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**SPIRITUAL LAW IN THE WRITINGS OF SAINT MARK THE MONK – THE
ROYAL PATH TO A MORAL LIFE**

-Summary-

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In the context of contemporary society marked by moral confusion, axiological relativism and desacralization of traditional values, the need for a return to the sources of authentic Christian spirituality is acutely felt. In this context, patristic writings acquire a profound relevance, thus becoming firm benchmarks for the recalibration of moral and spiritual life in contemporary society. Thus, among the great figures of Eastern spirituality, Saint Mark the Ascetic stands out for a balanced theological thinking, deeply anchored in scriptural revelation and in his personal experience of a life lived in continuous ascetic struggle, offering a coherent vision of the spiritual struggle and the dynamics of the inner transformation of the human person.

The present work thus aims at a systematic analysis of the concept of "spiritual law", as presented in the writings of Saint Mark the Monk, as well as highlighting the way in which this constitutes the "royal way" towards a moral life fully based on the synergy between human will and divine grace. In this sense, the choice of the theme *Spiritual Law in Saint Mark the Monk - the royal way towards a moral life* is justified for its ascetic, theological and spiritual importance, as well as its principles in everyday spiritual life. Offering a profound framework for research on the relationship between man and God, the impact of personal deeds on the soul as well as the spiritual struggle in the context of Christian spirituality. Therefore, in this thesis the concept of spiritual law was analyzed in the vision of Saint Mark the Monk with an emphasis on its ascetic, theological and spiritual implications. The in-depth study of the concept of "spiritual law" in Saint Mark the Monk is essential for understanding how the spiritual life of man unfolds in relation to certain immutable spiritual principles that regulate the relationship between sin, repentance and grace in the trials of everyday life, permitted by God. Therefore, one of the central aspects of Saint Mark the Monk's thinking is precisely the fact that nothing is accidental in Christian life, something that he seeks to explain in his writings, affirming that every sin inevitably attracts a consequence, and in turn, every good deed opens the path of grace to the center of the human being.

The theme of this research, *The Spiritual Law of Saint Mark the Monk – the royal path to a moral life*, represents a continuation of my undergraduate thesis, entitled *The Spiritual Law of Saint Mark the Monk – the cause of all things is the thought of each one*, which aimed to deepen the meaning of the spiritual law as defined by one of the most influential Fathers of the Eastern Church, named Saint Mark the Monk. Since this theme is of an inestimable and inexhaustible richness due to the very complexity of human life, which unfolds in perpetual change and movement, carrying man into an ever-new and

creative reality, I considered that deepening this theme through a scientific work could provide an answer to the struggles of the contemporary man.

In this sense, the main motivation for approaching this doctoral research involved outlining the connection that exists between the deepest and most mysterious movements of the human soul and the repercussions of these inner movements in their response to the misunderstood work of God in human life and in the world. Often, contemporary man finds it increasingly difficult to understand the Gospel revelation that says that "God is love" (1 John 4:8) and the painful reality of the world in which he lives and which he observes with his carnal, lacking understanding eyes. Thus, the theme chosen for this research is one of great relevance in the context of the contemporary world, which more than ever, is gripped by physical and moral degradation, precisely because of the difficulty of coming to terms with the fact that God works both in human life and in the world through certain laws that are absolutely immutable and that if man violates them without paying attention, he will be forced to bear certain consequences.

In the Romanian theological environment, this theme has not been of great interest for researchers, a fact that lead to a fragmentary and insufficiently developed work on the "spiritual law" of Saint Mark the Monk, although there are sporadic references to the teachings of Saint Mark within general works on Orthodox spirituality that deal with the concept. An analysis of Romanian theological literature shows that studies on the treatise "*On the Spiritual Law*" of Saint Mark the Monk are rare and rely mainly on a biblical exegesis, without a systematic approach to the concept of "spiritual law". However, as far as international studies are concerned, it can be noted that they focus on several directions that mainly involve theological debates on grace and good works, the personality of Saint Mark the Monk, the theme of repentance, and his dogmatic treatises. What can also be observed is that, in recent centuries, the writings of Saint Mark have become popular among the academic world as both Catholic and Protestant theologians studied ascetic tradition and Eastern patristic spirituality. In this sense, it can be observed that the research on Saint Mark the Monk is quite extensive and interdisciplinary, with increasing interest in the modern applicability of his teachings in recent decades.

Although there are a number of studies on the spirituality of Saint Mark the Monk, his approach to the spiritual law is a subject that has not yet been treated in detail in the Romanian theological space. Therefore, one of the objectives proposed in this research involved filling this very gap and offering a valuable contribution to understanding how the spiritual law governs the moral life of man. For, in a world where people are faced with

numerous moral dilemmas and lose their spiritual landmarks, it is precisely the spiritual law that can offer a concrete guide for discerning between good and evil, in improving the spiritual life. In this sense, studying this topic, I believe, has brought answers and clarifications both for the theological world and for any believer concerned by the spiritual life, since in the vision of Saint Mark the Monk, theology is not just a purely theoretical science, but is a living experience.

The present work aimed to analyze and deepen in a systematic and applied way the concept of "spiritual law" in the theological thinking of one of the most influential Fathers of the 5th century, namely Saint Mark the Monk. Thus, the first chapter of this doctoral research was dedicated to the life of Saint Mark the Monk, which aimed at the historical, ecclesial and spiritual contextualization of one of the most significant faces of monasticism and ascetic theology from the patristic period of the 5th century. Although biographical data about Saint Mark the Monk are relatively few and sometimes even uncertain, a series of defining aspects were highlighted that allowed a coherent reconstruction of his personality, as well as of the influence he exerted on theological thinking and spiritual life in the Christian East.

Regarding the second chapter, through an interdisciplinary, theological and patristic approach, the present research, in addition to framing the identity of Saint Mark the Monk, also aimed at rediscovering the moral, spiritual and therapeutic valences of the spiritual law, in order to recalibrate a model of authentic moral life in the context of contemporary society. The paper highlights the fact that, unlike an external, legalistic moral life, the spiritual law involves the transfiguration of the human being from within, through a living relationship with Christ. In this sense, the present research clearly highlighted the eternal novelty and theological depth of the concept of "spiritual law" in the thinking of Saint Mark the Monk, demonstrating that this constitutes a "royal road" towards a moral, living and integral life.

In chapter three, this work brings a series of theoretical and applied contributions to the field of patristic theology and Orthodox spirituality by capitalizing on an essential theme from the work of Saint Mark the Monk, namely the "spiritual law", through a systematic, integrate and contextualized approach. In this sense, the work offers a coherent and unitary theological reading of the notion of "spiritual law", extracting its deepest meaning from the writings of Saint Mark and demonstrating that this is not an external norm, but a living presence of grace in the soul of the human person. Thus, one of the central aspects of the present research was the presentation of the spiritual law, as defined

by Saint Mark the Monk in his writings. In this sense, it does not represent a norm imposed on the human person from the outside, but is an internal work of grace, inscribed in the human heart through Baptism, which illuminates and guides the entire life of man towards the fulfillment of the evangelical commandments. At the center of Saint Mark's vision of theology is also the principle of synergy between divine grace and good works, in which the human person cannot be saved exclusively through his works, but neither does grace work without his free and responsible participation. This conception of Saint Mark thus places the spiritual law at the center of a theological anthropology that respects human freedom and at the same time affirms the necessity of grace as an essential element of inner transformation.

In the fourth chapter, an essential element identified in the doctoral research is the pedagogical dimension of trials, where according to Saint Mark the Monk, temptations and troubles become ideal opportunities for self-knowledge and reflection of the real spiritual state of the human person. Saint Mark the Monk emphasizes that the restoration of the fallen man due to the sin is possible only through a correct understanding of the spiritual law, as well as through a life lived in accordance with it. Saint Mark explains how the fallen man can regain God's grace by obeying the divine will. The spiritual law is thus in his conception a principle of divine justice that defines man's life according to his deeds, nothing being accidental in human existence, all trials, joys and sufferings being permitted by God for the correction of man. Therefore, through the events of life, the human person can understand his true condition and seek spiritual healing through obedience to the spiritual law. The harmonization of the human will with the divine will is essential in this process, being considered the beginning of the redemptive work on the human soul, so that the true understanding of the fall of man, as well as of the possibility of his restoration, comes from a profound awareness of the work of the spiritual law. In contrast to an era in which morality is often reduced to a set of external norms or simple behavioral codes, Saint Mark proposes a “royal way”, full of discernment, balanced and deeply spiritual, which connects the evangelical commandment with the inner transformation of the human heart.

In chapter five, in the current theological context, dominated by spiritual fragmentation and identity crises, the teaching of Saint Mark proves to be a particularly valuable resource. It thus offers firm guidelines for the renewal of the life of contemporary man, not by imposing a morality alien to the human person, but by activating a living and lucid spiritual conscience. Saint Mark also constantly emphasizes in his writings the need

for man to live under the auspices of the “law of freedom” of Christ. In this sense, understanding the spiritual law as a means of approaching God in the context of today's world is also an interesting theme in which today's Christian is called to rediscover the spiritual dimension of his existence and to live in accordance with the law planted by Christ in his heart. Therefore, the spiritual law is not a constraint, but rather a path to true freedom in Christ, which the Holy Apostle Peter also mentions when he says: “Live as free people, but not as if you had freedom as a cover for evil, but as slaves of God” (1 Peter 2:16). Referring to the concept of spiritual freedom, Saint Mark insists on the human being's effort not to be enslaved by passions, which lead the human being to selfishness and self-absorption, but on the necessity of the human effort to collaborate with the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, divine grace, far from enslaving our freedom, assists us in the process of freeing our being, but the freedom of our collaboration with divine grace is conditioned by obedience to God through the fulfillment of the commandments.

In conclusion, we can say that, in a world marked by moral instability, individualism and superficiality, the relevance of the message of Saint Mark the Monk for contemporary man is essential. The royal way proposed by Saint Mark is, in essence, a path of balance between grace and effort, between humility and discernment, between action and contemplation. It responds to the need of contemporary man to find meaning, inner stability and communion with God, in a world dominated by superficiality and moral relativism. The spiritual law is thus one of the foundations of spiritual life and the essence of divine pedagogy, through which “the human person learns to know God, not through an intellectual act, but through a direct experience”. This law inscribed in the human heart and active through a life in accordance with the divine commandments, thus represents a set of divine principles that guide man on the path of salvation and knowledge of God.

The present research thus brings an essential contribution to Romanian theology, mainly by offering one of the few academic analyses, dedicated in a systematic way to the teaching of Saint Mark the Monk regarding the spiritual law, thus filling a bibliographical void and representing a reference material for patristic and moral theology. The work manages to fill an important bibliographical void, offering a model of patristic and moral reading, applicable not only in the academic sphere, but also in pastoral work, religious education and monastic life. In other words, the spiritual law does not belong only to the past, but constitutes a solid foundation for a balanced moral life, deeply anchored in the Eastern tradition, and full of life in Christ.

The thesis succeeds in transforming a classical ascetic theme into a dynamic and living model of Orthodox morality, in which it proposes a royal way not only between the extremes of moral life, but also between dogmatic theology and practical living and between the content of the commandment and the work of grace. In conclusion, the spiritual law in Saint Mark the Monk is not only a patristic theme of historical interest, but a living key to the restoration of the authentic Christian ethos. The rediscovery and revaluation of this law can contribute essentially to the reconstruction of a Christian moral anthropology capable of providing coherent responses to the ethical challenges of the contemporary society.

Keywords: Mark the Monk, spiritual law, freedom, sin, suffering, healing.

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