

# **The Mystery of Divine Love in the Apophatic Theology of Bishop George Khodr<sup>†</sup>**

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## **I. Introduction: Bishop George Khodr and Orthodox Apophatic Theology**

George Khodr, the Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Mount Lebanon, rekindles and reawakens the Christian theological flames of the early centuries that present the primordial and the simple Christian message of divine love.

The Mystery of divine love, as it is presented in this article, has been approached through the spectacles of the Patristic tradition to which George Khodr has remained faithful. Khodr has called for a revival of the Orthodox tradition, inspired mainly through the writings of the Russian Orthodox émigrés. It is possible to trace Khodr's engagement with Russian theology to the period of his study in the Institut de Théologie Orthodoxe Saint-Serge in Paris. And it is in this wider context of Orthodox Theology that one can perceive the Mystery of love, presented by Khodr, as I shall attempt to do in this paper.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Khodr makes use of the patristic tradition, Russian theology and even some social-philosophical contributions throughout centuries in his writings on divine love. This is why

For over fifty years Metropolitan Khodr has been writing weekly newspaper articles,<sup>2</sup> through which he addresses the contemporary Lebanese human predicament, providing a spiritual guidance and a corrective interpretation of the social-existential concerns. Through the topic of love, e.g., Khodr addresses questions on marital love, love of neighbor and the love of God, by way of a theological-philosophical discourse. His genre of article writing challenges the abstract theological constructions of most systematic theology. Theology, in the Orthodox understanding, is not an academic enterprise; it reflects both the personal and the communal life of faith and prayer.

Thus, Khodr's theology is defiantly a spiritual theology.<sup>3</sup> In an article he says: "I write that I may be purified, that I may approach God who orders me to write, that I may express His word, not a word emerging from human desires."<sup>4</sup>

In order to understand what is meant by apophatic theology, it is important first to begin with the notion of 'divine Mystery'. The concept of 'divine Mystery' is essential to Khodr's thought and to Orthodox theology as such. God is beyond human comprehension and

several references are made to different sources throughout this article, which directly or indirectly appear in Khodr's writings.

<sup>2</sup> Most of Metropolitan Khodr's articles on "divine love" referred to in this article come from later writings in relation to the whole corpus of Metropolitan Khodr's works. There are a few references in early articles, but they mainly address general theological questions. For reference see: <http://www.georgeskhodr.org/home.html> [All translations from Arabic are mine].

<sup>3</sup> It is important here to note that mystical/spiritual theology, in its Orthodox understanding, is not individualistic or personal; rather, it is grounded in the involvement and the experience of the Eucharistic community. It reflects the believer's undertaking to live according to divine truth.

<sup>4</sup> G. Khodr, "Limādzā aktob?" [Why do I write?], *An-nahār*, 31.07.2010.

knowledge and is inaccessible to human rational faculties. It is not possible to learn about God and acquire faith as one studies mathematics or sciences.<sup>5</sup> Intellectual greatness and external display of knowledge are unable to endow the person with meaning. Referring to the Patristic tradition, mainly to the spiritual theology of Gregory of Nyssa (335-395), Khodr, in most of his articles, maintains the impossibility of describing the essence of God. All human knowledge of God is the knowledge of God's works, or energies, rather than the knowledge of God's essence, while God's essence remains the incomprehensible Mystery.<sup>6</sup> One can approach divine Mystery only through prayer and contemplation which belong to the realm of the heart and the spirit.<sup>7</sup> In a recently published article "*Allāh Maḥabba*" [God is love] Khodr refers to the biblical verse Ex. 3:14 in which God replies to Moses' question about the divine name, saying: "I am who I am". Khodr comments that the biblical statement "I am who I am" does not refer to the essence of God; rather it refers to an act in God, a movement within God's people.<sup>8</sup> God moves toward God's people in love and compassion so that the people may move and dispose

<sup>5</sup> G. Khodr, "*Al-maḥabbah maṣraḥan lilīmān*" [Love: a cradle of faith], *An-nahār*, 15.05.1999.

<sup>6</sup> G. Khodr, *Al-ru'yah al-'urthūdūkstiyah lil-lāh wal-insān* [The Orthodox View of God and the Human Being], (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-nūr, 1982), pp. 7-8.

<sup>7</sup> Khodr writes: "Love does not replace the mind; rather it elevates it to itself. [Love] does not abort the mind but it transcends and purifies it so that it may give up all distortion and instability, and may become an instrument for discerning God." G. Khodr, "*al-maḥabbah kaiklīl wa faḥwā*" [Love as crown and core]. *An-nahār*, 02.09.2011. In the same article Khodr makes reference to B. Pascal's ascending "orders" of human existence, "the level of bodies, the level of minds and the ultimate level of love". See also: G. Khodr, "*Amwār 'ala al-'aqel*" [Lights on the mind], *An-nahār*, 08.03.2007. Thus, it is only when the mind descends to the heart that it may be purified.

<sup>8</sup> See the similarity with Bulgakov's interpretation of the same verse as denoting a "living identity", rather than an "abstract self-consciousness". S.N. Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), pp. 89-90.

themselves toward God in obedience. Thus it is possible to know God in God's relationship to the people. Every attribute of God, such as righteousness, justice, power, fatherhood is an attribute of the work of God in relation to human nature. Even when one speaks of God as "The Father of Jesus Christ" it is a description of a movement in God.<sup>9</sup>

Human language falls short of describing divine essence, hence the need for an apophatic<sup>10</sup> or negative theology.

Khodr presents apophatic theology as a fundamental dimension of Christian theology in an early work *Al-ru'yah al-urthūdhūksiyah lil-lāh wal-insān* [The Orthodox view of God and the human being] which was originally delivered in a lecture-series within the context of the Orthodox Youth Movement in the year 1960. Khodr follows Gregory of Nyssa, Dionysius the Areopagite (5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> century) and Maximus the Confessor (580-662) who maintained the apophatic nature of theology. Apophatic theology considers all theological language as limited and unable to convey divine truth as such. Apophatic theology maintains the analogical nature of all theological assertions. God is 'not' what one describes God to be. It is by negating all that is sensible and rational that one may transcend to the stage of ignorance and only then one can know God in love.<sup>11</sup> Thus the deeper sense of apophaticism implies a union with God that is based on mystical grounds rather than propositional-cognitive ones.

Hence, apophatic/negative theology must accompany any affirmative theological claim. Without the possibility of apophaticism

<sup>9</sup> G. Khodr, "Allāh mahabbah" [God is Love], *An-nahār*, 21.01.2012.

<sup>10</sup> The term 'apophatic' comes from the original Greek: *apophanai* 'to say no'.

<sup>11</sup> G. Khodr, *Al-ru'yah al-'urthūdhūksiyah lil-lāh wal-insān* [The Orthodox View of God and the Human Being], pp. 10-11.

in theology, theology may end up in error, since it may be thought of as describing Reality as such, while any theological assertion falls short of the reality of God. It is the move between assertive theology and negative theology that guarantees the true incomprehensible nature of God, so that a more faithful theology is made possible.

## **II. Divine love: Divine Descent and Human Ascent**

### **A. “God is Love”**

After almost two millennia of writing down the biblical, particularly Johannine phrase “God is love”, the phrase somehow has lost its significance and profound power and has been stripped of its potential meaning and sense of mystery. It might be possible to remark that in our modern times and societies divine love is no longer considered a *mysterium*. Even within ecclesial communities, most creeds and doctrines are taken for granted and have lost the essential purpose of their existence, which is to testify to the divine Mystery.

The notion of divine love is behind all theological conceptions of creation, revelation, incarnation, redemption and the Orthodox teaching on deification. Without a loving God creation, the universe and human existence would be incidents of expansion and evolution that lack significant goal, possible cohesion and theological meaning.

In the same article mentioned earlier Khodr says that the only name given to God in the Bible is “love” (1 John 4:8). This is not a divine attribute, he writes, rather the very name of God., Godself.

“Love gives content to the word ‘God’; it expresses the divine work in Christ”.<sup>12</sup>

“[Love] is the name of God ... above which no other name comes, since God shapes you out of God’s love ... and endows you with feelings of love. Thus you may be united with the whole of humanity which forms the sphere of divine descent.”<sup>13</sup>

Writing on love and friendship, Khodr makes a very bold claim: “God is love in God’s essence and not only in God’s attributes. God is love in Godself and in God’s work.”<sup>14</sup> This is the only article, to my knowledge, where Khodr refers directly to divine essence as love. Thus, divine love is the ground and the motive behind all divine action in relation to creation. It is the origin and the locus of the divine mind and therefore of all intellects and reason throughout all cultures and times. Though doctrines and creeds are different, yet love is one.<sup>15</sup>

Divine-human communion is the core element of Khodr’s theology; theological reflection begins and ends with it. Love is a divine gift of Godself, a gift which needs a corresponding inclination or tendency in human nature to love. Further, there is in the human being the longing to become the object of divine love and the

<sup>12</sup> G. Khodr, “*Allāh maḥabbah*” [God is Love], *An-nahār*, 21.01.2012. In the same article Khodr writes: “Love is the moving unity that gives life to all human beings. God is near to human beings ... and by the love of God and the love of the neighbor all may rise and unite with God.”

<sup>13</sup> G. Khodr, “*Limādzā aktob?*” [Why do I write?], *An-nahār*, 31.07.2010.

<sup>14</sup> G. Khodr, “*Bayn al-maḥabbah wal-ṣadāqah*” [Between Love and Friendship], *An-nahār*, 26.01.2008

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

tendency to communion, which makes the human partaking in God possible.

The experience of divine love unifies the whole of one's life; it is the experience most internal within the person yet never subject to any human limitation. It transcends and liberates the human being and grants him/her the freedom that is never dependent on anything beside itself.

However, divine love would not be experienced or received without God's coming to the human being. Thus it is important to speak about divine descent.

## **B. Divine Descent: Creation, Incarnation and The Cross**

Divine love meets the human reality through creation, incarnation and the continuous descent of God to the human beings through the divine words [الكلمات].

According to Khodr, creation is the work of God and the result of God's will and love. However, the ideas, words, and purposes of creation (*λόγοι*) are eternally present in God's mind. Those words are dispersed and scattered throughout the universe, as Maximus the Confessor maintains.<sup>16</sup> To put it in Trinitarian terms, the ideas, or the divine purposes of creation, are present eternally in the second person of Trinity - the *Logos*. The human subject is created with a dynamic principle that enables one to attain his/her *logos* (meaning, reason or purpose in life).

“God throws the divine words into the human heart — the words of divine revelation — and whenever you receive the divine words, they become your own reality and you

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<sup>16</sup> G. Khodr, “*Anwār ‘ala al-‘aqel*” [Lights on the Mind], *An-nahār*, 08.03.2007.

become theirs, hence no rift may separate you from God.”<sup>17</sup>

Thus, it is through divine words that God comes to the human being and the human being, in his/her turn, moves toward God. In a pure sense it is possible to say that divine words are nothing else than all the means and the ways through which God comes to the human being, making it possible for him/her to return to God.

In his “The Word and the Flesh” Khodr sees in the incarnation of God the very seeds of human salvation. God does not dwell somewhere up in heaven, rather it is in human nature that the divine resides. God’s very self is poured forth through the Holy Spirit into the human being in such a way that the human subject is in partnership with God. In this context, Khodr uses the word *laṣīq* (which may be translated as tangent or adherent) to describe God’s relation to the human being from the time of creation.<sup>18</sup> Through giving Godself and giving the divine words in the very act of creation, God becomes part of the human reality. Thus, divine Mystery becomes a concealed nearness, a forgiving assurance, something intimate which one can approach as one experiences triviality and estrangement in one’s empty life, thus the real home of the human subject. Khodr writes:

“Between God and the human inner reality there is a state of intimacy. ... God is independent from the human

<sup>17</sup> G. Khodr, “*Al-maḥabbah maṭraḥan lilīmān*” [Love: a Cradle of Faith], *An-nahār*, 15.05.1999.

“يقذف الله الى قلبك بكلمات هي منه واياه ينكشف فيها وتقره كاملا واذا انت تقبلتها تصيرك وتصيرها فلا يبقى بينك وبينه هوة.”

<sup>18</sup> G. Khodr, “*Al-kalimah wal-jasad*” [The Word and the Flesh], *An-nahār*, 29.03.1987; G.

Khodr, “*Yā ‘ishqī al-maṣlūb*” [O My Crucified Love], *An-nahār*, 02.04.2010.

subject, yet at the same time part of its inner reality. If this was not the case, then God would become a thing like any other object...

Does God for whom you long exist in reality? I doubt that an answer can be found apart from the inner affinity that binds the human depth to the divine. Your heart is the last evidence, the last revelation ... because God dwells in the heart."<sup>19</sup>

Both creation and incarnation can be described as the continuous will of God to come to and be united with the human being in the form of love that gives itself. Hence, incarnation is more than a single historical event. It is as if the whole cosmos suffers, and from all the pains and the labors of the world Christ is born. It is possible then to say, according to Khodr, that the whole world is the mother of Christ. Thus, Christ comes from the world and not only from heaven. Christ is in a dynamic movement. He descends from heaven and also ascends from the world.<sup>20</sup> The movement is then two-dimensional and it indicates both God's transcendence and intimacy to human nature.

Khodr continues to write about these two elements of divine Mystery. Beside divine imminence, nearness and self-communication divine transcendence is essential. By bringing these two paradoxical elements together the deeper meaning of apophaticism in theology is perceived, thus the antinomic being of God. Divine love, he explains,

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<sup>19</sup> G. Khodr, "*Al-mahabbah majrahan lilimān*" [Love: a Cradle of Faith], *An-nahār*, 15.05.1999.

<sup>20</sup> G. Khodr, "*Al-masth al-kawnf*" [The cosmic Christ] in C. Bandali and other Authors, *Madkhal 'ila al-'aqidah al-masthiyyah* [Introduction to Christian Doctrine] 4<sup>th</sup> edition. (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-nūr, 1988), pp. 194-195.

requires unity but not confusion (or dissolving) [*inṣihār*]. “Between you and God there is unity without confusion ... a unity that does not deny God to be Creator and you a creature.”<sup>21</sup> By affirming this, it is as if Khodr is trying to safeguard theology from pantheistic interpretations. Human beings are deified by participation, i.e., a union without confusion, each side maintaining its unique hypostatic reality. Thus love is not strange to human beings, yet at the same time it comes from above. God bestows God’s love on all.

Divine love is fully received and given in and through Christ, since in Christ the human and the divine, the body and the spirit reach their complete self-actualization to the very extent of giving the self, the ever highest expression of love. Christ’s limitless love of the world appears, according to Khodr, in his openness to God and his willingness to accept ‘the darkness of incarnation’ which itself implied suffering and self-emptying and foresaw the descent into death on the cross.<sup>22</sup>

By the incarnation the Son is claimed to be the manifestation of the Father, revealing divine love and mercy toward humankind. Hence, through Christ every human being receives sonship of and partnership with God. Through divine descent love is made possible. It is important here to reflect on knowledge and love as the means for self-fulfillment for the sake of a true human-divine communion.

### C. Knowledge and Love: The Way for Self-Fulfillment

<sup>21</sup> G. Khodr, “*Al-wathaniyyah wal-tawhīd*” [Monotheism and Paganism], *An-nahār*, 02.06.2007.

<sup>22</sup> G. Khodr, “*Al-faṣṣhu aydan wa aydan*” [Easter Again and Again], *An-nahār*, 05.05.2007; G. Khodr, “*Al-kalimah wal-jasad*” [The Word and the flesh], *An-nahār*, 29.03.1987.

The divine-human union presumes the self-fulfillment of the one with and through the other. The self-fulfillment of the object known is not possible without it being known by the knowing subject, and the completion of any reality, and of being as such, takes place through knowledge and love, i.e., through being known and loved by another. It is not the case that God is indifferent to the human act of knowing and loving God; rather, Godself is involved in the human reality and its self-fulfillment. Similarly, one never actualizes oneself without it being known and loved by God, since the very possibility of being known and loved by another determines one's true existence and marks its completion. Khodr writes: "[Love] may entail death for the sake of the other ... In love one remains oneself however poured in the other, to the extent of losing the self in its union with the other."<sup>23</sup>

The very possibility of existence is the result of being loved. "We live in communion", writes Khodr, "everyone of us knocks on another's heart so that it may receive him/her and he/she may exist in it... You are open, then you exist, since tenderness is the beginning of existence. ... Anything else is an intellectual and emotional drought."<sup>24</sup> Hence, one does not really exist until one is loved by another; otherwise one is only a physical existence and a mental confusion. Khodr writes again: "I do not exist alone. I exist whenever another loves me... [However] there must be one who embraces both [the loving and the loved one], one who liberates both and that is God. For a unity there must be always a triad",<sup>25</sup> says Khodr, using

<sup>23</sup> G. Khodr, "*al-mahabbah kaiklil wa fahwa*" [Love as Crown and Core], *An-nahār*, 02.09.2011.

<sup>24</sup> G. Khodr, "*Al-anāwīyyah aw 'ishq alanā*" [Selfishness or the Love of the Self], *An-nahār*, 04.09.2004.

<sup>25</sup> G. Khodr, "*Al-bnā wal-ākhar*" [The I and the other], *An-nahār*, 22.09.2007.

Trinitarian language within a new setting and conveying through it a new meaning to which I will refer in the last part of this article. Thus Khodr maintains the mysterious association between the human nature and God. All human expressions of love are penetrated and permeated by divine love. Hence, God is present in every true love and true existence.<sup>26</sup>

“I am loved, therefore I am. ... One cannot live without him/her being loved by another who is perfect. All the love expressions that come from imperfect others are only provisional consolations, in the sense that they leave the person with drought and great crave. This is why as our days proceed we move from one desert to another.”<sup>27</sup>

In this sense the whole creation has the inner dynamic drive to fulfill itself by being known and loved by God.<sup>28</sup> Love assumes knowledge, and, in the exchange of knowledge and love, salvation takes place. Divine love, whenever accepted and responded to by human beings, occasions salvation. Salvation in this sense is love.

#### D. “Love: A Cradle of Faith”<sup>29</sup>

Khodr differentiates between two distinct meanings of ‘love’ in the Greek language: *agápe* which refers to divine love toward the

<sup>26</sup> G. Khodr, “*Ibdā’ al-lāh wa Ibdā’ anā*” [The Creativeness of God and of Ours], *An-nahār*, 10.11.2007.

<sup>27</sup> G. Khodr, “*Al-maḥbūbiyyah*” [Being loved], *An-nahār*, 13.03.1999.

<sup>28</sup> See on this point: John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985), p. 19.

<sup>29</sup> This is a title of an article by G. Khodr: “*Al-maḥabbah maṭraḥan liṭīmān*” [Love: a Cradle of Faith], *An-nahār*, 15.05.1999.

human, the human love of God and the fraternal, brotherly love to one another, and *éros* which refers to the human love of another with passion, and he uses the words *shawq* (desire) and *'ishq* (affection, fondness) to translate *éros*. *Éros*, however, is rarely used to describe the love of God as in the two Old Testament books: Song of Solomon and Hosea.<sup>30</sup> While *éros* mostly denotes the lover's possession or control of the other, *agápe* is the gift of the heart to the other. It is the gift of Godself that one gives to another whenever one receives it from God.

In an article entitled "On Love, Passion and Fidelity" Khodr does not renounce the human body or the natural human love. Love admits all physical expressions and desires as long as they are wedded truly to love.<sup>31</sup> The body is part of God's creation; hence it reflects the divine image. *Éros*, however, may fade away without divine love which descends on the human being from the very heart of God. In many articles Khodr refers to the contemporary turbulent society, characterized by infidelity, deceit, greed and sensual gratification and urges for both spiritual and physical wholeness and faithfulness in love. Following Maximus the Confessor Khodr warns of *éros* as it may result in the love of the self.<sup>32</sup> Through loving one's own self one ruins one's true existence and spiritual reality.<sup>33</sup> Thus, human beings

<sup>30</sup> G. Khodr, "*Al-mahabbah wal-shawq*" [Divine Love and Passion], *An-nahār*, 12.06.2011.

<sup>31</sup> G. Khodr, "On Love, Passion and Fidelity" [The original Arabic: "*Min al-hob ila al-mahabbah al-zawjiyyah*"] in *Adyan*, Issue 1, 2011, p.17.

<sup>32</sup> G. Khodr, "*Al-ānā*" [The I], *An-nahār*, 11.06.2011. Khodr refers to B. Pascal who claimed that "the self is hateful." B. Pascal, P. Kreeft, *Christianity for Modern Pagans: Pascal's Pensées edited, outlined, and explained*. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), p. 159.

<sup>33</sup> G. Khodr, "*Al-anāwiyyah aw 'ishq alānā*" [Selfishness or the Love of the Self]. *An-nahār*, 04.09.2004. In this article Khodr makes a direct reference to Maximus the Confessor. Cf. Maximus the Confessor, Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, 91 (Paris, 1865), "To John the

yearn to worship their own selves, their own power and beauty. They create gods according to their own desires; this is what paganism is all about. Khodr continues to explain that the human heart is a battlefield between the one God and the many gods of human desires.<sup>34</sup>

In one's response to the divine bestowal within the human self, one is rather oriented through love and virtues to move beyond oneself toward the other and toward the infinite Mystery.

Divine love elevates the human love and the marital companionship from coexistence to the divine presence. In this sense *agápe* is higher than *éros*. However, *agápe* does not exclude or deny *éros*. *Agápe* preserves and protects *éros*, and without *agápe*, *éros* is in danger of turning to the love of self. Through *agápe* a holistic regard of the other is made possible rather than mere physical attraction. This holistic regard of the other is essential and in this regard only love may be accompanied with responsibility toward the loved one.<sup>35</sup>

Khodr refers to the verse from Ephesians 5:25 in which the apostle Paul uses *agápe* in addressing the husbands: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ **loved** the church and gave himself up for her".<sup>36</sup> Thus, divine love alone sanctifies the marital companionship,

Cubicularius", 396 D. Cf. A. Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 84.

<sup>34</sup> G. Khodr, "Al-wathaniyyah wal-tawhīd" [Monotheism and paganism], *An-nahār*, 02.06.2007.

<sup>35</sup> G. Khodr, "On Love, Passion and Fidelity" in *Religions*, Issue 1, 2011, pp. 15-16; "Al-zawāj fi riwālen masīhīyyah" (Marriage in a Christian Perspective), *An-nahār*, 04.08.2007.

<sup>36</sup> The original Greek reads: "οἱ ἄνδρες ἀγαπάτε τὰς γυναῖκας καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἠγάπησεν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν καὶ ἑαυτὸν παρέδωκεν ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς".

while the key element in divine love is the giving of one's self for the sake of the other as Christ gave himself up for the Church.<sup>37</sup>

In his concern for the quality of love, Khodr emphasizes the importance of deep and pure love of God that is more powerful than all love for earthly things. The human love of God may be a passionate love which conveys an "intense longing for God".<sup>38</sup> As was said earlier, *éros* is also used, though infrequently, in the Old Testament and also in Khodr's writings<sup>39</sup> to describe the love of God toward humanity or the human love of God. Such passionate love expresses the mystery of divine love. It is an incomprehensible yearning for God, a losing of oneself in God. In this sense, and most truly in this sense, the mystery of divine love reflects divine Mystery. Thus, both the human and the divine have not been deprived of the irrational parts of their being. Both the human and the divine share the same Mystery of love. Thus God bends in love to the human being and the human being inclines to God in love. In an article "*Yā 'ishqī al-maṣlūb*" [O my crucified love] Khodr uses the word *'ishq éros* to describe his love of Christ:

"O Jesus, 'my crucified love'. Before they hang you on a cross, you were hanged on our sins. ... We behold you now ... bloody and pierced, but not broken, the locus of divine love. You resolve our transgressions with your

<sup>37</sup> G. Khodr, "On Love, Passion and Fidelity" in *Religions*, Issue 1, 2011, pp. 15-17, 19; G. Khodr, "*Al-marāh*" [The Woman], *An-nahār*, 27.08.2011; G. Khodr, "*Al-mahabbah wal-shawq*" [Divine Love and Passion], *An-nahār*, 12.06.2011.

<sup>38</sup> See the similarity with Maximus the Confessor, *Centuries on Love* II. 48. Cf. A. Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, p. 41.

<sup>39</sup> See on this point: G. Khodr, "*Al-kāhen mutazawweg am 'āzeb*" [The Priest: Married or Celibate?], *Majallat annūr* 3, 1995; G. Khodr, "*Hawla ta'mid al-adab wal-fan*" [On Art and Literature], A lecture delivered in Saint George Monastery on 26.08.1991.

body without condemning us, because your heart does not tolerate that in it a person dies.”<sup>40</sup>

Thus, love is the cradle of faith. Love is the highest Christian virtue. It is the cradle of faith, hope, humility, meekness, gentleness, mercy, self-control, patience, kindness, long-suffering, peace and joy. It is as if love supplies faith with the reality that it believes, and hope by the proximity of what it hopes, and joy by the delight of divine presence.<sup>41</sup>

### E. Human Ascent: Deification

Creation, incarnation and deification [ἁγίωσις, التاله] are complementary to one another, all pointing to the sublime eternal experience of divine-human union. Through creation and incarnation God comes to the human being in love, while through deification the human being is clothed entirely with love and brought to rest in God. Khodr writes:

“From the beginning God is love. And if you come from love you descend from God and you live God’s divine nature within the limits of your particular nature, which is called to attend to the divine energies that sanctify you.

<sup>40</sup> G. Khodr, “Yā ‘ishqī al-maṣlūb” [O My Crucified Love], *An-nahār*, 02.04.2010. In his “*Bayn al-maḥabbah wal-ṣadāqah*” [Between Love and Friendship], *An-nahār*, 26.01.2008, Khodr makes reference to Ignatius of Antioch, one of the Apostolic Fathers (1-2<sup>nd</sup> centuries), who addressed Christ as Eros: “Christ, my Eros, has been crucified”. See also: G. Khodr, “*Al-ḥub al-baṣharī wal-ḥub al-ilāhī*” [Human and Divine Love], *An-nahār*, 04.09.1993.

<sup>41</sup> See on this point: Maximus the Confessor, Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, 91 (Paris, 1865), “To John the Cubicularius”, 393 C, D. Cf. A. Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, pp. 82-83.

Through sanctification you live on the earth but become free of its yoke ...<sup>42</sup>

Khodr describes human reality as inseparable from God. Divinity does not descend onto human beings from without; rather the two are united in a relationship of mysterious interpenetration. Khodr says: "... I write to arouse the readers to the truth that is in them, so as they know that they are deified".<sup>43</sup> Hence divinity exists in the inner construction of the human being and apart from it any human existence is inconceivable. Love has a deifying power; it brings the human reality into union with the divine, breaking down all barriers and transcending the human being into the divine glory.

Khodr seems to echo the words of Maximus the Confessor who wrote in the 7<sup>th</sup> century saying:

"For I know quite certainly that your holy soul is indissolubly bound to my wretchedness in the spirit through love ... nothing is more Godlike than divine love, nothing more mysterious, nothing more apt to raise up human beings to deification. For it has gathered together

<sup>42</sup> G. Khodr, "*Al-mahabbah wal-shawq*" [Divine love and passion], *An-nahār*, 12.06.2011. The original Arabic:

"بدء البدايات أن الله محبة وإذا جنت منها تكون ناراً من عند الله. وتحيا لاهوته في إطار طبيعة لك هي مدعوة دائما أن تبصر القوى الإلهية التي تلتصقك. وبالقداسة أنت في الأرض تتحرر من نير الأرض وليس من صعود جغرافي إلى السماء."

<sup>43</sup> G. Khodr, "*Limādzā aktob?*" [Why do I write?], *An-nahār*, 31.07.2010.

"من هذا الاتحاد بيننا وبينه أكتب لأوقف الناس إلى الحق الذي فيهم، ليعرفوا أنفسهم الهيين أو متاهلين."

The word has an Islamic origin. See: G. Khodr, "*Al-ḥurriyyah al-kāmilah: al-tarāṣh al-aqā'id*" [Total Freedom: Doctrinal Conciseness], *An-nahār*, 03.03.2007.

And Khodr writes:

“We do not distinguish between love [*agápe*], that is Godself, and that which descends upon us or indwells in us. ... Love is given to us since eternity and it remains forever as God takes us into Godself. Thus we become part of it and it becomes part of us and nothing other than it [love] alone endures in the kingdom. ... In the last day when all people unite in love, God will be ‘all in all’. God will be revealed as love both in God’s nature and works.”<sup>45</sup>

God comes to the human being from within. The human being is free, and in one’s freedom, one strives toward deification. Thus, it is through the experience of transcendence [*irtiqā*] that the mystery of God is revealed and the human being [*yartaqi*] is united with God. The human being, in his/her freedom, can also ignore God and one’s own true nature, since freedom implies having the possibility to choose between the longing for God and the denial of God’s presence and love in one’s life. Apart from divine love, however, human life is just a diversion from the true being, since one is under the pressure of daily pains and limited joys.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Maximus the Confessor, Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, 91 (Paris, 1865), “To John the Cubicularius”, 393B, C. Cf. A. Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, p. 82.

<sup>45</sup> G. Khodr, “*al-mahabbah kaiklil wa saḥwa*” [Love as Crown and Core], *An-nahār*, 02.09.2011.

<sup>46</sup> G. Khodr, “*Al-bu’ud al-’ufuṭ wal-bu’ud al-’āmūdī*” [The Horizontal and the Vertical Dimensions], *An-nahār*, 15.09.2007.

In both cases God's love continues to accompany humanity, for had it departed it, human existence itself would no longer be possible. Even though divine love is distorted by sin, it is never fully vanished or faded away.<sup>47</sup>

Deification is possible because God is present in the depth of every human self. Khodr, referring to the words of Jesus, "love your neighbor as yourself", writes:

To love this deep being present in me, because it came out of God's hand and because God has redeemed me with his grace. This luminous person in me, that is covered with my own defects and is imprisoned by my own illusions, the seeds of sanctity are latent in it. This eternal [person] in me, my divine name, as *Ibn 'arabī*, says, this is my ultimate... If we realize that the meeting between people is the meeting of the divine in me and the divine in the other, then the question of how to love my neighbor as my own self disappears. I and my neighbor are both the dwelling places of God. And in a pure view I love only God, who is dispersed without division in the souls. Every soul is God's throne.<sup>48</sup>

It is in one's everyday relations that love manifests itself, in the giving up of one's own self and replacing it with love and care for one's neighbor. Deification is then not only possible; it is what

<sup>47</sup> G. Khodr, *Al-ru'yah al-'urthūdhūkstyyah lil-lāh wal-insān* [The Orthodox View of God and the Human Being], pp. 21-23.

<sup>48</sup> G. Khodr, "Maḥabbet al-nāfs" [Love of the self], 22.11.1964, in G. Khodr, *Ḥadīth al-'ahad: al-'insān fī maṣṭrihi wa akhlāqihī* [Sunday's Word: Man in his Destiny and Morals], vol.3, (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-nūr, 1986), pp. 65-66.

creation, in particular the human being as its highest form, is essentially made for. This is rooted in the most common saying referred to Athanasius (d.373): “He, indeed, assumed humanity that we might become God.”<sup>49</sup>

Deification is the work of God, a kind of passing outside the flesh and the world. In this sense deification or the human orientation toward God, is nothing else than the natural response to the divine gift of love. It is the gift of grace, the gift of Godself, offered to the inner depth of one’s existential reality that makes the human participation in the divine possible. Thus no rift separates the person from the neighbor and from God, since in the human yearning toward deification God unites the person with one’s neighbor. Through love the human being offers the divine gift of Godself to another.<sup>50</sup> Here again Khodr uses trinitarian language. Both the human being and the neighbor are united through God who is the bond of love between the two. By this claim he echoes H. Bergson’s words: “it is in God that we love all other men.”<sup>51</sup> “Through God, in the strength of God’s love, he

<sup>49</sup> Athanasius, *Incarnation of the Word* 54, P. Schaff & H. Wace (eds.), *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, Vol. 4. (New York: Christian Literature Publishing, 1892), (pp. 65-66)

<sup>50</sup> G. Khodr, “*Al-ḥubbu finā*” [The Love In Us], *An-nahār*, 04.02.2012.

<sup>51</sup> H. Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, (London: Macmillan & Co., Limited, 1935), p. 40. Khodr makes several references to H. Bergson, who defended the primacy of intuition and immediate experience over rational-scientific methods in knowing Reality as such, e.g. G. Khodr, “*Al-’āliyyah*” [Kinship], *An-nahār*, 08.05.2004. In relation to love and deification, see the similarity with the words of Bergson: “That which [true mystics] have allowed to flow into them is a stream flowing down and seeking through them to reach their fellow-men; the necessity to spread around them what they have received affects them like an onslaught of love. A love which each one of them stamps with his own personality. A love which is in each of them an entirely new emotion, capable of transposing human life into another tone. A love which thus causes each of them to be loved for himself, so that through him, and for him, other men will open their souls to the love of humanity.” *Ibid*, p. 81.

[the mystic] loves all mankind with a divine love.”<sup>52</sup> In the same vein Khodr writes:

“If you are deified and you move in tenderness toward me, I, in my turn, become deified. This deep communion between us makes us each imitate the other since we both seek deification. We become one through divine passion that is in us...

Thus your person unites with another’s and you become one, yet each person maintains forever its essential being as independent ... hence, the mystery of your unity resembles divine unity.<sup>53</sup>

### III. Unresolved Questions

Several claims made by Khodr on the topic of divine love need further clarification, such as the statement that the mystery of one’s unity in love with an other “resembles divine unity”.<sup>54</sup> Referring to human unity Khodr says that one is poured in the other through love, but without ‘dissolving’ [ذوبان] in the other. It is a “unity without accumulation or conjunction”,<sup>55</sup> since every person in him/herself

<sup>52</sup> I. Singer, *The Nature of Love: The Modern World*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009), p. 167.

<sup>53</sup> G. Khodr, “*Al-bnā wal-ākhar*” [The I and the Other], *An-nahār*, 22.09.2007.

“فاذا كنت مألوما وعطفت على أتأثر بعطفك وأصير بنوري مألوما. هذه هي الشراكة العميقة التي تجعلني أشبه بك وتشبه بي لأننا كلينا نطلب المألوية فتصبح واحدا بالشوق الإلهي الذي فينا... على هذا المثال توحد أنك وأنا أخرى فتصبحان واحدا مع بقاء الذات او الفردة مستقلة، ثابتة الى الأبد ... وثاني وحدتكما سرا يقترب من الوحدة الإلهية.”

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> G. Khodr, “*Al-bnā*” [The I], *An-nahār*, 11.06.2011. See also: G. Khodr, “*Al-marāh*” [The Woman], *An-nahār*, 27.08.2011.

carries the divine image. Thus unity does not annihilate the particularity of every person. Khodr maintains that human unity expresses, in human terms, the divine Trinity: both the Father and the Son retain their particularity (the fatherhood and the sonship) and the bond between the two is love.

In an article, Khodr places these two trinitarian images beside each other: 'I and the other are united in God' and 'the Father and the Son are united in love'. Here Khodr moves freely beyond the traditional use of trinitarian language. He maintains, first, the necessity of a triad to achieve unity and the role of love in both uniting human beings to each other and the Father to the Son. Khodr here uses both 'God' and 'love' in an interchangeable manner<sup>56</sup>. Thus he describes God as be love and love as divine. All divine revelations are revelations of love, and all true expressions of love are from God. Not only love is the bond of unity between Father and Son, but love is also the bond of unity of all humanity in accordance to the divine unity.<sup>57</sup> " 'God is love' and love is not an attribute. It is God's name, i.e., God's very being."<sup>58</sup>

Through love human beings mirror the divine Trinity and so may be truly in the image of God. In both trinitarian images mentioned above the aspect of personhood is essential. Personhood implies

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. Khodr refers again to the two trinitarian images (divine and human) when he writes in the same article: "God is not one in number... [Rather] God is unique." And in his "*Al-ānā wal-ākhar*" [The I and the Other] he writes referring to the human reality: "You are unique ... but you are not one, since you meet another."

<sup>57</sup> G. Khodr, "*Al-nūr wa 'anta*" [The Light and You], *An-nahār*, 10.05.2008.

<sup>58</sup> G. Khodr, "*Al-ānā*" [The I], *An-nahār*, 11.06.2011.

freedom and love.<sup>59</sup> Thus love alone, that is not subject to anything else, affirms the personal aspect of every human being. The human being is a free personal being; who is irreducible to a common human nature controlled by natural limitations or necessities, just as each divine person within Trinity is irreducible to a common *ousia*.<sup>60</sup> Humanity and Divinity are distinct from each other, yet they meet in love.<sup>61</sup> By bringing these two trinitarian images beside each other Khodr contends that through love one is participating in the immanent, trinitarian life of God.<sup>62</sup> Khodr writes:

“Through divine descent [or inclination] God brings us into the Trinitarian community. Divine-human unity is a gift and this explains both God’s love and independence from us.”<sup>63</sup>

<sup>59</sup> The concept of personhood justifies the rejection of the *filioque* by Khodr and the Orthodox theology in general, since the *filioque* threatens the personhood of each of the three persons within divine Trinity.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. Here Khodr sounds very similar to V. Lossky’s claim: “Man is personal being like God, and not a blind nature.” V. Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1978), p. 70. And also: “... the idea of the person implies freedom vis-à-vis the nature. The person is free from its nature, is not determined by it.” V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1976), p. 122. The difference between human nature as common to all human beings and personhood as particular for every human being is compared to divine nature common to all three persons of the Trinity. Cf. V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, p. 120. See further: A. Papanikolaou, “Sophia, Apophasis, and Communion: the Trinity in Contemporary Orthodox Theology” in Phan, P., *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 250.

<sup>61</sup> G. Khodr, “*Al-ḥubbu finā*” [The love in us], *An-nahār*, 04.02.2012.

<sup>62</sup> See a similar claim by Bulgakov, who maintains that love unites the whole creation and further it relates the world to the “hypostatic God”. S.N. Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, p. 104.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

“بالانعطاف الإلهي يستدخلنا هو المشاركة الثالوثية. الاتحاد بيننا وبين الله هبة. وهذا يكشف استقلاله عنا ومحبه في أن واحد.”

Finally, the two trinitarian images imply that human beings reach their fulfilled reality only when they have a relationship of sonship to the Father similar to the relationship of the Son to the Father. Khodr writes: through divine love “God revealed that He loves us to the same extent that He loves His Christ.”<sup>64</sup> Thus, the Son, “by taking on a human nature has revealed the sonship of the human being to God.”<sup>65</sup> Christ offers to human beings his own personal reality, *hypostasis*,<sup>66</sup> as the Son of the Father. Thus, love as salvation is revealed in the relationship of one’s sonship to God made possible through the Son.<sup>67</sup>

However, some questions remain unresolved. How is it possible to relate the trinitarian image ‘the Father and the Son are united in love’ with the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit? The image in itself implies that love completes the third hypostasis in divine Trinity, the Holy Spirit. This is not very different from Augustine’s view of the Holy Spirit as the bond of love between the Father and the Son, thus as their ‘common gift’.<sup>68</sup> In order to escape the whole

<sup>64</sup> G. Khodr, “*Al-hubbu finā*” [The Love In Us], *An-nahār*, 04.02.2012.

<sup>65</sup> G. Khodr, “*Al-masīh al-wasī*” [Christ the Mediator], *An-nahār*, 29.05.2010.

<sup>66</sup> The term “hypostasis” referred in Patristic theology to the personal dimension of existence, unlike the impersonal substance [ousia] or nature [phusis]. See on this point: A. V. Nesteruk, “The Universe as Hypostatic Inherence in the Logos of God: Panentheism in the Eastern Orthodox Perspective” in P. Clayton & A. Peacocke (eds.), *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being: Panentheistic Reflections on God’s Presence in a Scientific World*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), p. 170.

<sup>67</sup> G. Khodr, “*Yā ‘ishqī al-maṣlūb*” [O My Crucified Love], *An-nahār*, 02.04.2010.

<sup>68</sup> “This relationship, to be sure, is not apparent in this particular name, but it is apparent when he is called the gift of God ... to signify the communion of them both by a name which applies to them both, the gift of both is called the Holy Spirit. And this three is one only God, good great, eternal, omnipotent, his own unity, godhead, greatness, goodness, eternity, omnipotence.” Augustine, *De Trinitate* 5, 12 in: Augustine, *The Works of Saint Augustine: The Trinity: A Translation for the 21st Century*, (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1991), pp. 197, 432.

Augustinian argument on the Holy Spirit and the *filioque*, Khodr simply ignores the place of the Holy Spirit as he describes divine love in terms of the love relationship between the Father and the Son,<sup>69</sup> while as he discusses the role of the Holy Spirit, under different subjects, he defends the Orthodox traditional position on the Holy Spirit as proceeding only from the Father. The role of the Holy Spirit in the world is not subordinated to that of the Son. It is the Spirit that makes the very presence of Christ in the human being possible, maintains Khodr.<sup>70</sup>

A second question is whether the knowledge of God's immanent being is possible for the human being through love? Does the experience of deification or the mystical union with God through love imply a union with the essence of God or the divine energies? In some articles, Khodr, echoing the Patristic tradition and V. Lossky's apophatic theology, defends the transcendence of divine essence as far beyond human access and knowledge. Thus God can be known only in God's *oikonomia*, which is primarily the knowledge of God's energies and works. In other articles, recalling the experience of several mystics and Sufis, Khodr maintains that divine-human communion result in a union with Godself. The latter claim similarly echoes John Zizioulas's approach of the possibility for the human

<sup>69</sup> This of course explains the double procession of the Spirit (the *filioque*) from the Father and the Son as it is maintained in Latin Western tradition. In contrast to this, Orthodox Eastern tradition maintains that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *through* the Son. See on this point: G. Khodr (The introductory word) in P. Evdokimov, *Al-rūh al-qudus ft al-turāth al-urthūdūksi* [The Holy Spirit in the Orthodox Tradition], (Beirut: Al-būlusiyah wal-manshūrāt al-urthūdūksiyah, 1989), p. 13.

<sup>70</sup> G. Khodr, "Christianity in a Pluralistic World: The Economy of the Holy Spirit" *The Ecumenical Review*, vol.23, (1971), pp. 125-126.

person to participate in the trinitarian life of God,<sup>71</sup> maintaining that through personal relationships, life of communion, and personal love the being of God or divine essence (God in *theologia*) could be known.<sup>72</sup>

In contrast to all Patristic tradition, which emphasized the apophatic nature of theology and claimed the unknowability of the divine essence and the impossibility of naming it,<sup>73</sup> Khodr makes an exceptional, ontological statement in that regard, as reference was made earlier, by stating that “the essence of God is love.”<sup>74</sup>

Where does this bring us to? Is the Johannine statement “God is love” able to convey divine truth as such far from the need for any apophaticism? Does Khodr safeguard the biblical statement against the analogical nature of all other theological claims? Does the mystery of love shed light on divine Mystery? Love, itself a mystery, a reality

<sup>71</sup> J. Zizioulas, a contemporary Orthodox theologian born in Greece, 1931, claims that “true being comes only from the free person, from the person who loves freely – that is, who freely affirms his being, his identity, by means of an event of communion with other persons.” Further, for Zizioulas, divine economy leads “finally to the vision of God “as He is,” to the vision of the Triune God in his eternal existence.” John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, pp. 18, 19.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. J.D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, p. 16. See on this point: A. Papanikolaou, *Being with God: Trinity, Apophaticism, and Divine-Human Communion*, (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), pp. 103-104.

<sup>73</sup> Basil the Great (4<sup>th</sup> cent.), Dionysius the Areopagite, Maximus the Confessor, John of Damascus (7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> cent.), Gregory Palamas (14<sup>th</sup> cent.), and others, all emphasized the unknowability of the divine essence. God’s inmost nature is beyond human understanding and experience. In contrast to all the tradition on divine unknowability Descartes introduced God as the highest being, knowable by rational arguments.

<sup>74</sup> G. Khodr, “*Bayn al-mahabbah wal-ṣadāqah*” [Between Love and Friendship], *An-nahār*, 26.01.2008.

It is necessary here to note that the notion of personhood has been criticized lately by most Patristic theologians who claim the absence of such a notion in the Cappadocian tradition. See on this point: J. Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press. 2004).

lost to the ordinary eye and regarded as folly by most people, is alone able to describe the divine Mystery. All divine works of creation, incarnation and preservation are works of a loving God, who comes to the human being in a form of self-denial and self-gift, anticipating a loving acceptance of the divine gift. Thus, divine Mystery can only be compared to the mystery of the undivided humanity. Each mystery reflects the other, and none can be perceived apart from love.<sup>75</sup>

On a different level, say a theologico-social level, another question comes to mind. Would Khodr consider the writings of the Fathers, with all their value and insightfulness, as the product of certain cultural settings, subject to external aspects and cultural traces? Is it possible to expose the Patristic tradition to critical evaluation and a reshaping of its content?

As several references were made earlier, Khodr bases his theology on Patristic writings. The Patristic tradition has been considered as the unique mode of acquiring divine revelation, thus as what makes theology, in the proper sense of the word, possible. As was mentioned earlier, Khodr does not consider tradition as static and dull. He is able most of the times to approach tradition dynamically. He remolds theological claims in new and creative ways, but what about other questions such as ordination of women? Khodr writes about the liberation of the woman, and that both man and woman are independent persons, who are not defined by each other, neither the

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<sup>75</sup> See the similarity with Bulgakov's claim that the mystery of all created reality lays in that God gave God's hypostatic being to all created-spiritual beings, thus they are "rooted in Divine eternity; the creaturely spirit has an eternity that is analogous to the Divine, and it is uncreated." S.N. Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, p. p. 91.

relationship between them defines each.<sup>76</sup> He makes reference to the biblical verse: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you all are one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal. 3:28). However, if divine love and grace are given to all and through all, what about female priesthood? One is left without a clear statement concerning this question.

### Conclusion

Similar to the twentieth century Russian Orthodox theologians Vladimir Lossky and George Florovsky, who are considered main figures in the so called “neo-Patristic revival”, Metropolitan Khodr’s theological contribution could be viewed as an important step within the same tradition in Antiochene Orthodoxy.

The ‘neo-Patristic’ movement considered the tradition of the Early Church Fathers as the foundation for Christian faith and revelation. The main two reasons behind such an assertion were, first, that the early Fathers’ teachings were the closest to the teachings of the apostles; second; the Patristic tradition could bring spirituality and theology together and was able to express divine Mystery in a balanced way, rarely to be found in the history of theology.<sup>77</sup> Thus the spirituality of the Fathers had drawn most Greek Orthodox churches, such as the Church of Constantinople, the Church of Antioch and the Church of Russia, which experienced loss and crisis of the Christian spirit throughout history.

<sup>76</sup> G. Khodr, “*Al-mar’ah*” [The Woman], *An-nahār*, 27.08.2011. See also: G. Khodr, “*Al-mar’ah*” [The Woman], *An-nahār*, 17.07.2004.

<sup>77</sup> Aidan Nichols, *Light from the East: Authors and Themes in Orthodox Theology*, (London: Sheed & Ward, 1995), pp. 36-38.

There is a second element that secures Metropolitan Khodr's place within the "neo-Patristic revival" and that is his philosophical reflection on human existence and the contemporary pressing questions of our days and his ability to expose the theological heritage to a critical examination. In a social context where Christians and Muslims live together, Khodr succeeds in addressing both Christians and Muslims in a theological-philosophical language that is neither alien nor exclusive to any of the followers of the two religions. He follows, as it were, the steps of the early Fathers of the Church who employed Greek philosophical language to present the Gospel message of divine love.

In this article I have tried to show how divine love is essential in the theology of Metropolitan Khodr. Christianity, then, is different from a combination of theories and decrees about God and the human being. Christianity has nothing to do with the proofs of a 'first cause' and its relation to every other cause and existence. Rather quite apart from all this, the nature of Christianity can be known and lived. "Christianity ... is the religion of the human heart", says Metropolitan Khodr. It is "the faith in divine love".<sup>78</sup> It is sense and taste for divine love within the innermost sanctuary of life. The experience of divine love is given to all. As long as human beings exist, they are given to discover the very bestowal of God within each and every person. The human being is also a mystery related to the mystery of divine love, since God is the ground of all true existence.

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<sup>78</sup> G. Khodr, "*Hawla ta'mid al-adab wal-fan*" [On Art and Literature], A lecture delivered in Saint George Monastery on 26.08.1991.

In his latest article on divine love Metropolitan Khodr quotes the words of the Muslim Sufi *Ibn 'arabī* (12-13 c.): “I am a disciple of the religion of love; however the parade of love moves [my religion and faith follow].”<sup>79</sup>

And as Metropolitan Khodr makes reference, in several of his articles, to the verses from the Old Testament book Song of Solomon, I close with the same verses.<sup>80</sup>

“Night after night on my bed  
I have sought my true love;  
I have sought him but not found him,  
I have called him but he has not answered.  
I said, ‘I will rise and go rounds of the city, through the streets and the  
squares, seeking my true love.’ ...

The watchmen, going the rounds of the city, met me, and I asked,  
‘Have you seen my true love?’” (Song of Solomon, 3. 1-3)

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<sup>79</sup> G. Khodr, “*Al-hubbu finā*” [The Love In Us], *An-nahār*, 04.02.2012. The quotation is taken from: *Ibn 'arabī, Tarjumān al-'ashwāq* [*The Tarjumān al-'ashwāq: A Collection of Mystical Odes*], (Dār Sādr, 1961).

“ادين بدين الحب انى توجهت ركانيه”

<sup>80</sup> See: G. Khodr, “*Al-hub al-basharī wal-hub al-ilāhī*” [Human and Divine Love], *An-nahār*, 04.09.1993; G. Khodr, “Christianity in a Pluralistic World: The Economy of the Holy Spirit” *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. 23, (1971), p. 128.