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Freedom and Grace in the Teaching of Mark the Hermit¹

Abstract: Mark the Hermit is one of the most important theoreticians of ascetic life in the ancient Church. In his ascetic writings, he takes up a number of subjects, including teaching about freedom and grace. This is not a systematic doctrine, but rather statements scattered in his works, occasional, often similar to each other. “Freedom” is defined by St. Mark the Hermit by the term ἐλευθερία, while “grace” – by the term χάρις. He also reminds us that freedom is given to man by Christ; man also receives it in the sacrament of baptism, because it frees him from the burden of sin. Grace, in turn, is presented by Mark the Hermit always as a gift from God given to man. Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven is a gift, and not a reward for deeds, and the salvation that we receive from Christ is also grace. St Mark the Hermit’s teaching on freedom and grace certainly differs from the views of the Messalian sect, whose followers did not want to admit that grace and freedom are given to the baptised, so that they can perfect themselves throughout their lives and become similar to God.

Keywords: Mark the Ascetic, Mark the Hermit, freedom, grace, Christ, baptism

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We have little information² about Mark the Hermit.³ According to Nicefor Ksantopulos he was supposed to be a disciple of St John Chrysostom and a superior in Ancyra (today's Ankara).⁴ Then he left the religious community and went to the Judean Desert, where he took up the hermit's life. He is undoubtedly one of the most important theoreticians of ascetic life in the ancient Church.⁵ In his writings Mark the Hermit undertakes a number of ascetic themes. One of them is drawing the monks' attention to the fact that they should always remember about God, fight against bad thoughts and pray without distractions.⁶

We know eleven works of St Mark the Hermit: *De lege spirituali*, *De his qui putant se ex operibus iustificari*, *De paenitentia*, *De baptismo*, *Ad Nicolaum praecepta animae salutaria*, *De temperantia*, *Disputatio cum quodam causidico*, *Consultatio intellectus cum sua ipsius anima*, *De ieiunio*, *De Melchisedech*, *Adversus Nestorianos*.⁷ Certainly in each one we can find the subject

² Biographical information on Mark the Hermit, see: O. Hesse, *Markos Eremites und Symeon von Mesopotamien*, Göttingen 1973; J. Gribomont, *Marc le Moine*, DSAM 10 (1977), col. 274–283; A. Grillmeier, *Marco Eremita e l'origenismo*, "Cristianesimo nella storia" 1 (1980), pp. 9–58; J. Gribomont, *Marc l'Eremita*, DECA 2 (1990), p. 1535; P. Szczur, *Marek Eremita*, EK 11 (2006), col. 1277; M. Starowieyski, J.M. Szymusiak (eds.), *Nowy słownik wczesnochrześcijańskiego piśmiennictwa*, 2nd ed, Poznań 2018, pp. 690–691.

³ Mark is usually called Mark the Hermit or Mark the Monk; also Mark the Ascetic. Some people believe that the second form is more correct, as he is defined in manuscripts in this way, that is Mark the Monk (see: A. Jasiewicz, *Misterium chrztu świętego w nauczaniu ascetycznym św. Marka Mnicha*, in: F. Drączkowski [et al.] (eds.), *Katechumenat i inicjacja chrześcijańska w Kościele starożytnym*, Lublin 2011, p. 207). In this study, however, we will use both the terms for St Mark, Marcus Monachus. Under the name of Mark the Monk there was also published: *Opera ascetica: florilegium et sermones tres*, ed. Ph. Roelli, Turnhout 2009, CCG 72. The author of those published works is however another Mark, living in XII/XIII century.

⁴ See: Nicephor Callisti, *Historia ecclesiastica*, XIV 30; LIII; LIV, PG 146, 1157; 1252; 1256.

⁵ See: P. Szczur, *Marek Eremita*, col. 1277.

⁶ See: J. Naumowicz, [introduction to:] *Św. Marek Eremita*, in: *Filokalia – teksty o modlitwie serca*, Kraków 2002, p. 113.

⁷ More on Mark the Hermit's works see: A. Jasiewicz, *Święty Marek Mnich, O Prawie duchowym*, "Śląskie Studia Historyczno-Teologiczne" 45 (2012) no. 2,

we are interested in, which does not mean that Mark systematically discussed the issue of freedom and grace. Rather, these are statements scattered throughout his works, incidental, often similar to each other. Therefore, a choice had to be made to present the most important texts relating to freedom and grace in the teaching of St Mark the Hermit.

St Mark the Hermit uses the word ἐλευθερία to denote “freedom,” while “grace” is denoted by term χάρις. In the author’s surviving writings, both in his ascetic and theological reflections and in the biblical texts he quotes, there are forty-two words with the stem ἐλευθερ- and the word χάρις appears one hundred and two times. Let us try to learn from selected fragments what our author thinks about freedom and grace.

Freedom

In his work *De lege spirituali*, Mark the Hermit stresses that Christian freedom does not consist in living a carefree and playful life. He refers to the words of St Paul, who states in his Letter to the Romans: “The law is spiritual. And I am fleshly, sold into the bondage of sin” (Rom 7:14), says that freedom means obedience to the Christ’s law of freedom.⁸ He also explains what it consists in. According to St Mark the Monk: “The law of freedom (Ὁ νόμος τῆς ἐλευθερίας) teaches the whole truth. Many read about it in a theoretical way, but few really understand it, and these only in the degree to which they practice the commandments.”⁹ The author therefore places the main emphasis on the necessity of keeping the commandments. This subject appears relatively often in the works of Mark the Hermit. In his opinion, knowing the law of freedom does not suffice; it should also be put into practice.

Mark the Hermit explains even more precisely the link between freedom and the deed. For he says: “The law of freedom (Ὁ νόμος

pp. 257–258; M. Starowieyski, J.M. Szymusiak (eds.), *Nowy słownik wczesnochrześcijańskiego piśmiennictwa*, pp. 690–691, P. Szczur, *Marek Eremita*, col. 1277.

⁸ See: A. Jasiewicz, *Święty Marek Mnich, O Prawie duchowym*, p. 257.

⁹ Marcus Eremita, *De lege spirituali*, 30, PG 65, 909; transl. G. Palmer, P. Sherrard, K.T. Ware, p. 112.

τῆς ἐλευθερίας) is studied by means of true knowledge, it is understood through the practice of the commandments, and is fulfilled through the mercy of Christ.”¹⁰ Three elements, therefore, according to the Monk, are essential, not to say indispensable, for the proper exercise of the law of freedom, namely knowledge of it, then the already mentioned practice of the commandments and, finally, grace.

However, Mark warns: “Do not seek the perfection of this law in human virtues, for it is not found perfect in them. Its perfection is hidden in the Cross of Christ.”¹¹ What does this mean? The author sees a profound connection between the right of freedom and grace. If acting in accordance with God’s commandments is considered an important factor in knowing the law of freedom, it is still not enough to be perfect. What is needed is, as Mark the Hermit says, “God’s mercy”¹² by which we can understand the gifts of grace.

Our author adds more. What he says, is: “Those who do not consider themselves under obligation to perform all Christ’s commandments study the law of God in a literal manner, ‘understanding neither what they say nor what they affirm’ (1 Tim 1:7). Therefore, they think that they can fulfil it by their own works.”¹³ Grace is therefore indispensable, grace which helps to know and keep God’s commandments, being guided by their spirit and not the letter of the law. Such approach guarantees achieving perfection.

Mark the Hermit speaks about freedom in yet another context, namely baptism. In *De baptismo*, he uses terms such as “freedom” (ἐλευθερία), “to be free” (ἐλευθεροῦνται), “to set free” (ἐλευθερώω) multiple times.¹⁴ This is entirely understandable when we take into

¹⁰ Ibid., 32.

¹¹ Ibid., 31.

¹² Ibid., 33: “When we are compelled by our conscience to accomplish all the commandments of God, then we shall understand that the law of the Lord is faultless (cf. Ps 19:8. LXX). It is performed through our good actions, but cannot be perfected by men without God’s mercy”.

¹³ Ibid., 34.

¹⁴ On the general analysis of the theology of baptism in Mark the Hermit see: T.K. Ware, *The Sacrament of Baptism and the Ascetic Life in the Teaching of Mark the Monk*, “Studia Patristica” 10 (1970) no. 1, 441–452.

account the fact that our author often refers to Saint Paul, who, in his statements, points out that baptism frees man from the bondage of sin and makes him free. The Monk also emphasises the liberation of man through Christ, for He brings him true freedom. And it is sin that always enslaves us and deprives us of power.¹⁵

Mentioning the consequences of baptism, our Monk, in addition to purification (καθαρισμός) and inhabitation (ἐνοίκησης) of Christ and the Holy Spirit in the baptised, also points to the liberation (ἐλευθερία) from sins. Mark the Hermit is aware of the fact that original sin has made man more capable of evil than good. Of course, according to the author, this does not mean physical incitement to sin.¹⁶ However, one can speak of a certain weakening and enslavement (δουλεία) of man¹⁷ as a result of “shameful passions (πάθη τῆς ἀτιμίας)”¹⁸ which are in him (cf. Rom 1:26). That is why Mark the Hermit points out that it is baptism that brings freedom, frees us from the evil powers and domination of evil.¹⁹ This does not mean, however, total freedom from sin after baptism. Man is still under threat from assaults (προσβολή) from the devil, because he has been endowed with free will, which is constantly under attack from Satan.²⁰ This is therefore a completely different approach to baptism from that of the Messalians,²¹ who believed that after receiving this sacrament, the demon constantly resides in man and continually conquers him.²²

¹⁵ See: Marcus Eremita, *De baptismo*, V 143–146, SCh 445, p. 336; *ibid.*, IX 39, 358.

¹⁶ See: Marcus Eremita, *Adversus Nestorianos*, 29, SCh 455, p. 284.

¹⁷ See: Marcus Eremita, *De baptismo*, II 60, SCh 445, p. 304.

¹⁸ Marcus Eremita, *Ad Nicolaum praecepta animae salutaris*, IX 5, PG 65, p. 1041.

¹⁹ See: Marcus Eremita, *De baptismo*, II 45, SCh 445, p. 302; A. Jasiewicz, *Misterium chrztu świętego w nauczaniu ascetycznym św. Marka Mnicha*, p. 209.

²⁰ See: Marcus Eremita, *De baptismo* XI, 70 – XIII, 5, SCh 445, pp. 370–374.

²¹ The Messalians are a well-known sect in Asia Minor and in Greece and Egypt. Its followers proclaimed that, as a result of Adam's sin, the devil dwells in every soul. He can only be cast out by praying and leading an ascetic life. More about this sect see: G. O'Collins, E.G. Farrugia, *Leksykon pojęć teologicznych i kościelnych z indeksem angielsko-polskim*; transl. B. Żak, Kraków 2002, p. 175.

²² See: A. Jasiewicz, *Misterium chrztu świętego w nauczaniu ascetycznym św. Marka Mnicha*, p. 210.

It should also be stressed that according to St Mark the Hermit, the sacrament of baptism frees the baptised from sin to such an extent that it enables this person to return to the state of being as Adam had before sin. Therefore, he mentions the so-called “second” paradise by which he means the Church: “By the grace of Christ (χάρτι Χριστοῦ) you have become a new Adam [...]. The Lord came for our sakes and died for us; He delivered us from inherited death (πατρικὸς θάνατος); He cleanses us and renews us through baptism; He sets us in the Paradise of the Church (τῷ παραδείσῳ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας); and He bids us eat from every tree that grows in Paradise – that is, to love all those who have been baptized in the Church.”²³ Baptism is not only the cooperation between God and man, it is also obedience on the part of man to the spiritual law and the law of freedom, as St. Paul argues (cf. Rom 7:14).

The Monk sees a close relationship between baptism and the right to freedom, because he says that “Holy baptism is perfect (τέλειον), but it does not render perfect the one who does not keep the commandments [...]. For faith is not only to be baptized into Christ, but to keep His commandments.”²⁴ So he has a recurring conviction that fulfilling the commandments becomes a condition of being open to Christ and thus of being a perfect man.

Grace

Speaking of grace, St Mark the Hermit often identifies it with the gift of the Holy Spirit. He calls it the grace of the Holy Spirit, which “is one and unchanging, but energizes in each one of us as He wills (cf. 1 Cor 12:11).”²⁵ At the same time, the Hermit also points out that it was given to man in the sacrament of baptism. Here, then, we discover a second, no less important element present in St Mark’s teaching on grace, namely, that its impartation takes place in

²³ Marcus Eremita, *De baptismo*, XVII 20, Sch 445; transl. K.T. Ware, p. 444.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, II 10, Sch 445, p. 298; transl. K.T. Ware, p. 446.

²⁵ Marcus Eremita, *De his qui putant se ex operibus iustificari*, 115, PG 65, p. 947; transl. G. Palmer, P. Sherrard, K.T. Ware, p. 134.

baptism. “Everyone baptized in the orthodox manner,” says Saint Hermit, “has received mystically the fullness of grace.”²⁶

Mark develops the theme related to linking the grace to baptism in the already quoted work *De baptismo*. He writes there that: “Christ, being perfect God, has bestowed upon the baptized the perfect grace of the Spirit. We for our part cannot possibly add to that grace, but it is revealed and manifests itself to us increasingly, the more we fulfil the commandments [...]. Whatever, then, we offer to Him after our regeneration, was already hidden within us and came originally from Him.”²⁷

While reading these words of St Mark the Hermit it is worth noting several important issues. Speaking of grace received in the baptism he emphasizes that we possess “the perfect grace of the Spirit” (τελείαν τὴν χάριν τοῦ Πνεύματος). And in other places, also referring to baptism he points to God’s grace (τὴν χάριν τοῦ Θεοῦ),²⁸ or Holy Ghost’s indwelling in the heart of the baptised (τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ τῶν πιστῶν κεκρυμμένον),²⁹ or Christ doing the same (Χριστὸς οἰκεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν).³⁰ The second remark concerns Mark’s favourite topic, that is keeping the commandments. By doing this, the Christian not only discovers grace in himself, but above all sees it working. What is more, baptismal grace is so perfect and so sufficient that no spiritual progress can “add anything” to it.³¹ According to the Hermit, this is due to the fact of Christ and the Holy Spirit living (ἐνοίκησις) in the baptised person.³²

Speaking of the grace of the Holy Spirit which we receive during baptism Mark the Hermit clearly argues against the views of the Messalians mentioned earlier. They believed that the Holy Spirit does not come with baptism, but at the end of a Christian’s spiritual

²⁶ Marcus Eremita, *De his qui putant se ex operibus iustificari*, 92, PG 65, p. 944; transl. G. Palmer, P. Sherrard, K.T. Ware, p. 133.

²⁷ Marcus Eremita, *De baptismo*, XVII 85–89, SCh 445; transl. K.T. Ware, p. 442.

²⁸ See: *ibid.*, II 26–37, SCh 445, pp. 300–302.

²⁹ See: *ibid.*, V 235, SCh 445, p. 344.

³⁰ See: *ibid.*, IV 93, SCh 445, p. 322.

³¹ See: A. Jasiewicz, *Mysterium chrztu świętego w nauczaniu ascetycznym św. Marka Mnicha*, p. 208; K.T. Ware, *Baptism and the Ascetic Life in the Teaching of Mark the Monk*, “*Studia Patristica*” 10 (1970), p. 441–443.

³² See: Marcus Eremita, *De baptismo*, XVII 95, SCh 445, p. 396.

life. Conversely, the author of *De baptismo* is of the opinion that the grace of the Holy Spirit is given at baptism, that is, at the beginning of the Christian way.³³ Our Monk believes that it is one thing for the baptised person to have Christ and the Holy Spirit inside him, and another for him to be aware of their presence, which should lead to putting the discovered grace into practice. Mark expresses this in the following words: “Grace has been given mystically to those who have been baptized into Christ; and it becomes active within them to the extent that they actively observe the commandments.”³⁴ Two levels can therefore be distinguished in this Hermit’s thought. The first is the grace of baptism (μυστικῶς) hidden in man, and the second is about grace manifested in deeds (ἐνεργῶς). This is done by keeping the commandments. “Everyone,” says St Mark the Monk, “baptized in the orthodox manner has received mystically the fullness of grace; but he becomes conscious of this grace only to the extent that he actively observes the commandments (ἐργασία τῶν ἐντολῶν).”³⁵

In the treatise *On Those Who Think that They Are Made Righteous by Works*, Mark the Hermit refers to the opinion of those who say: “There are those who claim that we cannot do good unless we actively receive the grace of the Spirit.”³⁶ It follows from these words that it is only through grace that we can do good; however, we must know that the grace given sacramentally does not work in a magical way. It requires us to do a concrete act and to cooperate. For the Hermit says that grace works when “they actively observe the commandments (ἐργασία τῶν ἐντολῶν).”³⁷ He repeats this in another place of his work *On Those Who Think that They Are Made Righteous by Works*. He says that man receives the sacramental grace of baptism, to “the extent that he actively observes the commandments.”³⁸ Mark the Monk is even of the opinion that: “He

³³ See: *ibid.*, V 235, 275, SCh 445, p. 344, 348, see: także A. Jasiewicz, *Misterium chrztu świętego w nauczaniu ascetycznym św. Marka Mnicha*, p. 211.

³⁴ Marcus Eremita, *De his qui putant se ex operibus iustificari*, 56, PG 65, 937; transl. G. Palmer, P. Sherrard, K.T. Ware, p. 130.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 92, PG 65, 944; transl. G. Palmer, P. Sherrard, K.T. Ware, p. 133.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 59, PG 65, 940; transl. G. Palmer, P. Sherrard, K.T. Ware, p. 130.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 92, PG 65, 944; transl. G. Palmer, P. Sherrard, K.T. Ware, p. 133.

who seeks the energies of the Spirit, before he has actively observed the commandments, is like someone who sells himself into slavery and who, as soon as he is bought, asks to be given his freedom while still keeping his purchase-money.”³⁹ However, this does not mean total passivity of God’s grace and that from the moment of its reception everything depends solely on man. Of course, we are not dealing here with any Pelagianism, because St Mark is convinced that “grace never ceases to help us secretly; but to do good – as far as lies in our power – depends on us.”⁴⁰

What does this hidden support of grace for us consist in? First, as the Hermit says, “grace arouses the conscience in a divine manner. That is how even sinners have come to repent and so to conform to God’s will.”⁴¹ So we can find here a connection between grace and God’s mercy, which no one is deprived of, not even the greatest sinner. The grace of God accepted by man gives God the opportunity to grant forgiveness. However, this is not the end of us being supported by grace in a hidden way. Mark adds that grace is also hidden “in advice given by a neighbour.”⁴² This type of statement leads to the conviction that God’s influence on us is also carried out by another person. Listening to his or her hints, being given advice, can be treated as a manifestation of God’s grace.

There is a third element that the Hermit points to. He says that grace supporting us in a hidden way also means that “sometimes it also accompanies our understanding during reading, and as a natural result teaches our intellect the truth about itself”.⁴³ In this case it is possible to speak of the inner inspirations to which a person open to the grace of God is subjected.

St Mark the Hermit also stresses that it is necessary for man to cooperate with God’s grace: “If, then, we do not hide the talent given to us in this way, we shall enter actively into the joy of the Lord (cf. Matt 25:14–30).”⁴⁴ He uses a clear comparison when he says,

³⁹ Ibid., 64, PG 65, 940; transl. G. Palmer, P. Sherrard, K.T. Ware, p. 130.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 61.

⁴¹ Ibid., 62.

⁴² Ibid., 63.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

“a seed will not grow without earth and water; and a man will not develop without voluntary suffering and divine help.”⁴⁵

Mark the Hermit also explains how one can recognize the action of God’s grace in man. This includes practical hints: what one should do, what attitude to assume to constantly live in grace. The saint first of all encourages vigilance, endurance and prayer. He says: “He who can without strain keep vigil, be long-suffering and pray is manifestly a partaker of the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁶ Mark, being aware of human weakness, allows, however, for a situation where man, despite his good will and many good intentions, is not always able to meet these requirements. He does not write such person off, but consoles him that “he who feels strain while doing these things, yet willingly endures it, also quickly receives help.”⁴⁷

The saint Monk, using images taken from everyday life, also draws attention to the reasons for man’s receiving grace. One of them is the strength necessary to live in virtues. He says, “When rain falls upon the earth, it gives life to the quality inherent in each plant: sweetness in the sweet, astringency in the astringent; similarly, when grace falls upon the hearts of the faithful, it gives to each the energies appropriate to the different virtues without itself changing.”⁴⁸

Another reason for receiving grace is the need for inner development and growth, since for human soul it is food, drink, clothing, rest, joy and strengthening. The Hermit says, “to him who hungers after Christ grace is food; to him who is thirsty, a reviving drink; to him who is cold, a garment; to him who is weary, rest; to him who prays, assurance; to him who mourns, consolation.”⁴⁹

Mark the Hermit warns against disregarding Divine grace or forgetting about it. Therefore in the *Letter to Nicolas the Solitary*, which is a beautiful lesson on the fact that whatever we have received from God, is His grace, he asks, “You must not let forgetfulness of evil or laziness make you grow unmindful of these many and great blessings, and so pass the rest of your life uselessly

⁴⁵ Ibid., 70.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 98, PG 65, 944; transl. G. Palmer, P. Sherrard, K.T. Ware, p. 133.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 116, PG 65, 948; transl. G. Palmer, P. Sherrard, K.T. Ware, p. 134.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 117.

and ungrateful”⁵⁰. This becomes important, for instance, when faced with a sense of gratitude to God, “who gave me all these gifts of grace for my salvation.”⁵¹ One more important aspect of this statement by Mark the Hermit should be noted. He speaks here not only of the grace we receive in the sacrament of baptism, but of all the other graces that man receives.

The encouragement to abide in every grace received from God is repeated many times. In the already quoted *Letter to Nicolas the Solitary* St Mark speaks to him: “Therefore, my dear son, since through the grace of Christ you possess natural understanding, continue always to occupy your mind with such meditation. Do not let yourself be overcome by destructive forgetfulness or by the laziness which paralyzes the intellect and turns it away from life.”⁵² Speaking of grace, Mark the Monk constantly stresses that it should be seen as a gift from God. That is why he refers to various types of life situations, which may confirm us in the mistaken belief that it is our attitude that makes the deeds we perform deserve recognition.

Yet, even if we treat someone with kindness, love, talk to each other like brothers, do good around us, all this is the fruit of God’s grace helping us: “When one man helps another by word or deed, let them both recognize in this the grace of God. He who does not understand this will come under the power of him who does.”⁵³ Saint Mark says even more: “Wishing to show that to fulfill every commandment is a duty, whereas sonship is a gift given to men through His own Blood, the Lord said: ‘When you have done all that is commanded you, say: We are useless servants: we have only done what was our duty’ (Luke 17:10). Thus the kingdom of heaven is not a reward for works, but a gift of grace prepared by the Master for his faithful servants.”⁵⁴ Here reappears the theme of baptism, of filiation, of the eternal reward, which we do not receive for our

⁵⁰ Marcus Eremita, *Ad Nicolaum praecepta animae salutaria*, II 1, PG 65, 1029; transl. G. Palmer, P. Sherrard, K.T. Ware, p. 148.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, II, PG 65, 1032; transl. G. Palmer, P. Sherrard, K.T. Ware, p. 149.

⁵² *Ibid.*, III.

⁵³ Marcus Eremita, *De lege spirituali*, 74, PG 65, 913; transl. G. Palmer, P. Sherrard, K.T. Ware, p. 115.

⁵⁴ Marcus Eremita, *De his qui putant se ex operibus iustificari*, 2, PG 65, 929; transl. G. Palmer, P. Sherrard, K.T. Ware, p. 125.

human merits and just for observing God's commandments, but by the grace of the Lord. Of course, there is a need for fidelity on our part, but we must not forget the basic truth that everything is done by the "grace of the Lord."

If we wish to sum up the teaching of St Mark the Hermit on freedom and grace, it should be said that it is not original in the sense of adding something new. It also lacks lofty and complex theological speculation; it is more about practical hints of spiritual character, aimed at showing the monk that he was generously endowed by God with both freedom and grace. It can certainly be said that our author faithfully conveys the most important aspects of the doctrine on freedom and grace.

It is Christ who gives man freedom. It is also received in the sacrament of baptism, because it makes one free from the burden of sin. In turn, grace is always presented by our author as God's gift given to man. Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven is a gift and not a reward for deeds; salvation given to us by Christ is also a grace. The attitude of gratitude towards God should therefore accompany man in his entire life. He cannot forget that he received everything from the Creator as grace.

At this point it is worth quoting the words of Pope Francis from his apostolic exhortation entitled *Gaudete et exsultate*, which can be a summary of the reflection on freedom and grace in the doctrine of St Mark the Hermit. One of the paragraphs of this papal document bears a significant title "New Pelagians." There we find the following words:

"Still, some Christians insist on taking another path, that of justification by their own efforts, the worship of the human will and their own abilities. The result is a self-centred and elitist complacency, bereft of true love. This finds expression in a variety of apparently unconnected ways of thinking and acting: an obsession with the law, an absorption with social and political advantages, a punctilious concern for the Church's liturgy, doctrine and prestige [...]. Not

infrequently, contrary to the promptings of the Spirit, the life of the Church can become a museum piece or the possession of a select few. This can occur when some groups of Christians give excessive importance to certain rules, customs or ways of acting. The Gospel then tends to be reduced and constricted, deprived of its simplicity, allure and savour. This may well be a subtle form of pelagianism, for it appears to subject the life of grace to certain human structures. It can affect groups, movements and communities, and it explains why so often they begin with an intense life in the Spirit, only to end up fossilized... or corrupt.”⁵⁵

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