

## The Theological Thought of Metropolitan George Khodr An Introduction to the Dynamic Movement of the Spirit<sup>+</sup>

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*“In the great darkness, I will live here, and in the heart of this darkness, I will search for light.”*

(George Khodr, *If I Recounted the Paths of Childhood*, 65)

### Introduction

On the centennial jubilee of Metropolitan George Khodr, I would like to extend my heartfelt prayers for his continued health, well-being, and the enduring blessing of his presence among us.<sup>1</sup>

This article is not a mere scholarly investigation of the theological thought of Metropolitan George Khodr, but also a reflection on his thinking.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the term “spiritual theology” best encapsulates his theological perspectives, in contrast to other theological approaches that might lean heavily toward intellectual or purely scientific methods. The fact that

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1 George Khodr (1923-), archbishop of Byblos, Botris & Mount Lebanon (1970-2018), is a thinker and theologian, and one of the most prominent representatives of modern Orthodox thought in the Middle East.

2 Few clarifying remarks might be helpful here: First, I use the word “theological” in this article not only in its Orthodox sense, i.e., as a praying person, but also to refer to someone who engages in theology in order to gain knowledge and share knowledge with others. This aligns with George Khodr’s concept of theology, as reflected in his writings. Second, the word “spirit” is often spelled in this article with a lowercase “s” as it refers to the spirit that is bestowed upon the human being. When “Spirit” refers directly to the “Spirit” of God or the Holy “Spirit”, then it is written with a capital “S”. Finally, all translations of the quotations from George Khodr in this article from Arabic into English are mine.

Christian spiritual theology goes back to the beginnings of the Christian faith enables different Christian traditions to find their roots in it, thus giving it an ecumenical character. Furthermore, spiritual theology has the notion of “mystery” at its core, as it perceives divine truth as an unfathomable mystery that cannot be completely grasped or categorized into specific dogmas or creeds.<sup>3</sup> This in turn opens the door for dialogue between different religious traditions and makes interreligious interaction and encounter possible. Finally, and alongside the aspect of “mystery”, the notion of “spirit” is of central importance for spiritual theology. The spirit operates in a dynamic, perpetual movement—ascending to God in search of love, hope and peace, and descending into the world in search of the Other—encountering the human being in his or her specific existential reality. Thus, the spirit makes it possible for the human being not only to ascend to the divine, but also to approach the Other, uniting the human subject with the Other and the human with the divine.

Before setting out the aim of this article, it might be helpful at this point to summarize what I consider to be the main characteristics of spiritual theology. These characteristics can also be found in the thought of George Khodr:

### **A. Spiritual Theology is in Constant Search of God**

The human being strives for the divine, even though human knowledge of God is always fragmentary and incomplete, as the final truth of God remains a mystery that cannot be fully grasped by the human subject.

### **B. Spiritual Theology is in Constant Search of the Other**

This is because spiritual theology perceives every human being as a dwelling place of the Spirit of God. “God is Spirit” (John 4:24), and God

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<sup>3</sup> In addition to church confessions and “positive theology”, which is concerned with God’s work in the world (since it is given to the human being to receive the divine light and participate in God’s work in the world), spiritual theology also follows “apophatic theology”, or “negative theology”, which denies the complete correspondence between the human perception of God and the absolute truth of God, claiming that the human mind is unable to grasp or comprehend the very essence of God. See on this: George Khodr, *The Orthodox View of God and the Human Being* (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-nūr, 1982), 9-12. See also: Kalistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, revised edition (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995), 14-21.

gives Godself to every human subject, that is, God bestows God's Spirit upon every human being. Thus, the search for God inevitably calls for the search for the Other.

### **C. Spiritual Theology is a Path Towards the Self**

Spiritual theology cannot be practiced without personal involvement and commitment. And the human being does not study and observe spiritual theology at a distance, as is the case in most other scientific fields. Rather, with every reflection on the divine, the human being draws closer to oneself. For the one who practices theology also participates—with God and the Other—in the truth of the spirit.

Against this background on meaning and characteristics of spiritual theology, I argue in this article that spiritual theology carries within itself the seeds of a contemporary Christian theology that is open both to God and to the Other and is capable to address the current challenges facing the human being and the church, not only in the East but also in the West.<sup>4</sup> In this article I am relying primarily on George Khodr's book *If I Recounted the Paths of Childhood*. In the first part of this article, I will demonstrate the uniqueness of George Khodr's thought, which draws from the theology of the Eastern Fathers of the Church and of modern Orthodox thought, representing this theological heritage in a way that is accessible and relevant to his time,<sup>5</sup> and in a language that resonates with a wide array of social, political, and religious groups in Lebanon. In the second part of the article, I will deal with the notion of the dynamic movement of the Spirit

4 Furthermore, spiritual theology is compatible with a secular social order in the sense of an order that separates religion and state. This is because spiritual theology is at its core independent of symbols. Although spiritual theology may preserve historical Christian symbols, it is not bound to them and therefore always reinterprets these symbols to reveal their meaning anew.

5 In his writings, which span more than half a century, George Khodr combines the theology of the early Church Fathers of the East (e.g., Origen, 185-254; Gregory of Nyssa, 335-394; Gregory of Nazianzus, 329-389) with modern Orthodox thought (e.g., Nikolai Berdyaev, 1874-1948; Vladimir Lossky, 1905-1958; Alexander Schmemmann, 1921-1983). His thinking also reflects the ideas of many thinkers and theologians—both in the East and the West—who tend towards a spiritual theology. The most important thinkers in the West who have contributed to the development of a spiritual Christian theology include Meister Eckhart (1260-1328); Immanuel Kant (1724-1804); Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834); Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1955); Henri Bergson (1859-1941) and Karl Rahner (1904-1984).

that God grants (and has granted from the beginning) to the human being so that the human being may seek the divine. This movement of the spirit forms the core of George Khodr's spiritual thought and theology.

Although Christian spiritual theology is not confined to the East, as there are also theological streams and thinkers in the West who have emphasized the importance of the role of the Holy Spirit in Christian theology, dogmatic theology has remained predominant in the West with its various theological schools.<sup>6</sup> In the East, the spiritual tradition of the Early Church Fathers was preserved but remained largely obscure and unknown to the common people. This is where the uniqueness of George Khodr's thought is evident, as it sheds light on this spiritual heritage and presents it as a contemporary, anthropological theology addressed to the human being of his time, whoever he or she is. This brings me to the first part of the article.

### 1. "A Spark of Poetry"

George Khodr's thought encompasses the present and the future. His thinking is driven by the dynamic movement of the spirit that God breathes into

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<sup>6</sup> Spiritual theology, as presented in this article through the thought of George Khodr, corresponds to the anthropological theology of the Catholic theologian Karl Rahner and the experience-based theology of the Protestant theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher. Rahner explains that the essence of existence is "luminosity" [Gelichtetheit] that is intrinsic to every human being. Rahner defines luminosity as the possibility of the radiance of the unity of existence in the human being, which makes human ascent to the divine possible, despite the limited understanding or grasp of this unity as a whole. The human being is thus already endowed with potential for knowledge, which Rahner calls the "anticipation" of knowledge [Vorgriff], by which he refers to the "dynamic movement of the spirit" and the implicit consciousness given a priori to the human being, making any worldly knowledge and any preapprehension of being possible. Furthermore, Rahner contends that the human being knows God and oneself implicitly in all that one knows, so that the knower and the known become one in the act of knowing. And the more one knows, the more one is present to oneself since the human being is a spirit and the spirit can return to itself. The experience of human transcendence or ascent to God (according to Rahner) is comparable to the human "feeling of absolute dependence" on God as explained by Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher describes religion in his book *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* as a feeling of inner relatedness to God that is bestowed upon every human being. See: Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928), §3-4; Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. John Oman (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1994), second speech; Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1978), 116-121; Sylvie Avakian, 'The 'Other' in Karl Rahner's Transcendental Theology and George Khodr's Spiritual Theology Within the Near Eastern Context (Frankfurt am Main/Wien: Peter Lang, 2012), 33-41.

the human heart and inspires it to “inhale the heights and carry them down to every soul.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, the human being oscillates between the limitations of the body and the vastness of the spirit, between earth and heaven, between darkness and light, between death and life. Life is then contained in this movement, in this dynamic, in this longing; the longing for the one who descended to the dust. All of life is a return to his wounded face, to the one who came to us in our night to free us from our slumber,<sup>8</sup> from the darkness of self and history, until the human being rises and with him/her this universe, so that the shadows fade, along with the idols of thought, and the symbols are burned.<sup>9</sup>

In this endless movement occurs Khodr’s thinking; a thinking of the spirit, the spirit that expands not only over a hundred years, but over many hundreds of years, a thinking that embraces the thought of the early Greeks and the Church Fathers, embraces East and West, embraces philosophy, theology, and poetry. Poetry, the absence of which may condemn thought to failure, because, like most literature, art, and music, it is a bridge between thought and spirit and between thought and the hearts of Others.<sup>10</sup> As for the spirit, it constantly strives for nearness to God and is in search of the Other until God passes through or descends upon every spirit.

And so Khodr begins the first chapter of his book “*If I Recounted the Paths of Childhood*” with “a spark of poetry,” as if to say that thoughts, which do not turn into understanding, poetry or feelings are destined from the outset to be forgotten.<sup>11</sup> God cannot be known through pure reason or

7 George Khodr, *If I Recounted the Paths of Childhood*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: An-Nahar, 2001), 64 [1st ed., 1979].

8 George Khodr, “A Prayer to the Crucified,” *Sunday’s Word (vol.1): God and Kinship* (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-nūr, 1985), 182-183.

9 Khodr, *If I Recounted the Paths of Childhood*, 16.

10 Khodr, *If I Recounted the Paths of Childhood*, 26.

11 About poetry we read Aristotle (384-322 BCE) writing: “poetry is more philosophical than, and superior to, history—for poetry tends to speak of universals, but history particulars.” Aristotle, *Poetics with The Tractatus Coislinianus*, trans. Richard Janko (Indianapolis [u.a.]: Hackett, 1987), 12. Also Martin Heidegger (1889-1996) wrote on poetry: “What is purely spoken is the poem” [„Rein Gesprochenes ist das Gedicht.“], Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 192.

mere theoretical analysis, but in the spirit, in the depths and through the discernment of the heart. Although scientific knowledge is essential for the human being, as it frees him or her from ignorance and the tyranny of leaders, and is always purifying,<sup>12</sup> the excessive (and mere) emphasis on law or legal frameworks—whether in the West or the East—does not allow the light to penetrate the human heart.<sup>13</sup> So, unlike most systematic theology (in the West), which relies largely on assumptions that are the outcome of rational, speculative abstraction, Khodr’s theological thought presupposes the existential involvement of the human being. Spiritual theology at its core is then this yearning for God, the Spirit, that takes up residence in the human self,<sup>14</sup> and the constant striving for knowledge of God, the self and the Other. Along the path of this striving—within the triad of God, the Other and the self—knowledge becomes love and spirit, and love becomes perfect.

The importance of understanding and knowledge in Khodr’s thinking is particularly evident in the founding of the Orthodox Youth Movement (often called “the Movement” in Arabic) in 1942 together with his friends. George Khodr was nineteen years old at the time; an age when one follows what the heart desires. Khodr, however, was looking for movement, a movement of the spirit that would cleanse the mind of the remnants of inherited beliefs and allow light to flow in. As for poetry, it is first-order knowledge; knowledge that does not follow predefined methodological rules but assumes that the human being makes a leap from an external

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12 Khodr, *If I Recounted the Paths of Childhood*, 74.

13 Khodr, *If I Recounted the Paths of Childhood*, 11.

14 In a similar vein, Henri Bergson explains that knowledge based on intuition is immediate and complete. In contrast, the predominant scientific research (which is also followed in philosophy and theology) focuses on intellectual analysis. In order to achieve such analysis, truth will be fragmented and divided into parts and subdivisions. The danger inherent in the process of fragmentation is the absence of the core meaning behind these parts. Thus, in the process of intellectual analysis, the parts themselves become the means to reach the truth, whereas in reality they are only fragments or bare intellectual theories. Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. v. Arthur Mitchell (Wroclaw: Amazon Fulfillment: 2018), 136-137, 141-142, 146-147.

world to the inner world of the self, the world of spirit and light.<sup>15</sup> Literature (or poetry) thus contributes to the unity of the human self. To know or understand therefore means that the human being appropriates the truth of what he/she understands and makes it his/her own, becoming one with it.<sup>16</sup> Although this knowledge is anchored in the depths of the human self, it is in constant forward movement, for it is by nature in search of light.

## 2. The Dynamic Movement of the Spirit

For Khodr God is a moving God; a God who dwells in the human being and forever breathes God's Holy Spirit into him/her yet is beyond full human grasp.<sup>17</sup> As for the spirit, it is in constant dynamic movement between the divine and the human.<sup>18</sup> This indicates that the spirit cannot be captured or confined in a rigid system of thought, nor can it be obtained—in any exclusive way—by a person or a particular group of people. The spirit is free like the wind. “The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit.” (John 3:8). God gives Godself, God's Spirit, from the beginning to the human being: “ then the LORD GOD FORMED MAN OF DUST FROM THE GROUND, AND BREATHED INTO HIS NOSTRILS THE BREATH OF LIFE; AND MAN BECAME A LIVING BEING” (GENESIS 2:7). The spirit bestowed on the human being makes the movement of the human towards the divine possible. Thus, the relationship between God and the human being is a reciprocal one. The descent of God—through creation, incarnation,

15 In his article “Raising the Cross”, *An-Nahar*, 13.09.2014, George Khodr describes death as a “leap towards resurrection”, and in his “The Exercise of Flesh”, *An-Nahar*, 08.09.2012, he writes that “life is a leap”. In another article—“The Uprising at Martyrs' Square”, *An-Nahar*, 19.03.2005, Khodr writes about “the souls yearning for freedom”. (Most of George Khodr's articles can be found on his homepage: <http://georgeskhodr.org/en/>) Similarly, in his book *Fear and Trembling*, the Danish philosopher Kierkegaard describes Abraham's ascent of Mount Moriah (to offer his son as a sacrifice to God) as a journey of faith along the lines of Gregory of Nyssa's *The Life of Moses*. During this journey, Kierkegaard explains, Abraham experienced the steadfastness of faith, portrayed as an inner movement punctuated by leaps of faith. See: Søren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's Writings, vol. VI: Fear and Trembling—Repetition*, trans. Howard Hong & Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 41 - 42.

16 Khodr, *If I Recounted the Paths of Childhood*, 11.

17 Khodr, *If I Recounted the Paths of Childhood*, 60.

18 Khodr, *If I Recounted the Paths of Childhood*, 100.

and preservation—precedes the ascent of the human being and makes it possible. While the human being responds to the coming of God through a movement that occurs within the human subject. In this sense, God’s continuous descent [κατάβασις, katabasis] and coming to the human being is reciprocated by the ascent [ἀνάβασις, anabasis] of the human being to God—through prayer and meditation.<sup>19</sup> It is important here to note that the two movements of God and the human being should not be understood as two movements in time. Rather, the descent of God symbolizes the coming of God to the human being and at the same time the transcendence of God. The ascent of the human being to God symbolizes his or her opening to God and listening to God’s voice while in the world.<sup>20</sup>

Reflecting upon the human-divine relationship Khodr maintains that divinity and humanity are not in a relationship of juxtaposition or accumulation, but in a relationship of intertwining and interpenetration, and the divine light is given in the midst of darkness. He writes: “The divine does not descend upon us from above. It is within us and therefore it shapes us. We can move only out of the image of God within us.”<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the movement of the spirit conferred on the human being begins when the human spirit ascends in search of God. However, after every ascent, there is a descent into the world and towards the Other. The descent indicates that humanity and divinity are distinct, despite their unity. The ascent and de-

19 Furthermore, each of these two movements can be understood as consisting of two ‘back-and-forth’ movements. God’s descent involves God’s descent into the world and God’s (simultaneous) return to Godself—these can be described as the two movements of procession and reversion—and the ascent of the human being involves similarly the ascent of the human being to God and his/her return to the world. In a similar way, Heidegger describes the oscillation (the back-and-forth-movement) of the human being between his/her being thrown into the world and his/her returning to one’s authentic self. See: Sylvie Avakian, “Being Towards Death”: Heidegger and the Orthodox Theology of the East (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 22-32; Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, trans. Parvis Emad & Kenneth Maly (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1989), 177-185. In this article I will only address the movement of the spirit that God gives to human being, i.e., the human ascent to God and descent to the world and to the Other. This can be referred to the anthropological character of George Khader’s thought and theology, as expressed especially in his book “*If I Recounted the Paths of Childhood*”.

20 Avakian, *The ‘Other’ in Karl Rahner’s Transcendental Theology and George Khodr’s Spiritual Theolog*, 138, 155; Avakian, *Being Towards Death*, 37, 272.

21 Khodr, *If I Recounted the Paths of Childhood*, 24-25.

scent of the spirit are thus two successive (simultaneous) steps in a single movement of the spirit, and it is the spirit that unites humanity and divinity in unity despite distinction, which is the unity of the spirit.

### **A. The Movement of the Spirit as Ascent**

The human being strives for the fulfillment of the self, i.e., he/she strives for God, for love. This striving can also be described as seeking understanding and knowledge, i.e., knowledge of God, the self and the Other. In this sense, Khodr's book can be understood as an attempt or endeavor to know God, the self and the Other. The aspired knowledge is, hence, not an indifferent knowledge, but it penetrates or leaps into the "event" itself and knows it, i.e., it knows God, the self and the Other from within, so that knowledge does not remain external, superficial, and disinterested. Having this in mind, and reading "*If I Recounted the Paths of Childhood*", the reader gets the impression that Khodr is doing what the French philosopher Henri Bergson calls turning inwards and seizing the self "from within".<sup>22</sup> Khodr is thus not concerned with describing situations and moments from his life historically or objectively, but rather he recalls feelings and emotions related to events of the past, as if he were—through the words of his "friend"<sup>23</sup>—reflecting on these events and evaluating them within himself. Moments, attitudes, feelings of compassion, love, humility and even disgust intertwine and permeate each other as if they were gathered from the past and present, without having to be ordered according to their temporal or spatial status or isolated from each other by numbers or categories. As if these moments bring the past with the present and the future together and ascend to the heights of love, in which controversies, contradictions and rivalries of the past abolish, making freedom and consciousness possible. In this way, the past is reinterpreted in an irreversible movement. All experiences and feelings converge in a continuous flow, like tributaries or streams of water joining the river of life, nourishing it throughout its

22 Henry Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, trans. Mabelle L. Andion (Wroclaw: Amazon Fulfillment, 2019), 197.

23 A character that Khodr creates in order to speak about himself through this character.

course. In this way, explains Bergson, the human past is recovered. It is protected from loss and its duration is made possible through intuition, i.e., within the human self,<sup>24</sup> without the need for external symbols, making the past present once again.

Duration is then the extension of the past, which does not remain the same, but is in constant movement—ascending and descending—enabling the reconfiguration of knowledge as a whole. This makes the knowledge of God, the self and the Other possible. Duration is thus simultaneously unity and diversity.<sup>25</sup> Khodr’s book can therefore be understood in the light of the concept of “qualitative multiplicity” (Bergson), which, in contrast to “quantitative multiplicity”, excludes any juxtaposition or sequencing of events and feelings. Rather, different states of consciousness and past human experiences come together in such a way that they permeate, penetrate, or pervade each other and ascend to God in a movement of love. In this upward movement, human experiences gradually gain meaning and content, contributing to the completion of the human self, which for Khodr, lies in love. The pursuit of understanding is then a pursuit of love, for the human being begins to understand when he/she begins to love. Love unites the person with an Other, and in this unity, there is an ascent to the divine and a descent to the human (the Other). For God is love, and only in love does the “despicable ego” disappear, while the heart, the spirit, endures.<sup>26</sup> Thus, Khodr writes: “Love is incarnated on the one hand and deified on the other. It is this complete circulation between flesh and divinity, upwards and downwards, that constitutes love”.<sup>27</sup>

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24 Bergson explains “intuition” as the penetration of the movement of life and understanding it from within. Through intuition, a person is in flow with the truth itself and feels it, that is, he/she feels the flow of truth. Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, 170-173, 196-197. In his article “*The Child*”, *An-Nahar*, 21.07.2007, Khodr writes: “*There is a delicate balance between the power of reason and the power of intuition, between thought and feeling... All of this is related to an impenetrable divine mystery.*”

25 Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, 155-156, 173, 196-199.

26 Cf. George Khodr, “Love of the Self”, *Lisan al-Hal*, 22.11.1964; “The Despicable Ego”, *An-Nahar*, 15.05.2004; “The Despicable Ego”, *An-Nahar*, 10.10.2005; “The Lord is Coming”, *An-Nahar*, 23.12.2006.

27 Khodr, *If I Recounted the Paths of Childhood*, 58.

One could ask here: How then can the credibility of this knowledge of God, the self and the Other be verified? The answer to this question is that the credibility of this knowledge cannot be proven because by its nature it is not based on scientific arguments and methods that require proof. There is also no room for adjustment or compromise to make this knowledge acceptable to others. One can rather say that the human being carries the validity of this knowledge within him/herself, since the person and what the person knows are one and the same. Khodr therefore explains that when a human being receives the Word, he/she becomes one with it and embodies it in words and life:

When the Word mingles with your mind, soul and heart, it makes you another gospel, a living one, because in the end it is important that you become the dwelling place of God and the Word of God.<sup>28</sup>

### **B. The Movement of the Spirit as Descent**

The descent is a second step in the one movement of the spirit. After the ascent to God through prayer, hope and love, which is always resurrectional, the human being descends into the world and comes to the Other, just as God descends and becomes flesh in Christ. This movement of descent always presupposes the cross, without which there is no descent into the world and no encounter with the Other.<sup>29</sup> The cross, in turn, requires the willingness to give up everything, even one's life. And although the descent is described here as the second step after the ascent, the cross precedes the resurrection and makes it possible (i.e., the ascent to God). Thus, the two are one and the same movement. Khodr uses the expression "being crucified" [*almaslubiyah*] to denote the feeling, realization, and acceptance of being crucified in the world, i.e., losing everything.<sup>30</sup> For Khodr, "being

<sup>28</sup> Khodr, *If I Recounted the Paths of Childhood*, 24.

<sup>29</sup> The movement of descent is not a backward movement, but the immediately following step of the upward move. Both ascent and descent are therefore forward movements.

<sup>30</sup> The expression "being crucified" does not appear in Khodr's book *If I Recounted the Paths of Childhood*, but in many of his essays. Cf. "The Peace of the Crucified", *An-Nahar*, 10.03.2007; "From the Great Week to Passover", *An-Nahar*, 01.04.2007; "Bishop's Homily at the Funeral of Rabab Al-Sayegh", Beirut, Church of the Annunciation, 26.06.2010.

crucified” stands for all those who suffer and thus share in the crucifixion of Christ, who descends into the world to alleviate its suffering.

In the context of Khodr’s understanding of the cross and of “being crucified”, one can understand the meaning of church and mission, the meaning of homeland and dialogue in his thought. The church can be very weak, writes Khodr, and whole generations can be infirm and sterile.<sup>31</sup> Since Christianity is a “a building without a roof”.<sup>32</sup> Thus, the church can dispense with all symbols and rituals so that Christ becomes all that is.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, Christianity cannot be limited to a specific political or social framework, nor can it align itself with an ideology over against another. Christianity is always in movement, and in this lies its creativity (i.e., in the dynamism of the God-given spirit). This is why Christianity has endured in history, despite the absence of Christian homelands on earth, maintains Khodr.

As far as the mission of the Church is concerned, it is based on dialogue, openness to the Other, and the renunciation of rigidity and self-centeredness. A dialogue is a dialogue between equals, and this requires a high degree of dying of the self, through which the human being transcends the self and is purified by the cross - and thus brings forth much fruit.<sup>34</sup> While Eastern Christianity with its spiritual tradition has a special mission towards the West, according to Khodr.<sup>35</sup> One could come to the conclusion that for Khodr the relationship between East and West is akin to that between spirit and reason, since only the spirit can save reason from the “idolatry of self-aggrandizing minds”.<sup>36</sup> And yet the West needs the East just as much as the East needs the West. Since the whole of creation is the field of God’s incarnation, and all will ascend to and attain unity in God.

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31 Khodr, *If I Recounted the Paths of Childhood*, 118.

32 Khodr, *If I Recounted the Paths of Childhood*, 98.

33 Khodr, *If I Recounted the Paths of Childhood*, 96, 98, 118-119.

34 Khodr, *If I Recounted the Paths of Childhood*, 69.

35 Khodr, *If I Recounted the Paths of Childhood*, 70-71, 75-76.

36 Khodr, *If I Recounted the Paths of Childhood*, 101.

The notion of death and the reality of being crucified accompanies Khodr's thought not only when he writes about church, mission, and homeland, but also when he writes about himself. Thus, he foreshadows death when he writes about isolation and alienation, about loneliness and disappointment, whereby all these feelings are accompanied by death in a certain way. In the words of his "friend", he describes himself as being thrown into loneliness, "as if he were carrying his desert with him wherever he went".<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, the experience of the cross is not tragic for Khodr. Rather, the cross carries the hope of resurrection, which brings peace to the soul and elevates the human being out of grief and despair.<sup>38</sup> Death is then essential to life, and loneliness enables resilience and endurance. Disappointment, similarly, opens windows of light and hope, and grief is the longing for joy.<sup>39</sup> However, the pursuit of truth and its embodiment, i.e., the embodiment of the Word, will inevitably lead to death, i.e. to isolation and alienation, even from the Church (in its temporal sense), as the majority of people are not interested in truth as such, but are content with the world and its logic. That is why Jesus also had to die, since without the cross there is no resurrection. Thus, Khodr writes: The one who does not see [the word] as the destruction of his/her own being has no right to utter it, for then he/she would imitate voices and the hearer would recognize him/her as a hireling.<sup>40</sup>

And because "the whole of Christianity is resurrectional, so all of it will pass through Golgotha."<sup>41</sup>

Khodr writes further: "When death confronts you ... you may be sure that the power of resurrection is within you".<sup>42</sup>

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37 Khodr, *If I Recounted the Paths of Childhood*, 78.

38 Khodr, *If I Recounted the Paths of Childhood*, 107-108.

39 Khodr, *If I Recounted the Paths of Childhood*, 85.

40 Khodr, *If I Recounted the Paths of Childhood*, 98.

41 Khodr, *If I Recounted the Paths of Childhood*, 107.

42 Khodr, *If I Recounted the Paths of Childhood*, 86.

### **Conclusion**

My aim in this article has been to show that spiritual theology presented here through the thought of George Khodr incorporates the constituents of a contemporary Christian theology; a theology that is founded on the Spirit of God bestowed upon the human and is able to address and embrace every human being, overcoming the different barriers among people and nations that have been erected throughout history. It is a theology that is open to ecumenism and dialogue, making unity in the spirit possible.

I will end this article with the words of Metropolitan George Khodr:

Christ ... has been the hidden Word in every tradition, sleeping in the night of religions, philosophies, literature, and arts. While the Christian is merely the one who rings the bell so that life in our inner cosmos rises and ignites the whole of cosmos.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, Khodr's thought combines the rise of life in the human being with the ignition of the entire cosmos, i.e., between the fullness of the human in ascent and of the divine in descent, and both as the one movement of the spirit.

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<sup>43</sup> Khodr, *If I Recounted the Paths of Childhood*, 88.