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**"SHARERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE" (2 PETER 1,4).
- EXEGETICAL AND THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE
THEOSIS PROCESS FROM A PETRIN PERSPECTIVE -**

Abstract of Doctoral Thesis

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Abstract of Doctoral Thesis: “Partakers of the Divine Nature” (1 Pt. 1,4)

Keywords: *partaker, divine, nature, biblical perspective, logos, adoption, deification*

The dissertation entitled: « **“Partakers of the Divine Nature” (2 Peter 1:4). An Exegetical and Theological Analysis of the Theosis Process from a Petrine Perspective** », is intended to be a biblical approach to the Orthodox Christian teachings of faith on the dehumanization of man.

The work comprises 311 pages (299 pg. of table of contents and 12 pg. of bibliography) and has been structured in three parts which progressively present the scriptural basis of the dehumanization of man.

In the first part, which is based on the Prologue of the Gospel of John, I presented the incarnation of the Son of God as the foundation or incentive of the dehumanization; in the second part, the possibility of our divine begetting, from a double perspective, Johannine and Pauline; and in the third part, the most extensive in scope, I considered the thesis of St. Peter the Apostle on the dehumanization of “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pt. 1, 4), presenting the context of the Petrine formulation and commenting on verses 3 to 11 of the same chapter 1 of the Second Solemn Epistle of St. Peter. Let us present them in turn.

1. The Biblical Premises of the Divinization

The first part (pp. 16-83) is made up of two chapters, dealing with two central and deeply intertwined themes: the Incarnation of the Word and the Kenosis of the Son of God.

The first chapter (pp. 16-56) presents the Incarnation of the Word of God, as we are presented in the first verses of the Prologue of John, and requires *first of all* as its object of reflection the ***presentation of the existence of the Word as a divine person from eternity (In. 1, 1-5)***, and *secondly* it is noted that He manifested His will to descend into the world through ***the act of incarnation***, with the purpose of saving man, and through man, the whole creation, thus emphasizing the necessity of the incarnation for the fulfillment of this divine and essential approach for the destiny of humanity.

If we consider in some detail the subchapter entitled “The Word before the Incarnation” (In 1:1-5),

we can observe that the John the Evangelist in **the first verse** of his Gospel presents the divine origin of the Word of God, which is from eternity, that it is inseparable from the Father and that the Logos is God from eternity. By this confession, based on divine revelation, is founded the supreme value of the act of salvation of the world, accomplished later, through incarnation, by the second Person of the Holy Trinity, the divine Word or Logos. In verse 3, as we also learn from the book of Genesis 1, that at the origin and bringing from non-being to being of man and of all creation is the eternal Word of God, and verses 4 and 5 present Him as the Life and Light of men.

The subchapter relating **the necessity of the incarnation of the Word** starts from verses 9-10 of the Prologue, and then dwells on several scriptural passages (Phil. 3:8-9; In. 14:6-11; In. 17:3, 6-8) which highlight the importance of coming to the knowledge of God in order to understand the value of the incarnation of the Word and His saving act.

Verses 9-10 of the Prologue present the Word as “the true Light” and show his work which is manifested in men to enlighten them, thus understanding that, after the act of man's creation, man is not neglected by God, who exercises His pronating action on him and completes His work of enlightening men in a perfect way after the act of the Incarnation. Through the Gospel he will bring humanity to the full knowledge of God. The scriptural passages quoted above emphasize precisely this truth about the illuminating work of the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, who alone is able to bring to the world the full revelation about God.

The second chapter (pp. 57-83) shows the paradoxical condition of the dehumanization of human nature through the **overwhelming act** of the **Son's kenosis**. In the course of three subchapters, the overwhelming dimension of the act of salvation through the incarnation of the Word is presented, that is, **the assumption of the human nature by the Son of God (In 1:14)**, which also involves the covering of divine glory with the humble condition of human nature, in other words, the emptying of divine glory, but not its disappearance, but the cohabitation in an ineffable state of the two divine and human natures in the Person of the incarnate Son of God. The text in John 17:5 shows us that the Savior **asks the Father to restore to him the heavenly glory which he had before his incarnation**, and the hymn in Philippians 2:6-11 unites both **the kenotic act accomplished by the Son through his incarnation and the regaining of the state of glory**. The chapter concludes with the Epistle to the Hebrews, chapter 5:8-9, in which the **Savior** is presented as the **bishop of our**

salvation, accomplishing our redemption through perfect obedience to the Father and willing suffering.

We can make a brief clarification if we refer to the text of In. 17:5, for it brings out an overwhelming truth about the Person of our Savior Jesus Christ which refers to his deity, namely, that the Word incarnate and made known to the world does not belong to this world, but he came from the Father in whose glory he was before the foundation of the world, that is, from eternity. Therefore, it is fitting that He who became man for the love of man should return to the glory that is due to Him as to a true God.

The text of Philippians 2:6-11 testifies to the depth of the act of humility of the incarnate Son of God, who, assuming the perfect quality of man without renouncing the quality of God, fulfills the work of the salvation of the world to the end, in the image of our humility, in the fullest and deepest form, with the most complete and profound self-denial. It is for this very reason that the act of his glorification is also wholly perfect, accomplished by the will of the Father.

Then we return to the Prologue to the Gospel of John where, in verse 14 of the first chapter, the Holy Evangelist, in a text of particular depth, reveals the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word of God as the foundation of the human being's divinization, in that through the act of the Incarnation, God's embrace of the humble earthly flesh is realized, and this is the occasion for it to become human in the Person of Jesus Christ, God and Man, and thus the gift of God's dwelling in us is offered to us human beings. The glory of God thus bursts forth from the humble human creature.

The end of the chapter reveals to us Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, as the bishop of our salvation (Heb 5:8-9). The work of salvation of humankind thus acquires an eternal value precisely because it is accomplished not by a man or an angel but by the incarnate Logos himself, of whom St. John the Evangelist speaks in the Prologue to his Gospel. In this way people can benefit from the gift of salvation and of divinization.

2. “Begottenness” as a Given and Becoming in the Process of Becoming Divine

The second part (pg. 84-109) is dedicated to presenting the effect of the redemptive act of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is the most sublime, our begetting, that is the possibility of becoming

sons of God by grace. This is possible because man was created in the image of God and is endowed with the capacity to resemble Him through the communion which God wills to fulfill with Him, His creation. This is why the Apostles John and Paul devote particular attention to it in their writings, showing that the begotten is a fruit-bearing of the Spirit in the hearts of believers, by which they can call God Father. **The begotten** is observed from a twofold aspect: **as a given and as a becoming.**

The first chapter (pg. 84-94) is dedicated to the bestowal as a reality granted to us by God, we as humans being the beneficiaries of this divine gift. Thus, in this context, the initiative entirely belongs to Him. Saint John the Evangelist, in verses 11 and 12 of chapter 1 of his Gospel, reveals that the purpose of Jesus Christ's coming into the world was to restore to humanity the awareness of their belonging to God as His children, showing us that this is made possible through faith in Him.

John the Evangelist's confession that the Word (God the Son) "has come in his own" (In. 1:11a) reveals that people and the world in which they live are God's creation, therefore He is their Lord and by His coming to earth He rightfully claims it as His own. This act marks the first stage in the divine ascent.

God's creatures turned away from Him through disobedience. This is affirmed in the second part of the verse: "but his own received him not" (In 1:11b). These words confirm the hostility with which the Savior was received by those of His own according to the flesh, the Jews, and which we learn about from the accounts found in both the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John.

Jesus Christ's mission was to offer humanity a second chance at reconciliation with God: "And to those who received him, who believe in his name, he gave power to become sons of God" (In. 1:12). Thus, His Gospel, with all that it encompasses as revealed teaching, as saving deeds and works accomplished by Christ, culminating in the supreme act of salvation fulfilled through the sacrifice on the Holy Cross, at Golgotha and concluded with the Resurrection and Ascension into heaven and followed by the reception by the Lord's disciples and then by the faithful of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, constitute a "**gift**" of God offered to men for salvation, for their acquisition of the status of sons of the Most High.

The second chapter (pp. 95-109), entitled “***Adoption as Becoming***”, presents the other side of the divine bestowal and is linked to our response to God's gift (In 1:13; 3:3-7). Through our cooperation with divine grace, this response can lead to the restoration of our nature, which has been corrupted by sin, bringing it back to its original state, and beyond that, enabling the man to become a child of God by grace (John 1:16–17).

This new reality, the birth from God through the work of divine grace, could only be imparted to humanity through their redemption from the bondage of sin and death accomplished by Jesus Christ. This is what the Evangelist John refers to as being "born of God" (John 1:13), "born from above," and "born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:3–7), as spoken by the Savior to Nicodemus, and which is part of the process of becoming divine.

Even though, in the beginning, God used an intermediary element in his relationship with mankind by giving them the Law through Moses to guide them to the One who was to accomplish salvation, the fullness of grace was nevertheless brought by Jesus Christ, who, from our perspective, is the motive in the process of our own *theosis*, of those who believe in him (John 1:16-17).

This is also ***the understanding of the spiritual reality of man's divine adoption*** also expressed by St. Paul the Apostle in Romans 8, 13-17 and Galatians 4, 6-7, which he focuses on **in the third chapter** entitled: “***Sonship in the Pauline Vision***” (pp. 110-132), in which the subject of divine sonship from the Pauline perspective is presented.

In ***the first subchapter: “Begetting Sonship – A Path to Theosis”*** (pp. 110-122), in the aforementioned passages, St. Paul emphasizes ***the importance of attaining the status of sons of God by grace***. This status grants us the right to call upon **Him as Father**, if we undertake personal efforts toward purification from sin and **receive within our hearts the working of the Holy Spirit**. Through this, we become successors with Jesus Christ. Saint Paul goes even further in explaining the believer's spiritual progress in the **second subchapter** (pp. 123–132), which explores ***epectasis in the Pauline vision*** (Philippians 3:10–15). He identifies himself with the one who, together with Christ, becomes a partaker in His death and resurrection. The spiritual journey he has embraced requires perseverance and steadfastness in reaching the ultimate and supreme goal of man, which aims for “the prize of the upward call of God” (Phil. 3:14). We are all called

to follow Him.

3. *“Partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pt 1:4) - the ultimate divine promise*

The final part of the work (the third - pp. 133–293), which is also the most extensive, was intentionally dedicated to the **in-depth exploration of the expression that lies at the heart of this thesis: “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4) and the thematic context of the Petrine formulation.** Spanning more than half the length of the entire work, I consider that it fully justifies the centrality of the theme, which is consistently present throughout the study.

The first chapter, “Partakers of the divine nature” (pp. 135-174), bearing the same title, begins with the verses of 2 Peter 1:3-4 and develops the ideas contained therein, which refer to the ***call of God, through His glory and power, inviting the faithful to attain the promises that serve as a premise for participation in the divine nature.***

The idea of theosis, expressed in the phrase “to be partakers of the divine nature” is authentically Petrine, being inspired by the words of the Savior Himself when He echoed (John 10:34; cf. Gal. 3:26; 4:6–7) the words He had divinely inspired (cf. 1 Peter 1:11) in the psalmist (Ps. 82:6 LXX [81:6]): “I said, you are gods.” These were words heard by the Holy Apostle Peter from the very mouth of the Lord. This expression gave rise to a distinct “mode of thought” and a purely Orthodox soteriological vision. The idea and formulation mentioned, central to New Testament theology, played a highly significant role in the theological debates surrounding Christological, soteriological, sacramental, ecclesiological, and histological issues raised by heresiarchs in the centuries following the writing of the Epistle.

This verse contains an expression unique in the New Testament and clearly affirms that salvation and, subsequently, theosis are a synergistic act in which man, the Christian, cooperates by his own strength or effort with the grace of God and that it is not only God's work but also man's. God grants grace and calls to cooperation: “be partakers...”, while man gives his consent and effort (1:5-7) which realize the cultivation of the virtues.

Verse 4, with which we are concerned, speaks of the Christian's theosis, emphasizing the work of God and of divine grace, as well as the deliverance of man from the wickedness of sin and the

pagan way of life (cf. I Peter 4:2-3), which requires the cultivation of the virtues. The believer's effort or striving, in cooperation with divine grace and communion with God, leads to the inner transformation of the person and of the mortal, corruptible nature into an immortal and incorruptible one (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:42–52). Over time, this verse gave rise within soteriology, as noted by J.W.C. Wand, a non-Orthodox commentator, to two distinct modes of thought: Western and Eastern. In the West, it was argued that man can be saved either by his own efforts alone or solely by grace, through a divine decree acting *ab extra* (from outside)—a conception characteristic of the Old Testament. In contrast, in the East, following the line of thought in 2 Peter 1:4–7, the belief was established that human salvation, through cooperation with divine grace, consists in the transformation of the mortal nature into an immortal one. This transformation is affected through communion with Christ, the God-Man, who, by assuming human nature, made it incorruptible and immortal, thereby deifying it. Since, according to the teaching of the Gospel, the partaking of grace and salvation, the Christian's dehumanization, is not possible without the Holy Sacraments (cf. Mark 16:15-16; I Peter 3:21; John 6:54-56; 20:21-23, etc.), and not outside the Church (cf. Matthew 18:17-18; Luke 10:16; Heb 10:24-29; I Peter 2:5, etc.), the two ways of thinking and understanding soteriology have exercised a great influence on the understanding of the Sacraments and of the nature of grace and its subjects, resulting in clearly divergent explanations in the West and the East.¹

The expression used by the Holy Apostle Peter—"that (through them) you may become partakers of the divine nature"² (Greek: γένησθε θείας κοινωνοί φύσεως), suggests that in order to attain that measure of theosis (deification), one must first follow the path revealed by the Savior, a path He Himself walked by elevating the human nature He assumed to that glorified state. This path toward perfection must then be appropriated by all Christians³ who desire salvation.⁴

¹ Ioan Mircea, The Second Epistle of the Holy Apostle Peter, in Glasul Bisericii (GB), nos. 9–10 (1975): 972–973.

² "The text from 2 Peter 1:4 was used especially by the Alexandrian Fathers, Saint Athanasius the Great and Saint Cyril of Alexandria, to whom we owe the clarification of the doctrine of theosis. Thus, Saint Athanasius speaks about the incarnation of the Lord as having the purpose of the adoption and deification of human beings through grace." - Ioan Mircea, *The Second Epistle of the Holy Apostle Peter*, p. 974.

³ "Continuing the logic of his argumentation from 2 Peter 1:3, the Holy Apostle Peter emphasizes that it is only through the glory and holiness of Christ that the promise of holiness has been granted to us. Moreover, this process of transformation in Christ never reaches a definitive conclusion, which is why the Christian life remains in a state of continuous tension—a never-ending growth in Christ." - Fr. Cătălin Varga, *Theosis and Restoration Between Typos and Antitypos in the Second Epistle of the Holy Apostle Peter*, p. 199, an idea drawn from Nicolae Mladin, *Christ – Our Life. Pauline Asceticism and Mysticism*, Deisis Publishing, Sibiu, 2012, p. 206.

⁴ "As the first among the apostles to confess the divinity of Jesus (Matt. 16:16), Peter is now able to exhort his

With the hope of the fulfillment of these promises, Christians are duty bound to live throughout this earthly life in the confidence that the Lord's promises are entirely true. already given as an earnest during this earthly life, will be revealed in perfect form in eternal life, when the reality of becoming “partakers of the divine nature” will be fully experienced. This fulfillment depends on the faithfulness with which believers cherish them (the promises) and resist “the lust of the world” (2 Pt. 1:4). The obstacles faced by the Savior Himself must likewise be overcome by those who follow Him on the path of salvation.

Chapter Two, “The Virtues of Divine Fellowship in Continuous Addition” (pp. 175-254), presents based on the fragment 2 Pt. 1, 5-8, *the virtues which adorn the life of the Christian*, which are necessary to become a unitary whole in an unceasing crescendo. The scriptural testimonies in this regard have supported my approach in a generous way.

The subchapters presented here start from the listing of virtues by the Apostle Peter as a guide to the spiritual life, which offers the opportunity to understand their content and meaning, illustrated through various words and teachings found in the pages of the New Testament, belonging both to the Savior and to the Holy Apostles.

The good deed that springs from faith calls to mind the good works mentioned by our Lord Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount, where He also reveals the way they must be carried out to be acceptable before God (Mt. 6). Furthermore, the explicit emphasis on good deeds found in the Gospel pericope of the Dread Judgment highlights that by fulfilling these acts, one may inherit the Kingdom of God (Mt. 25:34–40), whereas by failing to fulfill them, one stands to forfeit it (Mt. 25:41–46).

The knowledge (of God) starts from the intention of the author of the fourth Gospel to strengthen in the hearts of its readers the faith in the deity of Jesus Christ through the Lord's testimony about Himself when He says: “I am the bread of life” (In. 6:48); “I am the Light of the world” (In. 8:12); “I am the Door” (In. 10:9); “I am the Resurrection and the Life” (In. 11:25), all these testimonies pointing us to God's confession of Himself before Moses: “I am that I am” (Jer. 3:14).

listeners to the practice of the knowledge of Christ." - Cătălin Varga, *Theosis and Restoration Between Typos and Antitypos in the Second Epistle of the Holy Apostle Peter*, p. 199, an idea drawn from Natalia Manolescu-Dinu, *Jesus Christ the Savior in the Light of the Holy Gospels*, Bizantina Publishing, Bucharest, 2004, pp. 309–310.

Self-control, as a virtue, offers us the opportunity to undertake an exploration of the pages of the New Testament, to present the Person of the Savior, the Mother of God, Saint John the Baptist, and the Holy Apostles as exemplars of righteousness, virginity, self-restraint, and purity.

Patience, the virtue referred to by the Apostle Peter, is mentioned by St. Paul in the Epistle to the Romans 15, 1-7 in which he exhorts Christians to be patient with the weak, and in the Epistle to the Hebrews 12, 1-10, it is presented as a lever for the acquisition of holiness. It is also used by the holy Apostle James in his Solemn Epistle (James 5:7-11) in which he exhorts Christians to acquire it in expectation of the coming of the Lord.

Godliness is the virtue found especially in the Book of Acts (3:12, 16; 10:1-2; 17:22-23) and in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim 3:16; 2 Tim 3:12; Tit 1:1-3; Tit 2:11-14), and through it is manifested the honoring of God as Creator and Redeemer.

Brotherly love or the paradox of love has as its foundation the perfect love of God which is taken shape in the love of neighbor and manifested as a paradox in the love of enemies, a paradox from the perspective of the imperfect human, but which acquires its deepest meaning and can be fulfilled in a real way by living the truth of the Gospel of Christ.

Chapters three and four of the work (pp. 255-293), which dwell on the text of 2 Peter 1, 10-11, more reduced in length, have helped me to grasp in them on the one hand ***the striving of man on the basis of the call of God*** who knows from eternity those who are being saved and those who are being condemned, and on the other hand, as a crowning of people's spiritual labors, they receive from God the eternal reward and see with their own eyes ***the fulfillment of the promises, the greatest of which is entrance into the eternal Kingdom of God***, where life is lived to the fullest and the realization of the divinization is known.

4. Conclusions

If we are to make ***a general assessment of the novelty of the thesis*** whose title I have mentioned, I believe that it would be motivated by several points of view.

First, the novelty derives from ***the way in which the work is structured*** around the central theme, the process of Theosis, from a Petrine perspective. This, I might say, is put together in a gradual

way, as was only natural, beginning with the basis and motive of man's theosis which is the Incarnation of the Word of God, presented from a Johannine vision, followed by the effect of the Lord's redemptive sacrifice, through the realization of our being begotten as “given” and “becoming” from a double Johannine and Pauline perspective, and concluding by approaching the theme along the lines of St. Peter the Apostle's understanding, aiming at three stages: the purification, the fulfillment of the divine commandments, concretized in virtues, and the acquisition of the state of glory in the Kingdom of God, respectively the fulfillment of the promises.

Secondly, I would like to emphasize the fact that in unraveling the meaning of the biblical texts used as the support of the thesis, through *the development of an analytical exegetical analysis*, I have done so *by correlating the authoritative interpretations of the Holy Fathers of the Church, of more recent established biblical scholars and my own vision of the sacred text*, thus making a contribution to its understanding through a personal approach which I have attempted to keep in line with an orthodox interpretation.

Thirdly, as mentioned in the title, the thesis also seeks *to approach the text from a theological point of view*, because it conceals in it the presence of God both as a personal reality revealing Himself to us and as His intervention in the world as Creator, Provider, Savior, Sanctifier and Judge. This relationship between God and His creation, the man, in order to achieve the purpose for which man was created, is emphasized throughout the work, using the theological approach to the themes from the authors cited, while also developing my own vision of the theological ideas presented.

Finally, by *approaching* this eminently spiritual subject, I support the idea that the theme of divinization, which is an essential one in Orthodoxy, needs to be addressed, which it was for me, *because it opens up new and profound horizons of understanding of the spiritual realities* that we have the chance to experience while still on earth, with the prospect of eternity with God.

