



John of Damascus and the use of the letters of Paul in his writing
An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith

Juan Damasceno y el uso de las cartas de Pablo en su escrito *Una Exposición Exacta de la Fe Ortodoxa*

João Damasceno e o uso das cartas de Paulo em seu escrito *Uma Exposição Exata da Fé Ortodoxa*

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Abstract: In this paper, we are going to present how John Damascenes used the Pauline Literature to make the treatise *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, mainly the part of Christology. John uses the Pauline epistles in order to speak about the Deity. God gives us the ability to know Him through a mirror. John uses more texts from Paul's epistles than texts of other Church fathers. The passages from epistles are the base for the development of John's dogmatic teaching and arguments. So, by this way, we will reach to the conclusions that the main points in the teaching of John's this work are the some of the main points in the theology of St. Paul mainly. The sin of Adam, and each one's personal sins, all men are sinners and in need of redemption. In order to save mankind, God sent his Son into the world, born of a woman. Christ communicates his grace and justifies all who believe in him, and are baptized. Christ's grace includes the sending of the Holy Spirit, which constitutes the believer as an adopted child of God. Jesus is the fulfilment of all the prophecies of the Old Testament, and has established a New Covenant to replace that of Moses; therefore, Christians are not bound by the ceremonial and dietary laws, and circumcision, contained in the Law of Moses. This insight of Paul made Christianity into a religion open to all people.

Keywords: Paul's theology – John Damascenes – Son of God – Christology – Adam – Orthodox Faith – Moses.

Resumo: Neste artigo, apresentaremos como João Damasceno utilizou a literatura paulina para redigir *Uma Exposição Exata da Fé Ortodoxa*, especialmente sua Cristologia. João se vale das epístolas paulinas tratar da Divindade. Deus nos dá a capacidade de conhecê-Lo através de um espelho. João usa mais textos das epístolas de Paulo do que

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textos de outros Pais da Igreja. As passagens das epístolas são a base para o desenvolvimento de seus ensinamentos e argumentos dogmáticos. Assim, por este trajeto, chegaremos às conclusões de que os principais pontos do ensinamento do trabalho de João são alguns dos principais pontos da teologia de São Paulo. Através do pecado de Adão e de nossos pecados individuais, todos são pecadores e precisam de redenção. Para salvar a Humanidade, Deus enviou seu Filho, nascido de uma mulher, ao mundo. Cristo comunica Sua graça e justifica todos os que creem n'Ele e são batizados. A graça de Cristo inclui o envio do Espírito Santo, que constitui o crente como filho adotivo de Deus. Jesus, cumprimento de todas as profecias do Antigo Testamento, estabeleceu uma Nova Aliança para substituir a de Moisés. Portanto, os cristãos não estão vinculados às leis cerimoniais, dietéticas e à circuncisão, contidas na Lei de Moisés. Esta visão de Paulo fez do Cristianismo uma religião aberta a todas as pessoas.

Palavras-chave: Teologia de Paulo – João Damasceno – Filho de Deus – Cristologia – Adão – Fé Ortodoxa – Moisés.

ENVIADO: 10.02.2017
ACEPTADO: 22.03.2017

I. John Damascenes and his relationship with the Byzantine tradition

John of Damascus or John Damascenes (675-749) is one of the great theologians of the Eastern and Western Church; a personage of prime importance in the history of Byzantine Theology, a great Doctor in the history of the Universal Church. He is best known for his battle against the iconoclasts in an attempt to defend and restore the use of icons and pictures of Christ to the Eastern Orthodox Church². His theological synthesis made him a preeminent intermediary between Greek and medieval Latin culture.

His father, Sarjun ibn Mansur, is mentioned by the Byzantine chronicler Theophanes for the year 690/1 as the General Logothete (treasurer)³ in the court of Caliph. So he was a Christian, but notwithstanding held a high office under the Saracen caliph, under Abd al-Malik, in which he was succeeded by his son. John is said to have owed his education in philosophy, mathematics and theology to an Italian monk named Cosmas, whom Sarjun had redeemed from a band of captive slaves⁴. The works of

² John of Damascus, *Pro Sacris Imaginibus Orationes tres*, PG 94, 1227-1419.

³ Theophanis, *Chronographia*, in Carolus de Boor (ed), t. 1 (Hildesheim, 1963), 365.

⁴ Anton Baumstark, Cosmas, *In: The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York, 1908): <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04403d.htm>

John of Damascus gave him a foremost place among the theologians of the early Eastern Church, and, it could be underlined that he was in later times one of the highest authorities in the theological literature of the Greeks. This was not because he was an original thinker but because he compiled into systematic form the scattered teaching of his theological predecessors⁵. So, he lined up with Apostolic Tradition, theological heritage of the Church; its Holy Tradition, the decisions of Council, the church fathers' work and of course the Bible⁶.

Generally, John Damascenes was a product of the general regional and international context of the East between Byzantine and Persian Empire⁷. 'Much of the interest in studying John's theology lies in attempting to understand how John and the tradition to which he belonged coped with the transition from being the religious centre of the Christian Byzantine Empire to being the site of one of the holy places of the religion of Islam'⁸. John was a Melkite theologian. He was a very Christian immersed in the Arabic world but a supporter of the Christianity of the Byzantine emperor, or malkâ in Syriac. He wrote in Greek all his works, because the transition to Arabic as the language of learning in the region had not yet been accomplished. The latter happened after many years of his death⁹.

⁵ Fulbert Cayré underlined that the authority of the Fathers as spiritual and mystical guides, as well as teachers of sacred knowledge, has always been recognized by the Church; the teaching value of their writings goes beyond the systematization of doctrine, in spite of a modern tendency to enclose them within those systems. Protestantism, in all the form it took on in the sixteenth century, appealed to the ancient witnesses of Tradition in order to introduce its innovations in the Church. See Fulbert Cayré, *The First Spiritual Writers* (London, 1959), 124.

⁶ The term Tradition is referring to the truths of the Orthodox Faith. Holy Tradition is considered to be a source of Christian faith of the same authority and standing as that of the Bible. Basilus of Caesarea summarizes this teaching of Orthodoxy in the following words: 'From the dogmas and the truth which the Church safeguards, some we have received from written teaching and some, which have secretly reached us, we received through the tradition of the apostles. Both have the same importance for the faith. And no one with even a meager knowledge of ecclesiastical teachings will raise objection... Since if we asserted that we should abandon as many practices that are unwritten, because supposedly they're not of great importance, we would damage – without realizing it – the essence of the Gospel, or rather we would transform the Gospel into a name empty of meaning'. See Basil of Caesarea, *De Spiritu Sancto*, 27, 66, PG 32, 188A.

⁷ Timothee Bacyunjuze Mushagalusa, *John of Damascus and heresiology: a basis for understanding modern heresy* (Cape of Good Hope, 2008), 98.

⁸ Andrew Louth, *St John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 6.

⁹ Francisco J. Romero Carrasquillo, 'Aquinas' Reception of John's of Damascus (Mansūr Ibn Sarjūn) Philosophy of Religious Worship' (Cordoba, 2016), 4, https://www.academia.edu/26549891/Aquinas_Reception_of_John_of_Damascus_Mans%C5%A



When John left his position at court of the Caliph and became monk in the monastery of St. Sabas in Jerusalem. He had a very good acknowledge of the teaching of Islam and of Christian theology, the theology of the Ecumenical Synods. So he had to face a new task, refining the teaching of Orthodoxy through Councils and defining it more precisely in this new situation of open controversy with Islam, this time. It should be noted that John who was not as a 'remarkable individual who was able to reduce the amorphous mass of traditional Orthodoxy to some kind of *scholastic* form, but as the culmination of a tradition of definition that had entered on a new phase a decade or so before his birth, and consequently regard his works as the high point of this phase. But Palestinian monasticism, where John belonged in, was engaged in more than a prolonged bout of controversial theology: The Faith was not just defended and defined, it was also acclaimed in the weekly celebration of the paschal mystery, and in the celebration year by year of the great events of the history of salvation'¹⁰ until the end of the century.

John had understood that the tradition was part of the Byzantine theological and political history. He believed that Christians should not overpass the divine tradition which was the pillar of theology and Christian Church¹¹. He adopted the theological tradition and explained it by this way in order to be clarified for other Christians and scholars that seeked to identify the conditions under which Christianity was likely to be perceived as relevant to contemporary political and theological problems. He followed Paul's advice to Second Epistle to Thessalonians, in which Paul urges: 'Stand firm, then brethren, and hold by the traditions you have learned, in word or in writing from us'¹². So, John presented through his teaching that the analyses of the theological tradition should be without innovations and interpretations that opposed to the Holy Scripture and fathers' and Councils' sacred deposit of faith.

II. Paul's letters in the writings of Fathers

The apostle Paul, the first after the One, influenced the thought and teaching of the Church Fathers. The patristic tradition based on Paul's literature. The shaping of Christian theology entered a Pauline age, where the figure and writings of Paul took on enormous importance from the first centuries of Church to the era of John Damascene unit today. The Church Fathers understood everything through a Pauline

[Br Ibn Sarj%C5%ABn Philosophy of Religious Worship Aquinas and the Arabs C%C3%B3rdoBa Spain 2016.](#)

¹⁰ A. Louth, *St John Damascene* (2002), 12.

¹¹ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 1, 1, PG 94, 792A.

¹² *2Thes.* 2:14.

vision. Paul was the first person to go out there to bring pagans as well as Jews into a Christian community that had its own identity. Also, he was the apostle who spoke about all the revealed truths; God's plan of redemption: *the mystery*¹³, the two Adams: Christological typology¹⁴, the antithesis of flesh and spirit¹⁵, the role of the Law¹⁶, the redeeming death of Christ¹⁷, justification by faith¹⁸, the Resurrection of Christ¹⁹, the Church as the mystical body of Christ²⁰, Holy Baptism²¹ and the Holy Eucharist²² and the Eschatology: the last things²³.

The Fathers alone preserved faithfully the true and genuine way of theologizing initially set forth by St. Paul. As Paul's true disciples, the patristic Fathers did not confuse philosophy and theology in this discrimination between theology and philosophy. They were helped by the commentaries on the Pauline epistles that they made. These commentaries served as important vehicle for the development and

¹³ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 3, 12, PG 94, 1029C; *Ibid.* 3, 28, PG 94, 1100B; *Ibid.* 4, 9, PG 94, 1124B; *Ibid.* 4, 15, PG 94, 1176A. See *Rom.* 11:25; 16:26; *1Cor.* 2:1,7; 15:51; *Eph.* 1:9; 3:3, 5; 5:32; *Col.* 1:26; 2:2; 4:3; *2Thes.* 2:7; *1Tim.* 3:9,16.

¹⁴ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 1, 8, PG 94, 817A; *Ibid.* 2, 11, PG 94, 917B; *Ibid.* 4, 11, PG 94, 961C. See *Rom.* 5:14; *1Cor.* 15:22, 15:45; *1Tim.* 2:13-14.

¹⁵ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 4, 22, PG 94, 1200BC. *Rom.* 8:1-26.

¹⁶ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 1, 1, PG 94, 792A; *Ibid.* 2, 30, PG 94, 977A; *Ibid.* 4, 9, PG 94, 1121B. See *Rom.* 2:1-19; 3:19-31; 4:13-16; 6:14-15; 7:1-25; 8:3,7; 9:31; 10:5; 13;8; *1Cor.* 9:9,20; 14:21; *Gal.* 2:19; 3-23; 4:4-5,21; 5:3-4,18; 6:2,13; *Eph.* 2:15; *Phil.* 3:5-9; *Tit.* 3:9; *Heb.* 7:5,16,28; 8:4; 9:19, 22; 10:8,28.

¹⁷ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 1, 2, PG 94, 793A. *Ibid.* 3, 1, PG 94, 984A-C; *Ibid.* 3, 15, PG 94, 1057A; *Ibid.* 4, 2, PG 94, 1102A; *Ibid.* 4, 4, PG 94, 1109AB. See *Rom.* 5:21; 6:3,4,16; 7:5,10,13; *1Cor.* 11:26; *2Cor.* 1:10; 2:16; 4:11; 7:3,10; *Phil.* 1:20; 2:8,27,30; 3:10; *2Tim.* 1:10; *Heb.* 2:9; 5:7; 7:23; 11:5, 35.

¹⁸ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 4, 26, PG 94, 1220B; *Ibid.* 3, 12, PG 94, 1029A. *Rom.* 1:17; 3:5,21-22; 6:18-20; 9:28,30; 10:3,6; 14:17; *1Cor.* 1:30; *2Cor.* 5:21; 6:14; 9:9; *Gal.* 2:21; 3:21; *Eph.* 4:24; 5:9; *Phil.* 3:6,9; *1Tim.* 6:11; *2Tim.* 2:22; 3:16; *Tit.* 3:5; *Heb.* 1:9.

¹⁹ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 3, 28, PG 94, 1100BC. *Ibid.* 4, 1, PG 94, 1104A; *Ibid.* 4, 4, PG 94, 1108BC; *Ibid.* 4, 7, PG 94, 1116A; *Ibid.* 4, 11, PG 94, 1128B-1129B; *Ibid.* 4, 13, PG 94, 1137BC; *Ibid.* 4, 14, PG 94, 1161B; *Ibid.* 4, 15, PG 94, 1168B; *Ibid.* 4, 18, PG 94, 1184B; *Ibid.* 4, 23, PG 94, 1205A; *Ibid.* 4, 27, PG 94, 1220A-1228B; See *Rom.* 6:5; *1Cor.* 15:12-13, 21, 42; *2Tim.* 2:18; *Heb.* 11:35.

²⁰ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 4, 9, PG 94, 1117B-1154B. See *Rom.* 12:4-5; *1Cor.* 10:17; 12:12-23; 25, 27.

²¹ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 4, 13, PG 94, 1136B-1125B. See *Eph.* 4:5.

²² John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 4, 13, PG 94, 1141A-1148A. See *1Cor.* 1:17; 11:23-26.

²³ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 4, 27, PG 94, 1220A-1228B. See *Heb.* 9:27; 10:27.



statement of dogmatic teaching of Fathers. Finally, the Church Fathers adopted the center of Paul's theology which is God the Father's salvation through Christ, that is God the Father's provision through the death of Christ, of a way for humans to be reconciled to himself and to lead lives that are pleasing to him.

The Fathers seek to place Pauline theology in the context of the salvific action of the triune God in the world, relates salvation to the reality of participation in Christ, and then advances the argument that Paul expected his communities, individually and corporately to participate in the mission of God. They explore Pauline biblical interpretation from the perspective of missional hermeneutics, and is thus an attempt to read the apostle Paul from the perspective of the church as a sent community. All these imply that Paul's theology and most of the fathers are primarily patrocentric, soteriological and Christological. Finally, John of Damascus was influenced by Pauline literature and used it in his every writing directly or indirectly, but mainly in his work, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*.

III. The use of the Pauline literature in the dogmatic teaching of John Damascenes in his work

III.1. The Deity is incomprehensive

The specific work of John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, is historically the first systematic and comprehensive presentation of Christian Theology from the perspective of Greek Patristics. This writing is an extensive presentation of Christian theology with rich reference to Scripture and mainly to Pauline Literature. We are not going to refer generally to what John teaches in this work generally, but the texts of Paul that are used in order to explain John's teaching about the theology of the Church.

In the beginning of John's certain writing, it is emphasized that the Deity is incomprehensive. God is incomprehensible, not in the sense that the concept of God is unintelligible, but in the sense that God cannot be fully and directly known by finite creatures, because of His uniqueness and His infinitude. Only the three Persons of the Triune God can know the divine essence. The Holy Spirit knows everything about God as the human spirit which has the acquaintance of human nature and actions²⁴. By this way John underlined that knowledge of God is beyond man's power. So it is

²⁴ 1Cor. 2:11: 'Who else can know a man's thoughts, except the man's own spirit that is within him? So no one else can know God's thoughts, but the Spirit of God'. John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 1, 1, PG 94, 789A.



clear that God is ultimately incomprehensible to us but even of supramundane powers All beings including angels and men can never fully comprehend His whole being. So, John highlighted that God's incomprehensibility lies in the fact that He is God and infinite—He is Creator and we are His creatures, and His knowability lies in the fact that He is God who has chosen to reveal Himself. Without revelation, no human being could ever assert to know God partially²⁵, and even with revelation no human being can ever say that they know God exhaustively. Therefore, all knowledge of God is dependent upon the revelation of God²⁶.

John of Damascus underlined that the knowledge of God is beyond man's power. God promised that only those who are pure of their heart can have vision of God²⁷. God is by nature beyond our sight, but He is visible in His *energeiai*, being perceived in the *idiomata* that surround Him. So, it is better for man to speak for the deeds of God but when he is going to speak about His essence, then man should be remain silent²⁸. So, On their own, human beings cannot perceive God's being and nature or God's reign and will. Nevertheless, God does not conceal Himself, but rather reveals Himself to mankind. His revelation is a declaration of divine nature, divine truth, and divine will, and is to be seen as a sign of God's love and care for mankind. When men speak of God's 'self-revelation' they understand that God grants human beings insights into His nature. God thereby makes Himself known as the Creator of heaven and earth, the Deliverer of Israel, the Reconciler of mankind, and the Maker of the new creation. However, this revelation is not only a self-revelation and expression of the divine will, but also an encounter which God grants human beings in word and sacrament²⁹.

III.2. The Triune God. One God in Trinity and Three Persons in one God

The word *trinity* is never found in the Bible some wonder about whether this is a biblical doctrine or not, but the absence of a term used to describe a doctrine does not necessarily mean the term is not biblical. In reality, due to the incomprehensible nature of the truth this term reflects, some believe it is a poor word to describe exactly what the Bible teaches us about this truth concerning God. Paul's experience gives him a theological understanding which is fundamentally Trinitarian, as is obvious

²⁵ *Ibid.* 1, 1, PG 94, 789A. 1Cor. 8:1-3.

²⁶ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 1, 1, PG 94, 789A. Rom. 1:20.

²⁷ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, Crestwood, N. York 1997, 81. 2Cor. 4:6.

²⁸ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 1, 2, PG 94, 792B. Eph. 1:17.

²⁹ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 1, 2, PG 94, 789B. Rom. 1:20-25.



from the teaching from his letters. John, based on Paul's teaching and the earlier fathers', spoke about the 'Three persons of One God'³⁰.

Paul demonstrated the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. Furthermore, Paul taught us that these three names are not synonymous, but spoke of three distinct and equal Persons through his letters. He referred that Father is God³¹. Jesus Christ, the Son is declared to be God. His deity is proven by the divine names given to Him, by His works that only God could do, upholding all things³², by His divine attributes as omnipotence³³ and by explicit statements declaring His deity³⁴. The Holy Spirit has the attributes which only God can possess like omniscience³⁵ and omnipresence³⁶ and He regenerates people to new life³⁷, which must of necessity be a work of God for only God has the power of life. Finally, His deity is evident by the divine names used for the Spirit as 'the Spirit of our God'³⁸, which should be understood as *the Spirit, who is our God*.

John of Damascus, following the theological tradition which existed in Scripture and especially in Paul's letter, referred to the Triune God. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit comprise the one God. God is the only appropriate object of worship. Angels are not to be worshipped³⁹. That God is triune from eternity is attested by the self-revelations of God within the history of salvation, which makes clear that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have existed, created, acted, and sustained from the beginning⁴⁰. Damascene's exposition of the Trinitarian doctrine starts this book with the usual theological clarification that God is incomprehensible, 'before all ages'⁴¹ and men cannot go beyond what was bequeathed to people from the Prophets, the Apostles, and the Evangelists. It is a necessary clarification, very much in line with the Christian faith that permits Christians to enter into discussion and debates, to rationalize and seek understanding, but also requires humility from every disciple, especially intellectual humility. The knowledge of God, John reminded his readers, is possible

³⁰ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 1, 8, PG 94, 825B.

³¹ *Ibid.* 1, 8, PG 94, 820B. See 1Cor. 8:6; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 4:6; Phil. 2:11. Rom. 3:30.

³² John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 4, 16, PG 94, 1169A-1176A. See Col. 1:17.

³³ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 1, 8, PG 94, 816B. See Heb. 1:3

³⁴ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 1, 6, PG 94, 804A. See Tit. 2:13; Heb. 1:8.

³⁵ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 1, 1, PG 94, 789A. See 1Cor. 2:10.

³⁶ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 1, 14, PG 94, 860A-D. See 1Cor. 6:19.

³⁷ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 3, 1, PG 94, 981A- 984C. See Tit. 3:5.

³⁸ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 1, 7, PG 94, 805B. See Cor. 6:11.

³⁹ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 2, 3, PG 94, 865A- 873B. See Col. 2:18.

⁴⁰ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 1, 8, PG 94, 808B-809A.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 1, 8, PG 94, 809B. Heb. 1:3, 1Cor.1:24; Col.1:15.



only for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The theological explorations of the mysteries of God's unity and essence are indeed an effort to comprehend not so much what God exactly is, but rather to grasp the meanings and the truths of His revelation, including the revelation of the Holy Trinity⁴².

John of Damascus underlined the matter of the co-inherence among the Godhead on the divine unity⁴³. For him the Son is the channel through whom the divine life flows eternally from the Father to the Holy Spirit and through whom also the union of the three hypostases. H. B. Swete highlights that 'Such a transcendent mystery can be apprehended by human thought and expressed by human language only in disjointed fragments of the perfect truth'⁴⁴.

Also, John explained that the Creator is the Trinity. At creation, the Father spoke the commands that caused things to come into existence. Jesus was the agent of that Creation⁴⁵ for his reason Paul said: 'For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together'⁴⁶. The Spirit of God was also involved in creation. He was the active power of God present within creation and God with the same essence of the two other Persons of Triune God, coeternal with Them.

In sum, the Trinitarian theology of Paul was the pillar for John's trinitarian Theology. People cannot know the essence of God⁴⁷, but they know His existence⁴⁸. However, because of God's revelation, we can support that God is One, one essence and that He is known and has His being in three Hypostases, in Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are one in all respects, except in

⁴² John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 1, 8, PG 94, 808B-809A. See A. Louth, *St John Damascene* (2002), 86.

⁴³ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 1, 14, PG 94, 860B: 'The abiding and resting of the Persons in one another is not in such a manner that they coalesce or become confused, but, rather, so that they adhere to one another, for they are without interval between them and inseparable and their mutual indwelling (*en allais perichoresin*) is without confusion. For the Son is in the Father and the Spirit, and the Spirit is in the Father and the Son, and Father is in the Son and the Spirit, and there is no merging or blending or confusion. And there is one surge and one movement of the three Persons. It is impossible for this to be found in any created nature'.

⁴⁴ Henry B. Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the Ancient Church* (Mac Millan, 1912), 284-5.

⁴⁵ *Heb.* 1:2. *Col.* 1:13.

⁴⁶ *Col.* 1: 16-17.

⁴⁷ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 1, 9, PG 94, 836A.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 1, 2, PG 94, 792C-793A.

that of not being begotten, that of being begotten, and that of procession⁴⁹. The self-revelation of God constitutes the basis for the doctrine of the Trinity. God's actions in history and creation are executed as the respective works of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God reveals Himself as Creator, Redeemer, Reconciler, and Maker of the new creation.

III.3. The Father God

The Father God is One, the principle and cause of all things, begotten of no one, who alone is uncaused and unbegotten, the maker of all things and by nature Father of His one and only – begotten Son, our Lord and God and Saviour, Jesus Christ and Emitter⁵⁰, ‘προβολεὺς’ of the All – Holy Spirit⁵¹. The Father is the source, from whom were all things and for whom people existed⁵². The Father, who is unapproachable to his creation, has so structured the existence of all things that he can be made known to noetic vision therein. God’s inner life, as an outreach that lies outside all created knowledge and is known only to the Trinity itself, is therefore imaged through the Son to the created order⁵³.

The term *Father*, in connection with God, is linked to aspects of His creation, authority, and loving care. God is the source and sustainer of everything He has created. In this respect, all human beings are able to address God, who is their Creator, as Father⁵⁴. He cannot be called Father without the Son. But it should not be forgotten that the Father exists simultaneously with the Son, because the God is beyond time and place. For the Father, never was when the Son was not, because the Father could not be so called without a Son. But it should not be forgotten that the Father exists simultaneously with the Son, because the God is beyond time and place.⁵⁵ Also the Father is only one and Son cannot be called Son⁵⁶.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 1, 8, PG 94, 820B.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.* 1Cor. 8:6.

⁵³ John A. McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church. An Introduction to its history, doctrine and Spiritual Culture*, (Oxford, 2008), 158.

⁵⁴ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 1, 1, PG 94, 789A.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 1, 8, PG 94, 829B.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* It is found in Isidore's of Pelusium epistles that Son is called *Father*. So, from the other names of Christ which occur in Isidore, the name *Father* is worthy of special mention. He characteristically writes ‘Christ is the creator of all, and Father, and God, and Salvator...’. On this point it should be clarified that the saint of Egypt, when he refers to the Son as the ‘Father’, he was not influenced by the erroneous belief of Monarchianians, especially by the teaching of Sabellius. The Son of God is

John based on the Hebrew Epistle, he explained how the Son is begotten of Father without time or change or passion and in manner beyond understanding, as only the God of all knows⁵⁷. Also the byzantine father argued that ‘For we may not speak of God as destitute of natural generative power: and generative power means, the power of producing from one's self, that is to say, from one's own proper essence, that which is like in nature to one's self’⁵⁸.

Finally it was underlined that the names Fatherhood, Sonship and Procession, were not applied to the Holy Godhead by human beings; on the contrary, they were communicated to us by the Godhead, as the divine Paul supported, ‘Wherefore I bow the knee to the Father, from Whom is every family in heaven and on earth’⁵⁹.

III.4. The Son God

The Son is the living, substantial, unchangeable Image of the invisible God, bearing in Himself the whole Father, being in all things equal to Him, differing only in being begotten by the Father, who is the Begetter; the Son is begotten⁶⁰. Paul's Christology is more distinct in Damascene theologian's writing. He supported that never was a time when God was not Word⁶¹. He is everlasting and perfect as His Father and possessed of all the attributes of the Begetter⁶². He has the same essence with the Father⁶³. Son and Logos of the God Father is the essential and perfect and living image of the unseen God⁶⁴.

called ‘Father of the creatures’, because He is the creator of creation through Him, the God Father created the world. Only by this explanation, Isidore calls the Son Father and he adds also the names God and Saviour for the Son. Additionally, the name Father for the first Person of the Triune God signifies God's role as the life-giver, the authority, and powerful protector, often viewed as immense, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent with infinite power and charity that goes beyond human understanding. Also, the first Person of the Blessed Trinity is called the Father because from all eternity He begets the second Person, His only-begotten Son. See. Eirini Artemi, ‘The Comparison of the Triadological Teaching of Isidore of Pelusium with Cyril’s of Alexandria Teaching’, in print in *Studia Patristica*.

⁵⁷ *Heb.* 1:3. John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 1, 8, PG 94, 816B.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 1, 8, PG 94, 812A.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 1, 8, PG 94, 820A. *Eph.* 3, 14-15.

⁶⁰ See *Col.* 1:15.

⁶¹ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 1, 6, PG 94, 804A. See *Heb.* 13:8.

⁶² John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 1, 6, PG 94, 804A. See *Heb.* 1:8.

⁶³ *Ibid.* See *Heb.* 1:3.

⁶⁴ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 1, 8, PG 94, 812A. *Ibid.* 4, 11, PG 94, 1128B. See *Heb.* 1:3-5; *1Cor.* 1, 24; *Col.* 1:15.

John of Damascus didn't intensify only the theology about the Word but also for the enfleshed Word, Christ. John taught about the two natures of Christ, enfleshed Word, which were united with each other without change or alteration, neither the divine nature departing from its native simplicity, nor yet the human being either changed into the nature of God or reduced to non-existence, nor one compound nature being produced out of the two⁶⁵. He alike in His divinity and in His humanity both is and is said to be perfect God, the same Being, and that He consists of two natures, and exists in two natures⁶⁶. He became the only one mediator between God and men⁶⁷ and by this way he reunited the man with God, after all, Christ as God is over all⁶⁸.

The Son of God is naturally God, because He is born pro – eternally by the Father – God and He is truly human, because He is born in a specific time by Virgin Mary. And again John based on the words of the Apostle Paul: ‘God sent forth His only-begotten Son, made of a woman’⁶⁹. He did not say made by a woman. Wherefore the divine apostle meant that the only-begotten incorporeal Son of God and God is the same as He who was made man of the Virgin, and that He who was born of the Virgin is the same as the Son of God and God, ‘In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily’⁷⁰.

Hence it is that the Lord of Glory is said to have been crucified⁷¹, although His divine nature never endured the Cross, and that the Son of Man is allowed to have been in heaven before the Passion, as the Lord Himself said. Also John explained the perichoresis of the two natures in Christ. As a result of this co-inherence Christ is one Therefore, the glory which naturally comes from the divinity has become common (to both natures) thanks to the identity of hypostasis; and through the flesh, humility has also become common (to both natures)..., (but) it is the divinity which communicates its privileges to the body remaining itself outside the passions of the flesh⁷². And Christ accepted everything of human nature without compulsion or necessity. ‘Everything was free: willingly He was hungry, willingly thirsty, willingly He was frightened, and willingly He died’⁷³.

⁶⁵ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 3, 3, PG 94, 988B-989A.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 3, 7, PG 94, 1008C-1112C.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 3, 6, PG 94, 1004B. 1Tim. 2:5.

⁶⁸ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 3, 26, PG 94, 1093B-1096B. See *Rom.* 9:5.

⁶⁹ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 3, 12, PG 94, 1029C. See *Gal.* 4:4.

⁷⁰ *Col.* 2:9.

⁷¹ 1Cor. 2:8.

⁷² John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 3, 15; PG 94, 1057B.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 4, 1; PG 94:1101A.

John analyzed the pauline teaching about the two Adams. The first Adam was of the earth earthy; the second Adam was Lord from Heaven⁷⁴, he does not say that His body is from heaven, but emphasizes the fact that He is not mere man. John as Paul is not so much comparing Adam and Christ as he is contrasting the effects of their respective actions; Adam's disobedience resulted in death for all who came after him, and Christ's obedience resulted in the free gift of life for all who trust in Him. However, this contrast would be meaningless without the underlying similarity⁷⁵.

Finally, John summarized the Pauline theology about the death and resurrection of Christ, interpreting this biblical theology on the light of the patristic thought of the previous century: 'Although Christ died as man, and His holy soul was separated from His most pure body, His divinity remained with both the soul and the body and continued inseparable from either. Thus, the one hypostasis was not divided into two hypostases, for from the beginning both body and soul existed in the hypostasis of the Word. Although at the hour of death body and soul were separated from each other, yet each of them was preserved having the one hypostasis of the Word.

Therefore, the one hypostasis of the Word was an hypostasis as of the Word; so also of the body and of the soul, for neither the body nor the soul ever had any proper hypostasis other than that of the Word. The hypostasis, then, of the Word is ever one, and there were never two hypostases of the Word. Accordingly, the hypostasis of Christ is ever one. And though the soul is separated from the body in space, yet they remain hypostatically united through the Word⁷⁶.

III.5. The Son Spirit

The Holy Spirit is very important part of this work of John of Damascus. He (Spirit) plays a key role in the Pauline epistles and Apostle Paul's and John's pneumatology was closely connected to their theology and Christology, to the point of being almost inseparable from them. The Spirit is God and the giver of life⁷⁷. John affirms that the Spirit is from the Father and denies that the third Person of the Triune God is from the Son. The procession of the Holy Spirit is different from the generation of the Logos, despite both coming forth perfectly from the Father.

⁷⁴ 1Cor. 15:47.

⁷⁵ Rom. 5:12.

⁷⁶ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 3, 27; PG 94:1097AB.

⁷⁷ 1Cor. 15:45.



Damascene exhibited great caution here. He explained that ‘only the Son is begotten, for He is begotten, for He is begotten of the substance of the Father without beginning and independently of time. And only the Holy Spirit proceeds: not begotten, but proceeding from the substance of the Father’⁷⁸. The distinction between generation and procession, according to John of Damascus, ‘is the teaching of Sacred Scripture, but as to the manner of the begetting and the procession, this is beyond understanding’⁷⁹. And John’s of Damascus added ‘that the Holy Spirit is not the Son of the Father but the Spirit of the Father as proceeding from the Father. For there is no impulse without Spirit. And we speak also of the Spirit of the Son, not as through proceeding from Him, but as proceeding through Him from the Father. For the Father alone is cause’⁸⁰.

The biological beginning of Jesus Christ is due to the Spirit. The Spirit is the principle of communion because Love, which is poured out into our hearts by the Spirit, of He very nature unites⁸¹. The Spirit is the principle of unity and communion, because the unity of the Church is a grace and gift of God, and this grace is bestowed continuously on man just as life and existence are bestowed on him.

Just as the Spirit of God is life-giving, it is also leading us to truth and freedom. In experiencing forgiveness, one experiences God as the one who forgives and loves. Forgiving is the deepest activity of the Divine. God communicates himself to the heart of man as forgiveness. He manages the replacement of the heart of stone with a heart of flesh⁸² and enlightens the human mind. When the intellect has been freed in this way from the passions we have described and been raised up to God, it will henceforth live the life of blessedness, receiving the pledge of the Holy Spirit⁸³. And when it departs this life, dispassionate and full of true knowledge, it will stand before the light of the Holy Trinity and with the divine angels will shine in glory through all eternity.

As a conclusion, it should be underlined that the Holy Spirit is believed to present specific divine attributes in the life of Christians or the Church. Also He deified believers; that means that the Holy Spirit dwells within Christian believers and transforms them into the image of God in Christ, eventually endowing them in the

⁷⁸ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 1, 8, PG 94, 814A.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 1, 8, PG 94, 816A.

⁸⁰ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 1, 12, PG 94, 844C.

⁸¹ *Rom.* 5:5.

⁸² *2Cor.* 3:3.

⁸³ *2Cor.* 1:22.



resurrection with immortality and God's perfect moral character. The Holy Spirit so knows the things of God as the spirit of the man knows the things that are in him⁸⁴.

Conclusions

Saint John of Damascus (c. 676-749) is a pretty amazing man, priest, and Father of the Church. The knowledge of God, John reminded his readers, is possible only for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And as we will see, the theological explorations of the mysteries of God's unity and essence are indeed an effort to comprehend not so much what God exactly is, but rather to grasp the meanings and the truths of His revelation, including the revelation of the Holy Trinity⁸⁵.

John found necessary to clarify how these three—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—are possible in such a Deity that is 'simple' and 'uncompound'. Being unable to understand God's essence, Damascene suggests us to keep in mind the most important thing—that God exists, but he is 'above all existing things, nay even existence itself'. Damascene used a very interesting word about the modes of God's existence. He says that God cannot be visible or having specific shape. Also he explained that the difference in nature between God and His creatures, as well as the distinction between the 'natural' generation of the Son by the Father, and creation 'by act of will', is emphasized by John of Damascus⁸⁶.

Christ for John's teaching is the second Adam: He delivered our nature from the sin of our first parent and death and corruption, and became the first-fruits of the resurrection, and made Himself the way and image and pattern, in order that we, too, following in His footsteps, may become by adoption what He is Himself by nature⁸⁷.

In this paper, it isn't exposed the whole teaching of John of Damascus in his work 'An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith', only the parts that had accepted a great influence by the Pauline literature. John's exposition of the faith is a synthesis of phrases and concepts taken from the previous Fathers' writing and of Paul's epistles⁸⁸.

⁸⁴ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 1, 1, PG 94, 789A. 1Cor. 2:11.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 1, 8, PG 94, 812D -813A.

⁸⁷ John of Damascus, *Expositio Accurata Fidei Orthodoxae*, 4,11, PG 94, 961C. See *Rom* 7:17.

⁸⁸ Lionel R. Wickham, 'Review of Ronald E. Heine, *The Commentaries of Origen and Jerome on St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) Andrew Louth, *St John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 58 (2005), 491-497, 496.



As far as the Holy Spirit, He is the third person of Triune God. He enlightens the mind of people in order to understand the divine truth which is revealed to them. He has his procession in the Father, his unique divine source.

By all these, it is undoubtful that John Damascene was influenced by the epistles of Paul as many other fathers of Church before and after him. He adopted with a fertile way the teaching of the Church Fathers and the decisions of Council; but his teaching revealed the Orthodox Christianity through his works which are heritage for the believers in Christ and all scholars who deal with Christian theology.

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