain glory, to firstly obey the order of nature, then the word of Scripture and thirdly the commandments of the knowledgeable. This fact is underlined by Kunze as well, who claims that Saint Mark was rather moral than dogmatic, as he thought it was more important to fulfill Christ’s commandments than to speculate upon God’s miracles. Was convinced that the truth lies in the apostolic tradition of Church and needed to be guarded against innovations, he did not dogmatize, unless he was compelled to do so. His arguments were based directly on the Scripture, to the extent this was possible.

Hausherr states that the ideas of the Messalians result from simplistic experience which lacks God's work. According to the Messalians, Baptism cannot eradicate sin; it is but an experience as it does not change the psychology of the baptized; prior Baptism προσβολη, as well as after, the baptized remains the same πάθος, άμαρτία. This is the way in which these simple minds have judged, ignoring or rejecting to acknowledge a mystic and divine action. The denial of the efficiency of Baptism by the Messalians is due to the temptation present in the baptized ones, and also due to their opinion that the presence of the Holy Spirit must be felt and realized. However, to Saint Mark the cleansing is mystically achieved through Baptism, but is acknowledged (ενεργως) through the commandments. „Because if we have been baptized and he have not been freed from the ancestral sin, that means that we cannot fulfill the facts of freedom. And if we can however carry those out, obviously we have succeeded in releasing ourselves from the enslaving sin, as it is written: “because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death”. By disobeying the commandments of God who cleansed us, we are still sinful, but this time it is our personal sin, not Adam's; Baptism fully purifies us, which means there is no remnant of the ancestral sin after Baptism; nevertheless we wrap ourselves willingly in the bounds that have been released through achievement of commandments.” The thought that lingers around pleasure or wrath is not a sign of the remaining sin, but of a free passion. The grace of the Holy Spirit dwells deep inside the human soul waiting for our participation, unveiling itself as we spiritually progress, while virtues and commandments are achieved. Therefore, the fulfillment of commandments and the removal of sins we have committed after Baptism cannot be achieved without the help of Christ's grace.

To admit that sin remains after Baptism and therefore death of Adam is still there, means to deny the efficiency of Christ's coming and to consider that Baptism does not offer absolute purification. Nevertheless, just as the perfect, simple and equal ray of the perfect sun is perceived differently by the pure eye, all the same the Holy Spirit gave his gifts to those who believe in him from the very moment of Baptizing. However, not everyone is able to actually work with these gifts, except those who are worthy and fulfill the commandments, in other words Saint Mark refers to those who confess and show their faith in Christ by performing good deeds. Like Saint Diadachos, Saint Mark reacts to the messalian mistake by distinguishing between a mystic and a conscious presence of grace. By mistaking the sensitive order to the order of the spiritual experience, the grace to the feeling of grace, the conscious sin to the felt passion, the evil to the consequences of sin, the Messalians denied the efficiency of the Sacraments.

To Saint Mark Baptism **provides purification or cleansing** (καθαρισμός) of sin. Baptism fully erases sin as it is perfect. After Baptism the ancestral sin disappears completely, meaning that the inheritance of the ancestral sin cannot be used as an excuse for our personal sins. Even if after the Baptism man is tempted by evil thoughts, these must be understood as personal sins, and not a consequence of the ancestral sin. Their origins are the sins we commit on one hand, and the temptations of Satan on the other hand, which gives us the possibility to manifest our free will and our love of God or pleasures. It is not in our mutable nature to resist the experience of evil, but in the immutable nature of God. Adam had mutable nature after creation, but he also was immutable as regarding evil. Like him, we must have the same power to listen to temptation and to resist it, altogether.

Baptism confers freedom (ελευθερία). As an effect of the fall of Adam, man became morally weak and enslaved, dominated by shame (πάθη της ατιμίας), forever separated from the light of heaven, corruptibly adherent to the powers of evil, having more faith in mistake rather than truth, and even choosing the evil. Baptism frees the man of this inherited slavery, as Saint Mark asserts, restoring the completeness and the integrity of his free will, as it initially had been, and delivers man of any powerful pressure and domination of evil. After Saint Mark, the free will after Baptism is forced neither by God nor by Satan (το γαρ θέλημα μετα το βάπτισμα ούτε Θεος ούτε Σατανας βιάζεται). Even after Baptism man is still subject to the attacks of the devil, just like Adam before his Fall. However, this is a result of the free will with which the human being has been endowed through creation. We still have to resist the temptations of the devil, but this bait (προσβολής - the first thought or attack) is just an aspect of the free will of humans, and not a consequence of Adam's sin.

According to Saint Mark, through Baptism man is renewed, becoming another Adam with Christ's grace and having nothing left from the old one, other from what it is born out of his altered and disobedient faith. The faith of those baptized consists not only of receiving the Baptism of Christ, but also in observing the commandments, as deeds of freedom: "better yet, you show me that the baptized cannot fulfill the commandments of freedom, and then the baptism is not accomplished; or let them all who have received such power to confess they were liberated through Christ's grace, but they willingly surrendered to sin by not obeying the commandments." Speaking of the free will, which is given through the grace of baptism, Saint Mark claims that passions cannot be defeated and virtues cannot be obtained without God's support. That is why he teaches us that the work of salvation belongs to God and man together: „ If you wish to gain victory over passions and easily put to flight the hordes of mental aliens, collect yourself inwardly with God's help by prayer. You acquire these virtues

not merely by your own will alone, but by the power of God and with the help of the Holy Spirit.”

Through Baptism we receive grace. This underlines the pneumatological character of Saint Mark’s spirituality. Through Baptism we receive divine grace, which represents equally the presence of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, or – as he asserts – the Spirit gives us the Father and the Son. Speaking of the fact that the Holy Spirit dwells in us, and that it receives nothing from us, when asked why the Apostle states that we have the fruit of Spirit, Saint Mark answers: “when I have spoken of fruit I meant not a part of the whole or some section of the Spirit, for it cannot be cut or changed, but I indicated our ability to receive, for we cannot comprise within us the entire work of the Spirit, unless we fulfill the crucial commandment, which is death. Even Christ’s death for the truth is a commandment from God. So, as the perfect, simple and equal ray of the perfect sun is perceived differently by the pure eye, all the same the Holy Spirit gave his gifts to those who believe in him from the very moment of Baptizing. However, not everyone is able to actually work with these gifts, except those who are worthy and fulfill the commandments, which confess and show their faith in Christ by performing good deeds.

Saint Mark also speaks about the progressive discovery of the grace bestowed through Baptism, in proportion of each man’s way of observing the commandments. Despite the fact that grace is given in Baptism, if man does not fulfill the commandments, he will be unaccomplished and not the grace. Each of the baptized persons completely receives the Holy Spirit, and yet the work of the Spirit is shown through deeds that demonstrate faith, as opposed to the Messalian teaching, according to which the coming of the Holy Spirit guaranteed the non-suffering.

As for impeccability in the Messalian and Orthodox belief, we may say that with the authors prior to Evagrius, the common use of the terms *apathes*, *apatheia* was dedicated to God. Impassibility, incorruptibility and immortality were attributed to God. To Clement the Alexandrian this was the ideal representation of the Christian ascetic. Impeccability is not an absolute indifference, but rather the peaceful condition of the soul, which is no longer troubled by cravings. On the other side, the Messalians considered that the coming of the Holy Spirit has conferred impeccability, understood as plenitude, lack of cravings and sensitive desires and self-protection. Thus the spiritual soul could see with their physical eyes the Holy Trinity, and moreover it transforms into godly and immortal nature. Blessed Jerome states about the Messalians that they can achieve perfection not in the sense of a similarity to

God, but an equivalence to Him, because once they have reached the climax of perfection, they are unable to commit sin by thought or by ignorance.

From an Orthodox point of view the best definition given to impeccability belongs to Saint Isaac the Syrian. He asserts that impeccability does not mean that a man feels no passions, but that he does not accept them any longer. Some have received many and various virtues, either shown or hidden, thus the passions within them became weaker and could not easily agitate the soul. In addition, mind is not compelled to pay attention to passions, because it is constantly preoccupied with the worshiping meanings, with the inquiry of the best acting methods. If negatively expressed the impeccability condition means freedom of all passions, while the positive connotation refers to the possession of all virtues. To Evagrius, the soul that has the impeccability is the one which has been tempted but managed to remain unaltered even in front of the memories of the temptation. The impeccability condition does not mean that man is unable to do wrong, but that he is constantly preoccupied with the fulfillment of virtues and ignores the temptations of evil, becomes blind to passions, because both virtues and vices lead to blindness of the mind: the virtues do not let him identify the vices, while the latter will not let him see the virtues. However, in order to reach the true impeccability, the mind has to be completely cleansed, including of the simple imagining, although this would probably seem strange, as the simple thoughts are not accompanied by passionate thinking. Still, Evagrius states that he who has achieved impeccability yet does not truthfully pray, for he can follow simple thoughts and let him be taken away by their histories, and thus separated from God. When mind still lingers on the simple ideas of things, it is not yet ready for prayer. It may permanently contemplate things and talk about their meanings, which despite the fact they are simple ideas, yet they express views upon things. However these simple ideas lend their shape and appearance to the mind, and thus they direct the mind apart from God. Quoting Marcel Viller and Karl Rahner, Father Stăniloae states about Evagrius teaching on the cleansing of mind of any meaning that when the mind keeps only pure thoughts it can still discover God. In order to see the Holy Trinity, it is necessary for these simple thoughts to be cleansed, so that the mind becomes absolutely pure (γυμνός). This condition can only be achieved by God's grace. Once here, in the heart of man there shines the light of the Holy Trinity and he can see the Godly light. This light is "shapeless", because God is without face, simple and incomprehensible. In this knowledge of God there is nothing that can be conceived by human mind. Therefore, the mind must be freed from any imprinting of things and their meanings. God's knowledge is beyond any face. The imaginative visions are suspicious. This understanding is plain, whole, ineffable and boundless. It is a conquest of the mind through

the perpetuity of the Infinite One. This is why the light is from a certain perspective equivalent to the deepest darkness, “boundless lack of knowledge”.

Another section of this chapter refers to the ecclesiological character of Saint Mark’s spirituality, which is identifiable to the Christocentric one. Thus, he who has achieved perfection cannot be separated from the hierarchical background of Church on earth, namely he has to be inside the Church if he wishes to develop his communion with God. That is because he has to evolve towards the Church of the saints in heaven, which is a continuation of the earthly church. One can reach God only through Christ and one cannot go beyond Christ. According to Saint Mark, the Holy Baptism can be performed only inside the universal Church, because when we receive the adoption we become members of the Church, the mystic body of Christ. Thus, we do not become one sons of God and then members of the Church, but we are born from the Church as sons of the Father, seemingly to His Son, assimilated to His body. Although the life that man is called to imply his contribution, his fight for remaining and growing in Christ, to his strengthen as a person freed from the passions that assail fallen human nature, this does not mean that the man is called to an individualist experience, without relating to other members of the Church. Saint Mark underlines the same idea, showing that through Baptism we gain our place in heaven of Church just like Adam and Eve have their place in heaven; the heaven of church symbolizes the Kingdom of God in its earthly stage. The grace of Christ has transformed us into the new Adam, with no trace of the old one. It is also compulsory for us as well not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, in order to reach the evangelical perfection that fulfills the Law and the prophecies.

Saint Mark asserts that through Baptism “God places us in the heaven of Church, allows us to eat from the tree of heaven, meaning to love those who are baptized in Church, to suffer with them when they suffer, not to observe each and every one’s hesitations, to love them for the thing we judge as good and to hate them for the things we judge as bad. For this means to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil; once we taste it, our mind immediately stumbles across its own sins and discovers by means of malicious prying of neighbors its emptiness of which it was not aware before, as it was covered in the veil of compassion and mercy.” Before the Fall, the human mind was not divided, but focused on God alone. In the moment of committing the sin, not only did the human mind deviate from God’s contemplation inclining towards the sensitive part of the world before being spiritually reinforced, but it also accepted the thoughts that caused its separation from God and persuaded it to taste from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Thus, the baptized are

called to reestablish the unity to God. Father Stăniloae states that the initiation of he who receives Baptism in Church is symbolized primarily through the unfolding of the Baptism by the priest or the bishop who is an exponent of Christ and of the Church. The priest is a symbol of Christ working in the Church and for the Church, to initiate those who are being baptized in Church.

Chapter four performs an analysis on the role of heart in spiritual life, as it is stated in Saint Mark's teaching, after having described its importance in Eastern and Syrian spirituality. Communion of man with God is itself a sacrament, experienced in prayer and in a spiritual life, which cannot be fully contained in the rational concepts, while the true spiritual life lies in the union of mind and heart, more specific in lowering or immersing the mind into the heart. As B. Vâşeslavţev asserts, the heart is both the center of consciousness and unconsciousness, of soul and spirit, of spirit and body, of things that are accessible or inaccessible to the mind. In one word, the heart is the ultimate center. Saint Mark the Ascetic considers that deep inside the heart where the mind should immerse lies the throne or the place where Christ and the Holy Spirit, or more precisely the Holy Trinity dwells through Baptism. K. Ware affirms that the heart is on one hand a physical reality, namely the organ in one's chest, as well as a psychological and spiritual symbol. Above all, the heart embodies integration and relation: integration and unification of the whole being with itself and in the same time the focus of the whole being into God.

The failure to understand the heart in this respect has determined some of the authors to adopt the Platonist scheme, making the difference between the mind and the heart, scarcely using the term "*heart*". When the term does appear, it is associated with the feelings or it is dealt with as an equivalent of "mind" (*nous*). The same idea appears in the works of Origenus, Evagrius or Dionysius the Areopagite. Other patristic authors continue to use the term "heart" in the sense of the Scripture, in order to designate the spiritual center of the whole being. Among those one can mention Saint Mark, Diadochus, Hesychius, John and Varsanuphius, John Climacus or Isaac the Syrian. The two perspectives will be merged and transferred by the byzantine synthesis of ascetic concept after the 10th century, a synthesis that had emerged in the 5th and the 6th century in the writings of the Syrian and Greek Fathers. Thus we can get a better grasp of the stress that Eastern spirituality puts on the advice regarding the guarding of the heart and on the presence of God in man's heart. Paying attention to the heart we can eliminate any alien evil thought that attempts to enter in it. The so-called watchfulness is encountered in the tradition of the Desert Fathers, where the doctrine of the heart is mainly "neptic", meaning that it is preoccupied to maintain the state of watchfulness, in order not to

let passions enter the altar of spiritual intelligence. Because of the committed sins, the heart becomes ambivalent, like a battle field between good and evil, where we can meet the power of the sin, but also with the grace of God as a result of a successful heart cleansing process.

Regardless of their activities, the Desert Fathers were concerned about keeping the mind for prayer, which was considered the main and most important activity which must be continuous. This incessant meditation entailed the repetition from memory of a verse or a short prayer, such as the monologistic prayer (consisting in a single thought) in order to ensure the focus of the mind, and thus avoid the dispersion of thoughts. Evagrius recommended that in the course of prayer we should not try to imagine the face of God, nor allow the mind to shape any form, but we should approach the Immaterial in an immaterial way, and this action will lead us to understanding. This type of non-iconical and non-discursive knowledge of God's presence is often indicated in the Greek sources by the term *hesychia*, which means silence and inner peace (hence the terms "hesychasm" and "hesychast"). *Hesychia* means silence but not in the negative sense of the absence of words, but in the positive sense of listening; later on, there emerged directions to put the name of Jesus above the entire human life, with all its joys and sorrows.

By penetrating and transcending different levels of the heart, where good and evil are fighting, with the help of God's grace and mercy we finally reach the "depths of the heart", the divine sparkle within us, the most hidden altar in which the Holy Trinity dwells, since the Baptism, as a meeting point between time and eternity, between created and uncreated. It is a conception met in the Macarian Homilies: as the Holy Spirit actually dwelled in the earthly heart of the Savior, burning and illuminating, in the same way the Christians must bear in their souls the Spirit of God like a precious jewelry, keeping alive the candle of good deeds lit by the Godly fire. This can be done only through a continuous protection of the heart and through prayer, as the demons will be burnt with the fire of the Spirit received by the Christians at the moment of baptizing. If at the beginning the heart is suffocated by evil thoughts, by turning to the Lord and growing in the spiritual life, the presence of the Holy Spirit is more and more obvious and the heart becomes the palace of Christ, where He settles His kingdom. As priest John A. McGukin states, Macarius comes closer to the evagrian meaning of *apatheia*, but he performs a significant change by replacing the notion of ascendant *nous* detached of the material with a more comprehensive doctrine of the heart. In Macarius work, the heart is a center for *nous* – the center of spiritual watchfulness, because right in the heart one can find the mind and the thoughts and confidence of the soul.

Since the semitic syntax of the language offered the Syrian speaking Christians the possibility to grasp the specific language of the Scripture, it came as a logical consequence that the Syrian ascetics, more than the Egyptian ones, be close to the doctrine of heart, with a scriptural character. According to J.A. McGuckin and K. Ware, the Syrian authors added to their literary and theological traditions a profound biblical spirituality, characterized by advanced rhetorical Greek forms, thus bringing their contribution to the formation of the byzantine spiritual synthesis that will take place later.

In Syrian Christianity the bond between God and His people is seen as an engagement in which Christ is the Bridegroom. To Saint Ephrem, the historic engagement understood from a collective point of view had its beginnings in Israel. Afterwards, Israel was replaced by the Church, which was then made of pagan peoples. Meanwhile in another early pattern, the Church is made up of two elements, the people of Israel and the Pagan peoples. From an individual point of view, there is an interiorization of this engagement by each of the parties, where heart is understood as a “wedding chamber”. Thus, the engagement belongs to historic time, as an achievement of God’s Kingdom on Earth, while the celebration of the wedding and the mystery of consummating the marriage in the wedding chamber belong to the eschaton as an achievement of God’s Kingdom in its eschatological dimensions.

According to Saint Mark, through Baptism Christ and the Holy Spirit dwell inside the heart and the believer becomes a temple of God, who lives in us. Saint Mark also speaks of the interiorizing of the liturgy of the Temple and the Church in the very temple of the body and soul. This is a theme specific to the biblical context of the Old and the New Testament. For he who understands that Christ or the Holy Spirit dwells in him since Baptism, will throw away the earthly things and will dedicate completely to the guarding of his heart. Therefore, the main work of he who has denied any sorrow is to guard his heart and to search the Kingdom of God, for as soon as the mind moves away from the soul, the temptation of the devil occurs and he might accept the evil whisper.

Saint Mark demonstrates the importance of guarding the healthy mind and thoughts that first emerge out of the heart, in order to be brought as sacrifice to Christ, by analogy with the sacrifices of the Law and Temple. After having fulfilled the commandments with the help of the grace received at baptism, we will sacrifice to Christ our first-born healthy thoughts, instead of those touched by the evil which appear from the second thought of the heart, namely from a more complex thinking. The condition of peacefulness is characterized by the union between the mind and the heart, but the temptation of the devil appears immediately after the separation of the two. There are cases in which the “bait” resists, as a result of an old

habit, although it is the expression of a bad thought in its exclusive form. However, the denial this old habit by confessing the faith in God, we cannot be harmed by the occurrence of the simple thought of old habits. By removing the temptation, the thought remains simple, as it was prevented from developing into a complex thinking, and this thought may be instantly brought as sacrifice to Bishop Christ. The mind is once more endowed with power to watch over the heart, trying to enter deep inside where Christ has entered as a Forerunner at the Baptism. And if due to our imperfection we cannot properly use our judgment, which is similar to a fortress defending us from the spiritual beasts of this world biting our first-born thoughts, then we should accompany those who have the light of true knowledge in order not to walk through the dark, for “he who walks in the dark does not know where he is going” (In.12, 35). Through prayer, patience and godly grace we will gain peace and justice. By guarding our mind from evil hallucinations, the healthy thoughts can reach the palace that is full of light when living in peace and justice.

This godly light that fills the mind cleared of sin may be understood as similar to the glory of God that would fill the Temple in the days when the people of Israel was fulfilling God’s commandments, but removed from the Temple on the eve of the conquest of Jerusalem by the Babylonians; they returned to a new Temple in the renewed Jerusalem, only to withdraw again during the second demolishing of the Temple by the Romans; likewise, the “temple” that Saint Mark speaks about is surrendered to the enemies for dismantling. „This temple – the hermitage of the soul and body created by God - has its defined place in the most deep and hidden part of the altar screen of the heart, where Christ has entered through Baptism. This part of the heart must be opened with rational and empathic confidence without which we cannot be aware of the One who inhabits it or whether the sacrifice of thought has been accepted. For just as in the time of Israel the fire would consume the sacrifices, now when the heart is opening, the heavenly bishop accepts the first-born thoughts of the mind and consumes them in the godly fire.” According to Father Stăniloae, to bring as an offering the representation of a thing or person means to thank God for it, to praise Him and ask for His help. The Holy Fathers termed this act prayer or even liturgy.

The final chapter shows Saint Mark the Ascetic influence on other Holy Fathers and implicitly on the entire Christian spirituality. His impact is evident in the works of the Fathers that include Saint Mark’s teachings, as well as in their confessions about Saint Mark, beginning with Abba Dorotheus – where one can also find the oldest Greek quotes referring to Saint Mark’s writings – to Saint Symeon the New Theologian who confessed that Saint Mark’s influence on him had a crucial impact throughout his life. Thus, Abba Dorotheus

acknowledges the importance of humbleness or of heart crushing in order to be delivered from sin and to acquire virtues. And because the Law of Moses could not deliver man, God Himself came to offer us the grace, in proportion to everyone's faith and merits. The guarding of the consciousness is also of vital importance, as the despise of thoughts constitutes the beginning of the fall. With Saint Maximus the Confessor we find the same teaching as Saint Mark's regarding the grace we receive from God at baptism, for he who truly believes also has all the gifts. However, because of laziness, he cannot understand the treasure he has been given. This treasure can only be discovered depending on each and every one's cleansing of soul through observation of commandments. The mind is purified through denial the passion for things, and this act leads to the discovery of the treasure hidden in the depths of heart. Thus Christ that dwells in the heart will be revealed through the grace of the Holy Baptism. Saint Mark also states that God is concealed in His commandments. Thus those who are searching for Him can find Him if they fulfill His commandments. Saint Mark explains that at the beginning of the spiritual process the world is hiding God like a tomb, but those aware of Him will go on through faith and will reach the illumination to see the godly reasons like clothing or shrouds of God. However, we cannot seize God, as He is incomprehensible. But as God's word rises in us through deeds and contemplation, He attracts all the thoughts regarding both our nature and that of things. Therefore, the seer of godly things will diligently move forward, by following the Word, up to the place where He dwells, in the Holy of Holies, where He Himself has entered as a human being, as our Forerunner.

Hesychius describes the Satan's attack or temptation similarly to Saint Mark. He urges not to keep hidden in our hearts any of the words of bad thing hated by God. The "bait" inserted inside our heart by the devil transforms into sin by passionately talking to the mind. Also, Hesychius and Saint Mark show the importance of enduring troubles for spiritual progress, a theme encountered in the works of Saint Isaac the Syrian, who exhibits the same power of understanding as Saint Mark. Saint Isaac puts an emphasis on the prayer made consciously or with right account, as Saint Mark calls it, and on the necessity of enduring the temptations that the devil brings forth when he sees that the mind has decently prayed. In such cases, we need to pray for a greater power to endure the sufferings to come, just like the prayer concerning the acceptance of pure offerings that were destined to the Holy Temple, while we offer our heart to be an altar of God. It is also stated that the bodily creation not accompanied by a diligent mind is worthless, as a distinction between the knowledge of things following the ascetic work and the "knowledge of truth", as a consequence of putting the mind above anything and of continuous meditation of God. To Saint Symeon we all must be

in pursuit of the Kingdom of God, which can be reached through complete spiritual virtues, such as humbleness and love. We all have the duty to search for Christ with whom we have dressed in Baptism, after having removed the bad deeds. We have mystically received the grace and have been introduced in Heaven just like the first Adam, when we were but infants in thought and age. We must however work on His commandments and guard them with our souls and bodies, in order to acquire the sensitiveness of the mind through the work of the Spirit, in order not to ignore the unspoken care of God by doing worse things than Adam, on one hand despising Christ's love for mankind and on the other ignoring the Holy Sacrament of Baptism.