

An Application of Eastern Objective Soteriology in Evangelical Theology

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1. Introduction.

A brief summary of Eastern soteriology

1. The Eastern understanding of salvation began to form in the Church around the second century. It appeared already in the works of Irenaeus and it became typical for most of the Eastern theologians. The main points of the ontological-organic approach to the mystery of salvation developed by the Eastern Fathers are the following:

Humanity was created in the image of God in order to reach their eternal calling, namely *deification*, i.e. to attain the likeness of God (not by nature but by grace). Having sinned, our ancestors departed from this way and underwent decay, suffering, and death. Sin is not simply a transgression, guilt, or a juridical “offense” toward God. Sin is more like *decay*, *sickness* and the *misfortune* of human beings. The Creator had to heal or *cure* men from this suffering. Thus the point is not the forgiveness of sin, nor the satisfaction of the “offended” God (Western “juridical” understanding of salvation), but the *restoration of man himself*. For this reason the Incarnation was needed; through the complete assimilation of humanity the Savior—as a man from Adam’s line—took upon Himself our (*corrupted by sin*) nature in order to accomplish *in Himself* man’s transformation. The Lord took upon Himself our flesh and voluntarily submitted to all the consequences of the Fall (*without personal sin*) in order, by his death, to eliminate the distortion of the image and to give back to humanity our restored nature. Now, through taking part in the Body of Christ, every person can come back to his or her own true destiny and again enter the eternal way of unity and knowledge of the Creator (*deification*).

In this way, salvation is accomplished *ontologically* (through the transformation of objective reality, our nature), and *organically* (in the body of humankind which is considered to be a joint organism of the united nature of Adam-Christ).

2. *The relation between Eastern soteriology and the notion of deification.* As was mentioned earlier, the main issue for the Christian East was not the issue of man's objective salvation but the issue of his or her *deification*. Proceeding from this understanding, the soteriological work of Christ was the main connecting point on man's return journey to his or her original state: *the possibility of achieving God's likeness*, i.e. the uninterrupted way of deification:

One could ask why did God create man free and responsible? It is because He wanted to call man to the highest gift—deification, i.e. man in his infinite aspiration—as God is infinite—becoming by grace what God is by His Own nature.^[1]

This is the eternal destiny of man—infinity to come to know God, His holiness, love and power. This is the endless assimilation to God. God created humanity for this purpose and called them to it. The Fall distorted God's plan. Nevertheless, this goal continues to be humanity's eternal destiny and the work of Christ again made it possible. The issue of Salvation is merely an intermediate link on this infinite way to deification. Sanctification is a part of deification, although this notion is broader than the evangelical idea of sanctification. Therefore, the *goal of Incarnation and Salvation is the deification of man*. Of course, this term is not understood in an ontological way (as joint nature with God: there will always be an ontological abyss between the transcendent Creator and His creation) but in the sense of *connection*, providing human nature with godly qualities:

We are connected with God *not in His transcendent being, but in His uncreated energies...* By the energies of God we mean not the created gift of God to humanity, but God Himself in action. Energies are not an intermediary between God and the world, but are God Himself entering into direct contact with us... We are joined to God in His energies, and not in His Being, therefore "theosis" means that *man becomes divine by grace and not by nature*. We are "joined" to the Living God but He remains "Completely Other." In the words of the blessed Maxim the Confessor, "In all the fullness of our person we become partakers in the fullness of God; *we become what God is, except for identity with His nature.*" We have "one and the same energy" with God, but a different being. Through distinguishing between Being and energies, the teaching on the immanence and transcendence of God is outlined.^[2]

The ontological view differentiates between the biblical notions of the *image* and *likeness* of man. It means that man was created sinless but not perfect. Retaining in himself the *image* of God, man is called to achieve deification—the *likeness* of God. After the Fall man lost this opportunity although the image of God was not completely erased from his soul. Using the gracious support of the Spirit given to the Church

^[1] V. Losskii, "Dogmaticheskoe bogoslovie (10), Obraz i podobie," in *Misticheskoe bogoslovie* (Kyiv: Assotsiatsiia "Put' k Istine," 1991), pp. 297-298.

^[2] "Uchenie o spasenii v raznykh khristianskikh konfessiiakh" in *Dialog* (Moscow: Bibleisko-bogoslovskii institut sv. apostola Andreia, 2007), p. 28, author's italics.

through Christ, he can cooperate with God in the work of his own salvation. This cooperation is called *synergy*—the human side of achieving salvation, the assimilation of *divine energies*, the saving powers of the God-Man Jesus Christ.

3. *Sin* harmed the wholeness of nature, though it did not destroy it. People have not lost the image of God and they preserve their freedom of choice between sin and evil. Pre-election (for the reason of complete slavery of will) is completely rejected—here the Orthodox position is close to our Arminian one. The Fall restricted and undermined the freedom of the will but did not annul it. Practically all Eastern Fathers agree in their understanding of sin as original *damage*—more like sickness or spoilage than guilt. Although they too have a juridical element of sin's interpretation, it is not in the foreground. Man lost his unity with the Creator and His life within him. His nature is very corrupt but not completely, and it can be restored. This theory does not support soteriological determinism. Man can respond to the invitation of salvation; he can be saved if the original damage is liquidated and he receives the necessary grace to help him to restore his original essence.

4. *Therefore, the goal of Christ's incarnation is to take upon Himself Adam's nature.* As the Creator, the Word took upon Himself the human nature that He created in order to do away with the damage and restore creation to its previous condition, and even to give it much more: an opportunity for infinite deification:

... it is not a question of God the Word voluntarily accepting our damaged nature, i.e. with original sin. No one could force God to do it. God received the damaged nature in order to eliminate the damage, to heal original sin, to destroy it. It is in order that man through this healing and restoration could enter into complete unity with the Godhead, to the unity to which man was called from the beginning of his creation.^[3]

Christ, the Word Incarnate, took upon Himself human nature with the main goal of *restoring in Himself the original creation of Adam*, to completely reproduce both the original image of man and to become an example of God's image in man. Orthodox believers refer more to the resurrection of Christ than to His death, seeing in it the primary soteriological value. This is the main point of difference of opinion with the "traditional" juridical model of salvation. The English bishop Kallistos Ware writes:

Any theology of salvation focused on the cross alone is deficient from the Orthodox point of view...in the Orthodox faith the notion of substitution is used reservedly. *The substitutional element in our salvation accomplished by Christ is accepted but not stressed.* In particular, the categories of "imputation" are far away from the Orthodox faith. As a rule we... refrain from the category of "satisfaction" ...*salvation is understood in organic and therapeutic terms.* Salvation implies *healing* which is performed, in particular, through participation in the Eucharist... Our Lord saves us by becoming as we are; He *completely shares with us our human nature* and thus He allows us to participate in what He is.^[4]

^[3] A. I. Osipov, *Lektsii po dogmaticheskomu bogosloviiu za 4-i kurs MDS, Lektsiia 12 "Sut' zhertvy Khristovy*, <<http://orthtexts.narod.ru/>> (accessed 2 May 2012); note that Professor Osipov's lectures cannot serve as a valid source because they

exist in electronic format only (and are somewhat unorganized). However, they present interesting material for research on the consecutive "organic" approach.

^[4] *Uchenie o spasenii v raznykh khristianskikh*

The majority of modern Eastern (Orthodox) apologists, who adhere to the ontological-organic understanding of Christ's work, believe that it is possible to completely avoid the juridical element both in the belief system and in the area of moral teaching.

Christ is the only *eternal example of the complete accomplishment of God's image in man*. Being the God-Man, He possesses gracious powers, the attainment of which makes possible both salvation and the eternal way of deification:

He gave us His own image and His own breath but we did not retain it; that is why He takes on Himself our poor and helpless nature in order to cleanse us and to redeem us from decay and to make us again participants of His Divinity.^[5]

2. Assessment of Christ's work as the *restoration* of human nature

1. Initial foundation. In our opinion soteriology requires special assessment because *from this issue* the *main* difference in theology starts. Previously Christian confessions were more or less united in their teaching (in the basic points)^[6] in the theology of the Trinity, Christology, even in anthropology and the concept of sin (to some degree). The differences start from the understanding of the work of Christ that was done *in His own Body*. What Jesus did and how it was reflected in humanity is what makes a difference in soteriology and alters the vision of different Christian groups concerning both general and personal Salvation.

In our search to understand the work of Christ we will proceed from the integral theory of humanity which asserts that the unity of the Body that comes from the first man *remains indissoluble all the time as a whole*: from Adam to Christ to the last man (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15: 19-23.45-49; Eph. 2:5-7; Heb. 7:1-10). Understandably, the Eastern approach better fits this principle for two reasons: a) its organic explanation of human origin and the mystery of the personal relation of man with Christ; b) it was the most widespread in the early Church since the main accent and soteriological basis for the teaching—on which were based all the theological conclusions of the Eastern Church from the second to the seventh centuries and beyond—was this ontological transformation of human nature that Christ achieved in Himself.

2. Assessment of ontological understanding. There is a juridical interpretation which states that the sin of humankind was placed on the Lord at *the time of the crucifixion* (literally in the last hours of the eclipse). However, sin is inseparable from human nature. This is something illusory — personal “sins” taken separately from human nature. *The nature sins* and gives birth to sin. Therefore, not only all sins—as manifestations of sinful human nature—should be judged and removed, but also the *whole damaged human nature* which continuously gives birth to individual sins. Jesus had to bear

konfessiiakh, Seriya “Dialog,” (Moscow: Bibleisko-Bogoslovskii institut sv. apostola Andreia, 2007), pp. 25-26.

^[5] John of Damascus, *Tochnoe izlozhenie pravoslavnoi very, Kniga 4, r. 13*, <http://www.orthlib.ru/John_of_Damascus/vera4_13.html>, (accessed 1 May 2012).

^[6] Certainly, such a thesis can raise objections if not from the evangelical side, then, to some degree, from the side of traditional churches. Nevertheless, we will not touch on *private* theological discussions which still separate confessions in this area. For Protestants they have the meaning of *adiaphora* (for instance, the same *Filioque* question).

the burden of our nature. That is why He received the body from Mary and during the Immaculate Conception the Word received *upon Himself* Adam's nature (or *entered into it*). Having descended upon this nature, the Word sanctified it and cleansed it through Himself; therefore our *Savior committed no sin Himself*. However, He crucified our joint nature on the cross and thus in *one Body* sin was destroyed on the ontological level. At Golgotha *the whole of human nature* suffered in Jesus. If we say that God placed the sins of the world upon Christ only at the time of the crucifixion (whereas from the organic point of view He carried the burden of our nature *from conception*) we do not understand the essence of the Incarnation as the renovation of human nature. We can claim redemption only thanks to Christ Who took on Himself our nature; *our whole nature was crucified in Christ* and together with it all our sins were destroyed. (Speaking in "juridical" terms, the destruction of the sinful nature means the destruction of the guilt for sin as well. That is why Scripture talks not only about *Reconciliation* but about *Salvation* as a whole.)

The position of the early Church was as follows:

Irenaeus (second century): For the One *Who undertook to destroy sin* and redeem humanity guilty of death, had to become that which He was, that is, *a Man Who was consigned to the slavery of sin and was in the power of death so that sin could be put to death by a man* and man could depart from death... If He only seemed to be flesh, not having become flesh, then His deed was not true. But He was what He seemed to be: *God, who restored in Himself the ancient creation of man in order to destroy sin and nullify death, and bring man to life—and therefore His deeds are true.*^[7]

Athanasius (fourth century): He (*the Word*) did not suffer and, being in the body was not polluted, but on the contrary, *sanctified the body all the more...* giving Himself to be known in the body, he did not take on uncleanness, but on the contrary, being incorruptible *He enlivened and cleansed the mortal body.*^[8]

Here too, we must know that *corruptibility was not outside the body, but began within it* and it was necessary *in place of corruption to bring life* so that, as death took place in the body, so also did life take place... Therefore the Savior rightly clothed Himself in the body so that *by bringing life to the body, it would not remain any longer in death*, as a mortal, but like one dressed in immortality by the resurrection to become immortal... And more: since death could not exist in and of itself but only in the body, so the *Word put on a body so that, receiving death in the body, it could be destroyed.*^[9]

Gregory of Nazianzus (fourth century): But in the Captain of our salvation the structure of the death he took upon Himself was ultimately perfect, completely fulfilling its specific goal, for by death what was joined was divided and again the division was made whole, *according to the cleansing of that being of corruption* which was in unity,

^[7] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Tvoreniiia, Protiv eresei*, 3 kniga, 18.7, Biblioteka otsov i uchitelei tserkvi, (Moscow: Palomnik, Blagovest, 1996), pp. 291-292; author's italics.

^[8] Athanasius of Alexandria, *Tvoreniiia*, 4 vols., "Slovo o voploshchenii Boga-Slova," 17, (Mos-

cow: Izd. Sviato-Preobrazhenskogo Valaamskogo monastyria, 1994), vol. 1, pp. 212-213; author's italics.

^[9] *Ibid.*, vol. 1, "Slovo o voploshchenii Boga-Slova," 44, pp. 248-249; author's italics.

I mean the soul and the body, the return of the divided again into one unit *having been cleansed of alien corruption*.^[10]

Christ came in order to *take upon Himself the body of sin*: “Knowing this, that our *old man is crucified* with Him, that the *body of sin might be destroyed*, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Rom.6:6). Other Scripture passages, such as the following, attain a new meaning in the organic dimension: “For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation *perfect* through sufferings” (Heb. 2:10). “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered, And being made *perfect*, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Heb. 5:8-9). The meaning is as follows:

Having said, “*Perfect, being made perfect*” the apostle states the following. First, that His sufferings *perfected* Christ the Man; it indicates that sufferings are necessary for our salvation. Secondly, through sufferings He *made perfect* the human nature that He had accepted. (Here, of course, it means that sufferings made Him perfect but not in the spiritual-moral sense—He was already perfect—but in the *constitutive* sense, i.e. related to the condition of His human nature). Here is the central point of Christ’s Sacrifice and its absolute uniqueness.^[11]

In His resurrection the Lord *restored in Himself* the original human nature and through His death liberated it from the consequences of sin—cleansed it, transformed, glorified and lifted it up in Himself into heaven. At present our Lord, the God-Man, sits at the right hand of the Father as the Head and Beginning of the Church, His Body, and in Him He “hath *raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus*” (Eph. 2:5-6). And all this is thanks to the unity of our human nature.

3. Significant criticism of the theory. As any other interpretation of the work of Christ, the ontological vision raises some issues, first of all related to the question of the nature of Christ’s Body. In particular:

A. If the Lord took on Himself the existing (our) nature of Adam, then could He—as a result of the damage of sin—age and die a *natural death*? (Did the “incorrigible passions” that Christ took on include aging as well?) Generally, the “organicists” leave it out, since a positive answer would raise another more complicated question: Would Jesus’ *natural death* from aging (in this case) eliminate the corrupted nature? *Which is of more importance—death itself (as a fact) or death on the cross only?*

^[10] Gregory of Nyssa, “Bol’shoe oglasitel’noe slovo,” 35, <http://agios.org.ua/wiki/index.php/Григорий_Нисский.Большое_огласительное_слово>, (accessed 9 May 2012); author’s italics. Author’s note: Here Gregory sees the work of Christ as a kind of “renovation”: the “product” which had become useless (the Body of humankind) was dismembered in the death of Christ (body and soul), then each member was

“renovated” and the restored “structure” was returned to the “consumer” (i.e. to us) in the Resurrection, suitable for its originally intended use.

^[11] A. I. Osipov, *Leksii po dogmaticheskomu bogosloviu za 4-i kurs MDS, Lektsiia 10.1, “Sushchestvo Zhertvy Spasitelia*, <http://searchebookonline.com/book_586_glava_32_10._ZHertva_KHristova.html or <http://orthtexts.narod.ru/>>, (accessed 2 May 2012); author’s italics.

- B. From the organic understanding it follows that Christ *first of all saved Himself*. His work was necessary primarily for Him (liberation from His own nature through death and its transfiguration in resurrection). Does this mean that God simply needed a Man who *would agree to carry the nature* (“body of sin”) to its death *without taking its corruption by His own free will* (in order not to commit a personal sin)? Why could death not keep the body of Christ in the grave if Adam’s corruption was in Him, which affects the soul or spirit as well (the fullness of that nature)? How could Jesus eliminate the spiritual damage together with the physical through His death? These are difficult questions for the organic theory; it is not surprising that this theory, in spite of its doubtless advantages in understanding the foundation for Christ’s work, still does not have much support in modern Christianity.
- C. Most importantly, the question remains unanswered as to how Christ could take up *all the fullness of Adam’s corrupt nature* in order to restore it in Himself, and, at the same time, *remain absolutely Holy* (in order not to die for His personal sin).

4. Possible explanations for this antinomy as they developed in the history of theology.

- A. The “radical right” interpretation: by the incarnation in Mary’s womb God “created for Himself” a separate “clean” nature which was not affected by original sin. From this point of view Mary had no direct relation to the nature of Christ and could not transmit sin to him. (Mary plays the role of a “*surrogate mother*” to Jesus.^[12]) Following this logic, God could simply create a new nature for Jesus from dust, as for the first Adam. (Irenaeus says that if Christ had nothing in common with our nature, He could not restore it in Himself.) *Obviously, this is a heretical interpretation.*
- B. The position of the Catholic Church: Christ was born in a sinless body since His mother was cleansed from original sin by the preliminary action of the Holy Spirit (This is a *First Degree Dogma* according to the Catholic classification of dogmas according to their significance.) There is one significant disadvantage: Why was Mary excluded from the *general* (and just!) process of the inheritance of sin, from the general “law of sin” which rules over humanity?
- C. Christ Himself was immediately cleansed by the Holy Spirit in His mother’s womb and therefore He was born in a sinless body already (as was Adam before the Fall). Thanks to such a birth, Jesus had the power to stand against conscious

[12] Here is an example of such a vision according to Henry Morris, “Bibleiskoe osnovaniia sovremennoi nauki/IV. Nauki o formakh zhizni. Neporochnoe zachatie, <<http://lib.rus.ec/b/122336>>, (accessed 9 May 2012): “For the body of Christ to serve as a sacrificial offering for the sins of humanity, it has to answer to two conditions. First,...it should not have any mutated genes (and the physical defects caused by them) inherited from the father or mother. Second, from

the spiritual point of view... it should not inherit anything sinful from the parents... There was only one way to fulfill these conditions – *through the particular creation of an embryo in Mary’s womb*... Christ could not be born with an immaculate body and sinless essence if at least one of the parents (mother or father, in equal degree) passed along to Him their genes or other genetic material. His coming required a special creative act of God Himself.”

(external) sin. The Word, descending to Mary's nature, by *the fact of its descent*, cleansed the future nature of the Savior from original sin (sin is destroyed in the presence of the holy God, see Luke 1:35: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy one which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." Millard Erickson, for instance, holds this view. The "incorrigible passions," in this case, if accepted, are not then a *consequence* of the damaged nature, but a natural result of the Son of Man's stand "under the Law."^[13]

- D. The nature damaged by sin was "neutralized" by the presence of God's nature and there was no way it could develop in the Savior during His life. The Savior *did not have sin in His nature*; nevertheless, there were "incorrigible" consequences of the Fall—damage to the original nature (sickness, suffering, weariness, and hunger)—which the Lord was carried at Golgotha. The holiness of the Lord was achieved both by the divine and human natures. Such an approach is close to the views of moderate organicists and to the teachings of the Seventh Day Adventists.^[14]
- E. The nature damaged by sin was active in Jesus (as an *external* principle, a law or power which *is not conscious sin*; from here originates Satan's attempts to tempt the Lord through it); however, it could never persuade the Savior to commit a personal sin as a *conscious* act of His will (to lead Him, as Proto-deacon Andrei Kuraev says, "to fleshly desires or to obsession with spiritual passions"). This is the viewpoint of such Orthodox "organicists" as Professor I. Osipov of Moscow Theological Academy. (Here the issue is how we define the *origin* of an individual human's sinfulness: as an *inclination* to sin from the inherited *corrupt* nature [proposition, temptation] or as a *conscious choice* of the will, as a sinful act.) This nature was active in the Savior (as a law of resistance, *not the will*). He could resist temptations and stay absolutely holy (as a man) thanks to His perfect faith and to God's support. The main focus here is on the Holy Spirit's *full baptism* of Jesus' human nature as the *basis for preserving total holiness*. (The Jordan experience is represented here as a conscious *full committal* of human nature and will for God's service.) The emphasis is on the completeness of Jesus' *human deed*: a *man in our nature* overcame Satan. He fully experienced the power of temptation and fully used the gracious powers of the Holy Spirit. (Salvation was gained not only by the divine but also by the human nature of Christ.)^[15]

^[13] Consistent organicists criticize this position on the basis of the same premises which Orthodox and Protestants use to criticize Catholics: "Why should anyone be *preliminarily excluded* from the inheritance of the "law or body of sin" which is *common to all people*?"

^[14] It seems that Adventists are more disposed to understanding Christ's nature proper in the organic sense: "When Christ took upon Himself this nature which *reflected the consequences of sin*, He became subject to the weaknesses and weariness common to all people....the human nature

of Christ was not in the fullest sense the nature of Adam before the Fall. Nor was it the fallen nature or Adam's nature after the Fall. It was not as the nature of the created Adam because it *inherited the weaknesses that were a result of the Fall*. It was not a fallen nature because it never descended to moral contamination. Therefore, in the most literal sense, this nature was our nature, although, without sin," cited from *V nachale bylo Slovo*, glava 4, "Bog Syn. Dve prirody Iisusa Khrista," <<http://www.bible.com.ua/lib/r/26>>, (accessed 6 June 2012).

- F. The “far left” interpretation maintains that *Christ was subject to personal sin* and that only thanks to His self-perfection and experience in overcoming temptations, He learned with time to lead a sinless life and to abide in complete holiness, giving us an example to follow. Feodor Mopsuestskii, a prominent exegete of the fourth century and the actual father of Nestorianism held this view to some extent. (This is the statement that only by way of self-perfection and overcoming personal sins Christ achieved the sinless state of “Divine Logos” in Him. Pelagianism moved in the same direction and all liberal theology that totally rejected the divine nature of Christ). Obviously, this is a heretical interpretation. (Feodor’s position was condemned at the Ecumenical Council in 553.)

As we have seen, the interpretations range from a full accent on the divine nature of Christ to the full accent on His human nature. The evangelical understanding, in our opinion, varies between positions C and D from those mentioned above.

5. A question arises: Where in this line are the church writers, the organicists of the second to fourth centuries? What position did they hold? It seems that in their opinion Christ took on Himself a human nature that *was damaged* by the original sin of Adam, and then He healed it in Himself (positions D, E). However, they cautiously avoided discussions about theological differences in order not to give cause to debates and splits. For instance, Irenaeus wisely balances on the edge of this antinomy (as did succeeding church fathers, in particular, Athanasius). Skillfully, with a few strokes he outlines the presence of Adam’s damage in Christ (just a hint), and immediately explicitly affirms His complete holiness and sinlessness (in the sense of personal sin).

This is why, in our opinion, the *following statements should be accepted as the basis* for further study of these contradictory aspects in Christology and soteriology:

- 1) It is *inadmissible* to apply to the Holy Body of the Lord the following expressions: “*sinful body,*” “*Christ’s sinful nature,*” etc. The *antinomy of the Incarnation should be preserved completely:* A) The possibility (or necessity) exists for the adoption of Adam’s damaged nature by the Savior; but B) the God-Man, the Lord Jesus Christ is completely holy and sinless (not only at present but from conception by the power of the Holy Spirit in the mother’s womb).
- 2) Therefore, as a consequence, in talking about the Lord’s adoption of our human nature in *its damaged fullness* we have to *choose carefully among theological expressions*, for instance: “the nature damaged by the Fall,” “the nature that carries in itself the consequences of the original damage,” etc. but no more than that.

^[15] Based on the author’s limited information, from among the published books on theology (in the former Soviet Union) there is only one which supports such an understanding: “The teaching on the invincibility of Christ is based on the hypostatic union of His nature. Although the *human nature received by Christ was corrupted by sin*, the doctrine of hypostatic union claims that His human nature had such a connection with His

divine nature that both of these natures were acting in one person. The divine nature is sinless; therefore the Divine Person is sinless *even if His human nature is corrupted by sin*. The issue of vulnerability applies to Christ’s Person and not to His nature.” Cited from: *Doktriny Biblii, Uchebnoe posobie BEE Ukraine*, Chast’ 2, Urok 2 (Luts’k: Khristians’ke zhittia, 2002), pp. 72-73; author’s italics.

- 3) *In practice* it is easier to explain the work of Christ in juridical terms (images of sacrifice and payment for sin); they are widely used in Scripture and are more acceptable to the mind. For this reason we need to be careful how we present this theory in practice, in particular, in the way we use certain elements of organic interpretation in church classes or in sermons, in order not to tempt lay church members. “And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?” (1 Cor. 8:11).

3. An attempt to unite different elements of the systems

1. Organic and juridical approaches to Salvation: an evaluation. The organic theory which understands sin as general damage sees the primary motive of Salvation in the necessity of healing or restoring the human nature. The juridical theory that is typical to our evangelical theology (heritage of the Reformation) in its understanding of sin as guilt sees Salvation as a necessity of Redemption from slavery to sin, and then as the Justification of a person before divine justice. Both theories see salvation as an *essential condition* of the incarnation, though they differ in their definition of its main point. Organicists lay more stress on the necessity of the internal change of the nature, whereas juridicists talk more about the external restoration of legal relationships with the Creator. The former point out that the liquidation of the sin nature dismisses the question of guilt and initiates man’s restoration; the latter stress that the internal transfiguration of man by grace happens through a personal saving relationships with Christ (because of juridical justification). It seems that the former tend more to the anthropocentric view of salvation whereas the latter accent the theocentric. At the same time, both systems are *Christocentric* since both of them admit the exclusive right of the God-Man Jesus Christ to saving grace and His complete priority in Salvation, denying any possibility of man’s self-saving efforts without God’s full support.

2. Combination of the systems’ elements. In our opinion, these two systems do not represent totally opposite views. That is why an attempt can be made to unite them (in the basic elements only, to be sure):

- 1) Both theories of salvation can be examined “top-down” based on the juridical motive: a) man needs *Justification* before divine justice; b) the incarnation took place in order to bring sacrifice and for Redemption (because of God’s original plan of Salvation, to appoint the Lamb “slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8) – *juridical elements*); c) Redemption itself could be realized through *Salvation* only and through the restoration of man’s common nature (Christ as organic representative of humankind; its essential component; the way of communicating God’s blessed transforming powers—*organic elements*).
- 2) To avoid the impression that the juridical element dominates God’s plan and is the main defining element in it, we can build a reverse-logic soteriological correlation: a) God’s original plan was to direct, unite, and deify in Himself all creation in *Salvation* (incarnate Word—“Alpha and Omega” [Rev. 22:13] to complete creation—*organic argument*); b) *Redemption* as the logical result of

nature's ontological liberation from sin; c) *Justification* as the legal "shaping" of Salvation and Redemption (*juridical arguments*). Therefore, the juridical element as compared to the organic element about God's restoration of creation in Himself is less weighty.

In the author's opinion, the *organic approach* should be the basis for our soteriological vision; the juridical understanding of the work of Christ can be fully based on it. The followers of the organic explanation of Christ's work wrongly think that Protestants are against the ontological vision and therefore they cannot accept (or accommodate) such an approach to salvation in their soteriological system. On the contrary, in our opinion, nothing prevents evangelical Christians from accepting Eastern objective soteriology. Later it will be said that the Eastern vision is quite acceptable for Protestant theology and that it fits organically into its holistic theological system *without any significant change or reworking*. On the contrary, it enriches the system making it more holistic and even clearer in its individual elements.

4. Positive elements of the doctrine that can be applied in evangelical Christian theology

4.1. The influence of ontological anthropology and the concept of sin on the general understanding of Christ's saving work

According to the Eastern understanding of sin there are two "juridical" understandings which cannot be used in teaching about "original sin": 1) it is inadmissible to think that *all of us have participated in Adam's sin*, since although we were in the "loins of the first father," we did not take any personal, conscious participation in Adam's transgression (since we, *as individuals*, did not exist at the time of the Fall); 2) it should not be alleged that *God imputes to us Adam's sin* as our personal sin or guilt. In this context God's justice is referred to and the following passage is quoted:

The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall *not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son*: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him (Ezekiel 18:20).

However, since all of us are descended from Adam, we inherit his natural sinful state as our *active basis*—sin is the damage common to all of us, the *gradual* decay of human nature. Therefore it is emphasized that this nature is not totally corrupted and can be restored.

Juridicism views sin, first of all, as guilt. The juridical understanding claims that the (legal) loss of our relationship with the Creator eliminates direct contact with Him and the work of grace in our nature; therefore a human being is considered *completely* corrupted.

Since death is the just punishment for sin, (juridically) human nature should be punished by death, i.e. completely *destroyed*. From here comes the main emphasis of juridicism: Christ came (above all) to die, paying the punishment for sin (sacrifice) and nature's curse (guilt) destroying them on the cross.

The new nature of Christ is given to us exclusively by *faith*.^[16] Faith emerges as the main factor in receiving the gracious work of Christ and Justification (obviously in the Body of Christ only, not without Him). From here begins the way to personal sanctification: practical faith in the substitutional sacrifice of Christ in order to eliminate our totally corrupted nature by means of our *identification* with the death and resurrection of the Lord. The matter concerns the elimination of personal sinfulness through *strengthening*—by faith—our *connection* with the resurrected (but first of all *crucified*) Christ and our *adoption*—also by faith—of His nature in which operate both death to sin and the renewed life of the resurrection.^[17] In practice it is not me but Christ working in me; His death and resurrection are active in my nature and eliminate my personal sin. To some degree this is the way of *quietism*.^[18] My job is to develop my faith (by all possible means) in order to provide continuous progressive cleansing by the death of Christ and the acquisition of His new nature. Is this scheme true? Undoubtedly, it works; however, the ontological vision suggests a slightly different approach.

According to the Eastern understanding sin, as mentioned above, is damage, sickness, weariness, and the decay of nature. Therefore, this damage does not have to be eliminated, but rather has to be *healed*. Christ took up our nature in order to cleanse it, to *re-create* it. It is not as if in the East the question of the depravity of human nature was never raised.^[19] Here the emphasis shifts from understanding the necessity of its elimination to understanding the necessity of its correction or restoration by the Creator. Since the nature created by God is good in its essence (Eastern Fathers, Augustine: sin did not create a new nature, but corrupted the existing one), it needs to be cleansed from the acquired damage (which is parasitical and progressively sickens). Therefore Jesus came precisely for the purpose of restoration; the soteriological emphasis shifts to the *Resurrection* of the renewed nature endowed with gracious powers for eternal life and development. In this case our personal mission is to actively acquire (or develop) these gracious powers in ourselves that were granted to us in the renewed nature of Christ. From here begin ascetic efforts in the “acquisition” of grace, striving to change oneself (with the help of God’s grace, of course). Asceticism is not an end in itself; it is not self-salvation but the ancient practice of changing human nature by the power of the Resurrected Christ. Here is one of the main reasons (certainly not the only one) for the special attention the Orthodox Church pays to *Tradi-*

^[16] What is meant here is *Protestant* juridicism, since the Catholic juridical system, which is characterized by a *realistic* (in terms of universals) attitude toward the sacraments, acknowledges the possibility of the direct *infusion* of grace in the sacraments (the created substance of Christ’s Body), even with *faith being left out*, to some degree.

^[17] For example, Rom.6:3: “Know ye not, that as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were *baptized into his death?*” and Gal.3:27: “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ *have put on Christ.*”

^[18] Quietism was a product of the juridical Catholic West, even if in the form of striving for holiness; later Catholic theology rejected it (in

any case, it is closer to the organic approach than “official” Protestant dogmatism).

^[19] In our opinion, another side of the antimony of sin is present here: our nature, on the one hand, is simultaneously potentially completely useless for good and continually progresses toward greater evil (which is why it has to be completely destroyed in us by the Body of Christ). On the other hand, since man’s fall was not intentional (as it was for demons), his nature still has the ability to do good and to improve (which is why it can be healed by Christ). Both views are legitimate and, in our opinion, illustrate the different sides of the eternal truth of salvation; for this reason they should be used simultaneously in theology.

tion (as an example of true life and a present way of how to connect with the Resurrected Body) of the one saving Church (as the sole organism of the living resurrected Body of Christ^[20]) and its sacraments (the means of connecting with and being filled with the Resurrected One and accepting His nature).^[21]

How can evangelical theology use the ontological understanding of sin? As it was pointed out above, without rejecting the juridical aspects of sin (true and biblical) we enlarge its conception when we include the view of sin as damage or sickness (in the framework of strict Calvinism this is impossible). Thus, we move the faith emphasis from exclusively “kinetic” efforts on the *work of Christ* in us to personal responsibility in salvation—our work of salvation in Christ. (After all, does the process of *curing* not suggest the *synergic cooperation* of patient and doctor?) This is the concentration of faith not only on the death of Christ but more—on His Resurrection and permanent presence in us and with us.^[22] Jesus constantly works not only through us but with us as well. At first glance, it would seem that our subjective soteriology claims the same. However, in our understanding, in evangelical theology we sense the presence of *minimalism of one’s personal saving efforts*, which comes from the inherited *anthropological pessimism* of the Reformation (and finally the juridical understanding of sin). Neglect of the synergic approach (or elementary ignorance of it) leads to the deceleration of personal efforts in sanctification and discouragement in the spiritual life.^[23]

4.2. Objective soteriology: restoration of human nature

The ontological foundation for the correct juridical understanding of Salvation. The organic understanding seems to improve our evangelical understanding of the work of Christ. It gives a real foundation for the true understanding of redemption and sacrifice. We are dead in Christ, therefore all demands of the Law are invalid for the dead, and it is precisely the ontological approach that gives a solid explanation for the famous apostolic thesis (Rom. 6:3-7; 7:1-6).

Organicists have weighty logic: it is not the loving God who is at war with humanity, but it is *man who is at war with God*. God is not fighting and He is not angry; He loves men and pardons them, but the whole work of reconciliation depends on man; it is the man who does not want reconciliation, it is in him that the enmity lives. For this reason God was incarnated, in order to eliminate this enmity from *inside* the man. In

^[20] Here is not simply some kind of “mystical fetishism” (or “pious magic”), as Protestants superficially criticize traditional Churches, but a corresponding way of acquiring the salvific Body of Christ in the framework of an organic “system of coordinates.”

^[21] For a skeptical nominal Protestant understanding combined with a subconscious rational and logical inclination to the continual use of the principle of “Occam’s razor,” these are mystical things that hinder, to some degree, *faith’s access* to the spiritual reality of the Body and do not facilitate it. Nevertheless, how correct or exclusively true is the nominal view itself?

^[22] Unfortunately, at times our Christian life

does not resemble a service of worship in the presence of our resurrected Lord, but extreme unction for the “juridically” dead Savior who was crucified for our sins. After one is aware of one’s crucifixion with the Lord in one Body, there should follow the joyful life of resurrection—this is the whole point of the ontological vision of Christ’s work.

^[23] If the word *synergy* seems too “Pelagian,” the notion of *congruency* can be used (in the meaning of cooperation between man and Christ). For instance, Millard Erickson makes use of this notion of B. B. Warfield’s. See M. Erickson, *Khristianskoe bogoslovie* (St. Petersburg: Bibliia dlia vsekh, 1999), p. 300.

juridicism the notion of payment calls into question God's love. (Why does the Father not forgive "*just because?*") In addition, the use of the notion of the "*gift*" of Salvation is neutralized in a certain way (without the prerequisite of compensation; in organic theology our restored nature in Christ is given to us *unconditionally*, in love).^[24]

In accordance with the ontological interpretation, along with our nature Christ received all the weaknesses and subjection to change inherent in this damaged nature except personal sin, and in Himself He completed the healing and transformation of our nature—from one inclined to decay to one that is eternal and unchangeable. In Himself He experienced the condemnation of death and by the creative power of the Word He *re-created* the nature of man:

But what would be the correction of our nature if, when the earthly living being is ailing, the Divine visitation *took on some other kind of being*, a heavenly one? For it is impossible to heal the sick, if one does not undertake the doctoring of the *suffering member itself*. Therefore if there was sickness on the earth, and the Divine power did not touch what was sick, having in mind what was proper to it, then the labor of the Divine power would be useless for man, because it would have nothing in common with us.^[25]

Therefore, it can be said that the Lord saves all of us, having united us in Himself into one organism, one Body of humankind and having eliminated sin in Himself (this notion is used respectfully regarding the Lord: sin not as a personal act of the will or an open inclination to evil, but as a weakness inherited by the Body of humankind from their ancestors).

Therefore, the organic view allows us to see the ontological level of Salvation, i.e. *the restoration of our common nature*. Soteriological doctrine can be built on this foundation as well as our understanding of Redemption and Justification. The history of Christian dogmatics testifies that the early Church kept a balanced approach to juridical and organic understandings (in particular, they were not so strongly marked with the antagonistic tendency, as they are nowadays). As a result, it had a positive influence on the understanding of the subjective way of salvation. Therefore, Protestants do not have to ignore the organic approach, since in it there is the true foundation for the hope of salvation which was given to the Body and a real "foundation" for Redemption and Justification. Without it the juridical understanding remains as if "without a foundation," since it has no valid ontological background. It is this approach (which is basically ignored in Western evangelical Christian theology texts), in our opinion, that should be assumed as the basis for understanding the Work of Christ.

The organic foundation for the juridical teaching on Redemption. The "traditional" juridical understanding of salvation results from the understanding of Christ's work as completed Redemption. The Catholic Church, which never rejected the organic approach (and in the twentieth century has even given special attention to Eastern the-

^[24] Recognizing the unconditional nature of salvation as a *gift*, the organic view at the same time lays strict responsibility on man for the preservation and *development in himself of the gift of Salvation*.

^[25] Gregory of Nyssa, "Bol'shoe oglasitel'noe slovo," 27, <http://agios.org.ua/wiki/index.php/Григорий_Нисский_Большое_огласительное_слово>, (accessed 9 May 2012); author's italics.

ology) points out^[26] that Redemption takes place on the ontological level, encompasses the whole Body of humankind, and belongs to the whole Organism. Here is the basis for the juridical interpretation of Redemption: God accepts man in the Body of Christ Who is the *Person that gives Redemption*. However, even with the acceptance of God's mercy nothing happens by itself:

Redemption first of all touched upon the existence and essence of the Universe; it reached the ontological sphere. This means that Christ redeemed all men of all time. Nevertheless, personal redemption depends on our individual decision and free will. To move from the objective stage in Redemption to the actual state of salvation, cooperation with grace is needed.^[27]

Protestants must pay attention to this reasonable understanding of Tradition and to view Redemption not only as an *external* act of Christ (that is partially true) but to understand as well that Redemption works (or even gains juridical power for us) *only in the one saving Body*. Possession or acquisition of this redeemed Body (which *potentially belongs to us* in Christ) has to be constantly and persistently assimilated all one's life long.

Ontological evidence for the evangelical teaching on Justification. There are a number of texts in the Scriptures that talk about Justification as of an already completed fact that belongs to everyone but *not separate from the one Body*. Critics of the Protestant understanding of Justification see the Church as the one saving Organism (which is true, taking into account the understanding of the salvific boundaries of the Church as the Body of humanity—Christ). They are trying to defend themselves from an “individualistic reading” of these biblical texts and from approaching Salvation as a “subjective soteriological soother”; for this reason they warn that these places cannot be used *in isolation from* general Church teaching (Tradition) about the conditions and way of Salvation. In other words, the Eastern Church, recognizing the fact that our Salvation was completely arranged in Christ, continues to stress its gradual and long-term *assimilation* by man. Here is its primary difference from the evangelical-Protestant understanding of Christ's saving grace and how it can be received.

Traditional churches do not reject the biblical teaching of Justification; they merely view Salvation and Justification as a church-wide work and approach it more *ecclesiological* and *collectively*, not individualistically. This teaches individuals to think about salvation as salvation for everyone, but only as a part of one Organism, a united spiritual community and a vessel for the saving Spirit. Such an approach allows the experience of the ecumenicity of the Body of Christ and teaches cooperative reality (or activity) of personal saving efforts in one Body *only*.

4.3. Ecclesiology: Church boundaries as the Body of Christ and the sacraments

An essential part of practical organic soteriology is the united Church Organism. This is the Body of Christ, its eternal dimension; however, in the Protestant context it is

^[26] Ia. S. Stasiak and R. Zavila, eds., *Osnovy dogmatichnogo bogoslov'ia* (L'viv: Vydavnytsvo "Misioner," 1997), pp. 134-145.

^[27] *Ibid.*, pp. 136.148–149, author's translation.

understood more as a *community of believers* (regenerated, nonconformists) where correct teaching and sacraments are presented (Magisterial Reformation); by no means is it the *gate of salvation* (traditional view). Certainly, Protestants differ in their understanding of the Church; however, in contrast to traditional ideas, they view the Church as a community of the saved and not of those who are being saved. The Spirit of God is not transmitted through the Church (its sacraments) but exclusively by faith. Therefore in Protestantism there is no question of the apostolic succession of grace in one saving church.

Protestants drew their logical conclusions from the juristic theory (complete justification in Christ) but they lack the conclusions of the organic theory. They lack understanding that there is *one* Body of Christ; one enters into the Body by means of *expansion* by the Spirit of Christ's gracious powers (which work in one Body) over a specific individual (who has a correct understanding of this reality). **This would greatly help Protestants to find a basis for their argument in favor of being called the true Church of Christ and a part of His Body** (which is constantly rejected by traditional churches). Moreover, it is helpful for radical evangelical churches which are not burdened with the "magisterial inheritance" in their understanding of the Church as a "place of conveying" true sacraments or teaching. Traditional churches doubt that there is the presence of the Spirit's gracious gifts among Protestants (never mind radical evangelical movements). In the framework of their ecclesiology salvation outside the boundaries of the Ecumenical Church is problematic. Certainly, not all "traditionalists" support the slogan that "outside the Church there is no salvation." However, one can agree even with these words of Cyprian of Carthage, on one condition only: if anyone could show the *real boundaries of the saving church*. The issue of church boundaries is a very annoying problem for the most traditional churches.^[28]

Protestants could argue in favor of their right to be called true church of Christ based on the achievements of the organic theory of Salvation. The Lord completed Redemption in His own Body; organically it belongs to all people since Christ's connection with the entire Body of humanity *was never broken*. For this reason every person has *direct* access to the results of Christ's work. Awareness of the gospel truth by faith *immediately* connects him or her to the body of Christ since from birth—*organically*—they are already in the one Body of humankind. Therefore, salvation belongs to everyone *naturally* (from birth into the Body of humanity) but is obtained *potentially* (with the growth of faith and saving changes of the will under the influence of God's Spirit). There is a paradox here: the Church's boundaries are *potential* boundaries for all humanity but in *reality* the boundaries are continuously changing, including each person who *has believed* in the Lord. Salvation is available to everyone wherever they are, however, a believer will certainly mature spiritually in a local church (according to his or her mentality, rational or mystical inclination, and calling).

^[28] It is closely related to the *poor development* of the Church teaching. Traditional churches acknowledge that, on the whole, in Christian dogmatics the teaching on the Church has remained undeveloped. The Ecumenical

Councils of the fourth to the eighth centuries were dedicated to Trinitarian and Christological issues while ecclesiology itself remained, to some degree, without any attention from the collective church conscience.

The organic influence on the sacraments (Baptism and the Lord's Supper).

The traditional churches teach that the fullness of grace abides in the human nature of Christ; through the sacraments it flows out into mystical connection between humanity and its Head. The whole life of a traditional church is related to performing the *Paschal sacrament* or the sacrament of union with the Resurrected Lord.

The organic approach is capable of influencing a nominal understanding of the sacraments in evangelical Christianity (with its emphasis on the “pledge of a clear conscience toward God” and “In *remembrance* of the Lord’s sufferings and death” correspondingly). Evangelical nonconformist movements firmly hold to a rational approach to Christianity (expressed in the literal approach to the understanding of Scripture and Christian ministry).^[29] Nevertheless, it is impossible to avoid the mystical component (as a feature of faith) if we do not wish to “fall” outside of Christian orthodoxy as a purely rationalistic sect.

The ontological vision shifts the focus from individual salvation to a collective one; salvation takes place within the framework of the Body. It follows that not one of the church rituals or sacraments can, in that dimension, have any soteriological significance by itself without an organic connection with the one Church Body. Such an approach broadens the view of the Lord’s Supper; it is not only a *Remembrance* (which leads to growth in faith) but actual mystical union with the present Christ (which is a definite “mystic migration” toward a more literal understanding of *communion*^[30]). After all, a purely rational approach, in our opinion, dilutes, to some degree, the significance of Remembrance: from understanding the real connection with the living Christ, we nominally move to a “revival of faith” in the sufferings and death of the Savior on Golgotha.^[31]

The actual filling with the saving Lord recedes into the background. It seems necessary in the light of the organic approach to “realize” our *rationalism* (in the scholastic understanding of *the universal reality of Christ’s Body*) receiving the Lord’s Supper in more *realistic* terms (or mystically-organically). This will certainly have its impact on the “degree of reverence” of the sacred action, as well as on the power of mystical-spiritual influence of the ritual on the growth of faith and on strengthening the unity of communities (owing to a stronger organic accent in Communion on participation in the *one* Body of the glorified Lord). In our opinion, the emphasis on the Lord’s Supper or on the idea of *Remembrance* or on *Communion* (both of the terms are biblical) is already evidence of the degree to which one community or another is ready to accept the organic level of the understanding of Salvation.

^[29] A purely utilitarian and nominal approach to the sacraments: they are viewed simply as factors that serve “the formation of a mental conception” (a saving faith that unites us with the Lord). In such a conceptualization, Christ’s *literal presence* and *actual infilling* with Him, if not directly excluded, then are accepted mentally only.

^[30] For instance, see the article by S. V. Sannikov on the issue of understanding the

Lord’s Supper, especially the sections entitled “Communication” and “Fellowship”: S. V. Sannikov, “Vecheria Gospodnia,” *Bogomyslie*, No. 1 (1990): 77-84; 87-91.

^[31] Actually, in practice such a vision leads to a formal participation in the Lord’s Supper, not allowing the believer to realize the *actual filling* with Christ during *Communion*. Not one of even the most correct conceptions can substitute for *literal communion* with the Creator.

4.4. Subjective soteriology: faith, sanctification, grace, freedom of the will and the extent of personal salvific efforts

Teaching on faith: organic dimension. The Reformers rejected Catholic teaching on the accomplishment of personal salvation in one Church by means of grace transmitted through the sacraments. The transmission of Christ's gracious power is performed by the Holy Spirit *directly* to every person. Therefore in personal salvation Protestants give critical importance to faith.

Organicists criticize Protestant teaching on faith for its narrow juridical approach (in their point of view). In their opinion the notion of faith is much broader than its narrow juridical understanding as *trust* in the redeeming work of Christ. In fact, they claim that the vision of faith *should flow* from a general ontological understanding of the transformation of nature by the Lord and should serve as the ultimate goal of our lives—organic union with the Savior and deification. Here faith emerges not as an external act of trust in Christ's work or simply as a "gift that connects us with the Lord" but as man's *creative act of will* (movement) directed toward the goal of connecting with Christ's power in the one organism of the Church. In this sense faith is both a gift of God and a fully *human* factor. This makes the believer *responsible for acquiring* saving faith.^[32]

Moderate juridicism and its reaction to the idea of human deification. The evangelical understanding of sanctification and its attitude to the concept of deification. For organicists it can be a surprising discovery that neither in the Protestant nor (much less) in the Catholic context were ontological tendencies in understanding salvation—and even the specific doctrine of man's deification in Christ—ever rejected:

The Catholic Church, although it does not ignore the concept of deification (which was never annulled by the Church), has instead developed the study of the cross to a greater degree, drawing the faithful more closely to the mystery of pain and love.^[33]

Protestant theology faced definite difficulties when it tries to reconcile the idea of deification with the doctrine of Justification. However,

Although in Luther's works one rarely meets the term *deification*, the main idea is organic for him. As a rule, he uses such expressions as "the presence of Christ in faith," "participation in God," "unity with God," the well-known Eastern notion of *perichoresis* and others.^[34] By a conscientious reading of Luther's texts it can be found out that idea of deification is not there by accident, but is an essential part of the whole structure of Luther's views on salvation. And although Luther does not use broadly the concept of deification, his other ideas that are connected with it leave us with no doubts that he recognized theosis as the way of salvation.^[35]

^[32] Evangelical Christians do not deny the believer's personal responsibility for developing his or her faith. What we have here is a *shift of emphasis* which can cause, in our opinion, a somewhat superficial attitude to faith among Protestants. Continual confirmation of the idea that God gives faith without *any effort*, to some degree neutralizes personal efforts in its acquisition.

^[33] P. Parente, *Bogoslov'ia Khrysta*, trans. from Italian, (L'viv: Vidavnytstvo "Strim," 1995), p. 488; author's translation and italics.

^[34] "Uchenie o spasenii v raznykh khristianskikh konfessiiakh," Seriya "Dialog," (Moscow: Bibleisko-Bogoslovskii Institut sv. apostola Andreia, 2007), pp. 97-98.

^[35] *Ibid*, p. 111.

It is agreed^[36] that nonconformists display some unexpected points of contact with the Eastern Church. Nowadays there is sufficient validating information to prove that the theological teachings of Anabaptists *do not contradict the idea of deification*:

It could even be alleged that if nonconformists did not accept the doctrine of justification in its Protestant form, their soteriological teaching, it appears, would be much closer to the main ideas of the Eastern tradition.

The Anabaptists as well as their descendants focused on the incarnation of the doctrine of sanctification much more than the Protestants, to the point that they were accused by the latter of holding to the idea of “salvation by works” ... In agreement with Eastern Christians, but in contrast to Protestants, the Anabaptists understood grace as divine transforming energy.^[37]

For instance, the Anabaptist theologian Baltasar Hubmaier often characterized Redemption as regeneration through the Spirit.^[38]

To sum up, we should add that all parallels between the doctrine of deification and the traditional evangelical teaching on sanctification may be drawn only on a proper understanding of soteriology, i.e. on the organic view of Christ’s work. Therefore it is incorrect, in our opinion, to use the terms “*deification*” and “*synergy*” in the evangelical theological environment *outside* of the ontological-organic context.

Organic foundation for the idea of “grace” and human choice. Archpriest John Meyendorff states that Protestants agree with Orthodox believers in their denial of the Catholic understanding of created and infused grace, but they disagree with both Catholics and Orthodox in their view of grace that is “external, predefined by God.” Nonconformist evangelical soteriology, as it has been argued,^[39] traditionally identifies itself with the Protestant camp more out of fear of Catholicism and accusations that salvation has to be “earned.” The Reformers criticized both traditional churches and radical Anabaptists for two reasons: the acknowledgment of free will and personal efforts in salvation. Nevertheless,

Orthodox tradition... cannot be easily related to either one of these two categories. *It does not operate at all on opposition of nature and grace.* Nevertheless, strange as it may seem, the views of Orthodox and nonconformists remain, so to speak, on one side. Neither of the two traditions denies relative freedom of will and human responsibility.. The Orthodox tradition could be helpful here in its insistence on a pneumatological orientation, on the one hand, and the synergy of God and man on the other. Certainly, such an attempt would probably lead to accusations of Pelagianism. However, Orthodox theology has nothing in common with (semi-) Pelagianism; rather it insists on another type of anthropology and on the recognition of man’s synergy with God.^[40]

It seems that the evangelical understanding of grace is “detached” to some extent; it views grace as the *external* power which God gives to the faithful “from the outside”

^[36] Ibid, pp.111-115.

^[37] Ibid, pp. 85-86.103.

^[38] Ibid, p. 104.

^[39] Ibid., p. 114.

^[40] Ibid., pp. 114-115; author’s italics.

(from Him), since (a priori) man completely lost grace at the moment of the Fall (see above). Grace comes to us from *outside*, from God, and it affects every person *individually*, as a rule, through his or her mind. The question of grace's *nature* is not raised (nominal or conceptual approach).^[41] Such a concept of grace helps Protestants in their grounding of the doctrine of Justification (God *changes His attitude* to us in Christ) and characterizes man's efforts in sanctification (more *passive participation* based on a voluntaristic understanding of grace).

Eastern theology views grace as *inner* power from God which is present in the one Church Body because of its origin or birth from Christ the Head. Grace consists of eternal energies which do not have God's nature but are of divine origin; they flow freely into everything and the world is created and held together by them. These are impersonal energies although they *become incarnated* for each individual who has prepared himself or herself to receive them. Christ is the source (according to divine nature) and the focal point (as a man) of these salvific energies.

Therefore, grace is transmitted *internally* to all members of the Body and it acts through human nature in a special way through the Sacraments and directly, *collectively* (from human to human or through the process of the church life itself). Man *accumulates* ("acquires") grace,^[42] not apart from but together with nature; that is why the attainment of grace is, simultaneously, the achievement of each individual in salvation (deification). For this reason, in the East *sanctification* was never set apart as in Protestantism; in the Orthodox faith it is inseparable from the general, eternal process of deification.^[43]

Although Orthodox believers, in our opinion, by means of exclusivist^[44] ecclesiology and their teaching on the Sacraments erect a definite "screen" against the free distribution of grace in the Body of humanity, the emphasis on the inner position of grace and its inseparability from human nature allows them to avoid both the extremes of voluntarism and accusations of Pelagianism. Moreover, the inner understanding of grace (that is organically inherent to the Body) serves as a good basis for synergy (it defines salvation as a continuous process of joint action between man and grace).

The Eastern understanding of grace allows evangelical theology to view grace not only as an external manifestation of God, but also as power inherent in the Church Body *internally*. It means that we are capable of receiving grace both individually and *from each church member*, in particular (fellowship, prayer, ministry etc.). It is transmitted to us directly through the *whole process of church life*, including ministry and sacra-

^[41] At times, the nominal approach does not look at grace simply as at "God's benevolence, a change in His attitude, a merciful look, a movement of God's will toward the sinner," etc. (The limitations of the article do not allow us to dwell further on the teaching of Grace in Protestantism.)

^[42] Here is the basis for the worship of the relics of the saints: this approach to the acquisition of grace in a person's life leads to the conviction that grace is *inseparable* from the body of the dead person (as a *genuine part of its nature*) already here

and now, and is a guarantee of its future resurrection.

^[43] From the evangelical point of view one could define the Orthodox idea of *sanctification* as an "early life stage of deification." However, this definition is incorrect: this stage is simply described by the term *salvation*.

^[44] Author's note: In particular, emphasis on the exclusivity of one's church and the way grace is transmitted is, as a rule, only within the boundaries of or through a certain "conciliar" part of the Body.

ments (and not only through preaching or teaching for acquiring the “faith concept”)^[45]

In addition, this grace organically acts in the *whole body of humankind* because of Jesus’ unity with this Body (and not just with some individual “blessed” church), and each person can freely *cooperate* with it in any moment of his or her life (by the fact of our unity with this same Body). Understandably, that vision will not support the voluntary model of the origin of grace origin and insists on more *active* (congruism) participation of man in personal salvation.

Extent of saving efforts in the framework of one organism—the Church of Christ. Correction of the ideas of gradual Salvation and sanctification. In our opinion, Protestants need not have a biased attitude to the traditional concept of *synergy*. Under the right interpretation it allows one to see personal salvation not only as an exceptional work of God (which is true) but also to realize the fullness of personal responsibility, not only for sanctification, but for salvation as a whole. Of course, it is *not a question* of a wrong understanding of Salvation by Protestants. The fullness of justification in Christ is an absolute truth. It is a question of *fullness of our responsibility* for the consequences of this truth. A one-sided explanation of the doctrine of total Justification may lead a person to self-satisfaction. That *narrows the practical aspect* of Salvation: What is the need to work on my salvation if everything is already done by Christ? The Savior’s sacrifice perfected our Salvation, and for us everything comes down as if to a “theoretical” faith in that fact. From here rises the danger of spiritual self-satisfaction and neglect of the practical side of salvation.

It is not surprising that at times Protestants appear confused in the face of their own sinful nature; the juridical theory in its demonstration of *legal justification* moves the emphasis of responsibility for salvation to God and does not provide sufficient practical means for continual victory over personal sin.^[46] By itself, knowledge of the fact of Justification *does not free* a person from slavery to the sinful nature in everyday life. The lack of a thoroughly developed teaching about the practical side of Justification—the *mechanism of the implantation of Christ’s saving power in one’s life*—is a direct consequence of the juridical explanation of salvation and its separation from the organic elements of subjective soteriology.

To some degree this can be explained through a three-level approach to the saving process in the life of a Protestant Christian (*justification – sanctification – glorification*). Here is another difference from the subjective side of the organic theory of salvation in the Eastern Church which sees in that approach an unjustified *imbalance* in our salvation toward the side of God.

^[45] Due to the scope of this article, the author does not address the issue of the *ways grace is transmitted* to each person. However, we find it excessive when these ways are reduced simply to verbal or cognitive ones. In our opinion, there is a definite drift in evangelical churches to the side of “educational and instructive” work (as a basis to church life) at the expense of one’s own mystical life of grace and experience of unity with God and other people, prayer, fellowship and sacrificial ministry.

^[46] Author’s note: At the Council of Trent the Catholics, disturbed by Protestant “extremities” and the possibility of an *antinomian* interpretation of Justification (“left soteriological drift”), emphasized greater human responsibility and participation in salvation. Interestingly, at the same time they largely changed their own subjective soteriological understanding in order to eliminate future danger of pre-Reformation *semi-Pelagianism* (“right drift”).

In our opinion, Protestants should not only concentrate their attention on the gradual character of salvation, but, in addition, learn another understanding of salvation as of *a continuous process*. In our opinion, the Bible teaches both of these approaches. Thus, we could avoid the soteriological self-comfort to which Protestants are so accustomed, as well as *pay particular attention to the practical side of salvation* (the need for a thoroughly developed, consistent teaching on different aspects of sanctification such as the ascetic teachings in traditional churches). Acquaintance with classic examples of the spiritual legacy of the fourth to seventh centuries shows that Protestantism is still far away from their practical application in life. Having despised these achievements (under the forced accusation of *self-salvation*) Protestants again have to face moral antinomianism or be lost in constant defeat before their own sinful nature.

From here begins the misunderstanding of the basics of the beginning of the Christian life, the lack of rules for the fight against “ordinary” sins, or even the lack of understanding that such a fight is necessary (after all, is salvation not already obtained *freely by faith?*). A new-born Christian is doomed to remain in the condition of a “spiritual baby” (not expecting anything more from Christianity, thinking that the normal Christian life is *what they have*). And all the while, as supporters of the traditional organic approach correctly point out, the most detailed analysis of emotional and spiritual states and experiences developed by experienced Christian ascetics is regarded as unnecessary and confusing.

This also affects the qualification of pastoral counselors. The believer’s attempts to find answers to his or her spiritual needs meets with “advice” such as “just keep on believing,” “read the Bible and pray,” “trust the Lord and the problem will be solved.” One has to invent one’s own «hermit” rules, use lots of Western translated “spiritual” literature (often of doubtful quality), and meanwhile vast treasures of national spiritual-ascetic inheritance are lying about like unused (and misunderstood) luggage.

Therefore, in our opinion, the evangelical subjective understanding of soteriology needs correction—Christ has not only saved us already, He is also saving us *through ourselves* as well.

5. Conclusions

1. A general view of Eastern ontological-organic objective soteriology and its place in the broader system of soteriological teachings

This article examined the basic, in our opinion, concept of salvation developed in the Christian East. *The main elements of this position are the following:*

- A return to the fulfillment of God’s plan concerning the *deification of all creation through Jesus Christ*;
- *Ontological level* of salvation: complete healing (restoration) of fallen human nature in Christ
- *Organic union* in the Church—the Body of Christ—of all the saved for the receiving of gracious powers in order to develop Christ’s nature in them

In our opinion, the organic view *gives a good basis for the saving work of Christ*. It can be accepted as it is, and in its fullest expression, on the ontological level, it explains the essence of Salvation.

Redemption and Justification (the juridical sides of Christ's work) flow from it and *should be based on it*, otherwise the matter of juridical understanding loses its basis. God forgives us our guilt for sin, viewing us—according to the Law—as *dead in His Son*. Our verdict was carried out in Jesus as in the combined Adam who is *one with us in the Body*; this is the main conclusion from the organic theory for juridical objective soteriology.

The next conclusion may be applied to the subjective side of Salvation. Since we are *“dead to sin through Christ's body,”* we have free access to sanctification and victory over sin.

Concerning the question of man's direct participation (our integration of salvation as of the resurrected Body of the Lord) the emphasis can vary from the theocentric point of view (God does everything through man), to a moderate anthropocentric view (man does everything by God's power). The organic approach gives good grounds for the evangelical understanding of unity and the personal connection of every believer with the Lord and Savior, since we belong to *one organism* of the Adam-Christ's Body. All life is not enough to realize this immense truth, “and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

2. Application of certain theses in evangelical theology (significance for evangelical theology)

As a result of this article, four areas of evangelical theology were defined where the thesis of Eastern soteriology could be applied. These are:

- a) *anthropology and the concept of sin* (broadening of the juridical understanding of sin as guilt to the ontological understanding as *sickness and decay* from which Jesus had to liberate us);
- b) *objective soteriology* (the organic understanding of Salvation as *the general restoration* of human nature by Christ in Himself to lay the *foundation* of the juridical approach and a more authentic understanding of Redemption and Justification);
- c) *ecclesiology* (establishing the *boundaries of salvation* in the Body of humankind; *the apology for the truth* of one's own confession—the organic basis for justification of the evangelical understanding of the Church and salvation in the Church; *a more mystical approach* to the sacraments);
- d) *subjective soteriology* (the understanding grace as *inner power* which is organically inherent to the Body of humankind; a more balanced *synergic* approach to grace; the application of both *gradual and permanent models* of personal salvation).