

PETROS VASSILIADIS – NIKI PAPAGEORGIOU – NIKOLAOS DIMITRIADIS (eds.)

# ORTHODOX ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY THE OPEN PUBLIC LECTURES

Master in

Orthodox  
Ecumenical Theology



ORTHODOX ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY.  
THE OPEN PUBLIC LECTURES

The book **ORTHODOX ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY. THE OPEN PUBLIC LECTURES**, edited by P. Vassiliadis – N. Papageorgiou – N. Dimitriadis, consists of the open public lectures given by the Academic Scientific Committee members and the teaching staff of the Master Program in “Orthodox Ecumenical Theology”, together with the inaugurating lectures of the cooperating theological institutions.

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CENTER OF ECUMENICAL, MISSIOLOGICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES  
“METROPOLITAN PANTELEIMON PAPAGEORGIU”

36

**PETROS VASSILIADIS – NIKI PAPAGEORGIU – NIKOLAOS DIMITRIADIS (eds.)**

**ORTHODOX ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY  
THE OPEN PUBLIC LECTURES**

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ΚΕΝΤΡΟ ΟΙΚΟΥΜΕΝΙΚΩΝ, ΙΕΡΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΙΚΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΠΕΡΙΒΑΛΛΟΝΤΙΚΩΝ ΜΕΛΕΤΩΝ  
«ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΤΗΣ ΠΑΝΤΕΛΕΗΜΩΝ ΠΑΠΑΓΕΩΡΓΙΟΥ»

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ΠΕΤΡΟΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΑΔΗΣ – ΝΙΚΗ ΠΑΠΑΓΕΩΡΓΙΟΥ – ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΣ ΔΗΜΗΤΡΙΑΔΗΣ (εκδ.)

**ΟΡΘΟΔΟΞΗ ΟΙΚΟΥΜΕΝΙΚΗ ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ  
ΟΙ ΔΗΜΟΣΙΕΣ ΑΝΟΙΧΤΕΣ ΔΙΑΛΕΞΕΙΣ**

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Θεσσαλονίκη 2021

## **PREFACE**

*The International Hellenic University (IHU, ihu.edu.gr), with the blessing of His All-Holiness, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, and the support of the academic members of the Center of Ecumenical, Missiological and Environmental Studies “Metropolitan Panteleimon Papageorgiou” (cemes-en.weebly.com) has set up an inter-Orthodox, inter-jurisdictional English speaking Master Program in “Orthodox Ecumenical Theology” (MOET) of highest academic standards, within the framework of its School of Humanities, Social Sciences and Economics (hum.ihu.edu.gr/ index.php/en/courses/masters/master-in-orthodox-ecumenical-theology).*

*Although the program was originally planned for non-Orthodox graduate students wishing to learn more about the Orthodox Theology, not only as it was developed during the past two millennia, but also as it addresses current contemporary issues, after a consultation with other Autocephalous Orthodox Churches, it was decided to have it also serve Orthodox unity at the vital section of theological education. The program is mission-oriented, biblically and liturgically based, with a primary intention to study the authentic Christian tradition, and at the same time reflect on how this can be implemented in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

*To achieve this goal the Scientific Academic Committee of the Program was decided to consist of renowned Academic hierarchs who serve, or have served, as Rectors, Deans, Directors of Orthodox Academic Institutions from a wide range of Orthodox constituencies: the Metropolitans John Zizioulas of Pergamon (Athens Academy), Kallistos Ware of Diokleia (Oxford), Nifon Mihaita of Targoviste (Rector of the Targoviste University), Makarios Tillyridis of Kenya (Director of Makarios III), Hilarion Alfeyev of Volokolamsk (Ss. Cyril & Methodius, Moscow), Vassilios Karayannis (President of St. Epiphanius), and Archbishop of America Elpidoforos Lambryniadis (President of Holy Cross).*

*The director of the program and President in Honour of CEMES, in consultation with the President of IHU and the members of the Program’s Academic committee, have decided to extend the mission of the Program to the wider international public with a series of Open Public Lectures provided by the members of the Academic Committee and its teaching staff, and officially inaugurated with an extra lecture by the heads of the Angelicum Pontifical University, after their inter-university agreement with IHU.*

*The 32 chapters of this book contain all these lectures, recorded in the CEMES YouTube channel ([https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCD\\_5mcv3Z82pYW8LFUkZEmw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCD_5mcv3Z82pYW8LFUkZEmw)), either by transcription of the sound recording of the lectures or in an expanded written form from already existing material of the authors. The present edition is dedicated to all our teaching staff, as well as to our first students, and its publication in an e-booklet form was encouraged by the millions of viewers of the original presentation of the lectures.*

*Pentecost 2021*

*The Editors*

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*Chapter 1*

**MESSAGE BY CARDINAL KURT KOCH**  
**President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity**

*On the inauguration of the ecumenical cooperation between  
the Institute for Ecumenical Studies of the Angelicum  
and the Master Program in Orthodox Ecumenical Theology*

Your Eminence, dear Archbishop Job,  
Esteemed Professor Petros Vassiliadis,  
Dear brothers and sisters,

I am pleased to extend my cordial greeting to you and to all distinguished professors and students of the Master Program in Orthodox Ecumenical Theology of the International Hellenic University.

The Master Program in Orthodox Ecumenical Theology, founded with the blessing of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, offers a unique opportunity not only for inter-Orthodox academic collaboration, but also for inter-Christian relations.

In this regard, I am grateful for the recent signature of a protocol of partnership between the Master Program and the Institute for Ecumenical Studies of the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum), recently established under the patronage of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

The aim of this protocol is to develop research in ecumenical theology and in Catholic-Orthodox academic exchange, particularly through seminars and workshops for teaching staff and students, study visits and academic conferences.

Inaugurating this collaboration, Professor Hyacinthe Destivelle, Director of the Institute for Ecumenical Studies, will give today a lecture on “Challenges and Perspectives of the Catholic- Orthodox Dialogue,” which will be the first talk of the Spring cycle of the Open Public Lectures of the Master Program.

I am pleased that such an important topic is addressed as a point of departure of your academic exchange, since the dialogue of truth, in parallel to the dialogue of love and of life, is the only way to reach the unity in faith we long for. As Pope Francis affirmed in his address to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in Constantinople in 2014, “I want to assure each one of you here that, to reach the desired goal of full unity, the Catholic Church does not intend to impose any conditions except that of the shared profession of faith.”

It is my wish and hope that this ecumenical and international initiative between

MESSAGE BY CARDINAL KURT KOCH

the Pontifical University Angelicum and the International Hellenic University will promote possibilities in academic research and theological formation, in the conviction that not only a formation in ecumenism is required, but also the inclusion of an ecumenical dimension in all theological disciplines. Indeed, joint research and formation are essential on our journey towards the fulfillment of Christ's prayer: *"that they all may be one"*!

With these sentiments I invoke on all taking part in this partnership the blessings of the Almighty God. *Ad multos annos! Is polla eti!*

Rome, 8 February 2021

Cardinal Kurt Koch *President*

The poster features a central image of Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow in conversation. The background is a collage of religious figures. Text elements include the logos of the International Hellenic University and the Master in Orthodox Ecumenical Theology (MOET) at the top. The title of the lecture is prominently displayed in the center, along with the speaker's name, Rev. Prof. H. Destivelle. A note mentions Prof. Dimitrios Keramidis's role. The event details (date and time) are in the top right, and the streaming information (YouTube channel) is in the bottom right. A note about public access is in the bottom left.

INTERNATIONAL HELLENIC UNIVERSITY

MASTER IN ORTHODOX ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY

TUESDAY 09-FEB 5:00PM-7:00 PM

**"CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES OF THE ORTHODOX-CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE"..**

Rev. Prof. H. Destivelle

Prof. Dimitrios Keramidis will respond and monitor the discussion

Public Lectures by the members of the Academic committee and the Teaching staff of MOET

YouTube  
**Open to the public**

LIVE STREAMING AT  
CEMES YOUTUBE CHANNEL

## Chapter 2

# CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES OF THE ORTHODOX-CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE

*Rev. Prof. Hyacinthe Destivelle OP*

*Open public lecture of the Master in Orthodox Ecumenical Theology  
Inauguration of the cooperation between the Institute for Ecumenical Studies of the  
Pontifical University Angelicum and the Master in Orthodox Ecumenical Theology of the  
International Hellenic University*

I would like firstly to thank Professor Vassiliadis for his kind invitation to give this talk at the beginning of the Spring Semester's open public lectures of the Master Program in Orthodox Ecumenical Theology.

As mentioned by His Eminence Cardinal Koch and His Eminence Archbishop Job, this lecture inaugurates the cooperation between the Institute for Ecumenical Studies of the Pontifical University *Angelicum*, and the Master Program in Orthodox Ecumenical Theology of the International Hellenic University. It is my wish and prayer that this academic exchange between our institutions will bear fruits on our journey towards unity between Catholic and Orthodox, the topic on which I was today invited to speak.

In my lecture I will firstly call to mind the main steps of the Catholic-Orthodox international theological dialogue, after which I will mention some challenges of this theological dialogue and some future steps which can be effectively be made.

### *1. The main steps of the Catholic-Orthodox international theological dialogue*

The establishment of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church as a whole was announced during the visit on 30 November 1979 of Saint John Paul II to Patriarch Dimitrios in the Phanar. Since then, a long and fruitful journey has been undertaken. The institution of this "dialogue of truth" followed the "dialogue of charity" which, during and after the Second Vatican Council, restored a climate of trust between Catholics and Orthodox.

This Commission had three particularities. The first was its pan-Orthodox character: while there were previously bilateral theological dialogues between the Holy See and some autocephalous Orthodox Churches, especially with the Moscow Patriarchate, the Commission this time brought together all the autocephalous Churches. The second particularity was its aim: the objective of the dialogue was not a predetermined model of unity, but, as stated in the plan to set underway the Commission adopted in 1980, the "re-establishment of full communion between [our] two churches [.. which] will find its expression in the common celebration of the holy Eucharist". The third characteristic was the methodology: the dialogue would not start, like in the past, from the disagreements, but from the elements already unifying our two Churches.

On the basis of what is shared, it was hoped to establish a common ground that would allow them to address their differences in a renewed way.

This is why the first three documents adopted by the Commission dealt with a reality common to Orthodox and Catholics, namely the sacraments. The *first document*, adopted in Munich, Germany, in 1982, focused on the Eucharist as the foundation of ecclesiology. This document takes up four main themes of the ecclesiology of communion: (1) a primarily sacramental conception of the Church; (2) a pneumatological vision of the Eucharist and of the Church; (3) an emphasis on the local dimension of the Church, and therefore on the role of the local bishop; and (4) the theme of unity in diversity.

The *second document*, adopted in Bari, Italy, in 1987, focused on the relationship between faith and communion, and especially on the sacraments of Christian initiation - baptism, chrismation/confirmation and communion. This document reaffirms three positions common to Orthodox and Catholics regarding the relationship between faith and communion: (1) the inseparable link between Eucharistic communion and ecclesial communion; (2) the importance of the adage *Lex orandi lex credenda*; and (3) the recognition that a diversity of practice does not call faith into question, especially with regard to the question to the sacraments of Christian initiation.

The *third document*, adopted in Valamo, Finland, in 1988, dealt with the sacrament of order and the importance of apostolic succession. This document focuses primarily on the bishop's ministry and his role in the Church, reflecting on three aspects: (1) the christological and pneumatological dimension of the bishop's ministry; (2) the fact that apostolic succession is rooted in the local Church; and (3) the link between ecclesial communion and episcopal collegiality. In connection with the question of episcopal collegiality, it was decided that the next topic of reflection would be the relationship between primacy and conciliarity in the Church, a theme that is at the heart of the difficulties between Catholics and Orthodox, and which is also an internal challenge to each of our Churches.

However, the international context obliged the Commission to change its program. Indeed, the revival of the Oriental Catholic Churches in Eastern Europe imposed on the agenda of the Commission the issue of so-called "uniatism". In 1993, the Commission adopted in Balamand, Lebanon, its *fourth document* entitled "Uniatism, Method of Union of the Past, and the Present Search for Full Communion". Yet the reception of this text was difficult and the dialogue experienced a period of crisis. It was only in 2006 that the Commission could resume its work on the topic envisaged in 1990, namely, the relationship between primacy and conciliarity.

A *fifth document* was adopted on this topic in 2007 in Ravenna, Italy. This document has two main parts. The first deepens the notions of conciliarity and authority based on Scripture and Tradition. The second part addresses the implementation of these two notions in the three levels of the Church, local, regional and universal. The central statement of the document is the following: "Primacy and conciliarity are mutually interdependent. That is why primacy at the different levels of the life of the Church, local, regional and universal, must always be considered in the context of conciliarity, and conciliarity likewise in the context of primacy" (43).

As a continuation of this reflection the Commission adopted in 2016 a *sixth document* in Chieti, Italy, entitled "Synodality and Primacy During the First Millennium: Towards a Common Understanding in Service to the Unity of the Church". While the *Ravenna Document* was a rather systematic reflection, the *Chieti Document* focuses on the history of the first millennium. One of the interesting aspects of the document is to describe more precisely the exercise of primacy and conciliarity at the universal level in the first millennium. It emphasizes two particular aspects: on the one hand, the criteria for the reception of an ecumenical council (among which is the cooperation, or "*synergeia*", of the Bishop of Rome), and on the other hand, the procedure of appeal to the Roman See described by the Council of Sardica (343). One can say that the *Chieti Document*, more than that of Ravenna, considers the question of synodality for itself, and not only as a "perspective" or a "framework" of primacy. Indeed, from the original question of primacy the dialogue came to be a more balanced reflection, articulating on an equal footing the principles of primacy and that of synodality. One can note a certain shift in the center of gravity of the theological dialogue. The primary objective of choosing the theme of primacy and conciliarity was to reflect together on primacy on a universal scale, the main obstacle among Catholics and Orthodox. Now - and this is perhaps the surprise of this theological dialogue - from a question originally on primacy, it seems that theological dialogue has gradually placed synodality at the center of the discussion.

After the adoption of the *Chieti Document* the Coordinating Committee of the International Commission met in 2017 in Leros, Greece, and decided to entrust two sub-commissions with the preparation of two drafts. The first draft, dedicated to the theme "Towards Unity in Faith: Theological and Canonical Issues" would summarize the fruits of the dialogue and outline the theological and canonical issues to be solved. The second draft would propose a common reading of the relationship between primacy and conciliarity in the second millennium. The purpose of such a document is not to rewrite the whole history of Catholic-Orthodox relations in the second millennium, but to undertake a hermeneutic reading of the main phases of the estrangement between East and West from the point of view of the relationships between primacy and conciliarity. The Coordinating Committee, which met in 2018 and 2019, is currently working on this second draft. In a following meeting it should decide whether to convene a new plenary meeting of the Commission in order to discuss this draft.

This overview of the major stages of the international Catholic-Orthodox theological dialogue shows the various fruits of this dialogue, which has been able to address a sensitive issue such as the question of primacy and synodality. One should yet firstly bear in mind that these documents reflect the position of the commissions, and not necessarily the official position of the Churches involved. Secondly, one should not forget that there are also *other instances of theological dialogue*. At the local level official national Orthodox-Catholic dialogues sometimes have been established long before the international commission, and have produced significant documents. For example, the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation, established in 1965, has published about thirty documents of agreement, among which of particular importance are the text on the Filioque adopted in 2003, and the document entitled

"Steps towards a Reunited Church: A Sketch of an Orthodox-Catholic Vision for the Future" adopted in 2010. The Joint Catholic-Orthodox Committee in France, founded in 1966, has also adopted several documents, particularly on the pastoral care of mixed families, on primacy and on *uniatism*. A Joint Commission of the Catholic German Bishops' Conference and the Orthodox Bishops' Conference in Germany was established in 2007, and has also published pastoral documents on the celebration of Sunday, on the Sacraments and on Easter. Finally, I would like also to mention the Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group, an international unofficial group of theological dialogue founded in 2004, which published in 2018 an extensive study entitled "Serving Communion: Re-thinking the Relationship between Primacy and Synodality". These examples show that local and unofficial dialogues are also essential, being often more innovative than the official international dialogue and serving to stimulate its reflection.

Finally, it must be emphasized that the "dialogue of truth" is not the only kind of relationship with the Orthodox Churches. The "dialogue of love" continues bilaterally with each of these Churches. Recent examples include numerous meetings of Pope Francis with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, notably in 2014 in Jerusalem and Istanbul, his meeting with Patriarch Kirill in 2016 in Cuba, and his travels in countries of Orthodox tradition like Georgia in 2016, and Bulgaria and Romania in 2019. Alongside the dialogues of truth and love is also what might be called the "dialogue of life". Part of this dialogue is "practical ecumenism", aiming at common witness in the social sphere, illustrated by the insertion of Patriarch Bartholomew's teaching in the encyclical *Laudato si*, the visit to Lesbos in 2016 of Pope Francis with Patriarch Bartholomew and Archbishop Hieronymos, and the meeting of heads of Churches in Bari in 2018 for a day of prayer and reflection on the Middle East. It is also worth mentioning the many projects undertaken in the sphere of the so-called "cultural ecumenism": a good example is the fruitful cooperation between the Apostoliki Diakonia in Athens and the Catholic Committee for Cultural Collaboration of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, thanks to which many initiatives have been undertaken, including study exchanges of seminarians and young priests. Finally, as part of the "spiritual ecumenism" we could mention the gift or loan of relics, such as those of St. Nicholas loaned to the Russian Church in 2017, an event that attracted more than two million pilgrims. All these contacts are important and form part of the "common path" with our Orthodox brethren, which should be also read theologically, as I will mention later.

## 2. *Three challenges of the Catholic-Orthodox theological dialogue*

In this second part, I would like to identify three challenges that seem important in the theological dialogue with the Orthodox Church, especially from the point of view of the relationship between primacy and synodality: (1) a theological reading of the first millennium; (2) a hermeneutical rereading of the second millennium; (3) and a prospective reflection on the third millennium.

Firstly, it seems essential to continue together a *theological reading of the first millennium*. Principles and models of communion honoured in this period can remain

paradigmatic for a future restoration of full communion, in the spirit of the well-known formula of Cardinal Ratzinger, who wrote in 1982: "Concerning the primacy Rome must not demand of the East more than what was formulated and lived during the first millennium".<sup>1</sup> The Chieti document already initiated this reflection, identifying a "common heritage of theological principles, canonical provisions and liturgical practices from the first millennium" which "constitutes a necessary reference point and a powerful source of inspiration for both Catholics and Orthodox as they seek to heal the wound of their division at the beginning of the third millennium" (21).

Let us identify some of these principles. A first principle is that the expressions of communion in the first millennium were not primarily jurisdictional. Indeed, the Chieti document points out the informal nature of the expressions of communion in the first millennium, affirming in particular that "the bishop of Rome did not exercise canonical authority over the churches of the East" (19). Another principle is the "mutual interdependence" between the primatial and synodal dimensions of the Church, as described by Canon 34 of the Apostles. This canon of the 4th century offers a description of the correlation between the *protos* and the other bishops of each region, which can be analogically used at each level of the Church (Ravenna 24, Chieti 10). Another institution of the first millennium linked with the exercise of primacy and synodality is the right of appeal to the major sees. Recent Orthodox-Catholic dialogues underlined the importance of the canons of the Council of Sardica (343), which describe such a procedure to the see of Rome (Chieti 2016, 19). A fourth source of inspiration is constituted by the ecumenical councils, which were *par excellence* the expressions of communion of the first millennium at the universal level. In this regard the Chieti document mentions the criteria for the reception of a council as ecumenical described by the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicaea II, 787): "[T]he agreement (*symphonia*) of the heads of the churches, the cooperation (*synergeia*) of the bishop of Rome, and the agreement of the other patriarchs (*symphronountes*)" (18). Finally, the diversity of ecclesial models of the first millennium is often underlined. The North American Orthodox-Catholic dialogue, in its response to the Chieti document, emphasises that "the early Church had a diversity of ecclesial organizational models, responding to local custom and need" (O- C US 2017). For example, the churches of Alexandria and Rome had specific internal organizational principles different from other churches: "This is not necessarily a Church-dividing practice. A certain diversity is not only to be expected in Church life, but should be welcomed as healthy".

Secondly, if the theological reading of the first millennium is necessary, a *hermeneutical rereading of the period of separation* is also required. It is no longer a question of finding sources of inspiration, but of understanding our separation, and of realizing that different theological expressions are not necessarily dividing. Indeed, christological agreements between Catholics and Oriental Orthodox were possible because they applied such an hermeneutic of language and traditions. In this respect, the hermeneutical criteria proposed by the St. Irenaeus Orthodox-Catholic Working

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<sup>1</sup> Cardinal J. RATZINGER, *Principles of Catholic Theology. Sketch and materials*, Paris, 1985, p. 222 (original: *Theologische Prinzipienlehre*, Muenchen, 1982).

Group in its document of 2018 are very useful: the hermeneutics of theological language, as well as of dogmas and canons, and the importance of non-theological factors, are all aspects that enable a better understanding of the development of the ecclesiologies in East and West. Such a hermeneutic is particularly important with regard to the teaching of Vatican I. Many ecumenical dialogues have called for Catholic “re-reception” or even “rewording” of the teachings of Vatican I, which were deeply conditioned by their historical context, and suggest that the Catholic Church should look for new expressions and vocabulary faithful to the original intention but integrated into a *communio* ecclesiology and adapted to the current cultural and ecumenical context. A hermeneutic re-reading of history is required not only to understand that our theological differences are not necessarily dividing, but also for the healing of memory. It is such a reinterpretation of history that allowed the lifting of the anathemas of 1054 between Rome and Constantinople, designated for the first time by Paul VI as "healing of memory". As stated in the document "From Conflict to Communion" published by the Catholic Church with the Lutheran World Federation for the common commemoration of the Reformation: "What happened in the past cannot be changed, but what is remembered of the past and how it is remembered can, with the passage of time, indeed change" (16).

I have mentioned the theological rereading of the first millennium and the hermeneutic reading of the second millennium. But the Catholic-Orthodox dialogue must also address a third aspect: a *prospective reflection on the third millennium*. Indeed, if the history of the first millennium is “decisive”, the first millennium should nevertheless not be idealized. The customary distinction of first and second millennium is itself overly simplistic (the St Irenaeus Group offers a more subtle historical survey in terms of five periods: 1st-8th centuries; 9th-15th centuries; 16th- 18th centuries; 19th century; 20th and 21st centuries). Furthermore, it has often been observed that it is difficult to speak of an “undivided” Church in the first millennium, bearing in mind the numerous phases of divisions between Rome and Constantinople (cf. St Irenaeus 2018, 5.3), but also the tragic schisms of the 5th century following the councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon.

In fact, the model of a reunited Church would have to be defined not only in continuity with the ancient structural principles of Christianity but also in response to the need for a unified Christian message in the world of today. In this prospective reflection, the document adopted in 2010 by the North American Catholic-Orthodox Commission "Steps Towards a Reunited Church" could be an important source of inspiration. It seems particularly necessary to propose a new type, though inspired by the past, of the exercise of primacy and conciliarity in a reconciled Church. This would be a way to answer the call of John Paul II in *Ut unum sint* to "seek - together, of course - the forms in which this ministry [of the Bishop of Rome] may accomplish a service of love recognized by all concerned" (95). The prospect might be that formulated by the then Cardinal Ratzinger, to "distinguish again, more clearly, between the proper function of Peter's successor and the patriarchal function; if necessary, to create new

patriarchates detached from the Latin Church."<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, in his address in Constantinople in 2014, also offered an important guideline regarding the restoration of communion between Catholics and Orthodox, when he said that “the restoration of full communion [...] does not signify the submission of one to the other, or assimilation. Rather, it means welcoming all the gifts that God has given to each, thus demonstrating to the entire world the great mystery of salvation accomplished by Christ the Lord through the Holy Spirit”. He then continued “I want to assure each one of you here that, to reach the desired goal of full unity, the Catholic Church does not intend to impose any conditions except that of the shared profession of faith”.<sup>3</sup>

### 3. *Future steps to be taken.*

Seeking inspiration in our common past, interpreting our differences and reflecting about the future, are in my view the three guidelines necessary for Catholic-Orthodox dialogue. To address these three issues, some methodological steps should be taken concerning the dialogue: (1) a better connection is needed between the dialogues; (2) a clarification of the terminology used; (3) a theological interpretation of our current relationships, (4) the promotion of reception.

The first step is that a better *connection is needed between the dialogues* — local and international, official and unofficial, and between the bilateral and multilateral dialogues themselves. A “dialogue of dialogues” is required. Indeed, many theological dialogues have addressed the question of primacy and conciliarity, especially the Catholic-Lutheran and Catholic-Anglican dialogues: their input could be very significant to the Catholic-Orthodox dialogue, even from a methodological point of view. For example, already in 1976 ARCIC was speaking of ‘the complementary primatial and conciliar aspects of episkope’ — rather like the Ravenna text emphasised the complementarity of primacy and conciliarity/synodality 31 years later (cf. ARCIC *Authority in the Church*, 1976 23). From a methodological point of view, the ecumenical model of differentiated consensus, already adopted by some theological dialogues, could be helpful also in the Catholic-Orthodox dialogue. With reference to the title of the Chieti document (*Towards a Common Understanding...*), the North American Orthodox-Catholic dialogue asks “[I]s it necessary, or even desirable, that we have absolutely identical understandings? Perhaps the ecumenical model of differentiated consensus is of service here”.

Another methodological step concerns the *clarification of the terminology* used by the dialogues. In fact, the documents do not always use in an homogenous and consistent way concepts such as “synodality/conciliarity”, “collegiality”, “primacy”, “authority”, “power”, “administration”, “government,” and “jurisdiction”, and especially the concept of “universal Church”. For example, the title of the Ravenna document uses the terms “conciliarity and authority”, while the title of the Chieti document uses the terms “synodality and primacy”.

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<sup>2</sup> Joseph RATZINGER, *Le nouveau peuple de Dieu*, Paris, Aubier, 1971, p. 68-69 [ad hoc transl.].

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, *Address during the Divine Liturgy*, Patriarchal Church of St. George, Istanbul, 30 November 2014.

A third methodological step is that the theological dialogue, or “dialogue of truth”, between Churches should not only reflect on their doctrinal differences of the past, but also *interpret theologically their current relationships*. Indeed, the relations between our Churches in all their dimensions are also a privileged *“locus theologicus”*. Since Vatican II, the development of the “dialogue of love” and the “dialogue of life”, through common prayer and witness, pastoral agreements, fraternal exchange of letters and gifts, reciprocal visits between Christian leaders at all levels, is ecumenically highly eloquent and has provided new theological perspectives. Ever since the time of the early Church, such gestures were considered as authentic signs and means of communion. In this regard the “dialogue of love” and the “dialogue of life” should not be understood only as a preparation for the “dialogue of truth”, but as a theology in action, capable of opening up new ecclesiological perspectives, as affirmed by Metropolitan Meliton: “Loving one another and dialoguing in charity, we do theology, or rather we build theologically”.<sup>4</sup> At a time when the relationships between Orthodox and Catholic are intensifying, it seems more than ever necessary to reread theologically this life of relationships, developing a “theology of the dialogue of love”, and thus fulfilling the words attributed to Patriarch Athenagoras in 1964: “Church leaders act, theologians explain.” As also John Paul II states in *Ut unum sint*: “acknowledging our brotherhood [...] is something much more than an act of ecumenical courtesy; it constitutes a basic ecclesiological statement” (UUS 42).

Finally, I would mention a last necessary step of our dialogue: to *promote the reception* of the results of the dialogues, not only by discussion among experts, but at all levels, so that the results may become a common heritage. The dialogue commissions should be sensitive also to this aspect of their work. This process of reception should involve the whole Church, the whole People of God in the exercise of the *sensus fidei*: lay faithful, theologians, and pastors, with the involvement of theological faculties and local ecumenical commissions. It is somehow what we are now doing in this lecture.

After identifying the main steps of the dialogue, I have tried to identify some theological and methodological challenges. I would like to say in conclusion that the dialogue is also conditioned by the internal developments of our Churches. With regard to primacy and synodality, it is the practice of primacy and synodality within the Catholic Church itself that will give credibility to its ecumenical commitment. The *synodal shaping* of the Catholic Church is therefore crucial. As Pope Francis states, “The commitment to build a synodal church - a mission to which we are all called, each with the role entrusted him by the Lord - has significant ecumenical implications”.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, “it is clear that the way in which the Catholic Church experiences synodality is important for its relations with other Christians. This is a challenge for ecumenism.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Proche Orient Chretien* 18 (1968), p. 359-361.

<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis, *Address marking the 50th anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis, *Address to Participants in the Conference Promoted by the Society for the Law of the Eastern Churches*, 19 September 2019.

But together with this internal synodality, the promotion of what can be called a “*synodality ad extra*” between Catholics and Orthodox is also important. Of course, synodality constitutes an aspect of the internal life of our Churches, nevertheless a certain synodality among the Churches is promoted whenever Church leaders come together in the name of Jesus Christ for common prayer, action and witness. Without waiting for full visible communion as a pre-condition for speaking and acting together, such a practice might enable Catholics and Orthodox to start joint discerning and decisionmaking processes on urgent matters of shared concern. This could foster opportunities to deepen mutual understanding, and enable our Churches to better support one another. In this regard the invitation to leaders of other Christian communions to participate in Catholic synodal processes at all levels is particularly important, as it is practised in the Synod of Bishops and usually also in diocesan synods. At another level, the 2018 meeting in Bari of Church leaders gathered at the invitation of Pope Francis, to pray, reflect and exchange informally on the situation of Christians in the Middle East, indicates a new way of exercising synodality. A joint preparation and commemoration of the 1700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council (Nicaea, 325) could provide the occasion to practise this synodality among Christians.

This external synodality is nothing other than “walking together”, *syn/odos*, as Pope Francis constantly repeats in his ecumenical triptych: we must “walk together, pray together, work together”. It is by walking together that we will receive unity, as Pope Francis reflected during Vespers in 2014 at the conclusion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity celebrated on the feast day of the conversion of Saint Paul. I would like to conclude with his words on that occasion: “Unity will not come about as a miracle at the very end. Rather, unity comes about in journeying; the Holy Spirit does this on the journey. If we do not walk together, if we do not pray for one another, if we do not collaborate in the many ways that we can in this world for the People of God, then unity will not come about! But it will happen on this journey, in each step we take. And it is not we who are doing this, but rather the Holy Spirit, who sees our goodwill”<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Pope Francis, *Homily for the Celebration of Vespers on the Solemnity of the Conversion of Saint Paul the Apostle*, 25 January.

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### Chapter 3

## AN ONTOLOGY OF LOVE: A Patristic Reading of Dietrich von Hildebrand's *The Nature of Love*

*Metropolitan of Pergamon Prof. John (Zizioulas)*

*Abstract: Dietrich von Hildebrand's treatise, **The Nature of Love**, is set in relation to the theological personalism of the Cappadocian fathers of the Church, and to my own earlier work done in this tradition. Several points of divergence are explored, especially points concerning von Hildebrand's claim that love exists as a response to the beauty of the beloved person. God's love for human beings does not always seem to fit the paradigm of value-response; His love seems rather to be creative of beauty in us rather than to respond to already existing beauty. But at the same time, the deep kinship of von Hildebrand's personalism with that of the Cappadocian fathers is stressed; he is at one with them in affirming the heart as distinct from the intellect, in affirming love as the supreme act of the person, and in affirming the place of beauty in the existence of persons.*

### *Introduction*

I regard it as a great privilege to be invited to offer some reflections on the thought of the late Dietrich von Hildebrand. I fully share the conviction of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, expressed when he was still a cardinal, that von Hildebrand's place in the intellectual history of the Catholic Church in the 20<sup>th</sup> century will be a prominent one when this history is written.

I happen to belong to a theological tradition which in many respects approaches theological and philosophical questions in a way different from that to which von Hildebrand belonged. As an Orthodox, I am shaped intellectually by the thought of the Greek Fathers rather than that of St. Augustine or Thomas Aquinas, who lie behind von Hildebrand's intellectual formation. And yet at this ecumenical age in which we live, Eastern and Western traditions are no longer indifferent to each other. In our effort to restore full communion as one and undivided Church we are becoming more and more aware of the need to ask ourselves how we view not only our past but also the fundamental existential questions preoccupying human beings at all times. Philosophers such as von Hildebrand and the questions they discuss are of ecumenical significance today. They are important for Catholics and Orthodox alike, just as they are for every person seeking illumination and deeper understanding of their human condition.

My acquaintance with the thought of von Hildebrand has arisen out of my preoccupation with the personalism of Patristic thought, particularly of the Greek Fathers. It has been by no means a deep acquaintance, as it is essentially limited to his book on *The Nature of Love*,<sup>1</sup> but it has been sufficient to arouse in me a great interest

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<sup>1</sup> Dietrich von Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, trans. John F. Crosby with John Henry Crosby

and fascination leading to an attempt to compare his views with those of Greek Patristic thought which remains always my personal intellectual ground.

Thus, in the present paper an attempt will be made to present the Greek Patristic concept of the person with a view to the personalism of Dietrich von Hildebrand. Some of von Hildebrand's ideas will be picked up in order to indicate common ground as well as points of divergence. It is hoped that in this way von Hildebrand's thought will be placed in a broader ecumenical context and its relevance may become apparent beyond the bounds of Catholic thought.

### *Person as an Ontological Category*

One of the fundamental contributions of the Greek Fathers to personalist thought is the elevation of the concept of the person to the highest ontological level. In the ancient world, both Greek and Roman, the idea of the person lacked ontological content. For the ancient Greeks of the classical period πρόσωπον (*prosopon*) was a term associated with the theater and indicated the mask worn by the actors on the stage. There was also an understanding of the term in its anatomical sense; that is, as the part of the face just beneath the eyes or the cranium, as we find it in Aristotle's *History of Animals* and in Homer's *Iliad*. But even in Aristotle himself the term πρόσωπον (*prosopon*) or προσωπειον (*prosopeion*) very soon came to be used in the theatrical sense which has prevailed ever since in classical antiquity. A πρόσωπον (*prosopon*) is not what someone really *is* but rather what one wishes or pretends to be. Πρόσωπον (*prosopon*) indicates a tragic existence, and does not have the metaphysical quality of being *qua* being which Aristotle and Greek philosophy in general reserved exclusively for the notion of ουσία (*ousia* or substance).

A similar connotation was given by the Romans to the Latin equivalent of πρόσωπον (*prosopon*)—namely, *persona*. The origins of this term are still a matter of dispute. If the prevailing theory associating the origin of the word with the Etruscan *phersu* found in funerary representations is accepted, the original connection of the term with theatrical use would appear to be plausible. As the term finally established itself in Latin literature, it became more and more clear that the Romans used this term in a way not very different from that of the Greeks, namely in the sense of the role one plays in his or her social life, particularly in one's relation with the state.<sup>2</sup>

It was, in fact, with the Greek Fathers that the term πρόσωπον (*prosopon*) acquired an ontological meaning. This happened in connection with the discussions concerning the doctrine of the Holy Trinity in the fourth century when the Cappadocian Fathers for the first time in the history of Greek thought identified the term πρόσωπον (*prosopon*) with that of *hypostasis* (υπόστασις); that is, with a term used more or less as equivalent (or at times identical) with ουσία (*ousia*) or substance. With the formula proposed by these Fathers and used ever since in the theology of the Church ("God is one substance, three persons or hypostases") the term "person" was raised to the highest ontological

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(South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Even today we use the expression *personne morale*, or "legal person," to indicate an institution or identity which has no real ontological content, but is a relational identity vis-a-vis the state.

level: being a person no longer means wearing a mask and “acting” or playing a role in society. By being used to indicate God’s very being, the notion of the person acquired the highest and fullest ontological (or metaphysical) significance.

Now, in reading von Hildebrand one is struck by a similar insistence on the ontology of personhood. On the very first page of his Introduction to *The Nature of Love*, he writes:

Personal being stands incomparably higher than all impersonal being, and...in doing justice to the distinctive character of personal being, one penetrates much deeper into the realm of being and of metaphysics.<sup>3</sup>

It is noteworthy that in insisting on the ontological character of the person von Hildebrand contrasts this with what he calls “mere ‘psychology.’”<sup>4</sup> This is a most welcome contrast, which, I think, coincides with the Greek Patristic view of the person. According to the Cappadocian Fathers, the Persons of the Holy Trinity are not to be understood in psychological term (i.e., as centers of consciousness, will, etc.) since all psychological categories, including will and consciousness are applicable to all three Persons, being properties of Their common *ousia*; all three Divine Persons possess the same will, and if we wish to use anachronistically a modern term, the same “consciousness.” Psychology and ontology are to be clearly distinguished.

But although von Hildebrand seems to say precisely this, a careful reading of his analysis suggests that he understands psychology—and the person—in a way different from that of the Greek Fathers. Here the divergence between the Greek Patristic and Latin-Augustinian view of the person is probably at stake.

Augustine, as we know, illustrates the Persons of the Holy Trinity by using such terms as ‘memory’ for the Father, ‘knowledge’ for the Son and ‘will’ for the Spirit. These terms he borrows from Platonic or Neoplatonic psychology. Following this, Western personalism from the Middle Ages to modern times has understood the person as a thinking subject, conscious of itself and other beings, the key-notion for personhood being that of *consciousness*. Von Hildebrand seems to follow the same tradition. In explaining what he means by personal beings he equates them with “conscious beings.” And yet in a puzzling way he writes that “it is obviously nonsensical to regard the consideration of consciousness as trailing off into psychology.”<sup>5</sup> Apparently for him, terms such as “consciousness, willing, loving, rejoicing, mourning and repenting” are not to be regarded as merely psychological. He speaks of the “essence” of all these things,<sup>6</sup> thus ontologizing in some sense what is commonly regarded as psychological.

This view is crucial, as it enables von Hildebrand to work out an ontology of love. Love, according to him, appears to be psychological only if we begin with the observation of our feelings and use them as analogies by which to understand what love really *is*. If I understand him well, there is an “essence” in things such as will, love, etc., which in a sense is *given* to us, and we do not arrive at it by ascending from the lower to the higher. These are extremely important points to which we shall come back later, but for the moment let us note the difference between the view von Hildebrand has of

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<sup>3</sup> Von Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

psychology from that of the Greek Fathers. For the latter, the person cannot be defined with terms such as 'will,' 'consciousness,' etc., or even 'love.' Love is common to all three Persons of the Trinity; it is neither a "hypostatic" nor personal quality. For what distinguishes the person from the nature or substance of God is absolute uniqueness, to the point of making it impossible for us to indicate the difference of one Person from Another except by referring to the way He *denves ontologically* (the *tropos hyparxeos*): the Father is not the Son because He is not begotten but the Begetter, and He is not the Spirit because He does not proceed, and vice-versa. The language we can apply to a person is purely ontological; it refers exclusively to the "way of being" *τρόπος υπάρξεως* (*tropos hyparxeos*). Other than that, the person remains a mystery, an *apophatic* notion.

All this brings von Hildebrand very close to the personalism of the Greek Fathers and at the same time distances him from them. His insistence on avoiding the use of analogy ascending from lower to higher levels in order to arrive at the essence of personhood is most welcome from the point of view of Greek Patristic thought: personhood is *given*, not arrived at from lower or instinctive experiences by way of analogy. But the essence of what is given as personhood is not "translatable" in psychological terms of any kind. It remains simply a *tropos hyparxeos*; that is, a way of being. The real issue between the personalism of Augustine and that of the Greek Fathers has to do precisely with the question whether in order to be a person you need to possess any quality other than being yourself; that is, being truly, and being unique and irreplaceable. I leave aside the question whether consciousness, will, etc., cannot in fact be found also in impersonal beings, such as animals, which would make the consciousness of the human person a matter of degree; that is, of a qualitative and not of a radical difference.

The difficulty with von Hildebrand's association of the notion of consciousness with that of personhood makes itself apparent when we apply the idea of person to God: can we speak of the Divine Persons as three centers of consciousness? Perhaps for von Hildebrand—and this is our fundamental difference—the idea of person is not derivable from the revelation of divine personhood. It is not an accident that he makes almost no reference to the Holy Trinity in dealing with personhood. In fact, he carefully distinguishes divine Love from human love, the former having "an all-encompassing character, which infinitely separates it in a categorial respect from any human love."<sup>5</sup> For our philosopher, the mysteries of faith "cannot be the object of philosophical analysis."<sup>6</sup> We cannot love as God loves. It seems that theological personalism and philosophical personalism can never merge or coincide in von Hildebrand's concept of love.

### *Person as a Relational Category*

Person is for the Greek Fathers as well as for Augustine a relational category; it is described as *σχέσις* (*schesis*) by the Cappadocians, and as *relatio* by Augustine. One person is no person; you have to exist in relation to someone else in order to be called a person.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 251n.

Von Hildebrand seems to hold the same view. In fact he repeatedly refers to the I-Thou structure borrowed apparently from Martin Buber and Gabriel Marcel, as the fundamental structure of personal existence.<sup>7</sup> For von Hildebrand, too, the person is a relational category. But it would be instructive to take note of the nuanced way in which he distances himself from both Buber and Marcel.

In the first place, while accepting Buber's I-Thou structure he refuses to accept Buber's position that in a dialogical situation the other is taken entirely as subject and in no way as object. Equally; Gabriel Marcel's distinction between "*je*" and "*moi*" which, again, results from a clear and strong contrast between subject and object, does not seem to meet fully with von Hildebrand's approval. Von Hildebrand is anxious to defend the subject-object structure while maintaining that of the I-Thou. In a long excursus in his *The Nature of Love*<sup>8</sup> he states the view that there is an unacceptable way of understanding "object" by which we "neutralize" the other (as, for example, in science), which, however, must be distinguished from the "primary datum" that the other stands on the other side of myself.

Even in the interpenetration of looks that expresses love, this duality has a central position; the consciousness of my own self and of the other person to whom I am directed, to whom my love refers, to whom I look and to whom I give myself, is in a purely formal respect a subject-object situation, different as it may be from other subject-object situations.<sup>9</sup>

Why is von Hildebrand so anxious to defend the subject-object structure? I believe that he is so for two reasons: (a) because he wants to preserve at all costs the idea of person as *individual*; and (b) because he operates with the notion of *consciousness* as a fundamental dimension of personhood. The subject-object structure, purified from all negative nuances of "objectification" understood as "neutralization," serves as a guarantee that these two dimensions of personhood, namely individuality and consciousness, will be preserved.

Von Hildebrand's concern shows that he belongs faithfully to the personalistic tradition inaugurated by Augustine and Boethius in the 5<sup>th</sup> century and established firmly ever since in Western thought. Augustine, as we know, on one hand, was perhaps the first Christian writer to lay so much stress on consciousness, as it is evident particularly in his *Confessions*. Boethius, on the other hand, seems to have been the first philosopher in the West to give us a definition of the person as an *individual* endowed with *rationality*, *persona est naturae rationalis individua substantia*. Von Hildebrand, faithful to this tradition, argues that in love:

The union of persons is all the deeper for the very reason that as persons they cannot lose their individual existence— It is also much deeper because it is a conscious experience of union, whereas all union in the non-personal world is a non-conscious and non-experienced union.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 145ff.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 125.

I leave aside once more the question whether such a statement would do justice to all impersonal beings, for example to animals, which as Darwin has demonstrated do not lack consciousness at all in their relational existence. The problem on which I should like to focus our attention is the philosophical one. And it is in this that a certain divergence between von Hildebrand and the Greek Fathers would emerge.

As we have already indicated, for the Greek Fathers, too, the person is a relational, and at the same time, *hypostatic* entity, which means, in a sense, “individual”; that is, unique, unrepeatable, distinctly “other.” In any form of union between persons, therefore, especially in love, there is no amalgamation or absorption involved, as von Hildebrand would also insist. But there is a fundamental question that ought to be asked: *is the individuality or uniqueness of the person established before or after the union (or relationship)?* Do we first exist as persons and then relate? Is the person an entity (i.e., a personal identity distinct from other entities) already before he or she enters into the loving relationship? Does a person love another person, or does one *become* a person by loving another person? Is there an ontological dependence of the person on his or her relation with another person in the sense that my being a person depends on the other and not on myself?

Von Hildebrand seems to tackle these questions, albeit in a very indirect way. He discusses at length all conceivable ways of relating and being in union between persons ranging from the level of community which he had already explored in his *Die Metaphysik der Gemeinschaft* to those of sexual, marital, neighborly and even, briefly, ecclesial relations. In all these discussions I cannot help but detect the view that, in answer to the questions I just raised, for von Hildebrand the person exists as person already before he or she enters into relationship with another person. Love is not *ontologically constitutive* of the person. What constitutes the person ontologically is individuality and consciousness, not love. You still *are* a person, albeit imperfectly and unhappily, even though you do not love.

This observation brings to the fore two aspects of the theme of love which also form part of von Hildebrand’s investigations. The first is the relation of love to knowledge, and the other is the love of self. With regard to the first question von Hildebrand would appear to me to follow again the traditional Western view that knowledge precedes love (as both Augustine and Thomas Aquinas would insist making this axiom also the ground of the idea of *Filioque*). In a nuanced presentation of von Hildebrand’s thought, John F. Crosby would prefer to say that for our author “the relation between love and knowledge is a mutual relation.”<sup>11</sup> But I personally find it difficult to grasp this mutuality without presupposing the existence of the person as person before the loving relationship appears. For how could an exchange of priorities between love and knowledge ever take place without the identity of the knowing subject having been established already before the loving relationship? The “self” and the “other” may affect each other, but they do so only because they already exist as individual entities.

Von Hildebrand understands love as self-transcendence. But he is quick to add that, as again John F. Crosby remarks, “a human being is constructed as person not just in

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<sup>11</sup>John F. Crosby, introduction to *The Nature of Love*, xxxiii.

the moment of self-transcendence, but also in the moment of relating to himself.”<sup>12</sup> <sup>13</sup>At this point von Hildebrand introduces his idea of *Ezgenleben* which is rendered by Crosby with the English term ‘subjectivity’. An analysis of this idea shows clearly, I think, the indebtedness of von Hildebrand to the tradition which identifies person with conscious individual and establishes the ontological identity of the person prior to its relationship of love. For him there are two errors that one may commit in dealing with love and the person. One is to deny self-transcendence and thus reduce me to the biological (a plant or animal). The other is to rob me “of my character as a full *subject* and [to] destroy the personal in me by exaggerating the objective to the point of dissolving that which makes [me] subject.”<sup>13</sup> In short, a person is capable of transcending itself; but it is so through its capacity of being conscious not only of the other but also of itself as subject. A person, therefore, is a being that, thanks to its endowment with consciousness, can both transcend and assert itself as subject. The bipolarity and mutuality between the self and the other, between knowledge and love, is only an apparent one. In fact, everything springs from the self as everything hangs on the consciousness of an (already) existing self as well, of course, as of an (already) existing other.<sup>14</sup>

This is further illustrated by the idea of love of self, which occupies considerable space in von Hildebrand’s discussion of love. The idea of *Eigenleben* is developed in order to stress the importance not only of subjectivity as consciousness but also of subjectivity in terms of love. A fully altruistic love which has no desire for self-interest, no aspiration for its own happiness, lacks *Eigenleben* and implies a deficient personhood. Only a combination of self-transcendence with *Eigenleben* can do justice to full and true personhood. This is why von Hildebrand rejects any religiously driven altruism which seeks only the good of others and does not care for being loved and enjoying happiness.

Now, if we place all of this in the light of Greek Patristic thought, how would it appear? The answer has to be carefully worked out, for there is not a clear “yes” or “no” to such complex issues as love and personhood.

The person, for the Greek Fathers, is clearly a distinct identity which in no way can be amalgamated, confused with the other, or absorbed in a relationship of love. In this respect there is full appreciation for von Hildebrand’s personalism. But the question whether this distinct identity precedes or follows upon the relationship of love requires careful explanation. Drawing from Trinitarian theology, the Greek Fathers would insist that personal identity and distinctiveness are inconceivable prior to relation and communion: I am other because I am in communion with someone other than myself. This means that I am not a person until I relate to someone else; my identity is established only through love; there is no “I” until there is communion with a “Thou.” My personal distinctiveness and “individuality” (*hypostasis*) is not an a priori datum but a *gift* of the Other. My self-transcendence is not so much an effect or an achievement that comes from me as it is a *call* and a *gift* from one who loves me and calls me out of anonymity and similarity with other beings to the uniqueness implied in the name of

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., xxvii.

<sup>13</sup> Von Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, 206.

<sup>14</sup> It would seem as though there are two “others” already established here ontologically.

'Thou.' Until this happens, I am not a person. I may be a conscious individual, but I am not an individual in the personal sense.

This may sound like Buber's or Marcel's dialogical structure of existence, but it is not quite so. For with these authors personhood is born out of relationality while in our case it is not from, but through, relationality that the personhood emerges; the real source of otherness is not relation as such but an "other" other than myself. In terms of Trinitarian theology this means that the Persons of the Trinity do not derive from the relationship (the "between" of Buber) but the Father, Who generates the Son and brings forth the Spirit. Persons are "caused" ontologically not by love as such but by another Person. Love mediates but does not cause. There is always an *asymmetry* in love alongside with a mutuality and response: love always flows originally from the other towards me, not from me towards the other. In love there is always a call and a response to a call. The importance of the other as the initiator of love is far more crucial and decisive in the emergence of love than response and reciprocity. This is evident in the fact that there *can* be love even if there is no response or mutuality. We can see this in the case of love of enemies, which Christ exalts as the highest form of love, or even in the love of God Himself towards human beings and creation.

It is of course true, as von Hildebrand points out, that in every form of love, including God's love for us and for creation, there is an expectation and desire for response. Von Hildebrand is right when he criticizes as deformed love an extreme altruism that declares itself as totally uninterested in response and mutuality. Love always and by nature seeks response. But it is still alive and in full strength even when it is met with indifference or even hatred. What one misses in von Hildebrand's notion of love is the cross. It is on the cross that love seeking response meets with rejection and hatred. Painful as it is for love, the cross does not manage to annihilate it. On the contrary, according to St. John's Gospel, the cross is the glory of love, the glorification of love. While, therefore, it is right to say with von Hildebrand that an altruistic love that denounces any claim to reciprocity is not true to its nature, it would be wrong to imply by that, that the lack of response deforms love and affects its very nature. In fact, love being, as we said earlier, by nature asymmetrical as it originates from a call from the other, always involves an asymmetrical response. The cross, therefore, as the suffering imposed on love by lack of response (or by deficient response) is part of any definition of love: it belongs to love's very nature.

### *The Person as an Ethical Category*

Von Hildebrand's interest in ethics is known from his earlier work on this subject. It was, therefore, to be expected that in dealing with love he would also introduce the ethical dimension into personalism. This happens with his idea of "value-response." The way he treats and analyses this idea is worthy of special discussion.

The most important aspect of his analysis of the idea concerns his endeavor to *personalise* ethical concepts such as "value." Thus, he is particularly interested to dissociate value in the case of love from the Platonic view; namely, that values such as Goodness and Beauty respond to a need which is fulfilled by love: I love the other not

for his or her goodness or beauty but for his or her own sake. He carefully avoids any reduction of goodness or beauty, etc. to a value in itself and on its own. The individual person is always “thematic”—his favorite term—to any value: it is not the goodness or beauty found in the person that draws me to him or her, and my love is not a response to these values as such but to those values as they exist in this particular person.

I have called this “personalization” of ethics, because traditionally, at least since Kant, ethical values tend to be approached as categorical imperatives possessing their moral authority regardless of the person they can be found in. Von Hildebrand does not totally depart from this tradition, even in certain cases of love, such as love of neighbor, in which the value of goodness or beauty is not a condition for a loving response. But in some cases, such as friendship or love between man and woman, this condition applies fully and should never be dissociated from the individual person itself.

I leave aside a host of questions that come to mind with regard to the legitimacy of bringing together two concepts into one (value and person) without allowing for the possibility—the risk—that a mutual exclusion between them may arise (e.g., value and person may well be in certain cases mutually exclusive), and I concentrate on the question whether and to what extent love in its nature can be tied up to value of any kind.

I begin with a theological point arising again from Trinitarian theology, which is the starting point of Patristic personalism (both Latin and Greek). If a person is unique in an absolute metaphysical sense, any attachment to it of a moral quality would diminish or put to risk its absolute uniqueness. Values such as goodness, beauty etc. can be applied to more than one person. This is the case with the Persons of the Holy Trinity (all three equally good, just, omniscient or, if you wish, beautiful), and the same is true of human beings as well. If my love for one particular person is defined as a “value-response,” why limit my love to this particular person and not extend it to the rest? If the answer to this question is that I freely choose this particular person and not the others, although the same value is to be found in them too, this means that my love is not in truth a response to the value of the person but to the person as such. This would mean logically that it is conceivable that love may or may not depend on value. To join the person to a category that could be found in another person as well would mean putting to risk its absolute metaphysical uniqueness. (In other words, making the person “thematic” in the case of love as value-response, as von Hildebrand would like to do, is to impose on two concepts—one denoting uniqueness and another generality—a co-existence and a co-habitation that would run against each other’s metaphysical essence and peculiarity.)

In reflecting as deeply as possible on von Hildebrand’s insistence that there should always be a quality, a value, in the person we love, I have come to the conclusion that this insistence is closely associated with—if not due to—the understanding of person as an individual; that is, as an entity established already, as I have said earlier, before the relationship of love, and not as an identity emerging through this relationship. This conclusion is confirmed by what John F. Crosby writes in response to Jean-Luc Marion’s view that love should never have sufficient reason. I quote this response as it is found in the introductory study to *The Nature of Love*:

We conclude by observing that it would seem to be of no little importance for the phenomenology of love to acknowledge with von Hildebrand this role of beauty of the beloved in awakening love. For one could well wonder if the beloved person will really feel loved if the lover advances towards her entirely on his own initiative and is already fully constituted as lover prior to being drawn by her.... Will she not feel somehow ignored as person if she provides no part of the reason for the advance of the lover?<sup>15</sup>

The ontological implication is quite clear: in love the lover as well as the beloved must necessarily be somehow constituted as individuals before the loving relationship takes place. Any assumption that love may bring about new personal identities is to be excluded as making phenomenologically no sense.

All this leaves me puzzled as a theologian. What can I make of my faith in God as Creator out of nothing? Did he not create out of love, and was this love conditioned by a beauty already existing in what apparently did not yet exist? When he declared His creatures very good, was this a response to a beauty *of* creation or a gift *to* creation? If God's love can bring about new entities and endow them with beauty, this means that beauty does not preexist as a condition of personal love; it rather follows upon it.

Now, I admit that this is a question of a theologian. The philosopher may bypass it by calling it love at another level (I have noticed that von Hildebrand often resorts to this distinction). But when I come to Christ and the kind of love that he not only reveals to me but demands of me, I find it difficult to make a sharp distinction between theology and philosophy. To what sort of beauty does Christ respond when he loves the sinner? Not far from the place of this meeting there is a painting by Caravaggio depicting Christ's call to Mathew, the publican.<sup>16</sup> Every time I look at it I am captured by Mathew's surprise that Christ calls *him*. "What did he find in me?" Mathew seems to wonder. There is not simply an insufficient reason in love, as Marion would put it, but quite often in the love revealed in Christ, there is no reason at all. As soon as this sort of love is demanded also of me the idea of value-response, proposed by von Hildebrand, becomes for me problematic both theologically and ethically.

### *Conclusion*

In this paper, I have discussed von Hildebrand's view of love in the light of Patristic thought. This has inevitably involved me in a theological critique of someone who insists on being a pure philosopher, because the Fathers were primarily theologians. While admitting that there is a difference between theology and philosophy, I find it difficult to dissociate these two approaches when it comes to subjects as personhood and love. This is so, not only for historical reasons, since as I have already remarked, the idea of person originally emerged from theological pre-occupations, but also for profound existential ones: for the philosopher as well as for the theologian, personhood

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<sup>15</sup> John F. Crosby, introduction to *The Nature of love*, xxxvi.

<sup>23</sup> Michelangelo Merisi da Carravaggio, "The Calling of St. Matthew," oil on canvas, 1600 (San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome).

implies transcendence (as von Hildebrand would also say), and thus gives rise to the question of how this transcendence is conceived and lived in ordinary existence.

In my presentation I have stressed points of disagreement more than convergences. I should like to finish on a more positive tone. I have read *The Nature of Love* with great interest, and I have finished reading it with the impression that I have read one of the most important books I have come across in my life. In addition to the intellectual depth and analytical vigor of his thought I have particularly appreciated what he has to say to us on what I regard as the central theme in any dialogue between theology and philosophy; namely, the concept of the *Person*. Here are the points I wish to underline, particularly from the perspective of Eastern Orthodox tradition:

1. The person is “thematic” to all relations involving values of any kind. All values are centered on the concrete person and acquire their meaning for us only via the person. This is a major shift in the way ethics has been presented since Kant (and perhaps earlier) and constitutes in my view an important step toward a *rapprochement* between Eastern and Western personalist thought.

2. Love alone brings the human being into full awareness of his personal existence. This seems to challenge the traditional view— since Descartes at least, and to a great extent also current—that personal fulfillment is to be found in the development of man’s intellectual capacities, and in this respect constitutes a major critique of today’s culture.

3. Love involves a transcendence of the human being from his self-centeredness toward the other. This transcendence is not an achievement of the self but results from an encounter with the other who provokes the self-transcendence. There is a great deal of discussion in philosophy in our time of the importance of the Other, with figures such as Buber, Levinas, and others being the most prominent ones. I have myself tried to contribute to this discussion from the Greek Patristic perspective. I believe that what von Hildebrand has to say on love is particularly relevant to this discussion, as he tries to work out a balance between eudemonism and altruism.

4. Beauty is important for love and personhood. Beauty is a concept that usually is reserved for the realm of aesthetics rather than ontology. Von Hildebrand’s appreciation of this concept in relation to personalism reminds us of Dostoyevsky’s famous declaration, “Beauty will save the world.” It is an idea which remains still unexplored by theology, and von Hildebrand’s association of it with the concept of love is most suggestive. Something of the significance of this association may emerge, if it is used in the theology of the Icon on which the Orthodox Church lays special emphasis. This is an area which still awaits our investigation.

5. Finally, I should like to stress the importance of von Hildebrand’s emphasis on the role of the heart in the experience of love. In the Orthodox tradition going back to the Desert Fathers the heart is understood as the center of love because in it obedience is experienced. But in the Western tradition a

dichotomy has at some point occurred between will and heart, and von Hildebrand's insistence on the role of the heart can serve as a way of liberating ethics from its bondage to the will as sheer *praxis* deprived of any aspect of affectivity.

These are just a few points which reveal the great potential for both theology and philosophy to be found in von Hildebrand's rich and profound thought. It is a potential also for the theological dialogue between the two main traditions of Christian theology, the Eastern and the Western, as they try to understand each other more deeply and in relation to the existential needs of human beings. We cannot but be profoundly grateful to the Dietrich von Hildebrand Legacy Project for bringing this potential to our attention.

INTERNATIONAL HELLENIC UNIVERSITY

MASTER IN ORTHODOX ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY

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23-MARCH  
5:00pm-7:00pm

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"THE ONTOLOGY OF LOVE"  
(PRE-RECORDED SPEECH)

METR. OF PERGAMON PROF. JOHN ZIZIOULAS

Rev. Prof. Panteleimon Manoussakis will respond and monitor the discussion

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## Chapter 4

### SALVATION IN CHRIST

*Metropolitan of Diokleia, Prof. Kallistos (Ware)*

“Are we saved?”. How is one to answer such a question? And how are we to understand Christian salvation? The New Testament does not provide a single way of understanding the saving work of Christ, but rather a whole series of images and symbols set side by side. These are symbols of profound meaning and power, yet for the most part they are not explained. Therefore, we should not isolate any one image of Christ’s work, but should rather view them together. I will highlight possible models of salvation, but these are not exhaustive. Underlying all six models is one fundamental truth, namely that “Jesus Christ, as our Saviour, has done something for us that we could not do alone and by ourselves. We cannot save ourselves; we need help. We could not come to God, so He has come to us.

I propose *four questions* to help us evaluate each model.

1. *Does it envisage a change in God or in us?* Some theories of Christ’s saving work seem to suggest that God is angry with us, and what Christ has done is to satisfy God’s anger. But that cannot be right. It is we who need changing, not God. As St. Paul said, ‘God was in Christ, *reconciling the world to Himself*’ (2 Cor 5:19). It is the world that needs to be reconciled to God, not God to the world.

2. *Does it separate Christ from the Father?* Some theories seem to suggest that God the Father is punishing Christ when He dies on the Cross. I remember as a student in Oxford hearing Billy Graham say: “At the moment when Christ died on the Cross the lightning of God’s wrath hit him instead of you.” I didn’t find that a very happy way of thinking of Christ’s work. Surely, we should not separate Christ from the Father in that kind of way, for they are one God, members of the Holy Trinity. As St Paul states, ‘God was in Christ’. When Christ saves us, it is God who is at work in Him; there is no separation.

3. *Does it isolate the cross from the Incarnation and the Resurrection?* We are to think of Christ’s life as a single unity. So, we should not think only of the Cross, but we should think of what went before the Crucifixion, and of what comes after it.

4. *Does it presuppose an objective or a subjective understanding of Christ’s work?* Does Christ’s saving work merely appeal to our feelings, or did He do something to alter our objective situation in an actual and realistic way?

#### *Model 1: Teacher*

First of all, we may think of Christ as teacher, as the one who reveals the truth to us, who brings light and disperses the dark of ignorance from our minds: ‘He was the true light that enlightens everyone coming into the world’ (John 1:9). He saves us by teaching us the truth about God. This was exactly the way in which His disciples

thought of Him at the beginning when they called Him ‘Rabbi’, which means teacher. Later, of course, they realized He was not just a human teacher but something far more. This first model was adopted in particular by the group of second century writers known as the Apologists, the most famous of whom was Justin Martyr.

Considering the four questions, I point out that it passes the first three questions, for the change is in us not in God, there is no separation between Jesus and the Father, and it does not isolate the Cross but embraces Christ’s whole life. However, difficulties arise over this fourth question. Christ opens our minds by His teaching, but does He then leave us to carry out His teaching simply by our own efforts? Has He actually changed our objective situation? More specifically, we do not merely need to be instructed, but we need to be saved from sin. So, this first model embraces part of the truth, but not the whole, for it leaves out the tragedy and the anguish of sin.

#### *Model 2: Ransom*

The second image is that of Christ paying a ransom on our behalf, for “*the Son of God came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many*” (Mark 10:45). The point of this metaphor is that whereas we were previously enslaved to sin, now we are liberated, for “*Christ has set us free*” (Gal 5:1). This is a costly ransom, involving the laying down of Christ’s life on the Cross.

Let us remember that this is only an image or metaphor, not a systematic theory; and let us therefore not attempt to press the metaphor too far. It is wise not to ask: *To whom is the ransom paid?* In fact, the New Testament does not actually ask that question. If we say, “the ransom is paid to God the Father”, then we are in danger of separating Christ from His Father, and of thinking of the Father as angry and vindictive, and demanding payment. Surely God is not like that: He does not require payment, but forgives us freely. Should we then say that the payment is paid to the devil? That is an answer that the Fathers, Greek and Latin, have often given; but it creates major problems. It seems to suggest that the devil has rights or claims upon us, and that cannot be true. The devil has no rights; he is a liar. The essential point of the ransom metaphor is not transaction or bargain but liberation. It is better not to ask who is being paid, but to stick to the basic point: Christ has set us free.

Applying the above four questions of evaluation, we can conclude that there is no problem with the first, for the change is not in God but in us. There is no problem with the second, as long as we don’t see Christ as paying a ransom to the Father, in which case there will indeed be a danger of separating them. In terms of the third question, while the ransom model concentrates on the Cross, it need not do so exclusively, for it is His whole life which has set us free. And the fourth question shows the strength of this model compared to the first model, for in setting us free, Christ has indeed altered our objective situation.

#### *Model 3: Sacrifice*

With the model of sacrifice we enter deep waters. Today the idea of sacrifice has lost much of its meaning, whereas in the ancient world it was taken for granted. The Old Testament knew different kinds of sacrifice, yet we do not find a definition of it,

## SALVATION IN CHRIST

or of how it works. In the New Testament, however, Christ is seen as fulfilling the sacrifices of the Old Covenant more especially in two ways:

a. “*Christ our Paschal lamb has been sacrificed*” (1 Cor 5:7); “*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29). Here Christ is seen as the Paschal Lamb, eaten by the Jews at the Passover in memory of the Exodus from Egypt (see Exodus 12). Christ’s death on the Cross and His Resurrection is the New Passover.

b. “*He is the atoning sacrifice (hilasmos) for our sins* (1 John 2:2). This recalls the sacrificial ritual on the Jewish Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*), when the people were sprinkled with blood to cleanse them from their sins (Leviticus 16:23, 27-32). In a similar way the blood of Jesus, sacrificed for us, cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7). The sacrifice on the Day of Atonement is recalled in particular when our Lord institutes the Eucharist, saying: “*This is my blood of the (new) covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins*” (Matthew 26:28).

In order to understand the meaning of sacrifice we need to understand:

- that a sacrifice is an offering or gift made to God;
- that a true sacrifice involves the offering not of some object or animal, but of ourselves;
- that the true purpose of sacrifice is not death but life. If the victim is slain, that is not because its death has value as an end in itself, but so that its life may be offered to God. According to the understanding of the Old Testament, the life of an animal or human being resides in the blood; and thus, by the pouring out of the victims’ blood, its life was released and made available, so as to be offered up to God.
- a true sacrifice must necessarily be voluntary.

Applying this to the sacrifice we can say that Christ is offered up to God, that He offers Himself in sacrifice, that He dies that we may have life, something that is made clear by the linking of His Cross with His Resurrection, and that He laid His life down freely on our behalf.

Underlying this idea of sacrifice as voluntary self-offering is the all-important factor of love: Why does Christ lay down His life? Out of love: “*...having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end*” (John 13:1); “*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son*” (John 3:16). Love, then, is the key to the whole idea of sacrifice. Sacrifice is voluntary self-offering, inspired by love – love to the uttermost, love without limits.

Recalling our four questions, we may say: there is indeed a danger of stating the “sacrifice” model in such a way as to suggest that the change is in God, not us (question 1), that Christ is separated from the Father (question 2), that the Cross is to be isolated from the rest of our Lord’s life (question 3). But this danger is largely avoided, if the element of love is emphasized. In that case, Christ’s sacrifice is seen as an expression of God’s unchanging love; the sacrifice of love alters us, not God, there is no separation between the Father and Son. Moreover, the whole of Christ’s life, from the Incarnation onwards, is a sacrifice or offering to God; so the Cross is not isolated.

Linked to the idea of sacrifice we discerns two variants on this theme.

*Model 3, variant 1: Satisfaction*

This is the theory developed by Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), who applied the principles of feudal society to the atonement. Human sin, he argued, has offended God's honour; satisfaction must be given to the Father in recompense for His offended honour, and this satisfaction has been rendered by Christ on our behalf.

For all its popularity, this theory has two grave disadvantages: a. It interprets salvation in legalistic categories, rather than as an act of divine love; b. The notions of honour and satisfaction, while reflecting medieval feudalism, are not to be found in the Bible.

*Model 3, variant 2: Substitution*

This idea, that Christ bears our sins in our person and suffers instead of us, does have biblical roots and is seen as fulfilling the Old Testament prototypes of the sacrificial scapegoat (Leviticus 16:20-22) and the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53:4-7). Jesus is seen as taking our sins upon himself and enduring the punishment that we deserve to undergo.

In this *substitution model* it is clear that the change is in us, not in God (question 1); but we must be careful not to understand the model in such a way as to separate Christ from God, as Billy Graham unfortunately did (question 2). Also, there is a danger that the idea of substitution may turn Christ's work of salvation into a transaction that is somehow external to us, in which we are not directly and immediately involved. Jesus does indeed suffer for our sins, but we need to be associated with His act of sacrificial suffering and to make that our own. It is legitimate to say "Christ *instead of me*", but we should balance that by saying, "Christ *on behalf of me*", and also "Christ in me and I in Him". Substitution language should be combined with the language of indwelling.

*Model 4: Victory*

Here Christ's work of salvation is seen as a cosmic battle between good and evil, between light and darkness. Dying on the cross and rising from the dead, Christ is victor over sin, death and the devil. This victory is summed up in the last word that He spoke on the Cross, *τετέλεσται* (John 19:30), which is usually translated "It is finished". But this is not to be seen as a cry of resignation or despair. Christ is not just saying, "It's all over. This is the end", but He is affirming, "It is accomplished. It is fulfilled. It is completed". For other examples of the victory *motif*, see Col 2:15: "[God] *disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it [through the Cross]*"; and also Eph 4:8: "*When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive*" (quoting Psalm 68:18).

The Father who particularly uses the idea of victory is St Irenaeus of Lyons at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. If we want to see the idea of victory lived out, then we think above all of the Paschal Midnight Service, with its constant refrain, *Χριστός ανέστη εκ νεκρών*, "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death". Think also of the marvellous sermon attributed to St John Chrysostom, read at the end of matins or at the Liturgy, with its overwhelming sense of triumphant joy. The same note of victory

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is found in Latin hymns for Pascha: “*Death and life have contended in that combat tremendous. The Prince of Life who died reigns immortal.*”

The advantage of this victory model is that it holds together the Cross and the Resurrection which are seen as a single event. Christ’s death itself is a victory, though it remains hidden. When the Myrrh-bearing women come to the tomb and proclaim its emptiness, and when Christ appears, the victory is made manifest.

The disadvantage of the victory model is that it can appear militaristic, portraying Christ’s work as some sort of coercive power. It is therefore important to point out that this is a victory not of superior force or of militaristic power, but of suffering love. On the Cross Christ is victorious through His weakness, through His self-emptying, through His *kenosis*, to use the Greek term. So, a victory, yes, but a *kenotic* victory.

This kenotic victory becomes clear when we link His cry on the Cross *τετέλεσται* to Saint John’s account of the washing of the feet where he described Jesus as loving them *to the end*. (John 13:1). When Christ says “it is finished,” the Evangelist intends us to think back to what was said four chapters earlier, “*Having loved His own, He loved them to the end*”, (*εις τέλος*). From this we understand exactly what is finished on the Cross, what is fulfilled: it is the victory of love. Despite all the suffering, physical and mental, inflicted upon Him, Jesus goes on loving humankind; His love is not changed into hatred. We are to see the victory then not as a military victory but as the victory of suffering love, unchanging love, love without limits. As the Protestant theologian Karl Barth said, “The Christian God is great enough to be humble”. And that’s what we see above all in His victory on the Cross. God is never so strong as when He is most weak.

### *Model 5: Example*

This model is associated with another Latin writer, Peter Abelard (1079-1142/3), who sees Christ’s life and death as the supreme example of love in action and which evokes a response in us, drawing us to emulate this love. Many modern western Christians have been attracted by this model, because it moves completely away from the notion of God as angry, jealous, vindictive, and blood-thirsty, and from legalistic categories like satisfaction. Moreover, this model does not separate Christ from the Father nor does it isolate the Cross from the rest of Christ’s life.

But the difficulty comes in with question 4. If Christ has merely set us an example, does that mean we have then to follow that example by our own efforts? Has Christ objectively changed things? Understood in the right way, this model can be understood as involving an objective change in our situation, for love is an objective energy in the universe. Love is a creative, enabling force. Our love alters the lives of others. And if this is true of our human love, it is much more true of the divine-human love of Christ our Saviour. By loving us He does not just set us an *example*, but He changes the world for us, giving us a meaning and hope that we could not otherwise discover. So, the love of another for me infuses into me a transfiguring force, a transformative power. Love enables, just as hatred depotentiates. This is true of our inter-human relationships, but it is much more true of the love poured out upon us by the Son of God. Where love is concerned, the subjective/objective contrast breaks down.

It is, therefore, this theme of suffering love that unites the third, fourth and fifth models when they are rightly understood. What makes Christ's death a redeeming sacrifice is precisely that He offers Himself willingly in love (model 3). The victory of Christ is nothing else than the victory of *kenotic*, suffering love (model 4). The example of this suffering love alters our lives and fills us with grace and power (model 5).

*Model 6: Exchange*

This model is understood as a mutual sharing and takes the Incarnation as its starting point. In it, Christ takes on our humanity “and in exchange He enables us to share in His divine grace and glory.

As St Paul expresses it, speaking metaphorically in terms of riches and poverty: “*Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that through His poverty you might become rich*” (2 Cor 8:9). The riches of Christ are His heavenly glory; our human poverty means our fallen condition, our alienation and brokenness. Christ shares in our brokenness – in our anguish, our loneliness, our loss of hope – and so we are enabled by way of exchange to share in His eternal life, becoming “*partakers of the divine nature*” (2 Pe 1:4).

St Irenaeus of Lyons expresses the same point in more direct terms: “*In His unbounded love, He became what we are, so as to make us what He is*”. St Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 296-273) is yet more succinct: “*He became man, that we might become God*”. We could also translate the phrase: “*He became incarnate, that we might be ingodded*”, or “*He was humanized, that we might be deified*”.

This sixth model encourages us to think of salvation as *theosis* or deification: salvation is not just a change in our legal status before God, it is not just an imitation of Jesus through moral effort, but it signifies an organic, all-embracing transformation of our created personhood, through genuine participation in divine life. Equally this sixth model can be spelt out in terms of *healing*. St Gregory of Nazianzus (329-389), or Gregory the Theologian, as he is known in the Orthodox Church, affirmed with reference to the Incarnation, “The unassumed is unhealed”. Christ, that is to say, has shared totally in our humanness – He has taken up into Himself our human nature in its entirety – and in this way He has healed us and transfigured us. We are, therefore, *being saved*.

There are other aspects of salvation that we have not discussed here, especially its social and ecclesial nature. But let us return to the question of salvation that we posed at the beginning: “Are we saved?”

I might have answered, “Yes, I am saved”. But might not that have been somewhat over-confident? Long after his conversion on the road to Damascus, St Paul expressed the fear that, “*after preaching to others, I myself should be disqualified*” (1 Cor 9:27). God is faithful, and He will not change; but we humans, as long as we are in this life, retain free will and so, up to the end of our life, we are in danger of falling away. As St Anthony of Egypt (251-356) warned us, “Expect temptations until your last breath”. I am on a journey and that journey is not yet completed.

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Thus, I thought that the best way of answering was to say, “I trust by God’s mercy I am *being saved*”. In other words, let us use the present tense, but in the form of the *continuous* present: not “we *am* saved” but “we are *being* saved”. Salvation is a process. It is not just a single event, but an ongoing journey, a pilgrimage that is only completed at the moment of our death.

INTERNATIONAL HELLENIC UNIVERSITY

MASTER IN ORTHODOX ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY

TUESDAY  
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5:00pm-7:00pm

**"SALVATION IN CHRIST"  
(PRE-RECORDED SPEECH)**

METR. PROF. KALLISTOS WARE OF  
DIOKLEIA

Rev. Prof. Cyril Hovorun will respond and monitor the discussion

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## Chapter 5

### ORTHODOX MISSIOLOGICAL ASPECTS IN THE LIGHT OF THE HOLY AND GREAT COUNCIL

*Metropolitan of Targoviste, Prof. Nifon (Mihaita)*

*I.* The Holy and Great Synod was a crucial and very important ecclesial event of Orthodoxy despite the absence of four Churches, because the link of communion remained intact, decisions were made, conciliar relationships between Churches were mutual and unity was preserved. The aftermath of the Holy and Great Synod raises, apparently, some sort of difficulties. And one of these is the process of reception and more intense cooperation at pan-Orthodox level, although some Churches have been trying to create events to fill that gap. Facing this vacuum in terms of a global pan-Orthodox agenda, some Churches are trying an ingenious strategy, using commemorations of events, consecrations of Cathedrals to affirm the conciliar nature of the Orthodox Church.

Indeed, most of the Orthodox Churches get together in ecumenical settings, in interreligious fora, or in Episcopal Assemblies in the Diaspora, but these actions do not seem to be a post-council pan-Orthodox agenda, even though the reception of the Holy and Great Synod is determined by their ability to prepare for the next step.

One could even speak that there is a kind of Crisis of multilateralism in the Orthodox Church in terms of opportunity of mission in the world by the united universal Orthodoxy. Now that the Holy and Great Council is behind us, pan-Orthodox conciliarity may need a more institutional forum, as for example the suggestion made by His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel of Romania in the debate of the Synod in Crete, that a Holy and Great Synod should take place every 5, 7 or 10 years, or a regular Synaxis of the Primates depending on the common pan-Orthodox agreement.<sup>1</sup> In this way a clear perspective will develop that will allow pan-Orthodox conciliarity to face the challenges of today's world. We mention also the affirmation of His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch in his opening address at the Synod in Crete : "The Church constitutes a single body in the entire world, united in the same faith and the same Divine Eucharist and sacramental life, which is why it also needs synodality on the global level not only at local level."<sup>2</sup> The event offered an occasion to confirm together the self-consciousness of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ. The Holy and Great Council of Crete did not formulate new dogmas or canons, nor did it bring about changes in the liturgical life. The hierarchs who participated in the Council addressed some of the topical issues and sought solutions to the problems that the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://basilica.ro/en/patriarch-daniel-the-future-pan-orthodox-synod-represents-an-important-historical-event-for-the-development-of-synodality-on-a-pan-orthodox-level/>.

<sup>2</sup> Opening Address by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the Inaugural Session of the Holy and Great Council, <https://www.holycouncil.org/-/opening-ecumenical-patriarch>.

contemporary humankind faces. Thus, in order to emphasize the importance of this event for the life of the Orthodox Church, in his Address during the opening session of the Holy and Great Council, His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel said: "The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church is, at the same time a rare event and the beginning of normality, because synodality is a canonical rule of the life of the local Churches in order to express the unity of the Orthodox faith, of the sacramental life and of the canonical discipline of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. If synodality is a canonical norm at the local level, it should be a norm at the pan-Orthodox or universal level too."<sup>3</sup> The autocephaly of the Orthodox Churches expresses their administrative and pastoral freedom, while the pan-Orthodox Eucharistic concelebration and the pan-Orthodox synodality express the unity of the entire Orthodoxy.

We have to mention also that there are, some people, clergy or lay, that try to criticize the Synod in Crete, but without proper study. In orthodox theology we cannot speak of novelties as in natural sciences, but if we believe and I strongly hope that the majority of the participants did, that Orthodoxy expresses the truth, then these are no new dogmas, but just ways of expressing the eternal unchangeable truth, no new canons, because the canons are pastoral rules or practical applications of the dogmas in the life of the Church. So, we could not see any errors of the Council in Crete of those who dare to condemn it. Although their attempts to understand and even to analyse may be honest, they did not take into account the entire canonical and dogmatic tradition of the Orthodox Church, accusing strangely the sinodal documents of serious innovations.<sup>4</sup>

On the contrary, on the basis of the Orthodox tradition, the Holy and Great Council of Crete was very traditional, remaining in complete fidelity with the canonical and dogmatic tradition of the Orthodox Church. The Council of Crete did not bring and could not bring anything new in terms of dogma and canon. That does not mean that the Synod has no much importance, but on the contrary, it represents the canonical expression of the fidelity of the entire dogmatic and canonical tradition in a completely different historical context of today.<sup>5</sup>

*2. Mission and unity.* When we talk about the mission in our contemporary world, we must take into account some aspects of the Tradition. Tradition is one of the essential given sources of divine Revelation and it is very difficult to grasp it for the people at large, in the modern times and theology. Orthodoxy takes the tradition very seriously. Where disagreements arise, these tend to revolve around questions of fidelity to tradition. To be faithful to the tradition of the Church, we must avoid two errors in the process of understanding: exaggerated rigorism which is different from *acribeia*, and relativism. Tradition should be embraced in its totality and not selectively discarded or selectively defended. Tradition is the mode in which the whole experience of the

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<sup>3</sup> Address of His Beatitude Daniel, Patriarch of Romania, at the Opening Session of the Holy and Great Council, <https://www.holycouncil.org/-/opening-patriarch-daniel>.

<sup>4</sup> Nikolai Afanassief, "Canons of the Church changeable or unchangeable", *Sf. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly* 11, 1967.

<sup>5</sup> Metropolitan Hierotheos(Vlachos), "Intervention and Text in the Hierorchy of the Church of Greece", <http://orthodoxethos.com>.

Church is handed over in lived history. It is the living continuation of the faith comprising Scripture, the Fathers writings and lives, and the Holy Ecumenical Synods, Holy Sacraments and liturgy, iconography and canons, theology and prayers and much more. Ultimately is a way of life – the life in Christ. But we should discern what constitutes properly traditional theology. And the road to such discernment may lie between rigorism and a little bit of freedom in interpretation, believing in the work of the Holy Spirit.

If you refer to exaggerated rigorism, we have in our Church today quite many self-appointed guardians of tradition, who are ready any time to denounce and decry those they judge to waver from the royal road of strict fidelity to tradition. This may include in their minds periods or modes of Orthodox theology, individual theologians, or indeed the decisions and the work of the bishops assembled recently in the Synod in Crete.

The other error is that of relativism, regarding the tradition of the Church as a simple source of inspiration when and if we wish. This approach risks cutting Orthodox theology from its life-giving roots. This relativism error regards tradition as non-determinative and the truth as malleable to the demands of the age.

Bearing in mind these tendencies of errors in our theological endeavours and spectrum, we should not encourage any sort of polarization. If we get caught in battles of right versus left or liberal versus conservatives, we will gravely weaken Orthodox witness in the contemporary world.

Because we are here in Congress of theology, I would like to refer briefly to the Orthodox scholastic tradition, particularly after 1453. We should not dismiss simply the Western theological scholasticism. Many of the orthodox theologians have been inspired and even used to a certain extent that methodology of writing constructive theology. Some theologians have written good and useful orthodox dogmatic theology, as for example Christos Androutos, Trembelas, and others. Let us not forget that the dogmatic manual tradition has also been embraced and enriched by other famous figures, such as Fathers Dumitru Staniloae and Iustin Popovic So, when we come to theological tradition, we should not dismiss whole periods or modes of Orthodox theology. Our theological tradition may indeed be ascetical, mystical and liturgical but it is also rational, philosophical and scholastic. It may be ancient, but it is also utterly contemporary. It may be strict and uncompromising, but it is also open and generous. It should be also capable of finding support and inspiration in Western theological sources ancient, medieval and modern. We should be open in our receptivity to "*whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely or gracious*"(Phil 4,8). Such generosity of vision is in no way incompatible with an uncompromising adherence to our Orthodox faith.

*3. Theological dialogues and mission.* The Orthodox commitment to inter-Christian initiatives, and more specifically in official theological dialogues with non-Orthodox Churches exist under the reality and the authority of some pan - Orthodox decisions of the past and now of the Orthodox synodal document. The document declares: "The contemporary bilateral theological dialogues of the Orthodox Church and her participation in the Ecumenical Movement rest on this Self-consciousness of

Orthodoxy and her ecumenical spirit, with the aim of seeking the unity of all Christians on the basis of the truth of the faith and tradition of the ancient Church of the Seven Ecumenical Councils."<sup>6</sup>

The Orthodox unceasingly pray for the unity of the Church and look forward to the restoration of the unity of one body of Christ. All what Orthodoxy can substantially offer to the world is the treasure of its rich tradition, unbroken over 20 centuries and the consciousness that it is the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. The Orthodox Church should witness in the midst of the non-Orthodox its right vision of communion and otherness (derived from its trinitarian, pneumatological, cosmic and above all eucharistic vision of existence), at a time when communion with the other is becoming extremely difficult, not only outside the Orthodox Church, but unfortunately very often inside it.<sup>7</sup>

The foundation of the Church's unity is definitely from above, from Christ. However, one cannot draw from this fact, the conclusion that the divisions of Christians into different Churches are only superficial, and do not affect the basic unity of the Church.<sup>8</sup>

Only a Church that is one in dogmas, in Sacraments and in hierarchical organisation and communion is a Church that is truly unitary. For the Christian formations that do not have Christ intimately dwelling within them can be neither the body of Christ nor his bride. In addition to this, Christ cannot have more than one body organically extended from His personal body, nor more than one bride. And only this union represents the Church in the full sense of the word, as Father Staniloaie said: "Christianity cannot achieve the unity of the Church except by achieving unity in Christ's body, united in a maximum degree of faith and communion with the head. The holiness of the Church is strongly connected with her unity. For, the more united the Church is with Christ and thus within herself, – the more intimately she is united with her head and the holier she is in her quality as His body".<sup>9</sup> This means that the role of Orthodoxy in regard to ecumenism is neither to proselytize nor to impress and charm with its, apparently "exotic" look but to convincingly witness to its Holy Tradition.<sup>10</sup> As Metropolitan John of Pergamon has emphasized: "this can only happen through a slow process, a kenotic presence and a genuine integration. It can only happen in close and creative cooperation and truthful dialogue."<sup>11</sup>

**4. Missiological reflections.** The mission of the Church in the contemporary world, as indeed from its very beginning, has two inseparable dimensions: unity in Christ and service to humanity. Unity points to what the Church is to be and mission to what the Church has to do. In fact, the Church is not only a community that grows into

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<sup>6</sup> The documents of the Holy and Great Synod: "The relations of the Orthodox Church with the rest of the Christian world", paragraph 5.

<sup>7</sup> John Zizioulas, *Communion and otherness*, T & T Clark, New York, 2006, pp. 67-69.

<sup>8</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *The experience of God – Orthodox dogmatic theology*, Holy Cross Press, USA, 1989, pp. 63-64.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup> Petros Vassiliadis, *Eucharist and Witness, Orthodox perspectives on the Unity and Mission of the Church*, Holy Cross Press, USA, pp. 19-20.

<sup>11</sup> John Zizioulas, *Communion and otherness*, T & T Clark, New York, 2006, pp. 75-76.

communion with Christ, but also community that is sent by Christ to the world with a specific mission. Mission without unity is void of any ecclesiological basis. We have to be clear about the fact that the unity of the Church is neither a doctrinal *modus vivendi* nor merely cooperation nor a kind of peaceful co-habitation. It is the communion of the Church in Christ as well as communion of local Churches in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship. The Church is one "in each place" and "in all places."<sup>12</sup>

The mission of the Church is to participate in God's mission. The very being of the Church is missionary. Therefore, mission is not one of the "functions" of the Church, but the life of the Church that goes beyond itself to embrace the whole of humanity and the whole creation. The mission of the Church is to work for and proclaim the Kingdom of God. That is why the unity and mission must be understood in the perspective of the kingdom.

The interrelatedness of unity and mission is not a question of methodology or strategy. It is an ontological one, it is related to the very essence of "κοινωνία" as fellowship in the Triune God, and to the specific of κοινωνία as participation in God's economy in and for the world. Mission is commitment to the work of the Triune God incarnated in Jesus Christ. Both are God's gift and command. It is only in unity with the Holy Trinity that the Church is able to fulfill its vocation.

5. For all these reasons I believe that the document of the Holy and Great Council: "The mission of the Orthodox Church in today's world", is of utmost importance for the Orthodox, for the whole Christian world and for the whole of humanity. Indeed in the introduction about mission of the world transfigured it is stated: "This foretaste of the new creation—of a world transfigured—is also experienced by the Church in the countenance of her saints who, through their spiritual struggles and virtues, have already revealed the image of the Kingdom of God in this life, thereby proving and affirming that the expectation of a world of peace, justice, and love is not a utopia, but the *substance of things hoped for* (Heb 11:1), attainable through the grace of God and man's spiritual struggle."<sup>13</sup>

The document deals in a wonderful way about the "Dignity of the Human Person", "Freedom and Responsibility," "Peace and Justice in the World," "Peace and the Aversion of War," "The Attitude of the Church about Discrimination," "The Mission of the Orthodox Church as a Witness of Love through Service," "Ecological Crisis". The document ends in a prophetic and mobilizing way: "In our times, just as throughout history, the prophetic and pastoral voice of the Church, the redeeming word of the Cross and of the Resurrection, appeals to the heart of humankind, calling us, with the Apostle Paul, to embrace and experience *whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report* (Phil 4:8)—namely, the sacrificial love of Her Crucified Lord, the only way to a world of peace, justice, freedom, and love among peoples and between nations, whose only and ultimate measure is always the sacrificed

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<sup>12</sup> Many orthodox theologians express themselves in this way and also Aram, Catholicos of Cilicia, "The challenge to be a Church in a Charging world", New York, 1997, pp. 54-55.

<sup>13</sup> Document of the Holy and Great Synod: "The mission of the Church in today's world", p. 1.

Lord (cf. Rev 5:12) for the life of the world, that is, endless Love of God in the Triune God, of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, to whom belongs all glory and power into the ages of ages."<sup>14</sup>

All the 15 sections of the document indeed cover the whole essence of the Gospel of Christ. Some texts may need to be further explained and commented and I consider that this as a very normal process. This document is of extraordinary significance for the Church and for the world. It is interesting also to remember, for our information, that there are two other mission statements that were published recently: Pope Francis's Apostolic Exhortation "*Evangelii Gaudium*"(2013), and the Mission Statement : "*Together towards life: Mission Evangelism in changing landscapes*."<sup>15</sup>

6. "*Liturgy after liturgy*". We have to remember that there were major achievements in our reflection on world mission by renowned Orthodox theologians, as for example Archbishop Anastasios of Albania and Prof. Ion Bria. They expressed in a wonderful way the terminology of "liturgy after liturgy", stressing the social dimension of mission. The relationship between human rights and human responsibilities it is rightly argued that "freedom without responsibility and love leads eventually to the loss of freedom". Furthermore, we stress the affirmation that "the Orthodox Church believes that her values and principles form part of a common world ethic". When we discuss the missionary nature of the Church, the Orthodox proposes a typology of mission and witness which corresponds to the history of our own mission- and in particular to the consistent tradition in which worship and liturgy have been an essential element in proclaiming and confessing Christ. Some theologians have called this typology "the liturgy after liturgy."<sup>16</sup> According to this typology, mission cannot be exercised without reference to the Church as a community contemporary with Christ. The mission of the Church is not to build up the Kingdom of God out of historical forces and materials, but to announce and show the Kingdom in the eucharistic assembly as a symbol of the final recapitulation of all creation and all nations. Proclaiming Christ through Liturgy implies the inculturation of worship and preaching in a language that could be understood. In the liturgy the proclamation of the Gospel is not disconnected from the communion, because there should not be any dichotomy between the ministry and teaching of Christ and his death, resurrection and reconciliation.<sup>17</sup>

7. Finally, we should underline that, although without much specific theological argumentation in the Synodal document, the idea of the connection between economy and ecology is present and affirmed. So, Orthodox mission cannot ignore that various aspects of the climate change, ecological, financial and debt crisis are mutually dependent and reinforce each other, causing in many places so much suffering of people, endangering even their survival.

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<sup>14</sup> Idem, paragraph 15, p. 11.

<sup>15</sup> For example: Ion Bria, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy - Mission and Witness from an Orthodox perspective*, WCC Publications, Geneva, 1996.

<sup>16</sup> Metropolitan John Zizioulas, *op. cit.*, New York, 1995.9

<sup>17</sup> A. I. Herton "The forgotten Trinity", London, 1991; cf. Petros Vassiliadis, *Eucharist and Witness. Orthodox Perspectives of Mission and Unity*, Geneva, 1998; Metropolitan John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, SVS Press, New York, 1995.

## ORTHODOX MISSIOLOGICAL ASPECTS

Concluding these reflections, I believe that the document "The mission of the Orthodox Church in today's world" is also underlining the priority of ethical witness in Christian life. This document approved by the Council in Crete is still in the process of reception as the other documents are, but it constitutes, no doubt, a new era in Orthodox missiology as indeed was the Great and Holy Council in Crete a new era in Orthodoxy.

However, it is our duty to continue to reflect, and deeply study the missiological terminology. First, one should abandon in our ecumenical effort the phenomena of proselytism, particularly among the Christians of all confessions, and not only. Dialogue may be the term we may use to replace the old missiological terminology. The dialogue should be used as a radical reinterpretation of Christology through Pneumatology and then the rediscovery of the forgotten Trinitarian theology of the undivided Church.<sup>18</sup> We would like to welcome the fact that in the ecumenical circles the concept of "universal proselytizing mission" is almost altogether abandoned. That was due also to the rediscovery of the authentic identity of the Church through the invaluable help of the theological treasures of Orthodoxy.

The image is a YouTube video thumbnail with a dark blue background. In the top left corner, there is a logo for 'INTERNATIONAL HELLENIC UNIVERSITY' featuring a stylized cross and olive branches. To its right, the text reads 'MASTER IN ORTHODOX ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY'. In the top right corner, the date and time are listed: 'TUESDAY 16-MARCH 5:00pm-7:00pm'. The central part of the thumbnail shows a photograph of a modern building with large glass windows, also bearing the 'INTERNATIONAL HELLENIC UNIVERSITY' logo. To the left of the building is a portrait of a bearded Orthodox priest in black vestments. Overlaid on the right side of the building photo is the title 'ORTHODOX MISSIOLOGICAL ASPECTS IN THE LIGHT OF THE HOLY AND GREAT COUNCIL' in white, underlined text. Below the title, it says 'METR. PROF. NIFON MIHĂIȚĂ OF TARGOVISTE'. At the bottom of the building photo, a smaller line of text reads 'Rev. Prof. Cristian Sonea will respond and monitor the discussion'. In the bottom left corner, there is a white 'YouTube' logo with the text 'Open to the public' below it. At the very bottom center, it says 'CEMES YOUTUBE CHANNEL' followed by the URL 'https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCD\_5mcv3Z82pYW8LFUk2Emw'.

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<sup>18</sup> Idem.



## ETHNICITY, CHRISTIANITY (ORTHODOXY) AND AFRICA

*Metropolitan of Kenya Prof. Makarios (Tillyridis)*

*“I am the first and I am the last; there is no God except me,”* (Isaiah 44). God created the Heavens and the Earth and all that is in it. He created people in His Image and Likeness. He created man and woman. He entrusted all of creation to mankind.

God’s creation of every human being was according to His plan and His purpose for each one of these human entities. Each one has a face, with eyes, nose, mouth, ears, chin, brow, yet none looks like the other. God created each one with a rainbow of emotions and expressions, yet all alike within a range of nearness. God created man and woman, again, each were similar, but made differently and for different purposes. God en-peopled the world with people, all of whom were alike, yet different in looks, in language, culture, economic status, and even in religion. Creation was done in diversity. No one creation was a replica of the other and each creation was a part of the other, a part of the wholeness of Creation. Each flower, for example, is alike in its whole, yet diverse in its parts. Each daisy is different from the next, yet each is a daisy... as it is a flower. A rose is also a flower, yet it is not a daisy. Each aspect of Creation is diverse, yet the diversity is within God’s creation.

*“There can be neither Greek nor Jew, there can be neither slave nor freeman, neither male nor female,...for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And simply by being Christ’s, you are that progeny of Abraham, the heirs named in the promise.”* (Galatians 3-28-29).

In other words, put simply, we become the people of Jesus Christ, a new people of God. This new people of God open the way for all to be one in Jesus Christ without barriers of any kind. Yet each one of us has a background; an ethnic and national background of one kind, or another. All kinds of ethnicities make up the World from large and densely populated climates, to tiny islands surrounded by seas; from oases in huge deserts, to sparsely populated areas of frozen waste; from tightly packed slums in great urban centers to tiny villages in an immense countryside.

There is nothing we can do about ethnic identity. Our parents gave us this and their parents before them did the same to them. We inherit our identity regardless of our will. The ethnic element is a crucial part of our creation. It is our responsibility and an aspect of our identity to accept this ethnic heritage. It can and should be an element of us which enriches our lives and our relationships with others.

This difference in our being, sets us apart from others, yet this same diversity gives opportunity to become a part of the whole. The concept ‘I am because we are’ is essential to the understanding of our Orthodox Faith and to living with one another.

*“I have chosen you, I have not rejected you, Do not be afraid, for I am with you; do not be alarmed, For I am your God. I give you my strength, truly I help you, Truly I hold you firmly with my saving right hand.” (Isaiah 41: 9-10)*

Orthodoxy in Africa is a rather unique expression of African peoples. Orthodoxy in Africa, in recent times, has not been the result of an outward Missionary effort, though there have been Missionaries from other lands. It has been an evolution of spirituality which has come from the search for a Christian identity. People in Africa have looked for Christ and have found Him within the context of Orthodox spirituality.

It was the most noted of Orthodox Missionaries Ss. Cyril and Methodius who set the initial example of Mission long ago. Ss. Cyril and Methodius delivered the faith of Jesus Christ to the Slavs encouraging Slavonic expression creating a public liturgy which made full cultural sense using the symbol, gesture and language it incorporated which came from the Slavs themselves. In the Orthodox Archdiocese of Kenya and Maanpulis, particularly, much attention has been paid to translation of the liturgical services in many local languages. Initially the Divine Liturgy was translated, followed by more specific services. All Sacraments are translated into Swahili, the lingua franca of Kenya/East Africa. Bibles have already been translated. Liturgical Services are normally celebrated in the indigenous tongue, except in certain areas where there is a mixed ethnic population, for example in Nairobi. Then the services are celebrated in Swahili or English, both the National Languages of Kenya.

The growth and success of Orthodoxy in Africa comes through the diversities which exist within African cultures, yet which are able to identify with Orthodoxy. The Orthodox faith is the essence of Jesus Christ. The word Orthodox means right teaching, true expression of Jesus Christ. It teaches a way of life within one's existing community. African interpretation of life is expressed in the sense of community. The “we” is paramount and the “I” sub-ordinate. Orthodoxy and African expression are strongly similar. It is as if one was a reflection of the other.

Religion is paramount in Africa tradition, expression and thought. Religion being the relationship between the Creator and His Creation. In African exegesis life is God and living within the framework that is God. It is inter-action between God and His Creation, therefore, all aspects of life are God-related and all things are kindred. To understand this relationship between God and the living, one has to understand and accept as an integral part of one's being, the rituals which link God and His creations.

*“These rituals include birth, when a person enters into society, marriage, when the individual's status changes and death, when a person leaves the society to join the ancestors.” (J. M. Bahemuka, “Social Anthropology as a source of African Theology,” in CHIEA, African Christian Studies, vol. 7, no 2 June 1991).*

If one looks carefully at African initiation rituals, one can see that these rites confer identity upon the individual as a part of his/her group; it enhances the personality, gives dignity to the person as a part of his environment; it characterizes his role within his community and clarifies his responsibilities. Emphasis is placed upon Creation and

origin which give root to self-identification, communal status and appreciation of the Creator.

If we look at the Orthodox Expression of Christianity, we see that Orthodoxy has a very analogous emphasis.

The rituals of Orthodoxy and the accentuation upon common prayer and communal life are clearly similar to the African outlook. In both, great hope for the divine blessing and grace, are crystalline clear.

Attention to birth and the community is emphatic. God called upon His Handmaiden Mary to become the Theotokos, The Birth-giver of the Son of God.

The Birth of Christ is for the community of man. It is not an isolated incident, but an act for the entire community of mankind. Birth is, importantly, recognition and honour given to the role of women in the Church and in the community. The Mother in African Tradition is much loved and much honoured.

In Orthodox tradition, birth initiates the individual's relationship with God. The Nativity of Christ actuates the purpose of Jesus Christ's being. The Epiphany of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, is a rite of passage whereby the announcement of the Baptism of Fire is made and undertaken. Upon completion of John's Baptism of Christ, the Holy Trinity makes its appearance.

The first miracle of Our Lord is at the wedding at Cana where Christ turns water into wine. It is of apparent significance that this first miracle takes place at a marriage ceremony. Matrimony and its main purpose of fecundity is the promise of continued life. The marital union is necessary for survival of the community and the collective individuals. The rite of marriage is the spiritual link between those who have left us in death, the living and the unborn. African culture, as in Orthodoxy, recognizes the link between the living and the dead. In Orthodox theological interpretation those who die, fall asleep in the Lord for a time when they will be reunited with the living with the Second Coming of Our Lord. The ancestors of man and the living have a solid attachment of unity. It is the tradition of both to remember both the living and the dead, in various interpretations.

The fecundity of African life perpetuates life, itself. If a child, or indeed, anyone who dies without off-spring, they are deemed to be separated from that life as they have not left an inheritance of name, or deed. Yet, in Orthodoxy, even these are remembered because they have been, also, creations of God.

Baptism, Chrismation and Marriage are all rites of passage. Even, Our Lord, Jesus Christ, was circumcised, according to the traditions of the people of Israel.

However, His teachings showed that circumcision was not an element of division, but an aspect of diversity that was a part of a culture. Unity of Faith is not based on divisions, but upon being oneself and having the humility to accept others as they are.

The fundamental tenet of Mission is dialogue and building God's kingdom. Christ commanded us to love one another, not as we perceive, but as we are. Central to Orthodoxy is the unity of faith, the oneness which exists even in all kinds of diversity. Jesus came to help the sick, the lepers, those possessed by demons. He does not reject anyone, but exists for the salvation of all. The woman with the issue of blood is not denied. As she touches His robe His strength flows into her and she is healed, yet He

has abundant strength to heal and bring new life to the daughter of Jairus. Jesus accepts everyone whether they are a Jew, or not. Many of His Miracles take place with people who are not Jews ... further illustration that in the New Jerusalem all are one and no one is rejected who believes in Him.

At the Feast of Pentecost, the disciples become Apostles and are given gifts of tongues which mobilizes these primarily illiterate and monolingual fishermen to go out into the world to Teach His Word. They left the world in which they had lived all their lives and went to far places to bring the word of Christ.

*“The promise that was made is for you and your children, and for all those who are far away, for all those whom the Lord our God is calling to himself.” (Acts 2:39).*

In Matthew 28:19 we all are commanded to go in His Name and preach the Gospel to all nations. God commands in I Corinthians 14:10-12:

*“However many languages used in the World, all of them use sound:”*

The passage goes on to explain that a language used without meaning to the listener falls on deaf ears.

*“So with you, as you are eager to have spiritual powers, aim to be rich in those which build up the community.”*

The concept emphasized here is the communal involvement of the individual in relationship with the community. *Kenosis*, the self-emptying of Jesus, is given us in Philippians where Christ, The Son of God, willingly gave Himself up to be crucified in His humanity,

*“And for this God raised Him high, and gave Him the name which is above all other names... and that every tongue should acknowledge, Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil 2: 9,11).*

In the African life and ethos, the community is central to one's entire being. This is, also, a very Christian concept; *konoinia*. Christianity is a fast-growing religion in the African continent, yet the peoples of the continent grow poorer by the day. The fabric of local culture and tradition is being rent by the vast migration from the villages to the monstrous urban areas and by the entry of modernity and globalisation. People from countless ethnic origins become thrown into a pot of urbanization whereby they think they will find a successful life, which they do not. They carry with them the traditions from which they come, but these alienate them from the city as well as from others. Their identity as a member of their own community, as an individual, as a potential member of a Church, as a prospective member of a national unit, crumples. The migrant's identity becomes lost in the onslaught of what is new and alien. Because the migrant is far from his community, he must stand alone in face of all the changes, challenges and temptations of urban life. He, alone, is not able to preserve his identity, his language, his traditions. He loses the vision of his ethnic community, often remembering, or imagining something which might not have been, or which has been misunderstood.

Language, the great divider of humankind, creates conflict and when one adopts another language, he unwearyingly adopts another culture which he does not fully understand. His values become shattered, or are lost in his poverty. All before him, even

from the time passed becomes unstable. While, all may look without hope, all things are possible with God. We must remind ourselves that even in times of conflict and confusion, God is with us. We, who are Christians, must understand the plight of the poor. The problems of poverty increase the rate of HIV/AIDS, increase crime, increase ethnic tensions. Our efforts to bring the Word of God to those who are poor economically and spiritually must be accompanied by some means to provide them with the means to get their daily bread. Employment must be a realistic part of our conception of *diakonia*.

We, as Christians, have a moral and spiritual responsibility to alter our approach to reaching out to others. We have tended always to emphasise Salvation as the sole goal of Christianity. We have selected random verses out of context to pass on spiritual messages. Salvation is union with God and the life to come for all mankind. We have not been prepared to accept the changes being made by migration, by globalisation, by economic ups and downs, by social injustice and material well-being in the world we live. Many of these changes are beyond our control, yet there are things we can do. One looks, by way of example, at the Pandemic HIV/AIDS which surely puts all of mankind, and certainly, all of Christianity to the test. Yet, if we join hands together as a community for Christ, we can do much to alter the course of the Scourge of the Millennium. In our modest way, even Orthodoxy in Africa has joined hands with other Christian through CUAHA, (Churches United Against HIV/AIDS). We must, as Christians commit ourselves and one another to loving God in action in our relationship with others.

As life in the community is being eroded, so is life within the individual of the community. We must look to the positive aspects of our diversities to protect one another; to enable one another to survive. We must respect one another. We must make sure that what we pass on to our children is what is true and what is realistic. The ethnic identity of a person helps one to set his/her feet upon a stable pathway to Christ. Life in Christ must not alienate, but bring together. The context of one's environment must be a prime consideration. Do we have the possibility to alter, to change, our lives for the better, or must we prepare ourselves for a return to slavery, to colonialism, to isolation? We certainly do. Through the praxis of our faith; through our prayers, through our understanding and interpretation of realities we can change the lives of all and for all. To abide in people; to guide them in the faith and in morality is an incomplete act. We must support and empower people to have a sense of integrity; to be responsible; to stand on their own two feet. One of the most misused tools of Christianity has been the dependency which is created out of Christian charity. These handouts have created a poverty of dependency in which begging becomes paramount. Dependency upon others destroys the dignity of the receiver, unless it is in the form of some kind of assistance whereby the participation of the recipient is essential, such as in sponsorship in education, or skills training.

Throughout Biblical teaching there is direction to look after widows, orphans and the alien person: the stranger in our midst. In Exodus 22:21 it reads:

*“You shall not wrong an alien, or be hard upon him; you were yourselves aliens in Egypt.”*

Local customs ruled the manner in which care for widows, orphans and aliens was to be given. Some of these practices are now in question, particularly, when it concerns HIV/AIDS and the general rights of girls and women, but nonetheless there is an innate concern of their care. Early marriages are discouraged, so that young girls can extend their education. Female circumcision is being rethought due to the health risks. Widow inheritance has increased the rate of HIV/AIDS infections and created economic burdens which cannot be met and other problems exasperate the situation, i.e. hunger, lack of funds for education of the children. Many funeral practices are undergoing rethinking, as sheer economics create increasing restrictions.

African people have always been generous in giving to others and hospitable to strangers. Food has always been shared and prayed for even during times of hunger. There is one saying, from a local tribe that, 'if there is nothing to share, let us share water.' Food has, also, been an offering to God. Even today in rural Kenya, first fruits and grains are always offered to the Church in the sense of tithing. This has not been a borrowed, nor imported custom, but a natural gesture by the growers of the produce, or grains. Community contribution for the common good has always existed. For instance, the concept of "Harambee" has been a unique local attempt of the community to build schools. Many schools in Africa came as result of Mission effort of foreigners, but many schools were locally initiated.

Other giving takes place at times of funerals, although some of the present funeral customs have been economic disasters to the family of the deceased. In the past food was offered and respect shown to the deceased. Often now among certain ethnic groups, funerals last for days on end and enormous amounts of food are consumed, supposedly out of 'respect.' These "traditions" have impoverished families. Such is an example of how necessary it is for Elders of Ethnic communities to review and revise traditional practices, especially regarding death.

Donations given with a point of alienation destroy dignity and self-esteem. It is best to help local people to help themselves within their own community.

It is time as Christians, we must review our approach to Jesus. It is time to recognize and empower ethnic traditions to strengthen communal and individual identities. We must encourage ethnic traditions to maintain, and sustain, their cultures. Christians must encourage ethnic groups and members of the Church community to assemble to adjust their existence in the face of the realities they meet. In traditional African cultures the young were taught that the common good must precede the individual good. The community must exert a consensus over irresponsible individual will. Because Africans almost always live in a community, inter-dependence takes precedence over self-dependence and non-contributing dependency is not to be desired. Leadership is usually in the hands of Elders who work together, however, younger more educated people are being involved in this process.

In life, learning is something which is always ongoing ... something which ends only in death. In many African traditions, rituals initiate and acknowledge new levels of learning. It is very much like Orthodox spirituality, which is a living, growing relationship between man and His God.

*“So you are no longer aliens or foreign visitors; you are fellow citizens with the holy people of God and part of God’s household.”*  
(Ephesians 2: 19).

This emphasizes the need for us, regardless of our ethnicity, to put our identity in a context in which others exist. The stranger becomes Christ in our midst. The Christ in our midst has always been amongst us in the Holy Eucharist. As many kernels of grain are ground into flour, so they become one in a loaf of bread; as many grapes, when pressed, become one in the wine. So it is that the bread and wine become the One Body and the One Blood through the Grace of God and the Holy Spirit.

*“Then He who sat on the throne said, ‘Behold I make all things new.’ and He said to me ... ‘He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be my son’.”* (Revelation 21:5,7).

This is in reference to the New Jerusalem to which we belong when we are Baptised in Christ. We put on Christ, in the Orthodox Tradition, and we assert our faith in what we do. We repent, we fast, we pray. We recognize our sinfulness and the need of cleansing. In African tradition sins were cleansed, often with water, sometimes by fire. We partake frequently in the Holy Eucharist in union with Christ and in unity with one another.

Ethnicity is a diverse aspect of the Oneness of God. Our life in Christ overcomes the negative side of our communal being and our sinful selves.

*“... that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one, all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth in Him.”* (Ephesians 1:10).

The entire Christian ethos concerns God and our reciprocal relationship with Him, but according to His Commandment we are called upon to love the other, or neighbour, the one who is different, yet the same.

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## **ORTHODOX THEOLOGY AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY**

### **Freedom and Responsibility in the Understanding of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill**

*Metropolitan of Volokolamsk, Prof. Hilarion (Alfeyev)*

I wholeheartedly greet all of you, the organisers and participants of the inter-Orthodox online seminar held under the aegis of the International Hellenic University. Before getting down to my address I would like to thank the University's leadership for inviting me to speak at the seminar.

In its essential aspects my paper raises the most important topics of human life, such as values, individual liberty, rights, moral choice and ensuing responsibility for its consequences.

Inasmuch as the contemporary society has different ways to conceptualize and interpret these fundamental categories, in my address I would like to present the views of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia on the nature of human rights and freedoms in their relation to responsibility, moral choice and dignity. Over the years of his church ministry, His Holiness has systematically explored these issues in his homilies, speeches, lectures and written works. The majority of those who constitute the Russian Orthodox Church's flock have historically lived in Europe and belong to the European civilisation. Therefore, as the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church His Holiness Patriarch Kirill devotes particular attention to the human rights issues, as well as to the value system in the modern-day European society and in the social, legal and philosophical thought.

Values hold an important place in the life of the individual and society. A value system orients people in the world and motivates them to take concrete conscious steps and actions. Values embody ideals and meanings for which human beings can live and even sacrifice their lives. Values determine social development models and the course of world history, playing a decisive role at turning points of human life. Among the fundamental values of importance for the entire humanity we should mention faith, morality, truth, mercy, justice, peace, life, freedom, unity, human dignity, responsibility, self-sacrifice, mutual help, and solidarity. Of course, this is by no means the full list of the values common to all nations of the planet.

Looking at the universal values through the lens of religious worldview, we come to the conclusion that they are of supernatural origin and originate from God. Surely, there are those who tend to explain the origin and development of these values in terms of evolution, first and foremost, the social and legal one and even the evolution of morality. The reason behind it is that many present-day postulates, especially those pertaining to human rights and freedoms, took their final shape in the Modern Age, quite often as a direct response to social injustice and inequality. However, what kind of evolution can account for human religiousness and conscientiousness, human striving for truth and justice, love and mercy? As to their flourishing or degradation these qualities of human soul never depended on historical eras, political and social environment, or national, cultural and linguistic

differences. They are God's gift to the humankind as His creation, an integral element of the inward life of the person created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Genesis 1:26).

The European civilisation developed under the inspiring influence of Christian worldview. However, no one is inclined to idealise the past and deny the mistakes, abuses and even crimes committed under the banner of Christianity. In his article "The Worth of Christianity and the Unworthiness of Christians" the renowned Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev says: "In the course of history there has been a triple betrayal of Christianity by Christendom. Christians first of all deformed their religion, then separated themselves from it, and finally... began to blame it for the evils which they had themselves created... Man perverts Christianity in some respect and then turns upon both the perversion and the real thing". Such was Berdyaev's response to those who would frequently reproach Christians for the divergence between the Christian history and the loftiness of the Christian moral teaching.

He wrote much about the free moral choice of the individual as a fundamental value proclaimed by Christianity. Since our childhood, we all have been able to tell right from wrong, the truth from a lie with regard to ourselves and those around us. An ability to make a conscious choice in favour of goodness and truth elevates the human being, making him/her moral.

As Christians we are bearers of Christian morality—the Gospel truth commanded by our Lord Jesus Christ. On every occasion we strive to comply with the Gospel morality and fulfil the divine commandments related to the Lord and our neighbours. Such was the life of the European society for many centuries, starting from the moment when the peoples of the European continent were illumined by the light of Christ's faith and ending with the Modern Era, the period of humanism, the dawn of a new liberal teaching. The Primate of the Russian Church rightly noted that this teaching had its genesis in the Age of Enlightenment: "As it is known, the liberal doctrine originated in Europe in the 18th century, at the very end of the Age of Enlightenment, and in the subsequent century it grew much stronger... An idea of the overarching liberation of the individual from the social, national, religious, legal and other constraints was what often nourished the revolutionary movements which were in opposition to the politics of the time in the Western European countries and in Russia".

By striving to exalt the value of human life and affirming the lawfulness of human interests and inalienability of rights and freedoms, humanism at the same time engendered an idea of anthropocentricity as opposed to the religious outlook. God's place was taken by a human being. His Holiness Patriarch Kirill writes: "In the Modern Age a conviction arose that the main factor determining human life and therefore the life of society was man himself. Undoubtedly, it is a heresy, no less dangerous than Arianism. Before that, people used to believe that God ruled over the world by means of the laws created by Him, and over the human society based on the moral law that He had revealed in His word and mirrored in human conscience". Gradually developing and becoming anti-religious, humanism gave rise to secularism—the tendency which ousts religious dimension from the life of the individual and society and leads to the propagation of atheism. In the public sphere, humanism produces nihilism and social apathy, and creates an atmosphere of

discontent and revolt. The ideology of liberalism began to lay claim to universality and fight against the tradition.

Patriarch Kirill draws public attention to the problem of correlation and conflict between traditional and liberal values, to the necessity for seeking such ways of humanity's development that would take into account the experience of preceding generations and today's demands: "It is my deeply held belief that the fundamental challenge of the time, in which we all happen to be living, lies in the need for humankind to work out such civilizational model of its existence in the 21st century that would imply global harmonisation of dramatically opposing imperatives of neo-liberalism and traditionalism".

The raised topic provoked a heated public discussion. It was stimulated, first of all, by the widely spread opinion that the person's religiousness must not go beyond the church fence. His Holiness Patriarch Kirill disagreed with this opinion, emphasising that faith and religious choice must not be just a private affair unrelated to the life around. "It is impossible at the same time to be a Christian behind the doors of one's home, in one's family or in the solitude of one's cell and not to be a Christian while mounting the academic rostrum, sitting in front of a TV camera, voting in parliament and even starting a scientific experiment. Christian motivation must be present in all the areas of interest vital to a believer," the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church noted .

In many of his speeches and homilies His Holiness focuses on the problem of defending traditional values from attacks by aggressive secularism. It is one of the major topics in the dialogue with statesmen and public leaders, as well as in the interaction with other religious communities. As far back as the end of the previous century, Patriarch Kirill saw in representatives of other religions potential allies against the liberal standard which is being enforced on society: "Monotheistic religions, committed to their religious identity and firmly defending their believers' rights, as is clearly indicated by the relevant articles in the laws of Israel and the Muslim countries, can also be Orthodox Christians' allies in the dialogue with those who cast doubt on the importance of tradition".

Today's world has begun to forget that the European civilisation owes its development to Christianity and that the Gospel commandments laid the foundation for the moral law by which those living on this continent were guided. Theodor Heuss, the first President of the Federal Republic of Germany, once said that Europe had started on three hills: the Acropolis, which gave it values of freedom, philosophy and democracy, the Capitol, which gave Roman law and social structure, and the Golgotha, i.e. Christianity .

Exploring the issue of human value, rights and freedoms without any reference to Christianity, the contemporary society gives them entirely different meaning which is generally linked with the ideology of all-permissiveness and consumerism. As a result, being within this system of shifted moral guidelines, people cannot find their place in the rapidly changing environment. Nor can they find peace by constantly indulging and satisfying their passions. At the deep mental level, the conception of human nature and its relationship with God and outside world is getting distorted, and rights and freedoms are becoming identifiers for human beings. Freedom is becoming an obsession, without any serious deliberations on its consequences for personality and society as a whole, or on people's responsibility for their actions.

In 2010, in one of his addresses His Holiness Patriarch Kirill put forward an entirely different model of human interaction with outside world. He said: “I believe that Christianity, like no other religion, can offer the most convincing worldview to people today. Indeed, if the highest value for a man of our time is freedom, it is in the person of the God-Man Jesus Christ that human nature has attained its highest freedom—the freedom from evil and sin. Christianity offers a much loftier vision of freedom than just a negative concept of freedom ‘from’ something—from exploitation, violence and restrictions. With Jesus Christ, man can attain freedom ‘for’ something—for complete self-fulfillment in love for God and one’s neighbours. It is in this harmonious interaction (synergy) between God and man, as taught by Christianity and implemented in the lives of the saints and zealots of the Church, that everyone can find the answer to the issues concerning freedom, meaning of life and public service” .

Developing the idea expressed by the Primate of the Russian Church, we should note that the outlook based on the Gospel teaching cannot be subjected to revision with the view of adjusting it to ideologies or political preferences of certain groups of people. We ought to admit that rights cannot exist without a solid moral foundation. Human rights must comply with the law of God, thus affirming human dignity and taking the side of creativeness, instead of destruction and death. Otherwise, humanity will face degradation and degeneration and from “the force of law” the legal system will drift into “the rule of force.”

The Russian Orthodox Church has attempted to formulate its own views on the nature of human rights, freedom and dignity. In 2008 it adopted The Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom and Rights. Shown forth in the document is the Orthodox attitude towards these topics. The reason for producing this document is described in its preamble: “Christians have found themselves in a situation where public and state structures can force and often have already forced them to think and act contrary to God’s commandments, thus obstructing their way towards the most important goal in human life, which is deliverance from sin and finding salvation. In this situation the Church, on the basis of Holy Scriptures and the Holy Tradition, is called to remind people about the basic provisions of the Christian teaching on the human person and to assess the theory of human rights and the way it is being implemented” .

Human rights, freedoms and especially dignity are associated in the public sphere with justice, first of all, social justice. Justice is not just a philosophical, juridical or politological term; it is determined by morality. Striving for justice helps achieve social harmony and equality and give concrete meaning to the political, as well as socioeconomic rights of every human person. In one of his speeches addressed to our country’s parliamentarians His Holiness clearly pointed out the necessity of achieving justice in society for ensuring human rights and freedoms: “The ideal of equal opportunities for all people needs to and must be fulfilled not only within a Christian community, not only within a church. The ideal of social justice must be a guiding principle in the life of the state and in legislative activities. In this I see one of the most important goals of any state’s existence. Rephrasing a well-known expression of the Blessed Augustine, we can say that justice is a kind of criterion for defining moral legitimacy of power. Losing faith in justice seriously complicates the society’s development, dispirits people, and undermines the very foundations of public order and civil accord” .

## ORTHODOX THEOLOGY AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY

Our country's history distinctly confirms what I have said. For many centuries the unfree society, divided into classes, into masters and bondmen, was cultivating in people discontent with the established order, with the injustice of economic wealth distribution. The 1917 socialist revolution promised to ensure social justice: to eliminate class divisions and establish fair distribution of work products. "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs," a slogan of that time read. However, the idea of justice was discredited by the means used to achieve this welfare, namely, by repudiating religion, destroying the Church, eradicating faith in people's consciousness, by violence and murders. And where is this atheist regime today? It collapsed, while faith revived. So, in the post-Soviet countries churches and monasteries are being restored, welcoming more and more faithful.

So, what can the Church offer in response to these present-day destructive phenomena? Its living faith in the indisputable Gospel teaching about the meaning and purposes of human existence. And the Church's creative contribution to the organisation of human community based on truth, goodness, justice, love and mercy is bound to gain appreciation. Human soul, which is, according to the Christian author Tertullian, in its very nature Christian, strives after the eternal truths proclaimed by the Church.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill sees his vocation in serving peace, rendering aid to those who suffer from enmity and violence, and strengthening neighbourly relations between people, along with the moral ideals that help human beings build up their private and family life and ultimately the life of society.

The banner features a blue background with a central image of the International Hellenic University building. On the left, there is a portrait of a man in clerical attire. Text on the right provides event details: 'TUESDAY 16-FEB 5:00pm-7:00pm' and the title 'ORTHODOX THEOLOGY AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY'. Below the title, it identifies the speaker as 'METR. PROF. HILARION ALFEYEV OF VOLOKOLAMSK'. A note at the bottom right states 'Emer. Prof. Petros Vassiliadis will respond and monitor the discussion'. Logos for the university and YouTube are in the top left, and a 'YouTube Open to the public' logo is in the bottom left. The bottom center contains the text 'CEMES YOUTUBE CHANNEL' and the URL 'https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCD\_5mcv3Z82pYW8LFUKZEmw'.

INTERNATIONAL HELLENIC UNIVERSITY

MASTER IN ORTHODOX ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY

TUESDAY  
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## CRITERIA FOR A MORAL DISCERNMENT IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

*Metropolitan of Constantia and Ammochostos, Prof. Vasilios (Karagiannis)*

### *A. FROM ESCHATOLOGY TO HISTORY OR FROM HISTORY TO ESCHATOLOGY?*

In the Biblical and early Church Fathers' sources there are two different pneumatological forms related to the Church.

The **first** considers that the Holy Spirit was given to the Church as a power, so that She became capable to fulfil her call for her mission in the world. We find this very understanding in the Gospels and the Acts, where we observe the miraculous spread of the Gospel in the "oikumene", meaning the coming of the Holy Spirit in the History (Cf. Acts 3:13-16; Acts 5:30-32; Heb. 2:9-12).

According to the **second** form of pneumatology, the Holy Spirit is not only related to the mission and the extension of the Church throughout the World, but mainly to her eschatological nature.

The repercussions of these forms of pneumatology are very important: according to the first pneumatological type, the Holy Spirit is given by the risen Christ. According to the second one, found in Mathew and Luke, the Holy Spirit operates the Nativity of Christ as well as His Resurrection. This shows that from the first century and coming to the Fathers of the Church, there is a closed and uninterrupted cooperation between the Logos and the Holy Spirit for the fulfilment of the "oikonomia", which is the will of the Father.

A general remark from this is that the two forms of pneumatology are inseparably related with Christology as well with Ecclesiology. Consequently, we can underline that:

1. The first type of pneumatology with the mission perspective, has as goal the gathering of the dispersed people by the "power of the Holy Spirit" for the building of the Church (this is the historical and geographical dimension).
2. The second form of pneumatology with the eschatological perspective has not as goal the "synaxis" of the dispersed people but the "communion" amongst them and with Jesus Christ. The community of the believers follows Jesus Christ (cf. Col 4:2-6).
3. The bond between the head of the Church, which is Christ and the Church as the Body of Christ, is never broken and, with the Church or through the Church, Christ is always present in the World.

At this point it is important to remember that the first Christians were expecting the imminent second coming of Jesus Christ. This expectation and the eschatological

pneumatology and ecclesiology were imprinted to the East Liturgies<sup>1</sup>. Not only the theological content but even the structure of these liturgies is based on that eschatological expectation of the Lord for the final establishment of His Kingdom. With this base, the celebration of a liturgy constitutes the manifestation hic and nun of the expected Kingdom of Christ. In an iconic presentation of the Last Judgment, the par excellence liturgical book of Revelation refers to the Apostles and Prophets (Rev 18:17-20), but also to the 24 presbyters sitting on their liturgical thrones glorifying God for the Judgment (cf. Rev 19:1-21). The reference of the marriage of the Lamb and His Wife is evident that is the marriage of Christ with His Church (Rev 19:7-8). In chapter 21<sup>st</sup> of Revelation is said clearly that the Wife of the Lamb is the New heavenly Jerusalem. This section of Revelation's book describes the Last Judgement. The coming from heaven to the Earth of the New Jerusalem is an eschatological act entering the history. "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev 21:2). The opposite way could be the tower of Babel, which is the way from history to the Heaven (Gen 11:1-19), given that the humans were willing to reach the heaven by building the tower.

In the language of the Eastern Orthodox liturgies, still today the different orders remain: the believers (πιστοί), the catechumens (κατηχούμενοι), the penitence (μετανοούντες), those fallen to sin (ὕποπιπτοντες), those crying for their sins (προσκλαίοντες). The liturgical call of the catechumen, the penitent and all those under penitence to be retrieved from the service, corresponds to the final judgment and the closing of the doors as is symbolized by the parable of the ten virgins (Mt 25:1-13). Also, according to the early Fathers, like Ss Polycarp of Smyrna, Ignace of Antioch etc., the Bishop celebrating is alter God, alter Christus, or alter Apostolus. St Cyprian of Carthage spoke about the Catholicity of the Church as geographical understanding and St Augustin of Hippo qualified the Church as the "mystical body of Christ" (corpus Christi mysticum), qualification which suffered from different interpretations throughout the centuries. Probably, today, some of these eschatological perspectives lost their deep understanding, because of many influences from the West or modern theologies, but the study of the liturgical texts shows clearly that this was the theological and ecclesiological basis of the celebration of the Eucharist and the eucharistic ecclesiology of the Orthodox Church<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. C. E. Hammond and F. E. Brightman, *Liturgies Eastern and Western: Being the Texts Original or Translated of the Principal Liturgies of the Church*. Vol. I. Eastern Liturgies, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, M DCCC XCVI.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. John of Damascus, *Περὶ τῶν ἱερῶν εἰκόνων*, *Λόγος Β'*, 23. B. KOTTER III, p. 122: «Ὅρα, ὅτι καὶ ὁ νόμος καὶ πάντα τὰ κατ' αὐτὸν πᾶσά τε ἢ καθ' ἡμᾶς λατρεία χειροποίητά εἰσιν ἄγρια δι' ὕλης προσάγοντα ἡμᾶς τῷ ἀύλῳ θεῷ, καὶ ὁ μὲν νόμος καὶ πάντα τὰ κατὰ τὸν νόμον σκιαγραφία τις ἦν τῆς μελλούσης εἰκόνας, τουτέστι τῆς καθ' ἡμᾶς λατρείας, ἢ δὲ καθ' ἡμᾶς λατρεία εἰκὼν τῶν μελλόντων ἀγαθῶν, αὐτὰ δὲ τὰ πράγματα ἢ ἄνω Ἱερουσαλήμ ἢ ἄυλος καὶ ἀχειροποίητος, καθὼς φησιν ὁ αὐτὸς θεῖος ἀπόστολος: 'Οὐ γὰρ ἔχομεν ὧδε μένουσαν πόλιν, ἀλλὰ τὴν μέλλουσαν ἐπιζητοῦμεν', ἥτις ἐστὶν ἢ ἄνω Ἱερουσαλήμ, ἢ τῆς τεχνίτης καὶ δημιουργοῦ ὁ θεός.' Πάντα γὰρ τὰ τε κατὰ τὸν νόμον καὶ τὰ κατὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν λατρίαν ἐκείνης χάριν ἐγένοντο». The position of the Orthodox Church to renounce the practice of Eucharistic

## CRITERIA FOR A MORAL DISCERNMENT IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

Saint Maximus Confessor, in the detail comments of the Liturgy in his *Mystagogia*, considers the Eucharist as the movement of the whole Creation towards the Kingdom of God.

1. The entrance of the Bishop to the church for the celebration of the Liturgy – corresponding to the procession of the Gospel during which the Bishop enters in the holy Altar–, is the icon of Christ entering the World with His Incarnation.
2. The reading of the Letter and the Gospel signify the end of the history and the Judgement of the World, which is completed by the exit of the Catechumen and the closing of the doors of the church (cf. Mt 25:31-46).
3. The transfer of the Gifts from the Prothesis to the Altar (Big Entrance), the kissing of peace, the reading of the Confession of faith, the singing of the Trisagion, the Lord's Prayer and everything which happens during the celebration of the Liturgy after the Big Entrance, is the manifestation of the eschatological Kingdom in its fulness.
4. The catholicity of the Church extends, according to St. Maximus, to the fulness of the Creation in its eschatological perspective.
5. The Eucharist reveals the final purpose of the Church, which is the unity not only of humans, but all the beings of the Creation, as was stressed by St. Irenaeus on the second century.
6. The Eucharist is the "Synaxis" of the believers according to St. Paul, St. Anastasios of Sinai and St. Maximus the Confessor.

Here we could add the final goal which is the participation to the holy sacrament of the Eucharist. The dialogue between the celebrant and the members of the Eucharistic synaxis is relevant: before the Communion the celebrant reiterates the attention of every member, expected to come and receive the Body and Blood of Christ: «Be attentive, the holy sacraments are offered to the hollies» (πρόσχομεν, τὰ ἅγια τοῖς ἁγίοις). The answer of the believers comes as a confession: "Only one is holly, only one is Lord, Jesus Christ, for the glory of God the Father" (εἷς ἅγιος, εἷς Κύριος, Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, εἷς δόξαν Θεοῦ Πατρός). In that way, the holiness is seen also as eschatological reality experience already in the hic et nun of the manifestation of the Kingdom of God through the Liturgy.

Given the fact that all other "sacraments" were related to the celebration of the Eucharist, Baptism, Chrismation, Laying on the Hands (Ordination), Marriage, Confession of sins etc., we can understand why all rules (canons) of the Ecumenical and local Synods, and canons of individual Fathers concerning the moral discernment are related to the possibility of participation of the Holy Communion, that means to be members of the eschatological kingdom.

The Orthodox Ecclesiology, consequently, has as basis for the moral discernment the Eschatological experience and not the historical one. The world and its every time situation do not alter the Church of Christ, that means the Kingdom of God, but vice versa, the world must be transformed and become the Kingdom of God. This is the

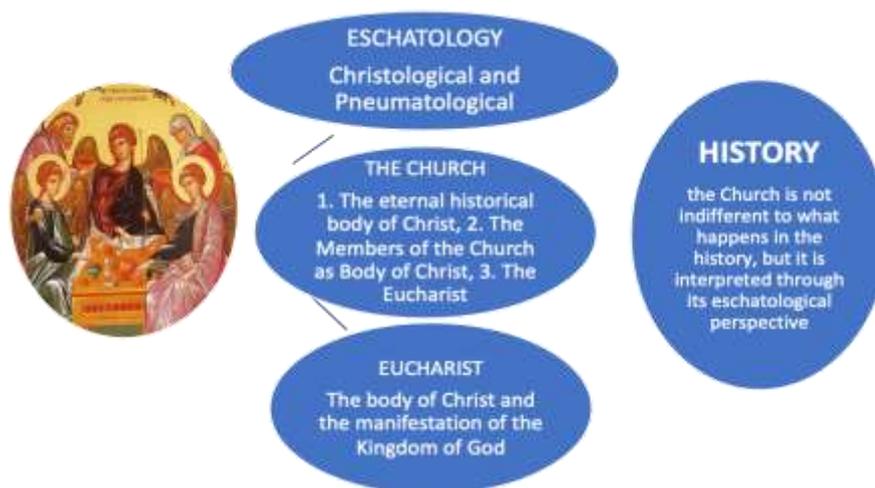
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hospitality is based on this understanding of the eschatological Synaxis. Those participating to the Eucharist are those who were called to be members of the Kingdom of God.

reason we pray during the eucharistic service: “Thy Kingdom come”. In this understanding, is not a question of “conservatism”, but it concerns the mission of the Church to liberate the world from its sinful situation and renew it in Christ by the grace of the Holy Spirit. We don’t pretend that the choice of the Churches of the West to begin with history and come to the eschatology, is mistaken, but this is a major difference between East and West and it’s reflected to the specific topic we try to give an answer. The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Churches stresses this point: “The one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church is a divine-human communion in the image of the Holy Trinity, a foretaste and experience of the eschaton in the holy Eucharist and a revelation of the glory of the things to come, and, as a continuing Pentecost, she is a prophetic voice in this world that cannot be silenced, the presence and witness of God’s Kingdom “that has come with power” (cf. Mark 9.1). The Church, as the body of Christ, “gathers” the world (Matt 23.37) to Him, transfigures it and irrigates it with “the water welling up to eternal life” (John 4.14)”<sup>3</sup>.

Till the great Schism of the 11<sup>th</sup> c., East and West shared the uninterrupted Christology and Pneumatology, But, because of the cutting of Christology from Pneumatology by the Scholastic theology (12<sup>th</sup> c.) and the establishment of independent Christology, which includes the incarnation, the teaching, the death and resurrection of Christ, and then the Pneumatological period of the Church from Pentecost and then, we experience a deep aggravation and distancing between East and West Ecclesiology. The “sacraments” in the West are more spiritual acts than the events happening by the co-work, the “Solidarity” and the “Synergy”, between the Logos and the Spirit of God. This was adopted also by the Reformation on the 16<sup>th</sup> c<sup>4</sup>.

The following diagram shows how the Orthodox Church proceeds from the eschatology to the history, having as purpose the inclusion of the history to the eschatology.



<sup>3</sup> Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church § 1, Crete, 2016. Cf. John ZIZIOULAS, Metropolitan of Pergamon, WRITINGS, Ecclesiological Studies, DOMOS Publications, Athens, 2016 (in Greek). Vlasios FEIDAS, ECCLESIOLOGY: Between Christology and Pneumatology through the light of the Patristic Tradition, Athens, 2018 (in Greek).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Vlasios FEIDAS, ECCLESIOLOGY, op. cited, pp. 165-318 (in Greek).

*B. DOGMATIC, CANONICAL, LITURGICAL AND ETHICAL DISCERNMENT*

*I. UNDER WHICH CRITERIA THE BODY OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH (SYNOD, BISHOP, PRESBYTERS AND THE FAITHFULL) DECIDES ABOUT AN ISSUE. WHERE THE CORRECTNESS OF A DECISION IS FOUNDED OR/AND AFFIRMED*

*Moral discernment in the Orthodox Church.* It is important to underline that the moral discernment in the Orthodox Church is conditioned by her eucharistic eschatological conscience and understanding. Nearly, all “penances” (ἐπιτίμια) are related to the question of the permission or not for somebody to take part to the “sacrament” of the Eucharist, which is the manifestation of the eschatological Kingdom of God. The canons are norms of the Kingdom, which is present and yet expected to come free of any legalism. The everyday life is illuminated by the eschatological Kingdom and not vice versa. It’s a Church action and not a secular activism. Thus, according to the orthodox understanding there is no defining border line between faith-doctrine and practical life-ethos<sup>5</sup>.

Saint Epiphanius of Constantia sets as criteria: a) what Jesus Christ has done during His earthly ministry, b) what is included in the Holy Scriptures and c) which is the role of tradition, of the teaching and the canonical order of the Church in the history of her life.

“*The Conscience of the Church*” is a comprehensive definition that includes all the above-mentioned criteria as the Church received them by Jesus Christ, the Apostles, the teaching and the content of the Holy Scriptures as Revelation of God, the teaching of the Fathers of the Church, the teachings and authority of the Ecumenical and local Councils. As the Church experienced them, she preserves them and hands them in as a continuous tradition and life and teaches them as the saving truth.

The “sacraments” of the Church, having the Eucharistic and eschatological character, either as a content, as structure, or as a tradition, reveal the self-conscience of the Church, meaning what the Church is and what her nature reveals within the history. She constitutes the experience of faith and the relation between the believer as member of the body of Christ with God and the other members of the body (faith and order).

There are two ways according to which the Church could decide about any issue challenging for a solution:

- i. “Akriveia” (ἀκρίβεια), as a criterion for moral discernment for the Orthodox Church, is the precise application of the norms that forbid for example abortions or suicides etc. and the predetermined canonical penances (ἐπιτίμια) that are imposed in order to apply the canons to the letter.

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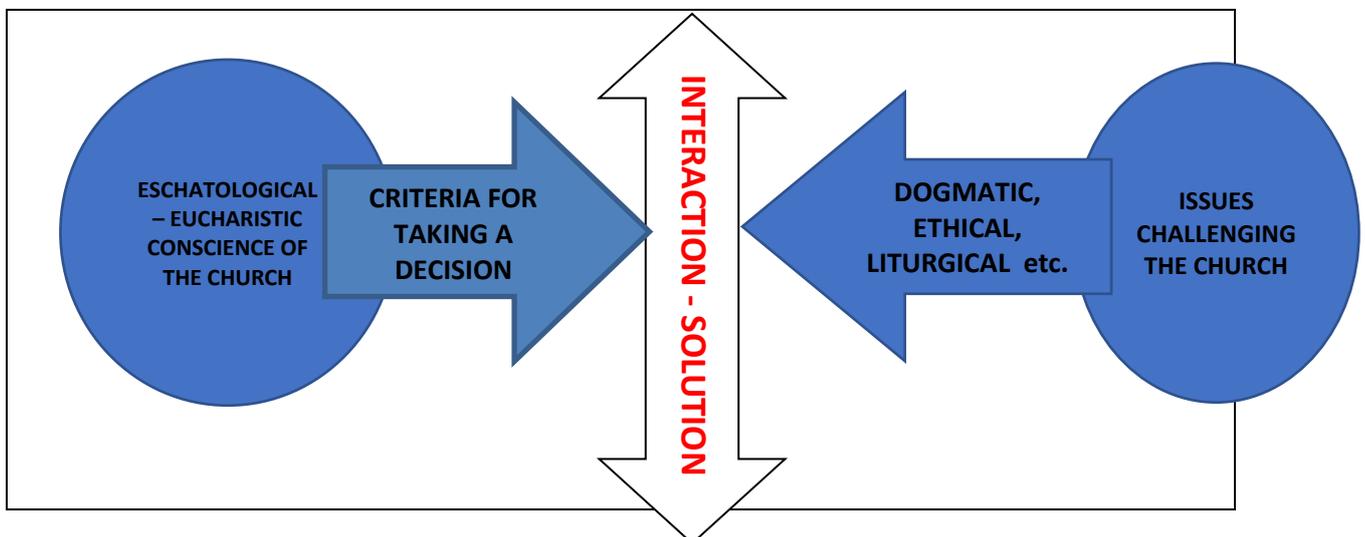
<sup>5</sup> Cf. *For the Life of the World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church*. (For the Life of the World reflects editorial changes by the Special Commission that incorporate elaborations and amplifications not included in the original document reviewed and approved for publication by the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate).

- ii. “Oikonomia” (οἰκονομία) does not mean the abolition of the canons but the pastoral discernment and their benevolent (φιλόανθρωπος) application, if these could become curative for the human being (There are decisions of the Holy Synod of the Church of Cyprus about abortions and suicides)

The issues that the church might confront in its daily life are numerous and various as it can be proved through its history.

1. Issues concerning faith, doctrine, teaching. These issues cannot be changed (Trinitarian Doctrine, the divinity of Jesus and of the Holy Spirit, the content of the divine Revelation etc.)
2. Issues about Christian ethics and life, application of the Commandments and especially love, the new Commandment of Jesus Christ
3. Issues concerning holy sacraments and liturgical order
4. Issues about canonical order
5. The Christian manner of living according to the teaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ
6. The ethical dimension of the political and economic decisions, which influence the everyday of life of the believers. Today the state Commissioners try to create norms foreign to the Gospel and Church tradition.

*This following diagram could be applied for the discernment concerning issues of faith and doctrine, issues about Christian ethics, for issues about canonical and liturgical order and action and of course for issues concerning the life of every single member of the Body of Christ.*



## *II. ISSUES THAT ACTIVATE THE CRITERIA OF THE CONCIENCE OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH FOR A MORAL DISCERNMENT, ACCORDING TO THE ABOVE DIAGRAM*

In many times, the interactions of the theological and dogmatic issues were productive, but in other cases they caused violent reactions and religious or political clashes. The challenges of the heresies led to the orthodox formulation of the content of the Christian faith.

## CRITERIA FOR A MORAL DISCERNMENT IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

The ones that through the centuries challenged the self-conscience of the Church were handled by the Church by the convocation of Ecumenical Councils, as an expression of the living experience of the Church's life, faith and tradition, while others, who due to their autonomous attitude towards the ecclesial body, remained voluntarily out of the communion of the Church, giving rise to various schisms.

Additionally, the teaching of the Gospel, the canons of the Ecumenical and local Councils and the tradition of the Church regulate the governing system of the Church and determine the framework of the Christian ethics of the believers.

*How the above diagram can work for the Church in order to find out the truth about a dogmatic and theological problem?*

- How and in what extend the Church can be influenced by an era? Can be justified the so called required “renewal” or/and “modernization of the Church”? If yes, why and how can be accomplished? If not, why? (Perceptions of a variety of ways expressing faith and unity. Answer: unity in wording and content. Jesus Christ is “the same yesterday, today, and forever”)
- What can be the interaction between the criteria of the conscience of the Church and the challenges that faces from the dogmatic, ethical, social and other questions from the societies? Is there a danger of alteration of either the church conscience or its criteria?
- Which criteria can be applied in order to discern a dogmatic theological issue?
- Which criteria the Ecumenical Synods applied in order to determine the orthodoxy of the faith and of the doctrine?
- How does a committee of the Orthodox Church judge the views of a respective committee of another Church or during theological dialogues in the World Council of Churches? Which are the required criteria from the Orthodox representatives?

*How the above diagram can work in order to discern the truth about an issue related to Christian ethics?*

- Which criteria must be applied to solve an issue about Christian ethics?
- How a priest/confessor is asked to correspond to the spiritual matters and spiritual curative procedures of a person that confess or of the whole of his parish?

*How the above diagram can work in order to discern the truth about an issue related to worship and liturgical order? (Liturgical diversity and unity of worship, differences of the liturgical order (τάξις) of the liturgical services, cultural elements)*

- The challenge for a liturgical renewal is always present. Is it possible for a liturgical and worshipping renewal? And how renewal is being understood?
- How the orthodox mission can apply all the above-mentioned criteria and develop the orthodox Church conscience in civilizations with different customs, different ethical behavior and other faith about God etc.?

### BIBLICAL TEXTS

*“The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all”. (Acts 3:13-16).*

*“The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him”. (Acts 5:30-32).*

*“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, 2:12 Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee”. (Heb. 2:9-12).*

*“But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins”. (Mt 1:20-21).*

*“And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: 1:33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible. And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her”. (Lk 1:26-38).*

*“But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live”. (Rm 8:9-13).*

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*“Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth” (1<sup>st</sup> Jon 5:5-6).*

*“Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving; Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds: That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man”. (Col 4:2-6).*

*“For in one hour so great riches is come to nought. And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off, 18:18 And cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like unto this great city! 18:19 And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying, Alas, alas that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness! for in one hour is she made desolate. Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her. And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus, with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all” (Rev 18:17-20).*

This chapter of Revelation is the description of the Last Judgement: *“And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And again they said, Alleluia And her smoke rose up for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia. And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God. And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS. And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great. And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army.*

*And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh” (Rev 19: 1-21).*

*Parable of the ten virgins “Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: 25:4 But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. 25:8 And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh” (Mt 25:1-13).*

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## Chapter 9

# THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST AND ITS CONSEQUENCE FOR A COMMON CELEBRATION OF PASCHA

*Emer., Prof. Petros Vassiliadis*

This year, more than in any other year in our generation, Christians all over the world need to reflect on the profound meaning of Christ's resurrection and its consequences for our human destiny and for a common celebration of Pascha. Having already experienced more than 3 million deaths around the globe, only through an understanding of the real meaning of resurrection can we find a lasting hope that comes out of Christ's resurrection, in fact His victory over death.

### *The Profound Meaning of Resurrection*

What is the reason for defining the even of the Resurrection of Christ as «Radiant»-«Lampri»? And what makes the faithful exclaim in the words of Saint John Damascene: «*this is the day of resurrection, let us be **radiant** O people: Pascha, the Lord's Pascha. For Christ our God has passed us from death to life, and from earth to heaven, we who sing the song of victory*» (Katavasia of Pascha)?

It is undoubtedly, the conviction of the Orthodox the world over, but also of all Christians, that fear of death was vanquished: «*Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and to those in the tombs, He has granted life*», triumphantly exclaims one of the oldest, together with the *Phos hilaron* (Gladdening light), hymns of the Christian Church.

However, the true fact of death, the result of humankind's fall, and of their free choice to disobey God and thus break communion with Him, was not abolished. Death, as human being's ultimate enemy, «*will be the last enemy to be destroyed*» in the words of Apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 15:26).

By means of their faith in the Resurrection of the Son and Word of God, the faithful will be able to live true life, «*life in abundance*» according to John the Evangelist: (*I have come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly*, John 10:10). This is the life, rid of the catalytic influence of the devil, that God gave to humanity by the Resurrection of Christ, who «*did trample down death and did abolish the devil*»

An important remark is here necessary. We should follow the correct wording of the euchologion in the funeral service: «*O Christ, the true God, who trampled down death and abolished the devil*». . NOT as some priests un-theologically insist: «*O Christ the true God, who abolished death and trampled down the devil*».

By His death Christ did abolish the devil that until then had the power of death, thus liberating humanity that used to be enslaved by their fear of death. In the words of the author of the epistle to the Hebrews: «*that through death he might destroy him that had*

*the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage* (Hebrews 2: 14-15. See also *«putting an end to the agony of death...because you will not abandon my soul to Hades»*, in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, 2:24 και 27).

This conviction was preserved unchanged in the century long tradition of the Eastern Orthodox Church, where, Easter, that is the Resurrection, is re-enacted not only every Sunday, especially during the Orthros, but it is also celebrated every year with even more joyfulness than in the Western world, where they celebrate more the Birth of our Saviour. There are other differences between the Western and Eastern Christianity, in the theology and in the conscience of the faithful, as for instance the “eschatological” – and therefore doxological – dimension of the Christian self-awareness, in contrast with the “historical” – and therefore more missionary – practice of our brothers in the Western world. The resurrection, however, remains the element that represents more than any other the Orthodox Christian self-awareness, while in the Western world, until very recently, Crucifixion was the predominant signifier.

*The Biblical Foundation of the Theology of the Resurrection*

The first theologian to have developed and established the determining importance of the Resurrection of Christ was St. Paul, the great Apostle to the nations. In his first, and, according to many, oldest written text, the first epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul refers, for the first time, to the significance of the Resurrection for the future of the Christians: *«for since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep*, 4,14). In other words, faith in the resurrection of Christ, leads to the partaking of the faithful to the eschatological Kingdom of God, a state by far more glorious than even that of Paradise. For this reason, and after quoting an apocalyptic text, using a language that all his readers would be able to understand, he concludes his argumentation by the phrase: *«and so we will be with the Lord for ever*, 4:17).

Some years later addressing the community of Corinth, Paul further developed his teaching on the subject of the resurrection of the dead, especially in chapter 15 of his first epistle to the Corinthians that was going to act as a catalyst in determining the Christian faith. In it we find the well-known quote of the apostle: *«if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless»* (15:17). For Paul, the Resurrection of Christ was not an isolated past event, a wonderful intervention of God in the created world that lifted at once fear of death and its domination. It was rather the beginning of humanity’s universal salvation, which will be completed at the “eschaton”.

In this chapter of his epistle, the apostle invokes the creed of the early church about the cross, the resurrection and the apparitions of the risen Christ, as this message was delivered by eyewitnesses, men and women apostles of Christ, and was recorded in the early Christian sources (15:3ff). One of the basic reasons for the extensive development, in this epistle, of the Christian teachings on Resurrection, was the conviction of certain Christians in Corinth, that there was no resurrection of the dead (*«some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead»*, 15:12).

This conviction maybe due to a misinterpretation of many traditions of early Christian, New Testament, but also extra biblical Christian sources (such as the Q source, the most ancient source of the Synoptic Gospel tradition, the Epistle of James, St. Thomas Apocryphal Gospel etc.), that put at the heart of their teachings not the Cross and Resurrection of Christ, but the eschatological, moral and prophetic teachings of the Historical Christ.

The apostle makes it clear that the resurrection of Christ ensures the *resurrection of the dead*. To illustrate his point, he uses two theological motifs. First of all, the Adam–Christ, first man–second man: «*for since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive*» 15:21-22). The second motif he uses is the *psychic-pneumatic* body that is the natural, earthy body of this life and the heavenly body after death. He describes how the new body will replace the old one, at the resurrection of the dead: «*so also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body*» (15:42-44).

Finally, he describes the future resurrection of the dead, using, as he did in 1 Thessalonians, the widely known apocalyptic themes of the Old Testament and of the inter-testamental sources, the last trumpet that will sound. This is the real “mystery” of immortality in Christ: «*Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality*”, (15:51-53). And he concludes, triumphantly exclaiming, in the way that the orthodox celebrate Christ’s Resurrection: «*O Death, where is your victory? O Death where is your sting?*” (15:55).

The Resurrection of Christ, therefore, as «*The Feast of Feasts*» and «*The Festival of Festivals*», is the fundamental truth and the ultimate event of Christian faith. It is the most decisive act of the liberation of humanity from the fear of death and devil’s power. It is the beginning of the new creation and the very assurance for the salvation of human beings affirmed by the certainty of the heavenly resurrection of the dead, which is a concept widely different from that of the Greek philosophical theory on immortality of the soul.

#### *The Resurrection in Orthodox Art*

It is precisely for this reason that we read in the later New Testament sources that Christ during the burial of his earthy body and his Resurrection “*He also went and preached to the spirits that were in prison*» (1 Peter 3:19). This is the reason that the Byzantine painting tradition represents the fact of the Resurrection by the “Descent to Hades”. The descent to hades is also hinted at in another passage of this letter: «*for this is why the gospel was preached even to the dead*», 4:6, and in the Acts of the Apostles (2:24. 27-31). Many researchers consider that the principal literary source is the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus, where we find the dialogue between hades and the

devil. But this Apocryphal Gospel is nothing but an imaginative projection of the Pauline theological reflection.

In other words, the Resurrection of Christ is not merely a fact of paramount historical importance, but it overarches history giving it a new sense, orientating it towards a new world, a new life, completely different from the conventional life of decay, strife and death.

This universality of the Resurrection of the dead was followed few years ago by the Interparliamentary Assembly of Orthodoxy (IAO) that initiated a contest on the Resurrection for modern iconographers from all Eastern Orthodox Churches. There were 222 entries from 19 countries, out of which the professional judges selected 63 artists, who were invited to work for 6 months during the second phase of the competition.

A specialist photographer photographed their works, in order to enable the members of the selection committee to study and evaluate them. The selection committee after consecutive secret ballots brought forth the 5 winners (first, second, third award and first and second commendation). The five winners were invited to the prize awarding ceremony that was held in the framework of the IAO 26<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. An electronic vote on the Internet ran in parallel for the public. 1880 persons from 48 countries voted for the third commendation.

This initiative by the IAO, both in regard to the choice of the subject, and its opening up of the competition beyond Eastern Orthodoxy including Oriental Orthodox iconographers, underlines the universal and ecumenical character of the Resurrection of Christ. It reaffirms the contribution of this pioneering organisation to the contemporary witness and pursuit of Orthodoxy «*that they all may be one*» (John 17:21) as Jesus Christ commanded. The words, after all, of the prayer petition «*for the union of all*» during the liturgical services of all the Orthodox around the globe, underlines that the ultimate goal of divine economy, according to the Apostle of the Nations and the basic Christian teaching, is the union of all «*so that God may be all in all*» (1 Corinthians 15:28).

The real meaning of the representation of the Resurrection by the “Descent to Hades” was the universal character of salvation in Christ.

*The Consequence of the Theology of Resurrection for Common Celebration of Pascha*

The universality of the Resurrection of the dead, as a consequence of Christ’s Resurrection, and their liberation from the fear of death, prompted the Ecumenical Patriarchate’s struggle for more than a century now for a common celebration of Pascha.

In an online, interconfessional and interdisciplinary meeting, organized by the Center of Ecumenical, Missiological and Environmental Studies "Metropolitan Panteleimon Papageorgiou" (CEMES), on Sunday, April 4, the day of celebration of *Pascha* in western Christianity, and symbolically this year the Sunday of the Veneration of the Holy *Cross* of the Orthodox Church, theologians and natural scientists, Orthodox and non-Orthodox, wondered whether the Orthodox this year celebrate Pascha in accordance with the Holy Tradition, and specifically with the

decisions of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (of the "Holy and Great" according to our tradition); namely, one month after the Easter of the Christians of the West.

At the meeting participated academics of biblical scholarship, of history and theology of religions, of sociology of religion, of natural science and theology, emeriti professors of foreign universities, an Archbishop of the Catholics in Greece and professors at the Department of Physics of AUTH, on the occasion also of the common desire of the Primate of the Catholic Church, His Holiness Pope Francis, and of the Orthodox Church, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, His All-Holiness Bartholomew, to celebrate Easter together in Nicaea of Bithynia in 2025, the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council, which that year coincides with the celebration of Pascha in the Julian and Gregorian calendars.

They asked themselves about the reasons the efforts of the Ecumenical Patriarchate a whole century now (from the historic patriarchal and synodal encyclical of 1920 "to all Churches of Christ on earth" for a common celebration of Easter) have not been successful. It is worth noting the case of Milutin Milankovic, a prominent Serbian Orthodox scholar, at the Pan-Orthodox Synod that followed in 1923 and suggested a Revised Julian Calendar, more accurate than the Gregorian, which because of internal reactions of extreme conservatives, who preferred a calendar named after a pagan emperor (Julian), rather than a Christian pope (Gregory)! Of course, his proposal, ideal until today for the immovable feasts of Christianity (Christmas, Epiphany, etc.), finally created the problems that this year are more than obvious, and moreover, his own Serbian Church did not adopt his proposal.

Recent reactions provoked by an article of the Archbishop of Telmessos, of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and its Permanent Representative to the World Council of Churches, Job (Getcha) on the vision of a common celebration in Nicaea for the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the convocation of the First Ecumenical Council, inevitably led to the question: Are the Christians of the West, or the Orthodox of the East, closer to the decision and the spirit of the First Ecumenical Council, as some Orthodox academic theologians have hinted at times, while at the same time trying to explain "why do the Orthodox celebrate Easter on a different day than other Christians".

At this point it is worth noting the practical/pastoral, but also deeply ecumenical, decision of the Catholics, but also of the Evangelicals, in our country to celebrate Pascha not with their fellow believers all over the world, but together with the Orthodox.

The conclusion of the statements of the interlocutors of the above online event was that there is a misunderstanding by some Orthodox, who believe that the reason for a different celebration of Pascha is due to the fact that the Orthodox Church follow the rules for calculating the date of Pascha as decided by the Ecumenical Council. They insist that the Council in Nicaea in 325 AD demanded to wait for the Jews to celebrate Passover before the Orthodox celebrate their Pascha. But this is not sufficiently documented, simply estimating that the main provision of Nicaea was that the Christian Pascha should not be associated with the Jewish Passover (Peshah, Passover, etc.), which came from a misinterpretation of later holy canons (the first of Antioch and the seventh of the Holy Apostles), which in essence forbid celebrating together with the

Jews, not dissociating it with the Jewish Passover, as both the Gospel accounts (Synoptics and according to John alike) and the Ecumenical Council itself, claim exactly the opposite.

The Nicene Council solved the practical problems of the different celebrations of Pascha among Christian communities at the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> c. AD, established that the Christian Easter should not be celebrated together with the Jewish Passover, that is, the same day as the spring full moon, the 14th/15th of the Jewish Nisan. On the contrary, deciding to celebrate it on the first Sunday after the full moon of the vernal equinox, it associated forever Christian Easter with the Jewish Passover, without of course identifying it with it. Most importantly, it was decided Pascha to be celebrated independently of the various calendars (mostly lunar at that time), but calculated it solely on astronomical scientific data (spring equinox and first spring full moon after it). That is why the Church instructed the Patriarch of Alexandria, a leading center of astronomy in the ancient world, to determine the exact time of the celebration of Pascha. In 455 AD the dynamic Pope of Rome Leo the Great, the one who insisted on the papal primacy, accepted the recommendation of Alexandria, although he was universally recognized as the first in rank.

The vernal equinox used today by the Orthodox Church to calculate Easter is not the actual astronomical equinox, nor was the full moon followed in the Orthodox celebration of Easter with the real, astronomical full moon. To put it in simple words, the best available calendar and the best science available are no longer used to calculate the Orthodox Pascha. And this has led the Orthodox to calculate it very often not in accordance with the real astronomical data (spring equinox and full moon). And this has often as a result, like this year, a celebration of Pascha much later in the spring! According to the scientists, this year not only the spirit of the council (common celebration) is being ignored, but also its regulatory decisions (spring equinox, first and not...fifth Sunday, and first and not second full moon).

This year the difference is a whole month. Western Easter was estimated and celebrated on April 4, while Orthodox Pascha a month later (based on the Julian calendar on May 2). And this, as our Physicist colleagues have confirmed, despite the fact that today the scientific methods have significantly advanced, so that we know with a reliable accuracy the dates of the vernal equinox and the full moon for each given year. In contrast, today the Orthodox Church uses a complex mathematical formula for calculating Easter and the most inaccurate calendar (currently 13 days behind the Gregorian calendar, and in fact, based on accurate astrological data, 14 days), and in addition an unreliable mathematical algorithm for calculating the full moon, based on an outdated lunar cycle of 19 years (the Metonian cycle).

The Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1920 suggested that all the Churches use a common calendar so that Christians in the East and the West could celebrate the great Christian feasts together. However, divisive reactions to the adoption of a new calendar and recalculation of Easter led to a compromise that allowed the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches to choose either the Old Calendar (Julian) or the New (Gregorian) for the immovable feasts and for determining the movable (the celebration of Pascha) a revised

Julian Calendar, which as we have already mentioned caused, if nothing else, a complete unreliability in our Orthodox Church.

*Ecumenical Efforts for a Common Celebration of Pascha*

The issue was also addressed relatively recently by the World Council of Churches and the Middle East Council of Churches. In 1997, with the consent and support by both the Holy See and the Ecumenical Patriarchate, they organized an ecumenical conference in Aleppo, Syria, on a common celebration of Easter. In addition to the Pan-Orthodox Synod of 1923 other attempts to solve the problem had preceded: the ecumenical conference of Chambésy in 1970, which put as a main priority the religious concept of Easter and Christian unity, and the preparatory consultation of the Pan-Orthodox Holy and Great Synod of 1977, with the participation of leading Orthodox natural scientists.

The proposal of the Aleppo Conference, with the consent of all Protestant denominations, was to maintain the ecumenical decision of Nicaea, that Easter should be celebrated on the Sunday after the first full moon that followed the vernal equinox. At the same time, for the calculation of astronomical data (spring equinox and full moon) the most accurate scientific data should be taken into account. Finally, for the first time it was proposed to determine the meridian of Jerusalem, the place of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, as the basis for the determination of the spring full moon.

More substantial, however, was the theological substantiation of the compromise (without the use of either the Julian or the Gregorian calendar, but a third scientific one, more accurate than the Gregorian one) and ecumenical recommendation, which were elaborated jointly by all three main families of the Christian faith.

First, the Church should not forget its *origins*, by including the close connection between the biblical (Jewish) Passover and the passion and resurrection of Christ. This connection reflects the overall course of the history of salvation, i.e. of the divine economy. In assessing a movable date (and not a fixed one, as suggested from time to time) this link and reference to biblical standards for calculating Easter is strengthened.

And secondly, the *cosmic* dimension of the Christian Easter should not be overlooked. Through Christ's resurrection the sun, the moon and all the cosmic elements are restored to their original integrity in order to declare the glory of God (cf. "*how clearly the sky reveals God's glory! How plainly it shows what He has done!*", Psalm 19:1, and "*praise Him, sun and moon; praise Him shing stars*" (Psalm 148:3), while at the same time the close relationship between creation and recreation, that is, incarnation and redemption, are revealed as inseparable aspects of the divine revelation.

Unfortunately, these thoughts and recommendations to the churches and Christian communities for further elaboration on the findings of the Aleppo conference have not been followed to this very day. And for us Orthodox, at the insistence of the Autocephalous Churches that follow the Julian calendar for their immovable feasts (mainly, until very recently, by the Russian one), the issue of the calendar was withdrawn from the agenda of the Pan-Orthodox Synod.

Approaching in 4 years, in 2025, the 1700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, which decreed for a common celebration of Pascha for all Christians, it is time for Orthodox Christians to follow in the footsteps of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and start discussing again the important issue of the calculation of a common celebration of Easter by all Christians, beyond any prejudices and misinterpretations of the historical and canonical data. A calculation that according to the spirit of the First Ecumenical Council requires the use of a more accurate calendar, beyond the Julian (old) and Gregorian (currently in use by most Orthodox Churches for unmovable holidays), as well as more accurate scientific (astrological) calculations .

The Holy and Great Council, moreover, has decreed at the highest dogmatic level, that *"for the Orthodox Church, the ability to explore the world scientifically is a gift from God to humanity."* (*The Mission of the Orthodox Church*, par. 11). And in her *Message* (par. 7) *urbi et orbi* it assured that *"in regard to the matter of the relations between Christian faith and the natural sciences, the Orthodox Church avoids placing scientific investigation under tutelage and does not adopt a position on every scientific question. She thanks God who gives to scientists the gift of uncovering unknown dimensions of divine creation. The modern development of the **natural sciences** and of technology is bringing radical changes to our life. It brings significant benefits, such as the facilitation of everyday life"*.

#### Conclusion

The profound significance of Christ's Resurrection is first and foremost His victory over the devil, who had the power of death, and through His descend to Hades the universal salvation of all created world from the fear of death with the hope of our resurrection.

That universal feast the Church decided to be commonly celebrated every year on the first Sunday after the first full moon, after the vernal equinox - astrologically/scientifically calculated - in the spirit of the First Ecumenical Council.

The image is a YouTube video thumbnail with a dark blue background. In the top left corner is the logo of International Hellenic University. In the top center, it says 'MASTER IN ORTHODOX ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY'. In the top right corner, it says 'TUESDAY 04-MAY 5:00pm-7:00pm'. The central part of the thumbnail features a religious painting of the Resurrection of Christ, with the text 'THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF RESURRECTION OF CHRIST AND ITS CONSEQUENCES FOR THE COMMON CELEBRATION OF PASCHA' overlaid in white and yellow. Below the painting is a portrait of Emer. Prof. Petros Vassiliadis. At the bottom, it says 'EMER. PROF. PETROS VASSILIADIS' and 'Prof. Nikolaos Dimitriadis will respond and monitor the discussion'. In the bottom left corner, there is a 'YouTube' logo and a 'Open to the public' badge. At the very bottom, it says 'CEMES YOUTUBE CHANNEL' and provides the URL 'https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCD\_5mcv3Z82pYW8LFUkZEmw'.

**PART II**

**LECTURES OF THE THEACHING STAFF OF MOET**

## Chapter 10

### THE ACTUALITY OF THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA (325)

*Archbishop of Telmessos, Prof. Job (Getcha)*

The year 2025 will mark the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first ecumenical council, the council of Nicaea, which initiated a new chapter in the history of the Christian Church. On this occasion, the World Council of Churches is planning to organize a World Conference of the Faith and Order Commission in order to celebrate this anniversary and to reflect on the transmission of the apostolic faith today. The purpose of this conference will not be to study the history of the council nor to study its theology, but rather to reflect on what “visible unity” means today to different Christian Churches and how Christians can collectively promote, preach and live the apostolic faith today in the context of so many contemporary challenges, such as secularization and religious pluralism. In this perspective, the present paper is an attempt to reflect on the actuality of the council of Nicaea and how it still ought to be considered as normative for the Christians of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### *The genesis of the Nicene Faith*

The first ecumenical council marked a new era in the history of Christian doctrine by setting up an appropriate terminology that would become the basis of all subsequent theology. The attempt made at Nicaea in 325 was to respond to the question of Jesus Christ – “Who do you say that I am?” (Mt 16:15) in relation with the strict monotheism of the Old Testament. Responding to Arius who claimed that Christ, the Son of God, was not divine, but the most perfect God’s creature, the Fathers of Nicaea formulated the doctrine of the Son being “consubstantial”, ὁμοούσιος in Greek, to the Father, that is to say that both the Father and the Son share the same divine essence.

By introducing a non-biblical, but a philosophical term, the Fathers of Nicaea took a great risk. Besides that, the term ὁμοούσιος had already a complex history, since it had been used in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century by Paul of Samosata. The term ὁμοούσιος is related to the terms οὐσία and ὑπόστασις, which will become key words in the subsequent Christian theology, both borrowed from Aristotelian philosophy where they are interrelated and inseparable from one another. While the first refers to the reality of an existence, the second one designates something which has an existence. Therefore, any οὐσία ought to be contained in a ὑπόστασις, and an οὐσία could not exist without a ὑπόστασις.

Besides teaching an adoptionist theory regarding Christ – considering him not as being the God who became man, but rather a man adopted by God – Paul of Samosata, as many other pre-Nicene Christian writers, did not actually distinguish the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, considering them as being the same hypostasis (ὑπόστασις) or essence (οὐσία) in a kind of modalism, and therefore, he use, in this context, the term ὁμοούσιος to claim that the Son or the Word was God.

The doctrine of Paul of Samosata was rejected at Nicaea, but the term ὁμοούσιος not only remained, but became the focal point of the Nicene faith. The Fathers of Nicaea introduced a clear distinction in God between his common essence (οὐσία) and his three specific hypostases (ὑπόστασεις). The term ὁμοούσιος was used at Nicaea to stress that the Father and the Son are not of different essences, but are distinct hypostases, three distinct realities within the same unique God. The council of Nicaea proclaimed, in its symbol of faith, that the Son of God is “consubstantial” (ὁμοούσιος) to the Father, that is to say belonging to the same reality and partaking in the same unique divine essence. In this way, the divinity of Christ was proclaimed while the strict monotheism of the Old Testament was preserved, thus avoiding falling into polytheism.

The concept of ὁμοούσιος at the council of Nicaea allowed the Christian Church to simultaneously claim that there is only one God, because of the unity of the essence, while distinguishing three realities in God – the three hypostases, something which would have been impossible for Aristotle because of the interrelatedness of οὐσία and ὑπόστασις. Certainly, the Nicaean ὁμοούσιος was an innovation within the Christian doctrine and one can definitely speak of a development of dogma. Thus, Nicaea inaugurated a new era in the history of Christian doctrine, and therefore, there is definitely both a pre-Nicaean Christian thought and a post-Nicaean Christian thought. But the innovation of Nicaea was not in contradiction with the Divine Revelation of the New Testament since it aimed at explaining it in proper and precise words. It was an attempt to reply to Christ’s question “Who do you say that I am?” (Mt 16:15) and to explain, in more explicit terms, Peter’s answer – “You are Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mt 16:16).

*Towards an ecumenical creed*

This answer was formulated in the symbol of faith, the creed, of Nicaea which clearly confessed the faith in the triune God: one God, the Father almighty, and one Lord Jesus-Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God, consubstantial to the Father, and the Holy Spirit. The Nicene creed then became the universal, or if you want, the ecumenical profession of the faith confessed by the Church. Faith is given to us by the Church, which has received it from Christ through the Apostles. For this reason, we are unable to change a single word, not any iota of the Church’s confession of faith. In contrast, theology is the interpretation of the confessed faith. In this interpretation, the words, the terms, the expressions may change, evolve, according to the times and the schools of theology. But the authority of the symbol of faith does not represent a moment in the history of the Church, but on the contrary, transcends the limits of time and space.

The symbol of faith is always linked with the participation of the members of the Church within the sacramental experience. Indeed, throughout the Christian history, the celebration of baptism always implied the confession of faith of the Church. An example, regarding the practice of the ancient Church in Jerusalem, is that of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem and of Egeria at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, testifying the creed as being the object of a long process of catechesis which preceded baptism during the Lenten

period, and then, on Good Friday, being recited in front of the bishop individually by each catechumen who was then baptized during the paschal vigil<sup>1</sup>.

During the first three centuries, each local Church had her own baptismal ‘symbol’ or creed, but their content have the same core of confessed faith: the Trinity, Christ, the Church and the last days (eschatology). The structure of each baptismal symbol was structured on the confession of God as Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in which the catechumen was baptized according to the command of Christ in Mt 28:19 and in the recognition of a unique baptism for the remission of sins. In the first three centuries, orthodoxy was manifested only through baptismal creeds although these symbols had theological weaknesses. Indeed, we cannot find any “Nicene orthodoxy” during the pre-Nicene period. Nevertheless, in the conscience of the early Church, each bishop had received, through ordination, the charism of truth, and for this reason each candidate for baptism had to come and recite the symbol of faith in front of him before being baptized, ensuring that they had properly assimilated the faith that the Church had transmitted to him.

According to the testimony of Eusebius of Caesarea, himself a bishop of Arian tendency having been restored into the communion of the Church, the symbol of Nicaea was developed on the basis of the baptismal symbol of the Church of Caesarea in Palestine<sup>2</sup>. This symbol may not have been the best baptismal symbol of the first three centuries. Perhaps there were some more accurate creeds, however it consequently led to becoming the symbol of faith of the entire Church. The term ὁμοούσιος was the added at the council of Nicaea to the creed to affirm the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father. In this regard, Saint Athanasius of Alexandria asserts that the Fathers of the council of Nicaea did not invent nor forge a new faith, but only reaffirmed the faith which they had received from their Church during the first three centuries.

Through its reception at the council of Nicaea, this symbol of faith became an ecumenical creed, which is mandatory for the entire Church and which the Church Fathers called “the lesson (μάθημα) of our faith”. This symbol of faith has been expended at the second ecumenical council, the council of Constantinople (381), which added the orthodox doctrine on the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Subsequently, the third ecumenical council, the council of Ephesus (431), officially canonized this symbol of faith known since then as the “Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed”, thus being universally received by the Church, specifying that nothing more could be added, nor anything deleted from it.

The Niceno-Constantinopolitan symbol of faith was later introduced into the celebration of the eucharist at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. The first group to introduce this creed within the eucharistic gathering were the non-Chalcedonians lead by Peter the Fuller in Antioch in 476, after the proclamation of the doctrinal definition of the fourth ecumenical council, the council of Chalcedon (451). By reciting the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed at every eucharistic gathering, the non-Chalcedonians wanted

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<sup>1</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Homilies* 1, 4 and 5, 9 (SC 126, 88 and 98); Egeria, *Itinerarium* 46, 5 (SC 296, 310-312).

<sup>2</sup> Theodoret, *Ecclesiastical History*, I, 11.

to stress that they were remaining faithful to the Nicene faith. Later, the Chalcedonians introduced this practice also, in 511, during the rule of the non-Chalcedonian emperor Anastasius, to secure the political support of the emperor by showing their faithfulness to the first ecumenical council<sup>3</sup>.

*The Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed and the Ecumenical Movement*

Given its widespread acceptance by the Church throughout the world, not a word or letter can be changed in this symbol which turns out to be the common heritage of all Christian denominations today. The Orthodox emphasize not only the usage of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed, but also the faithfulness to its original form. The Orthodox Church does not accept the Latin addition of the “*filioque*”. This addition was introduced into the creed in the 6<sup>th</sup> century in Spain at the Council of Toledo (589) and implies that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father “and from the Son” (*filioque* in Latin). This addition spread throughout the Holy Roman Empire during the time of Charlemagne in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, then made its appearance in Rome at the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, which probably caused the rupture of communion between Rome and Constantinople, and consequently, between the Churches of the East and of the West.

The Orthodox cannot accept this addition on the one hand because it is forbidden, since the third ecumenical council, to add or remove anything from the symbol of Nicaea-Constantinople, since it is a decision of an ecumenical council, and on the other hand, because the clause of the symbol which affirms that “the Spirit proceeds from the Father” is a textual quotation from the Gospel of John (Jn 15,26).

In contemporary ecumenical dialogue, when one refers to the faith of the first centuries, it is evident that the most authentic formula of the early confession of faith of the Church is the Niceno-Constantinopolitan symbol of faith. This is why, despite the difficulty of Protestant reactions, the symbol of faith of Nicaea-Constantinople, in its original form, was accepted by the World Council of Churches which introduced this creed in its Constitution during the general assembly of Porto Alegre in 2006, as the criterion determining whether a church can become a member. Therefore, agreeing with this symbol of faith, in its original form, has now become compulsory for all WCC member churches.

However, we need a theological interpretation of the common faith. What interpretation do we give to this universally received symbol? It is important to remember that the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed was first studied by the WCC and the Faith and Order commission in the years 1978-1979, during which the question of the *filioque* was analyzed, starting with the question of the procession of the Holy Spirit according to the Greek Fathers and including the historical development and implications of the *filioque* controversy. These studies showed the problems generated by the *filioque* clause, making it unacceptable for some while others may have found an acceptable theological interpretation for it. This culminated in the Klingenthal Memorandum of 1979 on the *filioque* clause in an ecumenical perspective which tried to find an ecumenical consensus on the procession of the Holy Spirit and on the addition

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<sup>3</sup> Theodore the Lector, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 2.32 and 48. PG 86A, 201, 209.

of the *filioque* to the creed by opening a new debate and taking into account new positions<sup>4</sup>.

Moreover, from 1986, following the proposal of Professor Thomas Thorrance of Edinburgh, representing the Reformed Church, the symbol of Nicaea-Constantinople in its original form and its interpretation by the prominent Church Fathers of the 4<sup>th</sup> century (especially by the Cappadocians), was accepted as the basis for dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Reformed Churches. The Orthodox accepted the Reformers' proposal and the commission set to work analyzing the symbol article by article. The triadological dogma caused no issue, agreement was easily established, and christological questions have not been a cause for problem either. However, the clause on the Church, "One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic", caused the most disagreement, as well as the confession of the one baptism which naturally raised the issue on the number of sacraments. Although the question of eschatology still remains to be studied, the Orthodox-Reformed bilateral dialogue has so far shown a convergence in triadology and Christology as long as the interpretation and the authority of the Church Fathers is accepted.

The Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed is of extreme importance not only for the dialogue with the Churches of the Reformation, but also for the dialogue between Catholics and Orthodox. Sometimes, because of their firm position on the *filioque*, the Orthodox are accused of being stubborn, fundamentalist or traditionalist. On the other hand, some Catholics are fond of the *filioque*, while others, to avoid this thorny question, prefer to use the so-called apostolic creed. However, we should note positive changes in relations between Catholics and Orthodox in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On 6 December 1987, during the official visit of the Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios to Rome, the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed was recited without the *filioque* by both Pope John Paul II and the Ecumenical Patriarch. The same happened again on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June 1995 during the official visit of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to Rome for the feast of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul.

On this occasion, in his predication in the liturgy in front of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Pope John Paul II asked the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity to prepare as quickly as possible, a purely orthodox theological interpretation of the *filioque*. The Pontifical Council immediately commenced work and published a document entitled "The Greek and Latin Traditions Concerning the Procession of the Holy Spirit"<sup>5</sup>, in November 1995, with the purpose of presenting a theological interpretation that would be acceptable to the Orthodox on the *filioque*. The publication of this document provoked great enthusiasm among Orthodox theologians of the Paris school (particularly from Prof. Olivier Clément and Father Boris Bobrinskoy), as well as, subsequently, the harsh criticism of the French patristic scholar Jean-

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. L. Vischer (ed.), *Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ. Ecumenical Reflections on the Filioque Controversy*, (Faith and Order Paper N° 103), London/Geneva, SPCK/WCC, 1981.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/greek-and-latin-traditions-regarding-the-procession-of-the-holy-spirit-2349>

Claude Larchet<sup>6</sup>. However, these theologians seem to have forgotten that the major issue that divided the Church over the whole second millennium was not the theology of the *filioque*, but its addition to the symbol of faith. It is not the theology of the *filioque* which was the origin of the rupture of communion, but its addition to the symbol of faith, for no one has the right to add or subtract anything from the symbol of faith and any alteration of a conciliar text is suspicious.

Following the 1995 document of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published in August 2000 the declaration entitled *Dominus Iesus*, signed by the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, in which the text of the entire Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed is quoted without the *filioque* in the first paragraph<sup>7</sup>. This fact is very significant, since this congregation is responsible for defending the Roman Catholic Church from heresy and promulgating the right catholic doctrine. Therefore, this declaration clearly shows that confessing the symbol of faith of Nicaea-Constantinople without the *filioque* is not heretical and that the original text is normative.

In addition, the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Commission focused its dialogue on the issue of the *filioque* from 1999 to 2003. Significantly important work has been done, which culminated in the publication of a joint declaration in October 2003<sup>8</sup>. In our humble opinion, this is the best statement to date on the question. It first addresses the understanding of the Spirit in Scripture, and then examines, in its second part, the history of the *filioque*: its addition to the Creed at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Council of Toledo in 589 against arianism of the Visigoths; its antecedents in the theology of the Latin Fathers (Tertullian, Hilaire of Poitiers, Ambrose of Milan, Augustine); the confrontation between the Franks and Byzantines in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, when the Franks criticized patriarch Tarasios of Constantinople for not confessing that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son; the dispute between Western and Eastern monks in Jerusalem in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, when Western monks were denounced by Easterners for having introduced the *filioque* into the symbol of faith; the encyclical of Patriarch Photios of Constantinople sent in 867 to the eastern Patriarchs on the subject of the Bulgarian question, criticizing the *filioque* of the Latins as blasphemy and asking for the summoning of an ecumenical council to resolve the question of the addition of the *filioque* within the symbol of faith; the coronation of Henry II in 1014 with the inclusion of the *filioque* in the Creed during the papal mass; the accusation brought in 1054 against Patriarch Michael Cerularius by Cardinal Humbert de Silva Candida of suppressing the *filioque* within the creed; the council of Lyon of 1274

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<sup>6</sup> Olivier Clément, « Liminaire », *Contacts* 48 (1996), p. 2-4 ; Boris Bobrinskoy, « Vers une vision commune du mystère trinitaire », *La documentation catholique* 2130 (1996), p. 89-90 ; Jean-Claude Larchet, « La question du filioque. À propos de la récente 'clarification' du Conseil pontifical pour la promotion de l'unité des chrétiens », *Theologia* 70 (1999), p. 762-812.

<sup>7</sup> *Dominus Iesus*, 1.  
[https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20000806\\_dominus-iesus\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.usccb.org/committees/ecumenical-interreligious-affairs/filioque-church-dividing-issue-agreed-statement>. Cf. « Le Filioque : une question qui divise l'Église ? Déclaration commune de la commission théologique orthodoxe-catholique d'Amérique du Nord », *Irénikon* 77 (2004), p. 69-100.

having approved of the filioque and condemning all those who reject it; the council of Blachernae of 1285 chaired by Gregory of Cyprus having condemned the double procession of the Spirit but speaking of the eternal manifestation of the Spirit through the Son; the discussions of the council of Ferrara-Florence; and finally, the various ecumenical dialogues and events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century related to the issue. The third part of this declaration consists of theological considerations on the question, examining the vocabulary (particularly the Greek verbs ἐκπορεύεται and the Latin *procedere*, and the substance of theological and ecclesiological problems) and concludes with a series of recommendations. Although this last statement could offer a valid theological interpretation of the *filioque* that would be acceptable for Orthodox, it has the merit of highlighting the central problem of the addition of the *filioque* into the creed and of suggesting to simply return, today, to the original text, which concretely means, for the Roman Catholic Church, suppressing the *filioque* in the text of the symbol of faith. This is what the last two of the eight recommendations of the declaration state:

“That the Catholic Church, as a consequence of the normative and irrevocable dogmatic value of the Creed of 381, use the original Greek text alone in making translations of that Creed for catechetical and liturgical use.

“That the Catholic Church, following a growing theological consensus, and in particular the statements made by Pope Paul VI, declare that the condemnation made at the Second Council of Lyons (1274) of those ‘who presume to deny that the Holy Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son’ is no longer applicable.”

The fact that Pope John Paul II, like his two successors, recited the symbol of faith in its original version without the *filioque* proves to the Orthodox that this addition does not constitute in any way a dogma of the Roman Catholic Church. If this was the case, the Roman Catholic Church should then regard her last three popes as heretics. But fortunately, this is not the case. Therefore, the *filioque* no longer proves to be a stumbling block for the restoration of communion between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church.

Thus, it is important to underline that the irenic theological dialogues carried out within the ecumenical movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have enabled us to overcome sterile controversies of the past that have divided Christendom. The key to this success is the use of the historical method which objectively studies the textual sources in their original form, as well as the reference to the common denominator of Christianity which is the confession of faith of the Church of the first millennium and its patristic interpretation.

When applying these criteria to the question of the *filioque*, it becomes evident that it does not appear in the original text, and therefore the return to the original text, suggested by the declaration of the Orthodox-Catholic Theological Commission of North America seems very valuable to us. The same methodological criteria have also led the World Council of Churches to adopt the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed in its constitution as a criterion for membership in this fellowship of Churches. In this context, we find it regrettable that on the one hand, Orthodox theologians continue to this day to insist on discussing the theology of the *filioque*, while, on the other hand, the Roman Catholic Church has not yet applied the recommendations of the North

American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Commission in its current practice, and that, moreover, some ecumenical celebrations have difficulties using the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed in its original form. There is no doubt however, that the fruits of the ecumenical dialogue of the 20<sup>th</sup> century will not take long to be received everywhere and by all, as long as we have the desire to remain faithful to the faith which we have received from the Church.

*The common celebration of Pascha*

The council of Nicaea did not only promulgate an ecumenical symbol of faith but also ensured a common celebration of Pascha for the entire Christendom. The importance given by the first ecumenical council to the celebration of the resurrection of Christ, which is the foundation of the Christian faith (cf. 1 Co 15:14), is witnessed by canon 20, which reads as follows:

“Forasmuch as there are certain persons who kneel on the Lord’s Day and in the days of Pentecost, therefore, to the intent that all things may be uniformly observed everywhere (in every parish), it seems good to the holy Synod that prayer be made to God standing.”<sup>9</sup>

The council of Nicaea is not merely dealing here with rituality. The attention given to the fact that Christians should not kneel on Sundays and during the whole period from Pascha until Pentecost was not merely a question of ritual, but had a deep theological significance, since the term resurrection, ἀνάστασις in Greek, means raising or standing up. Therefore, this canon is considering every Sunday of the year as well as the whole period from Easter until Pentecost as a common celebration of Christ’s Resurrection by all Christians.

The council of Nicaea also implemented a common date for all Christians to celebrate Pascha. In front of division caused by schisms and heresies, it became necessary to ensure a common celebration of Easter in order to stress unity in faith. As we know, in the pre-Nicene period, there was no common date for Pascha, since some celebrated the Resurrection alongside with the Jewish Passover and others celebrated it on the following Sunday. The rule established by the first ecumenical council for a common celebration of the Resurrection by all Christians is to observe Pascha on the first Sunday following the full moon after the spring equinox.

Although Nicaea established this rule for a common date for Easter to be observed by all Christians, unfortunately, today the Churches are divided with regards to this celebration. The reason for this is that although all Christian Churches define the date of Pascha according to the same Nicene rule – the first Sunday following the full moon after the spring equinox, –unfortunately, they do not use the same tools.

The Orthodox still use the Julian calendar, introduced by Julius Caesar in 46 BC, which is at the present moment thirteen days behind the astronomic reality, and they also use old lunation tables, leading to a belated date of Pascha, that may be one week or even one month after the Western date of Easter. Thus, the date of the spring equinox

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<sup>9</sup> Périclès-Pierre Joannou, *Discipline générale antique*, t. I/1, Fonti, fasc. IX, Rome, Tipografia Italo-Orientale S Nilo, 1962, p. 41.

(March 21) being determined by the Julian calendar corresponds to April 3 according to the Gregorian calendar. Therefore, if the full moon appears before this date, the Orthodox must wait for the following full moon, and in this case, there will be a difference of one month between the Western Easter and the Orthodox Pascha. If the spring full moon appears after April 3, Christians are supposed to celebrate Easter on the same day, as it indeed happens on occasion. However, since the Orthodox use old lunation tables to determine the date of the full moon, which are a few days behind the current astronomical data, in some cases the Orthodox must wait for the subsequent Sunday to celebrate Pascha, and this explains that there may be a difference of one week between the Eastern and the Western date of Easter.

When Pope Gregory XIII initiated a calendar reform in the West in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Patriarch Jeremiah II of Constantinople had expressed the desire for a calendar reform, however his wish was rejected by the holy synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The issue was raised once again at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the patriarchal and synodical encyclical of Ecumenical Patriarch Joachim III addressed in 1902 to all the Primate of the Orthodox Autocephalous Churches<sup>10</sup>. Again, the encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarchate issued in January 1920 addressed “unto the Churches of Christ everywhere” raised the issue of “the acceptance of a uniform calendar for the celebration of the great Christian feasts at the same time by all the Churches.”<sup>11</sup> This issue was subsequently discussed at the Pan-Orthodox Congress of Constantinople of 1923, convened by Patriarch Meletios IV of Constantinople, at which a revision of the calendar was partially adopted. Facing the reluctance of some Orthodox to adopt the “Roman Catholic” Gregorian calendar reform, a Serbian astronomer, Milutin Milankovic, proposed a revised Julian calendar, which was actually more precise than the Gregorian calendar, which was accepted only for the fixed feasts (the ones which are observed on the same date every year), but not for the Paschal cycle. This new calendar was adopted by the Patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria and Antioch as well as by the Churches of Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania and Poland, while the other Orthodox Churches continue to use the Julian calendar until today.

Seven years later, Ecumenical Patriarch Photios II convened the meeting of an inter-Orthodox preparatory committee in 1930 at the monastery of Vatopedi on Mount Athos, during which an initial list of 17 topics was established for a future Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, which included the question of the calendar and the question of the common date of Pascha. After the Second World War, Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras convened the first Pan-orthodox Conference in Rhodes in 1961 which launched the process of the preparation of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church and approved a long list of topics to be addressed, in which the issue of the calendar appeared once again. This list, considered too ambitious, was restricted

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<sup>10</sup> Patriarchal and Synodical Encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of 1902. G. Limouris (Ed.), *Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism*. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994, p. 1-8.

<sup>11</sup> Encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of 1920. G. Limouris (Ed.), *Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism*. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994, p. 9-11.

to ten subjects at the first pre-conciliar pan-orthodox conference of Chambésy (Geneva) in 1976, among which the issue of the calendar was still included<sup>12</sup>.

The revision of the lunation tables and of the calendar for determining the date of Easter was initially envisaged by the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church which was finally convened in Crete, in June 2016. In view of this council, a preparatory congress brought together Orthodox astronomers in Chambésy at the Orthodox Center of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in June 1977, with the task to produce both a revised calendar, even more accurate than the Gregorian one, and review the lunation tables according to accurate astronomic data<sup>13</sup>. A concrete project was then prepared, but, unfortunately, the Synaxis of the Primate of the Orthodox Churches held in Chambésy in January 2016, at the request of the Church of Russia, fearing that a calendar reform would create a new schism within the Orthodox Church, decided to exclude this question from the agenda of the Council and, to this day, no decision has been made on the issue. The day when the Orthodox will update their calendar and their lunation tables according to the astronomical data, would mean there will be no problems for instating a common date of Easter, since all Christian use the same Nicene rule to determine it. Therefore, we should not seek to change the Nicene rule, but only to update our tools taking into account actual astronomical data.

In that perspective, it is worth mentioning that in 1997, the World Council of Churches held a consultation in order to establish a common date for Easter and recommended maintaining the Nicene norms (that Easter should fall on the Sunday following the first full moon of spring), to calculate the astronomical data (the spring equinox and the full moon) by the most accurate possible scientific means, using as the basis for reckoning the meridian of Jerusalem, the place of Christ's death and resurrection<sup>14</sup>.

#### *Serving the unity of the Church*

Besides ensuring a common confession of faith and a common celebration of the Resurrection by all Christian Churches, the first ecumenical council reinforced the communion of the Churches by establishing norms, ecclesial canons, for the service of the unity of the Churches. This has already been highlighted during the past forty years in the Catholic-Orthodox bilateral dialogue which has reflected a lot on faith and unity of the Church as well as on authority and conciliarity. As the Joint International Commission for the theological dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Secrétariat pour la préparation du Saint et Grand Concile de l'Église orthodoxe, *Première conférence panorthodoxe préconciliaire, Actes, 21-28 novembre 1976, Synodika 3, Chambésy-Genève, 1976*, p. 114, 118 ; Ion Bria, "L'espoir du grand synode orthodoxe", *Revue Théologique de Louvain*, 8 (1977), p. 51-54. Viorel Ionita, *Towards the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church. The Decisions of the Pan-Orthodox Meetings since 1923 until 2009*, Studia Ecumenica Friburgensia 62 (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt Verlag, 2014), p. 127, 130.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Secrétariat pour la préparation du Saint et Grand Concile de l'Église orthodoxe, *Congrès pour l'examen d'une célébration commune de Pâques par tous les chrétiens le même dimanche, Actes, 28 juin – 3 juillet 1977, Synodika 5, Chambésy-Genève, 1981*.

<sup>14</sup> *Towards a Common Date of Easter*. World Council of Churches/Middle East Council of Churches Consultation, Aleppo, Syria, 5-10 March, 1997.

Orthodox Church has underlined in its document of Ravenna<sup>15</sup>, “Both sides confess, in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, that the Church is one and catholic. Its catholicity embraces not only the diversity of human communities but also their fundamental unity” (Ravenna, 32).

It is worth mentioning that the council of Nicaea understood that the communion of the Churches is based on the confession of the same faith in the Holy Trinity and the common practice of one baptism in the name of the three hypostases of the Trinity, as was clearly confessed in the Nicene symbol of faith. Indeed, someone becomes truly Christian by confessing the common faith of the Church and by uniting himself to Christ through his baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit according to Mt 28:19. Thus, this one baptism marks ones incorporation into Christ and His Church.

It is precisely in this spirit that one should read canon 19 of the council of Nicaea dealing with the disciples of Paul of Samosata and prescribing that those “who have flown for refuge to the catholic Church, it has been decreed that they must by all means be rebaptized; and if any of them who in past time have been numbered among their clergy should be found blameless and without reproach, let them be rebaptized and ordained by the bishop of the catholic Church”. The reason for their re-baptism and re-ordination is due to the fact that their confession of faith and baptism was not trinitarian, since the teaching of Paul of Samosata did not distinguish the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as three hypostases.

Thus, the first ecumenical council affirmed that confessing the Nicene faith is the key element in either recognizing, or not accepting, both baptisms and ordinations performed outside the canonical boundaries of the catholic Church. When the baptism had been trinitarian, then both the baptism and the ordinations are recognized, when integrating into the communion of the catholic Church. The same principle is applied in canon 8 of the same council for the Cathari (Novationists), who, unlike the Paulinists, confessed the faith in the Trinity, and for this reason, ought not to be rebaptized nor re-ordained, as we read in the canon: “Concerning those who call themselves Cathari (Novatianists), if they come over to the catholic and apostolic Church, the great and holy synod decrees that they who are ordained shall continue as they are in the clergy.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, unlike the Paulinists, Novationists were not rebaptized nor re-ordained when received into the catholic Church. This canonical principle of recognizing baptism administered outside the canonical boundaries of the Church in the name of the three hypostases of the Holy Trinity as well as the recognition of ordinations is repeated in the Apostolic canons 46, 47 and 68 (which, although they bear the title of “apostolic” were compiled in Antioch around 380), as well as in canon 2 of the second ecumenical council (381) and in canon 95 of the Quinisext council (in Trullo, 692).

Linking with the recognition of the ordinations of the Cathari, canon 8 of Nicaea also affirmed the canonical principle of one bishop in each single city. Thus, the canon

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-di-tradizione-bizantina/commissione-mista-internazionale-per-il-dialogo-teologico-tra-la/documenti-di-dialogo/testo-in-inglese.html>

<sup>16</sup> P.-P. Joannou, *Discipline générale antique*, t. I/1, p. 40-41.

states that “if they come over where there is a bishop or presbyter of the catholic Church, it is manifest that the bishop of the Church must have the bishop’s dignity; and he who was named bishop by those who are called Cathari shall have the rank of presbyter, unless it shall seem fit to the bishop to admit him to partake in the honour of the title. Or, if this should not be satisfactory, then shall the bishop provide for him a place as chorepiscopus, or presbyter, in order that he may be evidently seen to be of the clergy, and that there may not be two bishops in the city”.<sup>17</sup>

The canonical principle of one bishop in one city is due to the fact that the bishop acts in the Church as the figure (τύπος) and in place (τόπος) of Christ who is the head of the Church (Col 1:18; Ep 1:22; Ep 4:15; Ep 5:23). Therefore, since Christ is the only head of the Church, the local Church could not have two bishops at her head, but only one. Precisely for this reason, the main role of the bishop is to serve as the expression of unity of the local Church. Thus, the bishop is responsible for maintaining the orthodoxy of faith and preserving the catholicity of the Church in each local Church. As the Bari document<sup>18</sup> of the Joint International Commission for the theological dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church states,

“unity of faith within a local Church and between local Churches is guaranteed and judged by the bishop, who is witness to the tradition, and in communion with his people. It is inseparable from unity of sacramental life. Communion in faith and communion in the sacraments are not two distinct realities. They are two aspects of a single reality which the Holy Spirit fosters, increases and safeguards among the faithful” (Bari, 36).

This unity of faith as well as of order between the local Churches, facing the threat of divisions due to schisms and heresies, was safeguarded through the convocation of synods, which became an institution of the Church at the council of Nicaea, with its canon 5:

“it is decreed that in every province synods shall be held twice a year, in order that when all the bishops of the province are assembled together, such [disciplinary] questions may by them be thoroughly examined, that so those who have confessedly offended against their bishop, may be seen by all to be for just cause excommunicated, until it shall seem fit to a general meeting of the bishops to pronounce a milder sentence upon them. And let these synods be held, the one before the forty days, that the pure gift may be offered to God after all bitterness has been put away, and let the second be held about autumn.”<sup>19</sup>

As the Chieti document<sup>20</sup> of the same Joint International Commission underlined, “This bond of unity was expressed in the requirement that at least three bishops should take part in the ordination (cheirotonia) of a new one” (Chieti, 11). Indeed, the first

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-di-tradizione-bizantina/commissione-mista-internazionale-per-il-dialogo-teologico-tra-la/documenti-di-dialogo/testo-in-inglese3.html>

<sup>19</sup> P.-P. Joannou, *Discipline générale antique*, t. I/1, p. 27-28.

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-di-tradizione-bizantina/commissione-mista-internazionale-per-il-dialogo-teologico-tra-la/documenti-di-dialogo/testo-in-inglese1.html>

ecumenical council, through its canon 4, stressed that the election and the ordination of bishops manifested the synodality of the Church as well as its catholicity:

“It is preferable that a bishop be established by all the bishops of a province; but if this appears difficult because of a pressing necessity or because of the distance to be travelled, at least three bishops should come together; and, having the written consent of the absent bishops, they may then proceed with the consecration. The validation (κύρος) of what takes place falls on the metropolitan bishop of each province.”<sup>21</sup>

The same idea was repeated in apostolic canon 1. This was a novelty introduced by the council of Nicaea. Prior to that, bishops were elected by the members of the local Church – by the clergy and the laity. However, facing heresies and schisms, the Church decreed at the first ecumenical council, that the election of bishops should from now on be elected by the provincial synod of the neighbouring bishops in order to secure and reinforce the unity of the Church.

The document of Chieti of the same commission states: “Thus, the First Ecumenical Council (Nicaea, 325), while requiring of all the bishops of a province their personal participation in or written agreement to an episcopal election and consecration – a synodical act par excellence – attributed to the metropolitan the validation (kyros) of the election of a new bishop” (Chieti, 12).

This validation or confirmation (κύρος) by the metropolitan is underlined in canon 6 of Nicaea which stipulates: “And this is to be universally understood, that if anyone be made bishop without the consent of the metropolitan, the great synod has declared that such a man ought not to be a bishop.”<sup>22</sup>

The same principle was repeated by the local council of Antioch (327) in its canon 9 which underlines that “it is proper for the bishops in every province (ἐπαρχία) to submit to the bishop who presides in the metropolis”<sup>23</sup>, as well as in the famous apostolic canon 34 which defined the Church, the rule of primacy and synodality:

“The bishops of each people (ἔθνος) must recognize the one who is first (πρῶτος) amongst them, and consider him to be their head (κεφαλή), and not do anything important without his consent (γνώμη); each bishop may only do what concerns his own diocese (παροικία) and its dependent territories. But the first (πρῶτος) cannot do anything without the consent of all. For in this way concord (ὁμόνοια) will prevail, and will be praised the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit”<sup>24</sup>.

It is striking that the concord (ὁμόνοια) of which this canon speaks in the harmonious exercise of primacy and synodality is supposed to reflect the concord of the three hypostases of the Holy Trinity. Therefore, one can see that there is definitely a correlation between the institution of synodality confirmed by the first ecumenical council and the Nicene faith in the Trinity. It is not a coincidence that the council of Nicaea emphasized the necessity for synods to gather, for bishops to participate in the ordination of other bishops, the specific role of primacy of the metropolitan as well as the key role of the bishop for maintaining unity both within his local Church and within

<sup>21</sup> P.-P. Joannou, *Discipline générale antique*, t. I/1, p. 26.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28-29.

<sup>23</sup> P.-P. Joannou, *Discipline générale antique*, t. I/2, p. 110-111.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

the other local Churches. There is certainly a parallel between the Nicene faith in the Trinity and the unity in faith and order of the Church, which the document of Chieti underlined by stating: “The unity that exists among the Persons of the Trinity is reflected in the communion (koinonia) of the members of the Church with one another.” (Chieti, 1).

Regarding the procedures during synodal meetings, canon 6 of Nicaea also prescribed majority of vote as the principle for decision making: “If, however, two or three bishops shall from natural love of contradiction, oppose the common suffrage of the rest, it being reasonable and in accordance with the ecclesiastical law, then let the choice of the majority prevail.”<sup>25</sup>

Thus, we see that the first ecumenical council had a decisive role in introducing the institution of the synod in the Church in order to guarantee the communion of the local Churches and the unity of faith as well as underlying the primacy of the metropolitan presiding at the regional synod and the primacy of the bishop presiding at the local Church. In the Church, primacy and synodality, or in other words, authority and conciliarity, are indeed at the service of unity and of communion. As the Ravenna document has stressed,

“Unity and multiplicity, the relationship between the one Church and the many local Churches, that constitutive relationship of the Church, also poses the question of the relationship between the authority inherent in every ecclesial institution and the conciliarity which flows from the mystery of the Church as communion.” (Ravenna, 4).

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The first ecumenical council inaugurated a new era in the history of Christianity, regarding both faith and order of the Church. As one can see, the council of Nicaea has defined what orthodoxy of the faith means for the Church, both in theory and in practice. Although new terminology was introduced into the creed – the famous Greek word ὁμοούσιος, which is not biblical yet taken from the vocabulary of philosophy –, aimed nevertheless to preserve the apostolic tradition by setting a universal (ecumenical) symbol of faith. The aim of the council of Nicaea to uniformize the confession of the trinitarian faith through a creed goes together with its desire to simultaneously uniformize the Church order by setting a rule for a common celebration of Easter as well as for establishing primacy and synodality as an institution in the Church at the service of ecclesial unity. Facing heresies such as the ones of Paul of Samosata and Arius, the first ecumenical council defined what would become known as the Nicene orthodoxy of faith. Facing schisms, such as the one of Novatian, it introduced principles for primacy and synodality to reinforce the catholicity of the Church.

In this regard, the first ecumenical council will forever remain a paradigm for Christians. It shall particularly inspire the divided Christians of today in their quest for visible unity. In that perspective, it should be considered as the common denominator of Christianity which underlines that unity in faith, and communion of the Churches,

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<sup>25</sup> P.-P. Joannou, *Discipline générale antique*, t. I/1, p. 29.

## THE ACTUALITY OF THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA (325)

are inseparable. This stimulates them to preach the same apostolic faith, to seek the restoration of full communion between themselves on the basis of well-defined dogmatic and canonical criteria, and to strive to celebrate the resurrection of Christ all together in order to reinforce the power of their message and witness. Indeed, Christian Churches find, in the council of Nicaea, all the necessary answers and tools in promoting, preaching and living the apostolic faith today, in the contemporary world, which is confronted by secularism and religious pluralism, as was the case 1700 years ago.

INTERNATIONAL HELLENIC UNIVERSITY

MASTER IN ORTHODOX ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY

TUESDAY  
23-FEB  
5:00pm-7:00pm

THE ACTUALITY OF THE  
FIRST ECUMENICAL  
COUNCIL (NICEA 325) FOR  
THE ECUMENICAL  
MOVEMENT"

THE ARCHBISHOP OF TELMESSOS JOB  
(GETCHA)

Rev. Prof. Pavlos Koumarianos will respond and monitor the discussion

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CEMES YOUTUBE CHANNEL  
[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCD\\_5mcv3Z82pYW8LFuk2Emw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCD_5mcv3Z82pYW8LFuk2Emw)

The image is a YouTube video thumbnail with a dark blue background. It features a central photograph of a modern building with 'INTERNATIONAL HELLENIC UNIVERSITY' written on its facade. To the left of the building is a portrait of a man in clerical attire. Text overlays provide event details: the university name, the program 'MASTER IN ORTHODOX ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY', the date and time 'TUESDAY 23-FEB 5:00pm-7:00pm', the title 'THE ACTUALITY OF THE FIRST ECUMENICAL COUNCIL (NICEA 325) FOR THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT"', the speaker 'THE ARCHBISHOP OF TELMESSOS JOB (GETCHA)', and a note that 'Rev. Prof. Pavlos Koumarianos will respond and monitor the discussion'. A 'YouTube Open to the public' logo is in the bottom left, and the channel name 'CEMES YOUTUBE CHANNEL' and its URL are at the bottom.



## *Chapter 11*

# **THE ORTHODOX CHURCH OF BULGARIA IN THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT. A PAST WITHOUT FUTURE?**

*Emer. Prof. Ivan Zhelev Dimitrov*

What is said in the title of my lecture seems to exhaust its subject. Since 1997, the Orthodox Church of Bulgaria withdrew from the World Council of Churches and has not participated further in it, formally since the following year 1998 the OCB withdrew from the Conference of European Churches. But this withdrawal from the Ecumenical movement is only a formalization of a state that has long been observed. For several decades our church was inactively involved in ecumenical fora and events, very often only after insistence from other (influential) local churches, in order to defend certain positions or to protect some quotas in the governing ecumenical bodies. I want to say that the OCB did not have its own program for participation in the ecumenical movement. The individuals, bishops and theologians who usually raised concrete issues, were in cooperation with forces foreign to the OCB (inside and outside the country) and the tasks were "dropped" for implementation by other ecumenically engaged persons in our church.

The Theological Academy and (since 1991 again) the Faculty of Theology of Sofia University did not have ecumenical topics in its program (the same is the situation in the other 3 universities in Bulgaria, where Theology is taught), so the representatives of the OCB in the ecumenical movement were educated through their own participation in various events.

The "fashionable" now and too conservative notions of "storage of Orthodoxy" lead consequently to total rejection of contacts with non-Orthodox Christians. In this sense, the main line of modern Bulgarian theology is anti-ecumenical. Have been expressed opinions as "there should be no dialogue" (of a young lector at the Faculty of Theology of Sofia University) or "students should not be present at activities of other denominations in order to not convert to other faiths" (a former dean of the same faculty). It is evident that these positions are in line with the extreme positions of some bishops of the BOC. Whether the positions of these people are coordinated or simply influenced, the facts are there. Under such circumstances it is impossible to think about teaching of ecumenism at the Faculties of Theology in Bulgaria. Any ecumenical contact on local level of some of the Orthodox theologians is a private matter and such a contact is seen as "not popular" if not discrediting for the person practicing it.

In other words, there was no theoretical preparation for ecumenical work or any discussion of the value of this work. In the society of Orthodox believers (we are the vast majority in Bulgaria), ecumenical activity was seen as an opportunity for certain

people to go on business trips to Western countries, where it was not easy to go at that time.

In this situation, one would say: then why should financial and human resources be spent to participate in the ecumenical movement? Reasonable question, but still this was not the reason for leaving the WCC. The withdrawal in the late 90-is was the result of some processes in our church, which took place in parallel in other local churches of the former communist countries. After the political changes in our countries, there was a lot of talk about the cooperation of the Church leadership with the communist government in the past decades. And participation in the ecumenical movement was basically seen as the fulfillment of certain "tasks" set by the state authorities. As naive as this may seem now, it was also a question of presenting the situation in our countries as normal, even very good, and in any case better than in the "Western" countries. It was a kind of propaganda of the communist regime in our country.

(And something from my personal experience: at an ecumenical conference, the head of our church's delegation, the late Metropolitan of Stara Zagora Pankratius, talked about how "flourishing" the situation in his diocese was, but then some of his listeners who knew me in person and trusted me, they asked me whether all this is true. I naturally answered that it was not true and gave examples of the deplorable state of church life in our country. But formally the metropolitan had fulfilled his task).

Nevertheless, this was not the only reason for the negative attitude towards the ecumenical movement. In the spirit of the accusations against the Church, was included the reproach that the church leadership betrayed our Orthodox faith not only politically, but also doctrinally. Brochures and books was translated and published in Bulgaria (some of the translations and editions were even made abroad and were imported into our country) in order to point out the threats to the Orthodox faith by various ideological currents and by certain actions of the bishops. Among these actions, *participation in the ecumenical movement* was mentioned in the first place. In this situation, the church leadership considered that the easiest compromise they could make was to leave the WCC. Unfortunately, in this way, they tacitly accepted the accusations against the ecumenical movement as correct. No one dared to point out positive reasons for participating in this movement.

Criticism of the Orthodox Church's involvement in the ecumenical movement was not new. The Orthodox Churches participate in the work of the World Council of Churches for many decades, some of the churches – from the very beginning. Some people assess this as evidence of their positive attitude towards ecumenism, while others note that such ecumenism is nothing more than a kind of formal membership in any organization.

It is often added that ecumenical meetings and the documents adopted there, ignore the most difficult and acute problems that still divide Christians, and that ecumenical activities are carried out mainly in line with modern pluralistic culture. The latter "is able to develop the ability to a tolerate, restrained mutual understanding and the ability to carefully and flexibly conduct a not quite sincere dialogue, with a respect to the distance between its participants, when their interests are not infringed, and pain points

are not affected”<sup>1</sup>. In other words: you have to be at least a little humanly cultured, do not demand too much from others and then you will become quite ecumenical. As the critics say, pluralistic culture, however, does not know how to turn divisions into differences within the whole; the pluralistic culture does not have in itself the so called “all-Unity” (πανενότητα), the holistic Unity that Vladimir Solovyov in the 19<sup>th</sup> century sought to reconcile Christians<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, there can't be true unity without true sincerity and purity of intention. Many Orthodox are dissatisfied with the current state of ecumenism and therefore are skeptical of its prospects.

To say it shortly: it is always easier to criticize something than to do it yourself!

The main problem is, in my view, that the majority of Orthodox hierarchs do not take seriously ecumenism, in which the task of reconciling Christians is considered without connection with the fullness and purity of truth, without genuine responsibility for the truth, namely responsibility in the face of our modern divided world, led by different forces to another unity, unity on anti-Christian basis. “We are not against ecumenism, but we should not lower the level of ecumenism” – this was for many decades the refrain of our archpastors. In the ecumenical movement, they reproach, the dogmatic side of the faith is left unattended, the apostolic Tradition as well as the tradition from the holy fathers of the ancient undivided Church has been ignored. Priority is given to good relations, practical mutual assistance and cooperation in cultural exchange and religious education. All this is good in its own way, *but* a reconciliation, achieved with a minimum of faith, on love with distance, on good deeds, not seasoned with the salt of truth, does not cost much.

Orthodox hierarchs express the position that the ecumenical movement in a number of its directions went on a decrease in the level of persuasiveness, and serious opponents find it inconsistent with the Gospel ideal. They insist that Orthodoxy carries the fullness of truth, it is universal (i.e. ecumenical) in spirit, and if there is anything good in ecumenism, then this is also in Orthodoxy. There is no other way, they add, to reconcile and achieve Christian unity, except on the basis of Orthodoxy, the true Christianity, to which ecumenically minded people must aspire. And if an Orthodox Christian really finds the grace of God in the Holy Spirit, i.e. the grace of inner peace, purity of heart, true faith, love in the service of God and neighbor, then he will be a source of reconciliation in various situations, including in relations with non-Orthodox Christians. In fact, he will do what ecumenists call him to do, will find ways to the hearts of Catholics and Protestants, and build relationships with them in a spirit of true love.

These true allegations are usually associated with the statement that we Orthodox do not need to change anything in response to the challenge of the other Christians in the Ecumenical movement: let others take care to return to true Orthodoxy, that we have never left! But won't we be like the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son? Or maybe we are not suitable for him in one company? The patriarch of an local Orthodox

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<sup>1</sup> Vassilenko, L. Экуменизм – проблема и вызов. – [http://www.odinblago.ru/ekumenizm/vasilenko\\_ekumenizm\\_1/](http://www.odinblago.ru/ekumenizm/vasilenko_ekumenizm_1/)).

<sup>2</sup> Archimandrite Justin Popovich in his book “*Man and the God-man*” writes about the logosno *svejedinstvo* (η εν τω Λόγω (του Θεού) πανενότητα).

church under difficult situations once wrote: "Every non-Orthodox representative of Christianity, no matter how far he is from the Orthodox Church, will always remain for the Orthodox Christian the object of spiritual care. It is natural for a Christian to "become all things to all men", that means to recognize the very little, the last particle of truth, if a person has it, in order to be clear to the people in front of him through this particle of truth and to save at least some (1 Cor 9:22). But such a sublime mood is only an ideal, seldom feasible in practice... The inner sense of truth is therefore not audible to them with such immediate clarity, usually faith is something external to them, and therefore their relation to their faith and to the Church will not be so alive, but at the same time, their attitude to the non-Orthodox Christians will no longer be the same"<sup>3</sup>. It happens very often, that instead of testifying to Catholics and Protestants the purity, beauty and truth of the evangelical (in original sense, i.e. NT) Orthodoxy, many of our "partial", or so to say "semi-church" Orthodox brothers demonstrate to the world their passions, conflicts, commitment to spiritually unenlightened leaders and ideologies, slipping into nationalist passions, political ambitions and pure obscurantism.

At the same time, fidelity to the truth of Orthodoxy turns into ugly confessionalism without the inner experience of the highest truth and its implementation in actions in our own life, without the ability to convincingly convey it to other Christians, without strong inner confidence in the truth of Orthodoxy in meetings with Catholics and Protestants. In this case, unfortunately the spirit of alienation and separation operates effectively.

The "semi-church Orthodox"<sup>4</sup> Christians, in their spiritual condition, are not in a better position in relation to the true Orthodoxy, the "evangelical" Orthodoxy than Christians from non-Orthodox churches. It's very important to us as a Christian tradition to have dogmatic purity and an unbroken continuity with the Tradition of the ancient Church, but it is a severe spiritual failure for us as a community of Orthodox to not be able to carry out what faith and Tradition demand from us. And may be the ecumenists, with their poorer spiritual baggage, but with a more responsible attitude to the commandment "may all be one" (John 17:21), will be more righteous before the Lord? Then the position of those who declare that we do not need any ecumenism, because the Orthodox Church has everything necessary for salvation, is of little value. It is clear that the Christ's commandment of unity and love remains unfulfilled (this "not fulfilled" in fact means rejected!).

The existence and development of ecumenism is therefore justified by the *extinction of the spirit* (1 Thess 5:19) among Orthodox and among Christians of other traditions. Before we become able to testify to the others (non-Orthodox) about the truth of Orthodoxy, we need to gain the *strength and persuasion* to do so, but this will not be given to those who gloomily and stubbornly condemn all non-Orthodoxy. We *must* begin with an honest acknowledgment of the *extinction of the spirit* in our environment and the weak involvement in our church life of the early Christian Tradition (which we

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<sup>3</sup> Сергей (Страгородский), св. Патриарх. Отношение православного человека к своей Церкви и к инославию. Журнал Московской патриархии, 1993, 3, с. 36-40.

<sup>4</sup> The term belongs to the Russian Orthodox philosopher L. I. Vassilenko (see note 1 above).

are usually proud of). And before showing the firmness of the will to unity, one must take up the cross of living pain from the wound of the Church rupture, from the fact that the command "may all be one" has not been fulfilled, and must sincerely pray "for the union of all"<sup>5</sup>. Only then the Orthodox Churches will regain their universal breath, will revive the spirit of Christian universalism of the times of the first generations of Christians, so necessary for true ecumenism.

"The creative revival of the Orthodox world is a necessary condition for solving the ecumenical question", wrote Fr. Georgy Florovsky<sup>6</sup>, but it should be preceded by a positive attitude of the Orthodox people towards the Christian world beyond the visible boundaries of the Orthodox Churches. An open-minded Russian Orthodox bishop urged "to recognize for other Christian associations their belonging to the true Church of Christ, and for every baptized person, the right to consider and to call himself a Christian who has the possibility of salvation in the Church to which he belongs. In other words, a Christian – a Baptist or a Lutheran should recognize that both Orthodox and Catholics have the same possibilities of eternal salvation as his fellows in the Church they belong... If this joy of the possibility of salvation of every Christian becomes a common Christian feeling, then no one baptized person will condemn other baptized people to eternal destruction just because they belong to another church organization"<sup>7</sup>. What memorable words!

We, Orthodox Christians, received from the ancient undivided Church great spiritual wealth, which we should gladly offer to accept all non-Orthodox Christians. This includes the apostolic and patristic Tradition, the succession and the grace of the hierarchy, the conciliarity of church life, the sacraments and purity of faith, the beauty and depth of worship, the spiritual experience and wisdom of ascetics and saints, the unity with all martyrs and saints of different times and various peoples. All this should be revealed to everybody who seek the highest truth. But instead of offering openness, generosity, joy and love, we too often lock in ourselves and gloomy grumble from the kennel of our own "Ego".

The Orthodox theologian Olivier Clement wrote about "confusion and fear caused by the collision with modernity and which exacerbated the feeling of weakness in the face of urgent needs, like catechesis, renewal, dialogue with the intelligentsia, with scientists and representatives of other religions"<sup>8</sup>. Fr. Clement saw this widespread throughout the Orthodox world. Having access to a great spiritual heritage and actually being outside of it, without the opportunity to use it for the Christian witness today is our cross from past historical sins and their consequences. A huge number of today's Orthodox Christians actually do not know the tradition and fall into dependence on various ideologues and mentors who are far from the true piety and love of Christ. As a result, in the eyes of many convinced but poorly educated in the essence of the

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<sup>5</sup> Булгаков, прот. С. Автобиографические заметки. - Париж: УМСА-Press, 1991, с. 55.

<sup>6</sup> Флоровский, прот. Г. Пути русского богословия. - Париж: УМСА-Press, 1983, с. 515.

<sup>7</sup> Archbishop of Vologda Michail (Mudyugin, 1912-2000) / Михаил (Мудьюгин), архиеп. Вологодский. Единение в разобщенности. – Русская мысль, Париж, 2-8.9.1993, № 3994, с. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Клеман, О. Новая грань православно-католического диалога. – Новая Европа. М.-Seriate(Bergamo), 1992, № 1, с. 9.

Orthodox faith, the ideas of ecumenism have been simply compromised in recent years. And it must be honestly admitted, that "not at the top (the bishops), but at the bottom of the Church, there was bitter disappointment in the words, which we repeatedly say about brotherly love, which works miracles... And the Church pastors-ecumenists, were called enemies of Orthodoxy, and the word ecumenism began to be perceived as abusive."<sup>9</sup> In fact, having put the label "heresy" on ecumenism, the "true orthodox" people are already registering its supporters as anti-Christians, as servants of the Antichrist, with whom they must fight only to the victorious end.

*What is the future of the BOC in the ecumenical movement?*

This is an issue of increasing difficulty. Several years ago, were often expressed opinions that with the election of a new patriarch in place of the century-old Patriarch Maxim (+6.11.2012) will occur a change and BOC will become more open to non-Orthodox world. But people who had such hopes, just forget that the policy of the Orthodox Church is made by the bishops – the members of the Holy Synod, not only by the Patriarch. And still the bishops remain the same, with the same lack of capacity to meet the challenges not only of tomorrow, but even of the present day. This is not a good conclusion for such a survey. But at least it's honest.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless for a happy end I would like to add, that there is still a hope, which never die – the hope does not disappoint (Rom. 5, 5). Our hope lies firstly in Christ and secondly in the young generation. The problem with the young generation in OCB is however, that they almost do not have any positive examples to follow because the old is gone and a new should be created. We, all of us, ought to help creating new examples.

INTERNATIONAL HELLENIC UNIVERSITY

MASTER IN ORTHODOX ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY

FRIDAY 12-FEB 5:00pm-7:00pm

INTERNATIONAL HELLENIC UNIVERSITY

**"THE ORTHODOX CHURCH OF BULGARIA IN THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT: A PAST WITHOUT FUTURE"**

EMER. PROF. IVAN DIMITROV

Emer. Prof. Petros Vassiliadis will respond and monitor the discussion

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<sup>9</sup> Metropolitan Krutitsky and of Kolomna Yuvenaly, speaking on September 7, 1994 in Moscow at the conference "Father Alexander Men: Heritage" (L. I. Vassilenko in his article above).

<sup>10</sup> A rather optimistic picture of the situation see in: *Sabev, Todor. Church and Culture in Service to Society and Unity. V. Tarnovo 2003, p. 364.*

## Chapter 12

### PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES OF THE EASTERN-ORIENTAL ORTHODOX DIALOGUE

*Emer. Prof. Georgios Martzelos*

#### *Introduction*

One of the most comforting and promising ecclesiastical developments in recent years was the success of the theological dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Non-Chalcedonian Churches of the East, i.e. the Coptic, Ethiopian, Jacobite Syrian, Armenian, and Indian Church of Malabar, which all together have around 60 million Christian adherents. After over 1,500 years of mutual suspicion and dogmatic confrontations since the Council of Chalcedon (451) and despite the differences in Christological terminology and the diametrically opposing positions regarding the Chalcedonian definition, the two ecclesiastical families surprisingly came to an agreement to sign a common dogmatic document stating their shared dogmatic faith and teaching throughout the ages. It should be noted that although many gaps and difficulties remain to be sorted out in this theological dialogue before full communion can be reached between the two Church families, the success even captured the attention of Western theologians, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, who were amazed at such an accomplishment<sup>1</sup>.

#### *a. Key Milestones in the Theological Dialogue*

The official dialogue was initiated by the Ecumenical Patriarchate at an ecclesiastical level in 1985 in Chambésy in Geneva, Switzerland and lasted until 1993<sup>2</sup>. This undertaking was preceded by fifteen years of unofficial contact and theological talks between the Orthodox and Non-Chalcedonians (1964-1979), during which both groups became acquainted and realized the proximity between their theological traditions in relation to the Christological dogma. Significant stages in the official theological dialogue include the second general session of the ecclesiastical

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<sup>1</sup> See A. M. Ritter, «Der gewonnene christologische Konsens zwischen orthodoxen Kirchen im Licht der Kirchenvätertradition», in *Logos. Festschrift für Luise Abramowski*, (Berlin - New York 1993), 469 ff. D. W. Winkler, *Koptische Kirche und Reichskirche. Altes Schisma und neuer Dialog*, (Innsbruck-Wien: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1997), 222 ff., 332; also D. Wendebourg, “Chalcedon in der ökumenischen Diskussion,” in *Chalcedon: Geschichte und Aktualität. Studien zur Rezeption der christologischen Formel von Chalcedon*, hrsg. von J. van Oort und J. Roldanus, (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 193.

<sup>2</sup> For more on the dialogue between Orthodox and Non-Chalcedonians see George Martzelos, ‘Ο Θεολογικός Διάλογος τῆς Ὀρθόδοξης Καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας μέ τίς Μή-Χαλκηδόνιες Ἐκκλησίες τῆς Ανατολῆς. Χρονικό – Ἀξιολόγηση – Προοπτικές (The Theological Dialogue of the Orthodox Catholic Church with the Non-Chalcedonian Churches of the East. Timeline - Evaluation - Prospects), in The Minutes of the 14th Theological Conference of the Holy Metropolis of Thessaloniki with the topic “Ἴ Μίτηρ ἱμον Ὀρθόδοξος Ἐκκλησία” (Our Mother the Orthodox Church)» (10-13 November 1993), (Thessaloniki 1994), 293 ff.; *ibid*, *Ὁρθόδοξο δόγμα καί θεολογικός προβληματισμός. Μελετήματα δογματικῆς θεολογίας*, (Thessaloniki 2000), 247 ff.; Damaskinos Papandreou (Metropolitan of Switzerland), *Λόγος Διαλόγου* (On Dialogue) (*Ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία ἐνώπιον τῆς τρίτης χιλιετίας/Orthodoxy in the Third Millennium*), (Athens: Kastanioti, 1997), 211 ff. (all in Greek).

representatives of both traditions, which took place in June of 1989 at the Holy Monastery of Anba Bishoy in the desert of Nitria, and also the third general session, which was held in Chambésy in September of 1990. It was during these sessions that the common dogmatic statements, which clearly demonstrate total consensus on the essence of the Christological dogma, were signed. It is significant that the success of these above agreements is not limited to Christology only, but extends to the whole faith of the one and undivided Church of the first five centuries, as well as all the dogmatic teachings of the four Ecumenical Councils following the schism of 451. In other words, the Non-Chalcedonians now accept not only the first three Ecumenical Councils, which are common to both traditions, but the dogmatic teachings of the four Councils that followed as well; although, without recognizing them as Ecumenical and equal with the first three. The third general session mentioned above essentially fulfilled the purpose of the theological dialogue between the two committees as far as the Christological discussion was concerned; this being the main purpose of the dialogue. There remained, however, basic practical issues, which would need to be resolved in order to achieve full sacramental communion and unification between the Orthodox and the Non-Chalcedonians. Such issues include the recognition on the part of the Non-Chalcedonians of the last four Ecumenical Councils as holy and Ecumenical, the theological question of whether or not the Orthodox tradition allows the reversal of anathemas which were issued against certain people and Synods and which ecclesiastical authority would have the power to do so, and also the measure to which pastoral economy could be implemented in matters of liturgical and ecclesiastical administration for the realization of sacramental communion and unification between the two ecclesiastical families. Once more, the Ecumenical Patriarchate took the initiative to address these issues. A plenary session of the Mixed Theological Committee of the dialogue was convened in Chambésy in November of 1993 which, after meticulous considerations, drafted a mutually accepted text, which included specific proposals to both groups for the lifting of the anathemas and the restoration of full communion between them. Although this document does clearly define the way in which the anathemas could be lifted (taking into account the resulting ecclesiastical consequences) and specifically addresses the pastoral and liturgical issues of sacramental unification, it fails to mention the validation of the last four Ecumenical Councils as a presupposition for the sought-after sacramental communion. Having achieved the above-mentioned dogmatic agreements, the dialogue was then completely devolved from the Theological Committee to the level of the local Churches of both sides. Besides the signatures of ecclesiastical leaders who had taken part in the dialogue, the Patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Romania on the side of the Orthodox and by the Coptic, Jacobite Syrian, and Syro-Malabar Churches on the side of the Non-Chalcedonians upheld the dogmatic agreements with synodal decisions. The fact that the Non-Chalcedonians approved the agreements has especial dogmatic significance, since with this action they recognized all the teachings of the seven Ecumenical Councils and the Church Fathers as completely Orthodox.

*b. Problems Facing the Theological Dialogue*

Despite the astonishing success of this dialogue as far as the Christological aspects were concerned, (which, as mentioned above, drew the attention of Western theologians) it must be acknowledged that many obstacles still remain to be overcome before a full sacramental communion can be achieved between the two families. Although the Non-Chalcedonians had recognized the orthodoxy of the teachings of all the Ecumenical Councils and Church Fathers, as attested to by the signed declarations, they had still not recognized the last four councils as Ecumenical and equal to the first three. This is the most fundamental problem that needs to be resolved before the goal of communion can be realized. In order to overcome these obstacles, two subcommittees have been created, one for pastoral issues and one for liturgical matters, which meet from time to time, seeking out mutually acceptable solutions to the issues that arose from the success of the aforementioned dogmatic agreement. Specifically, these problems exist because of a lack of awareness regarding the successful dogmatic agreement. There are also steps that still need to be taken to guide us smoothly and certainly to full communion and unification. Regarding the issue of awareness of the proceedings, it must be mentioned that the plenary session of the Mixed Theological Committee confronted this topic during the fourth general assembly (November 1993) and decided that it was necessary for the two Vice-presidents of the committee to take the following actions: on the one hand they needed to visit the primates of both Church families to fully inform them of the results of the dialogue, and on the other hand to collaborate with the two secretaries of the assembly to see to the drawing up of suitable documents that could explain the content of the dogmatic agreement, both at a scientific level and in a context understandable to laypeople, so that any potential misunderstandings could be avoided.

However, while the two Vice-presidents were very active in organizing the visits to the primates of both Church families, very few steps were taken to create texts explaining the outcome of the dialogue. The texts and publications that did circulate were the result of people who took a personal interest and not due to an organized joint effort on the part of the Orthodox and Non-Chalcedonians. Besides this, these publications did not have the widespread impact that was needed to adequately and responsibly inform people regarding the outcome of the dialogue. And naturally the lack of proper and systematic reporting on the results - at least in the Greek Orthodox milieu - led to misinformation. If one excludes paragraph eight of the second joint declaration from 1990 (which needs clarification and better wording to avoid potential misinterpretations and to stop the doubts projected onto it by those who object the Christological Agreement), the fact remains that certain points of the dogmatic agreement that are indisputably orthodox and patristic in character were deliberately expressed in a vague manner with a clear dogmatic minimalism. This was allegedly done to facilitate a meretricious dogmatic agreement and an ecclesiastical union at the expense of the Orthodox faith<sup>3</sup>. There were, of course, documented responses to these

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<sup>3</sup> See Th. Zissis, *Η “Ορθοδοξία” τῶν Ἀντιχαλκηδονίων Μονοφυσιτῶν* (The “Orthodoxy” of Antichalcedonian Monophysites), (Thessaloniki: Vryennios, 1994). Ibid, *Τά ὄρια τῆς Ἐκκλησίας* (The

highly critical and largely unwarranted assessments<sup>4</sup>. However, this created confusion in theological and ecclesiastical circles regarding the accomplishments and goals of the Theological Dialogue. In certain instances there were attempts to revive the past and the Fathers of the Church were being interpreted partially and at will in order to bring a halt to the continuation and success of the dialogue. Some considered any further continuation of the dialogue as cause for a split in Orthodoxy<sup>5</sup>. Within the context of these objections, the harmful instances of Orthodoxy digressing into fanaticism were, unfortunately, extremely disappointing. To avoid the reoccurrence of similar deplorable instances, not only is an efficient process of informing needed, but also productive inter-Orthodox deliberations and dialogues within the local Churches so as to create the greatest possible convergence and consensus between the ecclesiastical representatives in dialogue and the rest of the Orthodox flock. Without the greatest possible consensus, the sought after sacramental unification of the two ecclesiastical families poses a danger of creating internal splits among the local Churches, which would be the worst possible outcome.

Concerning the steps that still need to be taken to achieve sacramental unification between the two Churches in dialogue (besides the resolution of the liturgical matters, which the appointed liturgical subcommittees have responsibility for), we have the opinion that the most fundamental obstacle that needs to be surpassed is the question

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Boundaries of the Church). Οικουμενισμός και Παπισμός (Ecumenism and Papism), (Thessaloniki 2004), 104-125. Holy Monastery of Osios Gregory, *Εἶναι οἱ Αντιχαλκηδόνιοι Ὀρθόδοξοι; Κείμενα τῆς Ἱερᾶς Κοινότητος τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὄρους καί ἄλλων ἀγιορειτῶν Πατέρων περί τοῦ διαλόγου Ὀρθοδόξων καί Αντιχαλκηδονίων (Μονοφροσιτῶν)* (Texts of the Holy Community of Mount Athos and other hagioreite Fathers on the dialogue between Orthodox and Antichalcedonians (Monophysites), (Mount Athos 1995). *Holy Community of Mount Athos, Παρατηρήσεις περί τοῦ Θεολογικοῦ Διαλόγου Ὀρθοδόξων καί Αντιχαλκηδονίων (Ἀπάντησις εἰς κριτικήν τοῦ Σεβ. Μητροπολίτου Ἑλβετίας κ. Δαμασκηνοῦ)*, Observations on the Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox and Antichalcedonians (Responses in critique of his Eminence Damaskinos Metropolitan of Switzerland), (Mount Athos 1996). S. N. Bozovitis, *Τά αἰώνια σύνορα τῆς Ὀρθοδοξίας καί οἱ Αντιχαλκηδόνιοι* (The Eternal borders of Orthodoxy and the Antichalcedonians), (Athens: Brotherhood of Theologians «Ο Sotir», 1999). A. N. Papavasileiou, *Ὁ Θεολογικός Διάλογος μεταξύ Ὀρθοδόξων καί Αντιχαλκηδονίων*, τόμ. Α (The Theological Dialogue between Orthodox and Antichalcedonians), vol. A', (Lefkosia: Center of Studies Holy Monastery of Kykkou, 2000). J. - C. Larchet, «Τό Χριστολογικό πρόβλημα περί τῆς μελετωμένης ἐνώσεως τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας καί τῶν Μή-Χαλκηδονίων Ἐκκλησιῶν: Ἐκκρεμοῦντα θεολογικά καί ἐκκλησιολογικά προβλήματα» (The Christological problem on the planned union of the Orthodox Churches and non-Chalcedonian Churches: outstanding theological and ecclesiological problems), in *Theologia* 74.1 (2003): 199-234; 74.2 (2003): 635-670; 75.1 (2004): 79-104 (all in Greek).

<sup>4</sup> See Damaskinos Papandreou (Metropolitan of Switzerland), “Ἀπάντησις εἰς τό Γράμμα τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὄρους περί τοῦ Θεολογικοῦ Διαλόγου πρὸς τὰς Ἀρχαίας Ἀνατολικᾶς Ἐκκλησίας” (Response to the Letter of the Holy Mountain on the theological dialogue to the Ancient Eastern Church), in *Episkepsis* 521 (1995): 7 ff. ff. and in *Synaxi* 57 (1996): 69 ff. Ibid, *Λόγος Διαλόγου (Ἡ Ὀρθοδοξία ἐνώπιον τῆς τρίτης χιλιετίας)*, (On Dialogue. Orthodoxy in the the Third Millennium), (Athens: Kastanioti, 1997), 237 ff. See also K. Papadopoulos, «Ὁ διάλογος μέ τούς Αντιχαλκηδονίους», (The Dialogue with the Antichalcedonians), in *Synaxi* 57 (1996): 43 ff (all in Greek).

<sup>5</sup> See Th. Zissis, *Ἡ “Ὀρθοδοξία” τῶν Αντιχαλκηδονίων Μονοφροσιτῶν* (The “Orthodoxy” of the Antichalcedonian Monophysites), (Thessaloniki: «Bryennios», 1994), 9ff. Ibid, *Τά ὅρια τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Οἰκουμενισμός καί Παπισμός*, (The boundaries of the Church. Ecumenism and Papism), (Thessaloniki 2004), 108ff. S. N. Bozovitis, 171 ff. J.-C. Larchet, «Τό Χριστολογικό πρόβλημα περί τῆς μελετωμένης ἐνώσεως τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας καί τῶν Μή-Χαλκηδονίων Ἐκκλησιῶν: Ἐκκρεμοῦντα θεολογικά καί ἐκκλησιολογικά προβλήματα» (The Christological problem on the planned union of the Orthodox Churches and non-Chalcedonian Churches: outstanding theological and ecclesiological problems)», in *Theologia* 75.1 (2004): 100 (all in Greek).

of the Non-Chalcedonians accepting the last four Ecumenical Councils and especially the Council of Chalcedon (451), which was the impetus for the schism in the first place. As was previously highlighted, the Non-Chalcedonians already fully accepted the dogmatic teaching of the last four Ecumenical Councils with the dogmatic agreement included in the common declarations. However, the Non-Chalcedonians have yet to recognize these Councils as Ecumenical and equal with the first three. This position of theirs, especially concerning the Council of Chalcedon, is due just as much to their traditional stance towards the definition of the Council and Pope Leo's Tome, which it approved (they considered the definition and Leo's Tome to have Nestorian traits in the Christology due to the dyophysite wording), as it was to the condemnation by the Council of Dioscorus of Alexandria, whom they honor as a great Father of their Church. Concerning the definition of Chalcedon, we must highlight the fact that modern academic research has proved very clearly that the theological nature of the definition not only is not Nestorian, but also is Cyrillian<sup>6</sup>. Indeed, the basis of the Dyophysite formula of the definition of Chalcedon has been proven outright to be not Leo's Tome, but the Christology of St. Cyril of Alexandria<sup>7</sup>; something which is acknowledged even by eminent Roman Catholic theologians<sup>8</sup>, who, as one can see, would have every reason to support the opposite opinion. Consequently, it must be understood by the Non-Chalcedonians that, based on modern theological scholarship, their reservation to accept the definition of Chalcedon is unjustifiable as long as they claim to be faithful adherents to the Christology of St. Cyril. Also, regarding Leo's Tome, we must underline the fact that the Tome was accepted by the Council of Chalcedon, which is already apparent from the minutes of the Council, but only after the Fathers of Chalcedon recognized the orthodoxy and full agreement of the *Tome* with the epistles

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<sup>6</sup> See Th. Šagi-Bunić, «'Duo perfecta' et 'duae naturae' in definitione dogmatica chalcedonensi», in *Laurentianum* 5 (1964): 203 ff. Ibid, «*Deus perfectus et homo perfectus*» a Concilio Ephesino (a. 431) ad Chalcedonense (a. 451), (Romae - Friburgi; Brig. - Barcinone, 1965), 205 ff. A. de Halleux, «La définition christologique à Chalcédoine», in *Revue Théologique de Louvain* 7 (1976): 3ff., 155 ff., 155 ff. G. D. Martzelos, *Γένεση καί πηγές τοῦ Ὁροῦ τῆς Χαλκηδόνας* (Origin and sources of the Definition of Chalcedon). *Συμβολή στήν ιστορικοδογματική διερεύνηση τοῦ Ὁροῦ τῆς Δ' Οἰκουμενικῆς Συνόδου* (Contribution to the historic dogmatic investigation of the definition of the 4th Ecumenical Council), (Thessaloniki 1986), 141ff., 197ff. (in Greek). See also A. M. Ritter, «Patristische Anmerkungen zur Frage "Lehrverurteilungen-kirchentrennend?" am Beispiel des Konzils von Chalkedon», in *Oecumenica et Patristica. Festschrift für Wilhelm Schneemelcher zum 75. Geburtstag*, hrsg. von D. Papandreou - W. A. Bienert - K. Schäferdiek, (Chambésy-Genf 1989), 269ff.

<sup>7</sup> For this subject see G. D. Martzelos, 172 ff. *ibid*, *Ἡ Χριστολογία τοῦ Βασιλείου Σελευκείας καί ἡ οἰκουμενική σημασία της* (The Christology of Basil of Seleucia and its Ecumenical Significance), (Thessaloniki 1990), 235ff (in Greek). G. D. Martzelos, «Der Vater der dyophysitischen Formel von Chalkedon: Leo von Rom oder Basileios von Seleukeia?», in *Orthodoxes Forum* 6.1 (1992): 21ff. and in Ysabel de Andia / Peter Leander Hofrichter (Hsg.), *Christus bei den Vätern. Forscher aus dem Osten und Westen Europas an den Quellen des gemeinsamen Glaubens, Pro Oriente, XXVII, Wiener patristische Tagungen 1* (PRO ORIENTE - Studientagung über „Christus bei den griechischen und lateinischen Kirchenvätern im ersten Jahrtausend“ in Wien, 7.-9. Juni 2001), (Innsbruck - Wien: Tyrolia-Verlag, 2003), 272 ff.

<sup>8</sup> See Th. Šagi-Bunić, «'Duo perfecta' et 'duae naturae' in definitione dogmatica chalcedonensi», in *Laurentianum* 5 (1964): 325ff. *ibid*, «*Deus perfectus et homo perfectus*» a Concilio Ephesino (a. 431) ad Chalcedonense (a. 451), (Romae-Friburgi; Brig.-Barcinone, 1965), 219 ff. M. van Parys, «L' évolution de la doctrine christologique de Basile de Séleucie», in *Irénikon* 44 (1971): 405 ff. A. de Halleux, 160 ff. A. Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, Bd. 1, (Freiburg - Basel - Wien 1982), 758.

of St. Cyril and especially with the third epistle to Nestorius, after the well-known intense challenges against its orthodoxy on the part of hierarchs from Eastern Illyricum and Palestine and the explanations given by the papal legates to the Council relating to the meaning of the dyophysite phrases in his Tome<sup>9</sup>. As a result, in this case, the reservations of the Non-Chalcedonians concerning the acceptance of Leo's Tome are not justifiable with the commonly proposed argument that its acceptance by the Fourth Ecumenical Council allegedly entails violation of the Christology of St. Cyril. In other words, the definition of Chalcedon, just as much as Leo's Tome, were accepted by the Council under the condition of their full dogmatic accordance with the Christology of St. Cyril, which means that in that aspect the theological character of the Council was absolutely in line with St. Cyril's theology. The Christological wording of St. Cyril comprised for the Council the highest dogmatic criteria both for the formulation and acceptance of the Definition and for the acceptance and signing of the *Tome* by the overwhelming majority of the Fathers of the Council. No reservations about the Cyrillian character of the Council of Chalcedon can be established scientifically based on the facts of modern historical theological research<sup>10</sup>. Finally, regarding the question of the condemnation of Dioscorus of Alexandria at the Fourth Ecumenical Council, it is also clear from the minutes of the Council that Dioscorus was condemned not for dogmatic, but for canonical reasons which are nevertheless real and incontestable<sup>11</sup>. As a result, the issue of his reinstatement, on which the Non-Chalcedonians insisted, can only be resolved in the context of the pastoral dispensation of the Church, and as such, the responsibility for this issue lies completely in the jurisdiction of the Eastern Orthodox Church itself. The only thing which we must note from a theological perspective is that the imposed ecclesiastical punishments are first and foremost of a pastoral character with the aim of either correcting the faithful, or their preservation from the danger of heresies and, as such, these punishments are valid in the history of the Church through the principle of economy. Besides, in order for the Church to fulfill its ecumenical calling, it cannot be captive to historical occurrences and people when the truths of her faith are not affected by those historical occurrences. The examples of the great Fathers of the Church who confronted issues of a similar nature show the way

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<sup>9</sup> See VI, 972 ff.· VII, 9 ff.· ACO II, 1, 2, 81 [277] ff.· 94 [290] ff. See also J. S. Romanides, «St. Cyril's "One physis or hypostasis of God the Logos Incarnate" and Chalcedon», in *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 10.2 (1965): 88. P. Galtier, «Saint Cyrille d' Alexandrie et Saint Léon le Grand à Chalcedoine», in *Das Konzil von Chalkedon. Geschichte und Gegenwart*, (Würzburg 1973), 354. G. D. Martzelos, *Γένεση καί πηγές τοῦ Ὁροῦ τῆς Χαλκηδόνας* (Origin and sources of the Definition of Chalcedon). *Συμβολή στήν ἱστορικοδογματική διερεύνηση τοῦ Ὁροῦ τῆς Δ' Οἰκουμενικῆς Συνόδου* (Contribution to the historic dogmatic investigation of the definition of the 4th Ecumenical Council), (Thessaloniki 1986), 44ff.

<sup>10</sup> See G. D. Martzelos, 197 ff. *ibid*, *Ἡ Χριστολογία τοῦ Βασιλείου Σελευκείας καί ἡ οἰκουμενική σημασία της* (The Christology of Basil of Seleucia and its Ecumenical Significance) 1990, 140 ff., 146 ff (in Greek).

<sup>11</sup> See G. D. Martzelos, Ἡ ἐπιστημονικότητα μιᾶς «ἐπιστημονικῆς κριτικῆς» στή διδακτορική διατριβή τοῦ Ἡλ. Κεσμίρη, «Ἡ Χριστολογία καί ἡ ἐκκλησιαστική πολιτική τοῦ Διοσκόρου Ἀλεξανδρείας» (The scientific approach of a "scientific review" in the doctoral thesis of IL. Kesmiri, "Christology and the ecclesiastical policy of Dioscorus of Alexandria", Thessaloniki, 2000», in *Grigorios o Palamas* 86 (798), Παντελεήμονι τῷ Β', τῷ Παναγιωτάτῳ Μητροπολίτῃ Θεσσαλονίκης, Τεῦχος ἀφιερωτήριον ἐπί τῆ εἰς Κύριον ἐκδημία αὐτοῦ (Panteleimon the 2nd All-holy Metropolitan of Thessaloniki, issue dedicated to his passing away), (Thessaloniki 2003), 598ff (in Greek).

in which even this matter can be approached. So, based on these facts, the acceptance of the Council of Chalcedon, and by extension the next three Ecumenical Councils, on the part of the Non-Chalcedonians should not constitute a problem for the achievement of the unification and full communion between the two Church families.

*Conclusion - Prospects*

Taking this brief overview of the theological dialogue between the Orthodox and Non-Chalcedonians, we must emphasize in conclusion that despite the problems presented by this Theological Dialogue, its prospects for the realization of sacramental unification of the dialoguing Church families after the achievement of the dogmatic agreement are clearly favorable; provided that dialogue for the sake of dialogue is avoided and of course also provided that they do not simply seek out a hasty and fragile unification which would lead to internal divisions and further problems than they are already seeking to solve. To achieve this goal, both sides need to take sensible and methodic steps based on the luminous examples of the great Fathers of the Church who overlooked all that was secondary and trivial as long as they saw that the unity of the faith was intact. The Fathers should not be perceived only as “canons of faith” and sure criteria of orthodoxy, but also as “canons” of pastoral prudence and ecclesiopolitical behavior in confronting similar problems of broken ecclesiastical unity. Only in this way can be properly understood the introductory phrase of the Definition of Chalcedon: “We, then, following the holy Fathers...”, and what it means for us today.

INTERNATIONAL HELLENIC UNIVERSITY

MASTER IN ORTHODOX ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY

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EMER. PROF. GEORGIOS MARTZELOS

Rev. Emer. Prof. K. M. George will respond and monitor the discussion

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## Chapter 13

### INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE AND MISSION

*Rev. Prof. Emmanuel Clapsis*

The Orthodox Church in the Great and Holy Council (Crete 2016) unequivocally affirmed in its Encyclical:

*The apostolic work* and the proclamation of the Gospel, also known as *mission*, belong at the core of the Church's identity, as the keeping and observation of Christ's commandment: "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19)... This mission must be fulfilled, not aggressively, but freely, with love and respect towards the cultural identity of individuals and peoples. All Orthodox Churches ought to participate in this endeavor with due respect for canonical order.<sup>1</sup>

The Holy and Great Council also stated that the Orthodox Church commits herself to a dialogue and collaboration with other Christian churches and faith communities seeking ways to jointly advance greater justice and peace in the world.

The dialogue of the Orthodox Church with other faith communities does not in any way presuppose or require for any faith community, including the Orthodox, to abandon her historic particularity. Quite the opposite such dialogue and collaboration advances only if each faith community participates in dialogue based on her religious and cultural tradition.

"The various local Orthodox Churches can contribute to inter-religious understanding and co-operation for the peaceful co-existence and harmonious living together in society, without this involving any religious syncretism."<sup>2</sup>

The underlying assumption for such an attitude and willingness to dialogue is the belief that religious communities, despite their irreducible differences, are capable to ground their ethical choices upon their faith tradition. The Great and Holy Council unequivocally affirms the dignity and the equality of all human beings having been created in God's image:

The Orthodox Church confesses that every human being, regardless of skin color, religion, race, sex, ethnicity, and language, is created in the image and likeness of God, and enjoys equal rights in society.<sup>3</sup>

In light of the dysfunctionalities of the modern world (injustices, conflicts, wars, discrimination, religious and political fanaticism, inequalities and economic disparities), the Council encouraged ecumenical and interfaith dialogue and collaboration that empowers the Church together with other religious communities to become an advocate of human dignity and rights advancing justice and peace for all.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church*, 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:3

<sup>3</sup> *The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World*, E.2

Such a noble ethical vision presupposes the acceptance of the plural democratic nature of modern societies.

*Why Dialogue?*

The Orthodox Church, in the Great and Holy Council, recognized dialogue to be the most important medium of communicating her message to the world.<sup>4</sup> Dialogue in generic terms refers to

a communication process that aims to build relationships between people as they share experiences, ideas, and information about a common concern. It helps them take in more information and perspectives than they previously had as they attempt to forge a new and broader understanding of a situation.<sup>5</sup>

Dialogue is considered to be "a safe process of interaction to verbally and nonverbally exchange ideas, thoughts, questions, information, and impressions between people from different backgrounds (race, class, gender, culture, religion and so on)."<sup>6</sup> As such, it involves, depending on the situation and the need, both formal and informal discussions, as well as shared educational initiatives, music performances, and art exhibitions, among other projects. It serves to clarify misunderstandings and illuminate areas of both convergence and divergence through mutual sharing and listening. As such, it helps rebuild trust and provides a space for healing and reconciliation.<sup>7</sup>

For the Orthodox church, the importance of dialogue for human interaction is theologically grounded upon the understanding of God's will to be in communion of love with the world.<sup>8</sup> As His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has stated:

When we enter into dialogue with each other, we behold God in whose image and likeness we are made. Through dialogue, we begin to discern the seed of the Word of God that is planted in the heart of every human. This discernment helps us better comprehend the divine.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit who is "everywhere present and fills all things" leads to the recognition of God's presence in all humanity, cultures and communities of faith. While plenitude of God's Spirit is present and operative in the Church, it is, also, actively present in the whole creation and in all human beings. The fact that the Holy Spirit operates in the world within the church and outside of its canonical boundaries bringing all into unity with Christ in different ways and degrees depending on

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<sup>4</sup> "The dialogues conducted by the Orthodox Church never imply a compromise in matters of Faith." In *Message of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church* #4; "The various local Orthodox Churches can contribute to inter-religious understanding and co-operation for the peaceful co-existence and harmonious living together in society, without this involving any religious syncretism." *The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World* # 1.3.

<sup>5</sup> Lisa Schirch and David Camp, *The Little Book of Dialogue for Difficult Subjects* (Intercourse, PA: 2007), 5.

<sup>6</sup> Leonard Swidler, Khalid Duran, and Reuven Firestone, *Triologue: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Dialogue* (New London, CT: TwentyThird Publications, 2007), p.16.

<sup>7</sup> Emmanuel Clapsis, "The Dynamics of Interfaith Dialogue," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 61, 3-4 (2016), pp. 7-29.

<sup>8</sup> See the text: *The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World*

<sup>9</sup> Address by His-All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew "Jerusalem in Judaism and Christianity," Ecumenical Patriarchate-IJCIC: Celebrating 40 Years of Dialogue (Jerusalem, December 5, 2017) in <https://www.patriarchate.org/-/address-by-his-all-holiness-ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew-jerusalem-in-judaism-and-christianity-ecumenical-patriarchate-ijcic-celebrating-40-years->

contextual realities is the origins of whatever good, sacred, and noble we find in the religious others. The Spirit of God is like the wind “blows where it chooses, and so you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes” (Jn. 3.8). Its mysterious freedom resists all narrow and well-defined perspectives with regard to His operation in history. Wherever the Spirit’s fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22) radiate, we may discern traces of the Holy Spirit’s action. And many such virtues seem to be present in the lives of numerous people belonging to other religions.<sup>10</sup> It is also worth noting that to the extent that interfaith dialogue brings people and communities closer to one another and sharing life giving, life sustain and life transforming experiences and goals, we must acknowledge its principal agent, the Spirit of God. We can attribute to God’s Spirit every authentic prayer (even if addressed to a God still unknown), the human values and virtues, the treasures of wisdom hidden in them. Thus, Interfaith dialogue aims to discern the presence of God’s Word and of His Spirit in Creation and humanity; appreciate the sacred presence in faith communities; and based upon God’s will to commence fraternal relationships that bring humanity closer to God. Interfaith Dialogue refers to all positive and constructive interfaith relations with people and communities of faith that aim to mutual understanding, enrichment and collaboration in the public sphere advancing justice and peace.

While the Orthodox Church emphasizes the universal love and active salvific presence of God in the world, it simultaneously recognizes that evil pervades in history and is active in different ways and occasions in all human beings and communities regardless of whether they are religious or secular in nature and orientation. Religious people and communities are not immune from the evil that pervades in the world, despite their sacred beliefs and practices. They all have the potential to commit evil against one another but at the same time, they can also be instruments of God’s peace and justice.<sup>11</sup> Religious communities and Christian churches should strive to minimize or lessen the evil that prevails in the world and be self-critical of their performance in history.

Dialogue builds and develops human relationships bringing the interlocutors closer to one another through sharing human/religious experiences; exchanges of theological reflection; and joint actions. Its goal is exclusively mutual correction and enrichment. Interreligious dialogue understood and practiced in this way by no means implies or leads to relativism. It does not espouse the view that all religions are ‘equal’ or ‘alternative’ ways to God or that one should bracket one’s faith. On the contrary those involved in dialogue are all deeply and passionately convinced of the truth of their

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<sup>10</sup> Georges Khodr, “Christianity in a Pluralistic World: The Economy of the Holy Spirit,” *Ecumenical Review* 23, 2 (1971) pp. 118-28; Emmanuel Clapsis, “The Holy Spirit in the World: The Tension of the Particular with the Universal,” *Current Dialogue* 52(2012) pp. 29-41; Dermot A. Lane, “Pneumatological Foundations for a Catholic Theology of Interreligious Dialogue,” in *Past, Present, and Future of Theologies of Interreligious Dialogue*, eds. Terrence Merrigan and John Friday (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017) pp. 28-46.

<sup>11</sup> R. Scott Appleby. *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000.

religious traditions and often defend them with vigor and rigor. Each participant firmly believes that his or her religious way is the best, even the only, way to achieve the ultimate goal intended by his or her religion. Thus, the real challenge in interreligious dialogue is not simply to retain one's religious convictions but to remain firmly rooted in one's religious tradition and at the same time be opened to learn from as well as be challenged by other, often different, and at times contradictory traditions.

Is it possible for someone to combine and make one's own, for instance Christian faith, another faith tradition? It is certain that there are elements of other faiths that are in harmony with Christian faith and can be combined and integrated with it. These will serve to enrich it, if it is true that other faiths contain elements of divine truth and revelation. There may be other elements, however, that seem to formally contradict the Christian faith and cannot be assimilated. It is important in the context of interfaith dialogue to recognize those aspect of our religious tradition that we discern to be present in the other faith communities and at the same time identify and recognize our irreducible and incompatible differences.

In any case, interfaith dialogue certainly requires that both partners make a positive effort to enter into each other's religious experience and overall vision, insofar as possible. In interfaith dialogue, the Church will not only give but will receive as well. Christians will benefit from their involvement in interfaith dialogue in two ways. On the one hand, their own faith will be enriched through the experience and testimony of the others. They will be able to discover at greater depth certain aspects, certain dimensions, of the faith that they had been perceived or communicated in Christian tradition. At the same time, their understanding of the Christian faith will be cleansed from certain historical misunderstandings of and prejudices against the religious others. While from the outset interfaith dialogue presuppose openness to the other and to God, it also effects a deeper openness and appreciation of God's mystery that each faith community espouses through the contributions, observations and insights of the other interlocutors. Thus, faith communities in dialogue become for each other, a sign leading to God. This reciprocal call, a sign of God's call, is surely mutual evangelization. It builds up, between members of various religious traditions, the universal communion which marks the advent of the Reign of God.<sup>12</sup> However, this is extremely difficult because and it presupposes communal humility and recognition of the cognitive and linguistic limitations of all religious traditions in describing the Being, the will, the judgment and the actions of God. Religious communities tend to be resistant to change and less than receptive to the new insights and experiences gained through dialogue. The admission of learning from another religion through dialogue may be perceived as an expression of weakness or insufficiency.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Dialogue and Proclamation in Theology*

In current Christian theology, the relation between interfaith dialogue and proclamation (Ἱεραποστολή) is passionately contested. Some understand the mission of

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<sup>12</sup> Jacques Dupuis, "Interreligious Dialogue, a Challenge to Christian identity," *Swedish Missiological themes*, 91.1(2004), p. 40.

<sup>13</sup> Catherine Cornille, "Conditions for Interreligious Dialogue," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, p. 24.

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the Church to be primarily the proclamation of the gospel that leads to baptism and membership in the church. In their view interfaith dialogue relativizes the faith and weakens the church's missionary goal. They adhere to the belief that since the plenitude of God's revelation and salvific presence subsists in the Church, interfaith dialogue does not have any other purpose except to convert and baptize those who do not believe yet in Christ. On the other extreme side, there are those who believe that in the context of the current religious pluralism, mission that aims to convert non-Christians is no longer appropriate. In their views all religions are to be considered simply as alternative and equally valid ways that lead to God and salvation. For them, only interreligious dialogue, in which people of different faiths share their religious experiences and doctrines as equals, is theologically credible. Between these two extremes there are those who maintain that evangelization remains the church's primary mission but also acknowledge the importance of dialogue and collaboration with people of different faiths. They advocate that both proclamation and interfaith dialogue are constitutive and irreplaceable, yet distinct elements of the church's mission. The intimate conjunction of these two activities demands the radical re-envisioning of how the church witnesses the gospel to the world. If the Church invites other religious communities to interfaith dialogue, the goal of this invitation cannot be their conversion to Christ through baptism. The acceptance of this assumption demands a clear distinction between proclamation and interfaith dialogue.

The objectives of interfaith dialogue are distinct but not completely separable from the proclamation of the gospel. Interfaith dialogue cannot be the enduring dialogue of faith communities that lead to peace and justice if it presupposes the abandonment of their basic tenets of faith. The integrity of their joint efforts in dialogue forbids any compromise or reduction of faith. It admits neither "syncretism" nor "eclecticism" that seeks to establish a common ground either by reducing their content or by choosing aspects from each faith tradition and combining them into something new. Dialogue does not seek to level the essential differences among the communities of faith but rather to admit the existence and face them patiently and responsibly. After all, dialogue seeks understanding in difference, in a sincere esteem for convictions other than one's own. Thus, it leads both partners to question themselves on the implications for their own faith of the personal faith convictions of the others.<sup>14</sup>

As the seriousness of dialogue forbids toning down deep convictions on either side, so its openness demands that what is relative in each faith tradition be not absolutized. In every religious faith and conviction, there is a danger, and a real one, of absolutizing what is not absolute. Here, the Orthodox church, should be mindful of its apophatic tradition and how it safeguards the mystery of God coping with claims of absolute human and therefore historical understanding of God. Orthodox theologians should further reflect on how the belief that Jesus Christ as the New Adam, the Cosmic Savior (Christ), affects the Orthodox understanding of other faith communities that seem to have different worldviews and ethical beliefs.

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<sup>14</sup> Jacques Dupuis, "Interreligious Dialogue, a Challenge to Christian Identity," *Swedish Missiological Themes* 92, 1 (2004), p.

The Great and Holy Council has provided us an enhancement of the Orthodox understanding of mission. In the preamble of *The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World* (Η Αποστολή της Ορθοδόξου Εκκλησίας στον Σύγχρονο Κόσμο) the ground of the Church's witness to the modern world is her eucharistic ethos:

Participation in the holy Eucharist is a source of missionary zeal for the evangelization of the world. By participating in the Holy Eucharist and praying in the Sacred Synaxis for the whole world (*oikoumene*), we are called to continue the "liturgy after the Liturgy" and to offer witness concerning the truth of our faith before God and humankind (ἀνθρώπων), sharing God's gifts with all mankind (*μοιραζόμενοι τας δωρεάς τοῦ Θεοῦ μεθ' ὀλοκλήρου τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος*).<sup>15</sup>

In its Encyclical, the Holy Council provided an evangelical understanding of mission of the Church:

*The apostolic work* and the proclamation of the Gospel, also known as *mission*, belong at the core of the Church's identity, as the keeping and observation of Christ's commandment: "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28.19). This is the "breath of life" that the Church breathes into human society"<sup>16</sup>

The two texts, the eucharistic and the evangelical understanding of mission, complement each other, the former gives priority to the prophetic actions of the Church in the world based on its eucharistic vision; and the latter focus on the proclamation of gospel according to the evangelical command of Christ. Thus, it enhanced the notion of evangelization/mission by insisting that the Church's mission (ἀποστολή) includes not only the proclamation of the Christian gospel (Ἱεραποστολή) but also prophetic acts of charity, justice, and peace. The one is not a substitute for the other.<sup>17</sup>

*Mission: Dialogue in Service of God's Kingdom*

We have argued that the Holy and Great Council has provided an enhance understanding of the Church's mission to the world that includes the proclamation of the gospel as well as prophetic acts of charity that reflect the living and transformative presence of God through the Church in the life of the world. The notion of "liturgy after liturgy" express the Orthodox belief that the mission of the Church to the world must reflect and embody what the Church celebrates and becomes in the Eucharist, an icon of God's kingdom. Such an involvement is not a matter of political expediency and capitulation to democratic liberalism but a reflection of the church vocation to participate in God's mission for the life of the world.

How is it possible for the Church to proclaim the gospel in the context of the interfaith dialogue? In the broad dialogical understanding of mission, the Church fulfils

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<sup>15</sup> Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church # 2.6

<sup>16</sup> #6 "Τό ἀποστολικόν ἔργον καί ἡ ἐξαγγελία τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, γνωστή ὡς Ἱεραποστολή, ἀνήκουν εἰς τόν πυρῆνα τῆς ταυτότητος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ὡς διαφύλαξις καί τήρησις τῆς ἐντολῆς τοῦ Κυρίου «Πορευθέντες μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη» (Ματθ. κη', 19)"

<sup>17</sup> Interreligious dialogue and proclamation, though not on the same level, are both authentic elements of the Church's evangelizing mission. Both are legitimate and necessary. They are intimately related, but not interchangeable: true interreligious dialogue on the part of the Christian supposes the desire to make Jesus Christ better known, recognized and loved; proclaiming Jesus Christ is to be carried out in the Gospel spirit of dialogue. The two activities remain distinct but, as experience shows, one and the same local Church, one and the same person, can be diversely engaged in both. *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 42 (19 May, 1991), 77, 8.

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her mission through her participation in acts that bring the world closer to the vision of God's kingdom that the Holy and Great Council has identified in its text on The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's world. Proclaiming the gospel in the context of interfaith dialogue would have as its aim to convert others primarily to the vision of God's kingdom. Converting peoples and other communities of faith to the notion of God's kingdom where justice, compassion and peace prevails and brings people closer to God intention for the world is more than making them members of the Christian church.

The possibility of conversion to Christianity cannot be excluded. But this applies both ways, that is, non-Christians may become Christian and vice versa. This is a possibility, some would say, a risk, to which each participant is vulnerable. However, conversion is not and must not be made into the goal of the interreligious dialogue and of the Church's mission to a religious plural world. Such conversions would take place not so much as the fruit of the church's missionary efforts and intent— but, rather, as the result of the Spirit who actively works in the world to bring all into unity in diverse manners and degrees.

If Christians can truly carry out such a mission that is a dialogue with others toward building a world of compassion and justice, they would be more faithful to the Gospel of Jesus, they would promote more fruitful relationships with other religions, and they will bring the suffering world a little closer to the peace of God's kingdom.<sup>18</sup> Thus, Christian proclamation in the context of interfaith dialogue will consist mainly in bearing witness, through word and example, to the way Jesus went about trying to build God's kingdom.

INTERNATIONAL HELLENIC UNIVERSITY

MASTER IN ORTHODOX ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY

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<sup>18</sup> Paul F. Knitter, "Mission and Dialogue," *Missiology: An International Review*, 33,2 (2005), p.,208.



Chapter 14

**ON EARTH AS IN HEAVEN**  
**Toward an Ecological Ethos and Worldview**

*Rev. Prof. John Chryssavgis*

*Introduction: The sixth day of creation*

Permit me to take you on a journey . . . back to what churches and theologians like to call “the beginning.” This would be their preferred starting point for speaking about the environment. Yet, whenever people think of the Genesis story, they focus on themselves, on our creation by a loving God and forget our connection to our environment. Whether this is a natural reaction or a sign of arrogance, the truth is that Christians tend to overemphasize our creation “in the image and likeness of God” (Gn. 1:26) and overlook our creation from “the dust of the ground” (2:7). I would claim that our “heavenliness” should not overshadow our “earthliness.” Most people are unaware that we humans did not get a day to ourselves in the creation account. In fact, we shared that “sixth day” with the creeping and crawling things of the world (1:24–26). We don’t *have* to talk about human beings in exceptionalistic or hubristic terms; perhaps our uniqueness lies simply in our peculiar relationship to nature.<sup>1</sup> The creation story—just as the Noah story—tell us that saving humanity is inseparable from saving other creatures. It is helpful—and humble—to recall this truth.

In recent years, of course, we have been painfully reminded of our egocentric reality resulting in cruel flora and fauna extinction, irresponsible soil and forest clearance, and unacceptable noise, air, and water pollution. Still, our concern for the environment cannot be reduced to superficial or sentimental love. It is a way of honoring our creation by God, of hearing the “groaning of creation” (Rm. 8:22). It should be an affirmation of the truth of that sixth day of creation. Anything less than the truth—the full truth and nothing but the truth—is dangerous heresy.

And speaking of “heresy” in assessing the ecological crisis is not far-fetched at all. For whenever we speak of heavenly or earthly things, we are drawing on established values of ourselves and the world. The technical language we adopt or the particular “species” we preserve, all of these depend on principles that we promote, even presume. We tend to call our predicament an “*ecological crisis*.” But the root of the problem lies

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<sup>1</sup> Even the so-called dominion texts, falsely if not willfully construed as authorizing human control over the rest of creation, must be interpreted in light of human responsibility toward creation. We are called to care for the land (Lev. 25:1–5), for animals (Deut. 25:4), and wildlife (Deut. 22:6). For the interpretation of these “kingship” passages in the Church Fathers, cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man* 2 PG 44.132; Basil of Caesarea, *On Psalm 44*, 12 PG 29.413; and Ambrose of Milan, *On the Gospel of Luke* IV, 28 PL 15.1620. For a contemporary analysis, see Elizabeth Theokritoff, *Living in God’s Creation: Orthodox perspectives on ecology*, Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2009, 70–79.

in the paradigms that impel us to pursue a particular lifestyle. The crisis concerns the way we *imagine* our world. It is essentially a battle over images and icons.

In classical traditions, human beings regarded themselves as descendant from God (or the gods). They looked on the world as soul-ful, not soul-less; as sacred (like them), not subjected (to them). In their experience, every flower, every bird, every star was holy. The sap of trees was their life-blood. Nature was not for experimentation or exploitation; and trade was never at the expense of nature.

So when I consider the experience of my tradition, the Orthodox Church, I turn to its distinct symbols and values, which include: icons (as the way we view and perceive creation); liturgy (as the way we celebrate and respond to creation); and asceticism (as the way we respect and treat creation). Early Christian mystics recognized that, when our eyes are opened to the beauty of the world, then “we can perceive everything in the light of the Creator God”<sup>2</sup> and discern the face of God on the face of the world.<sup>3</sup>

### *I. The iconic vision of nature*

Seeing clearly is precisely what icons teach us to do. The world of the icon reveals the eternal dimension in all that we see and experience. Our generation, it may be said, is characterized by a sense of self-centeredness toward the natural cosmos and a lack of awareness of the beyond. When Noah saved the animals two-by-two, he wasn’t saving specimens or species but an entire ecosystem! We have *broken* that covenant between ourselves and our world.

In Orthodox spirituality, the icon reflects the restoration of that sacred covenant. It reminds us of another world; it speaks in this world the language of the age to come. The icon provides a corrective to a culture that gives value only to the here and now. It aspires to the inner vision of all, the world as created and intended by God. And the first image attempted by an iconographer is the Transfiguration of Christ on Mt. Tabor. Because the iconographer strives to hold together this world and the next. By disconnecting this world from heaven, we desecrate both.

This is where the teaching about Jesus Christ, at the very heart of iconography, emerges. In the icon of Jesus Christ, the uncreated God assumes a human face, a “beauty that can save the world,” as Dostoevsky says.<sup>4</sup> And in Orthodox icons, faces are frontal; they always depict two eyes gazing back at the beholder. The conviction is that Christ is in our midst (Matt. 1.23). Profile signifies sin; it implies rupture. Faces are “all eyes,”<sup>5</sup> profoundly receptive, eternally susceptible of divine grace. “I see” means that “I am seen,” which means that I am in love. Remember the title of C.S. Lewis’s love story: *Till We Have Faces*.<sup>6</sup> Love compels us to see things from another perspective, from the

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<sup>2</sup> John Climacus, *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 4, 58 PG 88.892–893.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Augustine, *On Psalm 148*, 15 PL 37.1946.

<sup>4</sup> F. Dostoevsky, in *The Idiot*, cited in Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s 1970 Nobel Lecture: [https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1970/solzhenitsyn-lecture.html](https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1970/solzhenitsyn-lecture.html). Accessed July 4, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> See Bessarion, 11. *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, trans. Benedicta Ward, rev. ed (Cistercian Publications: Kalamazoo, MI, 1984), 42.

<sup>6</sup> *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold*, First published in 1956 (New York, NY: Harvest-Harcourt, 1980).

perspective of another. Ecology is much more than the flora and fauna; it's about the social nexus that surrounds them.

The icon, then, converts the beholder from a restricted worldview to a fuller vision. The light of icons is the light of reconciliation. It is not the waning light of this world; it "knows no evening," to quote an Orthodox hymn. And so icons depicting events that occurred in daytime are no brighter than icons depicting events that occurred at nighttime. For example, the icon of the sorrowful descent from the Cross is no darker than the icon of Ascension; the icon of the Nativity no brighter than that of the Crucifixion; the somber light of the Last Supper mirrors that of the supreme feast of light, the Transfiguration.

This is because the icon presupposes a "different way of life," as Orthodox Christians sing on Easter Sunday. Indeed, the entire world is a ladder or an icon; "everything is a sign of God," as a second-century mystic, Irenaeus of Lyon, said.<sup>7</sup> Which is why in icons, rivers assume a human form, as do the sun and the moon and the stars and the waters. They all have human faces; they all acquire a personal dimension—just like us; just like God.

The destruction of our planet's ecosystems and resources can only be restrained if we begin to see nature as an icon. Take any painting: The narcissist will see a wooden frame; if he is cold, he will burn it to keep warm. An altruist will see a sacred canvas as sacred; she will admire it and recall the uniqueness of the artist: Rembrandt or van Gogh. Only when our attitude to the painting changes will we value it. So if the world is an icon, nothing lacks sacredness. Put bluntly: If God is not visible in creation, then neither is God invisible in heaven.

## *II. The liturgy of nature*

What icons achieve in space, liturgy accomplishes in song: the same ministry of reconciliation between heaven and earth. If icons are an artistic means for the created world to remain in communication with the uncreated God, then liturgy is an aesthetic medium for our world to reach communion with its Creator. It is a way of reconciliation or what theologians like to call at-one-ment. In fact, the Greek word for reconciliation and forgiveness (*synchoreisis*) implies being in the same place with everyone else, which of course is precisely what happens during liturgy.

So by liturgical, I do not imply ritual; I mean relational. Or, in the context again of icons, we should think of the world as a picture: one requires every part of an image in order for it to be complete. Removing one part of the picture—whether a tree, an animal, or a human being—distorts the entire picture. If we are guilty of relentless waste, it is because we have lost the spirit of worship. We are no longer respectful pilgrims; we have become mere tourists. We must restore a sense of awe and delight in our relationship to the world.

The truth is that we respond to nature with the same delicacy, the very same sensitivity and tenderness, with which we respond to any human person. We have

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<sup>7</sup> See J.J. Johnson Leese, *Christ, Creation, and the Cosmic Goal of Redemption: A Study of Pauline Creation Theology as Read by Irenaeus and Applied to Ecotheology* (London: T&T Clark, 2018).

learned that we cannot treat people like things; let me propose to you today that we must learn not to treat even things like mere things. All of our spiritual activities are measured by their impact on the world, on people, especially the poor.

So liturgy is the language that commemorates and celebrates the innate and intimate connection between God, people and things—what Maximus the Confessor in the seventh century called a “cosmic liturgy”;<sup>8</sup> what in the same century Isaac the Syrian described as acquiring:

A merciful heart, which burns with love for the whole of creation—for humans, for birds, for the beasts, even for demons—for all God’s creatures.

And in the early twentieth century, Fyodor Dostoevsky conveyed the same vision in *The Brothers Karamazov*:

Love all God’s creation, . . . every grain of sand. Love every leaf, every ray of God’s light! If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things.<sup>9</sup>

There is a dimension of art and music in the world. Which also implies that whenever we narrow life (political life; social life; even religious life) to ourselves and our own interests, we are neglecting our vocation to reconcile all of creation. Because our relationship with this world determines our relationship with heaven; the way we treat the earth is reflected in the way that we pray to God.

### *III. The body of the world; or the world of asceticism*

Of course, unless you live in Maine, this world does not always look or feel like heaven. And in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011 or British Petroleum’s oil disaster a year before, it was somewhat difficult to perceive what Dostoevsky called “the divine mystery in things.” How, then, do we reconcile this mystery with reality?

For Eastern Christian theology, the answer lies in a tree, as John Chrysostom observed in the fourth century,<sup>10</sup> commenting on Paul’s Letter to the Colossians:

God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, through the blood of his cross (1:20).

Reference here to “the blood of the cross” is an indication of the cost involved when we fail to recognize the sacredness of creation. It reminds us of the reality of human failure and the radical reversal required in our perspectives and practices.

There is a price to pay for our wasting. The balance of the world has been shattered; and the ecological crisis will not be solved merely with smiley stickers. The “tree of the cross” presents self-denial as an antidote to self-centeredness.<sup>11</sup> The cross is not an

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<sup>8</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin wrote in similar fashion, echoing Maximus Confessor’s image of the “cosmic liturgy.” See his *Mass On the World in Hymn of the Universe*, trans. G. Vann (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1972), 16: “Once again the fire has penetrated the earth . . . the flame has lit up the whole world from within.”

<sup>9</sup> See Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (New York: Macmillan, 1922), ch. 41, 339.

<sup>10</sup> John Chrysostom, *On the Creation of the World V*, 7.

<sup>11</sup> See Cyril of Alexandria, *Against Julian* 3 PG 76.929.

empty symbol or costume jewelry; it is an expression of brokenness, a confession of failure. This may be why some are in denial about climate change—either claiming it as a hoax or assuming it can be fixed with Band-aid solutions.

In Orthodox spirituality, the cross translates into asceticism: a way of assuming responsibility for one's actions and one's world. It is vital to look in the mirror and ask: Is what I have what I need? Did I travel here on a plane to deliver an address on the environment? How do I reflect the world's thirst for oil or greed that is destroying the planet?

Of course, the earth keeps reminding us of our denial. Yet we stubbornly refuse to accept that our comfortable lives, dependent on cheap energy, are somehow responsible for the millions of gallons of oil polluting the Gulf of Mexico. How can we logically believe that a century of pumping oil-fired pollution into the atmosphere has no ramifications?

And asceticism is more than self-discipline. It is learning to be free, uncompelled by ways that use the world; characterized by self-control and the ability to say "no" or "enough." Asceticism aims not at detachment or destruction, but at refinement and restoration. Take the example of fasting. Learning to fast is learning to give and not simply give up; it is learning to share. It is recognizing in other people faces and in the earth the face of God.<sup>12</sup>

And here, I think, lies the heart of the problem. For we are unwilling—quite frankly, we violently resist any call—to adopt simpler lives. Everyone in this room is guilty of consuming far more than we should, far more than someone in Malawi. We should recover a spirituality of simplicity and frugality, living in a way that promotes harmony, not division; acknowledging "the earth as the Lord's" (Ps. 23:1).

#### *IV. Images of food and fish*

In fact, food—in its corollary vices of greed or gluttony and its concomitant symptoms of indifference or waste—comprises the most striking factor in ecological exploitation and economic inequity. The reason people go hungry today is not the number of people in the world. If there were fewer people but the way we distribute food remained the same, the poor would still go hungry. The problem is the way we distribute food through the free market, as private poverty, which people who are poor cannot afford.

There are three particular images in the Orthodox Christian tradition that speak to our response to the ecological crisis. In the first—derived from the Gospel parable—Jesus tells of a poor man, Lazarus, who lay at the gate of a rich man, "longing to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table" (Lk 16:21). The rich man never once invited Lazarus to his table. What is worse, the rich man probably never even noticed Lazarus. I wonder sometimes whether we even notice what goes on around us. How many people do we invite to sit at our table? What issues—poverty or peace,

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<sup>12</sup> On fasting and joyful gratitude, see Basil of Caesarea, *Homily 4 On Giving Thanks*, in *Saint Basil the Great, On Fasting and Feasting*, trans. Susan Holman and Mark DelCogliano (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2013), 97–122.

healthcare or human rights—do we readily embrace? Or, to paraphrase a contemporary politician: Perhaps the time has come to admit the problem lies with those who gorge themselves. The problem is not the immigrant. The problem is not any particular religion. The problem is the insatiable greed of some, who incessantly stuff themselves, and this problem has a face and a name!

In another well-known scriptural and iconographic depiction, sitting under the shade of the oak trees at Mamre, Abraham welcomed an unexpected visit from three strangers. The story is recorded in Genesis 18 (and Hebrews 13) and describes the Patriarch of Israel spontaneously sharing his friendship and food, extending such generous hospitality to the foreigners that—in my church’s theology—this scene is symbolical of the Holy Trinity. In fact, the only authentic image of God as Trinity in the Orthodox Church is this encounter scene from rural Palestine.

Traditional icons of “Abraham’s hospitality” portray the guests on three sides and leave an open space on the fourth side of the table. The scene is an open invitation. Of course, as then Senator Barack Obama told the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s Fight for Freedom in 2005: “It’s one thing that everyone has a seat at the table, but how can everyone pay for the meal?” Think of Pope Francis during his visit to the US in 2015 declining a meal with the U.S. Congress and choosing to eat with the homeless in the neighboring park.

There is also a unique iconographic depiction of this worldview in an eighteenth-century icon at a monastery in Crete.<sup>13</sup> It is literally a theological statement in color. The icon’s title derives from the Great Blessing of the Waters at the Feast of Epiphany on January 6<sup>th</sup> and repeated during the baptism of every Orthodox: “Great are you, Lord, and wondrous are your works; no words suffice to hymn your wonders!”

At the far left of this image, nature is portrayed as “mother earth” that indigenous peoples throughout the world (Indians of North America and Aborigines of Australia) have respected for centuries. The epic poet Homer of ancient Greece writes: “She is the mother of all and oldest of all; she nourishes all creatures that walk on the land, move in the deep or fly in the air.”<sup>14</sup> So nature extends her arms in a gesture of openness and embrace. The icon also depicts urban life (the cities of Samaria and Nineveh are in the background) and agricultural life (with farmers tilling the slopes). We can see people and rivers and vegetation, while a vast rainbow reflects the eternal covenant between the Creator and creation.

While the icon is rich in symbolism, let me highlight two particular scenes. The first depicts Jonah cast from the mouth of a large sea beast, as in the biblical story—a profound image of resurrection and renewal of all things. One of the early symbols of Christ, whereby Christians recognized one another, was the fish—the Greek word (ΙΧΘΥΣ) being an acronym for “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior.” The fish, then, is a statement of faith. Christ is integrally and inseparably identified with fish. Abuse of fishing or over-fishing relates in a personal and profound way to Christ.

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<sup>13</sup> The iconographer is Ioannis Kornaros (1745–1796) and the icon is found at the Monastery of Toplou.

<sup>14</sup> See *The Homeric Hymns*, transl. Apostolos Athanassakis (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

The second scene depicts the slaying of Abel by Cain, a violent representation of the destructive impact of our current policies and practices on future generations. Until we perceive in the pollution of our planet the portrait of our *brother and sister*, we cannot resolve the injustice and inequality of our world. Until we discern in the pollution of our planet the face of our *children*, we will not comprehend the irreversible consequences of our actions.

*Conclusion: the way forward*

I once accompanied my elder son to the optometrist. Alex is not as meticulous as he should be with his eye care. So as he received his new prescription, I overheard his reaction: “Wow! *That’s* what I’m supposed to see?” When we look at our world, what do *we* see? Because the way we view our planet reflects how we relate to it. We *treat* our planet in a god-forsaken manner because we *see* it in this way.

In his now classic article entitled “The Roots of our Ecological Crisis,” medieval historian Lynn White Jr. (1907–87) already suspected this truth:

The Greek saint contemplates; the Western saint acts. The Latins felt that sin was moral evil, that salvation lay in right conduct. The implications of Christianity for the conquest of nature would emerge more easily in the Western atmosphere.<sup>15</sup>

Far too often, we think that solving the ecological crisis is a matter of *acting* differently, more effectively or more sustainably.<sup>16</sup> I recall an article a few years ago, which I paraphrase for our purposes:

Yes, the world is sinking. And the band keeps playing: On the Titanic, first violinist, Big Oil’s Koch Brothers’ Empire. For them capitalism is the solution to everything; everyone has a price, especially politicians. Second chair, the world’s moral authority, Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Francis warning we are destroying the planet. And playing a mean solo flute, Mother Nature, who doesn’t care what climate change deniers think, but only what we do.<sup>17</sup>

Handing climate change over to capitalism is as good an idea as asking the iceberg to fix the Titanic. Paradoxically, ecological correction begins with environmental inaction. It is a matter of contemplation, of *seeing* things differently. We are back to the notion of icons. First, we must *stop* what we are *doing*. Then we might gain new “*insight*” into our world.

Peering through this lens, foreign policy and the economy actually *look* different, permitting us to abandon the urge for unbridled expansion and focus on the sustainability we desperately need. We can see the world in ways other than through

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<sup>15</sup> Lynn Townsend White, Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science* 155, no. 3767 (March 10, 1967), 1207.

<sup>16</sup> See Christos Yannaras and Norman Russell, “Conversation with Norman Russell,” in *Metaphysics as a Personal Adventure* (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2017), 120.

<sup>17</sup> Paraphrase of article by Paul Farrell, “Planet Earth is the Titanic, climate change is the iceberg,” *The Wall Street Journal* (February 16, 2015).

the glass of the market; there actually *can* be a green way of looking at the world apart from that of Alan Greenspan, former chair of the Federal Reserve of the US.

Some years ago, Larry Summers, then presidential advisor and World Bank economist declared: “America cannot and will not accept any ‘speed limit’ on economic growth.” Have we become so addicted to fantasies about riches without risk or profit without price? What is it about the model of life we have tragically created that we override our own better judgment in service of our selfish nature? Do we honestly believe that our endless, mindless manipulation of the earth’s resources comes at no cost or consequence? Our economy and technology become toxic when divorced from our vocation to see the world as God would. And if God saw the world as “very good” on that sixth day of creation, then we too can see the world in its unfathomable beauty and interrelatedness.

What we face is a radical choice, like Moses offered in Deuteronomy: “For this commandment which I command you this day is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ But the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it. Today, I am giving you a choice between good and evil, between life and death . . . Choose life!” (Dt. 30:11–19)

The question I leave you with is this: How do we live in such a way that reflects spiritual values, that communicates generosity and gratitude, not arrogance and greed? Because if we don’t, then a significant patch of the Gulf Coast will have been lost in vain; and the Fukushima nuclear disaster precipitated by the tsunami will have gone unnoticed. But if we do, we will hear the earth groan, we will notice the grass grow, and we will feel the seal’s heartbeat.

INTERNATIONAL HELLENIC UNIVERSITY

MASTER IN ORTHODOX ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY

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REV. PROF. JOHN CHRYS MAVGIS

Prof. Nikolaos Dimitriadis will respond and monitor the discussion

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## Chapter 15

### FUNDAMENTALISM IN CHRISTIANITY\*

*Rev. Prof. Cyril Hovorun*

#### *A History of the Term Fundamentalism*

Fundamentalists were initially proud to be called “fundamentalists.” This term, at the time, did not project any pejorative connotation. It would, however, later become a term of derision.<sup>1</sup> The term comes from the collection of leaflets edited by A. C. Dixon, Louis Meyer, and Reuben Torrey: “The Fundamentals: A Testimony of Truth.”<sup>2</sup> “The Fundamentals” were published in twelve volumes in Chicago between 1909 and 1915. The distributors of the leaflets sent them to “every pastor, evangelist, missionary, theological professor, theological student, Sunday School superintendent, Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A. secretary in the English-speaking world.”<sup>3</sup> A few years later, in 1920, the editor of the Baptist newspaper “The Watchman-Examiner,” Curtis Lee Laws, used the term “fundamentalist” for the first time in print. He defined the agenda of the fundamentalists as

a protest against that rationalistic interpretation of Christianity which seeks to discredit supernaturalism. This rationalism, when full grown, scorns the miracles of the Old Testament, sets aside the virgin birth of our Lord as a thing unbelievable, laughs at the credulity of those who accept many of the New Testament miracles, reduces the resurrection of our Lord to the fact that death did not end his existence, and sweeps away the promises of his second coming as an idle dream. It matters not by what name these modernists are known. The simple fact is that, in robbing Christianity of its supernatural content, they are undermining the very foundations of our holy religion. They boast that they are strengthening the foundations and making Christianity more rational and more acceptable to thoughtful people. Christianity is rooted and grounded in supernaturalism, and when robbed of supernaturalism it ceases to be a religion and becomes an exalted system of ethics.<sup>4</sup>

Before World War I, fundamentalism was irenic and focused on polemics with biblical criticism and Darwinism. After the war, it opened a wider front against modernism and featured military metaphors. They described their wrestling with modernists in the terms of skirmishes, battles, crusades, and battle royals. Sometimes, they meant it literally and applied physical violence.<sup>5</sup> Fundamentalists at this stage went as far as presenting modernism as a different sort of religion. J. Gresham Machen

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\* This presentation was mainly based on my study “Fundamentalism in Eastern Christianity,” ch. 8 of the collective work *Theology and the Political Theo-political Reflections on Contemporary Politics in Ecumenical Conversation*, edited by Alexei Bodrov and Stephen M. Garrett, 2020, pp. 128ff.

1 Andrew Walker, “Fundamentalism and Modernity: The Restoration Movement in Britain,” in *Studies in Religious Fundamentalism*, ed. Lionel Caplan (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1987), 195-210.

2 R. A. Torrey and A. C. Dixon, eds., *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008).

3 R. A. Torrey, “Foreword,” *The Fundamentals*.

4 Curtis Lee Laws, “Herald & Presbyter,” *The Watchman Examiner*, July 19, 1922.

5 David Harrington Watt, “Fundamentalists of the 1920s and 1930s,” in *Fundamentalism: Perspectives on a Contested History*, ed. Simon A. Wood and David Harrington (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2014), 65.

(1881- 1937), a professor of New Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary and the spokesman for fundamentalism at its initial stage,<sup>6</sup> wrote in 1923 that liberalism was a new religion different from Christianity:

In the sphere of religion, in particular, the present time is a time of conflict; the great redemptive religion which has always been known as Christianity is battling against a totally diverse type of religious belief, which is only the more destructive of the Christian faith because it makes use of traditional Christian terminology. This modern nonredemptive religion is called “modernism” or “liberalism.”<sup>7</sup>

“Fundamentalism” eventually identified itself with opposition to modernism. It thus became a Protestant movement that invigorated the ethos of the early Reformation. Only the enemy was now different: not Rome, but modernism.<sup>8</sup> As Paul Carter remarked, without modernism, “there could have been no fundamentalism.”<sup>9</sup>

Fundamentalism gradually expanded its front against modernism finding its apex at the so-called Scopes Trial in 1925.<sup>10</sup> In this court case, formally known as *The State of Tennessee v. John Thomas Scopes* and informally, as the “Scopes Monkey Trial,” the State of Tennessee prosecuted the schoolteacher, John Scopes, for teaching evolution. The prosecuting side was represented by William Jennings Bryan, three-time presidential candidate and an outspoken fundamentalist. Scopes was defended by a lawyer from New York, Clarence Darrow, who also enlisted famous scientists and theologians for his cause. Scopes was found guilty and fined \$100. However, this was a pyrrhic victory, as Harriet Harris remarked.<sup>11</sup> The trial discredited the fundamentalist movement, because the media, mostly from the North of the United States, used it as an opportunity to stigmatise fundamentalism as aggressive and uneducated, which in effect was only partially true. In reality, many fundamentalists chose to study in prestigious Universities, such as Harvard. After 1925, as George Marsden remarked, the progressives and fundamentalists became polarised as high-brow versus low-brow, North against South, urban against rural.<sup>12</sup> This polarisation did not represent correctly the fundamentalists, at least not all of them.

Although fundamentalism stood for the ultimate and unquestionable authority of the Bible, it featured its own magisterium and authorities. Fundamentalists listened to radio programs such as *Radio Bible Class*, *Bible Study Hour*, and *Old-Fashioned Revival Hour*. They subscribed to magazines like the *Fundamentalist*, the *King’s Business*, *Moody Bible Institute Monthly*, *Our Hope*, the *Presbyterian*, *Revelation*,

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6 Harriet A. Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 20.

7 J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity, and Liberalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1923), 2.

8 As Lucy Sargisson remarked, “it stems from protest” and thus “witness(es) to its Protestant roots.” Lucy Sargisson, *Fool’s Gold* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 44.

9 Paul A. Carter, “The Fundamentalist Defense of the Faith,” in *Change and Continuity in Twentieth Century America: The 1920s*, ed. John Braeman, Robert H. Bremner, and David Brody (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1968), 188.

10 Jeffrey P. Moran, *The Scopes Trial: A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Palgrave, 2002); Don Nardo, *The Scopes Trial* (San Diego, CA: Lucent Books, 1997); Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America’s Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

11 Harriet A. Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, 33.

12 George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 18491.

*Sunday School Times*, *Sword of the Lord*, and the *Watchman-Examiner*. Among their theological authorities were Bob Jones, Sr., Charles E. Fuller, William Jennings Bryan, A. C. Gaebelein, James M. Gray, J. Gresham Machen, Clarence Macartney, J. C. Masee, Carl McIntire, G. Campbell Morgan, J. Frank Norris, John R. Rice, William Bell Riley, Wilbur Smith, John Roach Straton, and Reuben Torrey.<sup>13</sup>

Fundamentalism was not evenly spread among Protestant denominations, although it was more popular among the Reformed traditions. Nevertheless, the fundamentalism-against-modernism controversy caused splits in many Protestant churches throughout the United States. For instance, Northern Presbyterians and Northern Baptists became divided almost equally.<sup>14</sup> So-called liberals prevailed in other denominations like Congregationalism, while southern churches remained conservative in their majority. At the same time, the controversy facilitated interdenominational alliances, such as the World Christian Fundamentals Association (WCFA) founded in 1919.<sup>15</sup> In those alliances, the ideological conservatism became more important than doctrinal differences between the denominations. The WCFA, nevertheless, failed to create a supra-denominational structure on the basis of ideology. The fundamentalist groups within different churches became too militant to live in peace even with each other. As Marsden remarked:

From 1920 to 1925 fundamentalism was a broad and nationally influential coalition of conservatives, but after 1925 it was composed of less flexible and more isolated minorities often retreating into separatism, where they could regroup their considerable forces.<sup>16</sup>

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, moderate fundamentalists reconciled with their denominations. Most schisms, caused by the ideologies adopted in the churches, were healed. Militant fundamentalists disappeared for a while from the scene, only to regroup and reappear later.

In 1941, the American Council of Christian Churches (ACCC) was founded as a rather radical fundamentalist alternative to the ecumenical and liberally inclined Federal Council of Churches. In 1942, a more moderate National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) welcomed those who chose not to follow strict fundamentalism. Harold J. Ockenga, who cofounded the NAE, coined the term “new evangelical” to describe a moderate edition of fundamentalism. The new evangelicals, on the one hand, firmly upheld the fundamentals of faith. On the other hand, they adopted a wider intellectual and social agenda. They were “postfundamentalists with a college education.”<sup>17</sup>

In the late 1970s, the so-called “neo-fundamentalists” continued the moderate line of postfundamentalists. In defending the “fundamentals,” they relied on secular intellectual, social, and media instruments. They invited, to support their cause, a broad variety of conservative Christians, including Roman Catholics, Jehovah’s Witnesses,

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13 David Harrington Watt, “Fundamentalists of the 1920s and 1930s,” 48-9.

14 Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 164-5.

15 Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, 28.

16 Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 164-5.

17 Clark H. Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation: The Foundation of Christian Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), x.

and Mormons among others.

Thus far, fundamentalism was regarded as an exclusively American phenomenon. It was coined and developed mostly in the United States. The usage of the word gained wider application after the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. The word “fundamentalism” then received Islamic connotations for the first time. In the mid-1980s, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences funded a study of fundamentalism with as broad a scope as possible. The project, which was led by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, resulted in the publication of five volumes by Chicago University Press and covered all major religions.<sup>18</sup> It demonstrated that fundamentalism went far beyond the Protestant milieu and is present in all religions.

### *Fundamental Characteristics of Fundamentalism*

The updated summary of the Project, published in 2003 also by Chicago University Press, systematized the common properties of various fundamentalist movements, regardless of their doctrinal and contextual differences.<sup>19</sup> Five of the common properties were ideological:

1. Fundamentalism reacts to the marginalization of religion. It has an original impulse and a recurring reference to what is believed to be erosion and displacement of the true religion. It seeks to resacralize and desecularize the state and public spaces. In its reactionary activities, fundamentalism can be both pre-emptive and defensive. It, on the one hand, wrestles with secularization, and on the other, exploits it.

2. Fundamentalism is selective as it engages the tradition and modernity and is often applied in three ways: a) it selects aspects of the tradition that favor its cause; b) it selectively employs some aspects of modernity, such as science, technology, and media; and, c) it is selective in fighting against the consequences of modernity.

3. Fundamentalism is morally dualistic, exhibiting a kind of moral Manichaeism. It believes that the world outside is contaminated, while the world inside is pure. It promises its protection from outside contamination.

4. Fundamentalism makes absolutist claims and asserts the inerrancy of the Bible. It absolutizes the sources of its teaching, whether they are texts or charismatic persons. It opposes hermeneutics coming from outside sources, which include the apostates.

5. Fundamentalism embraces millenarianism and messianism. Fundamentalists believe that good in the end will triumph over the evil. In addition to these fundamental characteristics, several administrative commonalities exist between different sorts of fundamentalism: a. The elect, chosen membership draws a line between the inner group of the committed and the periphery of sympathizers. b. Sharp boundaries and high walls separate the inner circle of the elect from the rest. c. Authoritarian and patriarchal organization implies charismatic structure and leadership.

Following the pattern set by the Fundamentalism Project, scholars have identified other key characteristics of fundamentalist groups. For example, Martyn Percy

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<sup>18</sup> Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, *The Fundamentalism Project*, 5 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991-1995).

<sup>19</sup> Gabriel Almond, R. Scott Appleby, and Emmanuel Sivan, eds., *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms Around the World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 93-8. 93-98.

established the following five core features:

- 1) backward-looking legitimization for present forms of ministry and belief;
- 2) opposition to trends in modernist society;
- 3) a set of core beliefs;
- 4) cross-denominationalism;
- 5) and, finally, an impact on the material world.<sup>20</sup> Torkel Brekke believed fundamentalism could be reduced to only one: "Fundamentalism is a special kind of reaction to certain developments in the modern world that have taken place in many, perhaps in most, religious traditions."<sup>21</sup>

All sorts of fundamentalisms have in common the defense of their core beliefs. They also share in identifying the threats to their "fundamentals." R. Scott Appleby, one of the authors of the Fundamentalism Project, identifies these threats as the following:

1. Religious plurality, which transgresses the traditional religious boundaries and penetrates religious enclaves:

Some believers accommodated religious plurality by joining secular liberals in accepting it as a feature of modern societies and endorsing it under the name of 'pluralism'. This response implied an accompanying acceptance of the concept of religious freedom - the right of each individual to choose his or her own religion without coercion or penalty by the state or society. For other members of religious communities - including those who would come to be called 'fundamentalists' - both 'pluralism' and 'religious freedom' smacked of indifferentism and relativism, two disturbing modern trends that threatened to erode traditional religious belief and practice.<sup>22</sup>

2. Relativism, which has become an outcome of the globalization and liberalization of society:

For fundamentalists in all religious traditions that are anchored in the conviction that absolute Truth exists and can be known, however imperfectly, relativism is a direct attack against the heart of religious faith. It leads, they claim, not only to atheism or agnosticism, but also to irresponsible experimentation in matters religious and spiritual. The results include reckless innovation, the plundering of selected beliefs and practices from once-coherent religious traditions, and the mixing and matching of these elements in a spirit-deadening farrago of new religions and new religious movements, oblivious to history and traditional wisdom.<sup>23</sup>

3. The "divided mind" of the modern men, who perceive themselves as belonging to incompatible domains:

Compartmentalization of the mind of the individual, who now may think of herself as containing multitudes, including, for example, all of the following: an independent woman, a mother, a lawyer, a college-educated humanist, a Democrat or Republican, and a Christian who happens to be a Roman Catholic (or a Methodist, or a Presbyterian). 'Where is the centre, or the soul, of such a fragmented individual?' ask the critics of modernism. 'The divided mind' is a particular threat to those who see

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20 Martin Percy, *Words, Wonders, and Power: Understanding Contemporary Christian Fundamentalism and Revivalism* (London: SPCK, 1996).

21 Torkel Brekke, *Fundamentalism: Prophecy and Protest in an Age of Globalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 6.

22 R. Scott Appleby, "Fundamentalisms," in *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy*, ed. Robert E. Goodin, Philip Pettit, and Thomas W. Pogge, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2007), 405.

23. Ibid.

religion as an encompassing and all-absorbing way of life that should dictate an individual's sense of self and behaviour in the community.<sup>24</sup>

4. Finally, and probably most importantly, fundamentalism is believed to be an extreme reaction to the process of secularization. As Richard T. Antoun remarked, "the ethos of fundamentalism, its affective orientation, is one of protest and outrage at the secularization of society."<sup>25</sup>

Paradoxically, however, in wrestling with secularization, fundamentalism itself becomes a secular and secularizing phenomenon. It turns to an instrument of self-secularization of the church.<sup>26</sup> R. Scott Appleby has noticed this paradox within fundamentalism:

Herein lies a defining irony of fundamentalisms: these self-proclaimed defenders of traditional religion are hardly 'traditional' at all... Fundamentalists have little patience for traditionalist or merely conservative believers, who attempt to live within the complex and sometimes ambiguous boundaries of the historic tradition. Fundamentalists, by contrast, are 'progressives' in the sense that they seek to mobilize the religious tradition for a specific temporal end (even if the final victory is expected to occur beyond history). Involvement in politics, civil war, liberation movements and social reform is central to the fundamentalist mentality: religion is, or should be, a force for changing the world, bringing it into conformity with the will of God, advancing the divine plan. In this aspiration fundamentalists are little or no different from other 'progressive' religious movements for social change and justice, including the Latin American proponents of liberation theology.<sup>27</sup>

I would go even further than this and suggest that fundamentalism turns more secular than secularism which it believes it fights. Because what it fights under the guise of secularism, is in effect a shift in the status quo in the relationship between religion and socio-political structures. In this regard, Richard T. Antoun is right when he defines fundamentalism as "a reaction, both ideological and affective, to the changes in basic social relationships that have occurred on a worldwide basis as a result of the social organizational, technological, and economic changes introduced by the modern world."<sup>28</sup> In other words, secularism is not as secular as fundamentalism believes, while secularism becomes secular to the extent it would not believe.

The Fundamentalism Project studied many cases in many religions but paid little attention to such hierarchical structures as the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, where fundamentalism has its noteworthy nuances. More specifically, when the leadership embraces fundamentalism, it becomes mainstream, effectively an official doctrine. In Protestant churches, where fundamentalism can be supported more widely, it cannot convert to a single and obligatory policy, because there is no one hierarchical center to impose it. Let us begin to address this lacuna in the Fundamentalism Project by analyzing the situation in the Roman Catholic Church.

#### *Fundamentalism in the Roman Catholic Church*

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24 Ibid., 406.

25 Richard T. Antoun, "Fundamentalism" in *The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Bryan Turner (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 524.

26 See Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Modern Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 36-7.

27 Appleby, "Fundamentalisms," 407.

28 Richard T. Antoun, "Fundamentalism," 526.

The interwar period, when Protestant fundamentalism flourished, was also the heyday for Roman Catholic fundamentalism. In contrast to the Protestants, however, the culture war against modernism in the Roman Catholic church was not marginal but a mainstream phenomenon. While in the United States the protagonists of the struggle against modernism were not the leaders of their denominations, but ordinary pastors, such as John Roach Straton, who was also known as a “fundamentalist Pope.”<sup>29</sup> In Rome, the pope himself commanded the battle. Pius X (1835-1914) condemned modernism in 1907 as heresy in two documents: *Lamentabili sane exitu* and the encyclical *Pascendi Dominici gregis*. In 1910, he introduced an anti-modernist oath for all bishops, priests, and academics. Modernism remained anathema for the Holy See until Vatican II, which somehow reconciled with it.

Vatican II provoked a new wave of fundamentalist reactions. This wave featured nostalgia about the council of Trent (1545-1563) and evoked the ethos of counter-Reformation.<sup>30</sup> The anti-Vatican II fundamentalists consider the period after-Trent as the golden years and treat Vatican II as an apostasy. Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre (1905-1991) and his Society of St Pius X (SSPX) became an embodiment of the opposition to the Council and of Catholic doctrinal fundamentalism. In his 1974, *Profession of Faith*, Lefebvre confessed:

[W]e refuse and always have refused to follow the Rome of neo-modernist and neo-Protestant tendencies which clearly manifested themselves in the Second Vatican Council and after the Council in all the reforms which issued from it... This reform, the fruit of liberalism and modernism, is completely and utterly poisoned; it starts from heresy and ends with heresy, even if not all its acts are formally heretical. It is accordingly impossible for any aware and faithful Catholic to adopt this reform and to submit to it in any way whatsoever.<sup>31</sup>

The same sort of fundamentalism mounted opposition to liberal popes, like Pope Francis. It even implied doubts about papal authority, when this authority supported what seemed to fundamentalists as a liberal agenda.<sup>32</sup>

The Roman Catholic fundamentalists who are critical of liberal popes, tend to undermine papal authority. In contrast to them, there is a tendency in the Catholic church, which elevates this authority above any other authority in the church; it interprets papacy in stronger terms and images than the official documents on papal authority would allow. This tendency, in my opinion, should be considered fundamentalist as well. One Catholic archbishop called this sort of fundamentalism “idolatry of the papacy.”<sup>33</sup> It can be found embodied in both theological statements and pious practices of ordinary Catholics. For example, Bertaud de Tulle, a French Ultra-Montanist bishop (1798-1879), presented the Pope as “the Word Incarnate which is continued.” And the bishop of Lausanne and Geneva Gaspard Mermillod (1824-1892),

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29 Harriet A. Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, 31.

30 Michael Trainor, “The Quest for the ‘Perfect Tile:’ Fundamentalism in Roman Catholicism,” in *Fundamentalism in the Modern World*, vol. 2, *Fundamentalism and Communication: Culture, Media, and the Public Square*, ed. Ulrika Martensson, et. al. (London: I. B. Tauras, 2011), 173-4.

31 Ibid., 181.

32 See Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Fundamentalism at Home and Abroad: Analysis and Pastoral Responses* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2017).

33 Roger Aubert, *Lepontificat de Pie IX, 1846-1878* (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1952), 302.

preached “the three incarnations of the Son of God” in the womb of the Virgin, in the Eucharist, and in the Pope.<sup>34</sup> This sort of fundamentalism, as any other sort of fundamentalisms, developed historically as a reaction to a growing modernity and gradual expulsion of the Roman Catholic Church from various domains of society. All fundamentalists in all religious traditions seek for unquestionable authorities. The Pope is not the only ultimate authority for the Roman Catholic fundamentalists. There are also visionaries who are believed to receive direct messages from Christ or Mary.<sup>35</sup> In this, Catholic fundamentalists come close to their Orthodox counterparts.

#### *Fundamentalism in the Orthodox Church*

The cult of spiritual authorities, the *gerontes* or *startsy*, plays an even more important role for Orthodox fundamentalists. This cult compensates for the “idolatry of the papacy” in the Roman Catholic Church and the biblical absolutism of Protestant communities. Both are missing in the Orthodox Church and substituted by what can be called “gerontolatria.” No doubt, the spiritual authority of the elders often works in a positive way. From the early *Apophthegmata* and up to the modern Athonite monasticism, the elders played and continue to play an important role in nurturing the faithful and edifying the Church. However, as with any institute of authority in the Church, this one is vulnerable to mistakes and abuses. A form of abuse of *starchestvo* is so called *mladostarchestvo*, when unexperienced and immature persons exercise spiritual authority and develop some kind of personal absolutism, namely “gerontokratia.” They often promote fundamentalism among their adherents.

The same applies to the Church Fathers. It is difficult to overestimate their role in the life of the Orthodox Church. Although most of Orthodox Christians do not regularly read the Fathers of the Church, they believe that the Fathers constitute the most reliable magisterium of the Church. Such attitudes toward the Fathers, in effect, shape the characteristic identity of the Orthodox, that is how we differentiate ourselves from the rest of the Christians. In its abusive form, however, the patristic identity of the Orthodox Church works like a “patristic fundamentalism.” This is when the Orthodox treat the Fathers as gurus—absolute authorities, out of context, without understanding their motives and intentions, without recognizing their errors, and omissions. Paradoxically, patristic fundamentalism disrespects the Church Fathers as fundamentalism in any tradition disrespects the sources to which it claims to adhere.

Another form of Orthodox fundamentalism is shaped by the way in which the Orthodox express themselves liturgically. This form of Orthodox fundamentalism can be branded as “ritualism.” Ritualism is often sported as a form of popular individual piety and can be organized into sectarian movements. The two most famous Orthodox fundamentalist movements based on such rites are the so-called “old-believers” and “old-calendarists.” The “old-believers,” who are more correctly to be called “old-ritualists” (*staroobryadtsy*) were a movement that was triggered in the seventeenth century by the liturgical reforms of the Moscow Patriarch Nikon (1605-1681). Nikon

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Michael Trainor, “The Quest,” 175.

wanted to adjust Russian liturgical rituals and books to the “Greek” ones. This provoked a fervent resistance from numerous members of the Russian Orthodox Church, including clergy and aristocracy. Certainly, the motivation of the movement was wider than merely the reforms for how to cross oneself (with three fingers instead of two) or how many times to sing Alleluia (three times instead of two times). The *staroobryadchestvo* absorbed social protests and expressed the divides in the Russian society of that time. Nevertheless, it is telling that the social protests in Russia were akin to the struggle for the nuances of the rite. This placed the cause for liturgical purity and traditionality at the center of the movement and made it fundamentalist.

A more recent case of ritual fundamentalism is the movement of the so-called “old-calendarists.” They emerged in the 1920s, about the same time as Protestant fundamentalists did in the United States. The pretext of their appearance was that some Orthodox churches adopted the civil Julian calendar, which replaced the traditional Gregorian calendar. All the Orthodox churches, except four: Jerusalem, Russian, Georgian, and Serbian, changed their calendars. As a result, some of them, particularly the Greek and the Romanian churches, faced protest movements that eventually separated from mainstream jurisdictions and developed their own hierarchy.

The “old-calendarists” and other fundamentalists formed a single front against modernism. In this, they concurred with the agenda of the Vatican during the papacy of Pius X and of the World Christian Fundamentals Association. Similar to the Society of St Pius X or the American Council of Christian Churches, they separated themselves from their mainstream churches and effectively became sects. They would have probably joined an alliance with other fundamentalist churches surpassing doctrinal divides if they were not so anti-ecumenical.

Ecumenism, for the aforementioned Orthodox fundamentalist movements, became the signature of modernism. In their view, the ecumenical movement was the most eloquent manifestation of Christian compromise with the sinful world. Remarkably, for many Protestant fundamentalist movements, ecumenism was also a compromise with this world. For all of them, ecumenism has become a symbol of Christian apostasy. To differentiate themselves from Orthodox churches that participate in the ecumenical movement and activities, the fundamentalist jurisdictions adopted an identity of the “Genuine Orthodox Christians” (Γνήσιοι Ορθόδοξοι Χριστιανοί) or the “True Orthodox Churches”. These churches often rebaptize those who join them from the “ecumenical” Orthodox jurisdictions and consider those jurisdictions as heretical.

The rite, the calendar, and the issue of ecumenism became the guises under which Orthodox fundamentalists promoted a conservative agenda and confronted liberalism.

Sometimes they did not hide their ideological preferences and openly joined the culture wars waged in western churches. The Russian Orthodox Church, for instance, has repeatedly declared, through its official speakers, its opposition to liberalism and identified itself with conservatism.

It has employed a rhetoric of traditional values, which is familiar to many American fundamentalists, who received such rhetoric as an invitation to partner with a powerful ally. Such an alliance resembles the attempts of the trans-denominational fundamentalist alliances based on the common values of the 1930s and 1940s.

*Conclusions: Why fundamentalism is toxic?*

Contrary to the widely-spread stereotype of fundamentalists as anti-historical, fundamentalists love history. They study it, appeal to it, and try to ground themselves in it. However, they are *selective* in using historical data. They appropriate only the data that support their claims. The history from the perspective of fundamentalism is speculative. Fundamentalism constructs a golden age, which it then makes as a criterion for judging the present. It also instrumentalizes rationality. When rational arguments turn against fundamentalist claims, they are rejected. Fundamentalist counter-culturalism can easily turn anti-social or even terroristic. That is why fundamentalism, despite its undeniable merits, is often toxic and abusive.

It abuses, in the first turn, what constitutes its core, namely the tradition. It turns tradition into traditionalism, which is an Orthodox analogue of the classical Protestant “biblicism.” Traditionalism distorts the tradition because it instrumentalizes the latter and transforms it to an ideology. It has been noted that fundamentalism is an idea-based movement, which aligns it with other ideologies.<sup>36</sup> This makes the tradition, which Orthodox fundamentalism pretends to defend, an instrument of ideocracy.

Although fundamentalism appeals to theology, it often pursues hidden political agendas. Sometimes these agendas overtake the religious aspects of fundamentalism. Because of this strong political component, it often happens that although fundamentalism fights for the integrity of doctrinal orthodoxy, it in effect creates a new orthodoxy. Fundamentalists construct their own orthodoxy in counter-position to what they regard as the heresy of liberalism/modernism. The fundamentalist orthodoxy is as ideological as the “heresies” it opposes. Tradition is not at the center of the new orthodoxy but an instrument to fight for a political program.

Fundamentalists, thus, significantly diminish the tradition and its religious practices as Appleby maintains: “Attempting to defend religion, they shrink it down to earthly size.... In the attempt to protect religion from encroaching politicians and governments, they reduce it to a political programme.”<sup>37</sup> They select those elements in the tradition they protect, which fit their agenda, and reject other elements as Appleby further argues: “They bleed the complexity out of the religion in order to channel its mobilizing power to specific, historically contingent political ends.”<sup>38</sup> This diminution of tradition and religion provides a key to understanding the difference between fundamentalism and what can be called “normal” Christianity. The latter accepts the tradition in all its complexity, even when it contradicts established beliefs. “Normal” Christians can revise what they believe on the basis of what they learn in the Church instead of tailoring the tradition to suit their ideologies. In some sense, they should study the history of the tradition like professional historians. Not in the sense that they should be relativists or avoid judging history as judgement of historical data is like the glue that brings the pieces of data together and creates a whole picture. The professional study of history means that it should not be anachronistic. Christians should not project

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36 Harriet A. Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, 36.

37 R. Scott Appleby, “Fundamentalisms,” 409.

38 *Ibid.*, 410.

their present into the past but to judge the present from the perspective of the past. When the past of the Church is perceived in its own right, then the Church becomes understood more broadly than its present can suggest. The past is often incompatible with the present and the current perceptions of the Church because such perceptions are shaped by the present. Therefore, studies of the past challenge both the present and the general conceptions of the Church. The past of the church teaches Christians humility and openness. In other words, when the past of the Church is studied on its own terms, and not instrumentalized to prove the fundamentalist agenda, then its effect is opposite to the one of fundamentalism. Study of Church history nurtures Christian kindness both within the Church and to their neighbors, because they often find in the past worse things than in the present.

Fundamentalism exploits not only ideas but also emotions. “Outrage, protest and fear” are the basic human instincts it dwells upon, says Richard Antoun.<sup>39</sup> These emotions mobilize people and often incite militant behavior. Militancy, according to Marsden, distinguishes fundamentalism from non-fundamentalism.<sup>40</sup>

Fundamentalism is also intrinsically dualistic and sees the world in black and white terms. Dualism goes hand in hand with paranoia, which is often a characteristic of fundamentalism. As R. Scott Appleby has noticed, fundamentalists tend to see history as a conspiracy, in particular a conspiracy of liberals against the tradition. They perceive the tendencies of secularization and modernization as “deliberate choices and calculated strategies, results not of random historical occurrences but of a long-standing, cumulative and global conspiracy against religion by its secular opponents.”<sup>41</sup> Paradoxically, conspiracy, which fundamentalism believes to be the driving force of history, is often practiced by the fundamentalists themselves, seeking various plots and strategies against their opponents.

In contrast to this, “normal” Christianity believes that the Lord is Master of Human History and human or diabolic conspiracy cannot control it. The agency of every human being is important in building the fabric of historical processes, which develop as a complex sum of non-orchestrated efforts. The picture of history it presents is colorful and complex in contrast to the black-and-white history of fundamentalism.

Protestant fundamentalism is often millennialist. It expects Christ to come to rule his people. A similar sort of utopia exists in other forms of fundamentalism as well. Islamic groups dream of establishing a Khilafah or Islamic state based on the rules and principles of the Qur’an and Sharia law. Many Jewish groups aspire for the coming of the Messiah.<sup>42</sup> Fundamentalist utopias, however, often turn to dystopias, as Karl Popper has convincingly demonstrated.<sup>43</sup> The desire of fundamentalists to defend their own worldview leads them to impose it on others often by means of coercion and violence.<sup>44</sup>

The coercive nature of fundamentalism stems from the desire of its followers to

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39 Richard T. Antoun, “Fundamentalism,” 527.

40 George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 4, 102-3, 141, 164-70, 228.

41 R. Scott Appleby, “Fundamentalisms,” 406.

42 Lucy Sargisson, *Fool’s Gold?*, 43.

43 Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Princeton: University Press, 1966).

44 Lucy Sargisson, *Fool’s Gold?*, 50.

put their beliefs into immediate action. Ian Lustick has defined fundamentalism as “a style of political participation characterized by unusually close and direct links between one’s fundamental beliefs and political behavior designed to effect radical change.”<sup>45</sup> The forms of political action can be radical. Militancy combined with fear, paranoia, and dualism, opens a door to terrorism. This is how fundamentalists sometimes become terrorists.

The Church should be concerned about fundamentalism. Instead of encouraging or even simply tolerating it, the Church should take care to contain it. Fundamentalism cannot be eliminated altogether, but it can be controlled. The Church should take care, as Paul taught, that people grow from fundamentalist *infantilism terrible* to “a mature person, attaining to the measure of Christ’s full stature. So, we are no longer to be children, tossed back and forth by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching by the trickery of people who craftily carry out their deceitful schemes. But practicing the truth in love.” (Eph 4:13-15).

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<sup>45</sup> Ian Lustick, *For the Land and the Lord: Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1988), 5.

## Chapter 16

### **THE VOCATION AND MISSION OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD: “A CHOSEN RACE, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION”**

*Rev. Prof. Stylianos Muksuris*

#### *Introduction*

I am happy to be with you today and to share with you some insights into the theme of the vocation and mission of God's people. I think that before we can discern what our vocation and mission as Catholic and Orthodox Christians is — or should be — we need to discover or, at best, reaffirm who we are.

So, when asked, “Who are we?” how do we respond? More specifically, how much information and what details do we care to share with one another? In John 1:19, the Jews from Jerusalem send out priests and Levites to John by the Jordan to inquire who he is, if he is the Messiah (the Christ) or Elijah or the prophet Moses. He negates each inquiry and finally says of himself that he is “the voice of one crying in the wilderness” (John 1:23).

Are we a similar voice crying out in the wilderness of life, to witness? Well, St. Peter the apostle tells us who we are:

*“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10)*

Our Lord Jesus Christ continues to call individuals to be his disciples, members of the "holy nation" we call his Church. From the day of Pentecost, this saving relationship with Christ has normally been established through the solemn and joyous event of baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit. A sacred rite, rich with deep significance - baptism, in water and in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit - ultimately proclaims that the newly baptized is united to Christ and his people, participates in his death and resurrection, personally receives the gift of the Spirit, and comes to know the generous love of the Father expressed in the forgiveness of sin. Through these new relationships, the believer now lives as a member of the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27), God's faithful people - a life which is manifested especially in the celebration of Holy Eucharist. He or she is now a member of the Church which is "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people."

These words from the Epistle of Peter immediately point to the value and dignity of every member of the Church. Baptism marks the beginning of a new life of holiness and discipleship in Christ. Each member has been fully united to him, is blessed with the gifts of the Spirit, and so is bound through Christ to other believers. Each one now has a public mission: to "declare the wonderful deeds" of God the Father, who "calls us out of darkness into his marvelous light."

So we reaffirm what we agreed almost twenty years ago, solemnly recognizing the validity of sacramental initiation in each other's communities: "The Orthodox and Catholic churches both teach the same understanding of baptism. This identical teaching draws on the same sources in Scripture and Tradition, and it has not varied in any significant way from the very earliest witnesses to the faith up to the present day.

A central element in this single teaching is the conviction that baptism comes to us as God's gift in Christ, through the Holy Spirit. It is therefore not 'of us,' but from above."<sup>1</sup>

In this Agreed Statement, the members of the North American Orthodox-Catholic Consultation want first to affirm the vocation and ministry of each member of the Church: a vocation and a ministry rooted in Christ's call, first given through baptism and chrismation, and lived out through the relationships, responsibilities and obligations each of us encounters in daily life, in family, Church and society.

Over the past four years, our earlier, continuing examination of the dimensions of primacy and conciliarity or synodality in the life of the Church has led us also to study the People of God, who are that Church in its fullness.<sup>2</sup> In the past, we responded to the Lima document on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry in 1984, and spoke more at length about the significance of baptism in both of our Churches in our Statement on "Baptism and Sacramental Economy" (1999). We have also briefly spoken of the laity in our early Statement on "The Church" (1974) and in our Statement on "Conciliarity and Primacy" (1989). We also referred to the distinctive vocation of the Christian laity in our Statement, "Steps towards a Reunited Church: A Sketch of an Orthodox-Catholic Vision for the Future" (2010). The International Orthodox-Catholic dialogue, too, in 2007, made a number of valuable references to the specific participation of the laity in the life of the Church in its Statement, "Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority" (The "Ravenna Statement," 2007) and our Consultation responded to that Statement in 2009.

We believe, however, that discussion of the basic constitution of the Church, and of the specific role of the laity, remains somewhat underdeveloped in our previous statements, as well as in the statements of the International Commission. On the one hand, the topic has not been a 'church-dividing' issue between Orthodoxy and Catholicism. Rather, in both our Churches in recent decades there have been continuing discussions about the proper role of the laity in worship, administration and witness. So, the Second Vatican Council, in its Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, expressed the Catholic Church's desire "that all believers be brought to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is required by the nature of the

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<sup>1</sup> Agreed Statement on Baptism and Sacramental Economy (1999).

<sup>2</sup> One often sees references that derive the word "layperson" from the biblical word *laos*, (*laóV*) meaning "the people of God" in contrast to the pagan nations. According to this view laypeople are simply those persons who belong to the people consecrated to God. If this were true, the word "lay" would be synonymous with "sacred." But such an interpretation rests on a double confusion. First, it presupposes that the word "lay" arose within primitive Christian or contemporary Jewish circles, when in fact it occurs 300 B.C. in Hellenistic papyri. The second presupposition is that the adjective "lay" is always suggestive of the noun *laos*, which Christians understand generally to mean "people of God." However, the noun *laos*, in the Bible as well as in secular texts, has a special meaning: not people in general, but the common people in so far as they are distinguished from their leaders - the equivalent of plebs.

While the Greek word *laos* is a biblical term that occurs frequently in Scripture, to designate the people of God in distinction from the pagan nations, the word "layperson" (*laikóV*) is not a biblical word. It occurs neither in the LXX nor in the New Testament, but is an ecclesiastical word that appears for the first time in the first epistle of Clement, about the year 96, to describe those members of the people of Israel who were neither priests nor Levites: "Special ministries have been assigned to the high-priest; a special place has been allotted to the priests; and the Levites have their own duties. Lay people are bound by rules laid down for the laity." Even though I Clement identifies the laity here by distinguishing them from "priests and Levites," he gives them a place within the consecrated people, who are set apart from the nonconsecrated "nations". His identification as a consecrated people opens the way for an identification of the laity with the "people of God" and the "royal priesthood," that is, to identify them as being consecrated persons.

## THE VOCATION AND MISSION OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

liturgy itself and to which the Christian people... have, in virtue of baptism, a right and a duty." (Sacrosanctum Concilium 14)

Second, we recognize that both of our churches have often been affected by a strong emphasis on the vocation and ministry of the clergy, even to the neglect of the ministry of the laity. A lay person has frequently been assumed, as in I Clement, simply to be one who is not ordained (see above, n. 2). This perspective appears to neglect the proper, wider vocation of every Christian disciple, as that is rooted in Christ's call and in baptism.

We have come, therefore, to recognize the need to articulate together a common perspective on the People of God and the vocation and ministry of lay persons and the ordained within it, especially in light of contemporary challenges both in the Church and in society. From the beginning of our Consultation in 1965, lay theologians, both women and men, have been full and active participants. We gratefully affirm their contributions, and believe that the North American Consultation can take a distinctive part in this important discussion. It is in that spirit that we respectfully submit this statement to our churches.

### *I. The Mystery of Baptism*

Baptism, as the central act of Christian initiation, is a rite rich in significance. At its heart are two fundamental affirmations. First, baptism, celebrated with water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and completed by chrismation and the reception of the Eucharist, brings about our union with God in Christ and our sharing in Christ's death and resurrection. It is the act that marks the beginning of every distinctively Christian life; so, with the Apostle Paul, we affirm: "As many of you who have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ" (Gal.3:27).

Second, baptism thus marks our entry into the Church, which is the People of God.

Our mysterious union with Christ our Lord through baptism is, at the same time, a union with all those who are 'in Christ' (Phil.1:1). If Christ is the head, then the Church is his Body (Col. 1:18). The two share one life. For every believer, growth in holiness takes place both through our relationship with Christ and through our sharing this relationship with fellow members of the Church.

As we have previously said: "Baptism is not a human work, but the rebirth from above, effected through 'water and the Spirit,' that introduces us into the life of the Church. It is that gift by which God grounds and establishes the Church as the community of the New Covenant, the 'Israel of God' (Gal 6:16), by engrafting us into the body of the crucified and risen Messiah (Rom 6:3-11; 11:17-24), into the one sacrament (mysterion) which is Christ himself (Eph 1:3; 3:3; Col 1:27 and 2:2)."<sup>3</sup>

A number of the Fathers, both Eastern and Western, have spoken about Christ's saving work in terms of his three "offices": of Priest, Prophet and King. As priest, Christ is the one who offers himself up for the salvation of the world. As prophet, he is the one who proclaims the truth to us about God and the human person. As king, he is the one who leads his faithful people to the Father.

The same Fathers of the Church also remind us that, through baptism, the faithful themselves share in these offices of Christ. So St. John Chrysostom says: "Through baptism, you have become king, and priest and prophet: a king, in that you have dashed to earth all the deeds of wickedness and slain your sins; a priest, in that you offer yourself to God; a prophet, knowing what shall be, and being inspired by God and

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<sup>3</sup> Agreed Statement on Baptism and Sacramental Economy (1999).

sealed." (Homily 3:4-5 on II Cor) A prayer from the Roman rite of baptism, accompanying the "sealing" of a newly baptized person with sacred chrism, says: "God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, has freed you from sin, given you a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, and welcomed you into his holy people. He now anoints you with the chrism of salvation. As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet, and King, so may you live always as a member of his body, sharing everlasting life."

Our understanding of the fundamental vocation and ministry of all Christian men and women is rooted in the call of Christ as it is manifested in the sacrament of baptism. By this sacred rite, we are bound to the Lord and his people, and blessed with the gifts of his Spirit.

## *II. The People of God*

The people of God are distinguished both by charisms (1 Cor 12:7; 14:26), or interior gifts, and by public ministries; both of these serve to build up the community. The New Testament mentions distinctive roles of leadership in the community, such as ministers (I Cor 4.1; 2 Cor 3.6; 6.4), presidents (Rom 12.8; I Thes 5.12; Heb 13.7, 17, 24; Acts 12.1; 20.28), pastors (Eph 4.11), elders (Tit 1.5), and teachers (Acts 12.1; I Cor 12.28) as gifts of the Spirit, given to some individuals in the community for the sake of all. The charisms of all the baptized, above and beyond these special roles, are linked with their participation in the prophetic, priestly and kingly role of Christ, enabling all to be witnesses to him through lives of faith. "The manifestation of the Spirit received by each person," St. Paul reminds us, "is given for the common good" (1 Cor 12:7). But all these charisms "equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Eph 4.11-12) The diverse ministries carried out in the Church are all forms of service, the focus being on our common mission rather than on anyone's particular identity.

Reflection beginning with the people of God as a whole, then, rather than with the notion of "the laity" as distinct from "the clergy," replaces the "priesthood-laity" divide with an emphasis on the necessity of all ministries for "the building up of the Body of Christ," as that Body serves the world. A genuinely dialogical Church, formed from these ministries, is thus characterized by mutual listening, mutual witnessing, and mutual respect, as well as by distinctions in office and function. Ecclesial structures, such as bishops' synods and regional or ecumenical councils, maintain and foster the unity in faith of the Body of Christ.

The terms "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" apply to all the baptized, before there are further distinctions within the community, and emphasize the unitary nature of the community, founded on a common baptism and common confirmation or chrismation. The people addressed in I Peter 2.9-10 are therefore not the "laity," but the faithful Christian people. According to I Peter, the spiritual rebirth of Christians occurs through the resurrection of Christ, in which Christians share through baptism and chrismation (see Rom 6:3-11). This is the basic identity that defines all groupings within the community, whether those groups be identified as the laity, the clergy, monks, or religious.

Every member of the Church has a dignity and value rooted in baptism. The Spirit also endows each baptized Christian with spiritual gifts, which are meant to contribute to the well-being of the Body and to the salvation of the world. While these spiritual gifts serve to highlight each person's unique identity, they are not meant to harm the bond of unity which each baptized person has with the rest in Christ (1 Cor. 12:4-11). Each gift is given, ultimately, not for the benefit of any one person alone, but for the well-being of all the members of the Body of Christ. As St. Basil the Great says: "We

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are all members one of another, having different gifts according to the grace of God which has been given to us...All the members together make up the Body of Christ in the unity of the Spirit, and render to one another the necessary service according to their gifts" (On the Holy Spirit, 26).

### *Baptism and Orders*

Among the many particular gifts of the Spirit, some persons are appointed to exercise a special leadership role within the community, as bishops, priests and deacons. Both Orthodox and Catholics affirm that these orders are essential to the life of the Church. Yet, the ordained ministry is itself but one of the many gifts of the Spirit to the Church. The differentiation between clergy and laity itself rests on a gift, which serves as the basis for liturgical ministry. Those who are called to the ordained ministry continue to be fellow members of the Body of Christ and People of God, together with all who are baptized.

At the same time, the gift of ordained ministry itself builds the distinctive relationship between the one ordained and the other members of the Eucharistic community. Each ordained minister is involved in a special ministry of service "for the building up of the Body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12). So St. John Chrysostom says to the clergy: "If lay people need us, in the same way we as ministers exist for their sake, appointed for their spiritual needs. We need each other: the leaders need the support of the people and those in office equally need the contribution of the flock. To be a leader implies that persons be taken care of and be helped. Nobody exists as self-sufficient, assuming that he himself can do all. ...Therefore, the Church as a conciliar assembly can do much more than one single person. All that one person alone cannot do, rather, he or she can do together with others." (Homily 30 on 1 Corinthians, 7).

So, we speak of the clergy as being "set apart," but not as "above" or separate from the body of believers. Indeed, it could be also said that every baptized believer is "set apart" to serve God in the Church and in wider human society. This means that the clergy are called to serve the other members of the community with the gift of the Spirit in a distinctive manner, which is sanctioned and blessed by the Church itself through the rites of election and ordination. Yet the fact that every ordination takes place within the context of the community's Eucharist, and with the assent of the community, reminds us that an ordained person is intimately related to the entire Body of the Church. God calls the one who is ordained from the midst of the Church for the service of the Church.

There is always a profound, intimate connection, then, between those who are ordained and those to whom and with whom their ministry is offered. St. Augustine expressed this reciprocal relationship when he boldly declared: "Although I am terrified by what I am for you, I am consoled by what I am with you. For you, I am your bishop; with you I am a Christian. The former is a title of an office which has been undertaken, the latter is a title of grace. The first is a danger, the second salvation...Precisely as we struggle in this office we find rest in the common good.... It consoles me more that I have been redeemed with you than that I have been placed over you...Aid us by your prayers and your obedience, that we may rejoice not so much in overseeing you as in serving you." (Sermon 340:1)

### *The Eucharistic Community*

This intimate relationship of the bishop and priest with the laity is most clearly expressed each time the Church gathers to celebrate the Eucharist. The bishop or priest who presides at the Eucharist represents Christ as the head of the Church, which is his body. As president of the Eucharistic assembly, it is the bishop's or priest's

responsibility to preside before the altar, to proclaim the Gospel, to preach and interpret the word of God, to receive and offer the bread and wine, and to intone the great Eucharistic prayer.

At the same time, the Eucharist is not the action of the bishop or priest alone, separated from the community. Rather, the Eucharist is, properly speaking, the priestly act of the entire People of God, gathered at a particular place in obedience to the Lord's command to do this in his memory (1 Cor. 11:24). So, all the members of the assembly truly celebrate the Eucharist, led by the bishop or priest. The prayers of the Eucharistic liturgy, in both our traditions, are normally addressed to God in the first-person plural, because they are rightfully the community's words; so while the bishop or priest speaks the prayers aloud, all the members of the community give their assent by responding together "Amen." While the bishop or priest offers the bread and wine, as the Byzantine liturgy expresses it, "on behalf of all and for all," it is the faithful who present these gifts to be offered. All respond to his greeting, "The Lord be with you," by replying "And with your Spirit," confirming their conviction that he presides by the grace of the Holy Spirit, given in ordination; all exchange the 'kiss of peace' and profess with the presider their common faith. And while the bishop or priest is the first to receive the Holy Communion, all the members partake of the same bread and the same cup. In these liturgical actions, the synodal or conciliar structure of the Church is expressed in a way which does not deny or diminish the genuine primacy of the bishop or priest.

It is within the Eucharistic context, in fact, that one can clearly see operative the mutual relationship of clergy and laity, as well as the principles of both primacy and conciliarity in the Church as a whole. So St. John Chrysostom says that "during the most awe-inspiring mysteries, the priest prays for the people and the people pray for the priest, for the words 'with your spirit' are nothing else but that. The offering of the Eucharist is in common, for it is not the priest alone who gives thanks, but the whole people. He first speaks in their voice, then they add that it is 'fitting and right' to do this. Then, the Eucharist begins." (Homily 18 on II Corinthians 8.24). And in another homily, he declares: "With us, all things are equal. The saving life that sustains our souls is given with equal honor to both you and me. I do not, after all, partake of one Lamb and you of another, but we partake of the same. We all have the same baptism. We have been promised the same Spirit. We are all hastening to the same Kingdom. We are all alike brothers and sisters in Christ, sharing all things in common!" (Homily 4 on II Thessalonians 3.2 ).

The image of an intimate mutual relationship of giving and receiving, modeled on the circuminsessio or perichoresis of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, may even be apt to describe the relationship of the various charisms, ministries, and states of life among the faithful in the Eucharistic community. Within the diversity whose source is the Spirit of unity, all work together to build up the Body of Christ.

### *III. The Ministry and Mission of the Laity*

While the entire people of God is called to minister in and for the church, as early as the Apostolic Tradition one finds a distinction between clerical and lay ministries evidenced through the distinction between the ordination of bishops, presbyters, and deacons, through a laying-on of hands, and the simple installation or institution of lay ministers such as widows and readers. So in both the Orthodox and Catholic churches, liturgical ministry includes not simply the presiders but altar servers, cantors, lectors, and the choir. Beyond these liturgical roles, increasing numbers of lay people today teach the faith, serve in peace and justice networks, in soup kitchens and shelters, in administrative positions, and in various parish programs. In the Catholic Church, for example, lay persons are regularly involved in the liturgy as extraordinary Eucharistic

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ministers, and in some places are responsible for leading Sunday worship in the absence of a priest. In the Orthodox Church, lay persons are involved in parish, diocesan, and national church assemblies (Clergy-Laity congresses), and function as short-term and long-term missionaries.

Through our union with Christ in baptism, every disciple has an obligation to be a defender of the apostolic faith through the way we live out our relationships and responsibilities in family, Church and society. As the recent Ravenna statement of our international Orthodox-Catholic dialogue says: "The whole community and each person in it bears the 'conscience of the Church' (εκκλησιαστική συνείδησις), as Greek theology calls it - the *sensus fidelium* in Latin terminology. By virtue of baptism and confirmation (chrismation) each member of the Church exercises a form of authority in the Body of Christ. In this sense, all the faithful (and not just the bishops) are responsible for the faith professed at baptism. It is our common teaching that the people of God, having received 'the anointing which comes from the Holy One' (1 John 2, 20 and 27), in communion with their pastors, cannot err in matters of faith (cf. John 16, 13)."<sup>4</sup>

The participation of the laity in councils, the consultation of the faithful in matters of discipline and faith, and their longer-term involvement in the reception of doctrinal definitions, so that they become embedded in the life, worship, and teaching of the Church, reflects the role that the whole people of God, as a single Body, ultimately must play. Engagement in society extends to all the baptized, insofar as all the baptized are called to participate actively and responsibly in the church's mission of proclaiming salvation to the whole world. All are called to share their gifts and talents in the family, the workplace, the civic community and the parish or diocese. Not surprisingly, it is often the laity who are best able to provide decisive Christian witness in these settings, and within the professional, political, and cultural life of society.

The Church has a mission to the world. The people of God are sent out as "the light of the world" and "the salt of the earth" (Mt 5:13-14). The relationship between the Church and the world is perhaps best described as an interplay, an interpenetration, insofar as the Church, along with the whole of humanity, shares the world's lot even while it serves as a leaven within human society, renewing it in Christ, and collaborating with Christ to transform it in conformity with the Kingdom of God.

The whole Church's mission, then, is ultimately the transformation of the world into the Kingdom of God. Jesus proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:9-15; Luke 3:21-4:14), identifying the transformation foretold by Isaiah 61:1-2: good news brought to the poor, captives released, the blind given sight, and the oppressed freed. The Kingdom was revealed as present in the person and actions of Jesus (Luke 4:21). The mission of the church participates in the mission of Jesus, manifested at his baptism and assumed by Christians in their own baptisms, in which they put on Christ and participate in his death and resurrection. Precisely as members of the body of Christ, all the faithful share in the anointing of the Spirit, are formed into a holy and royal priesthood, offer "spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ" (I Pet 2.4-5), and have a part to play in the mission of the body as a whole.

The church then, is a sign for the nations, and so has a mission that encompasses both the historical reality of human community now and its ultimate union with God. So, it is oriented eschatologically, signifying the ultimate union of all, when recapitulated in Christ at the end time. The Church in its most basic identity, for both the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, is thus called a sacramental reality, in which God

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<sup>4</sup> "Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority" 7 (Ravenna, October 13, 2007.)

works actively in and through human beings and actions in the midst of a concrete, historical community.<sup>5</sup>

*Implications for Synodality*

The identity of the whole Church, as participating in the threefold office of Christ and as sharing in the inerrancy of the whole people of God in matters of faith,<sup>6</sup> bears implications for its conciliarity and synodality. As our own "Agreed Statement on Conciliarity and Primacy in the Church" states, "The ordering of charisms within the community is the basis of the Church's structure, and the reason why permanent offices of leadership have been divinely established with the Eucharistic body, since apostolic times, as a service of love and a safeguard of unity in faith and life."<sup>7</sup> While the term "conciliarity" primarily refers to a gathering of bishops exercising their pastoral office, the Ravenna document affirms the possibility of "taking the term in a more comprehensive sense to refer to all the members of the Church (cf. the Russian term *sobornost*)" and "as signifying that each member of the Body of Christ, by virtue of baptism, has his or her place and proper responsibility in eucharistic *koinonia*."<sup>8</sup> The Ravenna document identifies the ultimate foundation of conciliarity to be the Trinitarian mystery, wherein the three persons of the Trinity are "enumerated' without the designation as 'second' or 'third' person implying any diminution or subordination."<sup>9</sup> Similarly, an ordering among local churches does not imply any inequality between them. While the Eucharist has rightfully been identified as manifesting this order and *koinonia* within the ecclesial community, we wish to assert here that a baptismal ecclesiology of the people of God, endowed with various charisms, likewise provides a theological foundation for the practice of conciliarity.

Conciliarity is manifested in the local church gathered around its bishop, in regional groupings of neighboring local churches, and in the entire or whole Church (*ecclesia universa*).<sup>10</sup> In each case, the Church is constituted by Christian believers and their assemblies; these people, regardless of their office or state in life, gather as *synodoi*, "travel companions". Synodality and conciliarity are aspects of the life of the entire church, before they are activities of the church's hierarchy. Consequently, synodality and conciliarity imply in some sense the participation of all the people of God.

The Ravenna statement identifies conciliarity primarily with the local Church, described as "synodal" or "conciliar" in structure (§ 20), but states that the composition of a regional synod is always essentially episcopal: even when it includes other members of the Church, only bishops have a deliberative voice (§ 25). Despite the episcopal character of regional synods, their conciliarity or synodality involves the entire Churches of the assembled bishops in two respects. First, the bishops "are bearers of, and give voice to, the faith" of the Churches (§ 38). Second, the decisions of a

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<sup>5</sup> The sacramental nature of the church is affirmed in the Ravenna statement, "Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority," Ravenna, 13 October 2007.

<sup>6</sup> *Lumen gentium*, 12; on the instinct of a baptized Christian to discern the truth in Scripture, see Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1.9.4, PG 7.545.

<sup>7</sup> Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation, "An Agreed Statement on Conciliarity and Primacy in the Church," October 1989, § 5. <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-andteachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/ecumenical/orthodox/conciliarity-and-primacy.cfm>.

<sup>8</sup> Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue Between the Roman Catholic church and the Orthodox Church, "Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority (Ravenna, 12 October 2007), § 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, §§ 10, 17.

council are received through a process "according to which the people of God as a whole—by means of reflection, discernment, discussion and prayer— acknowledge in these decisions the one apostolic faith of the local Churches...of which the bishops are the teachers (*didaskaloi*) and the guardians" (§ 37). The process of reception of the decisions of the bishops into the life of the Churches, especially their liturgical life, is a process which involves the entire Church.

Historical precedent for such a corporate understanding exists in the early Church. The Acts of the Apostles reports that "the apostles and elders met together to consider the matter" of the relation of Christian conversion to taking on the full obligations of Jewish law (Acts 15:6), and mentions the presence of an assembly (15:12). Local synods gathered during Cyprian's time in the Church of Carthage "with a multitude of faithful present" expressing their opinions.<sup>11</sup> At the First Ecumenical Council, laity eagerly defended the party of their choice,<sup>12</sup> although in later councils they were normally just represented by the Byzantine emperors and imperial officials.

A synodical and conciliar church is characterized by mutual listening, mutual dialogue, mutual witnessing, and mutual respect. Ecclesial events such as synods and councils become focal points for these activities, at the same time as they exhibit the very character of the church. As St. John Chrysostom says, "Church and Synod are synonymous."<sup>13</sup> The ideal, as articulated in the Ravenna statement, is that in a truly synodal order there should be "neither passivity nor substitution of functions, neither negligence nor domination of anyone by another."<sup>14</sup> The instinct of faith (*sensus fidei*), a gift of the Holy Spirit given to all the baptized, unites all the members of the church, each in his or her own proper role, in discerning the presence of the Spirit, the mind of Christ, and the will of the Father.

*IV. Challenges for the People of God:  
Clericalism, Individualism, and Ecumenical Reunion*

Expanded participation in the life of both of our Churches by lay people still represents, to some extent, a change in normal practice for the contemporary church. Not surprisingly, alongside the multiple benefits an active laity provides, there continue to be tensions, in some instances even a certain polarity between clergy and laity.

What this tension between trajectories of service has obscured is the fact that the whole church has an unchanged mission to serve the world. When the modern concept of a recognized lay ministry in the church began to be explored and developed, several decades ago, it seemed to lie somewhat outside the time-honored idea of how the church and its offices should function. Even today, the relationship between lay ministers and ordained clergy can be strained, as both navigate their respective roles and identities.

"Clericalism," surely, is a problem for both our churches. Ordination to clerical status is viewed by some as an "elevation," rather than as a gift of new responsibilities within the body for the well-being and ordering of the whole. Often, too, ministries in the church are understood by promoters of lay leadership as purely functional, a "job" for which one acquires professional qualifications, rather than as a lasting gift of the Spirit for the sake of the community. However, a dialogical relationship between the ordained and the non-ordained can enhance an appreciation of the underlying equality of the baptized faithful before God across the various charisms, ministries, and roles

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<sup>11</sup> Cyprian, Epistle, 13:31; PL 4.267, 3093, 320, cited by John N. Karmiris, *The Status and Ministry of the Laity in the Orthodox Church* (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross, 1994), 14.

<sup>12</sup> Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, 1.8; PG 67.64, referenced by Karmiris, *Status and Ministry of the Laity*, 14.

<sup>13</sup> Saint John Chrysostom, *Explicatio in Ps.* 149.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, § 21.

within the body. As the Lord said: "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." (Mk 9:35) Service to the other, in action and in spirit, is the hallmark of Christian leadership.

So, clericalism, when pushed to its extreme, brings about an understanding of the church as constituted in a privileged way by the ordained, and a reduction, an objectification, of the laity to second-class status can follow. This can lead, among today's young people, either to a world-hostile traditionalism or to the phenomenon of "voting with your feet." Feeling alienated from the contemporary life of the church, more and more faithful people, especially the young, have come either to seek authentic discipleship by returning to the forms of worship and structure they imagine were shared by their grandparents, or else to seek to privatize their inner lives in a way inspired by contemporary secular individualism, claiming to be "spiritual, but not religious." For both groups, contemporary ministerial professionals and their institution — the contemporary Church — can seem to be unnecessary, even a hindrance to real faith. A mutually respectful relationship between clergy and laity needs to be strengthened in both of our Churches, by our finding an expanded, active role for all the faithful in the conciliar and synodical structures of the church — at the parish, diocesan, and universal levels — so that a multiplicity of voices can be effectively heard. The ideal, as articulated in the Ravenna statement, is that there be "neither passivity nor substitution of functions, neither negligence nor domination of anyone by another." It will require a restored emphasis on the Church as constituting, in the united activity of all of its members, the full Body of Christ, who is its head. It will also require a spiritual renewal in all of us: new humility, a new desire to be of genuine service, a new pursuit of Christlike holiness. Yet the implications of such a renewal for growth towards ecumenical unity between the Orthodox and Catholic families of Churches seem also to be profound. All of us, after all, begin our Christian lives as lay persons. Through baptism, we are all incorporated into the Body of Christ, and therefore are in a relationship of communion with one another in Christ. However, this communion, though genuine, remains "imperfect;"<sup>15</sup> as a result, the desires of many Orthodox and Catholic Christians for a more intimate relationship of faith and religious practice, especially through Eucharistic sharing, remains largely unfulfilled. And while it is clearly the role of both leaders and other members of our Churches to act as "stewards of the mysteries of God" (I Cor 4.1; cf. Tit 1.7), one must also ask whether a deep sense of responsibility for the heritage we guard can also sometimes pose an obstacle to reunion.

#### *V. Conclusion*

A baptismally-based ecclesiology grounds the principle and practice of conciliarity. The Ravenna statement describes conciliarity as "signifying that each member of the Body of Christ by virtue of baptism, has his or her place and proper responsibility in eucharistic koinonia (communio in Latin)." <sup>16</sup> As a result of baptism and chrismation, the whole church makes up the royal priesthood, shares in the prophetic mission of Christ in the world, works to realize the justice and peace of his Kingdom in the wider human community, and yearns to express this vocation in the structured unity of Eucharistic celebration. An emphasis on the whole people of God, as the foundation for how we conceive of the Church, suggests that any attempt to divide the body of Christ leads ultimately to expressing the Christian faith, too, in contrasting and negative categories. Our focus in thinking about the Church, and in

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<sup>15</sup> See Vatican II, *Unitatis Redintegratio* 3.

<sup>16</sup> Ravenna document 5 (2007).

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celebrating its reality, must be on the unity of the people of God that is grounded in our common baptism, and on a corresponding understanding of the diversity of roles and charisms within that radically unified people.

From this renewed point of departure, we hope further insight may emerge regarding renewed conciliar and synodical structures and processes, which might pave the way towards deepening the unity that already exists between our two Christian families through baptism and chrismation. "There is one body and one Spirit," St. Paul reminds us, "just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call: one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift." (Eph 4.4-7) Enlivened by those particular gifts of God, may we continue to seek ways towards the unity in Christ of which Paul speaks.

The graphic features a dark blue background with white and yellow text. At the top left is the International Hellenic University logo. The top center text reads "MASTER IN ORTHODOX ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY". The top right text indicates the event date and time: "FRIDAY 09-APRIL 5:00pm-7:00pm". The central image shows a building with the university's name and logo. Overlaid on this image is the title of the event: "THE VOCATION AND MISSION OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD: A CHOSEN RACE, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION". Below the title, the speaker is identified as "REV. PROF. STYLIANOS MUKSURIS". A note states "Rev. Prof. Augustinos Bairaktaris will respond and monitor the discussion". In the bottom left corner, there is a YouTube logo and the text "Open to the public". The bottom center contains the text "CEMES YOUTUBE CHANNEL" and the URL "https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCD\_5mcv3Z82pYW8LFukZEw".

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## *Chapter 18*

### **CREATION AS ESCHATOLOGY Reconsidering the First Story of Creation A Narrative Reading of Genesis 1:1-2:4**

*Prof. Nicolas Abou Mrad*

#### *1. Introduction*

The Book of Genesis lays the foundations for reading and understanding the scriptural story which unfolds in the following books starting with Exodus. Its first chapters (1-11) contain the so-called primeval stories, related to the very beginnings of creation and the life of human beings, which reflect what the authors will elaborate upon later in the Bible. The creation of man in Gen 1-2 as well as his fall in Gen 3 are the theological premises for the whole story of salvation from the exodus of Abram from his home country until the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the New Testament writings. In chs. 4-11 we find the first articulations of the story of salvation paralleled with that of the rebellion of humans against their creator with their arrogance and evil deeds. This evil will be defeated by God through the promise of a new seed in Abraham and the culmination of this promise in Joseph in Egypt.

In the following sections, I shall endeavor to expound the main ideas in the first chapter of the book of Genesis, showing how it forms the basis for reading the Scriptures and the premises for a better understanding of the Biblical story. Moreover, the following narrative reading of Gen 1 will show that this chapter is not only the beginning of the story in the chronological sense of the word, but also its consummation and “ultimate end”, which is corroborated in the fact that Revelation, the last book of the Bible, refers to the story of creation, in chs. 21-22 as the culmination of God’s salvific work in Jesus Christ.

#### *2. General Overview*

The very first page of the Bible depicts an orderly world where things come into existence and fall into pattern in harmony, on the rhythm of the word of God. In this narrative, negation is non-existent, it has no place; only the word of God prevails. God is omnipresent in this text from beginning to end. He resides in all its minute details; however, He remains invisible, concealed and does not declare Himself. He does not utter a single word about Himself or about His own existence, yet the words He utters bring everything into existence. He withdraws from a scene which He himself has set in its entirety while remaining the One who controls and governs everything. Through an orderly, well-organized and well-calibrated text, the author aims to echo the order and balance characterizing this world fashioned through divine intention, highlighting God’s harmonious work. Thus, both, the world and the text are in perfect harmony, as to their structure.

A careful reading of Gen 1 reveals its overall structure, as well as the parallelism between the days of creation. Accordingly, on the first, second and third days, God’s

work revolves around separation. He separates light from darkness; He then, in terms of cosmic architecture, separates the firmament into an upper portion (the sky) and a lower portion (the waters). The latter is then divided horizontally into dry ground and waters.

In this paragraph, God transforms the primeval chaotic elements (water and darkness) into elements that would constitute a good/orderly world: On the first day, God separates darkness thus causing light and the day to exist. On the second day, He divides the abyss. On the third day, He creates land out of “chaos and void” and separates it from the waters. In the aftermath of this series of divisions, which culminates in the creation of the world and its elements: The skies, the seas, the dry land and the succession of days, God creates life on the land and brings forth grass and the trees. This life is brought forth on the third day and constitutes the link between the first three days and the last three, where God creates the celestial bodies (stars, planets, sun and moon) the creatures of the sky (the fowl of the air), those of the sea (fish) and of the earth (fowls, beast and man).

Through a meticulous examination of the link between the first three days and the last three days, one concludes that they are parallel. 1) The creation of the two great celestial bodies on the fourth day is linked to the creation of light on the first day. 2) On the fifth day, God creates the creatures of the sea and the sky which, in turn, have been fashioned on the second day when He divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above it. On the sixth day, God creates the beasts of the earth and man; He blesses them and asks them to be fruitful and multiply on the land that He has created on the third day. Moreover, He provides them with grass and fruit as the food He has created on that same day.

This parallelism is a sheer echo of an orderly world that God has created. Everything falls into harmony as it becomes imbued with life, prone to life. Then comes the seventh day when God rests. This reflects how a “week” comes to exist as a time unit. However, surprisingly enough, the text does not attribute the creation of the “week” to the movement of the celestial bodies, rather to the work of God alluding thus to the fact that time is not a mere succession of the days, nor is it related to the movement of planets and stars; it is rather a divine scheme, a life and a universe that function in an orderly manner through which all things become good.

This orderly design is also reflected in the structure of the text itself. One cannot but notice that the first paragraph, which refers to days one through four, is made up of 207 words, in the original Hebrew, and of three parallel passages each consisting of 69 words. Parallely, the second paragraph (days five and six) are made up of 206 words. One also notes a repetitive pattern built on numbers 5 and 7. Based on number 5: the words “God Said”, “the sky” “made/created” and the derivations of the stem of the words “plant” and “according to their kinds” recur 10 times. The words “calls” “separates”, “light” and their derivatives are mentioned five times. On the other hand, and with reference to number 7, we encounter the verb “created”, the sentence “and God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good”, “crept” and the derivations of the stem “flew” seven times, the word “day” fourteen times, “earth” 21 times and “God” 35 times.

It is noticeable that the presence of God is so intense, and out of this very presence stems the order of occurrence of the words. Through such linguistic patterns, a highly organized and good world emerges. It is thus that God has created heavens and earth.

### 3. *The Creation of Heaven and Earth*

#### A. *“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen 1:1)*

This is the title of the Book of Genesis; it is also the title of the whole Bible. Nonetheless, the plainness of such a title does not undermine its content. Even if it sounds simple and plain, this title still foreshadows a profound content. Every single word figuring in the title is of utmost significance to later narratives. Therefore, the title is worth the scrutiny:

1) First and foremost, as far as form is concerned, according to the Hebrew original text, the sentence “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” contains 7 words. Numbers 7 and 10 being of paramount importance in the making of the entire chapter. It is also worth noting that the title is made up of 28 letters (4 times 7) and that the seventh letter is none other than the first letter of verb “to create” (*bara*). The tenth letter is the first letter of God’s title (*Elohim*), and the fourteenth letter is the last letter of the same. The second part of the verse, “Heaven and earth”, is also made up of 14 letters based on numbers 7 and 10, yet in some random order. The order of the first part of the verse expresses the perfection of the divine act of creation; the lack of order in the second part emphasizes the fact that both heaven and earth reflect this perfection and are the outcome of it.

2) The expression “in the beginning” is highly significant. It does not necessarily refer to a definite time nor to an era when time did not exist. The counting of days starts at a later stage in v. 5. Thus, “in the beginning” refers to the fact that God rules over all things. To Him belongs “the beginning”, and His work is constant and stable. Similarly, this expression indicates the pre-eminence of God’s action over any other, notably man’s action, not in terms of chronology, rather in terms of power and authority.

In order to better understand this issue, it is useful to investigate two later usages of the same expression in Gen 10:10. The verse states that Babel, the kingdom of the mighty Nimrod, marks the “beginning” of his vast kingdom; therefore, it foreshadows his power and authority extending to all the cities. Gen 11:4 states that the builders wanted the city’s tower top to boast a “beginning” spiraling up into the sky. Instead, the Biblical accounts speak of its terrible fall on the hands of God who scatters its bricks and confuses the language of its people. Therefore, Babel never neared completion; its tall tower crumbled, and nothing remained to commemorate the one who commissioned it except for his ill-famed name: Nemrod, which literally means “we rebel”.

Therefore, the expression “in the beginning” is not preceded by any other expression at all. However, it precedes the two aforementioned “beginnings” referred to and calls attention to the true beginning of everything. Hence, human history in its totality and whatever achievements humans were able to accomplish comparably seem vain and fake. This fake “beginning” induced by people eventually collapses so that God’s “beginning” would last.

Another meaning of the expression “in the beginning” is the following: The beginning of Nimrod’s Kingdom (Gen 10) starts with his reign over a limited number of cities (Arak, Akkad, and Kilna) whereas the beginning of God’s work encompasses the whole heavens and earth thus designating his reign over all things. It is He who has created the land upon which Nimrod has built Babel. Hence, the author intends to trivialize that which Nimrod has achieved since what consists “the beginning of all things” for him, amounts to just one single city he managed to build on God’s vast land.

3) According to its Hebrew etymology, verb “to create” means heal, cure, or fix. In v.2 it is stated that earth was “*tohu wa-bohu*” which is a Hebrew expression that describes the primeval chaotic condition of earth (without form, and void). Conceivably, it is the actions of rebels such as Nimrod and those he incarnated throughout history that led to that chaos. God has redeemed earth out of chaos, out from a “beginning” the tyrants of earth have fashioned. He fixed it and restored its initial beauty.

4) In Hebrew, the expression used to refer to God is “*Elohim*”. It is in the plural form (the plural of *Ēl*), yet it sounds quite an odd form. It is usually used in plural with a plural connotation (the deities, the people’s deities). The author of Genesis, however, restricts this specific usage of the word to refer to the one God. It is worth noting that, in ancient Eastern civilizations as well as other civilizations, the plural forms of the deities’ names are typically used to refer to the temples dedicated to these deities, their shrines, and their statues outspread within the region where they were worshipped. (*Baalim*, thus, refers to the temples of *Baal* and his shrines, similarly, *Ashtarte* to *Ashtar*’s , *Ashiroth* to *Ashirah*’s . In the same vein, The plural of *Athena* – *Athenai* - refers to the temples of the goddess *Athena*).

Accordingly, using a plural form most often to refer to God in the Bible denotes the outspread of His reign and presence, not in a specific region or kingdom, but rather in ‘heavens and earth’ which means in the entire universe. It also suggests His presence in the Bible, shedding the light on the fact that He is the one who controls the plot of His narratives. God’s name remains the one expression that is the most recurrent in Gen 1.

This is a universe that God would create, organize, and make the dwelling place of stars, planets, animals, and humans to whom He will teach the very meaning of His reign which would unequivocally be different than that of Nimrod.

B. “*The Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the deep*” (Gen 1:2)

After the title, and as he describes the condition of earth, the author speaks of “*tohu wa-bohu*”, which is an expression that designates chaos and destruction. It alludes to an afflicted, desolate city or to an abandoned, crumbling and uninhabitable house or a wasteland. The author does not explicitly explain the reason behind such an odd creation. However, he alludes to darkness which most often is associated to chaos (Is 45:19; Jer 4:24). After darkness, he mentions the deep (the abyss), which usually refers to the moving waters of deep seas where nothing can exist (Jon 2:6; Ps 8: 42) and where death abides.

However, the author does not stop here; he inserts a third and the most important element: The spirit (wind) of God was hovering over the surface of the deep. The spirit is intended to refer to the blowing wind which makes the waters move, that causes a

disturbance in the waters. This sentence has two potential explanations: First, it could be considered as a thematic continuation of the previous verse that refers to darkness and the waters by considering the spirit (wind) of God moving on the face of the water as a persisting storm that adds more chaos to the havoc caused by darkness and the water; thus, chaos becomes even more violent.

Second, this talk might also be interpreted as referring to the spirit as a divine power which sees and knows that darkness and the waters are at the peak of their power. The spirit eagerly awaits the adequate moment to attack and vanquish these two forces. This waiting period seems to be an intentional period of grace where these two primeval elements are allowed to operate. The same spirit that allows chaos to operate, and even to exacerbate its power, is ironically the one that prevents it from growing. This is what shall happen eventually because God is present as a stormy wind in the darkness and over the waters. As such, He speaks, He orders the light to be and light came to be.

The author then moves from talking about the wind or the storm to talking about the word. Both are embodiments of God's power. One represents His powerful aspect - that which is more powerful than any other existing power - another is His creative salvific power. At some point, these two aspects eventually meet; they merge in order to move from the state of waiting, as a hovering wind over a scattered existence, to the state of speaking and causing everything to exist. the word of God is none other but His powerful breath that has abandoned its might in order to become a creative power. God's word faithfully does what it says; it is also light; therefore, there was light. It is a light that does not need a sun nor stars to exist, to shine forth. This is what John comes to understand when he describes it as "the light of all humankind" (John 1:4).

Accordingly, it can be assumed that that which would deliver earth from chaos is that same power that has allowed this chaos to exist, and here it is now transforming into a saving power. Typically, darkness and the waters are two opposing, antagonistic forces; however, God utterly defeats and vanquishes them in just one word but does not annihilate them. Just as He has transformed His own presence from a storm on a dark night into a bright light, He transforms darkness from an entity that ravishes and engrosses time into an element functioning within an orderly time. At a final stage, God transforms the watery abyss into seas which He would endow with life. Subsequently, from the sea, land would emerge, and He would transform into a life bearing abode.

Thus, the wasteland would become a land that fosters life; the watery abyss would turn into vast seas, and darkness would transform into nights in succeeding days. The author hereby speaks of a salvific pattern that he would often recur to it throughout the book in order to highlight extremely important meanings.

*C. "And there was evening and there was morning, the third day" (Gen 1:13)*

The spirit of God moving on the face of the waters shifts from being a presence that controls the two forces of darkness and that of waters into a divine presence that speaks forth: "let there be light". With this expression, God dissipates the tyranny of darkness over earth. He separates light from darkness and tames it before it becomes fully submissive to Him and to His word similarly to what light has previously done before it could exist. He then names them because He has mastership over them and sets boundaries for each. Darkness that was a leading factor to the desolation of earth

becomes night as well as a vital need for life on earth to prosper (Ps 104:19-23). This is what God has done on the first day.

On the second day, He addresses the second destructive force, the enemy of life. He divides it and transforms it into yet another source of life.

After defeating the forces of death on the first and the second day, dry ground emerges. God then transforms it into a lush garden where grass and all sorts of trees grow; He also provides it with a reason to thrive; life blooms on the third day; thus, the third day comes to be the day that marks the onset of life after death has long prevailed.

Nowhere in the Genesis does the author mention the fact that God has created life on the first day; this implies that life cannot come forth unless the reason that hinders its existence has been demised. To better understand the author's intention, it would be useful to refer to a text in Jeremiah where the identity of this force that has caused earth to be "desolate and void" is revealed. In fact, Jer 4:23-31 is the only text where the compound expression "*tohu wa bohu*" figures second to Gen 1:2. The allusions to Gen 1 that Jer 4:23-31 features are by no means coincidental. Jer 4:23-31 reflects the story of creation; thus light sets off (v.23), man, fowl, and beast do not exist (v.25), and earth turns from lush greenery into a desert (v.6), the good land turns into a wasteland (v.27) and God who has brought light forth, in Gen 1:3, deems, in the text of Jeremiah, that earth should lament and the skies darken (v.28). This is a return towards the state of "desolation and chaos" caused by God's word (v.28). In the same manner, the opposite state - from desolation to life - has been also fulfilled as per His word in Gen 1. But why does God reverse His creation scheme? Why does He order that earth turns from an abundant orchard to a destitute wasteland after He has previously turned it from a wasteland to a fertile field? The answer to this resides in the text of the prophet Jeremiah who points out that this was simply due to the fact that the inhabitants of the earth were unjust oppressors and murderers; they were thieves, killers and liars. They have neglected the word of their God and have become vain and arrogant (Jer 7:1-16).

Hence, according to Jeremiah, the people whom God has chosen to inhabit earth and celebrate life, have instead worshiped death. They have killed and oppressed others; they have invented war, and in doing so, they have annihilated each other acting as if they were the real masters of the earth. They have totally forgotten that the true master is the One who has given them earth and its riches. In front of this scene full of murderers, Jeremiah sets a painful cry, "my bowels, my bowels! I am pained at my very heart! My heart pounds within me" (4:19). God also shares Jeremiah's pain so that the reader is no more able to identify whether it is the prophet who is speaking or God Himself. In front of the scene of the murderers, both the prophet and God set a cry "How long must I see the signal flag and hear the sound of the trumpet?" (4:21). The speakers want to know how long they should behold the signs of war. Towards the end of this text, God laments his hapless people who chose to reject His word and complains about their slow wittedness and their fake and vain wisdom which they have acquired while doing ill deeds instead of righteous ones (4:22).

This is the sheer darkness, the life-annihilating force which would wreak havoc on earth. It is the darkness residing in the hearts of humans and their minds. They are oblivious of the fact that their Creator has fashioned life out of death; instead they went

on turning life into death; therefore, death they were given. What other than death could cause destruction, chaos and desolation?

Accordingly, what would God want to dissipate if not darkness embodied in human ignorance, not understanding His word, vain wisdom, wicked thoughts and the oppression humans commit? Isn't this the very reason why His spirit / wind moving on the face of the waters has become the very source of light, a light which does not emanate from a sun nor stars, nor from people's trivial thoughts, but rather, solely, from God's own mouth? Wouldn't the watery abyss be the embodiment of people's wars, their lust for oppression, their hands covered with blood, their arrogance and their mutilation of justice and truth? Don't all these reasons suffice to turn earth into a wasteland? Aren't we currently witnessing this sad truth every single day the way our predecessors did and the way our children will eventually do?

The way I see it, these are the two actual enemies that God would defeat: The dark ignorance of people and the killing in the form of war ravaging like a torrential flood. There would not be a real life unless these vicious enemies fall and are fully annihilated. The first one would be defeated through the knowledge that the Scriptures offer and, subsequently, through living this knowledge justly, rightfully and honestly. Then, on the third day comes life, one that is eternal and incomparably beautiful. In this respect, Hosea spoke thus "come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he has torn, and he will heal us. He has smitten and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight. Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord. His going forth is prepared as the morning. And he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth" (Hos 6:1-3). God resurrects us after two days, precisely on the third day, after He has annihilated our ignorance and our sins. It is then that we shall see the light emanating from Him like the rising of the dawn. He would visit us like rain falls on a desert to bless it with life again. Such is true creation.

When on the cross, Jesus refers to ignorance and killing by saying, "Forgive them, father, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). He dies and is buried because of ignorance and killing, those two sins. However, God raised him on the third day; through His resurrection, He defeated ignorance and killing, the two reasons behind death, and gave us eternal life. It is to this fact that Paul the apostle refers to as he states that "he was buried and that he rose on the third day according to scriptures" (1 Cor 15:4). The books which Paul refers to are none other but the Scriptures which he knows very well and is quite familiar with: through the scripture Paul knows that the third day is the day on which God gives life after he has defeated the agents which cause death. After experiencing mortality, life in Christ now belongs to us. It is a word given to us so that the greatest enemy, real death which is embodied in "ignorance and its resulting deeds", is defeated.

*D. And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good*

No Biblical scholar has ever tackled the story of creation without being astounded by God's might. With a mere word, He organizes the world and dwells it with living creatures. There is no hint to battles, tensions or conflicts in this text as in other Biblical

texts. The power that God exerts in this narrative, manifests itself in two essential forms:

First, His power shows in the division act He performs on the first four days; in fact, His order for time and space to exist emanates from great authority and consistency. However, He exerts this power without really having to destroy anything else, not even the two loathsome elements constituting the great void. I have previously mentioned that God generates a great power from His spirit / wind; however, He gently contains it, attenuates it and alters it into a word that oozes a life-giving potential. In the same manner, He does not abolish darkness; He rather assigns it with a complementary role, one that it would fulfill against light, thus the alternation of light and darkness / night and day. Hence, God's work and the universe He fashions acquire a certain rhythm. Water does not disappear; He rather contains it in seas; He integrates it into an abode He deems "good". It is worth mentioning that God does not describe the sky as "good"; He only favors the seas, whose waters were previously destructive, with such an attribute. Moreover, God does not abolish the elements of the Great Void which represent an anti-life force. Instead, He sets limits to its expansion, thus, causing these elements to fall into place within this great harmony that fills up the world. Thus, we behold God's power manifesting itself through an authority that the Creator exerts without generating neither destruction nor violence.

The second aspect of God's power is manifested in the creation of vegetation and the living creatures as a gift of life which turns out to be abundant, full of motion, diverse, in multitude and one which carries in its womb the very seeds of its persistence. God creates a life that generates another. He creates one with utmost generosity. Conversely to darkness which He contains within time and the water within the seas, He unleashes life and sets it free and does not confine it to any limits whatsoever. He unbinds it so it sets out towards infinity. God then passes His life-giving power on and delegates the living creatures He has created to carry out the task. He commissions the plants, the birds of the skies and the animals to take care of their likes; in the same manner; He commands the sun, moon and stars to handle Time. He also empowers man to rule over the land and what creeps upon it, and then He totally withdraws from the picture. He rests. Now everything is commissioned to take care of everything else; they are all commissioned to tame the power given to them in order to serve the great order.

Following God's example, every single element and creature is thus invited to set life forth to the widest extent possible, towards the end of the earth and the skies. God gives dominion to the sun, moon and stars over the days, years and times by setting His work on the first three days as an example. Their dominion is but a continuation of His work in order to contain all that which consists a destructive threat to life. In the end, He gives man dominion over earth and its creatures, thus, making all the days of creation an example for man to follow.

In the end comes the seventh day on which He pauses and sees that everything He has done was good. He leaves His work and His word behind and walks away similarly to a painter who has just finished his most precious painting. He moves away from it, rests for a while and calmly contemplates its beauty and magnificent colors while

granting it total freedom to cast its beauty and stir the heart of its beholders in the same manner it has done with its own creator.

Indeed, God does act like a painter or a sculptor. In a chorus-like scheme, the same verse, “and Gad saw it was good” recurs seven times in the text. In fact, using a chorus or repetition are but literary devices the poet uses in an attempt to rest for a while and savor the beauty of what he has created. At some point, it seems that the text ends up proclaiming an entity of its own beyond that of its creator. God acts as if He has accomplished something; He steps back for a while to contemplate the full extent of His beautiful and “good” masterpiece. He gazes upon His work, the things and the creatures which have now acquired a full existence. He then says, “It is good.” This sentence reveals the content of God’s heart and mind. It is also an invitation to the reader to perceive the universe through the eye of its creator: A good universe indeed.

This divine withdrawal scene reaches its fullness on the seventh day which stands for the same number of times God retreats to survey His work. This time, the seventh time, the author states, “and God saw that everything he created was good”. This pause actually deserves a full day; hence, the seventh day is the last day of creation. On this very day, God ceases to give orders. He does not create, nor does He transform anything. Nevertheless, it is on the Sabbath that creation reaches its perfection.

Parallely, in the Hebrew version, verbs “to end / to finish” and “to rest” are synonymous. Without this divine withdrawal, creation would not have been completed. Through His divine rest on the seventh day, God completes His last act of division. On one hand, He stops working, puts an end to exerting His divine power and, thus, overpowers His own power and controls it. On the other hand, He seems as if He refuses to be the one doing everything. Therefore, He delegates His power to representatives who would become life-givers in their own right; He gives the stars power over time and gives man power over earth and its creatures. However, there was still some unfinished work. Despite the fact that God has finished His work and rested, there remains a lot to be accomplished. Life would still need to move forth and those who were chosen to be God’s delegates still need to exert His power the way He Himself has done so far.

Thus, after seeing that everything was good, the Sabbath becomes an expression of God’s kindness. Actually, It is the law of kindness which would rightfully lead to the rectification of the image of an almighty god. It is an image that the reader’s delusional mind has unduly distorted. That the reader’s mind has been unduly mutilated with a distorted perception. This is what happens when the human mind fashions a god in his own image whereas, in reality, God resembles no one but Himself. He is a god who translates his absolute power into kindness and tenderness that overwhelm the whole universe. Nevertheless, His power is not the meek power of the weak rather a powerful kindness, one that is more powerful than any other power. “Your strength is the very origin of doing the right thing. Because you rule over all, you spare all. You show your strength to those who doubt how powerful you really are. You condemn the pride of those who should know better than to doubt you. Still, though you rule absolutely, you exercise careful judgment. You govern us with amazing restraint. If you wanted to, you could do anything you wished” (Wisdom 12:16-18).

This is how God has revealed Himself and His work “in the beginning”; from Him everything has thus originated. In the end, one last question remains: Would the stars ever be up to that power delegated to them? Would Man be up to the assigned task? Would Man be up to God’s expectations? This, we shall see.

*E. Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness" (1:26)*

It is with this opening statement that the narrative about man’s creation starts. The author uses a different style than the one he uses in the previous sections of the book. One aspect of this difference lies in the absence of the phrase “and God saw that it was good” which often recur in those sections. It figures immediately after a series of images notably depicting the creation of light, the emergence of dry land from the seas, the creation of vegetation, the sun, the moon and the stars, the fish of the sea and finally the beasts of the earth. Another prominent difference consists of using the third person plural in “let us make” and “in our image”.

Several fathers of the church have interpreted this usage as a means to refer to the Trinity. Some contemporary commentators consider that it is rather used as a plural of majesty, while others have relied on the history of religions to interpret it as an echo to the presence of a divine council. On the other hand, some scholars consider it to be an invitation addressed to every man, including the reader, in order to realize that he or she is God’s creation and that he or she should cooperate with Him and contribute to His work of creation so that it achieves perfection. The way I see it, this sentence presents multiple meanings, which makes it subject to a wide range of interpretations that would help reveal the deeper aspects of this text. However, before presenting my own interpretation pertaining to the usage of the plural form in this text, I would like to comment on some of the content of this paragraph (Gen 1:26-28)

It is worth noting that what the author says in this paragraph about God creating man “in His image and likeness” (Gen 1:26-27) is closely linked to the concept of man’s dominion over “the fish of the sea, and the birds of the air, and over all the wild animals of the earth” in two parallel locations in the text. Despite the fact that v.26, on one hand, and v.27-28, on the other, are parallel, one cannot but notice the different linguistic forms that the author uses when expressing God’s order to create man (v.26) and the one he uses when he talks about carrying out this order (v.27). Hence, the author tends to restrict the use of the word “likeness” in the second instance and resorts to the repetition of the word “image” twice through a tacit literary scheme while keeping the expression “the image of God” at the center of the passage. This is an inclusion that starts and ends with the creation of man which puts a greater emphasis on the center of the composition to mean that man was created to be “in the image” of God His creator.

The parallelism between v.26 and v.27-28 suggests a strong link between being created in the image of God and the dominion over animals. Based on the form of these verses and what would follow next in the story of Creation, it can be inferred that the concept of man being in the image of God or His shadow on earth is only fulfilled through “the subjugation of man to earth” and his “dominion over the animals”.

While discussing man and how he was created, the author uses a specific vocabulary pertaining to royalty notably the word “image” (in Hebrew referring to the king or the god’s statue) and the word “likeness” (the Hebrew word is also used to refer

to the king or the god's statue). He also uses the verbs "to subjugate" and "to rule over" which mean in Hebrew to trample, to step on, to kill. These two verbs are repeatedly used in the Bible to designate the dominion of kings and their reign over their people or the peoples of other nations.

In these verses, bringing together two verbs, which refer to the concept of power and its use in war, and two expressions, which refer to the relationship between the god and the king, is intentional and has important implications pertaining to the understanding of how the narrative will evolve in the Book. As far as the meaning is concerned, bringing those four expressions together serves the author's purpose. The author suggests that whenever a king gets to be described as one who is in the image of god, his shadow or his statue, then this status has only been achieved through war and the use of power that a king usually resorts to in order to prevail over a people or many. Therefore, the author does not only use the words "image" and "likeness", which usually refer to the king, he sets a link between their usages and the achievement of a royal status by subjugating and dominating others through war and the use of power. However, here, the author provides his own meaning to the words, "dominion" and "subjugation", in relation to the words, "image" and "likeness".

This new meaning is different from the standard meaning used in contexts relating to royalty. In order to better understand the new insinuations, one should keep on reading V. 29-30 where God orders that both man and beast shall eat grass and that man shall not kill animals in order to eat nor shall animals eat man. Therefore, the dominion of man over the animals and subjugating them should be carried out without resorting to violence or killing. My own interpretation to this is that, through altering the meaning of these expressions and bestowing new ones upon them, the author seems to advocate his stance against royalty not only from a historical perspective but, more specifically, because royalty manifests itself in the form of power and war. Through these novel indications of these words, the concept of peace between man and beast becomes of primary importance

However, one might ask: What is the meaning of dominating and subjugating animals in this context? Why does the author emphasize the relationship between this issue and the fact that Man is a creature born in the image of God and His likeness? In order to answer this question, it is important to examine the status of the animals in Ancient Eastern civilizations. It will not be possible to tackle all the details of this topic here in this article; however, it is useful to know that in the Ancient East, animals were, and still are in a variety of contexts, viewed as symbols of power, oppression and might. Representations of animals, especially powerful and ferocious ones, have long been used to represent this power especially when it manifests itself in the form of royalty and war. In fact, man represents his aspiration to possess great power and authority through animal images. Thus, the animal / beast becomes the ultimate human aspiration, and seeking to emulate it has long been a human endeavor in the pursuit of control and authority and an embodiment of human power and courage. The author of Genesis rejects this view and affirms that man ceases to be human when he becomes in the image and likeness of a beast simply because he was initially intended to be in the image of God and His likeness notably through the act of subjugating the beasts and

having dominion over them. If Man were actually seeking to be in the image of the beast through manifesting his power in war and killing; then, what the author intends to say is that man should subjugate this very endeavor - his animalistic drive - and turn it into peace, order, harmony and goodness in accordance with God's intention. Man has to abolish his aggressiveness; he should defeat it and convert it into peace. Through this peace, which is clearly manifested in the scene where man and beast share the food God has provided to both without having to shed blood in Gen 1:29-30, man's supremacy is achieved as he becomes worthy of God's image as he preserves the goodness of the creation and its utmost good.

Based on what has been discussed above, I would go back to the use of the plural form in the opening of this paragraph. In my opinion, using the plural form here is closely linked to the context pertaining to royalty in ancient civilizations which I have touched on. Besides the fact of rejecting power, I have referred to earlier, this text rejects all religious alibies that defend the use of power in war, the most important alibi being the association between king and god. When the author makes God speak in the plural form, he would be addressing the human mind that aspires to emulate the gods. He then tells this mind, in Gen 1, that the only image God intended man to emulate is His, only. This is exactly why the author shifts from the use of a plural form in v.26 ("let us make man in our image") to a singular form in v.27 ("so God created mankind in his own image"). When referring to God, the author shifts from the use of the plural form to singular; in a parallel manner, he moves from singular to plural when referring to man ("In the image of God He created him; male and female He created them"). This indicates that kings have always sought to emulate the gods, and that each king has his own, whereas God, the only true one, has created all humans in His image.

In the narrative that follows, the snake would seduce man into emulating the gods in the pursuit of his own glory. Man would rebel against God (Gen 3). In Gen 6:1-5, those who claim to be the children of the gods would usurp the power and would wreak havoc upon earth where they would spread evil and oppression. According to Gen 1, this is not what God has intended man to do; he is rather called to spread kindness out of which the world was molded by God and to be in the image of this god in repressing his lustful drive for power and subjugating his aggressiveness so that his existence on earth would be for his own good and for the good of the earth as a whole and not for his death.

*F. "These are the Generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created"  
(Gen 2:4)*

With this sentence the author closes the first story of creation in Gen 1. It forms what scholars call "an inclusion" with the Gen 1:1, "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth". Inclusion is a literary device whereby you begin an account and close it with the same sentence. It aims at emphasizing what this sentence says. What stands at the core here is the fact that the story of creation revolves around the heavens and the earth. In other words: since it is the story of the creation of the heavens and of the earth, God is interested, not in a part of that creation, be it the plants, stars, fish, animals or man, but rather in the whole world which he aims at filling it with life.

## CREATION AS ESCHATOLOGY

Hence the use of the term Generations or Genealogy of the heavens and the earth, which include all that God created and placed in this realm, including man. Man comes as a secondary creature after heavens and earth. His Genealogy will come later, in Gen 5:1. So the author, as it were, begins his account by zooming out, and then he starts zooming in from Heavens and earth, to Adam and his genealogy. and later he will continue to zoom further in to speak about individuals such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.

With a great deal of smoothness, the author moves from talking about heavens and earth in Gen 1:1-2:4 to the story of the creation of man in 2:4-5:32. Gen 2:4 consists of two parts. The first “This is the genealogy of heavens and earth when they were created”, closes the first account of creation. And the second “when the Lord God made heavens and earth” opens the second account of creation, which focuses on man.

Now the question that imposes itself: why there is a second account of creation? Why did the author dedicate a story of creation revolving around the creation of man, after having created the universe? The answer, in my reading, is to be found in the God’s call to man in Gen 1:26 to rule over the earth and the animals. This call addressed to man keeps the story open to how man would respond. Will he act as God’s image and likeness? Or will he deviate from that call and succumb to the animality which represents violence and oppressive authority. I am convinced that the second story of creation is an answer to this question. It relates how man responded to God’s call.

The perfection of the world God created in Gen 1 suggests that this is how the world must be. The way the author talks about the world in this account suggests that he wanted it to be, in a way, not just the opening of his book, but also the closing scene of the whole bible. In other words: this is how God created the world, and this is how the world should be. In reality, the reader experiences the world differently. The world of the reader is a world of pain, violence, enmity, hatred, discrimination, etc.. It is not necessarily full of goodness as Gen 1 suggests. This goodness is not only the beginning of everything, but it is also its desired end. In order for this goodness to be reached, all has to remain as God has created it, or, in other words, all has to be restored to the state of the initial goodness.

In order for this to be achieved, man has to respond positively to God’s call to rule over the earth as God’s image. The second story of creation will tell us how man responded and whether he remained faithful to the original order of things as established by God in Gen 1.

### *4. Conclusion*

The author of Genesis moves from the first story which is, at the same time, the introduction to the whole book and its end part to another/second story; however, it is obvious that there is a gap - pertaining to some aspects - between the first and the second story. I believe that this gap is precisely what makes the connection and complementarity between the two stories. The gap is the question that remains open when it comes to man who was ordered by God, in Gen 1:26, to have “dominion” over earth and animals.

Accordingly, my conviction is that in the second story of creation (featuring in 2:5ff), the author describes how man has responded to that call. Accordingly, it can be deduced that it is not just “another creation story”, in the narrow sense of the word, but rather a reading that offers a wider perspective in order to better understand “man” and to gauge whether this creature actually deserves to be “the child” of a perfectly created heaven and earth.

Through a simultaneous reading of both stories, one notices a striking contrast residing in the function of Man in relation to earth: In the first story, God orders man to “have dominion over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth”. However, in the second story, God forms man so he would “serve” the living land. In the former, man is the lord whereas in the latter, he is a servant. This contrast is better understood if we take into consideration that, in the Hebrew origin, different terms are used. In the first story, Man is lord over the whole earth (also earth in the Hebrew origin) whereas, in the second story, he is the servant of the ground (demiş in the Hebrew origin) which contains and out of which life flows. In the first story, Man rules over his animalistic instincts while, in the second, he serves the life that earth offers. Accordingly, this contrast is by no means controversial, but rather exhibits complementarity; if man is a slave, a servant and a keeper of life, he then is obviously a lord and one who fulfills God’s presence on earth.

The continuation of the Biblical stories show that man has fallen of this grace; instead imitating the life saving acts of God in creation, subduing violence in himself, man resorted to violence by obeying the beast (Gen 3:1-5). This would unleash a terrible sequence of abhorrent human acts that will result in the destruction of the earth and heaven as depicted by Jeremiah. Yet, the salvific act of God, already alluded to in Gen 1 as the beginning of everything, will come into effect throughout the Bible until it reaches its consummation in Jesus Christ, through whom the “goodness” of heavens and earth will be restored, after the forces of evil are fully annihilated.

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## Chapter 18

### **“HE THAT WOUNDED SHALL HEAL”. RECONCEIVING CHURCH HISTORY IN AN ECUMENICAL PERSPECTIVE**

*Profs. Dimitrios Moschos*

#### *1. The power of the historical narrative*

The effort of narrating events is part of the emergence of human mental framing of the surrounding physical environment. A central political force instrumentalized this to forge an identity, such as the Mesopotamian kings' project. Later, it became part of creating a shared past and religious belief through performance – that was the case of the Homeric poems, which were named "epos" literally "words" in Greek. Entering the classical Greek period, we encounter the systematic narration as a synonym of knowledge generally – “historia” (according to Herodotus). Into this crucial development of the Greek-Roman historiographical tradition entered the existential dimension of history, revealing the presence of God stated in the Law and the Prophets of Israel. We all know that history was a stage of meeting God and knowing his will. When history was interpreted as the locus of Revelation of God in the Messiah Jesus Christ and the innovative experience of a new era towards the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, the Scriptures of the Christians were mainly hermeneutical attempts of historical events. This is even more explicit in the Gospels, the Acts, and the Revelation of John while more indirect in the Epistles. The Acts record the subsequent story of the presence of the resurrected Messiah among the members of the new people called in his name by the power of the Spirit (the narrative of the “grandiose acts of God” «τὰ μεγαλεῖα τοῦ Θεοῦ»).

The first Chronographers Hippolytus in Rome and especially Sextus Julius Africanus, who lived in the 3<sup>rd</sup> c Alexandria, conceived a complete history of the world inspired by the Christian theology of history. In contrast, the disciple of the latter Eusebius bishop of Caesarea (4<sup>th</sup> c.) conceived Christians as a particular subject of history. These two strands build the twofold task of the newly born literary genre of Ecclesiastical history cultivated by writers like Sozomenus, Socrates Scholasticus, Philostorgius, and others in the subsequent centuries. They formed a kaleidoscopic political and cultural system of Christians in a transforming Christian “Romanitas.” However, during the reign of Justinian I, we note the renewed effort of John Malalas to write a "Chronicon" that is a project of inscribing the whole course of humanity in the immediate historical past and connecting it with the plan of God as was revealed in the Scriptures. Since then, histories begin with the scholarly reconstructed historical past of the individual writer, while the genre of the Chronicle begins with the creation of the whole world, reaching through a compilation of older texts and narratives to the historical present. Against this background, we should read the Chronicles outside the Greek-speaking East, such as the Chronicle of Nestor.

What strikes us while deploying this historiographical tradition in the East is the gradual narrowing of its perspective only to the Christian Empire. As influential scholars have noted, the Church history is gradually absorbed by the history of the Empire. Consequently, the horizon of the universal history is defined by the view of the imperial

center (Constantinople), which coincides with the church-political center of the Eastern Church. In the West, despite the important regional attempts to create a distinct subject of history in the form of a Christian nation (“gens”) like the works of *Gesta Francorum*, or the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* by *Vedas Venerabilis*, the supra-regional narrative of the Christian identity of the West and its Roman legacy (to the measure it was extended to the north among the German tribes and the East among the Slavs and the Hungarians) was controlled by Rome and her archive. Collections of papal decretals, titles of property, encyclical letters, and synodal canons were guarded and often forged to serve political or church-political purposes, the Donation of Constantine being the most important among them. Cities and monasteries limited themselves mainly to *Annales*.

Of course, the more self-asserted political and Church-political entities clashed (e.g., Franks vs. Byzantines, Rome vs. the Eastern Churches), the more issues of the Christian past were instrumentalized to serve the list of theological differences debated in the subsequent contacts between the East and the West. It was a list that was changing. Church history was used as a pool to draw arguments about ecclesiastical jurisdictions, mixed marriages, the unleavened bread, and of course, the papal Primacy. After the Crusades, history enriched by personal reports and memoirs contributed to the stereotype building of the Other (barbarian savages to the eyes of the East, treacherous hypocrites to the eyes of the West). In the East, we note a last attempt to revive the old genre of Church history precisely when the Christian Empire's irreversible shrinking in the 14<sup>th</sup> century by Nikephoros-Kallistos Xanthopoulos.

## *2. Entering the Early Modernity*

Soon, the explosive mixture of the export of the Classical studies and Plato, the entire Aristoteles and Neoplatonism to the West, and the money spent by the wealthy families of the North Italian cities will change the access to the historical past ending the omnipotence of the Roman-papal archive. The Renaissance will mark an era of critical inquiry and mastering original languages (Greeks mainly) in historical studies. The Donation of Constantine will be the first victim of this process, as is proved by the decent catholic priest Lorenzo Valla to be a fake. A few more years later broke the fierce, unprecedented clash of Christianities in Western Europe. Church history became a primary tool to question doctrinal identification and historical continuance of the papal ecclesiastical construction with the primitive Church. As we all know, by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> c. this clash was in many ways exported to the Christian East, which experienced its own “two-front” struggle against its identity and existence (against Islam and the West). Since the Orthodox Patriarchates of the East were deprived of freedom in the public space (under the Ottomans) or a not yet strong enough successor-empire (in Eastern Europe), this existence was identified with and founded on its historical resilience. Church history became, for different reasons, an identity marker in the Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant Churches. This became more evident in the so-called “war of books” after the 17<sup>th</sup> century, where different accounts of Christian histories were contested to witness the loyalty of every denomination to the spirit of the original Church. Cesar Baronius for the Catholics, Gottfried Arnold and Johann Lorenz Mosheim for the Protestants etc.

What lacked most was integrating a concise view of the eschatological future in hope into the historical account. This was an old problem. Instead, one noted a constantly diffused apocalyptic terror - a medieval legacy - though intensified after the Plague of the 14<sup>th</sup> c. and the advance of the Ottomans into Europe in the 15<sup>th</sup>. In the widely disseminated polemic literature between Protestants and Catholics, the opponent

(Luther or the Pope respectively) was pictured respectively as the Forerunner of the Antichrist. Soon, the polemical expressions in the West were exported to the East. First, there was the export of the imposition of the Catholic faith and papal jurisdiction upon the mixed population of Eastern Europe (especially in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth) and the so-called Union of Brest in 1596, which soon led the later Patriarch Cyril Loukaris to reconceive the placement of Eastern Orthodoxy between the Catholic Church and the Reformation. It was the first voice, which consented that a break-up with undifferentiated historical continuity could be beneficial for a traditional Church like the Orthodox. For instance, he was the first who initiated a translation of the Bible into vernacular Greek and sympathized with Reformation ideas on justification and the role of saints. The fierce opposition against him, apart from his physical extinction in 1638, contributed to the Orthodox Church's adjustment to the practices and ideas of the Catholic reform movement, such as the College founded by Peter Mohyla in Kyiv. This embracement of western culture coincided with the reforms of Peter I the Great in Russia. The 18<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the steadfast invocation of tradition as a bulwark of identity and guarantee of salvation against Islam and the West. Despite that, a long series of people and works in the East elaborated on the challenges of the Enlightenment and modernity being nominally traditionalist clerics and monks (examples are Evgenios Voulgaris or Nikephoros Theotokis). Among them were historians of the Christian Church. The passage from the older polemical and apologetic *History of the Patriarchs of Jerusalem* (written by Patriarch Dositheos and posthumously edited in 1721) to the *Ecclesiastical History of the Metropolitan of Athens Meletios (Mitros)* is very elucidating. The first is a polemic work that uses the history of the Orthodox Church, focussing on Jerusalem to expand on controversial differences with the Catholic Church and refute issues like papal Primacy, the enumeration of Ecumenical councils, the apostolic succession, or the usurpation of the pilgrim sites in Jerusalem. The second edited, also posthumously by 1784, is a relatively sober and balanced account of the Orthodox Church history with references to sources and careful presentations of controversial issues like the emergence of Islam. Meletios is integrating the scholarly method of Enlightenment<sup>1</sup>.

### 3. *Church History in the National-Romantic setting*

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one notes that, besides positivism (which aspired to turn history generally to exact science reconstructing "the events as they happened"), the emergence of National Romanticism led to a twofold result in the approach of Church history. One was the tightening of the bonds between the historical action of the Christian Church and the idea of the nation, which was considered the new metaphysical entity or carrier of the completion of an Absolute Spirit or eternal fate of a people on earth and in his own history. This phenomenon was by no means limited to Eastern European nations or the Greeks. It was a general phenomenon, at least in European thinking. Therefore, we have a solid recurrence to the study of the Middle Ages and topics such as the contribution of Christianity to the birth and the identity of individual nations like Germans, Hungarians, Russians, etc. The second was the transfer of important patterns of thought like the biological entity in the understanding of society and the like to understand the Church. In this way, we note the birth of

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<sup>1</sup> See more on this in D. Moschos, "Approaching the Byzantine Past in the Historical Work of Dositheos of Jerusalem and Meletios of Athens", in A. Alshanskaya/A. Gietzen/Chr. Hadjiafxenti (eds.), *Imagining Byzantium. Perceptions, Patterns, Problems*, Mainz 2018, 71-76

Ecclesiology as a distinct theological reflection on the existence of the historical Christianity<sup>2</sup>.

Regardless of these developments, the Catholic Church's brutal confrontation with modernity demanded a stricter subjugation to the papal Primacy and the "reductio Graecorum" from the Orthodox. This culminated in the I Vatican Council. On the other hand, numerous missionary societies worked with apocalyptic fervor in missionizing the colonized world (the Middle East), provoking their catechetical work and conflict with indigenous Christians. The (Negative) response of the Ecumenical Patriarch Gregory VI to the invitation of the Pope to the I Vatican Council (1868) concluded with the admonition: "... *For all these reasons (sc. above-mentioned), you should also recur to History and the Ecumenical Councils to achieve historically the real from Christ summoned union which is longed by everyone, or we should restrict ourselves to the constant prayers and supplications for the peace of all universe, the stability of the Holy Churches of God and the union of everything*"<sup>3</sup>.

Later (1895), Pope Leo XIII sends his encyclical "Preclara gratulationis" to the East, where he invited the Eastern Christians to unite with the Catholic Church through the model of the so-called "Greek Catholics" (maintaining their rites). The rejection of this invitation by the Ecumenical Patriarch Anthimos VII (in a rather eirenic tone) stated that "... *for the practical realization of the pious longing for the union of the Churches, a common principle and basis must be settled first of all; and there can be no such safe common principle and basis other than the teaching of the Gospel and of the seven holy Ecumenical Councils. Reverting, then, to that teaching which was common to the Churches of the East and of the West until the separation, we ought, with a sincere desire to know the truth, to search what the one holy, catholic and orthodox apostolic Church of Christ, being then 'of the same body,' throughout the East and West believed, and to hold this fact, entire, and unaltered. But whatsoever has in later times been added or taken away, everyone has a sacred and indispensable duty, if he sincerely seeks for the glory of God more than for his own glory, that in a spirit of piety he should correct it, considering that by arrogantly continuing in the perversion of the truth he is liable to a heavy account before the impartial judgment-seat of Christ.*"<sup>4</sup>

In all these encounters, Church history worked as a barrier to secure identity and independence from the Christian expansionism of the Other and a cause of self-pride and self-assertion. Maybe, it is far-fetched to claim that Church history produced schism, yet it is more likely to say that it went along and substantiated the practical aspects of the schism, enhancing the historical burden of the encounters between the different Christian denominations and traditions against the colonial background. Besides, the Crusader leaders of the I. Crusade wrote from Antioch to the Pope Paschalis about the "perfidea Graecorum". From the viewpoint of the East the encounter with West is measured with the means of the historiography of the Byzantine times: focusing on the Empire! This injuring effect of the Church History in the East remains crucial even if the historical output is today much more openly admitted that it is a construction which only used the suitable historical material, as it became clear in

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<sup>2</sup> Despite the rich homiletic speculation on the "nota Ecclesiae" with metaphors and symbols, we have to think that patristic thinking is not a systematic approach to the Church's essence but rather a mere description of the way that works with the purpose to teach and work pastorally.

<sup>3</sup> I. Karmires, *Dogmatica et symbolica monumenta Orthodoxae Catholicae Ecclesiae*, Graz 1968, v. 2, p. 929 (my translation).

<sup>4</sup> *Answer of the Great Church of Constantinople to the Papal Encyclical on Union: in the Original Greek with an English Translation* / Edited by the Very Reverend Archimandrite Eustathius Metallinos, Oxford 1896 (underlined by me).

the modern historiography<sup>5</sup>. In that case, history serves as a measure for every future development in the understanding of theology or the self-understanding of the historical course of the Church, in other words, in the way that the Church evaluates its own course. Thus, it ends up to encapsulate the living existence of the Church in past "glorious" forms. It promotes not living in tradition but traditionalism. Teaching about the remarkable achievements of the dialogue between the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox in the 1990s, we are confronted often with the objection that agreement on Christology with the Oriental Christians implies that we dare to regard ourselves in a position to understand better these things than the Fathers of the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Council! Subjugation to the historical past serves as a shelter that hinders the possibility to heal a most profound and fundamental schism!

#### 4. *Church history and the rise of Ecumenism.*

Nevertheless, times are changing... In our case, the most important event in the evolution of Christianity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is WW I. We tend to ignore it, yet not only the Great War itself but also the day after with the extinction of all the remaining symbols of the "Empires" and the collapse of divine state orders, Kaiser, Czars, Sultans helped all Christian denominations to reflect on their own trauma: most of them had fueled the warlike enthusiasm with ideas, visions, and images of the National Romantic past – and they contributed to a blood bath<sup>6</sup>. The next day Christians found themselves in a naked world, deprived of their supporting pillars in the public space. Instead of Holy Alliances emerged the League of Nations. The famous Patriarchal Encyclical of 1920 invited the local Orthodox Churches to act into the spirit of which once (1910 in Edinburgh) was a mere coordinative action for Protestant Missionaries: the Ecumenical movement.

During the Interwar time, Russian theologians who carried and elaborated the rich theological and religious speculation in Russia on the essence of the Church, the role of the (Slavic) nation, and similar complicated issues settled in the West, with the most prominent example, the Theological Institute of St. Serge in Paris. Among other essential contributions in theology, we also find an effort to present aspects of Eastern Church history and patristics in a form that could be received in the West. That was the contribution of George Florovsky and others. It is not accidental that this whole generation of essential theologians was engaged in the Ecumenical dialogue, while the very existence of St. Serge is due to donations of ecumenically committed Christians.

Experiencing life in the ecumenical landscape, a series of brilliant Church historians or scholars and theologians who worked on Church history and patristics made it possible to transform the old academic "positivist" Church historiography (mainly cultivated in the German academia by Greeks or in the Russian Academies) to a component of a theological synthesis: the study of the Fathers into the neopatristic synthesis (Florovsky); the study of the primitive Church to a means of understanding the eucharistic and eschatological identity of the first Christian community (Zizioulas); the quest of the byzantine ecclesiastical institutions or events as well the byzantine (and especially the hesychast) theology into a necessary tool of extracting the "byzantine legacy" of the Orthodox Church out of a nationalistic and traditionalistic context (Meyendorff); the insight into the post-byzantine Russian and Greek ascetic spirituality

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<sup>5</sup> One of these works, which clearly shows that is the Demacopoulos/Papanicolaou (eds.) *Orthodox Constructions of the West*. One can see many contributions that revise many individual historical issues that

<sup>6</sup> See about the importance of I WW for religion in Ph. Jenkins, *The Great and Holy War: How World War I changed religion forever*, Oxford 2014.

not to an anti-western folklore but to a shared asset for the modern world (Kallistos Ware); approaching critically the liturgy to an evolving human construct to express the communication with God in history and not above or outside history (Al. Schmemmann) – these are the most known examples. Such contributions were a giant step for the Orthodox as well as for universal Christianity. The Orthodox Church History became visible, NOT as an object of byzantine nostalgia and NOT as a mere weapon in a “blame game” of the Confessional wars. At the same time, the impact of the colonial West on the conceptual framework of these issues by the East is evident, and the accusations of colonialism are still (to some extent) valid. Stephen Davis has used the same approach to interpret the relations between Greek-Roman Chalcedonian (conceived as colonial center) and non-Chalcedonian Oriental Christianity during the 5th and 6th centuries understood as colonized periphery<sup>7</sup>. A recent book that was mentioned above, edited by A. Papanikolaou and G. Demacopoulos, attempted in a very compelling manner within the Eastern Orthodox scholarship to interpret this relation of the Eastern Orthodox discourse to the West within the methodological tools of post-colonial thinkers as “mimicry and mockery”<sup>8</sup>. Although I am not convinced about the representation of non-Greek Eastern Mediterranean and Late and post Byzantine Orthodox Churches as “colonized periphery,” these are significant efforts to integrate a non-Western historical narrative of a specific periphery in a joint and inclusive history. A series of younger scholars who contributed to that volume (Ed Siecienski, Tia Kolbaba) extend the project of a standard and balanced narrative in separate topics.

##### 5. *From Church history to a Church/Christianity IN history*

These projects introduce us to the next contemporary phase for an ecumenical Church which we witness the recent decades. The last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. saw the robust comeback of the Eastern Orthodox Churches. This was accompanied by the turn to new issues of Church history during the recent decades. Some negative examples are the complicated relations of the local Churches to the respective Communist regimes and Nazi or Fascist regimes, some of them being established in Orthodox countries during the Interwar period. The Holocaust raised the relevant unspoken (or rather despicable) question of Antisemitism in the Orthodox Church. The tremendous progress made in modern Cultural Studies since the 1960s (mainly in the USA) raised the question of gender in the late antique and byzantine past of the Eastern Orthodox Church History. Modern forms of religiosity also create positive challenges (e.g., new versions of sanctity, see the story of St. Maria Skobtsova), which need their way of being analyzed and historicized. The methodological turn to critical modern questions, post-colonial approach, etc., creates the necessary scholarly environment to reconceptualize Church history in a contemporary and ecumenical perspective. I will summarize this change in some points:

- Open Church history in an open human history

It is now clear that Church history is no longer forced to defend closed cultural entities thought as concurrent historically realized eschaton: the medieval papal authority, the Christian empire (in various forms), or utopias of enthusiastic sects. Church history is a constantly recalculated journey towards the eschaton. It is legitimate to defend the identity of the means for this journey (the spiritual vessel «νοητή ναῦς») as a point of

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<sup>7</sup> St. Davis, *The Early Coptic Papacy: The Egyptian Church and Its Leadership in Late Antiquity* Cairo/New York 2017.

<sup>8</sup> A. Papanicolaou/G. Demacopoulos (eds.), *Orthodox Constructions of the West (Orthodox Christianity and Contemporary Thought)* Fordham 2013.

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departure. Every historian can openly admit what he stands for<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, I would not regard it as a sign of openness to deconstruct the central point of self-understanding of the first Christians: the unity and identity of one Church and the sense of belonging. For various reasons, I would not prefer to speak of "Christianities" in the plural.

- Instead of Church history/history of Christianity, *Church/Christianity IN history*.

Nevertheless, this vessel is not untouchable in that journey. The vessel grows and is improved, as apostle Paul puts it in the metaphor of the building (οικοδομή) "the whole building is joined together and rises (αὐξει=grows) to become a holy temple in the Lord» (Ephes. 2, 21). The progress in Church history relates to the interaction with the surrounding sea, the route, the harbors (the history of humanity) from where passengers get on board or to where passengers step out. Therefore, it is much more suitable to speak of "Church or Christianity IN history" instead of the history of the Church. The Christians do not "own" their history to use it for a theological agenda, but they "built" their own history, engaging theology into assessing how they do it. It is the equivalent of neopatristic synthesis in the form of a "neohistoric" one. To prove that this is not something unprecedented, I will remind you that a series under this name was initiated by Jean Meyendorff (The Church in History) for teamwork on Church History from an Orthodox viewpoint that would treat in a just and impartial manner the events of the Western Church. He managed to write personally about the period 450-680 (*Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions. The Church 450-680 AD*, Crestwood NY 1989), and with Aristides Papadakis on the period 1071-1453 (*The Christian East and the Rise of the Papacy: The Church 1071-1453 A.D.*, St. Vladimir's 1994). Later the project was rebound by Andrew Louth on the period 681-1071 (*Greek East and Latin West: The Church, AD 681-1071*, Crestwood NY 2007). The aforementioned younger scholars built on this work further.

- *Ecumenical history as a comprehensive history*

Having extended our historiographic quest on the historical course of the relations between Christianity and the "world," we can now put the fate of this course on a global perspective. The Christians (Orthodox or not) live in the same world as the rest of the humans – not in Byzantium, in the Middle Ages, Newfoundland, etc. The Orthodox are not immune to antisemitism, xenophobia, corruption, autarchy – not more but also not less than the other people. We will get an Ecumenical Church history if we look to the broader picture: a comprehensive history of Christians in their social, economic, geopolitical, cultural, etc., setting, explaining theologically lumbered issues, e.g., the papal Primacy.

- A comprehensive history engaging equally center and periphery

If we turn to a comprehensive history, we will integrate the center and religious, cultural, or political periphery into a single narrative. Thus, it is vital to inquire about Christianity correlating East and West, old world and global South, paving the way for a "next Christendom" to fight against global challenges like climate change, brutality, injustice instead of fighting other religions or itself. The journey to the eschaton will be thus much safer and more attractive.

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<sup>9</sup> See the remarks of G. Florovsky, "The Predicament of the Christian Historian" in W. Leibrecht (ed.), *Religion and Culture: Essays in Honor of Paul Tillich*, New York 1959, 140–166.

INTERNATIONAL HELLENIC UNIVERSITY

MASTER IN ORTHODOX ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY

THURSDAY  
22-APRIL  
5:00pm-7:00pm

"HE THAT WOUNDED SHALL HEAL".  
RECONCEIVING CHURCH HISTORY IN AN ECUMENICAL PERSPECTIVE"

PROF. DIMITRIOS MOSCHOS

Prof. Tamara Grdzeldze will respond and monitor the discussion

YouTube  
Open to the public

CEMES YOUTUBE CHANNEL  
[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCD\\_5mcv3Z82pYW8LFUk2Emw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCD_5mcv3Z82pYW8LFUk2Emw)

The poster features a blue background with a central image of a modern building with large glass windows and the university's logo. On the left, there is a small inset photo of Prof. Dimitrios Moschos speaking at a microphone. The text is arranged in a clean, professional layout, with the title and speaker's name prominently displayed.

**THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH:  
MARTHA OR MARY?**

*Prof. Niki Papageorgiou*

*1. Introduction*

The question about the position of women in the Orthodox Church, and the roles that arise from this position, emerged with the evolution of modernity, which generally influenced in various ways the position of women in society, as well as reshaped the gender roles. It is common knowledge that the socio-economic transformations that led to the transition from the traditional to modern society, created new socio-economic conditions that conduced to the empowerment of women's position. The industrialization and the subsequent urbanization, the "exodus" of women in the labor market, the detachment of people from traditional community structures and the possibility to decide freely about their social roles, the claim for equal participation of both sexes in politics and so on, created the conditions for gender equality. An important role towards this direction was played by the development of the feminist movement, which highlighted the unequal treatment of women in society, promoted gender equality and claimed the social and political rights of women.

These social transformations raise many similar issues in the Christian Church regarding the position of women and call for a review of its traditional positions. The first reaction came from the field of Theology, with the development of feminist theology. The Feminist Theology, as it developed mainly in the West, is not just a supplement of traditional theology but constitutes a completely new concept in this field. From this perspective, women themselves constitute the theological issue and start making theology from their own experience, a theology that takes the form of liberation movements in two ways: firstly, by analyzing the concepts, values, norms and stereotypes developed in a patriarchal society, and secondly, by studying the consequences of patriarchal theology on women's lives, the Church and broader society. The Christian feminist theology uses the feminist approach as a tool for the analysis of reality and constitutes a source of critical thinking that honors not only women, but the whole humanity.

The Feminist Theology appears, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, almost at the same time with the feminist movement, and seeks to change the structures of society and church, beyond any "patriarchal" and "man-centered" thought. It is understood as a theology that liberates women and can formally join the ranks of feminist liberation movements in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As well as the latter, Feminist Theology started in the United States of America, where, in 1890, was published the first "Women's Bible" by Elisabeth Cady, followed by many other women such as Catharina Halkes, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, Elisabeth Schussler-Fiorenza, Mary Daly, Mary Grey, etc. This theological approach generally seeks to understand the Ecclesiastical history through the centuries, away from the "traditional" models, which were invented almost exclusively by men and often underestimate women. As feminist theology points out, all the texts of the Bible, Old and New Testament, were written by men "for

men” and even the “history” of Christianity for 2000 years shows the “His-story”, i.e. the history of “his” leaving only a little space for “Her-story”.<sup>1</sup>

The renewal of theological discourse through feminist theologians, but also the changes in the social roles of women, could not leave the Christian Church unaffected at an institutional level. The Protestant Church is the first to raise the issue of the priesthood of women and seeks its solution through the ordination of women to middle and upper clergy. On the contrary, the Roman Catholic Church, which remains largely traditional, is unaffected by these changes insisting on a more traditional conception of the priesthood and denying the ordination of women.

But what happens in the Orthodox Church? What is the position of women? What are the roles arising from this position? Are they ancillary, complementary or functional? Is the equal status of women and men recognized in the Orthodox Church? How does the Orthodox Church deal with the challenge of women’s priesthood? Bringing these issues to the first Church can enlighten us tremendously and offer us very interesting models of gender roles in order to discuss the position of women in the contemporary Orthodox Church.

The New Testament, as the primary source of mapping the experience of the first Christian communities, is an ideal text for the search of an authentic way of living. In the evangelical texts there are many models of feminine activities and roles that reflect the multi-faceted aspects of feminine diaconia and put emphasis on feminine dynamism and potential.<sup>2</sup> Well known women, such as the Myrofores, the Samaritan, the sisters of Lazar, Martha and Mary, Maria Magdalene, Elisabeth, Joanna, and, par excellence, Maria the Theotokos, Mother of Jesus, as well as many other anonymous women constitute ideal models of diaconal action for women in the ecclesiastical field. Particularly interesting is the reference to Martha and Mary as, through their oppositional but at the same time complementary dimension, they may, on the one hand, contribute to the understanding of the functional roles of women and, on the other, delineate feminine models of action in the Church. The phrase of Jesus “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is a need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her” (Luc 10, 38-42) goes beyond the conventional attitudes of that time and paves the way for the creation of new diaconal roles for women.

The two evangelical images of Martha and Mary describe two different perceptions of women, which in their turn “prescribe” the different roles that women are called to play in the Orthodox Church.<sup>3</sup> They may be used as ideal types, as models, in our effort to approach, in a better way, the position of women in the Church and the roles it entails. At this point, it is necessary to make clear that this approach is not a biblical hermeneutical reading, but an attempt for sociological analysis using sociological tools, such as the ideal type. When analyzing typologically the two models of women one can schematize the image of women and consequently the nature and character of diaconal roles that derive from each one of them.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, Suzan Frank Parsons (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, Natalie Watson, *Feminist Theology*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003, Sheila Briggs, Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theology*, Oxford University Press, 2014, Linda D. Peacore, *The Role of Women’s Experience in Feminist Theologies of Atonement*, Pickwick Publications, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> For the role of women in the early Christian community, see Eleni Kasselouri-Hatzivassiliadi, «Ο ρόλος των γυναικών στην αρχέγονη χριστιανική κοινότητα», in Ioannis Petrou (ed.), *Ιστορία της Ορθοδοξίας*, v. I, Road, Αθήνα 2009, pp. 340-361.

<sup>3</sup> Lk 10, 38-42.

<sup>4</sup> For a theological hermeneutics see, Basil the Great, *Όροι κατά πλάτος* 20, P.G. 31, 973B, and *Ασκητικάί διατάξεις*, P.G. 31, 1325A-1328C, Ioannis Chrysostomos, *Εις την προδοσίαν του Σωτήρος και*

2. *Martha or Mary?*

The two models, Martha and Mary, as they are depicted in the evangelical text of Luc 10, 38-42, typologically represent two different worlds with different social structures and relations: the static, hierarchical and patriarchal traditional society and the open, equal and participatory modern society. The traditional form of society is related to a specific distribution of positions, power and work between the two sexes as well as distinct fields of action, which in their turn correspond to the distinction of space between “private” and “public”. The domestic, private space, where the family concentrates and functions, constitutes the “women’s sphere”, which women are responsible for. On the contrary, the public sphere is the wider political and social space that constitutes the space of responsibility and activity of men. This distribution is not equal, as the distinction between the two spheres and, by extension, the two genders, creates an unequal distribution of power between men who are dominant and women who are subjugated. Men are the leaders, responsible for all important decisions; women are dominated, accepting passively the decisions of men, remaining true to their roles as wives, mothers, daughters. Men are attributed all superior work, such as the administration and powerful positions in the public sphere, whereas women are responsible for “menial” tasks, such as keeping house and raising children.<sup>5</sup>

In modern societies, the public space “is enlarged” so as to accept women as equal members, with roles that correspond to those of men and more participatory procedures in the allocation of positions and power. The key changes that defined modern society, such as industrialization, urbanization and political liberalization resulted in the change of the position and role of women. Women’s entrance into the labor market, the expansion of education to both sexes, the recognition of civil, political and social rights played an essential role in the free formation of the personality of women and in their claim for an equal place in the social and political field.<sup>6</sup>

The model of Martha corresponds to the traditional social structures according to which women are restricted to the private sphere, have no say in public affairs, remain silent in the public space, and even cover their head. The decisions they make concern domestic issues, relating to their household and children, while the public issues, administrative and financial responsibilities, are a concern of men. They remain “hidden” in the home kitchens, having the absolute responsibility of the necessary, yet menial jobs and roles, without any prospect of education or social participation.

The model of Mary expresses a society that is open to women’s participation; women are given the opportunity to fight for a position in the public sphere, perform a variety of roles, offer diaconia to the community and broader society, depending on their gifts. This model is closer to that of modern women, who claim an equal position

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*εξής* (sp), P.G. 59, 717 and *Περί υπομονής* (sp), P.G. 63, 941, Cyril of Alexandria, *Εξήγησις εις το κατά Λουκάν Ευαγγέλιον*, P.G. 72, 622B, *Εξήγησις εις το κατά Ιωάννην Ευαγγέλιον*, P.G. 74, 40 B-C and *Ομιλίες διάφοροι* 13, P.G. 77, 1052C, Abbas Neilos, *Διαφέρουσιν των εν πόλεσιν οικισμένων οι εν ερήμοις ησυχάζοντες*, P.G. 79, 1080 B-C.

<sup>5</sup> For the traditional society, see Ioannis Petrou, *Κοινωνιολογία*, Βάνιας, Θεσσαλονίκη 2007, pp. 164-182, St. Hall – B. Gieben, *Η διαμόρφωση της νεωτερικότητας. Οικονομία, κοινωνία, πολιτική, πολιτισμός*, transl. Θ. Τσακίρης – Β. Τσακίρης, Σαββάλας, Αθήνα 2003, Jacques Le Goff, *Ο πολιτισμός της Μεσαιωνικής Δύσης*, transl. Ρίκα Μπεβενίστε, Βάνιας, Θεσσαλονίκη 1993. Especially for the position of women, see Nina Skouteri – Didaskalou, *Ανθρωπολογικά για το γυναικείο ζήτημα*, Αθήνα 1984, Efi Avdela – Angelica Psarra (eds.), *Σιωπηρές ιστορίες, Γυναίκες και φύλο στην ιστορική αφήγηση, Αλεξάνδρεια*, Αθήνα 1997, Hafton Owlén, *Ιστορία των γυναικών στην Ευρώπη (1500-1800)*, transl. Ειρήνη Χρυσοχόου, Νεφέλη, Αθήνα 2003.

<sup>6</sup> See, Ioannis Petrou, *Κοινωνιολογία*, op. cit., pp. 285-301. For the modern society, see St. Hall, D. Held, A. Mc Grew, *Η νεωτερικότητα σήμερα. Οικονομία, κοινωνία, πολιτική, πολιτισμός*, transl. Θ. Τσακίρης – Β. Τσακίρης, Σαββάλας, Αθήνα 2003.

in society alongside men and perform a variety of roles at many levels of modern life: political, financial, professional, educational, and so on. The image of Mary, seated at the feet of Jesus listening attentively to him, actually represents modern women who afford enriched possibilities to participate and offer diaconia in a variety of ways in the Church. In reality, it expresses the attempt of women to function as full and equal members in the new society that Christ himself inaugurates and realizes.

The model of Martha, identified with the traditional perception of women, relates to the old world, appears to be insufficient as it does injustice to women and for this reason it is looked down by Christ. Christ praises the other type, Mary, who leaves the kitchen and sits by His feet and listens to Him. She becomes a student of His, giving priority to perfection and salvation as a full member of the community. She is the kind of woman who follows the teacher, as an equal student to men; she is sanctified, saved and eventually reaches the theosis. She expresses the effort of the woman to function as a full and equal member of the new society which Christ Himself inaugurates and realizes. Christ, who inaugurates a new world, pays a compliment to Mary and condones the search and conquest of an equal position for women at an ontological – charismatic level in the first place, and, by extension, at a social – institutional level, at least in the frame of community.

### 3. *The prevalence of “Martha” in the ecclesiastical field*

In the new society that was inaugurated by Jesus, the abilities and gifts of women were used by the early Church in a very positive way and efforts were made to even out differences regarding women’s participation. In the early Christian communities women perform a variety of roles and diaconias contributing actively to their better function. This is favored by the fact that the eucharistic life takes place mainly in the domestic sphere, i.e. oikos.<sup>7</sup> As the public gathering of the church of Christ believers takes place in homes and sees itself as a community that affords family characteristics, its organization provides opportunities for women to participate actively. So, along with the traditional role of wife and mother, women adopt within the community a set of new unexpected roles, such as those of the missionary, charismatic prophetess, teacher and social worker.<sup>8</sup>

Especially the role of Deaconesses in the ancient Church confers an institutional upgrading to the position of women at that time, at least within the community. This institution is created with the view to exercising social as well as liturgical work, since deaconesses take up tasks, such as baptizing women and offering the Eucharist. Irrespective of the fact whether deaconesses had the permission to be ordained or not, the institutional recognition of their role within the community indicates a relative improvement of their position compared to the one they hold in the surrounding society.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See, Eleni Kasselouri-Hatzivassiliadi, «Ευχαριστία και οίκος στην Καινή Διαθήκη: Από την ουτοπία στην εμπειρία της υπέρβασης των κοινωνικών και πολιτισμικών διαφορών», (2008), <http://www.acadimia.gr/content/view/full/171/76/lang.el/> (access on 15/12/2014), Rastko Jovic, *Οίκος και Ευχαριστία στις Παύλειες Επιστολές*, Doctoral Thesis, Τμήμα Θεολογίας Α.Π.Θ., Θεσσαλονίκη 2012.

<sup>8</sup> For the women that are referred in the early Christian communities, see, Eleni Kasselouri-Hatzivassiliadi, «Ο ρόλος των γυναικών στην αρχέγονη χριστιανική κοινότητα», in Ioannis Petrou (ed.), *Ιστορία της Ορθοδοξίας*, v. 1, *op. cit.*, pp. 356-360. See also, Spyridoula Athanasopoulou – Kypriou & Eleni Kasselouri-Hatzivassiliadi, *Εκεί συμβαίνο. Έμφυλα θεολογικά δοκίμια*, Αρμός, Αθήνα 2012, Elisabeth Clark, *Women in the Early Church*, Wilmington 1983.

<sup>9</sup> Evangelos Theodorou, *Ηρωίδες της χριστιανικής αγάπης. Αι διακόνισσαι δια των αιώνων*, Αθήνα 1949. See also, Kevin Madigan & Carolyn Osiek, *Ordained Women in the Early Church*, Johns Hopkins, Baltimore 2005.

In so far as the Church is shaped and reshaped by society and conforms to the broader social conditions, it is gradually transformed into a patriarchal and andocentric institution that places women in submissive positions. Given these conditions, the multifaceted diaconia of women is restricted so that it finally coincides with what society requires of them: to limit themselves in the private – domestic sphere of activities and deal with their own household and not with the affairs of community and consequently society. Despite the theological thesis of the Church on the equality between the two sexes at an ontological – charismatic level, the positions taken by the faithful, men and women, in the ecclesiastical body gradually come to correspond to the positions they have in the broader society.

So very soon, it was forbidden for women to speak and teach in Church, so the roles of teacher and prophetesses weakened and finally vanished. The unilateral interpretation of Saint Paul's passages, together with the compulsory silence in the public worship and the coverage of the head, heralds the hierarchical subordination of women to men. This is directly related to the rearrangement of space; for as long as the Church "belonged" in the private domain, being persecuted and "marginal", different roles, regardless of gender, were developed and adopted by its members and the participation of all was essential and true. When the Church, after its official recognition (313 B.C.), becomes part of the public domain and identifies with it, it accepts the distinction of social roles and reproduces the dominant social hierarchy.<sup>10</sup>

With the public recognition of the Church, especially after the 4<sup>th</sup> c., deaconesses were excluded from public functions of community, such as teaching, baptism, and the Eucharist and limited to the provision of social care. The institution of deaconesses as such, flourishes especially during the era of Great Fathers (5<sup>th</sup> c.) with Olympiad being the most famous deaconess, collaborator of Saint John Chrysostom. The sectors of feminine diaconia are many and they cover many areas of the diverse social and philanthropic work of the Church that involves a variety of activities, especially during the early Byzantine period. The deaconesses worked mainly in ecclesiastical hospitals and philanthropic institutions. They cared for the sick, the poor, the prisoners and the elderly; they were responsible for keeping the church clean and in order; they gave the sign to women for participation in the chanting of the congregation and also introduced the "kiss of peace" among them. In the sources, reference is also made to their active participation in the enshrouding, funeral and burial of deceased Christian women as well as the consolation of their relatives.<sup>11</sup>

Over the centuries, however, the institutional recognition of the role of deaconesses, even in the form of social contribution that it held in Byzantine society, gradually degenerates and, around the 10<sup>th</sup> century, it ceases to exist. The gradual identification of society and Church affects the latter that eventually comes to reflect the patriarchal and hierarchical social structures. The Church is consequently led to the acceptance of the strictly distinct fields of action for women and men following society standards. Women get more and more confined into the private sphere and emphasis is placed on the models of good mother and wife that mostly connect women with the family rather than the model of social worker that is associated with the "public" sphere.

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<sup>10</sup> See Ioannis Petrou, *Χριστιανισμός και κοινωνία*, Βάνιας, Θεσσαλονίκη 2004, pp. 386-405, E. A. Clark, 'Ideology, History and the Construction of "Woman" in Late Christianity', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2 (1994) 155-184, Robert F. Taft, "Women at Church in Byzantium: Where, When-And Why?", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 52 (1998) 27-87.

<sup>11</sup> See, Valerie Karras, "Female Deacons in the Byzantine Church", *Church History* 73/2 (2004) 272-316 and "The liturgical functions of consecrated women in the Byzantine Church", *Theological Studies* 66 (2005) 96-116, Ninna Edgardh, "Gender and the Study of Christian Social Practice", *Diaconia* 1/2 (2010) 199-213.

The equality between men and women, if and when it is recognized theologically, is interpreted in a soteriological and eschatological way, without affecting the historic ecclesiastical body and the conscience of believers.<sup>12</sup>

The work of the Church in all its dimensions, liturgical, pastoral, administrative, social and educational, is gradually concentrated in the hands of men, especially of the clergy, leaving women aside. In the structure and distribution of the ecclesiastical work, as this is expressed in a variety of areas, women hold auxiliary, complementary roles, which are socially rather than ecclesiologically defined, and are kept away from positions of authority, excluded from administrative or liturgical duties.<sup>13</sup> In the traditional Greek society of the late 19th century, as the one on the island of Skiathos for example, one can get a "taste" of the auxiliary presence of women in the priest's work. In the liturgies of small chapels, as described in the work of Papadiamantis, women keep the church and yard clean and in good order, make altar bread, refuel candle and oil lamps and so on.<sup>14</sup> This image is not far from contemporary descriptions of the duties of women in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, which reflect a significant part of current ecclesiastical views, at least in the Balkans. According to them, women's work is limited to dealing with the "simple tasks of daily worship in the parish", such as the propriety of the church, preparation of altar bread, organization of festivals, reading the names in the family diptychs by the priest, caring for funerals and memorial services of the deceased.<sup>15</sup>

In this way, while society changes and continually accepts new roles for women, the Church is still limited to a closed traditional worldview where gender roles remain strictly defined. Consequently, the diaconal contribution of women is easily accepted as long as it is limited to traditional sectors (teaching, catechesis, social work), always in an auxiliary form, without disturbing the established order of ecclesiastical structure. This diaconia, beyond its actual value due to the fact that it is offered by women silently as a gift of love, is faced by the ecclesiastical milieu as absolutely normal, as an extension of women's housekeeping roles in the family. But this does not certainly mean a full and equal participation of women in the entire work and function of the Church which would necessitate a certain upgrade and institutional recognition of women's diaconia.

#### 4. In search of "Mary"?

Nowadays, after the renewal of theological discourse over the past decades, we are able to argue about a "theology of equality" that faces positively the feminine person and recognizes gender equality. Even the negative position against the priesthood of

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<sup>12</sup> See, Ioannis Petrou, « Το γυναικείο ζήτημα και η εκκλησιαστική παράδοση», *ΕΠΕΠΘΣ* 10 (2000) 221-237, Thomas Hopko (ed.), *Women and the Priesthood*, New York 1983, Christina Breaban, Sophie Deicha, Eleni Kasselouri-Hatzivassiliadi (eds.), *Women's Voices and Visions of the Church, Reflections of Orthodox Women*, World Council of Churches, Geneva 2006.

<sup>13</sup> See, Dimitra Koukoura, *Η θέση της γυναίκας στην Ορθόδοξη Παράδοση και άλλα μελετήματα Οικουμενικού Προβληματισμού*, Κορηλία Σφακιανάκη, Θεσσαλονίκη 2005, Niki Papageorgiou, «Οι γυναίκες στην εκκλησιαστική διοίκηση: Δυνατότητες ή προοπτικές;», in *Ο σύγχρονος ρόλος της γυναίκας στην Ορθόδοξη Εκκλησία*, Πρακτικά της Α' και Β' Συνδιασκέψεως Γυναικών – Εκπροσώπων ιερών Μητροπόλεων της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος, Κλάδος Εκδόσεων της Επικοινωνιακής και Μορφωτικής Υπηρεσίας της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος, Αθήνα 2007, pp. 145-155.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Maria Gasouka, *Η κοινωνική θέση των γυναικών στο έργο του Παπαδιαμάντη*, Φιλιππότη, Αθήνα 1998.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, f. Michail Pigasios, «Η γυναίκα και το λατρευτικό έργο της ενορίας», (2009) <http://www.churchofcypus.org.cy/article.php?articleID=661> (access on 15/12/2014)

women is attributable to reasons of tradition rather than theological reasons.<sup>16</sup> Yet, the ecclesiastical reality is inconsistent with the theological discourse. As Elizabeth Behr-Siegel points out, “In the Christian milieu –some conservative groups excluded- the inferiority of women and their *natural* submission to men is not an issue. Nevertheless, we often talk about *alterity*, difference: a difference that supposedly assigns different social roles to men and women, different, complementary, spiritual missions. This position, appearing as self-evident, and despite the undeniable intention to recognize the professedly “feminine qualities”, contains a lot of ambiguities. In practice, it often perpetuates, in a special form, the traditional subjugation of women, limiting them to menial roles under the control of men?”.<sup>17</sup>

The debate is open and local Orthodox Churches, depending on the specific conditions their members live in, have realized that they need to answer the underlying question hidden behind the theological “self-sufficiency”.<sup>18</sup> Several initiatives that have been taken in recent years, either under the pressure of society, or the pressure of the other Churches and the WCC, point towards the need for empowerment of the role of women in the ecclesiastical body and their active participation in ecclesiastical life.<sup>19</sup> The Inter-Orthodox Theological Conference of Rhodes (1998) put forth specific proposals for the full development of women’s attributes, such as reviving the institution of deaconesses, taking up positions of authority in the ecclesiastical administration, appointing representatives in the Ecumenical Movement, as well as providing diaconia as readers, chanters, social care providers and so on.<sup>20</sup>

These decisions could only be the first steps towards the full and equal participation of women in the body of the Church, since both the development of the theology of the person and the requirements of contemporary society acknowledge the contribution of

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<sup>16</sup> See, Paul Evdokimov, *Η Γυναίκα και η σωτηρία του κόσμου*, μτφρ. Ν. Ματσούκα, Π. Πουρναράς, Θεσσαλονίκη 1992, Nikos Matsoukas, «Η Εύα της θεολογίας και η γυναίκα της ιστορίας», *Σύναξη* 36 (1990) 5-15 and «Η ιεροσύνη των γυναικών ως θεολογικό και οικουμενικό πρόβλημα», in Petros Vassiliadis (ed.), *Ορθόδοξη Θεολογία και Οικουμενικός Διάλογος*, Αποστολική Διακονία, Αθήνα 2005, pp. 122-127.

<sup>17</sup> E. Behr-Siegel, «Η ετερότητα του άντρα και της γυναίκας», *Σύναξη* 36 (1990) 29. See also the same author, *Το λειτούργημα της γυναίκας στην Εκκλησία*, μτφρ. Κ. Χιωτέλλη, Αθήνα χ.χ.

<sup>18</sup> A recent effort was made by the Center of Ecumenical, Missiological and Environmental Studies “Metropolitan Panteleimon Papageorgiou”, which organized two conferences over the last years. The first one, “Deaconesses, the Ordination of Women and Orthodox Theology”, Thessaloniki, 22-24 January 2015 and the second one, “Deaconesses: Past – Present – Future”, Thessaloniki, 31/1-2/2/2020. The Proceedings of the first conference were published by Petros Vassiliadis, Niki Papageorgiou and Eleni Kasselouri-Hatzivassiliadi (eds.), *Deaconesses, the Ordination of Women and Orthodox Theology*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017, whereas the Proceedings of the second conference are under publication. See also, Helena Kupari and Elina Vuola (eds.), *Orthodox Christianity and Gender. Dynamics of Tradition, Culture and Lived Practice*, Routledge, London and New York 2020, Gabrielle Thomas and Elena Narinskaya (eds.), *Women and Ordination in the Orthodox Church. Explorations in Theology and Practice*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Especially the Inter-Orthodox Theological Conference of Rodos (1988), but also the Conferences of Damascus (1996) and Constantinople (1997). See, Archim. Gennadios Lymouris (ed.), *The position of women in the Orthodox Church and the ordination of women*, Inter-orthodox Theological Conference, (Ρόδος, 30 Οκτωβρίου – 7 Νοεμβρίου 1988), Τέρτιος, Κατερίνη 1994, Kyriaki Karidogianni - Fitzgerald, *Orthodox Women Speak. Discerning the “Signs of Times”*, WCC Geneva – Holy Cross Press, Brookline Massachusetts 1999, Eleni Kasselouri – Hatzivassiliadi, Fulata Mbanu Moyo, Aikaterini Pekridou (eds.), *Many Women Were Also There... The Participation of Orthodox Women in the Ecumenical Movement*, WCC – Volos Academy for Theological Studies, Geneva/Volos 2010, Holy Synod of the Church of Greece / Special Synodical Committee, *Ο σύγχρονος ρόλος της γυναίκας στην Ορθόδοξη Εκκλησία*, Πρακτικά της Α’ και Β’ συνδιασκέψεως γυναικών – εκπροσώπων ιερών Μητροπόλεων της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος, Κλάδος Εκδόσεων της Επικοινωνιακής και Μορφωτικής Υπηρεσίας της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος, Αθήναι 2007.

<sup>20</sup> Gennadios Lymouris (ed.), *The position of women in the Orthodox Church....* op., cit., p. 38.

## THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH: MARTHA OR MARY?

women in the social arena and show the way to their full recognition at every level.<sup>21</sup> Women that study, acquire professional experience and have positions of authority in many sectors of social life are also capable of offering their knowledge and experience to the broader liturgical, administrative, pastoral and educational work of the Church. Making the best out of women's as well as lay people's potential constitutes a dynamic perspective for the Church.<sup>22</sup> This realization, however, is difficult and impinges on the deeply rooted patriarchal structures and attitudes of the Church as an institution that hold it captive in an absolute and, oftentimes, beautified past and create a confrontation between theology and the ecclesiastic praxis.

In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the “old fashioned” work of women, expressed by “Martha”, remains important and maintains its value. Nevertheless, the Church should take seriously into consideration the dynamics expressed by “Mary”, respectfully accept women (as equal to men), recognize the central role they play in the ecclesiastical body, provide the necessary institutional frame for the recognition of the work women offer, seek new ways for the development of feminine gifts, discover new operation models so as to transform itself into a participatory, decentralized, democratic and member-centered Church functioning as a body that provides space and opportunities for both “Martha” and “Mary”.

These two evangelical images of Martha and Mary, as models of diaconia in the ecclesiastical field, best describe the way towards the full and active participation of women in the multi-dimensional and multi-faceted ecclesiastical life. The development of these models offers unlimited possibilities both to the Church, in order to make the best of the rich contribution of women at all levels, and to women themselves, so as to offer, from the position they wish, their multifaceted diaconia to the Church. It is time for the Orthodox Church to accept that Martha and Maria are the two different sides of the same person, which is the Christian woman of today.

INTERNATIONAL HELLENIC UNIVERSITY

MASTER IN ORTHODOX ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY

FRIDAY 19-MARCH 5:00pm-7:00pm

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THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH: MARTHA OR MARIA?

PROF. NIKI PAPAGEORGIU

Emer. Prof. Petros Vassiliadis will respond and monitor the discussion

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<sup>21</sup> Quite recently, another initiative is being discovered in the recent history of the Orthodox brother (but mainly sister)hoods. More in Petros Vassiliadis, “Martha and Maria Orthodox Christian Sisterhoods. Princess Alice of Greece and her Unknown Sisterhood” in [https://mailchi.mp/wcc-coe/newsletter-of-the-ecumenical-patriarchates-permanent-delegation-to-the-wcc-april-8258371?fbclid=IwAR2ffjEPjsP5Lm9NBV\\_Gm8NIkay1LBCLqcqSOcUtSutLNxy9bmm3SbFL63M](https://mailchi.mp/wcc-coe/newsletter-of-the-ecumenical-patriarchates-permanent-delegation-to-the-wcc-april-8258371?fbclid=IwAR2ffjEPjsP5Lm9NBV_Gm8NIkay1LBCLqcqSOcUtSutLNxy9bmm3SbFL63M), and in Greek in [https://fanarion.blogspot.com/2021/05/blog-post\\_86.html](https://fanarion.blogspot.com/2021/05/blog-post_86.html)

<sup>22</sup> Dimitra Koukoura, *Η θέση της γυναίκας στην Ορθόδοξη Παράδοση*, op. cit., p. 64, Kaiti Chiotelli, «Η θέση της γυναίκας στην ορθόδοξη Εκκλησία», *Σύναξη* 36 (1990) 33-45.

**ORTHODOX THEOLOGY AND MODERN SCIENCE**

*Prof. Petros Panagiotopoulos*

Those who deal in a systematic way with the relations between the sciences and religion frequently encounter a typology of three categories within these relations: confrontational, harmonious and asymptotic. According to the first, scientific research is, by its very nature opposed to religion and inevitably clashes with it. In the second case, science and religion work in tandem, complementing and reinforcing each other. The third version has it that they are two areas which are incompatible with each other and examine entirely different and nonintersecting fields.

It is true that, in traditional societies there was no systematic confrontation. What we now call science, did not, of course, have the structure it has today. Theories about nature coincided with notions about the divine and any views which clashed with the principles of whichever religion was predominant in each society were dealt with either by the state authorities or by writings by philosophers or theologians. Things took a different turn after the age which we now call that of the Scientific Revolution.

In the sphere of religion, we often encounter an intense nostalgia for that traditional framework. In former times, what we called the *apologetic* position flourished in religious circles, in an effort to systematically confront the atheistic arguments which came, though not exclusively, from scientific thought. Although this method has not disappeared, it has largely given way to more refined and more modern ways of dealing with the apparent threats to religious ideals.

In certain instances, the responses of religious apologetics chose the path of confrontation, essentially categorizing scientific evaluations as part of a broader plan aimed at undermining the religion in question.

At other times, the solution of indifference is preferred. On the one hand, this is similar to the third type of relationship, that of non-compatibility, but with a clear tendency towards denigration: scientific knowledge can come to whatever conclusions it 'wants', because, in any case, it contributes nothing special to the way people are fulfilled religiously.

As a rule, however, what is embraced in apologetic arguments is the deployment of the second type mentioned above: that science cannot clash with religious concepts. This view may extend from the simple declaration that the truth is one and therefore can be approached by whatever means are available to human intelligence, to an insistence (probably indicating a phobic admission of the subordinate position of religion vis-à-vis science) on a necessary agreement between the two fields.

Be that as it may, however, what appears to be ignored is that, whenever turbulence has arisen in the relations between scientific and ecclesiastical thought, it did not somehow originate by itself, but followed periods of high-handed interventions both against the scientific innovations as well as society itself- interventions in which there was a clear religious note.

Historical examples are sufficiently instructive on this. We can gloss over the case of Galileo Galilei, since everyone is so familiar with it but there are many other, similar examples we might look at. The first periods of the scientific revolution, for example coincided with the emergence of the ideas of the Enlightenment, but we should remember that they also followed a time of intense religious oppression during the reign of Louis XIV (1643-1715), which ushered in a climate of acute anti-clericalism. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the British scholar C.W. Goodwin (1817-1878) observed that the positions of the apologists were so deficient, complex and self-contradictory that it was impossible for scientists not to reject them. John William Draper and Andrew Dickson White, for instance, leading lights in the conflict position, devoted themselves to the task of the systematic severance of the relationship between science and religion. They did so by any means at their disposal- though with varying degrees of success- immediately after the proclamation of Papal infallibility at the 1<sup>st</sup> Vatican Council (1869-70).

These and other examples suffice to reinforce the entrenched conviction among the scientific community that positions taken in advance, that is partisan views, are a clear threat to scientific evolution and also that, in an unfree (socially, religiously or politically) environment, in which ideas cannot circulate unhindered, it is difficult for innovations to emerge, for thinking outside the box to occur, and for distortions to go unchecked. The examples of mass flight of brilliant minds from Nazi Germany, on the one hand, and that of Trofim Lysenko in the Soviet Union, on the other, speak for themselves.

This is why, in scientific circles, a kind of allergy is triggered by any attempt to expropriate the consequences of scientific work by actors outside science. Two such instances are exceptionally enlightening as regards the loud-mouthed attitude on the part of centres of power- including religious ones- towards misappropriating the fruits of knowledge. In the first, the Roman Catholic priest, Georges Lemaitre, whose work resulted in the so-called Big Bang theory, needed to visit Pope Pius XII, together with the director of the Vatican Observatory, Daniel O'Connell, to ask him to refrain from making references to the Big Bang, the reason being that Papal support for the theory was damaging in scientific circles, since it caused either amusement or repugnance among experts.

The second instance concerns the historian and philosopher of science Paul Feyerabend. In 1990, in a speech at the La Sapienza University in Rome, the academic theologian and cardinal, Joseph Ratzinger, used some of Feyerabend's conclusions to call Galileo's trial 'reasonable and fair'. 18 years later, in January 2008, when he was Pope Benedict XVI, he was declared *persona non grata* by the faculty and students of the same university because of those statements, which were considered insulting to the academic community. Earlier, in 1993, Feyerabend himself had called these statements anachronistic and ill-advised.

In Orthodox circles one encounters a complex paradox. In the first place there is suspicion towards modern scientific thought as being the product of alien, Western culture and as means of a hidden agenda aimed at shackling religious institutions and undermining national identity. At the same time, however, the achievements of this

thought, the technological products and conveniences, are widely used- almost to excess- by all those who curse the invasion of our modern everyday life by the technocratic spirit.

Besides, scientific achievements are, as a rule, met by frosty indifference. Scientific knowledge is considered superfluous to the spiritual formation of people interested in religion, the result being that- wittingly or unwittingly- no learning or little learning is to be applauded. Critical thought is disregarded and the faithful thus become susceptible to conspiracy theories and other monstrous ideas.

The patchwork of cognitive paradoxes is completed by another, more of a moral nature, but related to those mentioned earlier: defense of the content of the teaching of love should be undertaken with shouting and expletives against those who disagree. It is to be aimed, not at a closer acquaintance with them, but, basically, at scorning them. We have seen, for instance, what happened in the case of the so-called ‘God-particle’ (Higgs boson): a journalistic (or more properly publication/commercial) designation was adopted in order to express a fear-mongering bigotry.

And yet, within Christian tradition, which we are supposed to be loudly defending, there is a rich dynamic, which is unexploited as regards the models and the example it has to offer. The Cappadocian Fathers, Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa, absorbed the scientific knowledge of their time and interpreted the six days of creation with a masterful combination of theological and scientific observations. John the Damascan included the cosmology of his own age in his dogmatic teaching. Gregory Palamas used arguments from Physics and Mathematics to support the truth of his discourses. Nikodimos the Athonite quotes the physiology of heart function in order to talk about prayer.

Within the spirit of this legacy, we believe that phobic reactions have no place. Objections, even views promoted as atheistic should not be taken as a threat, but as spiritual challenges, which should keep the reactions of research sharp and become occasions for dialogue and encounter. In the end, after so many scientific achievements, the questioning mind has earned the right to go beyond ‘how?’ and to ask ‘why?’. This should not be considered blasphemy, but rather simply the outcome of the gigantic leaps which have been accomplished. And let us not forget that reservations and sensitivities concerning the work of science are not an exclusive privilege of religious people, but of everyone actively involved with this task. The example of bioethics is exceptionally eloquent as regards the worries of the researchers themselves relating to the result of their efforts.

In the investigation of the unknown, theology tries to detect the mystery of divine will for man and the world, and the science recommends palpation of cosmic mysteries concerning the world and man. Of course, the scientific method prefixes the absolute value of reason to investigate phenomena and there is a deep trust in the data of experience and the products of human knowledge. For theology the created mind cannot access the limits of the uncreated, but also, to be effective, can’t remain trapped within the limits of intellectual self-sufficiency, but take advantage from the life-giving grace of the experience.

It is important here to note a basic tool of theological method, the so-called double methodology, that is the affirmation in reasoning on the created things and the possibility of reduction from senses and experience the divine mysteries.

Totally relevant to it, is the apophatic method of theological discourse articulation for those regions being located beyond the human knowledge accessibility. By this the inquisitive mind gets protected of failures and the general investigation of absolutism. The fundamental distinction for Christian ontology between created and uncreated is so able to combine the accepting the inconceivable divine reality with the need of human research and to offer thereafter a field of a fruitful dialogue between them.

More specifically, by apophatic theology it is simply recognized that human reason is not sufficient to express the ineffable – but without of course been any parallel attempt for its muzzling. We can say, in a more restricted as well as an opponent form, that Ludwig Wittgenstein may had understood this, considering his final Tractatus Logico-philosophicus statement: *Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent*

In an authentic Christian theology, searches of the human intellect are monitored with great interest, are dialogue points and treated with condescension. Knowing that the endings of these searches coincide with deeper dimensions of created reality, that is with sides of being in which is reflected the pattern of divine creative, leaves no room for authoritative didacticism contention and legal battles, as Apostle Paul states.

Besides, as Pierre Duhem proposed, there is always a necessity for a dual study of the world: a purely scientific and a meta-scientific one, where we have to stay outside of science and review upon scientific methods. Similar limits to the human ability to understand the deepest draft of cosmic processes implies the incompleteness theorem of Kurt Gödel. Under an expanded interpretation of it, the very logic of this world will not be able to ever fully understand the entire truth, precisely because it is part of it. A system can only be understood by another system that exceeds, for example, Mathematics of the Meta-mathematics. And, incidentally, this course is something which is particularly interested in the theological thought.

Moreover, without ignoring the right to a democratic and open society, to structure her education basing on the principle "knowledge for knowledge", we cannot ignore the source question many scientists put about the deeper texture - if not for the purpose, or the meaning - of the world studying.

Each issue scientific activity highlights is potentially equivalent to a meeting point and dialogue with all sectors of human spirit, thus to theology. The relationship and contact arises not from some "rightful" competence of theology on these issues. Church word is not and should not be a troublesome partner, demanding extortionate be consulted on every aspect of public debate. In societies, in particular, that is observed a gradual loss of social coloration, that is the abandonment of ideologies and great social visions, the so-called "great narratives", the religious leaders persistence to conform the social groups to their promptings cause at least negative associations and possibly disgust.

True morality accompanying religious thought is based on a given system of values, which is considered to have divine origin. Either through a divine revelation or through holy persons, the overall view of things, and therefore the natural world, is built

on a concrete layer of rules and norms of behavior. Modern science, by contrast, carries the spirit of the contemporary thought, attempts to establish some other moral codes or at least to align at those formed in its era. Its content has therefore a variable and evolving nature basing mostly on a naturalistic epistemology.

On this issue of the meeting of scientific thought with theological one, it is worth noting that the character of moral evaluation is too delicate to be placed under general aphorisms. Firstly, it is desired to go over the dependent individual traditions approach entitling their ethical codes a kind of a subjective connotation. On the other hand, theology must recognize the secular thought the difficulty of understanding the subtleties of Christian morality: the divine will cannot fit into human measures, and paths that sometimes follows are usually incompatible with conventional human norms. Finally, it is appropriate that declarations about inability of science to handle unmeasurable concepts, should be more cautious and not take the form of bragging. The current dimension of human intellect includes many forms, not only those of science. Many humanities - which handle such concepts - are able to contribute the findings and observations on the work of scientific cognitive domains.

By their nature, the Church and theology should be open and extrovert. They should understand people's worries and questions, however these may be expressed. In short, they should engage. Within this dialogue- particularly with today's world-science occupies a foremost position. Already such great figures of modern theology as Dumitru Stăniloae and Metropolitan John of Pergamon have emphasized the vitality involved in recognizing this need. Ignorance, clichéd positions and disdain clearly betray the fraternal spirit in which it should bear witness. They besmirch the hope within us and obscure the will to serve others which is exhibited by all manner of people, wherever they come from.

After all the point for both science and theology is to serve humanity. The answer within an anthropocentric perspective is "the man". As a modern Greek poet states, "we have to look for the human being wherever he is. When on the road to Thebes Oedipus met the monster called 'Sphinx' and it raised to him its riddles his response was just: Man. This simple word spoiled the monster. And nowadays we have many monsters to destroy. Let us think of Oedipus' answer".

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## Chapter 21

### MISSION AS COMMON CHRISTIAN WITNESS An Eastern Orthodox Perspective

*Rev. Prof. Cristian Sonea*

#### *Preamble*

In this presentation I will offer a short reflection on *Common Christian Witness* and how this appears in four recent mission documents: an Orthodox one, *The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World (MOCT, 2016)*, another one belonging to the Lausanne Movement, *The Cape Town Commitment (CTC, 2011)*, one coming from Roman Catholic Church, *Evangelii Gaudium (EG, 2013)*, and finally, the World Council of Churches' document *Together Towards Life (TTL, 2012)*.

Common witness is a much-discussed ecumenical theme, which be presented here from an Eastern Orthodox perspective by a Romanian Orthodox theologian, analysing the understanding of the term in all four documents and evaluating the different understandings' contribution to the discussion of this topic.

The article marks what through a normative theological reading can be considered irreconcilable differences in understanding of the term. It explores the limits of the common Christian mission as an ecumenical practice both in terms of possibilities and imperatives. Family is one of the *topoi* through which analysis, comparison and evaluation will be done.

#### *Introduction*

Christian mission has received much criticism from different segments of the society for the way in which the Church chose to present to the world the Gospel of Christ. If we critically analyze the results of the Christian mission from the past centuries, we admit that there are good reasons for such an attitude. Confessional missiology, colonialist behavior and confessional conflicts transplanted in the new missionary lands, to name just a few, put Christian mission in a bad light. At the same time, one cannot dismiss or ignore the contributions (for the better or the worse) of the Christian mission to the history of humanity, in all spheres of social, cultural, political and intellectual life. That is why an evaluation of the effects of Christian mission needs thorough analyses, as well as a clear view of the way in which Christian communities understand their missionary ethos.

The present article investigates the topic of common witness as it can be found in the latest document on mission produced by the Council of Crete, 2016, as well as in other documents on mission issued by Pope Francis , the Lausanne Movement and the World Council Of Churches. The method I chose was that of comparative analysis. The last three documents (*The Cape Town Commitment (CTC)*, *Evangelii Gaudium (EG)*, and *Together Towards Life (TTL)*.) will be analysed from the Orthodox understanding of common witness, exploring the ways in which the different types of common witness could be embraced in the Orthodox Church, or what the limits of the common Christian witness are from the Orthodox point of view.

Thus, the article consists of four main parts, each dedicated to a separate document, and ends with some concluding remarks through which I make some proposals for a possible common witness.

A brief note on the term common Christian witness should be made: the present article uses the terms ‘Christian witness’ and ‘common witness’ interchangeably, but always with the references made to the specific mission documents. Common Christian witness is a merging of the term and perhaps a programmatic notion for inter-Christian dialogue and unity.

*Common witness according to the Council of Crete*

Between 18–27 June 2016, most of the autocephalous Orthodox Churches met at the Holy and Great Council in Crete, after a very long period of preparation. The Council of Crete 2016 adopted six Official Documents: *The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today’s World*; *The Orthodox Diaspora*; *Autonomy and the Means by which it is Proclaimed*; *The Sacrament of Marriage and its Impediments*; *The Importance of Fasting and its Observance Today*; *Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World* and it also formulated a short *Message* and the *Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council*. In my view, the Holy and Great Council of Crete can be called The Council for the Mission of the Church for several reasons:

1. The documents that were adopted refer to the life of the Church today and not to dogmatic issues. The Council did not formulate any new dogmas, but tried to contextualize the teachings of the Church, the canonical tradition, the liturgical and spiritual experience to the realities of the contemporary world;

2. The Encyclical of the Council discusses the mission of the Church in the world, the family as the icon of Christ’s love for the Church, the work of the Church as an answer to the contemporary challenges, the attitude of the Church towards globalization, the phenomenon of extreme violence and migration, as well as the dialogue of the Church with the rest of the world and with the other Christian communities;

3. It adopted a special document on the Mission of the Church in today’s world, which is a premier for the Orthodox synodal tradition and offered a new understanding on mission, placing it into the “liturgy after the Liturgy” paradigm and defining it as “Christian witness”. It is important to note that the term common witness does not appear in the documents.

The Encyclical defines *mission* in the following way:

Participation in the holy Eucharist is a source of missionary zeal for the evangelization of the world. By participating in the holy Eucharist and praying in the Sacred Synaxis for the whole world (oikoumene), we are called to continue the «liturgy after the Liturgy» and to offer witness concerning the truth of our faith before God and mankind, sharing God’s gifts with all mankind, in obedience to the explicit commandment of our Lord before His Ascension: «And you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth» (Acts 1, 8)” (Encyclical 6).

## MISSION AS COMMON CHRISTIAN WITNESS

The life of Christians is a truthful witness to the renewal in Christ of all things – «If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, all things have become new» (2 Cor 5,17) – and an invitation addressed to all people for personal and free participation in eternal life, in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the love of God the Father, in order to experience the communion of the Holy Spirit in the Church...» (Encyclical 6).

It is worth mentioning here that “the liturgy after the Liturgy” was coined by Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos of Albania in 1975 during the missionary meeting in Etchmiadzin, from Armenia (Yannoulatos 2013:111–114) and it was later developed and promoted by Ion Bria (Bria 1996). The understanding of mission as Christian witness was also supported, besides the two theologians mentioned above, by Dumitru Stăniloae (Stăniloae 1980). Through these two ideas concerning the new understanding of Christian mission (“liturgy after the Liturgy” and “Christian witness”), the Romanian Orthodox missiology plays an important part at a pan-Orthodox level.

The understanding of mission as “Christian witness” is a concept which is frequently used in the ecumenical missiology (Keum 2013; Christian Witness 2011), and by the other confessional missiologies (Bosch 1991:474–489). It is important to mention that the emphasis on mission as “Christian witness” was the work of a group of Orthodox missiologists who analyzed the pre-Council document on mission and noticed that it neglected the contemporary terminology “martyria/witness” used frequently in their works by the archbishop of Albania Anastasios and by Ion Bria. This group of missiologists suggested the introducing of this notion in the document, and even changing the title of the document from “The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today’s World” into “The Witness of the Orthodox Church in Today’s World”. The same group also remarked the absence of any references to “the liturgy after the Liturgy”, from the pre-Council document. (Symeonides 2016:121) This being said, the following section is dedicated to the way in which the Holy and Great Council of Crete understands “Christian witness” and the “common Christian witness”. It is perhaps worth adding that “martyria” appears in the non-Orthodox missionary documents like *The Cape Town Commitment*, *Evangelii Gaudium*, *Together Towards Life* as well.

### *The theological understanding of mission as “Christian witness”*

According to the documents of the Council of Crete, apostleship and the preaching of the Gospel, also known as *mission*, are part of the very nature of the Church. Also, preserving and observing Christ’s commandment “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19) is the “breath of life” that the Church breaths into the human society and transforms the world into the Church through the newly-established local Churches everywhere (Encyclical 6). Evangelization “represents the diachronic mission of the Church” (MOCT 1). It is important to note that “the re-evangelization of God’s people in contemporary secularized societies, as well as the evangelization of those who have not yet come to know Christ, is the unceasing duty of the Church” (Encyclical 6). Thus, for the Orthodox Church, evangelization and re-evangelization are defined as two different aspects of the same missionary approach. We mention this especially because, according to the Catholic theology, Christian mission traditionally

concerns only non-Christian nations (cf. *Ad Gentes*), while re-evangelization is perceived as pastoral work and it does not fall into the field of *mission*.

Taking into account the rather extended period of time granted for the organization of the Holy and Great Council of Crete, as well as the long period in which the document was elaborated, we must mention that it contains missionary paradigms which reflect the entire history of the Orthodox Church in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We can find here the pattern of the great sending (Encyclical 6, MOCT 1), the paradigm of the universal mission with an extensive sense, the paradigm of mission focused on the Church (Encyclical 6), the pattern of the mission with an eschatological orientation (MOCT 1), the Trinitarian understanding of the Christian witness (MOCT 1), the liturgical meaning of mission, pluralistic approaches and the orientation towards social issues (MOCT C-D).

As far as the reception of the synodal document is concerned, there are voices that consider it to be too theoretical and abstract. For example, Evi Voulgaraki-Pissina thinks that generalization leads to uniformity, the final text lacking a contextualization of the Christian mission, relevant to the local Churches (Voulgaraki-Pissina 2017:138). Although I partially accept these remarks, one must take into account the purpose for which the document was adopted and the general context to which it is addressed. The document on mission is meant to show what the contribution of the Orthodox Church is to finding solutions to some of the problems of the contemporary world. One must not forget that this document initially had another title: The Contribution of the Orthodox Church to achieving peace, justice, liberty, fraternity and love among people and to eliminate racial or other types of discriminations (Chryssavgis 2016, 20), and the actual form of the document is the result of a process of analysis and theological reflection. The change of the title itself, as a result of a theological evaluation of the current context, determines us to give credit to the synodal text and to appreciate the interest in mission shown by the Council of Crete.

Hence, in the document “The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today’s World” we find the theological basis of the “Christian witness” in God’s will, who wants to save the entire humanity. According to an Eastern Orthodox understanding, this divine work is developed and can be found within the Church, understood as an icon of the Kingdom of God. In this context, the liturgical dimension has a fundamental role in the missionary activity. Through the participation of the ecclesiastic community in the Eucharist, Christians enter the world of an eschatological reality in which they can live their life together with Christ, with all His saints and the rest of the community, in a state of anticipation of the Kingdom of God. Inspired by this first form of experiencing the Kingdom, the Church cannot remain indifferent to people’s needs. That is the very purpose of mission, to give witness about the eschatological experience that takes place within the Eucharistic communion and implies different dimensions of Christian witness. I will now turn to some of these dimensions.

#### *The dignity of the human being*

According to the documents of the Council, one may identify a few directions in which Christian witness can be accomplished. The first one is the witness for the dignity

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of the human being (Encyclical 12) which is based on a theological ontology of the human being and his “destiny”, deification, according to the Orthodox theology. Those who believe in the intimate communion with God are raised towards salvation and *theosis* (deification), both manifested as extensions of the relationships between God and His creation. (MOCT 1).

Based on this, the inter-Christian dialogue and cooperation becomes relevant, especially in the effort to defend the value and dignity of human beings, good and peace among people. Having these common values in the Christian witness, the pacifist efforts of all the Christians may gain more credibility and force. In this direction, the Orthodox Church can bring her own contribution without resorting to any religious syncretism (MOCT 3).

### *Martyria as a struggle or peace and social justice*

The document also speaks about *martyria* for peace and social justice. The Church “suffers with all people who in various parts of the world are deprived of the benefits of peace and justice” (MOCT 5). Thus, the Christian witness is a legitimate work to accomplish peace and social justice, as well as to eliminate any type of discrimination. The Church today faces many challenges, taking into account especially the multidimensional social service, the social conflicts, the economic conditions and the gap between the rich and the poor (MOCT F, 1-4). Then, the Church has a great responsibility in the struggle against poverty: “Hunger not only threatens the divine gift of life of whole peoples, but also offends the lofty dignity and sacredness of the human person, while simultaneously offending God” (MOCT 5). The document underlines the profound meaning of serving the neighbor. If “own sustenance is a material issue” (MOCT 5), a very honorable one for that matter, on the other hand, “the concern over feeding our neighbor is a spiritual issue (*Jm 2:14-18*). And it concludes, stating that “it is the mission of all Orthodox Churches to exhibit solidarity and administer assistance effectively to those in need” (MOCT F, 5).

### *The prophetic character of the Christian witness*

According to the document, Christian witness today encounters a consumerist society, an immoral and secularized world, the so-called liberal globalization (MOCT F, 5-8). The Church is called to give a prophetic witness: “Even as the Church proceeds to preach and realize her salvific mission for the world, she is all the more frequently confronted by expressions of secularism. The Church of Christ in the world is called to express once again and to promote the content of her prophetic witness to the world, grounded on the experience of faith and recalling her true mission through the proclamation of the Kingdom of God and the cultivation of a sense of unity among her flock. In this way, she opens up a broad field of opportunity since an essential element of her ecclesiology promotes Eucharistic communion and unity within a shattered world” (MOCT F, 9).

One area in which the prophetic witness can be practiced is the Churches relation to scientific evolution. Even when one acknowledges the positive outcomes of the scientific evolution in the life of the contemporary society, one cannot deny the negative

consequences of the same outcomes, and the Churches are called to bear common witness regarding these consequences. One of them is undoubtedly the ecological crisis.

We should not forget that the earth's natural resources are not our property, but the Creator's: «The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, the world, and those who dwell therein» (Ps 23:1)<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, the Orthodox Church emphasizes the protection of God's creation through the cultivation of human responsibility for our God-given environment and the promotion of the virtues of frugality and self-restraint. We are obliged to remember that not only present, but also future generations have a right to enjoy the natural goods granted to us by the Creator (MOCT F, 10).

We do not mean to suggest that the ability to explore the world scientifically is a bad thing in itself. When it serves the correct purposes, it is God's gift to humanity.

For the Orthodox Church, the ability to explore the world scientifically is a gift from God to humanity. However, along with this positive attitude, the Church simultaneously recognizes the dangers latent in the use of certain scientific achievements. She believes that the scientist is indeed free to conduct research, but that the scientist is also obliged to interrupt this research when it violates basic Christian and humanitarian values. According to St. Paul, All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful (1 *Cor* 6:12), and according to St. Gregory the Theologian, “Goodness is not goodness if the means are wrong” (*1st Theological Oration*, 4, PG 36, 16C). This perspective of the Church proves necessary for many reasons in order to establish proper boundaries for freedom and the application of the fruits of science, where in almost all disciplines, but especially in biology, we can expect both new achievements and risks. At the same time, we emphasize the unquestionable sacredness of human life from its conception (MOCT F, 11).

#### *Christian martyrria for the protection of the nuclear (traditional) family*

Another concern for the Christian witness is the family. The struggle to protect and promote the values of the Christian family is a very important topic these days because of the influences of the neo-liberalism that is being “religiously” promoted in the contemporary world. There are societies, especially in the Western World, in which the traditional family, either nuclear (typical to modern and postmodern societies) or extended, is constantly being questioned as the preferred family system, especially when it comes to raising children. (Sear 2016) There are alternatives to family life, and even new understandings of what a married couple means, which forces the Orthodox Church to offer an answer and express a coherent position. In the document about mission, this comes in the form of pastoral concern for the education of the youth, and also as an extension of Church's pastoral care for the family as an institution. This institution is “divinely-granted, has always been and must always be founded on the sacred mystery of Christian marriage” and it is reconfirmed as “a union between man

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<sup>1</sup> I will use the numbering of the Eastern Orthodox edition of the Bible.

and woman, as reflected in the union of Christ and His Church (*Eph 5:32*)” (MOCT F, 14).

*Christian witness in dialogue*

A topic that received special attention at the Council of Crete was the dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the other Christian communities. In this context, the Christian witness is a testimony of dialogue. However, the explicit references regarding a common Christian witness cannot be found in the document on mission. But, in order to understand the Orthodox position, we will refer to two other documents of the Council: *Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World* (ROCRCW) and the *Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church*.

Understanding mission as a common witness must be explained first of all through the relations of the Orthodox Church with the non-Orthodox communities. This is due to the fact that in the Orthodox missiology, Church’s witness is associated with the apostolicity and catholicity of the Church. The calling to teach “all the nations” is a clear expression of the universal character of the mission of the Church.

The Orthodox Church is aware that the movement to restore Christian unity is taking on new forms in order to respond to new circumstances and to address the new challenges of today’s world. The continued witness of the Orthodox Church to the divided Christian world on the basis of the apostolic tradition and faith is imperative (ROCRCW 23, 24).

Moreover, according to the Council’s Encyclical, the ecumenical dialogue in itself is a kind of witness, “a witness in dialogue” (Encyclical 20). Consequently, in order to have a common witness, we must have an ecumenical dialogue. The inter-Christian dialogue has a vertical dimension in which theological problems are discussed, as well as a horizontal dimension, in which moral aspects and social challenges are considered. For the Orthodox Church, the vertical dimension involves the transmission of the apostolic faith through the Holy Scripture and the heritage of the Tradition. For now, the churches involved in the ecumenical dialogue do not confess the same apostolic faith, but we can still offer the world a common witness of the love of God.

In conclusion, it seems that, for the Council of Crete, Christian witness occupies a central place within the life of the Church. Also, common witness is a way towards the unity of all Christians. It is manifested in the need to continue or to start the ecumenical dialogue in order to come to a unity of faith. However, we must point out the domains in which the “common witness” can be achieved for the time being. In the current context, we must accept that there cannot be a common evangelization, because different Christian communities do not agree on all aspects of faith. Regarding moral or social issues, human rights, the family and the Christian education, a common witness of all Christians is still possible in the contemporary world. In the following I will turn my attention to recent mission documents written in different Christian traditions and look at how these documents conceive of Christian witness.

*Common witness in the Cape Town Commitment (CTC)*

In my reading, the Lausanne Movement document approaches the idea of a common witness in a section entitled *Partnering in the body of Christ for unity in mission*.

Here CTC affirms the theological ground for partnership in mission, which is, based on a Pauline theology, the unity of creation and the unity of the Church. If in the Holy and Great Synod's documents unity arises from the unity of the Church, here the unity is based on the reconciliation with God that has been accomplished through Jesus Christ on the cross.

Paul teaches us that Christian unity is the creation of God, based on our reconciliation with God and with one another. This double reconciliation has been accomplished through the cross. When we live in unity and work in partnership we demonstrate the supernatural, counter-cultural power of the cross. But when we demonstrate our disunity through failure to partner together, we demean our mission and message, and deny the power of the cross (CTC IIF, 1).

A divided Church has no authentic message for the contemporary world, divided itself. "Our failure to live in reconciled unity is a major obstacle to authenticity and effectiveness in mission." (CTC IIF, 1) and later:

We lament the dividedness and divisiveness of our churches and organizations. We deeply and urgently long for Christians to cultivate a spirit of grace and to be obedient to Paul's command to 'make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.' While we recognize that our deepest unity is spiritual, we long for greater recognition of the missional power of visible, practical, earthly unity. So we urge Christian sisters and brothers worldwide, for the sake of our common witness and mission, to resist the temptation to split the body of Christ, and to seek the paths of reconciliation and restored unity wherever possible (CTC IIF,1, A, B).

According to the document common witness, called "partnership in global mission", must have a Christocentric content. The former missionary principles such as "efficiency", the prioritization and preservation of the confessional identities must disappear before the "supremacy and centrality of Christ in our mission". This has to be "more than a confession of faith; it must also govern our strategy, practice and unity" (CTC IIF, 2).

Furthermore, the document seems to reject the old pattern of "from the West to the Rest". The old Western missionary model has long been criticized. However, simply moving the center of attention from one part of the world to another might not be the kind of change Christian mission needs. That is why, CTC states:

We do not accept the idea that the baton of mission responsibility has passed from one part of the world Church to another. There is no sense in rejecting the past triumphalism of the West, only to relocate the same ungodly spirit in Asia, Africa, or Latin America" (CTC IIF, 2).

The new paradigm of mission however cannot be reduced to the rejection of the pattern "from the West to the Rest" *per se*, neither to the acceptance without reasons of the model "from the South-East to the Rest", but rather the replacing of both the

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alternatives with a new pattern: “from the Best to the Rest”. And by “the best”, I mean “spiritually the best”, those who can prove moral authority and honesty in their wish to give witness to the world about redemption, salvation and sanctification in Christ. Having said this, I am aware of the fact that defining what is “the best” can only happen in community and dialogue.

A specific issue regarding witness and one which might be a valid invitation to reflect the idea of “the best” in this document is that of the partnership of men and women in mission (CTC IIF, 3). In MOCT, the only reference to women is found in the context of discussing the definition of the family. That does not mean that women are left out from the missionary work. Still, women’s ministerial service or priesthood, although discussed in some circles today, are not truly considered yet and, until now, there is no official statement on the issue of women ordination on a pan-Orthodox level. According to the Orthodox Tradition, women cannot be priests. The maximal sacramental priesthood position for a woman is that of the deaconess, but not even this is universally accepted by everyone. For some, there are theological arguments against the ordination of women, and the deaconesses in the history were consecrated through a simple blessing. Some modern theologians, such as Bishop Kallistos Ware, argue that there isn’t any theological argument against women ordination, but in the Orthodox Tradition, we cannot find women as priests, so the rejection is rather based on canonical and disciplinary reasons. (Behr-Sigel and Ware 2000) According to this view, the deaconesses were ordained the same way the male deacons were ordained. Here, CTC, supporting the Lausanne historic position, women and men are all called to do evangelization work and to give witness. (CTC IIF, 3, A)

Another issue, still linked to the gender question within the CTS can be found under the heading *Walk in love, rejecting the idolatry of disordered sexuality*. CTC makes a statement about the importance of the family in the society, and defines the family as the “faithful relationship between one man and one woman”.

God’s design in creation is that marriage is constituted by the committed, faithful relationship between one man and one woman, in which they become one flesh in a new social unity that is distinct from their birth families, and that sexual intercourse as the expression of that ‘one flesh’ is to be enjoyed exclusively within the bond of marriage. This loving sexual union within marriage, in which ‘two become one’, reflects both Christ’s relationship with the Church and also the unity of Jew and Gentile in the new humanity. (CTC IIF, 2).

The attitude towards the definition of the family is similar in MOCT (F, 14), even as far as the theological argumentation is concerned: “marriage as a union between man and woman, as reflected in the union of Christ and His Church” (Eph 5, 32). Another pastoral concern mentioned is the “disordered sexuality” that contributes to the social decline, “including the breakdown of marriages and families and produces incalculable suffering of loneliness and exploitation” (CTC IIF, 2). CTC also brings up the issue of homosexuality and rejects and condemns “all forms of hatred, verbal or physical abuse, and victimization of homosexual people” (CTC IIF, 2, B, 4).

In MOCT there is not direct mention of homosexuals or homosexual practice and the only reference is that in the context of defending the traditional family, having in mind the attempts in some countries and in certain Christian communities to legalize and to justify theologically “other forms of human cohabitation that are contrary to Christian tradition and teaching” (MOCT F, 14).

*Christian witness in the Evangelii Gaudium (EG)*

*Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel)* are the first two words of the first Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis, which was issued on November 24, 2013, under the title *On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World*. It is a substantial text, divided into five chapters and 288 paragraphs.

The first chapter, *The Church's missionary transformation* (EG19-49), reminds us that the heart of the Gospel is missionary: faith is a gift from God and since it is a gift, it shouldn't be just kept by one person, but transmitted to others. Thus, the Church is permanently renewed by preaching the Gospel and through the growth of her sons and daughters. *Similarly, the Encyclical of the Holy and Great Synod states that the mission belongs to “the core of the Church's identity”* (EL II, 6).

The second chapter, *Amid the crisis of communal commitment* (EG 50-109), is probably the most controversial section of the document. Pope Francis calls for a fairer approach in commerce, economic justice, a more equitable distribution of wealth in the world. He does not simply condemn capitalism, but says that the theories of economic growth, which claim that the profit of the rich will inevitably help the poor, don't work. This section also addresses the secularization of the cultures, which get further away from the beauty of the Christian message every day. At the end of this section, Pope Francis emphasizes his belief that it would be a benefit for the Church to rely more on the knowledge of the faithful women. It is not a radical view, but rather a continuation of what Pope John Paul II had started when he talked about “the feminine genius” (EG103).

The third chapter, *The proclamation of the Gospel* (EG110-175), represents the very heart of this Apostolic Exhortation, encouraging all Christians to consider themselves apostles called to preach the Christ's Good News about love and forgiveness. Pope Francis notes that all the various ways in which people live today constitute different callings, and the Gospel can find roots wherever we are. This conviction shows Pope Francis's faith in the power of Christ and of the Church to call all people to salvation (EG113-114). Pope Francis is not afraid of the diversity and notes that each nation can experience the gift of God [...] in accordance with its own culture”, while “the Church expresses her genuine catholicity and shows forth the ‘beauty of her varied face.’” (EG 116)

The fourth chapter, *The social dimension of Evangelization* (EG176-258), is perhaps the most “catholic” section, as it speaks about the most “universal and inclusivist” call to solidarity. At the heart of each community we should find the inclusion of the poor, the civil peace, the social dialogue, all these contributing to social harmony. This is the section in which ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue are discussed.

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The fifth and the last chapter is *Spirit-filled evangelizers* (EG 259-288) approaches a different topic: the descent of the Holy Spirit. Pope Francis thinks that the courage and boldness given to the sons of God upon this first descent of the Holy Spirit still exists today in the Church of Christ. Just like they did then, we are called to receive the Holy Spirit and to give it to those who don't know yet that they too are God's people. The accent here lies on the missionary impulse from the opening of the Exhortation, as well as on the Church that God wants to build with the entire humanity.

### *Common witness in Evangelii Gaudium (EG)*

The issues of the common witness is treated in the section dedicated to the *Ecumenical dialogue*. For Pope Francis, on the one hand, the commitment to ecumenism is an answer to the prayer of the Lord Jesus that "they may all be one" (*Jn* 17, 21). On the other hand, "the credibility of the Christian message would be much greater if Christians could overcome their divisions" (EG 244).

*Evangelii Gaudium* is Pope Francis's response to the Synod of the Bishops held from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup> of October 2012, under the title: *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*. The presence of the Patriarch of Constantinople, His Holiness Bartholomeus I, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, His Grace Rowan Williams, as a guest represented an important Christian witness (EG 245). So, according to the EG, the inter-Christian dialog in itself is a common witness. Having in mind the effects of Christian division as a counter-witness, especially in Asia and Africa, "the search for paths to unity becomes all the more urgent" (EG 246). The procedure for the searching of the unity of all Christians could follow "the principle of the hierarchy of truths"<sup>2</sup>. The urgency is given by the large numbers of people who have not received the Gospel of Jesus Christ. "Consequently, commitment to a unity which helps them to accept Jesus Christ can no longer be a matter of mere diplomacy or forced compliance, but rather an indispensable path to evangelization" (EG 246). This imperative is truly "revolutionary" from an Orthodox perspective, because the common witness involves here a common evangelization.

It is not just about being better informed about others, but rather about reaping what the Spirit has sown in them, which is also meant to be a gift for us. To give but one example, in the dialogue with our Orthodox brothers and sisters, we Catholics have the opportunity to learn more

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<sup>2</sup> According to *General Catechetical Directory* (GCD), "in the message of salvation there is a certain hierarchy of truths (cf. UR, 11), which the Church has always recognized when it composed creeds or summaries of the truths of faith. This hierarchy does not mean that some truths pertain faith itself less than others, but rather that some truths are based on others as of a higher priority and are illumined by them. On all levels catechesis should take account of this hierarchy of the truths of faith. These truths may be grouped under four basic heads: the mystery of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Creator of all things; the mystery of Christ the incarnate Word, who was born of the Virgin Mary, and who suffered, died, and rose for our salvation; the mystery of the Holy Spirit, who is present in the Church, sanctifying it and guiding it until the glorious coming of Christ, our Savior and Judge; and the mystery of the Church, which is Christ's Mystical Body, in which the Virgin Mary holds the pre-eminent place." (GCD, 43)

about the meaning of episcopal collegiality and their experience of synodality” (EG 246).

The idea of “reaping what the Spirit has sown in them” is very honorable, but a question still remains: how can this common evangelization be put into practice? Will it be a common “trans-confessional” evangelization that would not be accepted by the majority of the partners involved in the ecumenical dialogue or will it be a Catholic witness enriched with non-Catholic teachings? EG talks about things that unite us and about the things that we can learn from each another, but, in my understanding, the common evangelization is still elaborated in a “catholic” way and so it remains Catholic. The EG seems not to provide answers to the question of common, meaning inter-Christian witness encompassing both teaching and doing.

*Common witness in Together Towards Life (TTL)*

As one can read in *Together Towards Life (TTL)*, for a long time the history of the Christian mission was characterized by a tendency towards a geographical colonial expansion, starting from the Christian centers towards “unreached territories”, from the center to the ends of the earth. Today we face a different ecclesial situation, radically changed, described with the term “world Christianity”, as, according to the statistics (Pew Research Center 2011), most of the Christians live or have their origins in the *global South and East*<sup>3</sup>. This situation, together with the *phenomenon of migration*, which has become multi-directional in the past years, lies at the basis of the relocation in space of the Christian world. Then, the appearance of several powerful Pentecostal and Evangelical movements is one of the remarkable features of the nowadays Christianity.

What are the features of mission and evangelization within this “shift of the centre of gravity of Christianity?” (TTL, 5) The realistic diagnosis of the situation enriches the missionary paradigm with new accents. According to the missionary document, people who were considered “at the margins” until now, those who were the *object* of the mission from the centre, say they now play a key role in the missionary work, and this inversion of the roles is supported by the Holy Scripture. God is the One who chose the poor, the simple and the weak (1 Cor 1:18-31) to carry on God’s work to announce justice and peace into the world. This is the shift of emphasis in the ecumenical missionary model, defined as “mission *from* the margins” (TTL, 6). The new missionary declaration has been developed within this new frame, it is organized as answers offered to ten missiological questions and ends with ten missionary statements grouped under the title *Feast of life*.

TTL is by definition a common witness document produced by CWME from WCC.

The Christian communities in their diversity are called to identify and practice ways of common witness in a spirit of partnership and cooperation,

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<sup>3</sup> The Global South refers to the developing countries, which are located especially in the southern hemisphere. It is composed of Africa, Latin America and Asia, including the Middle Orient.

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including through mutually respectful and responsible forms of evangelism. Common witness is what the “churches, even while separated, bear together, especially through joint efforts, by manifesting whatever divine gifts of truth and life they already share and experience in common (TTL 63).

As the document states, with the integration of CWME in WCC new opportunities arise “to encounter new understandings of mission and unity from Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Indigenous churches from all over the globe”. Then, the context of the WCC has facilitated close relationships with the Roman Catholic Church, with Evangelicals, especially with the Lausanne Movement for World Evangelization and the World Evangelical Alliance. All these contributed to the ecumenical missiology and the theological reflection on common witness. (TTL 65)

The topics approached in the new document are the following: 1) Spirit of Mission: Breath of Life; 2) Spirit of Liberation: Mission from the Margins; 3) Spirit of Community: Church on the Move; 4) Spirit of Pentecost: Good News for All.

### *Common witness – an ecumenical understanding*

In the subchapter entitled “Spirit of Mission: Breath of Life” (TTL 12-16) the document presents the missionary value of the work of the Holy Spirit into the world and the relationship between the work of the Spirit and that of the Son. The emphasis on the role of the Spirit in the missionary work is a new attitude in the ecumenical missiology, compared to the old document on mission, *Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Declaration*, approved in 1982. Hence, reading the text in an Orthodox key, we see the kenosis of the Son which prolongs in history into the “kenosis” of the Holy Spirit, Who is perceived as the One through Whom Christ is continuously present and His mission is fulfilled through the Holy Spirit (TTL, 16).

Another element of novelty, in which we can see the contribution of the Orthodox missiology is the presentation of the Church as an eschatological assembly (*synaxis*) of the people of God. According to this approach, “the faithful go forth in peace (in mission) after they have experienced in their Eucharistic gathering the eschatological kingdom of God as a glimpse and foretaste of it” (TTL 17). The mission is thus the *result*, rather than the origin of the Church and it is called “liturgy after the Liturgy” (TTL, 16).

Another changed perspective in the understanding of mission is that concerning the relationship between human beings and nature. The document states that “in many ways creation is in mission to humanity; for instance, the natural world has a power that can heal the human heart and body. The wisdom literature in the Bible affirms creation’s praise of its Creator (Ps. 9:1-4; 66:1; 96:11-13; 98:4; 100:1; 150:6). The Creator’s joy and wonder in creation is one of the sources of our spirituality (Job 38-39)” (TTL, 22). If until now, the Christians’ life was seen as having effects on their relationship with the environment, the document presents the work of the Spirit within creation as a form of the world itself having a mission for the human being. Although we recognize God’s presence within creation, yet, the one who values the potentialities of the creation is the human being. According to the theology of Saint Maximus the Confessor, the meaning of the human being and creation being together in God is fulfilled when all reconcile in

the human being, the one who has the quality of being a mediator within creation. If things were different, creation would be self-aware or it would be understood in a pantheist key, which is not in agreement with Christian theology.

Then, the Holy Spirit inspires the human cultures, so that creatively including the inheritance of civilization and culture from different historical contexts becomes vital for the mission today (TTL, 27). Furthermore, the Holy Spirit generates a missionary spirituality, which intends to transform all the social systems that are against life (TTL, 30).

Evaluated from an Orthodox perspective, the document *Together towards Life* brings certain elements of novelty regarding the pneumatologic meaning of mission. Still, from my point of view, in order to be better received in the Orthodox environment, an analysis of the relationship between the work of the Holy Spirit, the apostolic faith and the holiness of life would be necessary. It is true that the Christian mission is the work of the Spirit of God in which missionaries participate as well, their participation being a participation in the life of the Spirit of Christ, who transforms people, sanctifying and making people bearers of the Spirit. The Spirit being the Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of the apostolic Church is transmitted as the Spirit that converts to the whole Truth, thus being absolutely necessary for the missionary work. Finally, although the work of converting the world is that of the faithful bearers of grace, it is the work of God-Holy Spirit present in the missionaries. This does not mean that the missionary is a passive object through which the Spirit works automatically, but that through the ascetic effort of the missionary, God's grace dwells in His saints and manifests a vital force which converts. From an Eastern Orthodox perspective, this is a condition necessary for the transmission of the true faith, for it is the same Holy Spirit that is transmitted, the Spirit of Truth or the Spirit of the righteous faith.

That is why, the missionary's capacity depends not only on the theological competence and on the pedagogical qualities, but also on the personal righteousness. Taking into account the manner in which the Holy Spirit is given, through the irradiation of the divine energies into the human receptacle, the saints, just as Saint Apostle Paul, are both recipients of light and preachers and witnesses of the Light, using their light to shine on the others. Not only do they commune with the life of God, but they also share it with the others. The Christian mission is efficient especially when the power of the Holy Spirit irradiates from the one who preaches Christ. This power shines unhindered through his word being a confirmation of the work of the Holy Spirit in him and through him. This takes place when the preacher incorporates, in his life, the truth of Christ, because the Holy Spirit is linked with the truth, meaning with God, who incarnated in Jesus Christ. That is why the mission was complete and profound when it was performed by saints and martyrs, who forgot about themselves and assumed Christ's Cross, confessing it to martyrdom. "They dedicated their whole life, not just the talent of their words, in order to render accessible to the other the mystery of Christ"(Stăniloae 1980:47-48).

The document *Together towards Life* proposes the ecumenical world a new understanding of the missionary model under the phrase *missio Dei*. *Missio Dei*, or the mission of God and our participation to His work, is underlined repeatedly in the text,

and “mission from the margins” is framed by this larger missionary concept, that has already become classic. Being an ecumenical document, it also has its natural limits, especially when analyzed from a traditional theological perspective, especially an Orthodox one. However, the new missionary declaration is a useful theological mark which describes the present context and offers new perspectives for the missionary work. Although at a first glance it seems not to address the Orthodox world, yet, at a certain level of understanding, the document is useful for the Eastern Churches as well. We notice that the text abounds in terms characteristic to the Orthodox missionary theology, but the way in which these terms are used and interpreted does not always completely express their original content. Then, an important topic that the declaration seems to avoid is the issue of conversion and its meanings. We understand that the document cannot recommend the confession to which the conversion should take place, and it speaks only about the personal conversion to the Gospel of Christ. Still, from an Orthodox perspective, the conversion that makes the new Christian a member of a Church is essential. The affiliation through conversion and Baptism to an ecclesial community proves that mission has fulfilled a part of its work, and the “continuous conversion” (with the meaning of *metanoia*) is a form of growth within the community until the “whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:10) is attained.

*Conclusion: Towards a Common Christian Witness*

One conclusion after reading the four documents would be that indeed common witness is an imperative and that it is a path to the unity of all Christians. While *common evangelization* is not possible as long as the ecclesiastic communities do not share the same confession of faith, still we are left with a *common witness*, on one hand, as a way to achieve the visible unity of the Church, and, on the other hand, a way to gain credibility when facing the secularized world. The ecumenical dialogue is in itself an example of Christian witness and it needs to be encouraged and developed.

Nowadays, we cannot be optimistic about achieving the unity of faith, but we can still give common witness in other areas, such as moral issues, social challenges, human rights, the definition of the family or Christian education.

According to the Orthodox theology, the unity of faith as a precondition of the unity of the Church has always been extremely important. Orthodox missiology confesses the existence of a single Church, present in various ethnic and geographical contexts. That is why, Orthodox theology speaks of the Universal Church as a theoretical paradigm which then is actualized in each local Church. From this point of view, each local church is a contextual manifestation of a unique universal Church.

Since the purpose of this article was to show the way in which several ecclesiastical bodies understand common witness, I looked at different types of ecclesiologies and different ways of understanding unity. Thus, one cannot help but wonder to what extent can one speak of unity in Christian confession in the absence of a theological consensus.

According to the texts analysed above, I conclude that one can indeed speak of a common Christian witness within, however, certain limits. The limits of the common Christian witness are marked by confessional differences, that is why, unfortunately, we cannot have common evangelization or common communion. The Orthodox

Church does not practice Eucharistic hospitality. Still, Orthodox theology recognizes the contribution of other ecclesiastical communities in building a missionary theology, as well as in the development of the contemporary ecumenical dialogue.

Besides the theological issues that still separate Christian communities, the documents analysed above identify social and theological areas in which common witness is possible. Thus, all four documents embrace the *Missio Dei* paradigm, although not all four documents mention it *expressis verbis*. They also mention the centrality of our Saviour Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in Christian mission, thus avoiding the trap of a Christomonistic missionary theology.

As a central missionary deed, all four documents speak of the necessity of the re-evangelization of the contemporary society, the fight against social inequalities, and for social justice. Also, certain changes regarding missionary work that have been synthesised in TTL's "mission from the margins" are mentioned in all four documents, without necessarily using the same words. They all acknowledge the fact that Christian mission has changed considerably and those who were once the object of the evangelization have now become actors and partners in mission, some even missionaries who participate in the re-evangelization of the Western world.

The documents stress the important role played by women in missionary work, as well as the importance of the nuclear family in the life of the Church. All documents approach in one way or another moral issues such as homosexuality, emphasizing the fact that any abuse or persecution against sexual minorities need to be rejected.

Another common theme for Christian witness is Christian education. Although approached from different angles (in MOCT, for example, it is seen as part of the Church's effort to protect and care for the family), all documents agree that Christian education of the young generations must occupy a central place in the life of the Church.

In conclusion, even though Christian mission is limited by certain theological differences, the documents presented above prove that Christian communities can act together in many fundamental aspects of the social life. A common Christian witness/mission understood this way can represent a new approach to the ecumenical dialogue. By building bridges among various Christian communities on practical issues, the ecumenical dialogue could start from social issues and then move towards theological issues rather than the other way around.

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## MISSION AS COMMON CHRISTIAN WITNESS

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MASTER IN ORTHODOX ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY

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Prof. Petros Vassiliadis will respond and monitor the discussion

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[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCD\\_5mcv3Z82pYW8LFUk2Emw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCD_5mcv3Z82pYW8LFUk2Emw)

The poster features a central image of a modern building with the International Hellenic University logo and name. A portrait of Rev. Prof. Cristian Sonea is overlaid on the left side of the image. The background is a solid dark blue color.

## Chapter 22

### EVANGELISM AND MISSION IN THE DOCUMENTS OF THE HOLY AND GREAT COUNCIL OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

*Prof. Dimitrios Keramidas*

#### *The Christian mission as proclamation of God's parousia*

For the Christian East, the missionary nature of the Church is rooted on two founding events of the economy of salvation: the Resurrection of Christ (Acts 1:8) and Pentecost (Acts 2:1-41)<sup>1</sup>. Yet, it is the mystery of the Trinity where Orthodox theology finds the supreme resource and the ultimate purpose of evangelism. Trinitarian theology states that “mission does not aim primarily at the propagation or transmission of intellectual convictions, doctrines, moral commands, etc., but at the transmission of the life of communion, that exists in God”<sup>2</sup>. Christian mission is thus perceived as a “programme” of the Trinity, which reflects the divine *hypostasis* (the way of being of God). In this way, Christology and pneumatology converge to a communal projection of the one divine mission.

It must be acknowledged that, until recently, orthodox theology of mission did not find a complete systematic articulation. The general viewpoint was that “in the Eastern tradition [...] the emphasis was on conservation and restoration, rather than on embarking on a journey into the unknown. The key words were tradition, orthodoxy, and the Fathers, and the church became the bulwark of right doctrine. Orthodox churches tended to become ingrown, excessively nationalistic, and unconcerned for those outside”<sup>3</sup>. It is true that the Orthodox Church does not benefit magisterial structures that can pronounce authoritatively on behalf of the whole of Orthodoxy principles regarding ecclesial doctrine and practice. She rather relies on the teaching of the Fathers, on liturgical *ethos*, on popular religious life, on monastic spirituality, and on the authority of the ecumenical councils – the latter are considered as authentic sources of Church identity, doctrine and action. This, however, must not lead to the impression that Orthodoxy has not developed at all its own program of evangelism nor that the theological apophatism, that is the interior or mystical dimension of the faith, lacks missionary relevance. In fact, it is the Church’s task to transfigure the world into body of Christ, in the same way that she consecrates mystically the Eucharistic gifts into the Body and Blood of Christ. In a wider sense, the Church *is* mission, for it is her

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<sup>1</sup> However, Incarnation and its direct effect, *théosis*, synthesized by Athanasius in the axiom “God became man so that man might become God”, has always been a strong motive for missionary action in the history of Eastern evangelisation. Cfr. J. Stamoolis, “Eastern Orthodox Mission Theology”, in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* April 1984, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> I. Bria, *Go Forth in Peace, Orthodox Perspectives on Mission*, WCC Publications Geneva 1986, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> D. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Maryknoll 1991, pp. 212-213.

duty to transform the world into *ekklesia*, i.e., the people of God, the body of Christ, the *koinonia* of the Spirit.

Triadology and the Eucharist are, therefore, the two theological assets through which it is possible to discover the orthodox missionary attitude, since evangelism renders visible in many and diverse ways the Kingdom of God, that is the relation of creation with its Creator.

*The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church*

If one wants to comprehend the current orthodox teaching on mission, he should firstly go back to the Third Preconciliar Panorthodox Conference (1986), where it was stated that:

We, Orthodox Christians, because we understand the meaning of salvation have the duty to fight and alleviate disease, disaster and anxiety. Because we live the experience of peace, we cannot be indifferent to its absence from the contemporary society. Because we are the beneficiaries of the divine justice, we struggle for a more perfect justice in the world and for the disappearance of any oppression. Because we live each day the divine dispensation, we fight against any fanaticism and intolerance among men and peoples. Because we proclaim steadfastly the incarnation of God and the divinisation of the human being, we defend the human rights for all human beings and all peoples. Because we live the divine gift of freedom, due to the redeeming work of Christ, we can show in a more extensive manner its universal value for all men and all peoples. Because by nurturing ourselves with the body and blood of Christ in the Holy Eucharist we live the need of sharing the gifts of God with our brethren, understand fully the meaning of hunger and shortage and fight for their elimination. Because we are waiting a new earth and a new heaven, when absolute justice will reign, we fight here and now for the rebirth and renewal of the human person and society<sup>4</sup>.

More recently, the *Synaxis* of the Orthodox Primates held in 2008 asserted that “the Church of Christ today fulfils its ministry in a rapidly developing world, which has now become interconnected through means of communication and the development of means of transportation and technology”<sup>5</sup>. To recognize, however, that the world undergoes rapid and profound changes, is to raise the question over the updating of traditional missionary models – developed predominantly in Christian areas – and the confrontation with that universe of cultures and ideologies that still live in a condition of life “without Christ” or can be defined as “post” or even “no-longer” Christian<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Third Preconciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference, “The Contribution by the Orthodox Church to the Realization of Peace, Justice, Freedom, Brotherhood and Love among Peoples and the Elimination of Racial and any other Discrimination” in V. Ioniță, *Towards the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church. The Decision of the Pan-Orthodox Meetings since 1923 until 2009*, Basel 2014, pp. 166-167.

<sup>5</sup> “Message of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches (October 12, 2008)”, <http://www.ec-patr.org/docdisplay.php?lang=en&id=995&tla=en> [access: August, 2 2018], 4.

<sup>6</sup> Today, the approximately 260 million Orthodox Christian live in mainly Orthodox-majority States, where religious faith is considered as important for the public life. Still, religious observance is low in Eastern Europe (former USSR Republics), while it appears slightly higher in South Europe. According to recent data, baptism is universal (almost 100%) among Orthodox Christians in Balkans (Greece, Romania, Serbia etc.) and very high in Eastern Europe (Russia, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Kazakhstan etc.). Yet, the rate of weekly attendance of Church service (Eucharist) is moderate or low (21% in Romania, 17% in Georgia and Greece, 12% in Ukraine, 6% in Russia and Serbia), even though

This new understanding of mission is not any more limited to terms such “Christianization”, “verbal proclamation”, “conversion” etc., at least in their literal and exclusive sense, but applies more inclusive terms, like “witness/*martyria*” and “inter-faith dialogue”<sup>7</sup>. The 2008 *Synaxis* of the Primate endorsed such view by stating that: “Efforts to distance religion from societal life constitute the common tendency of many modern states. The principle of a secular state can be preserved; however, it is unacceptable to interpret this principle as a radical marginalization of religion from all spheres of public life”.

The increasing attention to mission was confirmed by the convocation of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church (Crete, 19-26 June 2016) and the approval by the latter of the document “The mission of the Orthodox Church in Today’s world”. The topic of mission was subscribed first in the order of the conciliar agenda,<sup>8</sup> while the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew, in his opening address, remind us that “the meeting of the Church in Council makes it by extension also a missionary meeting, that is, one turning outwards and going forth “unto all nations” (cf. Matt. 28:19) in order to transmit the love of Christ to every person, sharing in the vicissitudes of history, as “a sign for the nations” (Is. 11:12)”<sup>9</sup>.

The Synod addressed her decisions not only to the Orthodox faithful but to “all people of good will”, so to extend the horizon of Orthodoxy “towards the contemporary diverse and multifarious world”,<sup>10</sup> that is the circumstances, problems and opportunities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in order to underline her responsibility to announce the truth of the

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61% of Orthodox in Balkans believe in God with absolute certainty (compared to the 33% of ex-USSR countries). Cfr. Pew Research Center, Nov. 8 2017, “Orthodox Christianity in the 21th century”, in <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/11/08/orthodox-christianity-in-the-21st-century> (access: October 27, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> Cfr. P. Vassiliadis, “Together Towards Life: An Orthodox Assessment”, in K. Ross – J. Keum – K. Avtzi – R.-R. Hewitt, ed., *Ecumenical Missiology. Changing Landscapes and New Conceptions of Mission*, Oxford 2016.

<sup>8</sup> The general topic of the “Contribution by the local Orthodox Churches to the realization of the ideals of peace, freedom, brotherhood and love among peoples and the removal of racial discriminations” was introduced in the official agenda of the Holy and Great Council by the First Preconciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference (1976). The Fifth Preconciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference (2015) edited the document issued by the Third Preconciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference (1986) entitled “The Contribution by the Orthodox Church to the Realization of Peace, Justice, Freedom, Brotherhood and Love among Peoples and the Elimination of Racial and any other Discrimination”. One can notice the passage from the plural form “local Orthodox Churches” of the 1976 text to the singular – and more correct ecclesiologically – expression “Orthodox Church” of the 1986, 2015 and 2016 documents. Through this shift it was indicated that the promotion of the Christian ideals is a task and an irrevocable responsibility of Orthodoxy *as a whole*. Compared to the 1986 draft, the 2015 and 2016 documents (including the one issued by the Council) present also a significant novelty: they have as their title the “Mission of Orthodoxy in contemporary world”. This choice changed somewhat their perspective, as it offered the opportunity to the synodal Fathers to broaden the text’s horizon and highlight new aspects of the Church’s missionary activity which in the pre-conciliar drafts were marked to a lesser extent.

<sup>9</sup> “Opening Address by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the Inaugural Session of the Holy and Great Council”. All official documents and speeches are taken from the official website of the Holy and Great Council: <https://www.holycouncil.org> (access: October 13, 2018).

<sup>10</sup> “Message of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church” (henceforth: *Message*), 12.

Incarnated God. “The Church lives not for herself. She offers herself for the whole of humanity in order to raise up and renew the world into new heavens and a new earth”<sup>11</sup>.

The Council was aware of its authority and canonical prestige of the approved documents: “The Church in herself is a Council, established by Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit, in accord with the apostolic words: ‘It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us’ (Acts 15:28)”<sup>12</sup>. The assembly exercised its mandate with a spirit of freedom and in conformity to the “tradition of the Apostles and of the Fathers of our Church”,<sup>13</sup> as servant of Christ, steward of the mystery of God<sup>14</sup> and guarantor of a spirit of unity, *consensus* and concord. In this way, the conciliar amendments have a binding force for the Churches that have endorsed them (and – by extent – for the whole Orthodoxy).

Drawing on “these principles and the accumulated experience and teaching of her patristic, liturgical, and ascetical tradition”, the Council realized its responsibility to comprehend “the concern and anxiety of contemporary humanity with regard to fundamental existential questions that preoccupy the world today”, so that the peace of God, “which surpasses all understanding (Phil 4:7)”, prevails in the world<sup>15</sup>.

### *The precedence of eschaton*

The mission document is divided into a Prologue and six paragraphs entitled as follows:

- A. The Dignity of the Human Person;
- B. Freedom and Responsibility;
- C. Peace and Justice;
- D. Peace and the Aversion of War;
- E. The Attitude of the Church Toward Discrimination;
- F. The Mission of the Orthodox Church as a Witness of Love through Service.

Even though the Council added no substantial innovations to previous intra-Orthodox missiological reflections, the documents suggested an updated vision to today’s global problems, placing at the centre of their attention God’s action in history (*missio Dei*), of which Church is image:

The one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church is a divine-human communion in the image of the Holy Trinity, a foretaste and experience of the eschaton in the holy Eucharist and a revelation of the glory of the things to come, and, as a continuing Pentecost, she is a prophetic voice in this world that cannot be silenced, the presence and witness of God’s Kingdom ‘that has come with power’ (cf. Mark 9:1)<sup>16</sup>.

The departure point, therefore, for the Christian mission is the eschatological nature of the ecclesial event: “The Church of Christ exists in the world but is not of the world (cf. Jn. 17:11, 14-15). The Church as the Body of the incarnate Logos of God, constitutes the living ‘presence’ as the sign and image of the Kingdom of the Triune

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<sup>11</sup> “Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church” (henceforth: *Encyclical*), Prologue.

<sup>12</sup> *Encyclical*, 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Encyclical*, Prologue.

<sup>14</sup> *Encyclical*, Prologue.

<sup>15</sup> “The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today’s World” (henceforth: *The Mission*), Prologue.

<sup>16</sup> *Encyclical*, 1.

God in history, proclaims the good news of a new creation (II Cor 5:17)”<sup>17</sup>. The Good News of the transfiguration of the world, the Prologue explains, is experienced in the Eucharistic synaxis, where all the scattered children of God are gathered together in the same place, without distinction of race, gender, age or social origin, as well as in the life of the saints, who practice Christian virtues and testify that the transfigured world is not an unreachable *utopia* but a tangible reality, and that the evil will not have the last word in history, nor it will direct the destiny of humanity. The “foolishness” of the Gospel of Christ (I Cor 1:18) is nothing but the transformation of the enmities and prejudices into friendship and acceptance of the others. This attitude designs the Church’s social commitment, since “every human being, regardless of skin colour, religion, race, sex, ethnicity, and language, is created in the image and likeness of God, and enjoys equal rights in society” (E.2).

It is in this way that the mission becomes truly a “new creation” and a proclamation of hope (Heb. 11:1). The Christian faith is the experience – and therefore proclamation – of the divine *parousia* in history, while her main task is to make God’s peace, reconciliation, justice and love prevail in the world.

On the basis of this auspices, the Council affirmed that the Church’s one mission consists in:

1. The *salvific mission* properly said, that is, the constant proclamation and diffusion of the Gospel (in accordance to the precept of Mt 28:19), which in turn consists in the deepening of God’s plan for the mankind and the *ecumene* but also in the service (*diakonia*) to all those in need of help<sup>18</sup>.
2. The *evangelism* of the world in the mystery of the Trinity. Evangelism is connected to the participation in the glory of God of those who have not yet known Christ and are invited to “come and see” (Jn 1:39) the gifts that God has distributed throughout the earth<sup>19</sup>.
3. The prophetic *witness* of the faith and experience of Christ, in the context of divine economy<sup>20</sup>.
4. The *re-evangelization* of the people of God in modern secularized societies<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> The term “eschaton” does not refer to the end of the times but to the announcement of an *aparche*, of the new era of the Kingdom that can be experienced proleptically within history. For the vision of the Christian East, eschatology summarizes all the doctrine on the Kingdom of God, of which the Church is an icon.

<sup>18</sup> Cfr. *Encyclical*, 6; *The Mission*, A.1, F.1, F.4.

<sup>19</sup> Cfr. *Encyclical*, Epilogue, I.3, II.6, VII.20; *The Mission*, C.1.

<sup>20</sup> Cfr. *The Mission*, E.3, F.9. In the early 1970s, Orthodox missiologist – such as Archbishop of Albania Anastasios Yannoulatos – introduced the term “martyria/witness” as a synonym of mission, for by it is expressed more authentically the Orthodox understanding of evangelism. The term “martyria” suggests that the mission is an irenic testimony of the ecclesial self-awareness to be the Kingdom of Gos. Cfr. Bishop Anastasios (Yannoulatos) of Androussa, “Towards World Community. Resources and Responsibilities for living together. A Christian view”, in *Ecumenical Review* 26 (1974), p. 635: “It is characteristic that in the early centuries, Christians spoke of ‘witness’ (martyria or martyrion), instead of ‘mission’. In the original Greek text, the word martyria means a ‘deposition’, based on personal certainty, by an eye- and ear-witness, even when the price of making such a deposition is one’s life, one’s personal sacrifice: martyrion (martyrdom)”.

<sup>21</sup> Cfr. *Encyclical*, 6.

From a semantic point of view, evangelism is distinguished from both ecumenism<sup>22</sup> and inter-faith dialogue<sup>23</sup>. The mission of the Church is fundamentally the proclamation of the truth about God and the sharing of the Eucharistic *ethos* - the so-called “liturgy after the Liturgy” - which distributes to those afar and to those who are near God (Eph. 2:17) what has been already shared in the Eucharist<sup>24</sup>.

The call to announce the new creation comes from above and is characterized, on the one hand, by the opportunity offered to every human person to hear the Gospel of God and, on the other hand, by the invitation to accompany humanity with love, patience and prayer, taking on peoples’ wounds and sorrows. Therefore, the synodal document highlights the reasons why the *eschaton* has a central role in the *missio ecclesiae*, since the Church announces a new *way of being* that has been revealed to her and which does not belong to the world of this century. For if it is true the conviction that “the Holy Eucharist constitutes the innermost core and the conciliar functioning of the ecclesial body”<sup>25</sup>, the prophetic character of the liturgical mystagogy becomes the motivating factor of the whole missionary spirituality. The late Alexander Schmemmann had expressed well such an idea, when he attested that “nothing reveals better the relation between the Church as fullness and the Church as mission than the Eucharist, the central act of the Church’s *leiturgia*”<sup>26</sup>. From his side John Zizioulas explains the interpenetration between heaven and earth in the following words: “The Word in Christianity is not a saying but a person; it’s not a voice but a living presence; a presence that incarnates eminently in the Eucharist, in a Eucharist that is a meeting (*synaxis*) and

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<sup>22</sup> “Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World”, 4: “The Orthodox Church, thanks to the ecumenical and loving spirit which distinguishes her, praying as divinely commanded that all men may be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4), has always worked for the restoration of Christian unity. Hence, Orthodox participation in the movement to restore unity with other Christians in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church is in no way foreign to the nature and history of the Orthodox Church but rather represents a consistent expression of the apostolic faith and tradition in a new historical circumstances”.

<sup>23</sup> *Message*, 4: “Sober inter-religious dialogue helps significantly to promote mutual trust, peace and reconciliation. The oil of religious experience must be used to heal wounds and not to rekindle the fire of military conflicts”.

<sup>24</sup> *Message*, 2: “Participating in the Holy Eucharist and praying for the whole world, we must continue the ‘liturgy after the Divine Liturgy and give the witness of faith to those near and those far off, in accordance with the Lord’s clear command before His ascension, ‘And you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth’ (Ac. 1: 8)”. The term “liturgy after the Liturgy” had a remarkable development from the 1970s onwards, bringing excellent fruits especially in the field of missiology. As such, it is an idea proper to Orthodox reflection, as it connected missiology to ecclesiology and especially to the effects of the Eucharistic theology. The recipient of this post-liturgical mission is, in a broader sense, the whole creation, which is why the purpose of the Eucharistic gathering, the sanctification of the body of the faithful, becomes a concrete witness of the transformation of the world in visible sign of the Kingdom of God. Cfr. I. Bria, *The liturgy after the Liturgy. Mission and witness from an Orthodox Perspective*, WCC Publications, Ginevra 1996, p. 20: “The dynamics of the liturgy go beyond the boundaries of the Eucharistic assembly to serve the community at large. The Eucharist [...] calls and sends the faithful to celebrate the sacrament of the brother outside the temple in the public marketplace, where the cries of the poor and marginalized are heard”.

<sup>25</sup> *Encyclical*, 20, 378.

<sup>26</sup> A. Schmemmann, “The Missionary Imperative in the Orthodox Tradition”, in G.-H. Anderson, ed., *The Theology of Orthodox Mission*, New York 1961, 255. From his part J. Zizioulas says that the Eucharist is the *raison d’être* of the Church; all other ecclesial functions support her revelation as Kingdom of God. Cfr. J. Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, T&T Clark, London – New York 2008, p. 147.

communion (*koinonia*)”<sup>27</sup>. Thus, the Eucharistic – and by extent the Church’s mission – aggregates the dispersed world into a single place, in which the *parousia* of God is perceptible and the demand of the participation in the glory of God is dynamically fulfilled.

From this framework comes the Council’s intention to reconcile the dialectic tension between apophatism and social commitment into an authentically evangelical historical prophetism. The Kingdom of God is, for Christians, an expectation of the “not yet” but also a reality that has been “already” experienced, proleptically and by grace, in the Eucharist and in the life of the saints. Thus, the inevitable tension between “living in the world” and “not being of (or belonging to) this world” is superseded by the *kenotic* and sacrificial *ethos* of the incarnation of Christ, who leads everyone to the reality of His Resurrection, in which all traces of death and pain disappear. If evangelism is not incarnated in all the human and social peripheries, it doesn’t suffer the saving imprints of Christ, it doesn’t breathe the sanctifying breath of the Spirit and it doesn’t defeat our *old* way of being. The text explains well that the eschatological character of Christian faith does not lead to any kind of *exodus* from our historical and biological boundaries but on the contrary becomes a norm so that the Kingdom can be “touched” within history. In fact:

The Church of Christ in the world is called to express once again and to promote the content of her prophetic witness to the world, grounded on the experience of faith and recalling her true mission through the proclamation of the Kingdom of God and the cultivation of a sense of unity among her flock. In this way, she opens up a broad field of opportunity since an essential element of her ecclesiology promotes Eucharistic communion and unity within a shattered world (F.9).

#### *The universal dimension of Christian mission*

Following these traces and the prophetic conscience of the Church, the first paragraph of the mission document examines the supreme role that the human person plays in God’s economy. In the history of salvation man has, in point of fact, a central position: God has created him in His image and likeness, so that he can contemplate the visible creation and perceive the invisible one. According to the Council, to announce this truth is to bring “a dynamic witness to the fullness of truth in Christ and to her spiritual treasures to those who are outside her (of the Orthodox Church)”<sup>28</sup>.

It is right, therefore, to believe that, in a certain sense, Christianity has introduced a radical laceration between those who ignore Christ and those who, on the contrary, know Him and, thus, proclaim His name; in other words, those who already know Christ can discern His presence in the various contexts of the world, even in the most diverse ones: hence the duty to discover His presence even outside the sphere of Christian history<sup>29</sup>. The purpose of the incarnation of Christ, the Council says, is to lead man to

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<sup>27</sup> I. Zizioulas, *Il creato come eucaristia. Approccio teologico al problema dell’ecologia*, Qiqajon, Magnano 1994, pp. 84-85.

<sup>28</sup> “Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World”, 6.

<sup>29</sup> According to Metropolitan of Mount Lebanon, George Khodr (Patriarchate of Antioch), “contemporary theology must go beyond the notion of ‘salvation history’ in order to discover the

deification (*théosis*), that is, relational unity with God. In Jesus-New Adam the *whole* human gender has been recapitulated in order to be reborn in his original existential condition. This means that Christ renewed in Himself the “old man” and saved him not as individual but seeking him in his spiritual restlessness. “For just as the entire human race was contained in the old Adam, so too, the entire human race is now gathered in the new Adam”<sup>30</sup>. This idea has relevant missiological consequences: Jesus has made possible for us to discern His presence even in non-Christian or non-religious environments. Following this criterion, the text not only does not reject but on the contrary suggests the collaboration: with the other Christians, for the protection of human dignity and for the good of peace (A.2); with non-Christians, so that the peaceful and harmonious social coexistence among peoples prevail, without this implying any kind of religious syncretism (A.3); and with all “men of good will” who are dedicated to the peace of God (A.4). This action can be realized at a local, national or international level, as it is God’s commandment (Mt 5:9) and, therefore, an essential and indispensable duty of the Church:

The Holy Church of Christ, in her universal body – embracing in her fold many peoples on earth – emphasizes the principle of universal solidarity and supports the closer cooperation of nations and states for the sake of resolving conflicts peacefully<sup>31</sup>.

This principle leads to the crucial argument of the interreligious collaboration and starts from an anthropological milestone of universal validity (the organic unity of humanity), which in turn recalls the fundamental Christological idea of the recapitulation of all things in Jesus and the inclusion of all human race in the providential action of God. The notions of “recapitulation” and “organic unity of the human race” enabled the Council to endure that non-Christian religions are not totally foreign to the observation of the divine values.

In the third paragraph of the mission document one can find the same inclusive logic over the holistic value of the Christian understanding of peace and justice. The “mystical” nature of Christian peace (C.2) is founded on the peace of Christ (since He has brought peace to all through the blood of His Cross [Col 1:20]), namely on:

1. The recapitulation of all things in Him.
2. The primacy of the dignity and greatness of the human person as image of God.
3. The manifestation of the organic unity of mankind in Christ.
4. The universality of the ideals of peace, freedom and social justice.
5. The fruitfulness of Christian love among the people and nations.

With regard to Christian peace, the Council says that it is nothing else but the result of the prevalence of the Christian ideals (C.1) and, thus, it can be considered as an

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meaning of *oikonomia*. The economy of Christ cannot be reduced to its historical manifestation but indicates the fact that we are made participants in the very life of God Himself”. G. Khodr, “Christianity in a Pluralistic World – The Economy of the Holy Spirit”, in *The Ecumenical Review* 23.2 (1971), p. 123.

<sup>30</sup> *The Mission*, A.1.

<sup>31</sup> *The Mission*, F.6.

indispensable goal of Christian witness. Nevertheless, the Church doesn't aim to impose these principles (although she doesn't omit her right "to proclaim and witness to her teaching in the public sphere", E.3) but she prays and works so that they can flourish everywhere, for there is no other noble virtue for a Christian than to be a peace-agent (C.2).

Such universal gifts, although of divine origin, require human synergy (C.3) and flow both where Christians perform works of faith, love and hope in Jesus Christ (C.3) and where peace is achieved and love favours through processes of justice, brotherhood, freedom and mutual love between the sons of the only heavenly Father and among the people who compose the one human family. The document confirms that international cooperation can offer a concrete support to those who "in various parts of the world are deprived of the benefits of peace and justice" (C.5). Likewise, the Council condemned the "increasing oppression and persecution of Christians and other communities in the Middle East and elsewhere because of their beliefs", because in this way "existing interfaith and international relations are threatened", while many Christians are forced to abandon their households. The proximity of Christians to the rest of humanity is inspired not only by the category of the universal dignity of mankind but also, at the ethical-practical level, by the parable of the Samaritan, which teaches the abolition of "every barrier erected by enmity and prejudice" (E.2).

What outlines the profile of Christian mission is the "witness of love through service", as the title of the sixth paragraph of the document confirms, which summarizes, so to say, the focal idea of the Synod:

In our times, just as throughout history, the prophetic and pastoral voice of the Church, the redeeming word of the Cross and of the Resurrection, appeals to the heart of humankind, calling us, with the Apostle Paul, to embrace and experience whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report (Phil 4:8)—namely, the sacrificial love of Her Crucified Lord, the only way to a world of peace, justice, freedom, and love among peoples and between nations (F.15).

### *Re-evangelization and secularism*

As already mentioned, the conciliar documents declared the task to re-evangelize today's world. This commitment concerns especially those societies that have lost, totally or partially, their Christian references. The visible sign of such a change is the individualisation of man and the breaking of his relationship with God, which in turn leads to the spiritual atrophy and to the disintegration of the "organic" unity of the human race<sup>32</sup>. It is precisely the fracture of the divine-human unity that generates the evil in its various forms and leads modern societies to define themselves in a way that, having lost their theocentric orientation, enclose the human spiritual needs in a materialistic perception of life. In other words, secularization represents a state of "forgetfulness" of God, for man seeks his self-celebration (F.6) rather than the

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<sup>32</sup> *Message*, 5: "Modern secularisation seeks the autonomy of man (*anthropos*) from Christ and from the spiritual influence of the Church".

confrontation with the pain and the suffering of the Lord and the sharing of the living experience of His Resurrection. “Freedom renders the human being capable of progressing toward spiritual perfection; yet, it also includes the risk of disobedience as independence from God and consequently the fall, which tragically gives rise to evil in the world” (B.1)<sup>33</sup>. What makes Christian freedom different from anthropocentric liberty is the fact that the former is expressed with responsibility and love towards creation, while the latter is self-centered and disobedient towards God, and therefore represents “a spiritual illness, whose external symptoms include conflict, division, crime, and war, as well as the tragic consequences of these. The Church strives to eliminate not only the external symptoms of illness but the illness itself, namely, sin” (C.4)<sup>34</sup>.

According to the secular self-centered logic the sacrificial love of the Gospel and the ascetic dimension of Orthodoxy are considered “unbearable challenge to the happiness of the individual”<sup>35</sup>. Yet, the “not of this world” origins of the Church demand from Christians to evidence the diversity of their faith from all other secular beliefs and to suggest the uniqueness of the truth revealed by Christ and, therefore, the detachment from the thrusts of postmodern ideological pluralism. However, one could ask: is it possible that the invitation to re-evangelize the world could justify a fundamentalist conception of faith and an opposition to post-modernity? It seems that the synodal approach is aimed at discarding any attitude of exclusivist or polemic attitude towards the world, since:

1. Re-evangelization cannot ignore the fact that the Gospel of Christ is offered to all,<sup>36</sup> not aggressively nor in terms of proselytism or condemnation but as a guide to redeem the world from its sufferings<sup>37</sup>.
2. The Gospel is given to man in order to help him spiritually and, in this sense, its goal is to unify – and not divide – humanity. To witness the Gospel is to spread – and not hide – the gifts of God, especially the ideals of reconciliation, of the

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<sup>33</sup> Evil can appear in different forms and has no mono-ethnic, mono-confessional and mono-religious connotations. The text enumerates different “evil” situations (violence, war, moral laxity, violation of human rights, deprivation of religious freedom, disinformation and manipulation of public opinion, uneven distribution of goods necessary for existence, hunger, economic misery, displacements of populations, ecological crisis, migration etc.) caused by the abuse of freedom and by the absence of a culture of responsibility (B.2) and of common action, since freedom without responsibility and without love leads to the loss of freedom (B.3). From this point of view, the evil is nothing else but the deprivation from the communion with God, the breaking of the divine-human relationship, an existential failure!

<sup>34</sup> The Church believes that war is primarily a consequence of the abandonment of God (D.1-2), therefore it condemns all religious and nationalistic conflicts and joins with her prayer and pastoral action all her members that suffer the consequences of war, while she suffers together with other Christians and all persecuted people who seek solid solutions of peace and justice.

<sup>35</sup> *Encyclical*, 10.

<sup>36</sup> Cfr. *Message*, Epilogue. The Encyclical specifies the novelties that Christ brought to the world: (1) the revelation of the mystery of divine economy (2); the participation of man in the holiness of God that has become tangible with the renewal of everything in Christ and with the free and personal participation in the divine life (6); the revelation of “God-man” as the ultimate measure of all things, in place of the “Man-god” of modern culture (10); finally, the assumption of the whole human race by Christ, who is the absolute prototype of the restoration of mankind and affirms the sanctity of life (12).

<sup>37</sup> Cfr. *The Mission*, Prologue.

sacrificial *ethos* of the Crucified Lord, of solidarity among peoples<sup>38</sup>.

The denunciation of evil does not mean the propagation of an apologetic religious mentality nor the exaltation of anti-modern campaigns. The Council's Encyclical confirms that the Church's mission is realized "freely, with love and respect towards the cultural identity of individuals and people", praying for the "personal and free participation in eternal life, in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the love of God the Father"<sup>39</sup>. Rather than promoting the purpose of the restoration of the so-called "Christian civilization", the Council emphasized the responsibility of all Christians towards the world and of the Church herself for the good witness of her faith and spirituality<sup>40</sup>. In fact, in front of the "arrogant apotheosis"<sup>41</sup> of the ideology of individualism, the Council wanted to emphasise the duties and responsibilities of the faithful for a "constant self-criticism on the part of both politicians and citizens for the improvement of society"<sup>42</sup>. The synodal Fathers spoke also of the "the crisis of freedom as responsibility, its decline into a self-centered self-realization, its identification with individual self-gratification, self-sufficiency and autonomy"<sup>43</sup>. The danger that underlines here is the reduction of human rights into an ideological individualism, which lies at the antipodes of the communitarian – and truly ecclesial – sense of freedom<sup>44</sup>. From this follows that Christians must be today active members of their communities and re-discover their personal responsibility within the world.

The specificity of re-evangelization lies on the fact that it manifests itself as a movement not only of the Church to those who have moved away from her but also *within* and – above all – *for* the Church herself. Moreover, if one takes into account that the modern man trusts the "new life" announced by Christianity to the extent that he is convinced that he can concretize his faith in a responsible way and with an open and positive attitude towards the world, and that in the postmodern era, Christianity from a state religion has become a post-institution with the task to project the eternity of the Kingdom and of the biblical *kairos* beyond the ephemeral promises of secular ideologies, of liberal globalism and of technologism, it is possible to argue that the notion of re-evangelization allows the passage from the institutionalized (according to some: the "Constantinian") model of the Church to the one in which the missionary action accompanies prophetically the world, even with its postmodern characteristics, towards the spiritual port of Christ.

The Council affirmed that the imperative of re-evangelization concerns Orthodoxy and rejected the idea that dechristianization is a phenomenon regarding exclusively Western Christianity. The Council didn't want to justify any kind of triumphalism but invited every single Christian to make a personal spiritual introspection in order to become God's co-operator for the eschatologicalization of history. Hence the

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<sup>38</sup> Cfr. *Encyclical*, Prologue.

<sup>39</sup> *Encyclical*, 6.

<sup>40</sup> Cfr. *Encyclical*, 2.

<sup>41</sup> *Encyclical*, 16.

<sup>42</sup> *Message*, 10.

<sup>43</sup> *Encyclical*, 7.

<sup>44</sup> Cfr. *Encyclical*, 16.

importance to discern the signs of the eschaton – and not those of the world – and highlight them in the circumstances of history. “The divine-human character [‘not of the world’ (John 18:36)] of the Church, which nourishes and guides her presence and witness “in the world,” is incompatible with any kind of conformation of the Church to the world (cf. Rom 12.2)”<sup>45</sup>. In a certain way, re-evangelization warns us about the transition from the model of the State-guarantor of religion to that in which the Church, as a post-institution per excellence, reveals the diaconal and relational Christian way of *being* and *acting*<sup>46</sup>. The ecclesial faith doesn’t need the support of the State or of any other ideological legacy to proclaim the Kingdom nor she develops an indoctrinated apology *against* the world, since her duty is to announce the hope of the Resurrection always, to everyone and everywhere. It’s for this reason that the Council payed attention to the personal responsibility of each Christian to overcome the “Christian by birth” model with that of “Christian by vocation” or “by choice”.

### *Conclusions*

The Council of Crete exposed its doctrine with pastoral sensibility and ecumenical openness. It invited the faithful to welcome the charismatic and exodic character of the Gospel, to embrace the sacrificial and diaconal love of God and to bring the others closer to the life of the Kingdom. Such participation doesn’t entail a forced “formal” adhesion to Christian dogmas but reformulates substantially the *ad gentes* mission towards an eschatological perspective, i.e. the life of the Paraclete, which we already live in the Eucharist and through holiness. It is therefore the task of the Church to transform history into a place where salvation can be achieved. Bringing the eschaton into history means that the Church, while announcing the Kingdom, denounces the domination of secularization and seeks the abundance of God’s charity even where evil seems to prevail.

The document adopted a logic that highlights the organic unity of humanity and the recapitulation of all things in Christ, which becomes central to the mission theology. This brings us to the option of cooperation with heterodox and non-Christians, since those who are engaged in the work of evangelism are no longer subordinated to the dividing dynamics of history (ideological, confessional, religious or national ones) but have the task of discover the signs of God’s presence beyond the different social, racial, confessional and even religious divergences. The conciliar documents affirmed that the nature of Christian mission is far from legitimizing the politicization of the faith which encourage a “Christianity of history” rather than that of the eschaton, that is to say a Christianity accustomed to support the one or the other political agenda, without offering to the man the holistic perspective and hope of the Christian message.

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<sup>45</sup> *Encyclical*, 10.

<sup>46</sup> The Archbishop of Albania Anastasios defined egocentrism as “the major heresy” and the “mother of all heresies”, because “it poisons human relations and every form of harmonious and creative coexistence [...] the opposite to peace is not the war but the self-centeredness of the people, of the States, of the different groups”. Anastasios [Yannoulatos], “Address at the Opening Ceremony of the Holy and Great Council”.

The presentation of the synodal teaching gives the image not of a severe, doctrinal understanding of mission but mostly of its practical applications. The Council proposed a specific way of acting that concerns both individual Christians and the Church as a whole, which protects the holistic value of human dignity. The human person is inserted, not independently of his religion or culture of belonging, to the divine plan of salvation, in which the Church participates in a decisive and protagonist way.

Undoubtedly, in the conciliar texts emerges the preoccupation for the current global social problems and the question over the active role of the Church, which is called to give an authentic witness of the transforming character of the Gospel and the “world to come”. Those who follow the *missio Dei* must therefore be ready to overcome the confessional boundaries of Christian history.

Likewise, while emphasizing the collaboration with non-Christians, the document left open for the future a more complete theological treating of the role of monotheistic religions and of their precise place in God’s economy. Nevertheless, the Council offered some precise guiding elements for a “theology of religions”: What does the term “organic unity of the human race” mean for inter-religious relations? Is it perhaps a unity that takes place only at the level of social convergences and religious diplomacy, or, as is our opinion, it recognizes a unity which, due to the fact that is “organic”, i.e., has its own “ontology”, already exists? Furthermore, what is the correct interpretation of the notion “recapitulation in Christ”? Is it an achievement which comes out from the formal acceptance of Christian faith, or can it be obtained through the observation of Christian ideals, even by non-Christians?<sup>47</sup>

It is the living God who defeats evil and sanctifies the body of Christ and all those who are outside the Church and generate, in various ways, vital fruits<sup>48</sup>. Mission causes a spiritual movement, a 360 degrees’ evangelism. It will be up to the post-conciliar work to overcome all resistance and hesitations and complete its reception from the ecclesial base.

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<sup>47</sup> Orthodox theology of religions must, therefore, focus on the following aspects: (a) participation in inter-faith dialogues does not mean acceptance that “all religions are the same”; (b) the universality of the truth of the Church cannot be undermined, nor the faith that Christ is “the way, the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6) be reversed; (c) inter-faith dialogue does not lead to syncretism, nor is simply an academic (inter-religious) dialogue, related to “comparative theology of religions”; it is a dialogue with the faithful of the other living religions.

<sup>48</sup> Cfr. P. Vassiliadis, “Introductory Remarks”, in Id., (ed.), *Orthodox Perspectives on Mission*, Oxford 2013, p. 4.

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## Chapter 23

### HAMILCAR ALIVIZATOS: AN ORTHODOX PIONEER OF THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT(1887-1969)

*Prof. Vassiliki Stathokosta*

Hamilcar Alivizatos is a major figure of the theological discipline and the ecumenical movement of the twentieth century. He received international acclaim and he was honoured by the Church of England with the Lambeth cross for his services to the Anglican-Orthodox dialogue (Lambeth, May 1945)<sup>1</sup>. In Greece he received the great honour to be elected a member of the Academy of Athens (1962)<sup>2</sup>.

Born in May 1887 in Cephalonia, a distant island of the Ionian Sea, he managed to study Theology in Athens/Greece (1904-1908), in Leipzig and Berlin/Germany (1908-1912), under the guidance of great specialists in Church History and Canon Law<sup>3</sup>. During his studies he was actively engaged in the theological discourse of his time that helped him to become a competent theologian<sup>4</sup>. At his return in Greece, still very young, he became a professor of the School of Theology at the University of Athens (1919)<sup>5</sup>. He did not conform to the stereotype of a typical professor of his time, but was also engaged in social activity that sprung from his Christian faith, as a manifestation of witness of Orthodox faith and diakonia to God and his people. He served the Church of Greece as a theologian, specialized in canon law, with his special ability to deal with crucial administration church matters as well as Church and State relationship<sup>6</sup>.

Alivizatos' contribution defined the developments in the theological and ecclesiastical field not only at a local but at an international level<sup>7</sup> that affected Christianity worldwide. This observation is possibly surprising; however, it is not an exaggeration. Prof. Alivizatos is officially recognized as one of the pioneers of the ecumenical movement alongside with the Metropolitan of Thyateira Germanos Strenopoulos, fr. G. Florovsky and Stephan Zankov<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> V. Stathokosta, "Relations between the Orthodox and the Anglicans in the Twentieth Century: A Reason to Consider the Present and the Future of the Theological Dialogue," in *Ecclesiology*, Vol. 8, Issue 3 (2012), pp. 350 – 374.

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.academyofathens.gr>

<sup>3</sup> G. Konidaris, *Ο Αμίλκας Σ. Αλιβιζάτος (1887-1969) εν τη Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία της Ελλάδος* (Hamilkar S. Alivizatos in the Church History of Greece), pp. 8-10.

<sup>4</sup> V. Stathokosta, *Η Θεολογική και Οικουμενική Σκέψη στην Ελλάδα κατά τον 20ο αιώνα - Η συμβολή του Αμίλκα Σ. Αλιβιζάτου* (The Theological and Ecumenical Thought in Greece during the 20<sup>th</sup> century – The Contribution of Hamilkar Alivizatos) in V. Stathokosta, *Ορθόδοξη Θεολογία και Οικουμένη: Μελέτες - Άρθρα* (Orthodox Theology and Ecumene: *Studies - Articles*), Parresia, Athens 2011, p. p. 107-112. Also, see V. Stathokosta, *Θεολογία, Εκκλησιολογία, Διακονία στο έργο του Αμίλκα Σ. Αλιβιζάτου* (Theology, Ecclesiology, Diaconia, in the works of Hamilcar Alivizatos), Ennoia Athens 2015

<sup>5</sup> G. Konidaris, *Ο Αμίλκας Σ. Αλιβιζάτος*, op. cit., pp. 8-10.

<sup>6</sup> V. Stathokosta, *Η Θεολογική και Οικουμενική Σκέψη*, op.cit., pp. 113-126.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Visser 'T Hooft, *The Genesis and Formation of the World Council of Churches*, WCC, Geneva 1982, pp. 6, 64, 83; Rouss & Neill, *A history of the ecumenical movement 1517-1948*, Geneva 1953, p. 658; and John Frederick Woolverton, *Robert H. Gardiner and the reunification of worldwide Christianity in the progressive era*, Missouri 2005, see indicatively p. 227 (footnote 57).

<sup>8</sup> See indicatively G. Tsetsis, *Οικουμενικά Ανάλεκτα, Συμβολή στην ιστορία του Παγκοσμίου Συμβουλίου Εκκλησιών* (Ecumenica Analecta, Contribution in the History of the World Council of

Though it is true that in Greece his diverse work is not well-known and it has not so far receive the recognition it deserves<sup>9</sup>. To mention some aspects of the life and works of Alivizatos, he served in the early twentieth century as the coordinator of all efforts in West and East for Christian unity. He had been a friend and a close associate of top executives of the ecumenical movement such as Visser' t Hooft. Their joint persistent and methodical efforts to inform and clarify the aims of this movement led to the positive response of the Greek-speaking Orthodox Churches, and their participation in it. We should underline Alivizatos' contribution in organizing and conducting the official visit of top executives of the "Faith and Order Movement" to the Orthodox Churches in the Balkans in 1919<sup>10</sup>, as well as the one of the delegation of the WCC in the begging of 1947. It was during this very visit that the Orthodox Churches confirmed their will to participate in the First Assembly of the WCC as founding members<sup>11</sup>.

Alivizatos was commissioned by the Ecumenical Patriarchate to introduce the proposal of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to "all Churches of Christ" according to the example of the "Koinonia of Nations", at the preliminary congress of FO (Geneva, 1920). He inspired and organized the "First Congress of Orthodox Theology" in 1936 in Athens. Although this Congress is a historic event linked solely by the name of fr G. Florovsky, it should be taken into consideration Alivizatos' great contribution as well<sup>12</sup>. Also, the celebrations organized for the 1900 years since the arrival of St. Paul in Greece (1951) was another initiative of him. Both were two pioneer efforts for the development of inter-Orthodox cooperation and openness of the Orthodox Church to the world<sup>13</sup>. He had undertaken much responsibility as the official representative of Church of Greece in FO and LW movements, in General Assemblies, in Central Committees as well as in other commissions of the WCC. In Greece he served as the director of the Committee of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece on Inter-Church Aid and Relations with the Foreign Churches; as the Permanent Representative of the Church World Service (C.W.S.) in Greece<sup>14</sup>; the director of "Inter-Church Aid and Service to Refugees" of the WCC in Greece, which was collaborating with the High Commission of the United Nations<sup>15</sup>. He also served as a director of the Inter-Church Aid and Service to Refugees (ICASR) programmes to institutions of the Church of Greece; he had an active role in the Committee of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) of the WCC etc<sup>16</sup>. All these positions were entrusted to Alivizatos by the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece<sup>17</sup>.

Ham. Alivizatos, Meletios Metaxakis, who served as Archbishop of Athens and later on as Ecumenical Patriarchate, Chrysostomos Papadopoulos (who also served as

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Churches), Tertios, Katerini 1987, σ. 134. V. Stathokosta, *The relationship between the Church of Greece and the World Council of Churches 1948-1961, based on the Archives of the WCC* (PhD diss. in Greek, University of Thessaloniki, 1999), p. 314.

<sup>9</sup> For further information and evaluation of his activity and work see V. STATHOKOSTA, *Η Θεολογική και Οικουμενική Σκέψη*, op. cit., pp. 103-156.

<sup>10</sup> See V. Stathokosta, 'The relationship between the Church of Greece and the World Council of Churches', op. cit., pp. 41-43.

<sup>11</sup> V. Stathokosta, *The relationship between the Church of Greece and the World Council*, op. cit., pp. 314-315.

<sup>12</sup> V. Stathokosta, *Η Θεολογική και Οικουμενική Σκέψη*, op. cit, pp. 145-148.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 148-150.

<sup>14</sup> See G. Konidaris, *Ο Αμίλκας Σ. Αλιβιζάτος*, op. cit, p. 32.

<sup>15</sup> V. Stathokosta, *The relationship between the Church of Greece*, op. cit., pp. 373, 380-382

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 361-417.

<sup>17</sup> See V. Stathokosta, *Η Θεολογική και Οικουμενική Σκέψη*, op. cit., pp. 103-14.

Archbishop of Athens) and Germanos of Thyateira (Strenopoulos) were the visionaries as well as the leaders of the Greek-speaking Orthodox for the development of inter-Christian and inter-Church relations in the twentieth century. These were the pioneers and leaders who struggled for church and theological renaissance, for the promotion of Theology and the Church in Greek society and abroad. It was exactly this offering that opened the way for capable successors to precede. N. Nissiotis or even S. Agouridis should be considered as Alivizatos followers as well as many others that worked hard and offered what we call today modern Greek theological thought.

*THE THEOLOGICAL WORK AND CONTRIBUTION OF PROF. HAM. ALIVIZATOS*

Alivizatos was open-minded; he had a solid Orthodox theological formation and ecclesiastical experience. These qualifications formed his ecumenical orientation and urged him to several initiatives. It is worth mentioning his activity as editor of the periodical “Orthodoxos Skepsis” (Orthodox Thought), published in 1957. The editorial group was consisted from prominent professors of the University of Athens, namely E. Antoniadis (archimandrite), V. Vellas, L. Philippides, K. Bonis and G. Konidaris<sup>18</sup>. “Orthodoxos Skepsis” recorded the concern of the time of 50’s for the present and the future of the Orthodox Church and Theology, for its opening to the world and the ecumenical movement. Certain thoughts and concerns expressed in this periodical at that time are still today not only timely but pioneer as well.

Church revival, training of clergy and church social work were three crucial points that attracted Alivizatos’ interest. These were a springboard for its active participation in the ecumenical movement as well. In this framework he supported the work of the “Apostolic Diakonia” and its programmes. It is worth mentioning its project for the establishment of the “School for Social Welfare – Deaconesses” for the formation of Deaconesses – Social workers of “Post – University” level (1957). At this project Alivizatos and Church of Greece met the sponsorship of WCC. Furthermore, he contributed a great deal to the development of the social activity of the Church of Greece and to taking a leading role in Greek society<sup>19</sup>.

The results of these endeavours were great and really innovative for his time. For Alivizatos, social diakonia was the fruit of Christianity, so he believed that the Church should be a pioneer in providing social work. His desire for giving martyria of Orthodox faith and offering diakonia was obvious in his life and works<sup>20</sup>.

*HAM. ALIVIZATOS PRIORITY: THE RETURN TO GENUINE PATRISTIC THOUGHT*

Inter-Orthodox and inter-Church relations were priority matters for Alivizatos and he worked for their development very successfully indeed. With his writings and activity he was capable to express the theological argumentation pro the ecumenical movement and to contribute for the promotion of church efforts for dialogue and cooperation, according the wish and prayer of Christ “that may all be one” (John 17, 21)<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> See V. Stathokosta, *Η Θεολογική και Οικουμενική Σκέψη*, op. cit., pp. 122-124

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 118-120

<sup>20</sup> It is worth mentioning Alivizatos’ commitment for the relief of the immediate needs of the earthquake victims during the earthquakes his birthplace, the Ionian Islands, suffered in August 1953, by ensuring essential humanitarian aid from foreign Churches and the WCC. Furthermore, aid was given by the WCC for the future development of the island of Cephalonia. See relative archive material in V. Stathokosta, *The relationship between the Church of Greece*, op. cit., pp. 402-405.

<sup>21</sup> See Alivizatos’ theological argumentation in V. Stathokosta, *Η Θεολογική και Οικουμενική Σκέψη*, op. cit., pp. 127-145.

A main characteristic of his theological thought, as well as of many, who supported that the Orthodox Church should participate in the ecumenical movement, was the demand to return to the genuine patristic thought<sup>22</sup>. His conviction was that this was the only guarantee for any further fruitful growth of Theology. He underlined the need for the development of theological thought and discipline without barriers, but in a spirit of freedom and critical analysis, taking into consideration new theological achievements, regardless their confessional origin. Moreover, he posed as an essential condition for the achievement of the above goals the systematic detection and removal of foreign elements, which had unwittingly ("ασυναισθήτως") entered Orthodox Theology in the past. This fact was officially marked by the "First Conference of Orthodox Theology" (1936): that Orthodox theology "bears many subsequent alien influences"<sup>23</sup>. He attributed these influences Orthodox contacts had with the heterodox in the past, where there was "ignorance of things", "a low-level of theological education" and "emancipation reluctance" (e.g. fear that they might be manipulated) on the part of the Orthodox. The results of these foreign influences were unpleasant; they were not a benefit but mostly harmful to the ecumenical movement<sup>24</sup>. However, there is no doubt that the twentieth century offered a totally different frame for cooperation between Churches and such danger did not exist anymore. Alivizatos contributed greatly to the understanding of that new reality, to the genesis and development of the modern ecumenical movement, to the openness of Orthodoxy to the world and its liberation from phobic syndromes some Orthodox maintained; to the growth of Orthodox Theology with fidelity to the spirit of patristic teaching of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church which is the Orthodox Church.

Since his involvement in the work of the "World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches" (1914)<sup>25</sup> of which he served as a president, until the 4<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the WCC in Uppsala (1968) where he participated as a representative of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Alivizatos left his mark in many ecumenical congresses and studies. He contributed for the formation of Ecumenical Theology, for the development of Orthodox Theology and for its contribution to the theological growth of the WCC. His offering for the rapprochement between East and West was recognized by the General Secretary of the WCC, Visser' t Hooft, as well as his leading role in the Ecumenical Movement from its early steps. Similarly, Edmund Schlink, the well-known and distinguished theologian and pioneer of the ecumenical movement recognized Alivizatos' work as well<sup>26</sup>.

It is fair that Alivizatos was one of the great professors, distinguished in the academic community as well as in society. He was a theologian who contributed a great deal to the development of genuine Orthodox Theology with fidelity to Orthodox tradition and he successfully managed to express it in a radically changing world of his time.

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<sup>22</sup> H. S. Alivisatos, *Αι σύγχρονοι θεολογικοί τάσεις εν τη Ελληνική Ορθοδοξία* (Modern Theological Trends in Greek Theology,) Reprint from *Θεολογία*, vol XX (1949), Athens 1949, p. 17. Cf. H. S. Alivisatos, *Ανασκόπησις και Προοπτική* (Review and Prospect) in *Ορθόδοξος Σκέψις*, 15.1.1958, no 1, pp. 1-5 (4-5).

<sup>23</sup> See H. S. Alivisatos three works: (1) *La position actuelle de la Theologie Orthodoxe*, 1939, pp. 24ff; (2) *Αι σύγχρονοι θεολογικοί τάσεις*; 3) *Ανασκόπησις και Προοπτική*.

<sup>24</sup> H. S. Alivisatos, *Αι σύγχρονοι θεολογικοί τάσεις*, op. cit., pp. 18-19.

<sup>25</sup> See V. Stathokosta, *The relationship between the Church of Greece*, op.cit., p.p. 34-37.

<sup>26</sup> Edmund Schlink, "The nature of Christian Hope", in *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. IV (1952), no. 3, pp. 284-290.

HAMILCAR ALIVIZATOS

INTERNATIONAL HELLENIC UNIVERSITY

MASTER IN ORTHODOX ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY

FRIDAY  
26-MARCH  
5:00pm-7:00pm



HAMILCAR ALIVIZATOS: AN ORTHODOX PIONEER OF THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

PROF. VASSILIKI STATHOKOSTA

Prof. Ivana Noble will respond and monitor the discussion

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[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCD\\_5mcv3Z82pYW8LFUkZEmw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCD_5mcv3Z82pYW8LFUkZEmw)



## INTEGRAL ECOLOGY IN THE LIGHT OF CHRISTIAN MISSION

*Prof. Nikolaos Dimitriadis*

The environment, God's creation (*ktisis*) and our world, is the context in which humans find their way to *theosis* or *deification*. It is a work of God and an integral part of His Kingdom. Unfortunately for over three decades the world has witnessed an ecological degradation of the creation and people refuse to undertake responsibilities concerning environmental policies.

The term "Integral Ecology" is first coined in religious literature by Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si*.<sup>1</sup> However, as a missionary concept it was underlined almost half a century ago in the ecumenical movement, when the "integrity of creation", together with the terms peace and justice, was used in forming a new unit of WCC: "Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation."<sup>2</sup> Almost at the same time the Ecumenical Patriarchate started its involvement in the ecological issues and His All Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew, the Primate of the Eastern Orthodox Christian Church of Constantinople, and the *primus inter pares* of the entire Orthodox world, was the first one in the Christian World to draw the attention of the global community to the duty of the Church to contribute theologically and spiritually towards the protection of our natural home. It was patriarch Bartholomew who also started convening a series of symposia entitled "Religion, Science and the Environment." These symposia originally started in 1988 on the Isle of Patmos, at a meeting of environmental and religious leaders. His concern was both theological and scientific, and for that purpose he started building bridges between representatives of faith communities, professional scientists, and environmental NGOs.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The entire 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of the encyclical is devoted to Integral Ecology.

<sup>2</sup> The essential turning point was during the Sixth General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Vancouver, Canada (July 24 to 10 of August) in 1983, an assembly that reflects the concerns of the Church to the modern world and focuses on how to enable action in the Christian world in order to contribute to the solution of today's problems. Posing as a foundation principle that the ministry is an integral part of the mission of Christ's Church developed the theological meaning of the term "integrity of creation" as declarative of environmental and ecological problems. "The integrity of creation" aired as an expression representing the Council's perception of the burning issues of humanity on justice and peace in the world

<sup>3</sup> Yale's University professors Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim held a series of ten conferences at the Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions, though of course many scholars of religion by the 1990s began to generate a substantial body of literature discussing and analyzing how nature is valued in the world's various religious systems Cf. Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Worldly Wonder: Religions Enter Their Ecological Phase Open Court*: Chicago, 2003. Dieter T. Hessel - Rosemary Radford Ruether (eds.), *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-being of Earth and Humans*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000. Cf. also in the Greek literature Elias Oikonomou, *Theological Ecology. Theory and Praxis* (Θεολογική Οικολογία, Θεωρία και Πράξη), Athens 1994. It is not accidental that the patriarchal environmental initiative was prior to the purely scientific work of the Center for the Study of World Religions in Yale.

These initiatives gave the Ecumenical Patriarch the nickname “Green Patriarch,” and gave rise of a new culture in a new human ethics that are an essential step in the ecological problem. The encyclical of His Holiness Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, in which he also highlights the Ecumenical Patriarch’s pioneering leadership, is a wake-up call to help humanity understand the responsibility that we have towards the environment. No doubts it has a worldwide effect on people’s consciousness, concerning a joint process, “a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet” (LS § 14)<sup>4</sup>

In the 66th paragraph Pope Francis acknowledges that according to the Bible “human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor and with the earth itself”. All those three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us.” (LS § 66). The basic biblical foundation of the integral ecology is Psalm 24:1 “*The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it. The world and all that is in it*”.

In this paper I will try to emphasize these three aspects of Christian mission (better attested nowadays as Christian *witness*) and I will underline the fact that they cannot be seen separately.

#### A. Mission of God (*missio Dei*)

“*As my Father has sent me, even so send I you. Receive the Holy Spirit* (Jn 20:21)

Christian traditions start being concerned about two interrelated aspects of globalization: ecology and economy,<sup>5</sup> both stemming from the Greek word *oikos* (household), and both carrying inherently the notion of communion (*koinonia*).<sup>6</sup> The world as “house of God” (*oikos Theou*) offered to the missionary inquiries the meaning of relationships, intimacy, warmth, family, which encompasses all people regardless of religion, nationality, gender. God is the Father of all. His mission (*missio Dei*) for the salvation of humankind and the entire creation is based in the “economy of the Holy Spirit” and we are called to participate in that mission of His.<sup>7</sup>

The emphasis on *missio Dei* came as a response to the *missio ecclesiae* and the idea of a Christocentric universalism (*missio Christi*), which led to the conversion of a “healthy Christocentrism to a problematic Christomonism”. That theologically

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<sup>4</sup> The goal of this dialogue is that there is a need for “a conversation that includes everyone, since the environmental challenge, we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all” (§ 14).

<sup>5</sup> This was analyzed in more details in the *Call for Action* of the WCC AGAPE (Alternative Globalization Addressed to People and Earth) project.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Petros Vassiliadis, “The Witness of the Church in Today’s World: Three Missiological Statements on Integral Ecology”, p.2. Although the general idea of the connection between economy and ecology is hinted in the document, no specific theological and epistemological argumentation is given. An Orthodox mission declaration cannot ignore that various aspects of climate, ecological, financial, and debt crises are mutually dependent and reinforce each other, causing in many places of the world so much suffering of people, endangering even their survival. Far-reaching market liberalization, deregulation, and unrestrained privatization of goods and services are exploiting the whole Creation and dismantling social programs and services and opening up economies across borders to seemingly limitless growth of production.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. the CWME document: Jooseop Keum (ed.) *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*, WCC, Geneva 2013. “We are called to participate in God’s mission beyond our human centred goals. God’s mission is to all life and we have to both acknowledge it and serve it in new ways of mission. We pray for repentance and forgiveness, but we also call for action now. Mission has creation at its heart” (§ 105).

problematic idea was the result of an “obliviousness to the Spirit” in Western Christianity.<sup>8</sup> At this point the Orthodox contribution in re-introducing the importance of the Trinitarian theology, was quite significant. From that time onwards proselytism as a missiological term was abandoned and new missionary terms, like (inter-religious) *dialogue* and *witness (martyria)*, were introduced to come closer to people of other religious beliefs.<sup>9</sup> The Orthodox Metropolitan of Mount Lebanon, George Khodr, was the first to highlight how a Christocentric theology can separate Christ from the mystery of the Holy Trinity. This does not mean abandoning the salvific significance of Christ, who still remains “the way, the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6), but it is a dynamic reinterpretation of Christology through Pneumatology, recognizing at the same time that the “*Holy Spirit (like the wind) blows where it wills*” (Jn 3:8).<sup>10</sup> The *economy* of the Holy Spirit, together with the *economy* of the Word (God’s Son), in other words without eliminating the Christ event, has helped us in thinking of the salvation not only of humanity but of the whole world. The phrase “the whole world” means that God uses not only the Church, but many other powers of the world for His salvific mission.<sup>11</sup> The boundaries of the Church are expanded, and religious and cultural superiority syndromes give their place to a humble mood for dialogue with all. Therefore, without abandoning the fundamental conviction that Jesus Christ is “the way, the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6) we insist that the Church is not but a simple servant in *missio dei* (i.e. the mission of God).<sup>12</sup>

In the Orthodox tradition, and I believe today all over the Christian theology, God in God’s own self is a life of communion and love that exist within the Holy Trinity.<sup>13</sup> Our responsibility aims at drawing humanity and creation into this communion with God’s very life.<sup>14</sup> This communion of love and with love means that

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<sup>8</sup> K. Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition. A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement*, WCC Publications, Geneva 1996, p. 174. The term “obliviousness to the Spirit” was first used by Cardinal Kasper.

<sup>9</sup> See Ion Bria, *Martyria-Mission*, Geneva, 1980, P. Vassiliadis, *Eucharist and Witness. Orthodox Perspectives on the Unity and Mission of the Church*, Geneva 1998. (Archbishop of Albania), Anastasios Yannoulatos, *Mission*, pp. 267-275. Many elements for the concept of *witness* to people of different religious beliefs we can get at the ecumenical declaration for Mission titled *Mission and Evangelism* and specifically from the last chapter “Witness to believers of other religions and contemporary beliefs” (trans N. Dimitriadis) in Petros Vassiliadis, *Unity and Witness*, ed. Epikentro, Thessaloniki, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> George Khodr considers that our main missionary work is “to follow the footprints of Christ as they are felt in the shadows of other religions». With the contribution of pneumatology, widening theological vision and the concept of missionary action changes. The mission led to the abandonment of imperialist tactics and adopting the behavior of Christian witness the emphasis is no longer given to proselytizing, but the transformation of believers of other religions because of their contact with the Gospel and Christian witness through the Holy Spirit (“Christianity in a Pluralistic World. The Economy of the Holy Spirit,” *The Ecumenical Review* 23 (April 1971), pp. 118-128..

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Petros Vassiliadis, *Unity and Witness*, p. 69.

<sup>12</sup> More on *Missio Dei* in the second chapter of my book *Theological and Religious-Historical Approach to Inter-religious Dialogue in Contemporary Mission*, 7, Cemes eds., Thessaloniki, 2017.

<sup>13</sup> I.Bria (ed.), *Go forth in Peace*, Geneva WCC Publications 1986, p. 3 “The Trinitarian theology points to the fact that God’s involvement in history aims at drawing humanity and creation in general into this communion with God’s very life. The implications of this assertion for understanding mission are very important: mission does not aim primarily at the propagation or transmission of intellectual convictions, doctrines, moral commands etc., but at the transmission of the life of communion that exists in God”.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Ion Bria (ed.), *Go Forth in Peace*, p. 3.

our mission is not a transmission of dogmas or ethical commands but primarily aims at drawing humanity and the entire cosmos into this relationship with God.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, God's mission (*missio Dei*) is based in the "economy of the Holy Spirit", that "blows where it wills" leading us "into all the truth" (Jn 16:13)" and embracing the whole of cosmos.

*B. Mission with the "other".*

*"I was hungry, and you gave me food; I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink." (Mt 25:35)*

In order to shed light to the issue of the relationship between humans and nature we should first examine the relationship between humans and the "other". The "other" is another piece – not species – of God's creation. Humans normally think egocentrically and forget that the creation was given by God to all humanity and that everyone has the same rights on earth and on its earthly goods. For St. Symeon the New Theologian, "everything is in common, just like air and light, everything is in common on earth".<sup>16</sup>

The spread of individualism, one of the pillars of modernity, in our culture goes side by side with the spread of social injustice.<sup>17</sup> We are facing both threads, social injustice and ecological crisis simultaneously. We cannot separate our concerns of human dignity with those for ecological preservation and sustainability. After all, it is known that God created humans from dust and from spirit which he inspired on them, creating in this way a very special being. Thus, people are related to God in terms of spirit, since they were made 'like His image' and are related to nature as biological organisms. This is how humans represent *the fusion of God with nature, both in a materialistic and in a spiritual way*. Patriarch Bartholomew at the 19th Eurasian Economic Summit states: "If we value each individual made in the image of God, and if we value every particle of God's creation, then we must also care for each other and our world".<sup>18</sup> Our ecological behaviour does not only affecting the "other". It is

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<sup>15</sup> Determined by a vision of how to "know" God, to "participate" in His life, and of course to be "saved" neither by an extrinsic action of God nor through the rational cognition of propositional truths, but by "becoming God", this anthropological notion a much more inclusive to non-Christians, even to non-believers, and much more relevant to the social, economic and environmental issues, than the old conventional missionary attitude. This rapprochement with people of other faiths does not mean a naïve affirmation that all religions are the same, or that a new "world religion", a Pan-religion, is needed or is at hand, as it is feared or claimed by the ultra-conservatives from all religions. On the contrary, the inter-faith dialogue and co-operation are necessary, exactly because the various religious traditions are different and promote different visions of the reality. The inter-faith dialogue is an "encounter of mutual commitments and responsibilities" on the common goal of humanity to restore communion with God, which would inevitably also lead to a "communion of faithful".

<sup>16</sup> St. Symeon, the new Theologian, *Catecheseis* 9, SC 194, p.110

<sup>17</sup> *A Comment on Pope Francis' Encyclical Laudato Si* by Elder Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon: "The rupture of the proper relationship between humanity and nature is due to the rise of individualism in our culture. The pursuit of individual happiness has been made into an ideal in our time. Ecological sin is due to human greed which blinds men and women to the point of ignoring and disregarding the basic truth that the happiness of the individual depends on its relationship with the rest of human beings

<sup>18</sup> Address by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the 19th Eurasian Economic Summit "Silk Road Economic Belt; Economy, Energy, Forced Migration And Terrorism" Istanbul, April 5-7, 2016.

considered also a sin against the future generations. This greed for a temporary happiness makes us forget our duty towards the successive citizens of the planet.

Theologically the misuse of creation contradicts fundamental principles of Christian faith. The Son of God came to save the whole creation through His Incarnation. Damaging human nature, we damage the “other” that Christ came to save together with the whole creation.<sup>19</sup> According to the Biblical *Magna Charta* (Mt 25), God judges humanity using non-conventional criteria. In our interfaith endeavors the “other” should be not an “object” of mission but rather a partner in dialogue.<sup>20</sup> There is a need for humans to discover the divine presence in every creature, to understand the distinctiveness and harmony of the world and to get enthusiastic with the awesomeness of life even in the smallest and humble creature. Humans we should place ourselves in the creation as its integral part and not to examine it as objective observers.

### C. Mission towards nature

*“In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth. But the earth was unsightly and unfurnished, and darkness was over the deep, and the Spirit of God moved over the water. And God said, Let there be light, and there was light”* (Gen 1. 1-3)

God’s mission begins with the act of creation<sup>21</sup>. The world becomes a fact, an act that happens, and a ‘ritual’ that is constantly performed. According to the Christian consideration, the creation of the world is the Triune God’s achievement, including Christ’s involvement: *“For in Him (Christ) all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities. All things were created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together”* (Col 1:17). According to the early Christian work *Poimin* of Hermas, Christians believe that God *“created all things and set them in order and made out of what did not exist everything that is, and who contains all things but is himself alone uncontained.”*<sup>22</sup> But creation is also part of God’s re-creation in Christ: *“For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that*

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<sup>19</sup> *ibid.* Metr Zizioulas rightly observes: “In assuming human nature, the Son of God took over material creation in its entirety. Christ came to save the whole creation through the Incarnation, not only humanity; for according to St. Paul (Rom. 8.23) “the whole creation groans in travail and is suffering” awaiting its salvation through humanity”.

<sup>20</sup> More on Interfaith aspects of creation in my Ph.D. dissertation, submitted in the Department of Theology of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (2009), entitled *Theological and Religious-Historical Approach to Inter-religious Dialogue in Contemporary Mission*.

<sup>21</sup> “God’s mission begins with the act of creation. Creation’s life and God’s life are entwined. The mission of God’s Spirit encompasses us all in an ever-giving act of grace. We are therefore called to move beyond a narrowly human-centred approach and to embrace forms of mission which express our reconciled relationship with all created life” (§ 19). Along with other documents, the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of WCC, this time with a full participation of other non-WCC-member Churches (Catholic, Evangelical, Pentecostal), produced a New Mission statement, entitled *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*

<sup>22</sup> Hermas, *Poimin*, 1st Commandment 26:1. Also II Mac 7:28 *“then you will know that God did not make them out of existing things. In the same way humankind came into existence”*. Cf. also I Pe 2:10

*the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time*” (Rom 8:19-22). But it is important to state that creation should not be identified with God but originates from Him and specifically from His word and His energies, and not from His divine essence.

Nature, therefore, cannot and should not be excluded from our mission. Humans are created by God and participate in the reign of God in heaven and earth, which means that their acts bear two kinds of results: First, it is the acceptance of their dual nature and the balanced symbiosis with nature and the second is the negation of their double ability that make them unable to recognize spiritual potential in nature and unable to see the evil in its destruction, since they live clearly in a material world. That shows their spiritual bias and their insensitivity which is translated in practice in a stance that harms and destroys the world. Such a stance is yet another reason of the ecological problem and is the result of the so-called western viewpoint of the world.<sup>23</sup>

Recent scientific findings by the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) indicate that the average global temperatures are rising by 0.6° annually. In short, climate change is real. It is the primary socio-human, economic, political, and existential and futurist challenge of the 21st Century.<sup>24</sup> There is an urgent need to redefine and rethink a holistic justice system.

Christians from all over the world believe that the values and principles that form part of a common world ethic need not only be publicly declared, they also require an international legal endorsement; they should be more effectively integrated into the work of the UN system and major international legal institutions, even if integrating such values and principles requires significant reforms to leading organs and agencies of the UN.<sup>25</sup> There is an urgent need to redefine and rethink a holistic justice system. Justice refers a fundamental value-based qualitative and quantitative approach in relationship to humans, planet, and resources. It is the cornerstone of common welfare and equality. The struggle of Christians to promote a Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities, side by side with the existing Universal Declaration of Human Rights,

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<sup>23</sup> Georgia Droumani, *The ecumenical patriarchate and the problems of the natural environment*, Master thesis submitted in the Department of Theology of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (2009), p.10.

<sup>24</sup> Aidan G. Msafiri, *Globalisation of Concern III Essays on Climate Justice, Education, Sustainability and Technology*, globethics.net, Geneva 2016. “Climate change needs not only viable national policies and strategies but also global solutions and solidarity. Blair (2000:4) affirms that climate change is probably the greatest long-term challenge facing humanity. Climate change needs deep change, systemic change, behavioural change and collaborative long-term solutions”

<sup>25</sup> The inter-faith document, Faith, Shared Wisdom, and International Law, insists that “a Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities that would stand beside the Universal Declaration of Human Rights” is a sine-qua-non for a just, peaceful and sustainable universe. Action has already been taken that the Secretary General of UN “acts to advance acceptance of a statement of shared ethical values and that the document be introduced into the General Assembly for debate and adoption”. And the document goes on: “To this end religious and other ethically based institutions should work with legal and political authorities...in order to develop a higher level of public understanding and awareness of commonalities in values between the major religious and ethical traditions, while fully respecting religious, ethnic and cultural diversity”. See more on these in Petros Vassiliadis’ presentation at the annual conference of AIESC: “Beyond Ecology-The integral Ecology as the new road to reconciliation” Thessaloniki (1 – 4 September 2016), entitled “The Witness of the Church in Today’s World: Three Missiological Statements on Integral Ecology”.

is not just a diplomatic initiative aiming at introducing in the world agenda Christian moral values at the expense of the values of modernity and the democratic achievements of the Enlightenment. It came out of pressure by prophetic and charismatic figures and theological movements for social and ecological justice from a faith perspective. “Economic justice” is a concept developed by the churches and the ecumenical movement towards achievement of global justice through advocating for equitable sharing of resources and power as essential prerequisites for human development and ecological sustainability.<sup>26</sup> Experts in modern political discourse define policy as the prudence or wisdom in the management of affairs. On a deeper level, policy, refers to definite framework or method of action selected among alternatives and in the light of given conditions to guide and determine present and future decisions or general goals.

There is correspondence of the spiritual situation of a human with the behavior towards the environment. Environmental destruction is the reflection of the image of destroyed human soul, pollution and natural catastrophe is the tangible result of the pollution and perversion of human spirit. No matter how many conferences are organized and how many measures humans take for the preservation of nature there will be no result, if humans do not change spiritually, if they do not regret and sense their own spiritual pollution.<sup>27</sup>

#### *Epilogue*

An ecological consciousness among the Christians, and in a wider level in the world community, is a *sine-qua-non*. In the ecumenical world religious leaders are encouraged to give concrete suggestions on how to act towards the environment. The reference to Patriarch Bartholomew by Pope Francis in the beginning of the declaration *Laudato Si* (§8 §9) shows a mood for cooperation and brings forth common proposals for building a new morality towards creation. Additionally, is an encouraging example which is characterized with seriousness and deep theological thoughts about the specific issue and its importance.<sup>28</sup> During the pandemic Covid-19 which still affects the whole world, we have proved that as humans we are able to work together despite our different viewpoints regarding our beliefs. The same dynamic we should show regarding our behavior towards the environment. We should stop falsely believe that the climate change, at least in the western world will be affecting us in the future. By the time that

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<sup>26</sup> Petros Vassiliadis, *From The Witness of the Church in Today’s World: Three Missiological Statements on Integral Ecology*: “Long before a universal concern (political, scientific etc.) and advocacy for the dangerous effects of the climate change was developed, Christian sociologists and theologians put a critical question to their Churches: Do they have “the courage to engage with the ‘values’ of a profit oriented way of life as a matter of faith, or will they withdraw into the ‘private’ sphere? This is the question our churches must answer or lose their very soul,” declared a WCC consultation of Eastern and Central European Churches on the problem of economic globalization at the dawn of the 3rd millennium” See also Rogate Mshane, *Globalization. WCC-JPC*, presented in the Harare WCC Assembly. See also *The Responsibility of World Religions for Ecology, the World Economic System, and the International Law*.

<sup>27</sup> Georgia Droumani, *The Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Problems of the Natural Environment*, p.9

<sup>28</sup> The two recent official declarations, the Papal encyclical *Laudato Si* (2015) and the Orthodox conciliar document “The Witness of the Church in Today’s World”, adopted quite recently by the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church (2016), both came in a critical moment in human history.

affects even one single soul on this planet, we should feel responsible as it would have been affecting ourselves.

In the world agenda, we should encourage people to see the environmental issue, not as a political or a technological one, but mainly as a spiritual one. The emphasis is given not in the preservation of the environment as many environmentalist movements are focusing on, but the viewpoint is the one of the realization of God’s plan for the salvation of humans. In the Smile World Tour, a project on Ethics, Environment and music inspired by CEMES and Globethics.net, I was trying to bring together interfaith cooperation on environmental action.<sup>29</sup> It’s not a matter to preserve something that belongs to us, the planet in our case, but to love, not just accept, the responsibility that we have towards creation. On the same direction the Halki Summits, organized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, “provided a platform for conversation and promote an atmosphere of dialogue to discern and foster changes in attitudes and lifestyles.”<sup>30</sup>

The Orthodox Church has shown a special responsibility for the ecological crisis. All of us as *royal priesthood* should contribute with all spiritual and practical means towards the protection of our natural home. We should also understand that all human beings are part of God’s creation, and not species above the creation. Together with “the others” as partners in dialogue we should draw the attention of the world community and make the protection of the environment, not just an aim but a way of living with continuous and sincere self-criticism for the mistakes we have made towards creation. We should also cultivate an ecological ethos that will be a result of a spiritual worldview and not a blackmailing morality in front of a possible natural disaster. It is a duty, a responsibility and a calling to preserve the earth and care for her.



<sup>29</sup> Abrams, Zara, *A Greek Rock Star's Message to Humanity*. [online] Available at: <[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/a-greek-rock-stars-message-to-humanity\\_b\\_591f7841e4b07617ae4cbc19](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/a-greek-rock-stars-message-to-humanity_b_591f7841e4b07617ae4cbc19)> [Accessed 10 June 2021].

<sup>30</sup> The ecological summits are series of encounters among that are focusing on discerning changes in values and social attitudes related to the abuse of God’s creation. See more on Halki Summit. 2021. *HALKI SUMMIT | Heybeliada, Turkey*. [online] Available at: <<http://www.halkisummit.com>> [Accessed 10 June 2021].

**THE OWNERSHIP OF GOD.  
THE ORTHODOX CHURCH AND THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES:  
FRIEND OR FOE?**

*Rev. Prof. Augustinos Bairactaris*

*1.1. Introductory Questions.*

Although it appears simple that the Christian Churches *confess Lord Jesus as God and Saviour*, it is not; on the contrary it is quite complicated in view of the continuing scandal of division among Christians. Jesus asked his disciples: “*Who do you say that I am?*” - “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*”, Peter responded.<sup>1</sup> What does such a universal claim about Jesus Christ mean for Christians and for the members of other religions?

It is a common principle among Christians that Jesus is the life of the world, a blessing to many and an offence to others.<sup>2</sup> How much the world needs such a blessing today, but how big is the failure of Christians to fulfill Jesus’ commandment to be all one, following the prototype of unity of the Holy Trinity.<sup>3</sup> What then are the consequences and responsibilities resulting from the tragedy of Christian disunity and the pain of the contemporary world torn by oppression, starvation, violence, intolerance, hate and killing?

Thus, what is the importance of identity in the current unity process? Am I member of the Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Reformed etc. Church, or am I primarily member of the Body of Christ? And even more, can we speak of Churches (in plural) instead of Church? Is our identity a problem to this unity? Do we receive as identical the Body of Christ within our confessional ecclesial body? Who defines the limits of the Church? What sort of diversity could be accepted? What is actually ecclesial unity? What does diversity in the ecclesiastical life mean and how far can we speak about legitimate or not legitimate diversity? In other words, is diversity against catholicity (*Una Sancta*)? Do we share Christ, or do we possess Christ like a valuable object kept within our confessional boundaries and with no will to share Him with the other?

*1.2. Orthodox Church, Ecclesiology and Ecumenical Dialogue: a relation of comfort or of discomfort?*

For the Orthodox Church the issue of ecclesiology remains a crucial one, which demands a special attention within the ecumenical perspective. A church – centered

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 8:29.

<sup>2</sup> Ion Bria, *Jesus Christ – The Life of the World – An Orthodox Contribution to the Vancouver Theme*, WCC, Geneva 1982, pp. 32-33.

<sup>3</sup> Florovsky Georges, *La Sainte Église Universelle – Confrontation œcuménique*, Delachaux, Paris 1948, p. 17: “*Est le seul modèle de l’unité parfaite, c’est la Trinité Très Sainte, où les Trois Personnes ne font ou plutôt ne sont qu’un seul Être unique. C’est sur cette exemple suprême que l’unité chrétienne doit être modelée*”.

ecumenism must be developed in order the Churches to achieve a consensus status regarding the appropriate model of ecclesiology accepted by all members of the WCC. The area of ecclesiology could be easily conceived as a vision and as a place of witnessing Jesus in sacraments. Questing for unity is identified with questing for Church. If we find the answer to the question what kind of unity we desire, we shall find at the same time the answer to what kind of Church we desire. They are two sides of the same reality.

Some of the most prominent Orthodox theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have written about ecclesiology: “*ecclesiology of sobornost*” by Boulgakoff, Zernov, Florofsky, “*eucharistic ecclesiology*” by Afanasieff, “*ecclesiology of open sobornost*” by Staniloae, “*pneumatological ecclesiology*” by Nissiotis, “*ecclesiology of communion*” by Clement. According to the Orthodox theology there are two important key elements of ecclesiology in order to understand the notion of ecclesial unity.

Firstly, there is an internal actual relation between the spirituality and the salvific experience. Therefore, ecclesiology describes the experience of salvation of the faithful member of the local community.

Secondly, unity is the outcome of the sacramental essence of the Church. Jesus is one, the Holy Spirit is one, the Church is one. Since the Church is the Body of Christ it means it is by nature indivisible.

Unity is not a result of gathering separated groups into one entity, but rather unity is growing together into the fullness of Christ. Mutual acceptance and shared reconciliation are pre-conditions for the Churches to meet at the same locus. However, are these elements quite enough when we speak about sacramental unity?

A group of Orthodox theologians, staff at WCC, gathered in Bossey for two days in 1974 working on the topic “*Concepts of Unity and models of Union*”. There, it was analysed the model called *organic union*. According to their opinion “unity is preserved alive by the Holy Tradition (with capital T) in the Church from the very beginning. The faith, hope and love of the apostolic community are a reality perpetuated in history by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is by this living Tradition, that the Church is one. Moreover, the witness borne by the Church is exactly the same as that of the first apostolic community finding its supreme expression in the Divine Liturgy.

Additionally, the Church has a ministry (ordained episcopate) which continues the apostolic ministry and its life is related to the experience of the saints of all ages. The prayer also for the presence of the Spirit in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy is an expression that God renews the community continually. Divided Christians then are able to re-discover their full communion in the one Body of Christ as they are led to re-discover one another in this living Tradition.<sup>4</sup>

For the Orthodox theology Church remained one, catholic and undivided, even if several confessions might appear and divisions might take place during the historical route. They believe that the Orthodox Church is the bearer of the UNA SANCTA. To the potential question what is the relation of the Orthodox Church to the fellowship with the other Christians, the given answer should be like that: The Orthodox Church

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<sup>4</sup> Ion Bria, *What kind of Unity?* Faith and Order Paper No 69, WCC, Geneva 1974, pp. 65-74.

does not penetrate into the mystery of *oikonomia* of God and certainly it cannot replace God's judgment with theirs. What is important for the Orthodox is the notion of unity in true faith and in sacraments. The Orthodox Church does not stand against the model of *unity in diversity*; however, such diversity is not accepted to be identified with some contradictory differences in teaching which have caused in the past painful separations. Another question is: what elements of the ecclesial life are changeable, and which are not?

For the Orthodox Church the ecclesial communion (*koinonia*) should be stressed upon the vertical perspective of unity, without of course ignoring the horizontal dimension. The communion of the faithful in hope, faith and love within the Body of Christ is literally the true *koinonia*, where peoples are incorporated ontologically in a spiritual manner into the risen human nature and glorified divine nature of Jesus. In Jesus, God communes with his creation and with the totality of humankind. Thus, the human person in baptism participates in Jesus' resurrection and in Eucharist participates in Jesus' glorification. Hence the faithful enters into communion with God and they partake in the mission of the Church. Moreover, such kind of *koinonia* unites each one in solidarity with the other members of the Body of Christ. Consequently, the Church can be understood as a sacrament, becoming the community of salvation, where Baptism and Eucharist link all Christians to Christ and one another in a fundamental sacramental communion. Church does not have a political or social concept, but it is a sacramental place where grace and eschatology meet together.

Thus, the Orthodox Church since the beginning of that ecumenical pilgrimage has participated toward the full and visible unity along with the other Christian Churches and Confessions. The above-mentioned elements are necessary for the Orthodox ecclesiology in order to achieve a convergence in understanding the Church as a communion and as a sacrament.

On the other hand, the WCC has presented in a series of texts a comprehensive articulation of ecclesiology beginning with Toronto (1950), highlighted in New Delhi (1961), focused in Nairobi (1975), explicated in Canberra (1991) and most recently reflected with the Faith and Order Paper *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (2005).

### 1.3. *The Unity is dead; Long live the Unity*

Whether it is pleasant or not there are in front of us some facts demanding solutions *vis a vis* the ecumenical movement:

- Fact number one: The current situation where the Churches live in is the one of separation and of division.
- Fact number two: The unity of Churches has been lost and not found yet.
- Fact number three: The WCC was founded at a very critical and historical moment for humanity, after the end of WWII when disrespect, hate, suspiciousness, controversy, rivalry and conflicts used to dominate in the relations between states and between Churches as well. The world had been torn into two pieces.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> op. cit., Ion Bria, "An Orthodox Contribution to the question of unity", pp. 73-74.

Given that situation the work demanded by WCC seemed to be enormous. It must become clear that the task of the WCC was not to create a new homogeneous Church by bringing together different ecclesial communities, but to restore the broken churchly unity according to its historical and spiritual continuity. Thus, it is without doubt that the WCC managed to impel Churches to go beyond their limits and move far away from their isolation entering into a new era of communication. However, it is still premature and unrealistic to believe that full unity among the member-Churches of the Council has been reached. At the same time we have to see what the Council has inspired Churches to do: cooperation in mission, union conversations, reconciliation, theological research, spiritual sharing, etc.

A few decades ago, the WCC had to deal with issues such as the nuclear crisis, the war crisis in Vietnam, the hostility between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R., the apartheid in South Africa, the political system of oppression and the military regimes ruling in Central and Latin America, just to mention a few. After the fall of Berlin's wall, the whole situation didn't improve as it was initially expected. Globalization influenced dramatically all aspects of life: economy, communication, religiosity, education, commercial relations, etc. Simultaneously, other problems raised such as the ecological crisis due to the exploitation of the natural resources, the economic debt of the poorest countries of the South to the richest of the North, the unjust forms of the world economic and trade system, the loss of the self-governing of the small communities, etc. Trying to tackle these problematic situations created around the oikoumene, WCC shifted from its first aim which was the convergence on the doctrinal issues. As a result, a series of working theological papers and projects were deployed with positive results. For instance, new theological trends were developed: theology of liberation, black and feminist theology, but mainly several projects such as the *Alternative Globalization addressing people and earth* (AGAPE), *Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society* (JPSS), *Program to Combat Racism* (PCR), *Churches' Participation in Development* (CCPD) and many others which mobilized significant amounts of resources and humans' activity. After the 90's a need for re-configuration within the Ecumenical Movement was highlighted by many members-Churches especially by the Orthodox which felt that this shift of the programmatic orientation and the change of the agenda of the WCC it was leading the whole organization to uncharted waters.

However, besides of the temptations and difficulties caused by the secularization that WCC had to deal with, it appeared another one; the spiritual crisis or else the problem of desacralisation which eventually raised the following question: What exactly is the role of the WCC in the third millennium. There is a spiritual crisis related to the problem of the new identity of WCC in the post-modern era. In other terms WCC felt that it should advocate in favour of all peoples who were in danger, to act as a defender of all marginalized groups and to have generally an active role in the social and political life around the world.

For some Churches engaged in the ecumenical movement this shift was an inevitable development, while for some other Churches this attitude was a total remove from the starting point of the Council's foundation, which was the unity of the Church. The pivotal moment where this shift unconsciously took place was the 3<sup>rd</sup> General

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Assembly of the WCC in 1961 in New Delhi, where a large number of Orthodox Churches and even a larger number of Churches coming from Africa and Latin America entered into the Council. After the first moments of enthusiasm, it became clear that for these Churches it was crucial to find a place of recognition, to find an international organization where they would be treated as equals, since they were striving for their national dignity, for their economic and political freedom and for a general development in their education and health systems. They did not ask for charity, but they did ask a forum where they would be able to present their perspective of Christian life and to be listened to their daily life's problems they had to face. So, they seek for an understanding and for a serious support by their ecumenical partners. The doctrinal issues which separated mostly the European Churches were not their main concern. They had a social arena to fight for their rights, and they asked for a social implementation of Gospel's values.<sup>6</sup> The new hermeneutics therefore had to find a wider and broader dimension of *inclusiveness* of all into Christ's Body. Likewise, the mission of the Church obtained a new dynamic. These inevitable changes in the agenda of WCC had by that time given a socially oriented targeting and it took shape in the 4<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Council in Uppsala in 1968. Consequently, it was decided by the Council to contribute and to react as an ecumenical family as much as they could to the existing reality that the newly independent and developing countries were facing.

The Orthodox members - Churches of the Council without ignoring the importance of these historical events they expressed their worries about the social-political activity of the WCC. It must not be reduced the significance of the fact that some of the Orthodox Churches were living under the continuous control of the communist-soviet regimes. Besides, the Orthodox Churches could affiliate neither the theological language and terminology, nor the biblical arguments used by the new members – Churches coming from the South. In others words, the Orthodox Churches were in agreement with the incorporation of the new members Churches into the organization under the condition that the Council would not lose its theological nature or its original scope of foundation, namely to promote the unity among the Christian Churches. So, they refused the socio-political dimension and action of the WCC which was formed in '60s and developed in '70s.

Another issue which is strongly related to the current situation of the Ecumenical Movement has to do with the different way of understanding the notion of unity by the members coming from the Protestant family and by the members coming from the Orthodox family. While for the Protestants unity could be achieved by bringing together in the same *space* different denominations creating an inter-denominational adjustment, for the Orthodox Churches unity is identical with the *restoration of the schism*. Therefore, it has the meaning of healing the past; it is like doing ecumenism *in time*. The Orthodox Church does not accept the *parity of denominations*, (or "*equality of Confessions*", according to the document of the Holy and Great Council) but they do accept equality in terms of participating in commissions and working groups of the

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<sup>6</sup> Georges Tsetsis, "The Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Movement–The ups and downs of a one century old relationship" (unpublished lecture in Bossey Ecumenical Institute, 2004-2005), pp. 3-7.

Council according to its Constitution and also they accept parity in questing for the truth. In that sense they are all equal *vis a vis* the inquiry of truth. However, this development was achieved firstly by different ways of expressing the relation between God and humanity and secondly by different types of worshipping God in the sacramental ritual life.

For the Orthodox Church the union between different Churches can be neither the outcome of a simple reconciliation, nor an agreement between two different parties. Therefore, the Orthodox Church cannot “*in no way is she able to accept the unity of the Church as an inter-confessional compromise*”.<sup>7</sup> But for the Orthodox Church unity is a long process of searching for a common ecclesiological ground linked with the tradition of the ancient and undivided Church of the seven Ecumenical Councils, but it must be also founded on the unity of faith, preserved in the sacraments. The only way the Orthodox realise the Churchly unity is based on the sacramental life of the Church, without passing judgment upon those Christian communities which held a different perception.

Therefore, according to the Orthodox ecclesiology the apostolic succession through the episcopate and the sacramental priesthood must be in an unbroken continuity with the timeline of history. In 1961 during the works of the general assembly in New Delhi the Orthodox representatives had declared that “*the Orthodox Church by her inner conviction and consciousness has a special and exceptional position in the divided Christendom as the bearer of the tradition of the ancient undivided Church from which all existing denominations stem, by the way of reduction and separation*”.<sup>8</sup>

Certainly the type and the tone of the written language has been modified by that time, but the belief of the Orthodox Church has remained the same as it is witnessed to the official document of the Holy and Great Council in Crete in 2016, where it is noted that “*the Orthodox participation in the movement to restore unity with other Christians in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church is in no way foreign to the nature and history of the Orthodox Church, but rather represents a consistent expression of the apostolic faith and tradition in a new historical circumstances*”.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the Orthodox Church has always serviced for the restoration of the Christian unity, because of its ecumenical engagement and its charity to pray that “*all men may be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth*”.<sup>10</sup> Such an attitude does not come in contradiction with Orthodox Church’s nature and history, but rather it represents a deep expression of its apostolic faith and tradition within a new historical environment.

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<sup>7</sup> “Programme of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church”, in *Commemorative Edition of the APOSTOLOS TITOS bulletin, on the occasion of the convocation of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church in Crete*, (2016), p.261.

<sup>8</sup> *op. cit.*, Gennadios Limouris, “The Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Movement”, p. 30.

<sup>9</sup> *op. cit.*, “Programme of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church”, in *Commemorative Edition of the APOSTOLOS TITOS bulletin, on the occasion of the convocation of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church in Crete*, (2016), p.261.

<sup>10</sup> 1 Tim 2:4.

## THE OWNERSHIP OF GOD

### 1.4. *The Faith and Order Commission and the vision of Unity*

In 1963 in Montreal during the 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference of Faith and Order Commission the representatives of the Churches realised their failure to define the ecclesiological nature of the World Council of Churches (WCC). As a consequence of this failure and during the elaboration of Vancouver's general theme "*Jesus Christ – the Life of the World*", a clear and significant shift happened within the agenda and the framework of WCC from *theology* to *anthropology* in the basis of discovering the churchly meaning of unity in the light of God's plan for all creation.<sup>11</sup> For the first time in Vancouver it was mentioned the term "holistic theology" describing the Eucharistic vision along the renewal of the Church and the healing of humanity. We read in particular: "*Church unity is vital to the health of the Church and to the future of the human family...Christ unites God and world, spiritual and secular...His body and blood given to us in the element of bread and wine, integrate liturgy and diaconate, proclamation and acts of healing...Our Eucharistic vision encompasses the whole reality of Christian worship, life and witness*".<sup>12</sup>

In continuation of that plan the Faith and Order Commission proposed three schemes of unity within its members. The first one called "*organic unity*", which was the outcome of the 3<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly of WCC in New Delhi (1961) based on the notion of *corporate life*, which describes the link between the mission and diakonia of the whole Church which must go into the world to witness and service. The vision of the one Church and the proclamation of the one Gospel make the visible unity even more vivid. The Unity Statement of New Delhi opened new dimensions of understanding the work of the Holy Spirit within the ecumenical encounter. I quote not a mot from the Statement:

*"We believe that the unity which is both God's will and his gift to his Church is being made visible as all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith preaching the one Gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls his people"*.<sup>13</sup>

Seven years later in the 4<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of WCC in Uppsala (1968) Churches showed that the fellowship (*koinonia*) is at the same time universal and local. The final adopted statement in Uppsala was supplementary to the theological content of New Delhi statement which talked about *all people in each place*. On the other hand, Uppsala talked about *all people in all places* who shape a truly ecumenical conciliar form of

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<sup>11</sup> John Meyendorff, *Living Tradition – Orthodox Witness in the Contemporary World*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, NY, 1978, p.129-135.

<sup>12</sup> *Towards A Common Understanding and Vision of the World Council of Churches – A Policy Statement*, WCC, Geneva 1997, p.10.

<sup>13</sup><https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/1961-new-delhi/new-delhi-statement-on-unity>.

common life (*universal fellowship*).<sup>14</sup> According to the Uppsala proposal Churches should work for the moment when a universal council will speak for all Christians and lead the way into the future. By *conciliarity* the Faith and Order Commission describes the process of the Churches coming together in local and in universal level, keeping their different traditions and their own authentic ecclesial identity and providing room for sincere dialogue, common prayer, counsel and decision making and believing that the Holy Spirit once more can lead Christians into a common future.<sup>15</sup> It was understood as a way of “re-reception” of the past councils in the form of a living dialogue. Thus, dialogue must be a process mutual empowerment, and not a negotiation between parties who have conflicting interests and claims. Furthermore, partners in dialogue should join in a common pursuit of justice, peace and constructive action for the good of all people, being able at the same time to hear and listen to the self-understanding of each other’s faith.<sup>16</sup> Through that process it is achieved a mutual commitment at all levels.

In the Meeting of Faith and Order Commission in Louvain (1971)<sup>17</sup> and in the Consultation of Faith and Order Commission in Salamanca (1973),<sup>18</sup> in both cases the issue of conciliar unity was stressed one more time under the theme “Concepts of Unity and Models of Union”. In Accra’s meeting in 1974 the members of Faith and Order pointed out clearly the nine requirements needed in order to be established the vision of the conciliar fellowship as a step towards the visible unity of the Churches. These conditions are the following:

1. Unity in the Gospel’s truth.
2. Unity around the table.
3. Unity in each place.
4. Fellowship for the sake of human’s life quality.
5. Fellowship in a universal level.
6. Mutual acceptance of members and ministries.
7. Appropriate authority of each level of the Church.
8. Faithful responsiveness to the presence of the Holy Spirit.
9. Co-operation in a faithful mission.<sup>19</sup>

The third model of unity it was presented in Nairobi (1975) during the 5<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of WCC under the notion of “*conciliar fellowship*”.<sup>20</sup> This delicate issue of unity and diversity describes on the one hand the great difficulties existing towards the

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<sup>14</sup> Op. cit., *Faith and Order Louvain 1971 – Study Report and Documents*, p.226: “...the Uppsala Assembly first calls for eventually actualizing a truly universal ecumenical conciliar form of life and then asks the Churches to work towards the time when a genuinely universal council may once more speak for all Christians and lead the way into the future”.

<sup>15</sup> Bernard Leeming, *Les Églises à la recherche d’ une seule Église*, Saint Paul, Paris 1964, p.188.

<sup>16</sup> *Ecumenical Considerations for Dialogue and Relations with People of other Religions*, WCC, Geneva 2003, p.9-10.

<sup>17</sup> Lukas Vischer, *Faith and Order Louvain 1971 – Study Report and Documents*, Faith and Order No.59, WCC, Geneva 1971, p.171-179.

<sup>18</sup> “The Unity of the Church – Next Steps: The Report of the Salamanca Consultation of Faith and Order, September 1973”, in *The Ecumenical Review*, vol.26, no2, (1974), p.294-295,

<sup>19</sup> *Commission Report Uniting in Hope: Commission on Faith and Order, Accra 1974, Faith and Order Paper No72*, WCC, Geneva 1975, p.110-123.

<sup>20</sup> David Paton, *Breaking Barriers: Nairobi 1975, Official Report of the Fifth Assembly of the WCC, Nairobi 1975*, SPCK, London 1976, p.60.

Christian unity and on the other hand it reveals the different reception and understanding of the term unity itself. In one sentence *conciliar fellowship* means the unity of the local churches witnessing the same apostolic faith, sharing the fullness of catholicity, recognising mutually the baptism, the Eucharist and the ministry, proclaiming the gospel of Christ in order to service the world.<sup>21</sup> “Each local Church must be the place, where two things are guaranteed: i) the safeguarding of unity and ii) the flourishing of a legitimate diversity”.<sup>22</sup> Thus conciliarity describes the form and the structure of Church’s unity showing at the same time the way to this goal.<sup>23</sup> The councils have as a primary target to guard the unity, but also to restore any broken fellowship by healing an existing schism.<sup>24</sup>

Apart from these three models of unity a fourth one was proposed by the World Lutheran Federation under the name “*reconciled diversity*”, which actually tries to find a way to reconcile the existing differences between the Christian traditions through the establishment of a new general Christian identity. Also, the reconciled diversity leaves room for the element of diversity and does not demand uniformity.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, it was proposed another model of unity called “*unity in diversity*”, which is actually based on the sense and practice of *consensus*. It is a convergence process mainly of critical self-assessment and spiritual renewal and not something new.

#### 1.5. Proposals by the Orthodox Church to overcome the hill

Without any question Ecclesiology and Christology remain the crucial issues for theologians in the modern ecumenical agenda. And while we take for granted that we have reached a common place of agreement regarding Christology at the same time we experience and live within our various confessional bodies a *different Christ!* We are the receivers of the baptismal gift (*unum baptisma*) and of the calling to be workers of unity, but still we are living in a “*not yet*” unity situation.<sup>26</sup> We all witness the paradoxical phenomenon of accepting that baptism brings us in communion with God, but not with one another, especially with those who come from different Christian denominations,<sup>27</sup> coming in that way in controversy with Paul’s words: “*By one Spirit we are baptized into one body*”.<sup>28</sup> Thus, it means in other words that either we deny the

<sup>21</sup> Aram Keshishian, *Conciliar Fellowship – A common goal*, WCC, Geneva 1992, p.15.

<sup>22</sup> *The Nature and Mission of the Church – A stage on the way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper No.198, WCC, Geneva 2005, p.36.

<sup>23</sup> John Zizioulas, “Conciliarity and the Way to Unity – An Orthodox Point of view”, in *Churches in Conciliar Fellowship*, p.20.

<sup>24</sup> Lukas Visser, “Drawn and Held together by the Reconciling Power of Christ: Reflections on the Unity of the Church - Towards the Fifth Assembly of the WCC”, in *The Ecumenical Review*, vol.26, no2, (1974), p.190.

<sup>25</sup> Oscar Culmann, *L’ Unité par la diversité*, Cerf, Paris 1986, p.16-17.

<sup>26</sup> Augustinos Bairactaris, «Unity in Diversity and the Perspective of Baptism”, in *Catholicity under Pressure: The Ambiguous Relationship between Diversity and Unity – Proceedings of the 18<sup>th</sup> Academic Consultation of the Societas Oecumenica*, Leipzig 2016, pp. 301-302. See also, Thomas Best & Dagmar Heller, *Becoming a Christian – The Ecumenical Implications of Our Common Baptism*, Faith and Order Paper No.184, WCC, Geneva 1999, pp. 8-29.

<sup>27</sup> Vlassios Phidas, “Baptism and Ecclesiology”, in *The Ecumenical Review*, vol.54, no.1 (2002), pp. 43-46.

<sup>28</sup> I Cor. 12:13.

transcendent reality of baptism or we attempt a schism within the Body of Christ.<sup>29</sup> We read in Faith and Order's study document "The Nature and Purpose of the Church": "*In the One Baptism with water in the name of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit...Christians are brought into union with Christ, with each other and with the Church of every time and place. Our common baptism, which unites us to Christ in faith, is thus a basic bond of unity*".<sup>30</sup> We are "already" in God's grace, but "not yet" in that same gracious acceptance of one another. We tend to want to correct each other before we encourage one another; to judge before we accept. Statements of faith tend to carry more value than acts of faith.<sup>31</sup>

It is commonly accepted that the Churches as institutions are in the midst of a long crisis and it has been realised stagnation within the ecumenical movement. The separation seems to get an *institutional* and *bureaucratic form*, a condition accepted unfortunately by some Churches who have abandoned their original commitment, while some others Churches have withdrawn their membership of the Council. Finally, there are some others partners going one step further by founding international ecclesial bodies and affiliations besides the WCC. Apparently, the Church of Christ, which we all proclaim and confess as the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, is still divided.

A first warning from the Orthodox Church manifested with the Declaration of the Ecumenical Patriarchate on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the World Council of Churches in 1973. In that official text though it is noted the tremendous work achieved by the Council in the social and diaconal sector during these years, at the same time the Patriarchate expresses its worries about the question whether the contemporary social issues should constitute the only objective and orientation of the WCC. Some members-Churches consider the Council as an organisation aiming at certain social and political problems on behalf of the Churches, while some other Churches see the Council as a forum for theological dialogue of doctrinal differences. It is proposed then by the same text to be found a proper balance between these two orientations in order to keep untouched the inner cohesion of the Council. As such the Ecumenical Patriarchate proposed that the World Council of Churches should remain as it was a *Council of Churches* serving the members – Churches in their wider efforts towards unity. Also, the Ecumenical Patriarchate asked from the officials of the WCC instead of incorporating movements which are neither Church, nor have relation with some Church to include in particular the Roman Catholic Church. This would enrich the Council giving it a wider spectrum of Christianity, while the different, namely to include non-Church groups, would get the Council out of its original route and cause. Additionally, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, criticizing WCC's social horizontalism, noticed that its supportive voice should not be a secular one among other similar voices, but it should be a living prophetic voice proclaiming Christ and Christ alone. Finally,

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<sup>29</sup> Lukas Vischer, *A Documentary History of the Faith and Order Movement 1927-1963*, The Bethany Press, Missouri 1963, p. 135.

<sup>30</sup> *The Nature and Purpose of the Church*, Faith & Order Paper No.181, WCC Geneva 1998, p. 36.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Best, *Faith and Order at the Crossroads Kuala Lumpur – The Plenary Commission Meeting 2004*, Faith and Order Paper No.196, WCC, Geneva 2005, p. 129.

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the declaration pointed out once more that according to the Council's Constitution the WCC is a Churches' instrument acting in the ecumenical dialogue on their behalf and that the Council could never take or replace the Churches.

Specifically, after the successful 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> General Assemblies of the WCC in Nairobi (1975) and in Vancouver (1983) relatively, the Orthodox Church was quite satisfied with the agenda and also with Faith and Order's studies presented. The real problems between the Orthodox Church and their partners in the Council appeared during the 7<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in Canberra (1991), where it was noticed a departure from the fundamental and traditional biblical framework regarding the Triune God, the meaning of Salvation, the good news, the creation of human in likeness and image of God and the nature of the Church. Also, the provocative main presentation made by Prof. K. Chung confusing the Christian teaching of the Holy Spirit with the spirits of earth, air, water, Jeanne D' Arc, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, with the spirit of Jewish people killed in the gas chambers, of Vietnamese people killed by napalm bombs, with the spirit of the Amazon rain forest, with the spirit of people killed in Chernobyl etc.<sup>32</sup> and the desire of the WCC to expand its relations with other religions, were some serious reasons which caused the dissatisfaction of the Orthodox Church. Consequently, the members of the Orthodox delegations submitted in the end as a protest a separated document including their opinions and decisions and expressing their disappointment with the general orientation of the present Assembly's works.

Notably the Orthodox participants declared their concerns that the main aim of WCC must be the restoration of the unity of the Church. That neither diminishes nor excludes Churches' unity with the wider unity of humanity. On the contrary, the achieved unity among Christians will contribute effectively to the unity of humanity as a whole. Likewise, the visible unity in faith and in worship cannot be taken for granted, since it is a long and a demanding process. Also, it has been noticed by the Orthodox participants a tendency to marginalize the Basis of WCC which affirms Jesus Christ as Saviour. Meanwhile the Orthodox Church while it promotes the relations with other religions, the mutual respect, the co-operation with neighbours of other faiths, all these must not take place in expense of the Christian unity. It is necessary then a definition regarding the limits of diversity.

Notwithstanding the differences and the problems arising from time to time within the organization the spirit which dominated in the relations between the Orthodox Church and the WCC it is best described during the official visit of the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras at the headquarters of the Council in Geneva in 1967. He started his speech with Matthews' words: "*For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them*".<sup>33</sup> He firmly believed in Christ's real presence in the midst of the Christians delegations, because the Kingdom of Christ is the Kingdom of love. According to Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras' address to the plenary not even one Church has the right to remain in isolation, staying away from other Churches and

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<sup>32</sup> Michael Kinnamon, *Signs of the Spirit – Official Report of the Seventh Assembly*, WCC, Geneva 1991, pp. 37-47.

<sup>33</sup> *Matthew*, 18:20.

denominations. On the contrary those who believe in Christ and remain faithful to His teaching should collaborate and enter into the ecumenical dialogue with humility and mutual charity following the impetus of the Holy Spirit in order to build up Jesus' Body. Moreover, he emphasized that the real scope of the ecumenical co-operation should be the sharing of the same bread and wine from the same chalice. Therefore, in a world which is torn by lack of spiritual guidance and it suffers from moral confusion, the collaboration of Christian Churches is urgent and requisite for the sake of the whole oikoumene more than ever before.<sup>34</sup> Thus, it goes without saying that the local Orthodox Churches participate fully and equally in the life and various activities of WCC, contributing with all their means they have at their disposal in order to promote the peaceful co-existence and also to advance their co-operation facing the critical social and political challenges of post-modernity.

A glimpse of enthusiasm and hope for a closer *rapprochement* between Churches took place with the publication of the convergence document of Lima in 1982 *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*. However, Churches preferred to remain cohered with their own respective confessional and denominational ecclesiological roots and history, denying any further unification.

As a solution to the problematic and questioning relation of the Orthodox Church with the WCC which emerged during the 90's was the establishment of the *Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the Council*, which was the follow up of the Inter-Orthodox Conference held in Thessaloniki in 1998. The established Special Commission, proposed by the Orthodox and accepted by the WCC officials, led to the formation of the Permanent Committee on Consensus and Collaboration. Finally, the criteria were approved and included in the Constitution and Rules of the World Council of Churches.

The Orthodox Churches came forward in the ecumenical dialogue proposing a new method called *ecumenism in time*. This suggestion is based upon the recovery of unity, where Churches and different denominations would return back to their own common past. Accepting that methodology several denominations and confessions would meet each other on the historical traces of their common tradition, time and space. It sounds like an ecumenical journey back in time.<sup>35</sup> Again that type of unity is not based on a rigid uniformity, but rather it has a dynamic dimension, since the same faith cannot be expressed identically by humans in the same manner in all times. According to the opinion of the Orthodox Church that methodology of ecumenism in time would lead the ecumenical partners to a recovery of the Apostolic Tradition, to a fullness of Christian vision and to a reintegration of Christian mind.

Additionally, it must be clear that among the Christian Churches there is an already existing unity; that is why during the first assembly in Amsterdam it was declared that "*Churches intend to stay together*". That means that beyond their differences they are still united establishing their common faith in Jesus who is the bond of unity. Christ has

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<sup>34</sup> Op. cit., Gennadios Limouris, "Address by His All Holiness Athenagoras I, Ecumenical Patriarch on the occasion of His visit to WCC Headquarters, 1967", p.35.

<sup>35</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God*, London 1953, p. 21: "*We are in a transitory phase of the journey from disunity to unity*".

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made Christians to be his own, and he is not divided! In other terms there are two types of unity: the one which is on route and the other which is promised. In any case Churches have to work, act and pray together in order to respond to His calling in the garden of Gethsemane. Hence, ecclesial unity is not something to be fabricated or elaborated within a group of some experts but it is given as a gift, and it demands from humans' part their effort and spiritual obedience to do His will.

But how must Churches continue on their way to Emmaus searching for unity? There is a great need of re-discovering Christ. In the times of crisis of faith Jesus has been placed under question. On the contrary He must be placed again in the midst of the Churches and a renewal of faith must be emerged from the ecclesial tradition rooted in the apostolic years. This demanding return of Churches back to their common origins could help them also to declare openly their metanoia and repentance for the historical divisions they mutually caused. At the same time Churches inspired by their common past must set new visions and new ways of acting together according to the new contextuality, but without ignoring or changing the content of the message. In that process of transmitting the Gospel to people cultural environment and historical background should be also taken into a serious consideration. In other words, the "good news" must be implemented, without *chop and change* its salvific message, according to the current social language so to be understood and received well by modern society. From the hermeneutics point of view unity is never static, which means it cannot be institutionalised. Rather unity is received as a process linked essentially with the notion of gathering around the altar. So, the Church is the Body of Christ but at the same time it could be seen as the Temple of the Holy Spirit, where each one of us individually is called to bring their charisma as a service to the pleroma. Through that perspective Church becomes an expansion of Jesus' incarnation and of community's Pentecost. Within that ecclesial community there is a vast space for manifold interpretation and for a convergence in seeking the truth in Christ.

One could see three major elements in the picture of the Pentecost:

1. *The given Spirit is a gift to the whole people of God:* The Spirit descends upon each member of the community and they are all baptized becoming spirit bearers. Also, there is another giving of the Spirit by Risen Christ upon his disciples: "*Receive the Holy Spirit. Whatsoever sins you remit, they are remitted and whatsoever sins you retain, they are retained*".<sup>36</sup> At this moment disciples become apostles representing the later hierarchy of the Church, not as a form of exercising power, but as a special charisma given for the service of community by binding and loosing sins.

2. *The given Spirit is a gift of unity:* It is Spirit's work to bring in one place all people together in accordance, so to con-celebrate the Eucharist sharing the same bread and wine from the one and unique chalice.

3. *The given Spirit is a gift of diversity:* The tongues of fire at the Pentecost symbolize the gifts given individually to each one of the members of community, but also, they picture collegially the diversity of services upon which the ecclesial unity is built. This community's vision for unity is realised on diversity and vice versa. They

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<sup>36</sup> *John*, 20: 22-23.

are two complementary but not in opposition aspects of the same reality: *unity in diversity and diversity in unity*.<sup>37</sup>

#### 1.6. Final Remarks

The participation of the Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement is something challenging but at the same time necessary beyond any kind of obligation. The so-called Toronto Statement offered to the Orthodox members of the Council the necessary ecclesiastical space and safety where they were assured that their participation would not mean to change their ecclesiology, neither to accept their ecumenical partners as Churches with the true and full meaning of the term.

Additionally, the same statement made clear once and for all that the WCC is not and will never going to be a super Church. Thus, because of that document the Orthodox Churches, mainly those coming from the Slavic nations, moved away from their “ecclesial and political isolation” and they stepped into the mutual ecumenical dialogue questing for unity and for the common life in Christ.

Notwithstanding, perhaps now has the time arrived to act with boldness and courage, without fear, and to move into the after-Toronto era, since everything has been revealed in Christ’s person. The existing ecclesiological agnosticism which affirms that the Orthodox Church has the right to affirm where it stands and for the other Christian Churches is only God who can judge, is not any more fruitful.

According to my personal perception the ecumenical dialogue needs to use of an apophatic theological language and also it needs to adopt some *mystical theological hermeneutical tools* in order to interpretate life in Christ. I have the strong feeling that in the ecumenical dialogue the representatives of the members Churches act, talk and behave as the defenders of the realm and they lack of the missionary spirit.

In other terms, if the Churches truly desire to be united, they must transcend their confessional boundaries, healing their divisions of the past and their historical trauma. In order to achieve this, they have to let the Holy Spirit to guide them out of the formality into the surprise of the miracle. That Spirit is the one which fills the gaps, unites the oppositions, bridges the distances, links the different gifts of grace.

Through this perspective the Church is understood as the Body of Christ and not as the Body which simply contains Christ, but it is THE Christ who contains in his BODY all creation, however in diverse ways according to His will. Thus, the importance is shifted from the one who confesses, to Christ who is confessed. The canons and the laws of the Church are not restricted measures to Christ’s grace. If that was the case, then the canons would be more powerful than Christ is. Canons are tools guiding the people of Church to live in Christ.

According to father Florovsky the *mystical territory of the Church extends beyond its canonical borders*. It is almost impossible to discern the limits of the Church by canonical limits. And also, this is the spirit of *oikonomia*, which could be applied for all issues except the doctrinal matters. A very good and at the same time difficult

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<sup>37</sup> Gennadios Limouris (Metropolitan of Sassima), “Hermeneutics: An Instrument for an Ecumenical Reflection on the Search for Christian Unity”, in Peter Bouteneff & Dagmar Heller, *Interpreting Together – Essays in Hermeneutics*, WCC, Geneva 2001, pp. 122-127.

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question to be answered is if the schismatics and heretical communities, or the separated communities, still have relation to each other and to the UNA SANCTA as well. The Orthodox Church should re-evaluate their relationships to other churches which stand and exist beyond their canonical boundaries in order all Orthodox Churches to have an unanimous and common voice regarding the non-Orthodox Christian, because now among the Orthodox Churches and theologians there are different voices, where others accept the ecumenism and others call it as a pan-heresy. Some accept the dialogue as an opportunity of sharing and as a form of reconciliation, as a chance to learn from the other, to be taught and not to teach, while others have the opinion that discussing with non-Orthodox delegates is similar like to commit a sin. So, there is an asymmetry within the operation of the body of the Orthodox Church.

Last but not least is the danger of the *ecclesiological self-sufficiency and the behaviour of arrogance or triumphalism*, which also can be traced within Orthodoxy. The Orthodox Church must be ready to recognize the presence of God everywhere, in all creation and in all human creatures, even if some people are not members of the Orthodox Church. It is difficult to start walking to the other direction, though it is necessary; if you desire the Resurrection of Christ, firstly you must learn to crucify your personal will in order the world to live. All and everything somehow participate in the plan of God for the salvation of the world. Nothing and no one are rubbish, just we need to do everything to make the impossible possible.

The poster is for a lecture titled "THE OWNERSHIP OF GOD, THE ORTHODOX CHURCH AND THE WCC. FRIEND OF FOE?" by Rev. Prof. Augustinos Bairaktaris. It is part of the "MASTER IN ORTHODOX ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY" program at International Hellenic University. The event is on Tuesday, 30-MARCH, from 5:00pm to 7:00pm. The poster features a photo of Prof. Bairaktaris speaking at a podium, a photo of the university building, and a YouTube logo with the text "Open to the public". The YouTube channel URL is [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCD\\_5mcv3Z82pYW8LFUkZE1mw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCD_5mcv3Z82pYW8LFUkZE1mw). A note mentions that Prof. Vassiliki Stathokosta will respond and monitor the discussion.

INTERNATIONAL HELLENIC UNIVERSITY

MASTER IN ORTHODOX ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY

TUESDAY  
30-MARCH  
5:00pm-7:00pm

INTERNATIONAL HELLENIC UNIVERSITY

THE OWNERSHIP OF GOD,  
THE ORTHODOX CHURCH  
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FOE?

REV. PROF. AUGUSTINOS BAIRAKTARIS

Prof. Vassiliki Stathokosta will respond and monitor the discussion

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QUESTS AND QUESTIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY ORTHODOX MISSION(S)

*Prof. Athanasios N. Papathanasiou*

As I was preparing my lecture Prof. Vassiliadis asked me to give, I was trying to figure out how I could adequately map a huge ocean or, at least, give a characteristic feeling of this ocean. The ocean is the contemporary and multifaceted Orthodox missionary activity, which implies missionary quests, missionary criteria, even perhaps missionary illusions or mischief. This mapping is not an easy task at all, so I need to make some clarifications in advance:

First of all, I will try to focus on missionary *praxis*. That means that I need to avoid presenting the theology of mission in abstract, or sketching Christian witness in general. It is true that the very church event (the “self” of the Church) is a missionary event. The church does not exist for herself, but she is the foretaste and the herald of the future Kingdom of God. So every aspect of the church event is conditioned by mission. But here, in this lecture, I will focus on certain issues related to the actual encounter of the Gospel with diverse cultural and social contexts. These issues of contemporary missionary *praxis* involve decision making and practical steps, definitely inspired by sound theological criteria, yet practical in any case. As you have probably seen, in the title of my lecture [*“Quests and questions for contemporary Orthodox mission(s)”*] I have bracketed the final “s”. I’m doing it intentionally, in order to emphasize the relationship between Mission in general on the one hand and the specific missionary initiatives in certain contexts on the other hand<sup>1</sup>.

My approach has faced special tangible difficulties. One can find lavish bibliography on mission theology in general, on its ecclesiological presuppositions, on its eschatological perspective etc. However, extremely little is to be found in Orthodox literature as far as the missionary *praxis* in different cultures and contexts is concerned. The vast majority of Orthodox churchmen and theologians bypass the Global South, that is the areas which were formerly referred to as the “Third World” or “developing countries”. Of course some churchmen and theologians do refer to the Global South, thus affirming the ecumenicity of the Christian faith, and this affirmation is definitely important. Nevertheless, the *real* Global South hardly appears *for real* on the stage. The real issues are something totally different from the enthusiastic reports on massive baptisms or occasional humanitarian aid. The real issues have to do with contextualization and the construction of really local churches *with their own voice*, their own *contribution* to the universal church and their own *openness to ecumenicity*

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<sup>1</sup> For an overall approach see Athanasios N. Papathanasiou, “Mission in Orthodox Theology”, *Christian Mission, Contextual Theology, Prophetic Dialogue. Essays in Honor of Stephen B. Bevans* (eds. Dale T. Irvin & Peter C. Phan), Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 2019, pp. 37-54

(all the three are necessary). Allow me to note here that, beside the theological study, my own little experience from short-term “missionary visits” to missionary Churches<sup>2</sup> convince me that questions

- about art,
- about church singing,
- about not the translation, but the composition of new hymns,
- about the fact that many churches celebrate the sacraments using elements imported from abroad and totally non-existing in the local culture and daily life (such as olive oil for the anointing as well as wheat bread and grape wine for the Eucharist)<sup>3</sup>, etc

remain wide open. And it is a pity to bypass these questions, also because the Postcolonial studies, social anthropology and discussions on Orientalism have been offering great opportunities for a real encounter with diverse cultures. Perhaps I am wrong, but my impression is that the Orthodox Patriarchates have not officially organized special conferences or standing committees for the examination of *concrete* issues and palpable questions. These issues remain the work of few individuals, no matter church leaders or lay theologians. The sad thing is that very often (and for various reasons) certain missionary initiatives or pastoral decisions do not (or cannot) receive publicity. For this reason I believe that the CEMES as well as the young “International Orthodox Theological Association” and its “Missiology Group” (founded in 2017) are at present a promising factor.

One more clarification: I am posing here the issue of the Global South, not in the old and outmoded perspective, that the alleged Christian western countries have to pour their faith to heathen lands. Mission (or witness / *martyria*) is an opening up of the Church everywhere to everyone, and every human context is “land for mission”.<sup>4</sup> However I am bringing the issue of the Global South to the fore because I believe that it is a great mistake to ignore a great part of the world, or (focusing solely on the discourse going on in the Western academia) conceive the rest of the world as a replica of our own world. We have also to understand what is going on globally nowadays. Today some parts of the Global South still struggle to survive neo-colonialism, but other parts of the Global South not only do they thrive but they also seem to pose a global paradigm of vitality. Moreover, some of them even lay claim to global economic hegemony, which means not sheer economic expansion, but also potential for cultural expansion as well. Countries of the Far East such as China, Singapore and South Korea boast that the so called “Asian values” (which echo the authoritarian spirit of Confucianism and result in a strict pyramidal structure of the society) are especially effective for the economic development, contrary to the western world and its “insufficient” liberal democracy.

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<sup>2</sup> Here I’m using the term “missionary” in a conventional way, to denote the young churches in the Global South. In reality every local church, wherever it exists, is a missionary church.

<sup>3</sup> See my paper (only in Greek at present): “Mono me psomi? Mono me krasi? E dynatoteta hreses allon ylikon ste theia Euharistia” [“Only with bread? Only with wine? The possibility of using different elements in the Holy Eucharist”], *Synaxis* 105 (2008), pp. 55-73.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the book which puzzled many people in the 1940s, as it challenged the notion of Christendom: Henri Godin & Yvan Daniel, *France, pays de mission?*, Editions du Cerf, Paris 1943.

## QUESTS AND QUESTIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY ORTHODOX MISSION(S)

At present there are many Orthodox churches in countries of the Global South, especially in Africa and Far East. I think that there are 25 dioceses in total, covering more than 60 countries, some of them being unbelievably huge territories. Statistically the Orthodox presence in the Global South is extremely small. In many countries the Orthodox comprise a tiny minority of less than 0.5 %. This means that though the Orthodox Churches do have –in my view– a potential for a meaningful contribution to the Global South fermentation, at present they have not participated in the shift of the demographical center of gravity of Christianity from the Western world to the Global South. I will try to explain, hoping that the statistical data that I have collected are, more or less, accurate.

- Approximately 61% of the world's Christian population lives in the Global South<sup>5</sup>, and
- 39% of the world's Christian population lives in the Western world (27% in Europe and 12% in North America).
- 50% of the Protestants worldwide and 70% of the Catholics worldwide live in the Global South<sup>6</sup>. But only 7% of the Orthodox population worldwide lives today in the “missionary” Global South<sup>7</sup>.

Having all these in mind I will single out five points about tasks, potentials and deficiencies of the contemporary Orthodox missions, inevitably in broad outline.

### 1. THE CONSTRUCTION OF A REALLY LOCAL CHURCH

The renowned formula “Three Selves” has already been a much discussed commonplace in Missiology since early 19<sup>th</sup> c.. The formula means that a really local church has to be *self-supporting*, *self-governing* and *self-propagating /self-theologizing*. On this basis I would underline the following:

- Financial dependence of the young churches on the budget of the metropolitan churches is usually necessary for the commencement of the missionary work; however it should not last for long. Financial dependence is something really different from solidarity, which is an essential task. Dependence jeopardizes the self-consciousness of the young church and especially the self-consciousness of its clergy, which receives its salary from abroad. Moreover, the financial dependence sometimes may function as a tool for blackmail or, at least, as a means of pressure. Suppose, for example, that a local “missionary” church wishes to restore the institution of the Deaconesses in its structure, but her “mother” church opposes the restoration and sabotages the procedure, threatening to cease financing! Besides, financial dependence threatens the “daughter”

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<sup>5</sup> 24% in Sub-Saharan Africa, 27% in Latin America, and 13% in Asia and the Pacific. <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-christians/>

<sup>6</sup> See 1. <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/11/08/orthodox-christianity-in-the-21st-century/#fn-29043-1>, 2. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protestantism\\_by\\_country#Europe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protestantism_by_country#Europe), 3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-21443313>, 4. <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/11/08/orthodox-christianitys-geographic-center-remains-in-central-and-eastern-europe/>

<sup>7</sup> Almost 78% of the Orthodox live in Europe and North America. But the rest 22% includes the traditional Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox, which comprise 15% of the Orthodox population worldwide. The result is that only 7% of the Orthodox population worldwide is to be found today in the “proper” Global South.

church with collapse in case that the economics of the “mother” church collapses. As you may know, all these have happened in the history of Orthodox missions.

- *Self governance* is certainly connected with financial dependence, but it goes beyond this. Self governance certainly should not be a manifestation of localism or nationalism. From an authentically Christian point of view, self governance is simply the application of Saint John the Forerunner’s model. “*He must increase, but I must decrease*” (John 3:30). The Missionary has to be aware that the young church will not (and should not) remain in a state of childhood forever. Her arrival to adulthood has not to be seen as a sad yet unavoidable outcome, but, on the contrary, it must be welcome as a willed and joyful growth. This joyful growth implies what has playfully been described as “*euthanasia of the missionaries*”. The missionary should be happy to know that he/she has to decrease in favor of the adulthood of the young church.

- In Orthodox perspective, the third postulate, *self-theologizing*, acknowledges the untamable action of the Holy Spirit. Self-theologizing means the articulation of the doctrine in new ways, with the conceptual and experiential tools of the “new” people. It does not mean the replacement of the doctrine by religious hybrids. Self-theologizing means that the cultural context has to be transformed into new flesh of Christ, but not degenerate into a sarcophagus. The context becomes a sarcophagus whenever culture is conceived as the source of the meaning, thus replacing the Gospel.

## 2. RE-ARTICULATION

I would like to focus on the issue of re-articulating the faith that is, expressing the faith in new ways, which are added to the old. This task requires that Missiology has to combine doctrine with a respectful knowledge of other cultures and languages, and find out the indigenous elements proper for the re-articulation of the Christian faith.

On 4-5 January 2016, that is seven months before the Holy and Great Council at Crete, a Meeting of Scholars was convened by the Ecumenical Patriarchate at the Phanar, Constantinople. The study group on Mission (in which I had the honor to participate) proposed the following to the Patriarch:

“... A ‘mechanism’ is needed, in order to gather information and reflect on the experience of the so called missionary churches and issues of inculturation and contextualization. For example: What is the stance of Orthodox theologians and local churches towards the question whether the established ontological vocabulary of the systematic theology can be paired with the narrative vocabularies, which express the genius of several peoples (such as the peoples of the Far East) who do not think in Greco-Roman categories? We can mention here that in our days the narrative way of doing theology (which in a way belongs to the Church tradition, since it is the biblical manner to a great degree), has come to the forefront in modern discussions. So, it is worth examining how notions like the African concept of Christ as the *Great Ancestor* or *Brother*<sup>8</sup> and the Asian concept of Christ as *the liberating suffering God* can come into a fruitful osmosis with the so called classical theology. The

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<sup>8</sup> See my paper (only in Greek at present): “Christos, o Progonos kai Aderfos. Mia afrikanike Christologia” [“Christ, the Ancestor and Brother: An African Christology”], *Bulletin of Biblical Studies* 25.1 (2007), pp. 59-82.

study especially of the complex Chinese identity is of urgent importance. That means study of the Chinese traditional roots together with the traces of Christianity (which, by the way, is a present reality in China, in the face of Roman Catholic and Protestant communities as well as independent – self defined Christian communities) and the trend of China to gain global hegemony...”.

As a matter of fact the Holy and Great Council in 2016 was not preoccupied with this view. Happily enough, an echo of it is to be found in the recent (2020) document of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, “For the Life of the World: Towards a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church”. Laconically enough, it reads:

“... As the Church of the early centuries profited from and in time baptized many of the philosophical, religious, and cultural riches of pre-Christian Europe, Asia Minor, and the Near East, so too may it now discover new ways of articulating the deposit of faith or new ways of thinking about its cultural expressions and conceptual forms by exposure to, say, the great philosophies and faiths of India, or to the traditions of China and the greater Far East, or to the spiritual experiences of tribal peoples throughout the world, and so on...”.

I will try to elaborate a little bit more on the question of re-articulating the doctrine in new ways. By way of example, I will briefly discuss the views of the late Fr Georges Florovsky (1893-1979), exactly because this giant of theology seemed very reluctant towards re-articulation<sup>9</sup>.

As is well known, Florovsky claimed that Christian Hellenism, namely the articulation of doctrine in Greek ontological categories, is a standing category of Christian existence and (what is of special importance here) a *trans-cultural*, universal norm.

“... In a sense *the Church itself is Hellenistic*, is a Hellenistic formation, -or in other words, *Hellenism is a standing category of the Christian existence...* And thus any theologian must pass an experience of a spiritual Hellenization...”.

There was a special reason for this stance. Florovsky saw re-articulation as a potential hazard, because he was having in mind Adolf von Harnack’s (1851-1930) rejection of the dogma itself as a Hellenistic distortion of the original Christian faith; as an interpretation valid only in the Greco-Roman world (for Harnack, even the Incarnation or the Trinity are inventions in the framework of a Greek interpretation of the Biblical God). This view was eventually repeated by the so-called “Pluralistic Theology” almost 70 years later<sup>10</sup>.

However Harnack’s view is a matter totally different from the task of re-articulation I am bringing to the fore. As I said, the re-articulation I am speaking of, *affirms* the content of the dogma. We need to discern that there are huge differences between the western mind (I mean non Orthodox and Orthodox alike) on the one hand and some of the Global South cultures on the other hand. Westerners (Orthodox and non Orthodox

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<sup>9</sup> I am dealing extensively with this issue in a paper which is going to appear in the collective work: *The Living Christ: The Theological Legacy of Georges Florovsky* (eds. Fr. Dr. John Chryssaygis & Prof. Brandon Gallaher), T & T Clark / Bloomsbury Publishing.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Athanasios N. Papathanasiou, “Journey to the Center of Gravity. Christian Mission One Century after Edinburgh 1910”, *2010 Boston. The Changing Contours of World Mission and Christianity* (eds. Todd M. Johnson, Rodney L. Petersen, Gina A. Bellofatto, Travis L. Myers), Pickwick Publications, Oregon 2012, pp. 67-83

alike) are well aware of ontological concepts such as “being”, “essence”, “hypostasis”, “person” etc., no matter what the attitude of any particular theology towards these concepts is. But, quite the contrary, great Far Eastern cultures seem to lack such ontological thinking. Their conceptual tools are rather pictures, narratives and symbols. The issue became central in the World Council of Churches at the dawn of the 1970s. Florovsky passed away at the end of 1970s. Contrary, for example, to Nikos Nissiotis (also a great Orthodox ecumenical theologian; 1926-1986), Florovsky did not pay any attention to the contextual theologies and the Global South, apart from a brief reference to the great missionary Saint Nikolai Kasatkin of Japan (1836-1912).

However, in some parts of Florovsky’s work one can discern some very interesting references in favor of re-articulation.

“... Loyalty to tradition did not prevent the Fathers of the Church from ‘creating new names’ (as St. Gregory Nazianzen says) when it was necessary for the protection of the unchangeable faith. [...] Revision and re-statement is always possible, sometimes imperative. The whole history of the Ecumenical Councils in the past is evidence of that...”

Moreover, Florovsky spoke of *two* legitimate languages of the Church. He admitted that

“... the unalterable truths of experience can be expressed in different ways. Divine reality can be described in images and parables, in the language of devotional poetry and of religious art. Such was the language of the prophets in the Old Testament, in such a manner the Evangelists often speak, in such a way the Apostles preached, and in such a manner the Church preaches even now in her liturgical hymns and in the symbolism of her sacramental acts. That is the language of proclamation and of good tidings, the language of prayer and of mystical experience, the language of ‘Kerygmatic’ theology. And there is another language, the language of comprehending thought, the language of dogma...”

And he continues with remarkable vigor, praising the alternative language of "Kerygmatic" theology:

“... The experience and knowledge of the Church are more comprehensive and fuller than her dogmatic pronouncement. The Church witnesses to many things which are not in “dogmatic” statements but rather in images and symbols. In other words, “dogmatic” theology can neither dismiss nor replace ‘Kerygmatic’ theology. [...]. And furthermore: the Church does not endeavor to crystallize her experience in a closed system of words and concepts...”

In my opinion *this* is the way for encountering the spirit of the Global South. However for the time being few, very few Orthodox churchmen understand this task and work on it (only by way of example –and without entering details– I would mention Fr Damascene, the author of the book “Christ, the Eternal Tao” (1999), and Fr. Jonas Mourtos in Taiwan, who, unfortunately, lacks the time needed to write and present his approach in English<sup>11</sup>).

Beyond this special issue, as I said earlier I believe that the Orthodox Churches do have the potential for a meaningful contribution to the Global South fermentation and

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, “The Orthodox Church in Taiwan”, <http://theological.asia/%E6%9D%B1%E6%AD%A3%E6%95%99%E8%81%96%E7%A6%AE%E5%84%80%E7%A6%B1%E6%96%87/>

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(behold!) to the global Orthodox Church. Again by way of example I would like to emphasize the fact that some very important advocacies

- for the revival of the institution of the Deaconesses
- for the connection between the ecological ethos and the social justice and
- for creative reception of indigenous art

have come from certain missionary Orthodox Churches in Africa and Far East.

### 3. CHRISTIAN DIVISIONS

As is well known, Christian division remains a major problem in word mission, despite the fact that the Ecumenical Movement owes its own birth to the world missionary movement and the anguished awareness that witness and unity have to go hand in hand. However the divisions are still strong and, notably, pertain not only to the hundreds of Christian denominations, but also to the devastating jurisdictional antagonism between Orthodox churches.

The important thing is that missionary experience offers a unique opportunity to all sides, to strengthen the inter-Christian dialogue and understanding. Yet at the same time this means that the Orthodox theology has to generously contribute its own criteria. As far as I can tell, both the Ecumenical Patriarchate (for Asia and Latin America) and the Patriarchate of Alexandria (for Africa) officially participate in ecumenical discourse and the local Orthodox Churches participate in the regional councils or forums of Christian Churches. Nevertheless, the task of dialogue (not theoretically or on the level of church diplomacy, but in real life) has certain difficulties.

One of the numerous predicaments is the time of the celebration of Easter. I'm afraid that especially in cases where the Orthodox are tiny minorities, the separate celebration does not appear as a special, distinctive witness but, quite the opposite, as the attitude of a sect. Imagine what happens when fundamentalist Old-Calendarists establish separate jurisdictions, heralding the salvific dimensions of the "traditional" calendar!<sup>12</sup>

Yet I would like also to single out a special difficulty, which, I think, is on the top of the difficulties within the Christian world. I am speaking about the sweeping growth of the "Prosperity Gospel" (the "Gospel of Health and Wealth") all over the world and especially the Global South. I think that it is all about one of the biggest distortions of the Gospel. The proponents of the "Prosperity Gospel" claim that God grants wealth and good health to those who have strong faith, so they link poverty not with injustice, but with the capture of the sinner by the devil. This religiosity not only bypasses the mystery of the Cross in this world, but also results in the shaping of powerful organizations and preachers – gurus with tremendous spiritual and political power, and aggressive policies. The phenomenon is associated mainly with Neo-Pentecostalism and especially with the activity of American missionaries, but we must seriously consider the fact that the "Prosperity Gospel" is also penetrating many other Christian churches. Every church tradition (the Orthodox included) contains elements which, when emphasized, can make room for the reception of the "Prosperity Gospel" (for

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Dmitri M. Bondarenko & Andrey V. Tutorskiy, *Conversion to Orthodox Christianity in Uganda: A Hundred Years of Spiritual Encounter with Modernity, 1919–2019* file:///C:/Users/test/AppData/Local/Temp/religions-11-00223-v2.pdf

example the way the miracles are understood, the emphasis on charity instead of social justice and so on).

#### 4. INCLUSIVISM

To be a Christian means to accept - the centrality, the universality and the finality of the Triune God and the Kingdom, as well as - the distinction between the canonical and the charismatic boundaries of the Church<sup>13</sup>.

That means that the Churches have

- to understand themselves as the deacons of the missionary God,
- to acknowledge that God is free to act in obvious as well as in unseen ways wherever he pleases, and
- to trace God's presence in all good human intentions and deeds.

In this inclusivistic perspective the Missionary is a teacher, but at the same time he/she remains a student, ready to learn from God's wisdom which infiltrates the wisdom of the peoples. So the missionary praxis is the field *par excellence* for this twofold operation, which neither pushes the faith into syncretism, nor negates the centrality and the finality of the Triune God and the Kingdom. On the contrary, it witnesses to them and invites all to them.

#### 5. POLITICS

Especially the Orthodox Churches in the so-called traditionally Orthodox countries have to realize that the missionary Churches are *de facto* the proponents *par excellence* of democracy, freedom of thought, freedom of every single person to decide for his/her own religious affiliation, etc. The missionary Churches are in reality the herald of the truth that human rights are not subject to the principle of majority.

That implies that the missionary Church has to be aware of the fact that no society is a solid entity. On the contrary, every society contains sub-cultures. The class stratification presupposes power of oppression and people who are marginalized by the dominant system. We arrive again at the need for careful and respectful encounter with the culturally Other. Certain missionary areas suffer from neo-colonialist Missionaries, e.g., who strive to colonize the minds and deface the natives to ethnic Greeks who celebrate Greek national holidays equally to ecclesiastical feasts. This distortion of the Gospel deserves only utter condemnation. But I would like to emphasize a danger which lurks the good-willed Missionaries, who are willing to theoretically study the traditional culture of the country. The potential danger here is that the good-willed Missionary risks missing the *current* situation. He runs bypassing the current encounter of traditional and modern, and the changes which are happening in society. As is clear, all these are dangers implied in the essentialist approach to culture.

That means that prophetic mission implies a twofold movement. It implies both annunciation and denunciation, to use the words of Gustavo Gutiérrez; a transformation of life on the one hand and a clash with the powers of death on the other hand (poverty, ecological disaster, sex discrimination etc): Serving the broken people and standing with

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<sup>13</sup> Athanasios N. Papathanasiou, "If I cross the boundaries, you are there! An affirmation of God's action outside the canonical boundaries of the Church", *Communio Viatorum* 53.3 (2011), pp. 40-55.

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those in pain lies at the heart of the Christian mission, since this stance lives out and manifests the compassionate God's sacrificial love, even in silence.

The missionary Churches thus may become an extremely important laboratory, a pioneering workshop: They have the great opportunity to study the traditional, indigenous political concepts in the country and bring them into a creative dialogue with the quests of modern democracy. Let me give you an example: The traditional, pre-colonial African direct democracy is not a memory, as many may think. It inspired many liberating, anti-colonialist movements in the 1960s and, more important, it is playing a special role in current debates among Africans, about the representative democracy, the manipulation of the majority by certain centers of power, the consensus principle in the decision-making process etc. And these debates presuppose discussions on African anthropology, which is a *relational* understanding of the human being, too much close to the theology of human Person<sup>14</sup>.

### CONCLUSION

I have the feeling that what I tried to touch upon is merely an aspect of the very task of the Church. Every local church is invited

- to be the deacon of the missionary God,
- to be aware that she does not possess her Lord, but is accountable to Him, and
- to be ready to acknowledge God's traces in all good human endeavors.

INTERNATIONAL HELLENIC UNIVERSITY

MASTER IN ORTHODOX ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY

FRIDAY 16-APRIL 5:00pm-7:00pm

QUESTS AND QUESTIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY ORTHODOX MISSION(S)

PROF. ATHANASIOS PAPATHANASIOU

Prof. Nikolaos Kouremenos will respond and monitor the discussion

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. my paper "Is a dialogue between "African anarchism" and Christian Orthodox anarchist principles possible?", which is going to appear in the collective work: *Orthodoxy and Anarchism: Contemporary Perspectives* (ed. Prof. Davor Džalto).



**EUCHARIST IN FIRST CORINTHIANS:  
A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY**

*Prof. Demetrios C. Passakos*

The Sociology of New Testament is a rather new sub-discipline in the area of NT studies. It flourished during the last decades both in America and in Europe. Many studies have been written with this sub-discipline as their methodological tool. Most of these studies focus on Paul and Pauline theology and some of them in 1 Corinthians particularly. It was first *Gerd Theissen* with his collection of articles, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* (trans. J.H. Schütz, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1982), who used the Sociology of the New Testament and its application to the study of the Corinthian community, that convinced me that this new methodology what was missing from hermeneutics so that biblical scholars would read in the text what the text really said and not what they thought it said, according to their cultural, denominational or ideological background. Some years later, *Wayne Meeks' s* book, *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), opened new horizons in the area of the Sociology of the New Testament.

The correlation, if any, between the social level of the writers and the recipients of the New Testament texts and theology became an issue of special interest for New Testament scholars. When I was studding for my doctoral degree at the University of Thessaloniki, this correlation became a fundamental part of my thesis about Eucharist in 1 Corinthians.<sup>1</sup> It was a theme that both Theissen and Meeks had explored with a great success, shown by the almost unanimous appraisal of their studies by scholars all over the world. Is then anything more to be said on this theme?

Two major areas of study are related to the scope of this paper, the first one concerning the Eucharist and the second referred to Pauline Christianity and the Apostle Paul himself. I have to admit that the general consensuses of the scholars using the classic interpretative methods, were somehow discouraging on the areas of my interest. Regarding Eucharist, most of the studies I know, exclusively focus on the so called "Institution Narratives" in order to reach their conclusions, disregarding most of the times other eucharistic texts such as Jn 6, the synoptic feeding stories, 1 Cor. 5,6-8, 2 Cor. 9,11f, Hebr 13,10-16, Rev 4 and 5. This is probably the reason for the anxiety of the scholars using critical-historical methods to reach the "original text" of the eucharistic words and to affirm the historicity of the Last Supper. The emphasis is on "what was really said on that night" (*ipsissima verba - ipsissima vox*) or on what was

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<sup>1</sup>D. C. Passakos, *Eucharist in the Pauline Mission. A Sociological Approach* (dissertation in Greek), University of Thessaloniki: Department of Theology, 1994.

left to the community as a cultic deposit,<sup>2</sup> instead of on the impact and the importance the eucharistic meals or specifically the last eucharistic meal had for the development of the self-consciousness of the Christian communities. In this way, a significant deviation from the basic concepts of biblical theology (eschatology, Kingdom of God, pneumatology etc.) towards cultic or sacramental categories from the Hellenistic world about Eucharist, missing in this way the basic correlation between Eucharist and the identity of the Christian community.<sup>3</sup>

The second area of study, concerning the Apostle Paul and his theology, is mainly based on the Lutheran insistence on the centrality in Pauline theology of the *sola fide* justification, although this doctrine was effectively questioned by leading scholars such as F.C. Baur, E. Käsemann, W.D. Davies, E.P. Sanders and others. A result of this one-sidedness was, as I understand it, the attribution of social and theological conservatism on Paul. Although the scholars using the sociological interpretative methods for the analysis of early Christianity opened new horizons in the study of the Eucharist, the above-mentioned general characteristics remained effective.

Gerd Theissen has shown a particular methodological preference for the analysis of the conflicts. According to the German scholars "in most cases they expose to view the structures which transcend individuals... The analysis of such concepts is one of the most fruitful analytic approaches of a sociology of primitive Christianity. Conversely, every sociology of primitive Christianity must seek to determine to what extent it can make such conflicts comprehensible".<sup>4</sup> Theissen makes an insightful analysis of the social stratification of the Corinthian community and of the problems caused in it because of this stratification. He successfully shows that all the tensions in the community (the schisms, the appeals before the heathen courts for the settlement of disputes among the believers, the practice of eating meat offered to idols, the divisions during the eucharistic gathering), can not be explained as based on different theological presuppositions only, but on different social behaviors determined by the social position of the members of the community as well. The conflicts are between the "strong" and the "weak", those who have and those who have not, eventually the well-off and the poorer members of the Corinthian church.<sup>5</sup> Wayne Meeks utilized in a critical way the analysis of Theissen and tried successfully to reconstruct the "social world" of the Apostle Paul. His main interest was to find out "what was it like to become and be an ordinary Christian in the first century".<sup>6</sup> He assumes the position of a "moderate functionalist" and he is interested in how the early Christian movement worked. Meeks

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<sup>2</sup>Cf. J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (trans. N. Perrin), Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986. All the other scholars are influenced by his presuppositions even though some of them are questioning his conclusions.

<sup>3</sup>The innovating and pioneering studies of J.Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine. On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (University of London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1990) and *Map is Not Territory. Studies in the History of Religion* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993) have successfully shown the false presuppositions of the History of Religions School.

<sup>4</sup>G. Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 181-182.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, 69-119; 121-143.

<sup>6</sup>W. Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 2.

analyzes the urban setting of Pauline Christianity, he criticizes Theissen for his oversimplification of the term "social status" and he concludes that there is a fundamental ambiguity in the social character of the Pauline communities, caused by the contradiction between their eschatological character and their option for missionary activity.<sup>7</sup> For the Eucharist specifically, he accepts the sociological analysis of Theissen for the divisions in the eucharistic gathering and the social intentions of the Apostle by the solution he provides. He claims that "Paul uses the symbolism of the Supper ritual not only to enhance the internal coherence, unity, and equality of the Christian group, but also to protect its boundaries *vis-à-vis* other kinds of cultic association"<sup>8</sup> and he concludes: "The relation between the symbolic reality presented in the rituals and everyday reality, both in the inner life of the group and in interaction with the larger society, remained an area of controversy and ambiguity. And of course, this ambiguity remains at the heart of our hermeneutical perplexity when we try to understand what rituals do for people".<sup>9</sup>

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Theissen and Meeks generally agree in what today is a consensus -as *Robin Scroggs* put it<sup>10</sup>- among New Testament scholars: The Corinthian community was a fair cross-section of the wider urban society of Corinth. The two extremes of the Graeco-Roman social scale are missing from the picture, the levels in between are well represented. But the Corinthian Christians we know by their names are mostly situated in the higher social position. They are members who, having the role of the patron in the church, exercise the greater influence and have a leading place within the community. They are at the same time these who caused the problems mentioned in 1 Corinthians. Below them were the great majority of the members belonging to relatively lower social positions, who were depending on the former, the patrons.

It seems that after Paul's departure from Corinth<sup>11</sup> and through dynamics which can be discernible,<sup>12</sup> the strong used their high social position in an opposite way than that Paul had taught them by his example.<sup>13</sup> They transformed their capability for diakonia to an elitistic behavior and to a privilege of exercising their power on the community. This development was not the outcome of social dynamics only. It was supported by the theological opinions of the strong, especially their spirituality and eschatology.<sup>14</sup> The overestimation of the spiritual gifts and particularly of glossolalia,

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid, 84-110.

<sup>8</sup>W.A. Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 160.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid, 162.

<sup>10</sup>R. Scroggs, "The Sociological Interpretation of the New Testament. The Present State of Research" *NTS* 26 (1980), 164-179.

<sup>11</sup>A very helpful book for every student who is engaged in the study of the situation in the city at that time is J. Murphy-O'Connor's, *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology* (Good News Studies 6.), Wilmigton DE: Michael Glazier, 1983.

<sup>12</sup>For the analysis of group-dynamics cf. A. Schreiber, *Die Gemeinde in Korinth: Versuch einer gruppensdynamischen Betrachtung der Entwicklung der Gemeinde von Korinth auf der Basis der ersten Korintherbriefes*, Muenster: Aschendorff, 1977.

<sup>13</sup>Cf. the excellent article of E.A. Judge, "Cultural Conformity and Innovation in Paul: Some Clues from Contemporary Documents" *TynBul* 35 (1984), 3-24; 12ff.

<sup>14</sup>Cf. J. Murphy-O'Connor, "Slogans in 1 Cor. 6,12-20", *CBQ* 40 (1978), 391-396.

which went hand to hand with their self-understanding as "spiritual men", the attribution of almost magic power to Baptism and Eucharist, led them to the certainty that they were already living as individuals in the eschaton, disregarding in this way the corporate soteriological reality on which Paul insisted. Such a spirituality, supported by the partial emphasis on the "already" in eschatology (1 Cor. 4,8),<sup>15</sup> led them to a neglect of the everyday problems of the community and in an incompetence to harmonize their individual aspirations for personal freedom and salvation with the social sensitivity<sup>16</sup> they ought to have because the saints would judge the world (cf. 1 Cor. 6,2). This "opened the back door" for a peculiar assimilation with the outer society, seen in the acceptance of structures of the Graeco-Roman world in their eucharistic practice.

Two points should be mentioned in this context. First, the strong did not question what Paul had taught them regarding Eucharist. It seems more probable that the disorders went hand to hand with a different understanding of the meaning of Eucharist for the everyday life of the community by the strong. Second, Paul was somehow not surprised by the divisions caused (1 Cor. 11,18), possibly because of the situation in the Corinthian community as a whole. If we keep in mind the practice of the Graeco-Roman meals of the time,<sup>17</sup> we can understand that the behavior of the strong was in accordance with their social aspirations. Social Anthropologists have shown that the whole context of a meal was one of the most effective means of defining the boundaries of a community vis-à-vis the rest of the society and of the social differentiations within the community.<sup>18</sup> It would bring to surface several social divisions based on who, what, how, and with whom somebody eats.<sup>19</sup> What actually happened during the eucharistic meal in Corinth is efficiently described by both Theissen and Meeks. Those who had, the strong, provided their houses<sup>20</sup> and their "idion deipnon" for the gathering of the community. Without waiting for the other members (11,21), they started eating and drinking the best and the most food, so that the ones who came later could only eat from the leftovers, or not eat at all. In this way, Eucharist was celebrated in an atmosphere

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<sup>15</sup>A.J.M. Wedderburn, *Baptism and Resurrection: Studies and in Pauline Theology against its Graeco-Roman Background*, Tuebingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1987, who rightly claims (p. 359): "The error of the Corinthians had been, in part at least, their stressing of the realized power of the new age present in their congregation, to neglect of the powers of death and the old age still at large there". Cf. A.C. Thiselton, "Realized Eschatology at Corinth" *NTS* 24 (1977/78), 510-526. A very interesting attempt to reconstruct the dialog on this issue between Paul and the Corinthian community is made by C.L. Mearns, "Early Eschatological Development in Paul: The Evidence of 1 Corinthians," *JSNT* 22 (1984), 16-35.

<sup>16</sup>J.H. Schótz, "Charisma and Social Reality in Primitive Christianity" *JR* 54 (1974), 51-70; 59.

<sup>17</sup>D.E. Smith, *Social Obligation in the Context of Communal Meals: A Study of the Christian Meal in 1 Corinthians in Comparison with Graeco-Roman Communal Meals* (dissertation), Harvard University Divinity School, 1980.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. the very illuminating works of V. Turner, *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977; M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1966, and "Deciphering a Meal", in *Myth, Symbol and Culture*, ed. by C. Geertz, New York: Norton, 1971, 61-81; G. Feeley-Harnik, *The Lord's Supper. Eucharist and Passover in Early Christianity*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981.

<sup>19</sup>S.C. Barton, "Paul's Sense of Place: An Anthropological Approach to Community Formation in Corinth", *NTS* 32 (1986), 225-246.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. F.V. Filson, "The Significance of the Early House Churches", *JBL* 58 (1939), 105-112; J. Murphy-O'Connor, "House Churches and the Eucharist", *BibToday* 22 (1984), 32-38.

of division. For the strong the eucharistic meal provided an opportunity to project the social inequalities and divisions -a legitimate practise for an ordinary Graeco-Roman meal- in the community, transforming Eucharist, the act of unity, into a socially determined meal. With their sacramentalistic views referring to the quasi-magical power of the Eucharist mentioned above, the patrons of the Corinthian community transformed the eucharistic meal into an "opium" of elitism and individualism. Paul had to follow a dangerous route: to instruct the community in such a way, so that personal freedom and communal reality, transcendence of the world and the need to evangelize it, would not be a dilemma.<sup>21</sup> His first priority was to correct the eschatological views of the strong.

Although early Christian eschatology should be understood as a continuous translation of the early kerygma in the language of the new situations,<sup>22</sup> there are some constant aspects in Pauline eschatology. First, the Death and Resurrection of Christ, the most determining eschatological events according to Paul, have already taken place, so that the eschaton has entered history. The whole faith and hope of the believers are based on this fact. Second, God's plan will be consummated in the future with Parousia. This future remains secret and the determination of the time of the end is pointless, although the end can be described through apocalyptic images. In spite of this, the eschaton is faced with confidence because they become a present reality through "being in Christ".

This new situation of the believer is crucial for Pauline eschatology. For this reason realized eschatology was at the heart of Paul's kerygma in his newly established communities (1 Cor. 10,11; 2 Cor. 5,17; 6,2). The possibility of "living" the eschaton *hic et nunc* is, according to our opinion, what gave Christianity the great impulse towards the gentiles and affirmed its predominance among the variety of the mystery cults of the Graeco-Roman era. This very fact was for Paul the starting point for the establishment of his communities and for the facing of their everyday problems, even for the accomplishment of the ideal of equality and equal sharing of goods in the communities through the plan of logia.<sup>23</sup>

Paul then would not oppose to the realized eschatology of the community's patrons, but he perceived that such a doctrine in combination with the strong enthusiastic element and the continuous manifestation of the spiritual gifts at the gatherings of the church, could lead to a spiritual elitism, self-sufficiency and overestimation of human capacity. For this reason, Paul keeps the community in the center of the tension between the "already" and the "not yet" of eschatology. The balance should be carefully kept. The overemphasis of realized eschatology could lead to spiritual elitism; the orientation

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<sup>21</sup>Cf. S. Agouridis, *Apostle Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians* (in Greek), Thessaloniki: Pournaras, 1982, 131-132.

<sup>22</sup>C.F.D. Moule, "The Influence of Circumstances on the Use of Eschatological Terms", *JThS* n.s. 15/1 (1964), 1-15; J.G. Gager, "Functional Diversity in Paul's Use of End-Time Language", *JBL* 89 (1970), 325-337.

<sup>23</sup>P. Vassiliadis, *Grace-Koinonia-Diakonia. The Social Character of the Pauline Program of Collection (Introduction and Hermeneutical Commentary of 2 Cor. 8-9)* (in Greek), Thessaloniki: Pournaras, 1985.

only towards the expected in the future fact of Parousia, could direct the community to a form of "apocalyptic sectarianism".<sup>24</sup>

As a consequence of this view of eschatology, the church is for Paul a body, the Body of Christ, the eschatological manifestation of the coming Kingdom of God. As a body, the community was a historical reality with concrete responsibilities. As the Body of Christ, was a reality different from the society and there was a need for the quality of the community's separation from the outer world to be elucidated. As the eschatological manifestation of the Kingdom of God, the community should find its full identity looking at the eschaton and at the same time it should manifest this identity in the world. This dual orientation of the community towards the eschaton and towards the world made the boundaries of the Pauline churches somehow ambiguous. The church was open to the outer society, otherwise the members would have to leave this world (1 Cor. 5,10); but when the relations with the unbelievers created problems within the community, then these relations should be questioned. This was the principle under which Paul faced the problem about eating meat offered to idols in his first epistle to the Corinthians (chs. 8 and 10).<sup>25</sup>

For Paul the community was a new social reality, an alternative, in comparison with the outer world, reality. It was a *koinonia* of the eschaton, which although it had its citizenship in heaven (Philip. 3,20), it was at the same time responsible for the evangelization of the world. This principle was crucial for Paul since his communities with their firm eschatological orientation and the continuous manifestation of the spiritual gifts in their gatherings, often had a tendency towards an enthusiastic stance of indifference for the world and the everyday problems.<sup>26</sup> One of the most vivid proofs of that, was the way Eucharist was celebrated in Corinth. This is the reason that the divisions during the eucharistic meal of the Corinthian community, gave Paul the best opportunity to reaffirm his "eucharistic theology" in a way that would face successfully the enthusiastic tendencies of the Corinthian strong. His purpose was to show that during the celebration of the Eucharist, where the community was becoming the Body of Christ, its eschatological identity and its responsibility towards the world should be simultaneously manifested.

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Paul's all direct accounts for the Eucharist are in the first Epistle to the Corinthians and they are connected with concrete problems the community there was facing. The first is given as an answer to the question about eating meat offered to idols (10,16-17), the second in relation to the divisions during the eucharistic meal (11,23-26).

The first instance is based on the OT story of the wandering of the Israelites in the desert. Paul wants to show that the redemption takes place within history. The term

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<sup>24</sup>J.C. Beker, *Paul the Apostle. The Triumph of God in Life and Thought*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987, 160.

<sup>25</sup>W.A. Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 105-107; cf. G. Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 121-143. Cf. J. Murphy-O'Connor, "Food and Spiritual Gifts in 1 Cor. 8:8", *CBQ* 41 (1979), 292-298, and "Freedom or the Ghetto (1 Cor. VIII,1-13; X,23-XI,1)", *RB* 85 (1978), 543-574.

<sup>26</sup>This was one of the most severe problems Paul had to face in his communities. Cf. E. Käsemann, "Principles of the Interpretation of Romans 13", in *New Testament Questions of Today*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969, 196-216; 209-212.

"pneumatikos" for the food, the drink and the rock, shows that behind these expressions lies a primitive eucharistic theology<sup>27</sup> of the Hellenistic Christianity, possibly of the Corinthian strong as well. This early Christian midrash<sup>28</sup> is used by Paul in order to face the sacramentalistic views of the Eucharist the strong had. The Israelites although found in a peculiar charismatic situation in the desert did not please God and died since they desired idolatry (denoted in this context by the verbs eat and drink), cultic dance and sexual immorality. The Corinthians believed that through their Baptism and their participation in the Eucharist became immune to idolatry, and they had no suspensions to participate in pagan ceremonies where idol meat was consumed. For Paul these two participations were incompatible. In order to establish his claim, he invoked the judgement of the members of the community (10,16-17 NIV):

"Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf"

The wording reminds us of the eucharistic words. This means that in the verses 16 and 17a, we have a pre-Pauline eucharistic terminology, probably accepted by the strong of Corinth. Paul uses the theology of these verses, placing the phrase for the bread second, in order to connect it with his interpretation that follows (v. 17b). He emphasizes that the Eucharist means participation and koinonia in the death of Christ, a doctrine originated in the Hellenistic Christianity, and consequently already known to the strong. This is done, according to our opinion, for two reasons.

First, Paul shifts through the Eucharist the importance for the community from the resurrection to the death of Christ. J.Z. Smith has drawn attention upon the observation that according to where the emphasis of a community lies, its central characteristics are respectively determined. "The pre-Pauline or non-Pauline Christ-cult, expressing its consciousness of the transforming presence of Christ in the community employed three quite distinct languages. One focused on his death (without employing the notion of resurrection) as having significance for the community; another focused on both death and resurrection, with the latter originally referring, not to the destiny of the community, but only to its significance for Jesus. A third language appears to have focused on the resurrection as having saving significance for the members of the community, but appears to minimize the death. The first two can be still classified as essentially locative understandings; the third is potentially utopian". The first language is that of martyrdom (cf. Rom. 3,25-26), and it could be combined with the second language (Phil. 2,9; Eph. 4,10; cf. 1 Tim. 3,16). "The third language is best illustrated by the Corinthian 'spiritists', who claim present experience of the power of the resurrection."<sup>29</sup> It is obvious that with the theology of 10,16-17, Paul wants to correct

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<sup>27</sup>E. Käsemann, "The Pauline Doctrine of the Lord's Supper", in *Essays on New Testament Themes*, SiBT 41, London: SCM Press, 1964, 108-135; 113.

<sup>28</sup>W.A. Meeks, " `And rose up to play` : Midrash and Paraenesis in 1 Corinthians 10:1-22", *JSNT* 16 (1982), 64-78.

<sup>29</sup>J.Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 138-139.

the view of the strong, that they already participated in the resurrection, disregarding the soteriological dimensions of his death.

The second reason for Paul's indication of the already known teaching of 10,16-17, is the identification of the community with the Body of Christ. The church through her eucharistic gathering makes a visible reality the fact that she is the Body of Christ, and in such a context it is impossible for personal freedom to surpass the communal interest and scope, the building up of the unity of the community, then it becomes a parody, or even worse a distortion.<sup>30</sup> This unity is already visible in the common Baptism (1 Cor. 12,13), but since the Body of Christ is not just the sum of the members of the community, but their mystical unity in Christ where the latter become members of the former,<sup>31</sup> the unity does not derive from Baptism, but from the participation in the death of Christ. Through this participation and *koinonia* a new, ecumenical, eschatological and soteriological reality is inaugurated. For Paul *koinonia* and *eschaton* are firmly associated with the activity of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13,13),<sup>32</sup> and make the church an eschatological, charismatic, eucharistic community. Above all the Church is *koinonia* and not an institution.

In the context of facing the disorders at the eucharistic gathering, Paul passed to the community the tradition of the eucharistic words, he received during his activity in Antioch (1 Cor. 11,23-26 NIV):

"The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; Do this in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

Paul does not only cite the tradition of the eucharistic words (vv. 23-25), but he dynamically interprets it, in order to deduce the consequences for the particular context of the Corinthian community. The tradition itself, through the chronological elements it includes, proves that Lord's Supper should not be understood as a cultic celebration of a timeless myth, in accordance with the mystery cults, but as having its roots in the history of salvation.<sup>33</sup> This is the reason why the Eucharist should not be the place for social antagonisms and divisions, but it should express the hospitality, the unity and the justice among the members of the community. It should be an icon of the Kingdom of God.

With the interpretation of verse 26, the Apostle emphasizes the centrality of Christ's death, since every eucharistic gathering is a proclamation of it. This Pauline teaching signifies a shift from the early palestinian celebration of the Eucharist, which

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<sup>30</sup>Cf. L. Dequeker, W. Zuidema, "The Eucharist and St. Paul (1 Cor. 11,17-34)", *Concilium* 40 (1969), 48-59.

<sup>31</sup>J. Murphy-O'Connor, "Eucharist and Community in First Corinthians", *Worship* 50 (1976), 370-385 and 51 (1977), 56-69.

<sup>32</sup>J.D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion. Studies in Personhood and the Church*, Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985, 130ff.

<sup>33</sup>G. Bornkamm, "Lord's Supper and Church in Paul", in *Early Christian Experience*, New York: Harper and Row, 1969, 123-160; 132.

was taken place in a context of joy and enthusiasm (Acts 2,46). It was a shift in emphasis from the resurrection, a post-historical fact, to the death, the crucifixion of Christ, a historical event. In fact Paul was moving, in relation with the situation in Corinth, from an anti-historical eschatology to an "eschatologizing" of history. The strong, in line with their social pursuits, disrupted the unity of the cross and the resurrection,<sup>34</sup> boasting that they are already in the Kingdom of God (1 Cor. 4,8), and neglecting the everyday problems of the community. The Apostle corrects the behavior with the association of the Eucharist with Christ's death.

What seems to have been overlooked by scholars, is not the above mentioned association, but the connection between Eucharist and the proclamation of Christ's death, in other words the connection between Eucharist and Mission. Before examining the consequences of such a connection, we should remind ourselves of what the Cross meant for Paul: It is understood as the representative reconciliatory sacrifice and as a victory against the ungodly powers. "Jesus dies for the present world of sin, oppression and corruption and he is risen bringing with him the new world of God's Kingdom".<sup>35</sup> Every time that Paul had to face in his communities judaizing or enthusiastic factions, he calls forth his theology of the Cross with its socio-political dimension. If we keep in mind the meaning of the cross in the Graeco-Roman era,<sup>36</sup> then it becomes obvious that the death of Christ was for the weak of the community an alternate source of power (power in powerlessness), a symbol of reversal of the commonly accepted values.<sup>37</sup> The proclamation of Christ's death then, was supposed to mean for the community the rejection of the expressions of the old world and the manifestation of the new in everyday life.

The strong of the community by accepting the social antagonisms in the eucharistic gathering they changed the Lord's Supper into a typical private supper of that time, where social divisions were justified by the protocol. The Apostle by making the place of the eucharistic gathering of the community the locus of proclamation of Lord's death, first takes a perspective "from below",<sup>38</sup> since in the eyes of the weak the death of the Lord corresponds with their social situation. Then, the proclamation of Lord's death, in the eschatological background that Paul understands it, meant that the life of the community, as a visible sign of the Kingdom of God, should denote love, justice and

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<sup>34</sup>P. Vassiliadis, *Cross and Salvation. The Soteriological Background of the Pauline Teaching about the Cross in the Light of the Pre-Pauline Interpretation of Jesus' Death*, (in Greek), Thessaloniki, 1983, 97-98.

<sup>35</sup>S. Agouridis, *Why Christ was crucified? (Interpretations of Christ's death from the writers of the New Testament)*, (in Greek), Athens, 1990, 72-95; 78.

<sup>36</sup>J. Schneider, "σταυρός, σταυρώω", *TDNT* 7, 572-584.

<sup>37</sup>S. Barton, "Paul and the Cross: A Sociological Approach", *Theology* 85 (1982), 13-19. W.A. Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 180f. Cf. A.J.M. Weddenburn, *Baptism and Resurrection* (p. 392): "since the destiny of the Christian is to be ste in a "marginal" mode of existence, the theme of "life in death" arises out of the symbolism of the Christian's transition from the old life to the new; whereas for the most initiates "death" is a necessary path to "life", for the Christian "death" is the destination, for what in other rites is a limbo-like interim state between two positions in the established order of things is for the Christian the paradoxical enjoyment of God's order of things, which is in revolutionary fashion subversive of the established order".

<sup>38</sup>G. Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 163.

equality. Only in this way the victory of Christ through the Cross, would mean for the community victory against the structures and the expressions of the old world.

Although the scholars who analyzed the problem of the divisions in the Corinthian eucharistic gathering with the sociological methods of interpretation, have done an excellent work in revealing the two types of social behavior behind the theological arguments of the strong and the weak, in our opinion they have misinterpreted the social intentions of the Pauline teaching on the Eucharist. The reason for this misinterpretation, beyond the preoccupation of the scholars regarding the effectiveness or the "progressiveness" of Pauline "social ethics",<sup>39</sup> lies in the "captivity" of the research in the conception of "patriarchism of love",<sup>40</sup> a term originally introduced by Ernst Troeltsch,<sup>41</sup> to describe the ethos of Pauline communities. This ethos is the outcome of a compromise, since it takes social and economic distinctions for granted and does not question them. Its target is to ameliorate these distinctions by demanding respect from the poor toward the rich, and a philanthropic stance from the rich toward the poor. *This* is indeed the most conservative ethos a scholar could describe!

According to our analysis, the deeper meaning of the Eucharist, as it is expressed by Paul in 1 Cor. 11,26, is the profound contest against social divisions, in order that equality and justice may prevail in the community. We could paraphrase Paul in his facing if the problems in the eucharistic gathering: "Do you want your gathering to be a truly eucharistic one? Then you should have equality and justice in the community! Do you want justice and equality? These are some of the requirements for the Eucharist!".

If Paul's intervention in the dispute ended in this point, then he could be easily accused of "liturgical escapism" from everyday social problems, since he would confine the experience of solidarity and justice in the frame of the liturgical space and time of the community, projecting in this way a kind of social conservatism towards the outer society.<sup>42</sup> This is the point where the accusers miss the fact that Paul does not just connect Eucharist with the eschatological event of Jesus' death, but with the proclamation of this death. In this way he binds together Eucharist, eschatology and mission. The experience we mentioned above should not be restricted inside the community!

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Two realities are of a great interest for Paul: the community as an alternate society and the world as the field of mission. Although Christians' citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3,20), the Apostle does not neglect the world. As it is a misunderstanding of the Pauline teaching that his scope was a sociopolitical program of change of the word, even more it is a distortion that he viewed Christians as an "angelic community", which had

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<sup>39</sup>This term used by the scholars is somehow misleading, since the Christian community is not a microcosm of the society, but, as already mentioned, an alternative reality of being.

<sup>40</sup>Cf. G. Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 164f.

<sup>41</sup>E. Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (trans. by O. Wyon), New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956, 69f.

<sup>42</sup>This is indeed what happened! Cf. For example, J.C. Beker, *Paul the Apostle*, 322-327; D. Tidball, *An Introduction to the Sociology of the New Testament*, Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1983, 118-122; G. Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 108; S.C. Barton, *Paul's Sense of Place*, 242-243.

nothing to do with the sinful, immoral and perishable world. The community is the new yeast, the new world of sincerity and truth (1 Cor. 5,7b-8). Being a Christian means living in Christ at the "crossing" from the sinful world, in accordance with the events of the story of Exodus.<sup>43</sup> The remembrance of the salvific actions of the God in the history of Israel, and the reference to Christ's sacrifice, reminded Corinthians of the fact that this action of God was continuing through the community's history, until the reconciliation of the whole world (Rom. 11,15-16). Moreover, while the recollection of that salvific action of God was for the Israelites the motive for the annual celebration of the Passover, for the Christians it became through Eucharist a daily experience.<sup>44</sup>

In this way the eucharistic gathering was the center of the community's life. The conviction that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female" (Gal. 3,28), but that the community was a new people, the third gender, was the outcome of the eucharistic experience. The dilemma "Gospel or social action"<sup>45</sup> could be overcome, since Eucharist was the rediscovery of the Church *in actu*.<sup>46</sup> The whole life of the community was centered around the eucharistic table. The Epistles of the Apostle were read there,<sup>47</sup> the collection was collected, the realization that the Church is the community of the eschaton was effected. This binding of Eucharist and eschatology was understood as a consequence of the activity of the Holy Spirit,<sup>48</sup> and any false perception of spiritual self-sufficiency was corrected by the introduction of the proclamation of Jesus' death in the eucharistic gathering. This proclamation was the very essence not only of Eucharist, but of Paul's mission as well (cf. 1 Cor. 2,1-2 NIV: "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified").

What were the consequences for mission in the light of such a proclamation? At first, it meant the comradeship of the Christians with the "foolish", the "weak", the "lowly" and the "despised" of the world in order to accomplish righteousness, holiness and redemption (1 Cor. 1,27-30). In a time of omnipotence of the Roman rule, Paul, through the proclamation of Jesus' death, brings to the front of history the lowly and the despised of the world. The symbol of the Cross is the symbol that fits with the marginalised of the Roman imperium.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>J.K. Horward, " `Christ Our Passover` : A Study of the Passover-Exodus Theme in 1 Corinthians", *EvQ* 41 (1969), 97-108.

<sup>44</sup>P.S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960, 36.

<sup>45</sup>Cf. T. Engberg-Pedersen, "The Gospel and the Social Practice According to 1 Corinthians", *NTS* 33 (1987), 557-584.

<sup>46</sup>A. Schmemmann, "Theology and Eucharist" in *Theology, Truth and Life* (in greek), Athens: Ed. Zoe, 1962, 89-127; 124.

<sup>47</sup>J.A.T. Robinson, "Traces of a Liturgical Sequence in 1 Cor. 16,20-24", *JThS* n.s. 4 (1953), 38-41.

<sup>48</sup>J.J. von Allmen, "Worship and the Holy Spirit", *StLit* 2 (1963), 124-135.

<sup>49</sup>This is a fruitful reminder of the so called "Liberation Theology". Cf. for example, G. Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (trans. by C. Inda and J. Eagleson), New York: Orbis Books, 1988, 162-173; J. Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation. Toward Political Holiness* (trans. by R.R. Barr), New York; Orbis Books, 1988; S. Galilea, *The way of Living Faith. A Spirituality of Liberation* (trans. by J.W. Diercksmeier), Philadelphia: Harper and Row, 1988.

For the Apostle the eucharistic diastole of the community towards the world, does not refer only to the human race, but to the whole creation. As the creation was subjected to decay because of the will of the human, in the same way, when the heirs of God will be brought into the glorious freedom, the creation has the hope to be liberated from its bondage to decay (Rom. 8, 16-24). This dialectic relation between the human and the creation, reveals the "priestly character of humanity: humanity can now in Christ recapitulate and `refer back` (anaphora) nature to its Creator".<sup>50</sup> In the light of this, the Eucharist is not only the icon of the eschaton, but a missionary event as well,<sup>51</sup> with direct consequences for the whole world. It is not just the mystery of the Church,<sup>52</sup> but the mystery of the world as well. In this way, through Eucharist, the life of the Pauline communities is organized around a double orientation: towards the world, in a motion of diastole (mission) and towards God in a motion of systole (liturgical life). The one-sided emphasis on the systole, leads to introversion and to liturgical escapism from the challenges of history; the one-sided emphasis on diastole, reduces Christian faith to a religious ideology either of the left or of the right. Eucharist and mission "cannot be conceived apart from each other without erroneous consequences for the authenticity of the Christian ethos".<sup>53</sup>

When Paul faced the liturgical detachment of the Corinthian strong from the everyday problems of the community, dressed with an individualistic pneumatocracy that distorted the prophetic, eschatological ethos of the community, he turned to the central expression of the communal ethos, the eucharistic meal, in order to remind the strong that Eucharist and social responsibility are two inseparable aspects of an eschatologically conscious community.

As we mentioned above, at the Eucharist the people of God "lives" in a mysterious way the transformative experience of the eschaton, the experience of the Kingdom of God. Although this experience takes place into history, it does not become part of history because of the "already" and the "not yet" of eschatology. Eucharist then is an experience of the eschaton and at the same time a movement towards eschaton. This movement is realized as transition from death to life, from injustice to social justice, from inequality to equality, from division to unity, from the old to the new world.<sup>54</sup> This is the dimension Paul ascribes to the Eucharist when he makes it the place of the proclamation of the death of Christ.

The way of the Cross was the only choice left by Christ to those who would like to follow him (Mark 8,34). This is the reason Paul did not face the Cross as an isolated event, but as a model of action for the members of the Church. Christ's example brings

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<sup>50</sup>J.Z. Zizioulas, "Human Capacity and Human Incapacity: A Theological Exploration of Personhood", *ScotJournTheol* 28 (1972), 401-448; 435.

<sup>51</sup>Cf. N.A. Nissiotis, "The Church as a Sacramental Vision and the Challenge of Christianity Witness" in *Church, Kingdom, World. The Church as Mystery and Prophetic Sign* (ed. G. Limouris), Geneva: WWC, 1986, 99-126.

<sup>52</sup>P. Evdokimov, "Eucharistie - Mystere de l' Eglise", *La pense Orthodoxe* 2 ( 1968), 53-69.

<sup>53</sup>E. Clapsis, "The Eucharist as Missionary event in a Suffering World" in *Your Will be Done. Orthodoxy in Mission* (ed. G. Lemopoulos), Katerini, Greece: Tertios, 1989, 161-171; 162-165.

<sup>54</sup>G. Limouris, "The Eucharist as the Sacrament of Sharing", *ER* 38\4 (1986), 401-415; 408.

out an ethos structurally opposite to the world's (cf. Matt. 20,25-28 par<sup>55</sup>). In this way, the unjust structures of the Graeco-Roman world are faced by Paul through the prism of the par excellence anti-structural<sup>56</sup> expression of the community's life, the common Lord's Supper. That's why Paul castigated the practice of the strong: relations based on the system of social stratification, even if they are completely understandable in the outer society, when transferred in the community, even more in its eucharistic gathering, they distort the very nature of the Church.

The "space" of the community is the place of overcoming and transformation of the world's structures. In this line the solution to the problems of the community, should be given by its members and not by the heathen courts (1 Cor. 6,1-11). "Those who have wives should live as if they had none, those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep, those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them". (1 Cor. 7,29-31). Those who were slaves when they became members of the community are Lord's freedmen, while those free, became slaves of the Christ (1 Cor. 7,21-23). Philemon is addressed to accept back Onesimus "no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother ... both as a man and as a brother in Lord" (Philemon 16).<sup>57</sup>The model of such an anti-structural practice is Christ himself, who, according to Paul, "though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8,9), and whose example the Apostle follows ("though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible..." 1 Cor. 9,19f).<sup>58</sup>

This anti-structural character of the Eucharist was for Paul the starting line for the transformation of the relationships and the structures in the community. At the same time, the proclamation of Christ's death, the very essence of the Eucharist, meant the transition of the eschatological experience to the outer world through its evangelization. The dynamics from within the community would gradually transform the world as well. The sacramental vision of equality and justice is on itself a process of witness, a witness of faith, hope and love. The equality, the justice and the freedom of the members of the community, which was "lived" with the activity of the Holy Spirit during the Eucharist, should permeate the world, so that the world would be christianized. The Gospel of

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<sup>55</sup>It is worth noting that Luke (22,25-27) mentions this pericope immediately after the story about the Last Supper. This proves the binding of this ethos with the Eucharist. Moreover, the common origin of the eucharistic traditions of Luke and Paul, shows that the same binding exists in the background of the Pauline teaching on the Eucharist.

<sup>56</sup>At this point we are indebted to V. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, who quotes (p. 177): "All human societies implicitly or explicitly refer to two contrasting social models. One ... is of society as a structure of jural, political and economic positions, offices, statuses, and roles, in which the individual is only ambiguously grasped behind the social persona. The other is of society as a *communitas* of concrete idiosyncratic individuals, who, though differing in physical and mental endowment, are nevertheless regarded as equal in terms of shared humanity. The first model is of a differentiated, culturally structured, segmented, and often hierarchical system of institutionalised positions. The second presents society as an undifferentiated, homogeneous whole, in which individuals confront one another integrally, and not as "segmentalized" into statuses and roles".

<sup>57</sup>For the way Paul, motivated by the incident with Onesimus contrasts the structures of the world with the anti-structures of the Church, cf. the excellent work of N.R. Ptersen, *Rediscovering Paul. Philemon and the Sociology of Paul's Narrative World*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985.

<sup>58</sup>Cf. G. Bornkamm, "The Missionary Stance of Paul in 1 Corinthians 9 and in Acts" in *Studies in Luke-Acts* (ed. L.E. Keck and J.L. Martyn), London: SPCK, 1976, 194-207.

Christ the community witnessed to the world through the Eucharist, was a Gospel of denunciation of the structural evil, of diakonia and liberation from every form of oppression and injustice, in conclusion a Gospel of transformation of the world.

INTERNATIONAL HELLENIC UNIVERSITY

MASTER IN ORTHODOX ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY

FRIDAY  
3-MARCH  
5:00pm-7:00pm

SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH TO  
THE EUCHARIST IN ST. PAUL

PROF. DIMITRIOS PASSAKOS

Emer. Prof. Petros Vassiliadis will respond and monitor the discussion

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## Chapter 28

### MISSION AND EVANGELISM IN MODERN GREECE. A Selective Guide through Major Missionary Initiatives in the 20th and 21st Century

*Dr. Evi Voulgaraki*

We are living in a changing world. And we are changing too, day after day. Stagnation is death, change is a sign of life. Change is welcome, change is inevitable. Yet, not all forms of change are welcome. Some are to be avoided. Getting old, for example, is a change, getting sick is another one. But even these uncalled-for forms of change cannot be dealt with by nonchange, by stagnation. We can only get affiliated with them, get the most out of them, or direct the inevitable change into a different path, transform it into a positive, life giving reality. Older age or sickness can even be rejoicing experiences, if seen by a different angle, if approached as a new, advanced level and opportunity of awareness. Moving from the biological to another systemic example, to life in modern-day Greece, one cannot help noticing that the socio-economic situation is deteriorating vastly, rapidly, abruptly and immensely.<sup>1</sup> People despair. People commit suicide. People lose jobs, homes, hope. People die of hunger and sickness. People are angry. Yet, a new level of thinking, of raising questions, of exploring is currently at work. People wish to know who and what to blame. People try to define what to change and how. People reexamine the way to live. People philosophize. People's awareness is increasing. Devaluation is present, not in the economic sense, but in a philosophical one, as more superficial values lose their previous glamour and more essential values become center-stage in our value system. Amidst darkness and general despair, a shivering light, a humble candle is lit, the candle of faith and hope, of solidarity (in social terms) and love (in Christian terms).

Shifting paradigms call for a new missionary approach in a changing world. Local experience is intertwined with the global one, as described in the New Missionary Statement of the WCC. From an orthodox point of view, theology is but the interpretation of Eternity into Modernity. So is our missionary paradigm, traditional in its very core, yet full of variety, color and flexibility in its expressions. Truth is not an invention or an innovation, in philosophical terms.<sup>2</sup> For theology, truth is the Triune God, eternal and present in human history, known to us in time through Jesus Christ, the incarnate Logos, and through the Holy Spirit that enlightens and inspires us. What is timely, what comes and goes out of fashion, is of a relative value, facilitating our

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=88j30vh-yho&feature=share>

<sup>2</sup> So claimed Zisimos Lorentzatos, one of the most reputed experts in Literary theory in modern Greece, and a poet himself: «Όσοι ξεκινούν» (“To Those who are starting out”), in “Μελέτες” (Studies), bd. 1, Athens, Domos, 1994, p. 471.

meeting with the Triune God: partially now, but utterly so in His eschatological Kingdom. Life affirming ways are welcome, at all levels of human existence.

In more precise terms, I shall offer an account of the inter-dialogue among these elements in modern missionary praxis. A very short second prologue might be needed.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Russian Orthodox Church experienced one of the most flourishing periods of its missionary history, in Eastern Asia and the Alaskan peninsula, a period marked by personalities like St. Innocent of Alaska (Veniaminov), also characterized by the integration of the Orthodox faith into the local cultures, and the attainment of a new level of organization, financing and awareness in general. At that same time, the Greek Orthodox Church was making its first uncertain steps in an environment characterized by a strong craving for national self-fulfillment. The new Greek state was recognized in 1830 after 400 years of slavery to the Turks. Almost a century later, the flourishing Russian mission was abruptly interrupted by the October Revolution of 1917. On the other hand, the Greeks could not find a steady walk for many decades to come. The early 20<sup>th</sup> century was unfortunately sealed by a state of uncertainty, by war after war, including the Balkan wars, the 2 World wars and the Asian Minor Catastrophe of 1922, an event of disastrous impact on the Greek political thinking and self-awareness. As Archbishop Anastasios of Albania (Yannoulatos) summarizes the situation, adding the further factor of massive immigration, which placed many Greeks in an unknown heterodox environment, all this “caused the Orthodox - in order to maintain their own faith - to close themselves temporarily up and form to a certain extent introspective communities. This tactic, understandable and perhaps needed, became time after time a habit and often took the characteristics of isolationism.”<sup>3</sup>

Only in the late 50's did this situation start to invert. In the context of thinking on questions of mission at the International Missionary Conference (especially the 3rd one, held in Tambaram, India, 1938) and subsequently in the WCC, as well as in the context of Syndesmos (World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth), the Inter-Orthodox Centre

‘Porefthendes’ (‘Go ye’) was founded in Greece in 1961, and a first breeze of mission began to blow. At that time the protagonists of this effort, the present Archbishop of Albania Anastasios Yannoulatos and Elias Voulgarakis, later Professor of Missiology at Athens University, were voices crying in the wilderness. This was unheard-of, as is apparent from their writings of the time. Mission seemed a preposterous idea, a rash and groundless youthful enthusiasm... Our theology at that time was deeply rooted in academic rigidity, misery, peevishness and ethnocentrism. Yannoulatos and Voulgarakis, along with other colleagues and collaborators, initially founded the

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<sup>3</sup> Anastasios (Yannoulatos) of Albania, *Ιεραποστολή στα Ίχνη του Χριστού (Mission's: Footsteps in Christ's Way)*, Athens, Apostoliki Diakonia, 2007, p. 53 of the Greek edition.

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missionary journal *Porefthendes* ('Go ye'), published in Greek and English (1960-70). Later, in 1967, after struggles lasting many years, the Office of Foreign Mission of the Church of Greece was set up, and the popular missionary magazine *Panta ta Ethne* (All Nations) was launched in 1981, continuing up to the present. It is an important source of news about mission, but only sporadically carries short theological and theoretical articles. The hard core of *Porefthentes* visionaries and executives volunteered to work closer with the official Church, though without abandoning their original home. This choice, an ultimate combination of the "public" and "private" sectors, if one may use this metaphor, provided authority and flexibility at the same time. Some of them also followed an academic career that allowed them to do further research as well as teach about mission.

*Porefthentes* contributed highly to the dissemination and deepening of the idea of mission, and many imitators came along the way. To this day, *Porefthentes* is facilitating other missionary associations in terms of organizing money transfer or welcoming aid in different forms and sending it via its own transportation means, for example by arranging for common containers, when needed, or by undertaking to perform bureaucratic work for all, etc.

*Porefthentes*' origin coincided historically with movements of awareness within African Christianity, which sought their own freedom as well as authenticity and tradition in faith, elements discovered by some in the Orthodox Church. [The deepest source of knowledge of all this development is, for me personally, oral: the various narrations and stories told at home, along with discussions and questions heard, perhaps overheard, by me... Yet, there is written evidence as well in the two above mentioned periodicals (passim), particularly in Arch. Anastasios's book *Στην Αφρική* (In Africa)].<sup>4</sup> A request was received by leaders of the Maou Maou movement, a revolutionary anti-colonialist, mainly Kikuyu rooted movement, that led to a military conflict in Kenya between 1952 and 1960, which was repressed by the British army. Despite the defeat and failure, the Maou Maou uprising set up the stage for Kenyan independence in 1963. Although the latter is also disputed by some historians, who claim that the actual riot delayed the independence, the fact is that within this movement the new revolutionary ideas of self-determination and African self-fulfillment were planted and cultivated. Parallel ideas found a favorable ground in Uganda. Three personalities marked the period: Arthur Gaduna, a Kikuyu from Kenya (who later created a schism within the Orthodox Church), Ovadia Basayiakitolo, whose grandson today is Metropolitan Ionas of Uganda, and Rouvim Spartas. The latter two belonged to the Muganda ethnic group (plural: Baganda), consisting of 52 tribes, and having a leading role in Uganda as the largest ethnic group.

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<sup>4</sup> Anastasios (Yannoulatos) of Albania, *Stin Afriki* (In Africa), Athens, Apostoliki Diakonia, 2010, p. 132ff, 165ff

The challenge was enormous. Yet, the response did not match the challenge. The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria was ill-prepared: it is a historical Patriarchate with ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the whole continent of Africa, but traditionally its activity extended chiefly to the Greek communities on the Mediterranean coast of Africa, which corresponds historically to Roman North Africa.<sup>5</sup> Together with the inward-looking and bureaucratic attitude in Greece, this led to enormous mistakes. So when some initial steps were finally taken, they were timid, wrong and utilized unsuitable people, so that a great opportunity was lost... Nevertheless, *Porefthentes* was ready. *Porefthentes* persisted. *Porefthentes* grasped the vast opportunity on offer. While Elias Voulgarakis was working backstage, keeping an eye on everything in Athens, Anastasios went to Eastern Africa one day after his ordination as a priest (presbyteros), on the 24<sup>th</sup> of May 1964. An outbreak of malaria delayed his effort, but only temporarily. Precious time was lost. The opportunity was passing by. Yet, much was redeemed and healed later. However, if the Orthodox had the readiness, the eagerness and the missionary awareness that characterizes the Muslims, for example, the religious map of Africa would have been quite different today. And this is something we should regret about and repent for the rest of our lives...

Even so, ever since the first invitation to Africa, *Porefthentes* has been supporting the missionary work there. To this day, a significant amount of its budget, coming mainly from donations for a specific cause, is directed to Africa and in general to all Orthodox external (from a Greek point of view) missions on the globe. A group of volunteers gather there for the purpose of sewing priestly garments, baptism vests (robes) and all kinds of clothing needed for liturgical purposes. They also manufacture icons, paper on wood, or plastic icons, while keeping a good company and disseminating the concern for mission, which is also a concern against any form of racism or marginalization of people and groups of peoples.

The great shift in European history that took place in the '90s with the fall of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe, was met as a new challenge, and was just as eagerly taken up by *Porefthentes*. Without abandoning the old agenda, a new one came forward: Albania, the most deprived European state at the time, both spiritually and financially. The work done in Albania is of epic proportions. Starting out literally from the ground level, as a result of the complete destruction of the indigenous Orthodox Church, which was in ruins (a common fate for every religious segment in Albania), Archbishop Anastasios built a flourishing and living Church. It would take too long to narrate all achievements in this field. Mention must be made, however, of the generic relation between *Porefthentes* and the Albanian Orthodox Church.

Many churches were built, among which the Cathedral in Tirana is worth mentioning. Hospitals, schools of different nature and direction, even a University with

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<sup>5</sup> For further reading on the historical context, see: Souses Raven, *Rome in Africa*, New York, Routledge, <sup>3</sup>1993.

## MISSION AND EVANGELISM IN MODERN GREECE

technical, theoretical and medical Faculties were founded.. ,<sup>6</sup> None of this would have been possible if not for *Porefthentes* as a supporting mechanism, facilitating the work of Archbishop Anastasios.

Another, independent effort is worth mentioning; the Balkan Orthodox Youth Association, founded in 1996 in Sibiu, Romania, after a first preparatory meeting in Pendeli, Greece, held in 1993. BOYA is an organization, the concept of which is based partly on *Porefthentes*' model and partly on WSCF and Syndesmos' model. It is an Association of youth Organizations and Church based groups, responding to the basic missionary needs of the 90s in the Balkan region.<sup>7</sup>

Today, after the major crisis of 2008 that hit Greece in 2011, there has been a shift of priorities. Firstly, there is a lack of financial resources that poses different problems on different projects. They all come down to one: asphyxiation, a threat to the very existence of these projects. People have to come up with resourceful solutions, new ways to do things, and place more effort and commitment as well as invent new ways to increase productivity and achieve results.

One of the oldest problems facing orthodox mission, has resurfaced: Lack of continuity... The generation that founded *Porefthentes*, my father's generation, is now comprised of old people and is furthermore split in two neighborhoods, the homeland and the destined land. We younger members continue the effort to a certain extent, but also seek new ways to accomplish mission in Christ's way, the Trinitarian way. Urgent social problems, the disorientation of Greek society, a yearning for solidarity, a wish for clarity of mind and spirituality, all raise different priorities. I shall only mention one example, characteristic for a different style of mission: the founding of a Facebook group called christianantirafana,<sup>8</sup> an Initiative of Christians contra racism, fascism and neo-Nazism. Being the founder of this Group, I can speak with "authority": we envision an expression of faith in relation to daily life and society. Without wishing to substitute the Church in any way, we wish to counter Nazism and fascism, inspired by the Christian faith, the Gospel, our Tradition, and the example of Christian martyrs. Living as we do in an extreme situation of violent impoverishment and despair, we wish to serve the Greek society in a solidarity movement that may also serve as a witness for the Orthodox faith.

As regards the globe, one can only say that the new and dramatic exodus of our younger generation, the best and most educated of our youth, to the ends of the earth looking for work and a better fortune, might reveal, through this human tragedy, a new opportunity to manifest the ethos of martyrdom which governs our faith. From

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<sup>6</sup> Further information on <http://www.orthodoxalbania.org/new/index.php?lang=en> (official page).

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.boyonet.org/index.php/en/about-us/10-balkan-orthodox-youth-association-18-years-of-continuous-presence-and-activity> (official page). I happened to serve as the founding General Secretary of this Association, taking it from the first conception of the very idea to its official foundation.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.facebook.com/groups/christianantirafana/>.

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martyrdom to witness... “From death to life...”, as we sing at Easter. In Greek, the word revolution (επανάσταση) is based on the word resurrection (ανάσταση). And what is urgently needed more than ever is the revolutionary Christian ethos of the first Christian community. A life affirming way and much more: a fullness of life.<sup>9</sup>

The banner features a blue background with white text and images. In the top left is the International Hellenic University logo. The top center text reads 'MASTER IN ORTHODOX ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY'. The top right corner specifies the date and time: 'FRIDAY 21-MAY 5:00pm-7:00pm'. The central image shows a modern building with 'INTERNATIONAL HELLENIC UNIVERSITY' written on its facade. Overlaid on this image is the title of the event, '“PATRISTICS AND ORTHODOX MISSION”', and the speaker's name, 'DR. EVANGELIA VOULGARAKI'. A smaller inset photo shows a woman with glasses. At the bottom, there is a YouTube logo with the text 'Open to the public', the channel name 'CEMES YOUTUBE CHANNEL', and the URL 'https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCD\_5mcv3Z82pYW8LFuk2Emw'. A small note at the bottom of the central image states 'Prof. Athanasios Papathanasiou will respond and monitor the discussion'.

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<sup>9</sup> “Affirming life in all its fullness is Jesus Christ’s ultimate concern and mission (John 10:10)”: Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in changing Landscapes. A New WCC Affirmation on Mission and Evangelism (2012) (<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/mission-and-evangelism/together-towards-life-mission-and-evangelism-in-changing-landscapes.html>, posted 5.09.2012).

Chapter 29

**THE EUCHARIST:  
THE ANSWER OF THE FATHERS TO THE SOCIAL PROBLEM**

*Rev. Dr. Pavlos Koumarios*

The quest for an ideal relationship of persons in an attempt to form an ideal community can be summarized in a pursuit to achieve simultaneous coexistence of love and freedom in the same relationship. Or in other words, to make happen the simultaneous existence of personal independence along with the interpersonal dependence.

How can autonomy and individual freedom not suppress love? Likewise, how can unity, equality and solidarity not suppress autonomy and freedom?

I think that it is necessary to point out that throughout history, human societies have wrestled between these two dichotomies, resulting in various relationships and social systems. This has at times created peak moments in the history of civilizations, while at other times left behind a bitter form of disenchantment and despair.

*[This has been the case in the history of Christian societies. There have been "Christian" societies or leaders who have preached love in the name of Christian truth, whereas in practice their actions were unjust and coercive; On the contrary there have been Christian societies which have experienced the value of obedience, however this was achieved in absolute freedom, love and mutual respect!]*

My purpose, though, is not to present the various historical phenomena of adapting social systems within or outside of the Christian community. My purpose is to make an attempt to present the proposal of the Teaching of Christ and the Tradition of the Church, with reference to the problem of personal relationships and social structures. What did the Church propose in the agonizing existential need of humanity? That is, the need for a human being to commune with his/her fellow human beings, by means of relationships of love, while at the same time being absolutely free.

Who is absolutely free, but also engaged in a perfect relationship of love?

From the beginning, the Church saw communion and freedom and their harmonious coincidence, in principal as supreme properties of the Divine Being. Only the three Divine persons of the Trinity are in a relationship of absolute freedom, which at the same time is one of love, unity, and communion.

Emphasizing the truth of the ontological freedom of God, the holy Fathers used for God the term "anarchos" (αναρχος) which means either "the one with absolute independence" or "the one being above all authority". However, it is very critical for our topic to notice a certain peculiarity in the use of this term by the Tradition of the Church.

In the development of the Trinitarian theology, this term *ἀναρχος* is used especially in regard to the person of the Father. As for the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Church used the term "syn-anarchos" (συναναρχος). "Syn-anarchos" having almost equal meaning with the term "*anarchos*", but with a slight differentiation, which also includes a certain contradiction. *Συνάναρχος* means *ἀναρχος* «together with another *ἀναρχος*», i.e. "co-independent", or "together being above all authority". Thus, the Father is "*anarchos*" the Son is "*syn-anarchos*", and the Holy Spirit also is "*syn-anarchos*".

There is nothing more self-contradictory to human logic than the use of the term "*synanarchos*". In human logic, the occurrence of two or three beings, being *jointly independent* cannot exist: two or three beings either are alone independent, or if they are associated and mutually dependent, then they are not independent. However, the Church expresses the co-occurrence of freedom and love in the mode of existence of the Trinity by the use of this oxymoron "synanarchos".

In order to point out here the truth of this inexpressible mystery of the life of the Trinity where *freedom and love coincide absolutely*, we report a passage of St Basil, where this truth is expressed, in relationship not so much to the inner life of the Trinity, but to the revelation of this life in the act of creation:

"The Father does not need the Son, since he [is able to] create by his will alone; however, *he wills* [to create] through the Son.

Nor does the Son need co-operation [of the Holy Spirit]...

but the Son *wills* to complete [his work] through the Spirit."<sup>1</sup>

The coincidence of freedom and love, then is found in God; it is a property of the uncreated as an expression of absolute personal freedom above any determination from inside or outside.<sup>2</sup>

Man though is created, and as created is bound to necessity.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, he can neither have freedom nor is able to love freely. Love tends to abolish freedom, or freedom to abolish love.<sup>4</sup>

The sole hope for humankind to live his freedom as love and his love as freedom, is to participate in the life of the uncreated God. To exist in the image and likeness of the uncreated God.<sup>5</sup> In a word, the solution is the Kingdom of God or the deification of humankind.

This, however, means that in here and now there exists no hope of experiencing an ideal society? The ideal society, in which freedom is love and love is freedom, is the eschatological community, the Kingdom of God.

The position of the Fathers is, however, that there can exist a *foretaste* of the Kingdom of God in the mystery of the Church.

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<sup>1</sup> St Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit* 38. These words of St Basil are in absolute harmony with the Gospel of John (Jn 5,19-21), where the evangelist refers to the relationship of the Father with the Son.

<sup>2</sup> J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, New York 1985, pp. 40-44.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 44.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 50-53.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 49-65.

The realization of the mystery of the Church is the sacrament of Holy Eucharist. According to the Fathers, in the Eucharist we tend to exist like the Triune God.

It is very interesting to see here a text of St Maximus the Confessor, where he tells us exactly *what the Church is*; and obviously Maximus finds the mystery of the Church revealed in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

"It is in this way<sup>6</sup> that the holy Church of God will be shown to be working for us the same effects as God, in the same way as *the image reflects its archetype*.

For numerous and of almost infinite number are the men, women, and children who are distinct from one another and vastly different by birth and appearance, by nationality and language, pursuits and studies, also by reputation, fortune, characteristics, and connections: All are born into the Church and through it are reborn and recreated in the Spirit.

To all, in equal measure, the Church gives and bestows one divine form and designation, to be Christ's and to carry his name...

It is through [the Church] that absolutely no one at all is in himself separated from the community since everyone converges with all the rest and joins together with them by the one, simple, and indivisible grace and power of faith..."<sup>7</sup>

This, then, is the role of the Church and the goal of celebrating and participating in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

We must, though, notice the following point: Participation in the life of the Triune God through the Eucharist within this world is not perfect and complete. The Eucharist is the most completely possible form of participation in the life of the Triune God here and now, i.e. within the boundaries of this world, the highest mark of communion with God. However, the perfection will be given in the Kingdom of God. It is, though, the most that we can have from the Kingdom here and now, "but not yet the fulfillment". Therefore, while the Church tells us that through the Eucharist we enter into the reality of the image and likeness of God, nevertheless, by the words of the Church every Easter we pray for the "more manifest"<sup>8</sup> participation in the Kingdom of God at the Resurrection of all.

This reality is confirmed again by St Maximus with the following words:

"We believe that in this present life we already have a share in the gifts of the Holy Spirit through grace that is in faith.

In the future age, after we have kept the commandments to the best of our ability, we believe that we shall participate in «the gifts of the Holy Spirit» *but in very truth*, in their concrete reality, according to the steadfast hope of our faith and the solid and unchangeable promise to which God has committed himself.

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<sup>6</sup> The expression "this way" alludes here to the Eucharist.

<sup>7</sup> St Maximus Confessor, *The Church's Mystagogy*, in *Selected Writings*, tr. George C. Berthold ("The Classics of Western Spirituality", Paulist Press, New York 1985) p. 187-8. (P.G. 91, 665CD-668B).

<sup>8</sup> Troparion of the ninth ode of the canon of Matins of Easter Sunday.

Then we shall pass from the grace which is in *faith* to the grace of *manifestation*, when our God and Saviour Jesus Christ will indeed transform us into himself by taking away from us the marks of corruption and will bestow on us the archetypal mysteries which have been represented for us through sensible symbols here below."<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, we can say that here and now, through the Eucharist, we tend to exist like the Triune God. Thus, while the Eucharist is precisely a participation in the uncreated divine energies, it is yet *within the limits of the ontologically corruptible world*. Hence, the Eucharist is celebrated in this world dynamically, as an enterprise. It is typical that one of the prayers of the Liturgy of Saint Basil begins as follows:

"Christ our God, the sacrament of your divine dispensation has been accomplished and fulfilled by us, so far as we are capable of, ...."<sup>10</sup>

A result of this, human weakness is a certain degeneration of the Eucharist: Often the original and chief aim of the Eucharist escapes the mind of the faithful and is replaced by other secondary purposes, which have no relationship whatsoever with the essence of the sacrament. One such symptom stems from the fact that in the mind of the majority of Orthodox Christians, the communal character of the Eucharist has been forgotten. It has been forgotten, that the Eucharist is not only a means of communion of one faithful with God individually, but that this communion with God is at the same time unity and communion with the other faithful.

However, a brief view of the text of the prayers and the rubrics of the Eucharist, as also the theology of the Fathers concerning the Eucharist, confirms immediately what has been forgotten and the fundamental importance of it, i.e. the communal character of the Eucharist.

Looking first at the text of the prayers and the rubrics of the Eucharist we can observe the following:

- The Eucharist is always to be celebrated by many people. One priest is forbidden to celebrate alone without there being at least one of the laity! The Eucharist is celebrated as a gathering, as an act of *many persons* together.
- All the prayers and hymns of the Divine Liturgy are expressed in the plural number, except for one prayer of the Divine Liturgy, which refers exclusively to the celebrant priest.
- The whole Divine Liturgy has the form of a dialogue. Each point of the Liturgy supposes, as we have said above, *at least* two people. According to the rubrics, the Divine Liturgy is a continuous dialogue between clergy and people. This dialogue presents a variety of forms: sometimes it is in the second person, when the priest addresses the people and the people reply to

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<sup>9</sup> St Maximus Confessor, *The Church's Mystagogy*, in *Selected Writings*, tr. George C. Berthold ("The Classics of Western Spirituality", Paulist Press, New York 1985), p. 207-8. (P.G. 91, 704D-705A).

<sup>10</sup> Prayer at the Skevophylakion of the byzantine liturgy of Saint Basil. A **similar** statement of the limits of human ability and of the incompleteness of the participation in the uncreated glory of God before the eschaton, is the expression of the troparion of the Transfiguration: "You showed your glory to your disciples so far as they were able", while the kontakion says as well: "and your disciples saw your glory, Christ our God, as they were able."

him; sometimes the priest, in the name of the people, addresses God, and the people put their seal of accord to his words by saying "Amen". Sometimes the priest and lay people share the same prayer, and the people complete a part of the prayer calling out words of it.

- Finally, receiving communion from the common cup is a supreme act of communion of the faithful among themselves and of course with God.

There are other indications of the communal character of the Eucharist. Many of these, though, have been de-emphasized for the reasons to which we have referred above.

Thus, in more traditional forms of the Eucharistic order, the communal character of it is clearer. Thus, Pseudo-Dionysius calls the Eucharist simply "the sacrament of the gathering". In the *Apostolic Constitutions* and the related liturgico-canonical sources of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Eucharist is a common act of the faithful together, where almost everyone has some work to perform. In this way everyone contributes to the celebration of the Eucharist by his/her own ministry.<sup>11</sup>

The faithful are not divided simply into two orders, clergy and laity, as it is today. The Eucharistic community does not have a static character, but is revealed to be a dynamic source of varieties of charisms, a diversity of ministries and activities.

The eucharistic assembly is composed of:

- the bishop, who is the head of the congregation, the supreme symbol of unity and therefore the co-ordinator of all the ministries;
- the presbyters who with the bishop govern the eucharistic community; they are concelebrants of the bishop and counselors and teachers of the people; the Presbyters, also, sharing the same priesthood with the bishop. This is a supreme symbol of unity in diversity, an expression of the non abolishment of personal uniqueness in the state of unity and communion;
- the deacons and the deaconesses who assist the bishop and the presbyters in their liturgical work and are responsible for the charitable work of the parish, an expression of unity as a diffusion of love and care for the members of the community-church;
- the subdeacons who are concerned with the order in the sanctuary;
- the door-keepers who are concerned with the order of the faithful during the worship;
- the readers, who proclaim the biblical readings;
- the confessors, who occupy an honoured place as examples of faith and self-sacrifice;
- the virgins, *male* and *female*, who are dedicated to uninterrupted prayer;
- the widows who likewise are dedicated to prayer, charitable work and the care of the helpless;

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<sup>11</sup> See Pistoia A., A.M. Triaca (eds), *L'Assemblée Liturgique et les différents rôles dans l'Assemblée*, (Conférences Saint-Serge, XXIIIe Semaine d'Études Liturgiques, Paris 28 Juin-1er Juillet 1976), Roma 1977.

- the exorcists who have the grace by their prayer to relieve their brothers and sisters of particular demonic influences;
- the healers, who were the grace-bearing physicians of the community,
- the neophytes likewise held a special place in the community of the faithful. They are the newly enlightened, who constituted a special order of the faithful.
- there were also different categories of faithful who were repenting, that is, the weepers, prostrators, hearers, co-standers,
- similarly, the catechumens were a separate group in the gathering of the faithful, and were also divided into categories analogous to their progress in the catechesis and their nearness to holy baptism.
- finally, the children had a special place in the Eucharistic gathering. According to the liturgical sources of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, the children stood in front of the others or circled the holy altar together with the priests!<sup>12</sup>

It is clear here that the Eucharistic gathering constituted a living community, where each of the faithful had some work to accomplish and a task to fulfil to the benefit of the other members. Each of the faithful was also a "clergy". He/she had some "lot" (κλήρος) in the worshipping Eucharistic community.

Thus, what is celebrated during the Divine Liturgy is, through the cooperating liturgical acts of the faithful together, a set of steps towards the realization of the eminent unity of the faithful with one another and with God. This is a process from ordinary gathering in place and time to perfect mystical unity in one body and one Spirit.

These acts represent different degrees of unity and communion towards the perfect communion and unity with one another and with God.

Thus, more concretely, the Divine Liturgy begins with the assembly of the faithful with their shepherd in one place at the same time (=the beginning of the D. Liturgy until the Little Entrance). The gathering of the faithful "in one place" is the basic presupposition for and form of communion among the faithful and with God.

After the initial act of assembling the people of God by the bishop and the presbyters, there follow the readings. The faithful communally hear the readings and communally express their obedience to the will of God, while the catechumens are dismissed as not having definitely shown through baptism their obedience to the divine will.

In this way, this gathering is not just any gathering, but the *assembly of the people of God*.

However, the assembly of the people of God needs to become communion and unity with all and with God; they have to become one and unique divine and human body and spirit.

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<sup>12</sup> Today, we have in Canada learned the fashion of sending the children to the "crying room" during the divine services.

Thus, in order to celebrate the Eucharistic Offering (*the Anaphora*), the gifts of the faithful are placed on the holy altar by the deacons (= the Great Entrance). They will be offered to God in the Anaphora.

However a close bond of love among the faithful is a necessary condition for the Anaphora. Therefore, before the Anaphora, the kiss of peace precedes as a confession of the love of the faithful for one another. The assembly, then, has become a *communion of love*.

After the kiss of peace, the Eucharistic act proceeds to the stage of the Eucharistic offering, i.e. the offering of praise, glory, thanksgiving and perfect adoration to God "for all and on behalf of all" ( τὰ Σα ἐκ τῶν Σών)<sup>13</sup>.

During the Anaphora, the faithful recognize God as the absolute and unique cause and source of their being. They recognize that all that "is", has its being as a gift, a gift of the absolutely free love of God, since He, through His will alone, leads everything from non-being into being.<sup>14</sup>

In absolute gratitude, then, they sing the triumphal hymn of the angelic hosts. "Singing the victory hymn"<sup>15</sup> they unite their voices with the voices of the Angels in their eternal giving back thanks to the Creator.

Besides Angels and humankind, in the Anaphora, even the material world participates in this thanksgiving through the hands of human beings, since bread and wine, elements of the material world, are offered to God. Thus the whole creation shares in the Eucharist. The piece of bread and the cup of wine are offered as gifts of gratefulness to God. Also incense, oil in the lamps, fruits, vessels and other material things are offered to God as a part of the Eucharistic celebration.

The communion of the faithful with one another and with God reaching its peak, is then sealed and completed with the reception of the Holy Things, *which is the natural continuation of the Anaphora*. It is the natural result and conclusion of the act of the Creation to offer and present itself to God through the human being.

During the Holy Communion, the faithful become really an image of the Triune God: one substance in many persons, one body and one soul - the body and soul of the incarnate Son of God - in many hypostases. One divine and human nature existent in a variety of personal identities...

The most resounding indication that the Divine Liturgy demands, presupposes and accomplishes not just a vertical communion of each of the faithful individually with God in Christ, but communion of the faithful with one another in the Holy Spirit and all together through Christ with the Father, is the Epiclesis of the Anaphora of St Basil:

"... Most holy Master, even we Your sinful and unworthy servants ... pray to You and beseech You, Holy of Holies, by the good pleasure of Your goodness, that Your Holy Spirit may come upon us and upon these gifts here set forth, and may bless them and sanctify and show this bread to be the

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<sup>13</sup> Anaphora of both byzantine Eucharistic Liturgies.

<sup>14</sup> For more on "Eucharistic ontology", see John Zizioulas, Metropolitan of Pergamum, "Christology and existence: The dialectic of created-uncreated and the dogma of Chalcedon", *Synaxis* 2 (1982) 9-20, and *Creation as Eucharist*, (Series, *Orthodox Witness* 44, Athens 1992), and N. Loudovic, *Eucharistic Ontology* (Athens 1992) - all in Greek.

<sup>15</sup> Pre-sanctus of the byzantine Anaphoras.

precious Body of our Lord and God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, and this cup to be the precious Blood of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ ... and all of us, who share in the one bread and cup, unite to one another towards a communion in the one Holy Spirit."!

Along the same lines St John Chrysostom, talking about holy communion, tells us:

"One table lies before everyone; one Father has begotten us; all of us have loosed the same labour pains; the same drink has been given to all, rather, not only the same drink, but moreover to drink from one cup. For the Father, willing to bring us to affection, has invented this too, i.e. that we drink from one and the same cup, which is a characteristic of ardent love."<sup>16</sup>

After acknowledging this, it becomes clear that the holy Eucharist, besides being a vertical communion of the faithful with God, is simultaneously an horizontal communion of the faithful among themselves: *the Eucharist forms a community*.

However, as mentioned earlier, this community, in order to constitute a proposal or an answer to the existential struggle of humankind for personal intimacy, which does not abolishes freedom and autonomy, the Eucharistic community must exist freely.

If the Church does not have freedom, then it does not constitute any answer to the existential problems of humankind.

According to the Tradition, there exists in the Eucharistic community order and hierarchy, *however coercion and dominance has no place in it*. Moreover, the hierarchical structure of the Eucharistic gathering is not allowed by the Tradition to degenerate into a relationship of power and coercion, because clearly and resolutely the order of the Eucharist and its theology require and prescribe the opposite. The hierarchical structure of the Church is a structure of unity, not of domination.

Unfortunately, throughout history even within the Church, the distinction of ministries has been changed into a stratification of superiors and inferiors, where domination by the superiors and the oppression of the inferiors took place. It must be said though, that this constitutes a distortion and adulteration of the Eucharist. All of these movements were outbursts and explosions of accumulated rage against "fathers" of the Church, who, however, were not fathers. These movements, and other similar to them, were outbursts and explosions against Church communities, which proclaimed love, however accepted the rule of coercion. Thus, instead of leading their flocks to green pasture, they let their flocks die spiritually, because the only approach they knew was exploitation.

In the Eucharistic gathering, as has been said, there exists a distinction and hierarchy of ministries, but not subordination and lording it over others. Saint Clement of Rome declared emphatically:

"The great cannot exist without the small, nor the small without the great; there is a mixture and unity of all, and herein lies the advantage."<sup>17</sup>

Precisely this "blending", i.e. the mutual dependence of ministries, the dependence not only of the "small" on the "great" but also of the "great" on the "small", the

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<sup>16</sup> Commentary on Matthew, 32/33.7, P.G. 57, 386.

<sup>17</sup> St Clement of Rome, The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians 37.4 in The Apostolic Fathers I, tr. Kirsopp Lake (Loeb Classical Library, Harvard UP, Cambridge MA 1977) p. 73.

reverence of the small by the great, the humility of the great before the small, *is precisely that way in which the freedom of the members of the assembly is realized.*

The distinction of superiors and inferiors and the danger of domination are nullified through humility and love, through the fact that, as will be seen in certain examples, the superiors seek the *consensus* of the inferiors in the accomplishment of their task.

If there is obedience, it is a matter of mutual submission of all to all, which thus transcends subordination and becomes love. It is not only submission and obedience from the inferior towards the superior, but also submission and humility of the superior:

“... let each be subject to his neighbour, according to the position granted to each one.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, “the one who leads” becomes “like a servant” (Lk 22.26).

Metropolitan John Zizioulas has called this mutual dependence the “con-stitution” of the gifts and ministries in the Eucharistic community versus their “institution”. And says that in the Eucharistic gathering the different ministries have not only been instituted by Christ, but also “con-stituted” by the Eucharistic Community in the communion of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of Communion and Love and hence of Freedom.

The Holy Spirit, always in freedom, builds relationships of communion and unity - not imposition - and acts through these relationships of communion and love in the community, that is, acts by means of the *free, voluntary will and loving consent* of the members of the community.

Every act (not some, but every act) of the Holy Spirit is an act of communion and love, because He *is* the Paracletos, i.e. the Spirit of communion and love. Whatever the Holy Spirit creates has the seal and the character of communion, love and freedom.

Therefore, Zizioulas says, the Holy Spirit does not simply *institute* but *con-stitutes*. The Priesthood, then, as a gift of the Holy Spirit, i.e. by definition, is an event of relationship, and certainly then not an object of individual appropriation. Priesthood, as a gift of the Holy Spirit, is not offered to someone in order to become his/her individual personal property, but it is a gift, which is an event of communion and consequently it is exercised as a living relationship of the faithful with one another and vice versa.

Thus when a Bishop or a Presbyter is ordained, he becomes the Bishop or Presbyter of a particular parish. He becomes a *father to these* children in *this* parish. And he becomes a *father*, because he has *sons* and *daughters* who recognize him as their *father*.

For, precisely, this reason, the priestly authority is not something which can be imposed, but something which is *composed*. And so, it does not strike the freedom of the members of the Eucharistic community, but on the contrary, it manifests it and makes it grow.

Zizioulas points out:

“The institution is something presented to us as a fact, more or less a *fait-accompl*i. As such, it is a provocation to our freedom. The *constitution* is something that involves us in its very being, something we accept freely, because we take part in its very emergence. Authority in the first case is

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 38.1, p. 73.

something imposed on us, whereas in the latter it is something that SPRINGS FROM AMONGST US.”<sup>19</sup>

And therefore, as he says in another place:

“... All pyramidal notions disappear in ecclesiology: the “one” and the “many” co-exist as two aspects of the same being... On the local level, this means that the head of the local Church, the Bishop, is conditioned by the existence of his community and the rest of the ministries, particularly the Presbyters. *There is no ministry which does not need the other ministries; no ministry possesses the fullness, the plenitude of grace and power.*”<sup>20</sup>

In the Eucharistic community, each person is what he/she is, because the others wish her/him to be what he/she is. The reverence, then, of the faithful for the Bishop or the Presbyters or the Deacons and the Deaconesses is a voluntary reverence, because the existence of the Bishop or the Presbyter or any other ministry is a result of their own will and love. And, finally, the reverence of a Bishop or a Presbyter is the reverence for the good shepherd who in imaging Christ “lays down his life for his sheep” (*Jn* 10.11).

Here it would be very relevant to remind ourselves of the fact that the founder of the theological formula of the episcopal office is a martyred bishop, St. Ignatios. He not only denied every flattery and human hero-worship, but when his friends tried to save him from martyrdom, he willingly asked them to stop any such proceedings because he wanted to offer himself to the extreme act of humility and loving faith: the self sacrifice.

St. Ignatios, suggesting the respect and the honor towards the episcopal authority, would not impose this (= institution), rather, he would suggest this with the following words (= con-stitution):

“I am a ransom on behalf of those who are obedient to the bishop, presbyters and deacons...”<sup>21</sup>

Mentioning the word “ransom”, Saint Ignatios, is not speaking metaphorically, he referred to his martyrdom and death!

One of the best expressions of the con-stitutional character of the Eucharistic ministries are the following words of saint Maximos, where, talking about the spiritual fatherhood, he says:

“The Fathers according to the Spirit, have become fathers willingly, of willing sons too, ... forming them by their word and manner of life in accord with God. And the sons according to the Spirit, deliberately and by their own choice become sons of their willing fathers, ... For the grace of the Spirit effects through free choice the spiritual birth of those who beget and are begotten.”<sup>22</sup>

From the order of the Eucharist, the following examples can be given, where the distinction of authority and power is transcended, and instead, voluntary *reciprocal* submission and unconditional love prevail.

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<sup>19</sup> Metropolitan John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, p. 140.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139

<sup>21</sup> Saint Ignatius, *To Polycarp*, 6.1, [M.Holmes (ed.), *The Apostolic Fathers*, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1992, p.198.]

<sup>22</sup> St Maximus Confessor, *To Thalassios, concerning various doubts* (P.G. 90. 528BC).

Perhaps the most impressive act for this event in accordance with the ancient Byzantine tradition is the taking off on the part of the Bishop of his omophor during the anarxis of the Holy Liturgy. Since this practice is not preserved today in its original form, permit me to expand a little on this theme.

In accord with the unanimous testimony of the manuscript Euchologia, during the antiphons and before the First (or Little) Entrance of the Divine Liturgy, clergy and laity were gathered in the atrium of the church. The Bishop with the Presbyters and Deacons entered into the nave during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Antiphon of the Divine Liturgy. As the Bishop entered with the clergy into the nave from the middle aisle, the multitude followed entering from the side aisles. The people took their places in the nave, the chanters climbed the ambo, and the Bishop with the Priests entered the holy sanctuary and went to the synthronon, while the Trisagion was sung. At the synthronon, the Bishop sat in the middle chair, while the Presbyters took their seats at both sides of him. As we said above, prior to the Bishop's seating, he had to remove his omophor. He celebrated the entire Liturgy without the omophor until the completion of the reception of the holy gifts. Only after the reception of holy communion, did the Deacons bring the omophor back to him.<sup>23</sup>

Unfortunately, today the significance of this act is misinterpreted, because the Bishop's vestments do not have the same form as they had during the Byzantine period. Likewise, while today he removes the omophor before the Gospel, another form of omophor has been invented, the small omophor, which he puts on after he has just removed the great omophor, and he celebrates in this way.

During the Byzantine period though, except for the omophor, the rest of the Bishop's vestments were the same as those of the Presbyters. Now then we can understand the splendour of this usage: during the Liturgy, the Bishop, having put off the omophor, is not distinct from the Presbyters. *He is distinguished only by his liturgical function, since he presides.* The external similarity of the vestments after the removal of the omophor was an act of *self-emptying* in the image of Christ, it was a movement of humility and thus *voluntary assignment of his distinction as Bishop to the love of the others.* He oversees "not as lording it over the clergy" (1 Pt 5.3). He is distinct, not since *he* has separated himself, but because of the reverence and love of the *others*, clergy and the flock.

Another typical act, as the Liturgy continues, is the dialogue of the Bishop with the Presbyters after the entrance of the gifts into the sanctuary (= Great Entrance). Unfortunately, even here we must turn back to the manuscript tradition, because again in the printed liturgical texts, the act has been altered.

According to the evidence of the manuscript tradition, after the placing of the holy gifts on the holy table, the Bishop says to the Presbyters: "Pray for me, brothers." And they answer him: "May the Holy Spirit come upon you and the power of the Most High overshadow you!"

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<sup>23</sup> See R. Taft, "The Pontifical Liturgy of the Great Church according to a Twelfth - Century Diataxis in Codex *British Museum Add. 34060*", in *Liturgy in Byzantium and Beyond*, (Variorum Collected Studies Series CS494) Aldershot/Brookfield 1995.

In the case of a Liturgy with a Presbyter presiding and a Deacon assisting him, the Deacon says to the Priest, "May the holy Spirit come upon you and the power of the Most High overshadow you," while the presiding Presbyter has asked the Deacon, "Pray for me, brother."<sup>24</sup>

A very similar practice can be observed in the Byzantine Divine Liturgy of Jerusalem, known as the Liturgy of St James, the Brother of God<sup>25</sup>. In this liturgy it is the people who say to the Bishop or to the Presbyter:

"May the holy Spirit come upon you..."

The Priest or the Bishop place the gifts on the holy table calling all to share in the holy Anaphora as he calls out,

"Magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together."

And the people respond:

"May the Holy Spirit come upon you and the power of the Most High overshadow you."

The Deacons reply to the people:

"May the Lord God remember you in his kingdom, always, now and ever, and to the ages of ages."

How beautiful this is! For it emphasizes the truth of the collectivity of worship, of the unity and co-operation between clergy and people, the mutual dependence of the ministries and their existence as an event of constant communion, assuring thus the freedom of the members of the body of Christ!

Let us point this out again: the lay people are praying and in a certain way uttering a blessing for the clergy,(as the Chrysostom says) so that the Holy Spirit will overshadow them (and especially the first celebrant) for the task he has to fulfill according to his ministry.

Another place where this mutual dependence of the ministries is emphasized, is the way in which the offering of the precious gifts to God is accomplished with symbolic movements. It is that point in the Anaphora which is called the anamnesis and introduces the epiclesis. This original text has as following:

"Recalling all that has come to pass for us, the cross, the tomb, the resurrection on the third day, the sitting at the right hand, his second and fearsome appearing again, offering to You Your own from Your own, we praise You, we bless You, and we give thanks to You on behalf of all and for all ...."

Furthermore, according to the Byzantine liturgical practice, at the moment when the Bishop intones, "offering to You Your own from Your own," the holy gifts are elevated in a symbolic movement of offering them to God. At this point, although the Bishop is the one who presides and offers the holy Anaphora, he steps back in order to permit the Deacon to come to the middle and elevate with his hands the Holy Gifts and offer them to God on behalf of the whole community.

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<sup>24</sup> See, R. Taft, "The Dialogue after the Entrance of the Gifts" in *The Great Entrance* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 200, Roma 1978) pp. 285-307.

<sup>25</sup> Any possibility that this liturgy is really written by James, is completely out of the question.

Thus, the Bishop is the centre and head of the Eucharistic community, the one who presides and through whom the community offers its gifts before the throne of God. Nevertheless, by this act he emphasizes exactly that as the relationship of the community with God flows through him, so his relationship with God is again a relationship of communion, i.e. flowing through the community.

Finally, the original order of the communion of the clergy is an ultimate and concluding act of the Liturgy, with which communion as freedom and freedom as love is utterly proclaimed.

It is very unfortunate that in the Orthodox Churches today the ancient tradition regarding the practice of giving and receiving holy communion has not survived. Thus in accord with the (wrong) order prevailing today, the priest takes by himself a portion of the precious Body and drinks from the holy Cup. And in the case of concelebration of many priests, each priest communicates himself, none of the Priests receives holy communion from someone else! The same in the case of a pontifical Liturgy, the presiding Bishops communicate themselves. However, this practice would be inconceivable in the Byzantine Church.

In the Byzantine Church, the truth that communion with God passes through the communion with the brethren<sup>26</sup> and is at the same time both communion with God and an act of unity and love of the faithful with one another, was expressed by the manner of communicating with one another. Where every minister, even the Patriarch, always received communion from the hands of someone else.

According to the early liturgical tradition of the Church, no one communicates himself, no one communicates alone. According to the liturgical practice of the Byzantine Church, when a Bishop is officiating, if no other Bishop is concelebrating, some Presbyter would approach the holy table and offer the Holy Communion to the Bishop, and the Bishop would then offer the Holy Communion to this Priest. When a Presbyter officiates with a Deacon, the Deacon would offer the Holy Communion to the Presbyter, and then the Deacon would receive the Holy Communion from the Presbyter.<sup>27</sup> It is an expression of mutual respect, equality and freedom.

According to Chrysostom:

"All things are equally for us (clergy) and for you, even the greatest among the good things:

We do not share the holy table, with more abundance, and you with lesser, but each in like manner lays hold of it.

If I am first, this is nothing great...

All things are for us equally; the saving life, holding together our souls, is given to each one of us with the same honour.

I do not participate in another lamb of God, you in another, but we all share in the same one."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> John Zizioulas, Metropolitan of Pergamum, "The experience of the sacrament of the Church" ("Kastoria-Attica, volume dedicated to the Metropolitan of Attica, Dorotheos Yiannaropoulos, Athens 1991) pp. 31-40.

<sup>27</sup> See R. Taft, "Receiving Communion - a Forgotten Symbol", *Worship* 57 (1983) pp. 412-418.

<sup>28</sup> Commentary of the Second Letter to the Thessalonians 4.4, (P.G. 62, 492).

Therefore, the sense of superior and inferior, the sense of authority, is again abolished<sup>29</sup>.

This ideal communion of the Eucharist extends into daily life in the form of asceticism as a *willing sacrifice of the individual will* (εκκοπή τού ιδίου θελήματος) *through love*.

The cutting off of one's individual will is not a confirmation of the power of another individual. Because in the Church, the cutting off of one's individual will is not imposed upon him/her, but it is *offered* by him/her.

That is, the cutting off of the individual will is not imposed on others, who are usually weak, by someone who has the power to impose his will. Rather, it is the opposite, it is an offering by him who has the power to impose his domination, however, he loves and out of love he holds back his power and gives the comfort of freedom to those who do not have power.

In the ascetical, Eucharistic life, this relationship functions in the opposite way:

“You know that the rulers of the nations lord it over them and the great exercise power over them. It will not be so among you, but he, who would want to be great among you he must be your *servant*, and he who wants to be first among you, must be the last” (Mt 20.25-27).

Tyranny is finally an expression of ignorance of God. Saint Maximos says: “out of ignorance concerning God, there arises self-love; and out of this comes tyranny towards our neighbour”.

While love is the supreme expression of the knowledge of and communion with God: “he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love, does not know God for God is love.” [1 John 4:7-8].

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<sup>29</sup> “... recognize from this inequality that you are far from perfect love.” St Maximos Confessor, Four hundred texts on love 2.10.

**BIBLE TRANSLATIONS AND GENDER-INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE**

*Dr. Spyridoula Athanasopoulou-Kypriou*

As I started preparing this lecture that touches upon the difficult and complex issues of justice in language and of the interrelation between God-talk, gender and representation, I came across an interesting story that was told by Andreas J. Köstenberger, a scholar who was reviewing two books on the inclusive language debate back in 1999. As he wrote:

The other day, my six-year-old daughter Lauren and I read the gospel account in which Jesus promises to make his followers “fishers of men” (or so it read in the translation that we were using). My daughter commented: “Daddy, I’m going to be a fisher of women,” and then adding, with customary “generosity,” “Tahlia [her younger sister], she can be a fisher of men.”<sup>1</sup>

Unaware of the recent inclusive-language controversy, the little girl had unwittingly yet intuitively picked up on the need for Bible translators to be sensitive to how they render gender-related terms in Scripture.

The whole issue with the use of “inclusive language” in the United States is connected with the civil rights movement and especially the women’s movement. Back in 1972 and 1973, the U.S. American national organization for women made contact with catholic, Protestant, and Jewish Bible translation projects in order to bring its influence to bear on the removal of an unjustifiable masculinization in Bible translations. UNESCO also has issued guidelines for combating sexist and discriminatory language. Equivalent standards for Bible translation were also being demanded in this regard. In 1974, the division of education and ministry of the national council of the Christian churches in the U.S.A. set up a “task Force on sexism in the Bible” with women who had a proven academic track record.<sup>2</sup>

The suggestions of the task force were adopted by the “inclusive language lectionary” (ILL), which appeared in 1983. The translation committee had the task of revising the Revised Standard Version (RSV), considered to be the standard scientific translation at that time, “*only in those places where male-biased or otherwise inappropriately exclusive language could be modified to reflect an inclusiveness of all persons.*” In the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), which appeared in 1990, change was restricted entirely to the language about human beings and limited to cases in which, according to the opinion of the translation committee, inclusive language could be used without altering passages that would be appropriate to the patriarchal

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<sup>1</sup> J Andreas J. Köstenberger in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42 (1999): 689–93.

<sup>2</sup> Claudia Janssen and Hanne Köhler, “Long History of Sowing, from Which Miracles Occasionally Grow: Bible Translations in Language That Is Just” in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ed. *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century: Scholarship and Movement* (Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta, 2014).

historical context. Androcentric language continues to be used in reference to God in the NRSV. These moderate changes of the English translation tradition, however, were met with strong criticism. For example, the authorization of the NRSV in the Roman Catholic church was cancelled because of the inclusive language used by the Vatican's congregation for the doctrine of the Faith at the end of 1994. *Inclusive language with respect to humans was also taken up in other Bible translation projects and was successful to varying degrees, although criticized by conservative groups.*<sup>3</sup>

Nowadays one has access to various translations in many languages and each of these translations has its own guidelines regarding inclusive language. One can visit the following address and find more information about various translations and compare them <https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/>

In order to see for example how the passage that preoccupied the little girl I mentioned at the beginning of my talk, is translated, I visited two English translations. So, where the translation of the Revised Standard Version (RSV) speaks of men (Mathew 4,19 "Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men."), there the NRSV speaks of people ("Follow me and I will make you fishers for people.") (*Δεδτε ὀπίσω μου, καὶ ποιήσω ὑμᾶς ἀλιεῖς ἀνθρώπων*) The NRSV makes it clear where the original texts intend to include all humans, male and female, and where they intend to refer only to the male or female gender.

It appears that often, as the above excerpt gives evidence, the translation can be corrected in a more inclusive way. However, sometimes the problem comes from the original version itself. In this way it is not a daring thesis to say that the Bible seems to be talking more about men than women.

In 1995, six of the eleven members of the ILL committee published another translation entitled: *The New Testament and Psalms: An Inclusive Version*. This translation is based on the NRSV but goes beyond it insofar as it uses not only gender but also race, class, or disability in order to underscore that all are addressed by the New Testament and the Psalms. Furthermore, in contrast to the NRSV, this translation uses inclusive metaphors for God. Moreover, in 2007 the Priests for Equality published *The Inclusive Bible* that is considered The First Egalitarian Translation. While this new Bible is certainly an inclusive-language translation, it is much more: it is a re-imagining of the scriptures and our relationship to them. Not merely replacing male pronouns, the translators have sought new and non-sexist ways to express the same ancient teachings. The Inclusive Bible contains both the Old and the New Testaments. The translation has Jesus no longer referring to God as "Father," but as "our Mother and Father who are in heaven." Likewise, Jesus is no longer referred to as the "Son" but rather as the "child" of God. The title "Lord" is replaced with "God" or "the Eternal One." "One of the great ideas of the Bible is justice. We have made a translation that does justice to women, Jews, and those who are disregarded," said Pastor Hanne Koehler, who led the team of translators.

Claudia Janssen and Hanne Köhler, two scholars who were involved at the origin of the German inclusive language Bible translation "Bibel in gerechter sprache," say:

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid

## BIBLE TRANSLATIONS AND GENDER-INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

“Bible translations do not appear out of nowhere, but emerge under certain social conditions and from within specific power networks. Furthermore, translations are always influenced by preconceptions and by the theologies of those involved, as well as other contextual factors. These include economic considerations, images of the Bible as a cultural asset, and issues of theological/church teaching and authority.”<sup>4</sup>

*In the following table we can see various translations of three verses from 1 Thessalonians. In the second chapter of this epistle, Paul expresses his feelings adopting the role of mother, then the role of father and finally the role of an orphan child<sup>5</sup>. Yet only some translations point to the fact that Paul feels like an orphan and only the more inclusive translation refer to Paul’s beloved members of the body of Christ as brothers and sisters. It seems that “every translation moves in a grey area between text and interpretation, between faithfulness and betrayal, loss and gain, the literal and metaphorical, between the deep ambiguity of the text and the translation decision.*

Critical text	Authorized (King James) Version (AKJV)	Revised Standard Version (NRSV)	New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)	Ελληνική Βιβλική Εταιρία	Παν.Τρεμπέλας
ἀλλὰ ἐγενήθημεν ἥπιοι ἐν μέσῳ ὑμῶν, ὡς ἐάν τροφὸς θάλπει τὰ ἐαυτῆς τέκνα·	1 Thes 2.7 But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children:	But we were gentle[a] among you, like a nurse taking care of her children	But we were gentle[b] among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children.	Απεναντίας ἡμασταν στοργικοί σαν τη μητέρα που φροντίζει τα παιδιά της.	Αλλ’ υπήρξαμεν πρόοι και ταπεινοί μεταξύ σας, σαν μητέρα, που περιθάλπει τα παιδιά της
καθάπερ οἴδατε ὡς ἓνα ἕκαστον ὑμῶν ὡς πατήρ τέκνα ἐαυτοῦ παρακαλοῦντες ὑμᾶς και παραμυθούμενοι	11 as ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children,	for you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you	As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children,	Ξέρετε καλά ὅτι φερθήκαμε στον καθένα σας ὅπως ο πατέρας στα παιδιά του	Καθὼς βεβαίως ηξεύρετε, ὅτι καθένα ἀπὸ σας, σαν πατέρας τα παιδιά του
Ἡμεῖς δέ, ἀδελφοί, ἀπορφανισθέντες ἀφ’ ὑμῶν πρὸς καιρὸν ὥρας, προσώπῳ οὐ καρδίᾳ, περισσοτέρως ἐσπουδάσαμεν τὸ πρόσωπον ὑμῶν ἰδεῖν ἐν πολλῇ ἐπιθυμίᾳ.	17 But we, brethren, <b>being taken from you</b> for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire.	But since we <b>were bereft of you</b> , brethren, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face	As for us, brothers and sisters,[g] when, for a short time, <b>we were made orphans</b> by being separated from you—in person, not in heart—we longed with great eagerness to see you face to face.	Εμεῖς, ὁμως ἀδερφοί, ὅταν σας αποστερηθήκαμε προσωρινά -με το σώμα βέβαια και ὄχι με την καρδιά- πολλές φορές προσπαθήσαμε με πολλή λαχτάρα να σας ξαναδοῦμε.	Ἡμεῖς ὁμως, ἀδελφοί, ὅταν εχωρίσθημε ἀπὸ σας και εμείναμε σαν ορφανά παιδιά, μακρὰν ἀπὸ σας προσωρινά και με το σώμα μόνον, ὄχι ὁμως και με τη καρδιά, εις μεγάλον βαθμὸν και με πολλήν ἐπιθυμίαν ἐποθήσαμεν να ἰδωμεν το πρόσωπόν σας.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 339.

<sup>5</sup> *Evanthia Adamtziloglou*, «Η περιεκτική Γλώσσα και οι Συμβολισμοί του Αποστολικού Έργου: Μια γυναικεία ερμηνευτική θεώρηση των στ. Α΄ Θεσ. 2,8.11.17» στο *Ἦσαν δε εκεί γυναίκες πολλαί... Βιβλικές και θεολογικές μελέτες για τη γυναίκα: Παρεμβάσεις στη σύγχρονη φεμινιστική θεολογία* (Simbo, Thessaloniki, 1997), 109-123.

The question to be raised at this point is *why there are some people who consider it essential to change the masculine religious language*. Because it is one thing to simply change the word “man” or “men” into “people”, “humankind” or “human being” etc. and quite another to speak of God as Mother and Father.

A very interesting and strong argument that can be given as an answer is that the idea of the “feminization” of religious language is linked with the process of becoming divine. In Feuerbach’s book *The Essence of Christianity*, religion is considered as a totally cosmic projection. Religion is a mirror for humanity, into which ideal human characteristics are projected and which people then strive to reflect. As Feuerbach puts it:

In religion man necessarily places his nature out of himself, regards his nature as a separate nature... God is his alter ego, his lost other half; God is the complement of himself; in God he is first a perfect man. God is a need to him; something is wanting to him without his knowing what it is – God is this something wanting, indispensable to him; God belongs to his nature.<sup>6</sup>

God is, therefore, the horizon for human becoming. In order to become, a divine horizon is necessary, not in the realist or empirical sense made dubious by the critiques of modernity, but, as the feminist philosopher of religion, Grace Jantzen, argues, as a mirror of “that of God in everyone”, that ideal likeness we may both project and reflect.<sup>7</sup>

Taking into consideration the Feuerbach’s view of religion as a human projection – in fact men’s projection – the French feminist philosopher, Luce Irigaray, argues that “in order to become”, that is, to achieve subjectivity, it is necessary to have a “horizon”, an ideal of wholeness to which we aspire.<sup>8</sup> The symbolic of religion, and in particular the idea of God, has provided such a horizon for becoming, whatever else it has also done. It has served as a mirror of perfection, “the place of the absolute for us, its path, the hope of its fulfillment”.<sup>9</sup>

Yet, according to Irigaray, the religious symbolic of the west has shown only the face of the Father. As she puts it:

Man has sought out a unique male God. God has been created out of man’s gender. He scarcely sets limits within Himself and between Himself: He is father, son, spirit. Man has not allowed himself to be defined by another gender: the female. His unique God is assumed to correspond to the human race (genre humain) which we know is not neuter or neutral from the point of view of the difference of the sexes.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Prometheus Books, 1989), 195.

<sup>7</sup> Grace Jantzen, *Reflections on the Looking glass: Religion, Culture and Gender in the Academy*. Inaugural lecture presented on Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> October 1996 in the John Rylands University Library of Manchester, 24.

<sup>8</sup> Luce Irigaray, “Divine women” in *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 61.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-2.

For Grace Jantzen, this male God could serve as a divine horizon only for male becoming.<sup>11</sup> But what happens with the female becoming? Irigaray accuses the Western religions of having taken the divine away from women.<sup>12</sup> For her, the religions of the west with their male God(s) offer no way for women to achieve their subjectivity in relation to a divine horizon. Irigaray puts it again:

We have no female trinity. But as long as woman lacks a divine made in her image she cannot establish her subjectivity or achieve a goal of her own. She lacks an ideal that would be her goal or path in becoming... If she is to become woman, if she is to accomplish her female subjectivity, woman needs a god who is a figure for the perfection of *her* subjectivity.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, as Grace Jantzen suggests, the masculinist religious symbolic must be disrupted, the male figure in the mirror must move over and make space for the female divine.<sup>14</sup> In other words, men need to make space for a new female religious symbolic that can become an effective horizon for women's becoming divine.

Briefly, for feminist theologians and philosophers of religions (both Jewish and Christians) of the West, the feminization of religious symbolic is a *sine qua non* for women's becoming divine.<sup>15</sup> The masculinist religious symbolic is considered a projection of a totally patriarchal society that has taken the divine away from women. Therefore, if women want to have a horizon so as to become divine, the masculinist language when speaking of God has to be reconsidered and changed into a feminist form.

How could then one object to this argument? If God belongs to people's nature and is a human projection, if God is an ideal of wholeness to which we aspire, then it is absolutely legitimate to create God and religious symbols, in this case religious language, in our own image. The masculine religious language must be disrupted, the white male God must make space for a black, female, infantile, disable religious symbolic. Otherwise, we (women, black people, children, disabled people) would lack a point of reference indispensable for our becoming divine or rather really human.

If God is just a human projection, then symbols do not refer to a transcendent divinity; symbols are themselves the reality to which we aspire. By denying the referential function of symbols, we can alter the symbols in order to meet our special needs. In order to remain an effective horizon, symbols are subject to constant changes. It is thus the construction and reconstruction of religious symbolic the condition of our having a point of orientation or a divine horizon at all.

But what happens if God is not a human projection. What happens if God is, or, if I may venture the expression, exists as a transcendent reality. What if God is ontologically different from our nature as the Christian tradition, as expressed in the

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<sup>11</sup> Jantzen, *Reflections on the Looking glass: Religion, Culture and Gender in the Academy*, 27.

<sup>12</sup> Luce Irigaray, "A chance for life: Limits to the concept of the neuter and the universal in science and other disciplines" in *Sexes and Genealogies*, 190.

<sup>13</sup> Irigaray, "Divine women", 63-4.

<sup>14</sup> Jantzen, *Reflections on the Looking glass: Religion, Culture and Gender in the Academy*, 28.

<sup>15</sup> Judith Plaskow, *Standing again at Sinai*, 1980. "The male imagery Jews use in speaking to and about God emerge out of and maintain a religious system in which men are normative Jews and women are perceived as Other". *Ibid*, 125.

seven ecumenical councils of the Church and in the writings of the Church Fathers of the church, has claimed! In terms of this tradition the change of religious language is not a condition of women's becoming divine, for our divinization does not depend upon the symbolic system we use. But before I explain why the religious language is not a *sine qua non* for our divinization and speak of the conditions of our becoming divine, I would like first to present very briefly how the symbols, and especially the linguistic symbols, function according to a more *traditional* theological understanding.<sup>16</sup>

The cosmic, or rather the cosmos/creation, so far as it refers to a transcendent divinity, can become its symbol. A symbol, though, that neither presupposes an analogy between itself and the symbolized divine reality –in other words, between the cosmic signifier and the divine signified– nor has any divine power. Symbols are only used to help the believers' mind go beyond the phenomenon and refer to the transcendent reality of the divine. Basil the Great says that “through the icon...can we know the archetype”.<sup>17</sup> The consideration, however, of the cosmic as a symbol of the transcendent divinity is epistemologically based on the freedom of the believing human existence.

For this traditional theological understanding the cosmic as a symbol both hides and reveals the Divinity. In other words, the cosmic symbol keeps the mystery of the transcendent divinity as well as it relates to the divinity positively. Stephen Need uses very successfully the Chalcedonian Christology and the relation of the two natures (φύσεις), the human and the divine, of Jesus Christ so as to show how language about God functions. He, thus, argues that within a Christological climate it is necessary always to be conscious of both the positive and the negative contents of metaphor. Although metaphors [I say symbols] do not quite mean what they say, they do, nevertheless, have meaning... The negative side of metaphor in the Chalcedonian context militates against idolatry, while its positive element militates against irrelevance and meaninglessness.<sup>18</sup>

But how can the finite cosmic reality become a symbol of the infinite transcendent divine reality? The answer to this question can be found in the primordial theological event of the natural revelation of the divine, that is, of the divine reality taking cosmic forms. By using the term “natural or general revelation”, I do not mean that the world is or becomes God's body. Creation cannot be considered as the incarnation of God, for it is only Jesus Christ who is considered God's true revelation and incarnation.<sup>19</sup> By the term “natural revelation”, I only mean that the God's revealing actions –in fact whatever people consider as God's revealing actions– take cosmic shapes and forms. This natural revelation is essential to humanity because the human conceptual

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<sup>16</sup> On language and Imagery of God from an Orthodox perspective see Emmanuel Clapsis, “Naming God: An Orthodox View”, *The Ecumenical Review* 44:1 (1992) 100-112; Spyridoula Athanasopoulou-Kypriou, “The problem of inclusive religious language as a condition of women's becoming divine: A critical approach”, *Θρησκευολογία* 6/7 (2005) 137-147.

<sup>17</sup> *Κατά Ενωμίον, λόγος 1*. MPG 29, 552B

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Need, “Language, Metaphor, and Chalcedon: A case of Theological Double Vision,” *Harvard Theological Review*, 88 (1995) 237-255, 254.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. David Scott, “Creation as Christ: A problematic Theme in some Feminist Theology” in *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the challenge of feminism*, ed. Alvin Kimel, Jr. (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 242.

competence is limited and cannot go beyond the cosmic reality in order to grasp the intangible and incorporeal. As John of Damascus puts it:

For God knoweth man's infirmity: for in general man turns away discontentedly from what is not well-worn by custom: and so with His (God's) usual indulgence He performs His supernatural works through familiar objects.<sup>20</sup>

Due to this revelation of the divine actions, the cosmic reality can become a symbol of the transcendent divinity. Pseudo-Dionysius puts it this way:

This is the kind of divine enlightenment into which we have been initiated by the hidden tradition of our inspired teachers, a tradition at one with scripture. We now grasp these things in the best way we can, and as they come to us, wrapped in the sacred veils of that love toward humanity with which scripture and hierarchical traditions cover the truths of the mind with things derived from the realm of the senses. And so it is that the Transcendent is clothed in the terms of being, with shape and form on things which have neither, and numerous symbols are employed to convey the varied attributes of what is an imageless and supra- natural simplicity.<sup>21</sup>

People can talk symbolically of the transcendent divine reality that is not at their disposal, by using the cosmic categories at their disposal. Pseudo-Dionysius says again:

But as for now, what happens is this. We use whatever appropriate symbols we can for the things of God. With these analogies we are raised upward toward the truth of the mind's vision, a truth which is simple and one.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, as long as the theological language is iconological (symbolical), it does not identify the signifier (symbol) with the signified (symbolized). Considering the symbolical nature of religious language, theology uses the language only to refer to the Divinity, without presupposing that there is an analogy (let alone an identification) between the symbolical language and the symbolized Divinity. Besides, the whole issue about the nature of language and about whether names can actually have a natural correspondence to the reality of God was discussed during the Eunomian controversy in the 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>23</sup> Eunomius argued for the inferiority of the Son and his teachings were condemned by the second ecumenical council.<sup>24</sup> Eunomius based the teaching

<sup>20</sup> John of Damascus, "An exact exposition of the orthodox faith" in *Nicene and Post- Nicene fathers*, Vol. IX. (Eerdmans, 1898), 83.

<sup>21</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, "The divine names" in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987), 52.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>23</sup> On the Eunomian Controversy and the nature of language see Spyridoula Athanasopoulou-Kypriou, "The doxological nature of all language and the Eunomian Controversy" in *Samuel Beckett's 'Trilogy' and the Soul's Ascent to God: Reading a Literary Work as a Sacrament of Communion With God*, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Manchester 2002, 147-177. Georgios Martzelos, *Η Ουσία και οι Ενέργειες του Θεού κατά τον Μέγαν Βασίλειον* (Thessaloniki 1984)

<sup>24</sup> In the first canon of the second ecumenical council (Constantinople 381) the heresy of Eunomius or the Anomean heresy is condemned along with all heresies (kai anaqematisqhnaí pasan airesin kai eidikwǵ thn twn Eunomianwn eit oun Anomoiwn). Ioannis Karmiris, *Dogmatica et Symbolica Monumenta Orthodoxae Catholicae Ecclesiae*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Vol. I (Athens, 1960), 132. At this point, it must be said that the council did not make any particular mention of Eunomius' teachings about language. However, since Eunomius' heresy is based upon his ideas on language, then condemning his heresy implies an equal disapproval if not condemnation of his theory about language as the primary cause of his heresy.

about the inferiority of the Son and about his being unlike the Father upon the fact that Father and Son were called with different names: the Father was called ingenerate whereas the Son generate. According to Eunomius, different names indicate different essences, for in the name lies the essence (*ταῖς τῶν ὀνομάτων διαφοραῖς καὶ τὴν τῆς οὐσίας παραλλαγὴν ἐμφανίσαντας*)<sup>25</sup> For Eunomius, names in general are designed (by God) to differentiate the essence of each thing and that there is a natural conformity between names and things.

From the Orthodox side, Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa addressed and discussed several issues relating to the Eunomian controversy, including the problem of the divine knowledge, the relationship of the three persons of the Holy Trinity, and the problem of the nature of language. First, to Eunomius' claim that God's essence is comprehensible by people, both Basil and Gregory responded that the divine essence is beyond human comprehensibility and remains ungraspable and incommunicable. Speaking of the essence of God, Basil says that it is beyond human knowledge (*ὑπὲρ πάσαν γνῶσιν ἀνθρώπων*).<sup>26</sup>

To Eunomius' claim that words are given to people by God, Gregory responds that word-building is a human endeavour. Departing from the idea that after the creation, Adam names the world at God's request, Gregory asks a sarcastic question: if it is all too pious to ascribe the invention of names to God, then why did God ask Adam to give names to the creation? How is it possible that God Himself ignores this kind of piety? In Gregory's own words, the question is as follows:

How, too, is it that the Deity Himself never knew of this kind of holiness, when He did not give names from above to the animals which He had formed, but gave away this power of name-giving to Adam?<sup>27</sup>

For Gregory, it is the human faculty of conception that invents words, which in turn come after things. As Gregory says:

I say, then, that people have a right to such word-building, adapting their appellations to their subject, each person according to his/her judgment; and that there is no absurdity in this, such as our controversialist makes a pretence of, shuddering at it as at some gruesome hobgoblin, and that we are fully justified in allowing the use of such fresh applications of words in respect to all things that can be named, and to God Himself.<sup>28</sup>

Given that it is human beings who invent words in order to speak of things, the question arises as to what words signify. Do words designate the essence of things or simply their operations and attributes? Since for Gregory, the essence not only of God

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<sup>25</sup> Basil the Great, *Adversus Eunomium*, MPG 29: 573.

<sup>26</sup> Basil the Great, *Adversus Eunomium*, MPG 29: 544.

<sup>27</sup> [The Greek text: *πῶς δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ θεὸς ἀγνοεῖ τὸ τοιοῦτον εἶδος τῆς ὀσιότητος ὅς γε οὐκ ἀνωθεν ἐπιτιθησὶ τοῖς παρ' αὐτοῦ πλασθεῖσι ζῴοις τὰς προσηγορίας, ἀλλὰ τῷ Ἀδὰμ τὴν ἐξουσίαν τῆς ὀνοματοποιίας χαρίζεται;* Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium*, book 2, chapter 1, section 547.]

<sup>28</sup> [The Greek text: *Φημι τοίνυν τῆς τοιαύτης ὀνοματοποιίας τοὺς ἀνθρώπους εἶναι κυρίους κατὰ τὸ φανέν ἐκάστῳ προσφυσῶς ἐφαρμόζοντας τῷ ὑποκειμένῳ τὰς κλήσεις, καὶ μηδὲν ἄτοπον εἶναι, ὅπερ ὡς φοβερὸν τε καὶ φρικῶδες μορμολυττόμενος ὁ λογογράφος προτείνεται, τὸ νεωτέρας εἶναι τὰς τῶν ὀνομάτων θέσεις ὁμολογεῖν ἐπὶ παντὸς αὐτοῦ τοῦ κατονομαζομένου πράγματος καὶ ἐπ' αὐτοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ. Ibid., book 2, chapter 1, section 148.]*

but also of everything is incomprehensible, incommunicable and ineffable,<sup>29</sup> it follows that words designate only the operations and attributes of the things and are of a later origin than the essence of things. So, whereas the essence remains unknown and ineffable, the operations come after the essence and can be experienced and spoken about. This being said, it follows that God's essence is incomprehensible and prior to His (God's) operations and effects. People perceive God's operations as they appear to people's senses. People, then, transform the perceptions of God's effects into conceptions, that is, into concepts and express them in words, as they are best able. Hence, God (and anything in the world for that matter) receives His appellations from what is experienced by senses and is believed to be His operations in regard to people's life. Even the name "theos" (God) indicates a divine attribute (*θεὸν γὰρ αὐτὸν λέγοντες τὸν ἔφορον καὶ ἐπόπτην καὶ διορατικὸν τῶν κεκρυμμένων νοοῦντες*). Gregory expresses this idea as follows:

For God is not an expression, neither has He His essence in voice or utterance. But God is of Himself what also He is believed to be, but He is named, by those who call upon Him, not what He is essentially (for the nature of Him Who alone is is unspeakable), but He receives His appellations from what are believed to be His operations in regard to our life. Take an instance ready to our hand; when we speak of God, we so call Him from regarding Him as overlooking and surveying all things, and seeing through the things that are hidden. But if His essence is prior to His works, and we understand His works by our senses, and express them in words as we are best able, why should we be afraid of calling things by words of later origin than themselves? For if we stay to interpret any of the attributes of God till we understand them, and we understand them only by what His works teach us, and if His power precedes its existence, and depends on the will of God, while His will resides in the spontaneity of the divine nature, are we not clearly taught that the words which represent things are of later origin than the things themselves, and that the words which are framed to express the operations of things are reflections of the things themselves?<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Commenting on the incomprehensibility of the essence of anything, Gregory writes that "whosoever searches the whole of revelation will find therein no doctrine of the Divine nature, nor indeed of anything else that has a substantial existence. For we are ignorant of everything, including of ourselves". [The Greek text: *Διὰ τοῦτο πᾶσάν τις θεόπνευστον φωνὴν ἐρευνῶμενος οὐκ ἂν εὔροι τῆς θείας φύσεως τὴν διδασκαλίαν οὐδὲ μὴν ἄλλου τινὸς τῶν κατ' οὐσίαν ὑφεστηκότων ὅθεν ἐν ἀγνοίᾳ πάντων διάγομεν πρῶτον ἑαυτοὺς ἀγνοοῦντες οἱ ἄνθρωποι, ἔπειτα δὲ καὶ τὰ ἄλλα πάντα. Ibid., book 2, chapter 1, sections 106-107.]*

<sup>30</sup> [The Greek text: *οὐ γὰρ ῥῆμα ὁ θεὸς οὐδὲ ἐν φωνῇ καὶ φθόγγῳ ἔχει τὸ εἶναι. ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν θεὸς ἐστὶν καθ' ἑαυτὸν, ὃ τι ποτὲ καὶ εἶναι πεπίστευται, ὀνομάζεται δὲ παρὰ τῶν ἐπικαλουμένων οὐκ αὐτὸ ὅ ἐστιν ἄφραστος γὰρ ἡ φύσις τοῦ ὄντος, ἀλλ' ἐξ ὧν ἐνεργεῖν τι περὶ τὴν ζωὴν ἡμῶν πεπίστευται τὰς ἐπωνυμίας ἔχει, οἷον καὶ αὐτὸ τοῦτο τὸ ἐκ τοῦ προχείρου λεγόμενον θεὸν γὰρ αὐτὸν λέγοντες τὸν ἔφορον καὶ ἐπόπτην καὶ διορατικὸν τῶν κεκρυμμένων νοοῦντες ἐπικαλούμεθα. εἰ δὲ προῦφέστηκε τῶν ἐνεργειῶν ἡ οὐσία, νοοῦμεν δὲ τὰς ἐνεργείας δι' ὧν αἰσθανόμεθα, ῥήμασι δὲ ταύτας ὅπως ἂν ἡ δυνατὸν ἐξαγγέλλομεν, τίς ἔτι καταλείπεται φόβος νεώτερα τῶν πραγμάτων τὰ ὀνόματα λέγειν; εἰ γὰρ μὴ πρότερον ἐρμηνευόμεν τι τῶν περὶ θεοῦ λεγομένων, πρὶν ἂν νοήσωμεν, νοοῦμεν δὲ δι' ὧν ἐκ τῶν ἐνεργειῶν διδασκόμεθα, προῦφέστηκε δὲ τῆς ἐνεργείας ἡ δύναμις, ἡ δὲ δύναμις ἐξήρηται τοῦ θεοῦ βουλῆματος, τὸ δὲ βούλημα ἐν τῇ ἐξουσίᾳ τῆς θείας ἀπόκειται φύσεως, ἄρ' οὐ σαφῶς διδασκόμεθα ὅτι ἐπιγίνονται τοῖς πράγμασιν αἱ σημαντικαὶ τῶν γινομένων προσηγορίαι καὶ ὡσπερ σκιαὶ τῶν πραγμάτων εἰσὶν αἱ φωναί, πρὸς τὰς κινήσεις τῶν ὑφεστώτων σχηματιζόμεναι, Ibid., book 2, chapter 1, sections 148-150.]*

In a more systematic way, it can be said that for the Orthodox there is an unbridgeable distance between the linguistic sign (σημεῖον) and the referent, that is, the reality to which the sign points to without ever being able to signify its essence. Between the signs and the referred reality there is no natural relationship. Signs are conventional products of the human faculty of conception. Being unable to relate as much to the essence of things as to the divine “reality”,<sup>31</sup> signs signify concepts, that is, the product of the human faculty of conception.<sup>32</sup> Speaking of the relationship between the signs and the “reality” of God, Gregory says that God is greater and more sublime than any sign by which God may be known or by which his power and operations may be recognized and spoken about. Referring to Abraham, Gregory writes:

When he had gone beyond every conjecture respecting the divine nature which is suggested by any name among all our conceptions of God, having purged his reason of all such fancies, and arrived at a faith unalloyed and free from all prejudice, he made this a sure and manifest token of the knowledge of God, that is, the belief that God is greater and more sublime than any token by which He may be known<sup>33</sup>

The linguistic sign consists of the signifier or the acoustic image (ῥήματα, φωνῆς ἦχον) and the signified or concept (ἐννοια, νόημα) that the acoustic image expresses.<sup>34</sup> The relationship between the acoustic image and the concept is not natural but arbitrary. Thus, for Gregory, if people ascribe the same concept to apparently different acoustic images, then these acoustic images can be, in a manner, of like force and equivalent to one another. As he says:

For whether you say that God is the first cause and principle of all, or speak of Him as without origin, whether you speak of Him as of ingenerate or eternal subsistence, as the cause of all or as alone without cause, all these words are, in a manner, of like force, and equivalent to one another, as far as the meaning of the things signified is concerned.<sup>35</sup>

Analogously, people can ascribe any concept to a particular acoustic image for there is no natural relation between concepts and acoustic images. Hence, in the

<sup>31</sup> Commenting on the incomprehensibility of the essence of anything, Gregory writes that “whosoever searches the whole of revelation will find therein no doctrine of the Divine nature, nor indeed of anything else that has a substantial existence. For we are ignorant of everything, including of ourselves”. [The Greek text: *Διὰ τοῦτο πᾶσαν τις θεόπνευστον φωνὴν ἐρευνώμενος οὐκ ἂν εὔροι τῆς θείας φύσεως τὴν διδασκαλίαν οὐδὲ μὴν ἄλλου τινὸς τῶν κατ’ οὐσίαν ὑφεστηκότων· ὅθεν ἐν ἀγνοίᾳ πάντων διάγομεν πρῶτον ἑαυτοὺς ἀγνοοῦντες οἱ ἄνθρωποι, ἐπειτα δὲ καὶ τὰ ἄλλα πάντα.* Ibid., book 2, chapter 1, sections 106-107.]

<sup>32</sup> “Le signe linguistique unit non une chose et un nom, mais un concept et une image acoustique”. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Paris: Payot, 1949), 98.

<sup>33</sup> [The Greek text: *ἐκκαθήρας τὸν λογισμὸν τῶν τοιούτων ὑπονοιῶν ἀμιγῆ τε καὶ καθαρὰν πάσης ἐννοίας τὴν πίστιν ἀναλαβὼν, τοῦτο σημεῖον ἐποίησατο τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπιγνώσεως ἀπλανές τε καὶ ἐκδηλον, τὸ κρείττω καὶ ὑψηλότερον παντὸς γνωριστικοῦ σημείου τὸν θεὸν εἶναι πιστεύσαι.* Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium*, book 2, chapter 1, section 89.]

<sup>34</sup> “Nous appelons signe la combinaison du concept et de l’image acoustique”, Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, 99.

<sup>35</sup> [The Greek text: *εἴτε γὰρ ἀρχὴν αὐτὸν καὶ αἴτιον τοῦ παντὸς εἶναι λέγοις εἴτε ἀναρχον αὐτὸν ὀνομάζεις εἴτε ἀγεννήτως εἶναι εἴτε ἐξ αἰδίου ὑφεστάναι εἴτε τοῦ παντὸς αἴτιον εἴτε ἐξ οὐδενὸς αἰτίου μόνον, πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα ἰσοστάσιά πως ἀλλήλοις ἐστὶ κατὰ τὴν δύναμιν τῶν σημαινομένων καὶ ὁμοτίμως ἔχει τὰ ῥήματα,* Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium*, book 2, chapter 1, section 137.]

Scripture, the Lord may well be called a Curse, and Sin, and a Heifer, and a Leopard, and such like names. These words, that is, these acoustic images when taken to refer to and signify concepts that are alien to the way that Lord manifests Himself and is experienced by people, seem not above suspicion. Nevertheless, by ascribing concepts, which are in accordance with the way that Lord manifests Himself, to these acoustic images, people can reconcile these words with that piety<sup>36</sup> and reverence which is God's due.<sup>37</sup> As Gregory writes:

For if he (Eunomius) had learned the divine names, he must have known that our Lord is called a curse and sin, and a heifer, and a lion's whelp, and a bear bereaved of her whelps, and a leopard and such like names, according to various modes of conception, by the Holy Scripture, the sacred and inspired writers by such names, as by well-directed shafts, indicating the central point of the idea they had in view; even though these words, when taken in their literal and obvious signification, seem not above suspicion, but each single one of them, unless we allow it to be predicated of God by some process of conception, will not escape the taint of a blasphemous suggestion. But it would be a lengthy task to bring them forward, and elucidate in every case how, in the general idea, these words have been perverted out of their obvious meanings, and how it is only in connection with the conceptive faculty that the names of God can be reconciled with that reverence which is His due.<sup>38</sup>

What the Orthodox try to stress is that words do not have a univocal meaning, be it conventional or natural. The understanding of language as an economy of signs, whose meaning is definitely determined, represents a highly utilitarian approach to language. Univocal meaning may be ascribed to words with the hope that the informativeness of language is facilitated. Thus, if one fixes semantics, one has fixed the informativeness of any sentence. However, by fixing semantics, one suppresses the metaphoricity of language. For the Orthodox, the meaning of a linguistic sign is analogical and metaphorical and that is why a sign can always assert something else, stand for something else, become in other words an allegory (άλλο-αγορεύει).

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<sup>36</sup> The word piety translates the Greek word *eu/se/beia* that for Gregory means right thinking about God and is opposed to idolatry.

<sup>37</sup> Michel René Barnes refers to Gregory's concern over the inherent ambiguity of language because language and dialectic can be used for good or evil. A more thorough account of the ambiguity of language is found in *Against Eunomius* (book 1), where Gregory argues that each word contains an implicit reference to its contrary because language mirrors the existence of contrary elements in the created world. *The Power of God: Δύναμις in Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 252-253. Thus, words do not have univocal meaning. The meaning of the words depends on those people who employ them, ascribing meaning to them.

<sup>38</sup> [The Greek text: *εἰ γὰρ πεπαιδευτοὶ τὰς θείας φωνάς, ἔγνω πάντως ἂν ὅτι καὶ κατάρα καὶ ἁμαρτία καὶ παροιστρώσα δάμαλις καὶ σκύμνος λέοντος καὶ ἄρκτος ἀπορουμένη καὶ πάρδαλις καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα κατὰ διαφόρους ἐπινοίας παρὰ τῆς γραφῆς ὁ κύριος λέγεται, τῶν ἁγίων τε καὶ θεοφόρων ἀνδρῶν τὸν σκοπὸν τοῦ νοήματος πρὸς ὃν ἀφεύρων εὐθυβόλως τοῖς ὀνόμασι τούτοις διατρανούντων, εἰ καὶ διαβεβλήσθαι ταῦτα δοκεῖ πῶς κατὰ τὴν πρόχειρον ἐνδειξίαν τὰ ὀνόματα· ἅπερ ἔκαστον εἰ μὴ κατὰ τινὰ τις ἐπίνοιαν εὐαγῶς ἐπιλέγεσθαι τῷ θεῷ συγχωρήσειεν, οὐ καθαρῶς τῆς ἀσεβειώσεως ὑπονοίας ἢ λέξις. καὶ μακρὸν ἂν εἴη περὶ πάντων παριστάν τε καὶ ἀποδεικνύειν πῶς ταῦτα καὶ διαβέβληται κατὰ τὴν κοινὴν ὑπόληψιν ἐκ τῆς προχείρου ἐμφάσεως καὶ ὁ τῆς ἐπινοίας λόγος οἰκειοῖ τῇ εὐσεβείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ τὰ ὀνόματα, Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium*, book 2, chapter 1, section 300-301.]*

In this respect, for the Orthodox, the quality, dignity and meaning of words do not lie in the words themselves, for there is no natural correspondence between words and reality. The dignity and quality of words and consequently of all language depends upon the people who employ them (*ἐν τῇ τῶν ὀνομαζόντων ἐξουσίᾳ κείσθαι τὴν τῶν ὀνομάτων ἀξίαν*).

In the Scriptures, however, one realizes that most of the names and pronouns concerning the Divine are masculine.<sup>39</sup> One might argue that God is being revealed as the “Father” who sends His “Son” to save the humankind. But this happens because all the names and attributes of the three persons (hypostases) of the Trinitarian God are offered in an anthropological way. Otherwise, if it had not been for this anthropomorphism there would have been no talk about God at all. Elizabeth Johnson argues that it would be a serious mistake to think that God’s self-revelation through powerful acts and inspired words in the Jewish tradition and through the history and destiny of Jesus Christ which give rise to the Christian tradition removes the ultimate unknowability of God.<sup>40</sup> In the *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox faith*, John of Damascus says that

since we find many terms used symbolically in the Scriptures concerning God which are more applicable to that which has body, we should recognise that it is quite impossible for us men clothed about with this dense covering of flesh to understand or speak of the divine and lofty and immaterial energies of the Godhead, except by the use of images and types and symbols derived from our own life. So then all the statements concerning God, that imply body, are symbols, but have a higher meaning; for the Deity is simple and formless.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, if the Deity is simple and formless, it cannot be comprehended by means of the human categories.<sup>42</sup> In the Orthodox theological tradition the word “hyperousios” –that is to say, supraessential, supranatural, suprasubstantial, beyond-being– has been coined as the technical term to express the convection of God’s incomprehensibility.<sup>43</sup> The Greek term “hyperousios” indicates that God’s essence is considered to be beyond all categories of expression.<sup>44</sup>

Taking into consideration that the Deity cannot be comprehended by means of the human reason, it becomes clear that the names “Father” and “Son”, when referring to God, do not have their roots in the human understanding of these names. It is, actually,

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<sup>39</sup> There are, however, evidences for female language for the Deity in both Scripture and the tradition. See Elizabeth A Johnson, C.S.J., “The incomprehensibility of God and the image of God male and female,” *Theological Studies* 45 (1984) 441-465.

<sup>40</sup> Johnson, “The incomprehensibility of God and the image of God male and female,” 441.

<sup>41</sup> John of Damascus, “An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith”, 13.

<sup>42</sup> By categories I refer to the divisions and distinctions through which we organize descriptions, facts, and information into knowledge.

<sup>43</sup> For a development of the theme of divine incomprehensibility see also: Gordon Kaufman, *God the problem* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1972).

<sup>44</sup> Cf, Thomas Hopko, “Apophatic Theology and the Naming of God in Eastern Orthodox Tradition” in *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism*, 150.

the divine ontology that sets the meaning of the terms. It is not an already established meaning of the terms that dictates the divine being.<sup>45</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius claims that

The procession of our intellectual activity can at least go this far, that all fatherhood and all sonship are gifts bestowed by that supreme source of Fatherhood and Sonship on us and on the celestial powers. This is why Godlike minds come to be and to be named “Gods” or “Sons of Gods” or “Father of Gods.” Fatherhood and Sonship of this kind are brought to perfection in a spiritual fashion, that is incorporeally, immaterially, and in the domain of mind, and this is the work of the divine Spirit, which is located beyond all conceptual immateriality and all divinization, and it is the work too of the Father and of the Son who supremely transcend all divine Fatherhood and Sonship. In reality there is no exact likeness between caused and cause, for the caused carry within themselves only such images of their originating sources as are possible for them, whereas the causes themselves are located in a realm transcending the caused, according to the argument regarding their source.<sup>46</sup>

In fact, the names “Father”, “Son” and “Spirit” are the signifiers of a relationship between the “hypostases” (persons) of the Trinitarian God. Gregory Nazianzen argues that

Father is not a name either of an essence or of an action, most clever sirs. But it is the name of the relation in which the Father stands to the Son, and the Son to the Father.<sup>47</sup>

The Sonship of the second hypostases (person) of the Holy Trinity signifies only the property of a person in terms of a relationship and not a characteristic of the male sex.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, to the questions raised why it was the Son of God, and not the Father or the Spirit, that became human (Anthropos) and what having become human He achieved, John of Damascus responds that

Wherefore the Son of God became Son of Man (sic) [anthropos] in order that His individuality might endure. For since He was the Son of God, He became Son of Man, being made flesh of the holy Virgin and not losing the individuality<sup>49</sup> of Sonship.<sup>50</sup>

Therefore, the sonship is only a property of the second person of the Trinity and not a characteristic of the male sex. Besides, the term “sonship”, when used to speak of the relation between God and human beings – God is the Father while human beings are His Sons – includes both men and women.

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<sup>45</sup> Geoffrey Wainwright, “Trinitarian Worship” in *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism*, 218.

<sup>46</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, “The Divine names,” 64.

<sup>47</sup> Gregory Nazianzen, “On the Son” in *Nicene and post-nicene Fathers*, Volume VII (Eerdmans, 1893), 307.

<sup>48</sup> This idea is very well analysed in K. Γιοκαρίνης, *Η Ιερωσύνη των Γυναικών στο Πλαίσιο της Οικουμενικής Κίνησης* (Κατερίνη: εκδ. Επέκταση, 1995), 400-418. In Greek

<sup>49</sup> The Greek term for individuality is “ιδιότης” and the Latin “proprietas.” In other words, individuality means the propriety that which is distinctive of each.

<sup>50</sup> John of Damascus, “An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith”, 75.

Furthermore, the use of the names “Father”, “Son” and “Spirit” for the hypostases (persons) of the Trinitarian God are offered to people by virtue of God’s benevolence. As John of Damascus puts it:

Through His unspeakable goodness, then, it pleased Him to be called by names that we could understand, that we might not be altogether cut off from the knowledge of Him but should have some notion of Him, however vague.<sup>51</sup>

God is incomprehensible and nameless. No one has seen God at any time. The Deity is ineffable and incomprehensible.<sup>52</sup> God’s names cannot be identified with God’s essence and actions. Besides, the proper use of names is only to explain the actual things. John of Damascus suggests that

The Deity being incomprehensible is also assuredly nameless. Therefore, since we know not His essence, let us not seek for a name for His essence. For names are explanations of actual things.<sup>53</sup>

Considering the incomprehensibility of God, people cannot project the fatherhood or the sonship – as they understand these notions – to the Divinity. Consequently, people, and especially men, cannot justify patriarchy, understood as the ontological superiority of men, by misusing the symbolical and conventional religious language. In fact it is blasphemous to use the image and name of the Holy to justify patriarchal domination. In terms of this theological tradition, the masculinist religious language does not mean that God is male, for the image of God as predominantly male is fundamentally idolatrous. God is genderless, for God is incomprehensible and beyond all cosmic distinctions and dichotomies.

Taking into account that God is beyond the male and the female sex, women can use the masculinist religious symbolic as a horizon for their becoming divine. In fact, women can use the masculinist symbolic so far as they manage to negate it, go beyond it and refer to the transcendent reality of the Divinity.

However, if women feel that they cannot use the masculinist symbols as a horizon for becoming divine, they can very easily change them into whatever they want. For God’s nature can be referred to with all possible names, images, and attributes that exist in the created order – abstract and concrete, positive and negative, spiritual and physical, masculine and feminine, animate and inanimate – because the divine nature is the metaphysical source and example of everything created. And so it is, says Pseudo-Dionysius, “that as Cause of all, he is rightly nameless and yet has the names of everything that is.” In so far as God created both male and female in the divine image and is therefore the source of the perfection of both, God can be represented equally well by images of either. As Elizabeth Johnson thinks: “Both (male and female images) are needed for a less inadequate imaging of God, in whose image the human race is created.”<sup>54</sup>

There are some theologians, however, who argue that although in the Orthodox tradition God’s nature can be referred to with all possible names and images, the proper

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>54</sup> Johnson, “The incomprehensibility of God and the image of God male and female,” 460.

names of “Father,” “Son” and “Spirit” cannot change because they are not subject to apophatic qualification and they are never transcended or negated as are all the metaphysical properties and metaphysical images attributed to God’s essence.<sup>55</sup> In my judgment, in so far as the fatherhood and the sonship of God are subject to apophatic qualification, for, as Pseudo-Dionysius claims, they transcend the corporeal understanding of fatherhood and sonship, the names “Father” and “Son” are also transcended, negated and subject to any necessary changes. Moreover, as Elizabeth Johnson claims, it is only if the full reality of woman as well as man enters into the conceptualization of God that the idolatrous fixation on one image can be broken and the mystery of God can be more appreciated.<sup>56</sup>

From what I have already said I hope it is clear that according to the theological tradition that still believes in the ontological difference of the divine, linguistic symbols have only a referential function. Affirmative symbols are offered to be negated and transcended. By negating all religious language, be it feminine or masculine, we want to ascend from the perceptible to the intelligible, return to the simple transcendent God and thus become divine. In *The Celestial Hierarchy*, Pseudo-Dionysius says:

Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights.” But there is something more. Inspired by the Father, each procession of the Light spreads itself generously toward us, and, in its power to unify, it stirs us by lifting us up. It returns us back to the oneness and deifying simplicity of the Father who gathers us in. For, as the sacred Word says, “from him and to him are all things.”<sup>57</sup>

Nevertheless, in order for the creatures to ascend from the perceptible to the intelligible and return to the simple God, the divine grace and enlightenment are needed. The reception of this divine enlightenment depends upon the receptive ability of each individual and this receptive ability is dependent upon the purity of the heart and the mind. Nothing should rest between the Godhead and the human beings and prevent people from receiving the divine enlightenment and thus from ascending from the perceptible to the intelligible. When we pray to God, nothing cosmic must remain in the centre of our prayers. For God is nothing, in the sense that God is nothing cosmic. As Meister Eckhart says:

When I pray for something, I do not pray; when I pray for nothing, I really pray. ... To pray for anything except God might be called idolatry or injustice. Right prayer is prayer in spirit and in truth....Really to pray, one must want nothing, for as far as God is concerned there is neither Henry nor Conrad. ...As I said not long ago, when one puts something before God, he makes God nothing, and nothing, God.<sup>58</sup>

Moreover, in an analogous way it is in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* that Gregory of Nyssa systematizes the detailed description of the stages of the soul’s

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<sup>55</sup> Hopko, “Apophatic Theology and the Naming of God in Eastern Orthodox Tradition,” 158.

<sup>56</sup> Johnson, “The incomprehensibility of God and the image of God male and female,” 463.

<sup>57</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, “The Celestial Hierarchy” in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 145.

<sup>58</sup> Meister Eckhart, “Fragments,” trans. Raymond Bernard Blakney in *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1941), 245.

progress in perfection found in *The Life of Moses* and speaks clearly of a threefold distinction of these stages.<sup>59</sup> Thus, Gregory writes:

Moses' vision of God began with light (Exod. 19.18); afterwards God spoke to him in a cloud (Exod. 20.21). But when Moses rose higher and became more perfect, he saw God in the darkness (Exod. 24.15-18). Now the doctrine we are taught here is as follows. Our initial withdrawal from wrong and erroneous ideas of God is a transition from darkness to light. Next comes a closer awareness of hidden things, and by this the soul is guided through sense phenomena to the world of the invisible. And this awareness is a kind of cloud, which overshadows all appearances, and slowly guides and accustoms the soul to look towards what is hidden. Next the soul makes progress through all these stages and goes on higher, and as she leaves below all that human nature can attain, she enters within the secret chamber of the divine knowledge, and here she is cut off on all sides by the divine darkness. Now she leaves outside all that can be grasped by sense or by reason, and the only thing left for her contemplation is the invisible and the incomprehensible. And here God is, as the Scripture tell us in connection with Moses: *But Moses went to the dark cloud wherein God was* (Exod. 20.21).<sup>60</sup>

Therefore, in so far as we have to negate religious language so as to ascend from the perceptible to the intelligible and return to God, it is not the language we use but the negation of speech and thought the condition of our divinization. And to be more precise, our divinization does not depend on the negation of speech and thought either. It is rather the divine grace and our willingness to accept it the conditions of our becoming divine.

However, although in terms of this Orthodox theological thought, the feminization of religious language is not a condition of women's becoming divine, it is a *sine qua*

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<sup>59</sup> In his work, *In Inscriptiones Psalmorum*, Gregory speaks of five stages of the spiritual life, corresponding to the five divisions of the Psalter in this treatise. The imprecise nature of Gregory's discussions of the stages of the spiritual life comes as a result of the fact that, as Ronald Heine points out, "the Biblical text being followed in each treatise is more important to the structure Gregory gives to the spiritual life than any preconceived view of spiritual progress". Ronald E. Heine, *Gregory of Nyssa's Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 79. What is important to keep in mind at this point is that, despite the imprecise nature of his discussions of the stages of the spiritual life, Gregory has a concept of different levels of spirituality, which are progressively achieved, and that there are correspondences between the different schemes of the stages of the soul's ascent to God that can be found in different places of his *oeuvre*. On that subject see: *Ibid.*, 71-79.

<sup>60</sup> Herbert Musurillo (ed.), *From Glory to Glory: Texts from Gregory of Nyssa's Mystical Writings* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995), 247. [The Greek text: *ὡς μὲν ἐν τῷ φωτὶ ἤρξατο ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπιφάνεια, μετὰ ταῦτα διὰ νεφέλης αὐτῷ ὁ θεὸς διαλέγεται, εἶτα ὑψηλότερος καὶ τελειότερος ἤδη γενόμενος ἐν γνόφῳ τὸν θεὸν βλέπει. ὁ δὲ διὰ τούτου μανθάνομεν τοιοῦτον ἔστιν· ἡ πρώτη ἀπὸ τῶν ψευδῶν καὶ πεπλανημένων περὶ θεοῦ ὑπολήψεων ἀναχώρησις ἢ ἀπὸ τοῦ σκότους εἰς φῶς ἔστι μετὰστασις, ἢ δὲ προσεχέστερα τῶν κρυπτῶν κατανόησις ἢ διὰ τῶν φαινομένων χειραγωγούσα τὴν ψυχὴν πρὸς τὴν ἀόρατον φύσιν οἷον τις νεφέλη γίνεται τὸ φαινόμενον μὲν ἅπαν ἐπισκιάζουσα πρὸς δὲ τὸ κρύφιον βλέπει τὴν ψυχὴν χειραγωγούσα καὶ συνεθίζουσα, ἢ δὲ διὰ τούτων ὀδεύουσα πρὸς τὰ ἀνω ψυχῆ, ὅσον ἐφικτὸν ἔστι τῇ ἀνθρωπίνῃ φύσει καταλιπούσα, ἐντὸς τῶν ἀδύτων τῆς θεογνωσίας γίνεται ὡς κατὰ τὴν γνόφῳ πανταχόθεν διαληφθεῖσα, ἐν ᾧ τοῦ φαινομένου τε καὶ καταλαμβανομένου παντός ἐξω καταλειφθέντος μόνον ὑπολείπεται τῇ θεωρίᾳ τῆς ψυχῆς τὸ ἀόρατόν τε καὶ ἀκατάληπτον. ἐν ᾧ ἔστιν ὁ θεός, καθὼς φησι περὶ τοῦ νομοθέτου ὁ λόγος ὅτι Εἰσήλθε δὲ Μωϋσῆς εἰς τὸν γνόφον οὗ ἦν ὁ θεός.* Gregory of Nyssa, "In Canticum canticorum" in H. Langerbeck (ed.) *Gregorii Nysseni Opera*, vol.6 (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 322-323.]

## BIBLE TRANSLATIONS AND GENDER-INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

*non* for not identifying God with a particular sex, namely the male. *Besides, the very incomprehensibility of God demands a proliferation of images and a variety of names, each of which acts as a corrective against the tendency of any one to become reified and literal.*

Concluding, I would like to go back to the question I raised at the beginning of my paper: why do we want to change religious language into a more feminine form? Is it because we want to protect God from being identified with a sex? Is it because men have used the conventional religious language in order to justify patriarchy? Or is it rather because we lack a feminine religious language without which we cannot become divine? Whichever the answer is, it is dependent upon a specific theological understanding and certain presuppositions. That is to say that if we claim that God is a human projection, religious symbols are themselves the horizon to which we aspire. In which case inappropriate masculine linguistic symbols prevent us from becoming divine. On the contrary, if we believe that God is not a human creation and is really transcendent, symbols have only a referential function and they are not our horizon. In this case the masculine religious language has to change not because it prevents us from becoming divine but because if we insist on its unchangeability it means that we identify the masculine symbolic with the divine reality and this is nothing else but idolatry. It is clear that in both cases the masculine language when speaking of God has to change but the reasons for this change are different. Although it is up to each woman to decide whether or not she needs this change and why she wants this change, we could all be aware of the different theological presuppositions that each reasoning conveys.

INTERNATIONAL HELLENIC UNIVERSITY

MASTER IN ORTHODOX ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY

WEDNESDAY  
21-APRIL  
5:00pm-7:00pm

INTERNATIONAL HELLENIC UNIVERSITY

"BIBLE TRANSLATIONS AND GENDER-INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE"

PROF. SPYRIDOULA DENIA  
ATHANASOPOULOU-KYPRIOU

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**THE NEW PERSPECTIVES IN PAULINE STUDIES  
AND ITS ECUMENICAL CHALLENGES**

*Rev. Dr. George Adam*

I would like to express my joy and appreciation for the privilege to be among you all. I am an Evangelical pastor; I minister at the Second Evangelical Church of Athens. Theologically speaking, I can describe myself as Evangelical and, more specifically, Reformed. I have always felt very welcome during my studies at the University of Thessaloniki under the supervision of prof. Vassiliadis and I am blessed to say that I still feel this way.

In the first part of this presentation, I will try to explain as briefly and comprehensively as I can, in broad strokes, what the New Perspective is in Pauline Studies, and what the Evangelical Protestant response is; so that we will be informed about what the issues are. I hope this will provide an “insider’s view”, and that will be educational in and of itself.

In the second part, I will switch gears and put on the pastoral ‘hat’ and share with you how some of the issues the New Perspective raises can be a challenge, but can also be of great help, both within the context of the local parish, as well as in the context of ecumenical dialogue.

To give you a “feel” let me quote Carl Trueman,

*To put it bluntly, it seems to me that the current revision of the doctrine of justification as formulated by the advocates of the so-called New Perspective on Paul is nothing less than a fundamental repudiation not just of that Protestantism which seeks to stand within the creedal and doctrinal trajectories of the Reformation but also of virtually the entire Western tradition on justification from at least as far back as Augustine.<sup>1</sup>*

He added furthermore:

*For Protestants, the issue is particularly acute. Given the role of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith both in the theology of the Reformation, and as perhaps the defining feature of Protestantism over against post-Tridentine Catholicism, the kind of revision being proposed by the New Perspective involves a fundamental re-definition of what Protestantism, at least in its conservative, confessional form, is.<sup>2</sup>*

One can sense that there are some strong feelings involved; so, yes, there are some ecumenical challenges here.

The New Perspective is not really “new”. In the first phase, the New Perspective was supported in 1853 by Lipsius, Sabatier, Luderman, Weizsacker, and Wrede. More

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Trueman, “A Man More Sinned Against than Sinning? The Portrait of Martin Luther in Contemporary New Testament Scholarship: Some Casual Observations of a Mere Historian”, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/man-more-sinned-against-sinning-portrait-martin-lu/>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

recently by George Foot Moore, Krister Stendahl, George Howard, Joseph Tyson, Nils Alstrup Dahl, and Hans Joachim Schoeps.<sup>3</sup>

However, E.P. Sanders, 'Paul and Palestinian Judaism (1977) was the more recent work that brought the discussion to the front. According to Sanders, Judaism has not been interpreted correctly.

*The general Christian view of Judaism, or of some part of it, as a religion of legalistic works-righteousness goes on.... One of the intentions of the present chapter, to put the matter clearly, is to destroy that view...by showing that the Weber/Bousset/Billerbeck view, as it applies to Tannaitic literature, is based on a massive perversion and misunderstanding of the material.*<sup>4</sup>

According to the New Perspective, "covenantal nomism" is a better paradigm for the study of Judaism.

*Briefly put, covenantal nomism is the view that one's place in God's plan is established on the basis of the covenant and that the covenant requires as the proper response of man his obedience to its commandments, while providing means of atonement for transgression.*<sup>5</sup>

Paul, therefore, has been misunderstood at least since Augustine and his debates with Pelagius, though especially from Luther during the Reformation.<sup>6</sup> First century Judaism has been misunderstood for centuries and that means that the church has misunderstood what Paul taught in Romans and Galatians.

The New Perspective has been influenced by various views. Krister Stendahl's *Paul among the Jews and Gentiles* (1976) was published just one year before Sander's book. Stendahl talked about the introspective conscience of the west and he offered the wider framework within which covenantal nomism and the new perspective grew. James Dunn was the first to use the term "New Perspective" in 1982. James Dunn formed a comprehensive description of new perspective.<sup>7</sup> He believed that the problem of Judaism was not legalism, but nationalism.

Then, N.T. Wright introduced New Perspective to the conservative evangelical theologians and academics. Wright's book *What Saint Paul really said* is a short, well written, very informative and comprehensive introduction and explanation of the New Perspective; a very popular book.

The New Perspective is not "one" thing; there is a wide range of issues. At its center, however, it replaces Paul's critic of Judaism from "individual salvation" to the

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<sup>3</sup> Preston M. Sprinkle, "The Old Perspective on the New Perspective: A Review of Some 'Pre-Sanders' Thinkers", *Themelios* 30/2, pp. 21-31, Also see the introductory article by D. A. Carson in *Justification and Variegated Nomism vol. 1, The complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, eds. D. A. Carson - Peter O' Brien - Mark A. Seifried (Mohr Siebeck, Tubingen, 2001), pp. 1-5.

<sup>4</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Studies in Religion* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1977). p. 59.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75

<sup>6</sup> E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, p. 492 footnote. 57; James Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and The Law, Studies in Mark and Galatians*, (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), pp. 185-187, N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), pp. 258-9.

<sup>7</sup> Dunn: *Jesus, Paul and the Law* pp. 183-205.

corporate aspect on the basis of salvation history. Paul does not oppose the Law because the Jews believed that they can be saved through the Torah, but because they were using it to exclude gentiles from salvation in Christ. So, where is the criticism? Since Judaism did not teach justification by works as the Reformation understood it, it's not possible that Paul fights against this kind of Judaism.

According to the New Perspective, the Pharisees were not legalists. They have been misunderstood because theologians introduced the debate of Augustine with Pelagius and the debate of Luther with the Roman Catholics in the debate between Paul and the Judaizers.

Paul's disagreement was not about individual salvation, but about how the Jewish Christians accept Gentile Christians. According to Philippians 3, Paul was never really in an esoteric struggle because of his indwelling sin.

The New Perspective believes that the main message of the Gospel is that Christ is Lord. The Gospel is the proclamation that Christ, through his death and resurrection, is the Lord of the universe. It's not a message for personal salvation from guilt. The proclamation of the Gospel brings salvation as a result.

Seyoon Kim has highlighted the significance of this:

*"Since the Reformation, I think no school of thought, not even the Bultmanian school, has exerted a greater influence upon Pauline scholarship than the school of the New Perspective. With its radical reinterpretation of Paul's gospel, especially his doctrine of justification, on the basis of Ed P. Sanders's definition of Second Temple Judaism as covenantal nomism, the New Perspective is in many respects overturning the Reformation interpretation of Paul's gospel. The potential significance of the school for the whole Christian faith can hardly be exaggerated."*<sup>8</sup>

Let's try to clarify the issues a bit more:

*What about Justification by faith?*

Justification according to the New Perspective is not the gospel, it's the outcome of the gospel. Justification has a corporate, national and social dimension. According to N.T. Wright, *"the problem Paul addresses in Galatians is not the question of how precisely someone becomes a Christian or attains a relationship with God.... The problem he addresses is: should his ex-pagan converts be circumcised or not?"*<sup>9</sup> Further down he writes that the question is: *"who belongs to Abraham's family?"*<sup>10</sup> According to Paul all those in Christ, regardless of racial background, belong.

*What are "the works of the law"?*

According to the historic protestant understanding they consist of every possible work. According to Dunn, however,

*"works of the law" are nowhere understood... as works which earn God's favour, as merit-amassing observances. Rather they are seen as badges:*

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<sup>8</sup> Seyoon Kim, *"Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul's Gospel"* (Eerdmans 2002), page xiv.

<sup>9</sup> N.T. Wright, *What St. Paul really said*, (Eerdmans, 1997) p. 120

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p. 121

*they are simply what membership of the covenant people involves, what marks out the Jews as God's people ...they serve to demonstrate covenant status... What he [Paul] denies is that justification depends on "covenantal nomism," that God's grace extends only to those who wear the badge of the covenant<sup>11</sup>*

The conclusion is that according to Wright,

*Justification in Galatians is the doctrine which insists that all who share faith in Christ, belong at the same table, no matter what their racial differences, as together they await for the final new creation<sup>12</sup>*

*The righteousness of God.*

According to N.T. Wright, God's righteousness is not something credited to the sinner. It's an expression of God's faithfulness. So, when Paul says in Philippians 3:9, and "be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith" (Phil. 3:9), according to the New Perspective, this righteousness is the participation in the covenant.

Therefore, in summary, the New Perspective claims that:

1. Judaism of Paul's age was not a 'works religion' teaching that salvation is earned through the accumulation of virtue and good works.
2. Paul's debate with the Judaizers was not a debate between justification through works vs. justification through faith.
3. That debate was about the position and status of gentile Christians in the Church community.
4. Justification, then, is more about ecclesiology than soteriology. Justification pertains to who is a member of the eschatological community and not how each person stands before God.

The New Perspective helps and influences theologians in the following ways:

1. Better understanding of Paul's theology, because of a better understanding of the Jewish background within which the ancient Church was born.
2. The doctrine of justification is shaped to include the social dimension. This development provides a more solid theological foundation for social justice and ecumenism.
3. As an extra bonus, the "Gordian knot" of the never-ending struggle of theological differences between Protestants and Roman-Catholics is "cut".
4. The Church and Paul are freed from any accusation of anti-Semitism.

*The Critique of Reformation theology*

One can easily understand why the New Perspective has undergone severe criticism by Reformed, non-reformed and non-evangelical theologians.<sup>13</sup> This is not

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<sup>11</sup> Dunn, Jesus, Paul and the Law, p.194.

<sup>12</sup> Wright, What St. Paul really said, p. 122.

<sup>13</sup>See, Phil Johnson, A Defense of the Old Perspective on Paul What Did St. Paul Really Say? Seminar at the London Reformed Baptist Seminary, meeting at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, London, on 10 January 2004. <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/defense-old-perspective-paul-what-did->

without reason. From the perspective of Reformed Christianity, Richard Gaffin, professor of systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary back in 2000 says that:

*This school of thought raises two kinds of questions. First, it questions the relationship and understanding of Paul and Judaism. Second, it undermines the Reformed understanding of Pauline Theology. It closes the gap between Paul and Judaism and widens the gap between Paul and Reformation.<sup>14</sup>*

So, what are the basic points of criticism?

*The issue of normative Judaism.*

Sanders supported that covenantal nomism is the soteriological paradigm par excellence for first century Judaism. Critics say that this paradigm oversimplifies the situation. Various Jewish sources emphasize different aspects of election, covenant and works of law. Covenantal nomism, then, oversimplifies a much richer background.

Also, covenantal nomism includes a lot of theology of “works”. So, there is a critique both in the method and the way in which Sanders uses rabbinic literature.<sup>15</sup>

A second line of critique is that all historians agree that first century Judaism emphasized obedience to the law. Thomas Schreiner says:

*Legalism also may exist in practice, even if grace is trumpeted in theory. Religionists may easily proclaim the primacy of grace and actually live as if the determining factor was human effort. The history of the Christian church amply demonstrates that a theology of grace does not preclude legalism in practice.... My colleague, Robert H. Stein has remarked that, if Judaism were not legalistic at all, it would be the only religion in history that escaped the human propensity for works-righteousness.<sup>16</sup>*

This claim is verified historically by the existence of various sects in Judaism. The existence of sects proves that the covenant with Israel as the foundation for obedience was insufficient. Sects acted competitively, claiming that they were the faithful remnant of Israel. They answered the question about how one remains in the community of Israel, not by relying on covenantal nomism only.

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paul-really/ The structure of the arguments presented here against and in favor of the New Perspective from a Reformed-Evangelical point of view are based on this presentation.

<sup>14</sup> Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. "Paul the Theologian," *Westminster Theological Journal* 62 (2000): 121. Reformed Evangelical theologians believe that when it comes to the doctrine of salvation, the New Perspective confuses justification with sanctification, which is a very important distinction since the time of Reformation. According to the Westminster Confession of Faith (Shorter Catechism), article 33: *Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.* ([https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Shorter\\_Catechism.pdf](https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Shorter_Catechism.pdf)) See also, Peter Stuhlmacher, *Revisiting Paul's Doctrine of Justification: A Challenge to the New Perspective*, (IVP, 2001) p. 90, and Bernie L. Gillespie, *Will the Real Justification by Faith Please Stand Up?*, 2002. <http://www.inchristalone.org/RealJustPt1.html>.

<sup>15</sup> The major volume on that is: *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 1: *The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001).

<sup>16</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993) p. 115.

What got the Qumran community thinking that they were on the “inside” but the Pharisees were on the “outside”? Their own attachment to their own community. In practice then, several Jewish groups had substituted national election with a form of individual election or the election of a community. The position of a person in that community was based on their obedience to the Law.

Researchers also recognize that Judaism, regardless of how one interprets the various data, emphasized “synergy”. Gundry believes that Sanders did not take into consideration the difference between theology and everyday practice. Every-day practice always leans on the side of works:

*Weighing the materials of Palestinian Judaism shows a preponderance of emphasis on obedience to the law as the way of staying in. The covenant, based on God’s elective grace, may be presupposed; but it has not prominence (as Sanders admits). Rather, the law is searched, pulled, stretched, and applied. The rabbis start building a fence around it in order that people may not even come close to breaking it.<sup>17</sup>*

Most scholars admit that in first century Judaism, God’s grace was the foundation for salvation. However, what mattered for judgment day – and what really distinguished the true Jew from the fake – was the quality and consistency of obedience to the law.

*When I say Paul opposed legalism it does not follow that there was no emphasis on God’s grace in Judaism. Sanders rightly disputes the caricature that Judaism had no theology of grace and was consumed with earning merit. My thesis is that Paul detected legalism in Judaism because its soteriology was synergistic.<sup>18</sup>*

It’s this idea of synergism that Paul opposes in several occasions. If someone “enters” the community by grace, but “stays” by his own obedience, isn’t that a form of works-religion?

All scholars acknowledge that first-century Judaism placed great emphasis on the obedience to the law. Even if all our extant theological sources taught covenant nomism (which we question), one might still find significant pockets of legalism among “Jews on the street.”

*Any faith that emphasizes obedience, as Judaism undoubtedly did, is likely to produce some adherents who, perhaps through misunderstanding or lack of education, turn their obedience into a meritorious service which they think God must reward. Christianity, with considerable less emphasis on law, certainly produces such adherents; is it not likely that, as the New Testament suggests, first-century Judaism did also?<sup>19</sup>*

Is there any hope of agreement on this? Seyoon Kim accurately summarizes the situation:

The pendulum which had swung too far toward the side of denying any element of works-righteousness in Second Temple Judaism has begun to swing back. When it eventually finds its equilibrium we may see that neither the traditional view of Judaism as a religion of pure works-righteousness nor the New Perspective that totally denies any element of works-righteousness in Judaism is right, but that Judaism was a covenantal nomism with an element of works-righteousness.<sup>20</sup>

Let us summarise briefly:

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<sup>17</sup> Robert H. Gundry, “Grace, Works, and Staying Saved in Paul”, *Biblica* 66 (1985) 6.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law*, p. 94.

<sup>19</sup> Douglas Moo, *Beyond the New Perspective Hints of an emerging consensus* p. 8

<sup>20</sup> Seyoon Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, pp. 83-84

Evangelical-Reformed Criticism of the New Perspective claims that

- a. Covenantal nomism oversimplifies the situation.
- b. First century Judaism emphasized obedience to the law.  
There is also a third line of critique. That
- c. the writings of the first reformers have not been interpreted correctly.

Carl Trueman argues that James Dunn never used the writings of Luther himself in his resources, only his biography by Bainton, *Here I Stand*. The same he argues for N. T. Wright that in *Jesus and the Victory of God*, N.T. Wright proceeded with no reference to primary material or even to the best secondary material. He believes that the accusation that

*Luther ...is introspective in his reading of Paul and thus in his understanding of salvation; and he is individualistic in his formulation of justification*

is wrong. His views on infant baptism and his ecclesiology point to the exact opposite direction.

*...It is thus misleading to imply that the Lutheran notion of justification was necessarily borne out of extended introspection prior to conversion. There is plenty of evidence in the Reformation that such introspection was not a prerequisite to faith, and thus the absolutely necessary connection between the two is impossible to maintain. His understanding of baptism places great emphasis upon the ecclesiological dimensions of the sacrament and diverts attention away from introspective, individual considerations to the larger realities of union with Christ and God's own fidelity to his word. His understanding of justification as a vertical God- humanity relationship which profoundly affects horizontal relations between individuals and their neighbours, his theology of suffering on behalf of others, and his view of calling, all militate against the notion that Luther's theology of justification is inherently individualistic.<sup>21</sup>*

Is there any hope that one side will convince the other in the foreseeable future? I seriously doubt it. Nevertheless, now I want to switch 'hats' and talk to you from the heart, as I have promised earlier.

Let me repeat two of the ways in which the New Perspective has been helpful:

1. A better understanding of Paul's theology, because of a better understanding of the Jewish background within which the ancient Church was born.
2. The doctrine of justification is shaped to include the social dimension. This development provides a more solid theological foundation for social justice and ecumenism.

I believe it is this dimension that pushes everyone in the right direction, both in the local parish but also broadly in the relationships among different churches.

For the sake of brevity, let us think first of the Galatian situation.

*For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas*

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<sup>21</sup> Carl Trueman, *A Man More Sinned Against than Sinning?*

*before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”*

*We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. (Galatians 2:12-16 ESV)*

Regardless of the sharp differences on the content of justification, one cannot and should not bypass the fact that “*in Christ and by the Spirit the one God is now extending his salvation to all, irrespective of race. That was the message that both Antioch and Galatia needed to hear*”<sup>22</sup> He is right! Furthermore, Wright argues: *The Cross has obliterated the privileged distinction that Saul of Tarsus supposed himself to enjoy; the new life he has as Paul the apostle is a life defined, not by his old existence, but solely by the crucified and risen Messiah*<sup>23</sup>

It is true that Justification is the doctrine which insists that all who share faith in Christ belong to the same table, no matter what their racial differences are, as together they wait for the final new creation. An Evangelical-Reformed theologian would argue that we do reach the same conclusion even though we don't abandon the traditional Reformed understanding of justification.

#### *Pastoral and Ecumenical Challenges*

I have to admit that from a pastoral perspective this is a great challenge, but also a great blessing. Andrew Louth says that doctrines “*are not truths which could be appraised and understood outside the bosom of the Church*”<sup>24</sup> but “*they are part of the church's reflection on the mystery of her life with God*”<sup>25</sup> Even though, as Evangelical Reformed we don't share all the presuppositions of Orthodoxy understanding of ecclesiology, we agree with his remarks.

In the Church I serve, we have been blessed to have among us people from 12 countries: Greece, Albania, Bulgaria, Madagascar, UK, Canada, US, Holland, Nigeria, Syria, Lebanon, Korea, Finland. The non-Greek are about 15% percent of the congregation. I think that in many ways this is a reflection of the city of Athens.

It's a challenge to stay together as a church. It's a challenge that can be faced successfully only with faith, hope and love. And that is of course in addition to all the other challenges: young and old, men and women, rich and poor; those who have always been there and the newcomers. There are also matters of conscience: *One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables (Romans 14:2 ESV). Or, one person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike (Romans 14:5, ESV).* What is the solution? *Therefore*

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<sup>22</sup> N.T. Wright, *What St. Paul Really Said*, p. 122

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Andrew Louth, *Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology*, Downers Grove, IVP, 123,

<sup>25</sup> Andrew Louth, “Tradition and the Tacit” in *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1989, 89).

*welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God (Romans 15:7, ESV).*

Human selfishness is defeated only by the Cross of Christ, nothing else. But that needs to be repeated and taught very often. Only the Gospel of Jesus Christ can create an atmosphere of real acceptance. It's one thing to preach and teach it, and another thing to convince Christians that, in God's eyes, we are accepted in Christ only! This should be evident, of course, when we celebrate the Lord's Supper together, the Holy Eucharist; the most radical part of our worship. The celebration of the Lord's Supper should undermine all systemic evil that penetrates society, provided of course that the level and depth of unity it proclaims between the Lord and His Church, and among the believers is very clear in our hearts. Otherwise, the Church is judged, as it happened in Corinth, but also, we misrepresent Christ to the world.

Human fear, that was the motive behind the apostle Peter's denial to eat with the Gentile Christians. One needs to resist the tendency to please some - the "important" ones - to the exclusion of those who are not "like us".

So, I believe that the emphasis of the new Perspective on the social dimension of Justification is vital; it is good. There is no such thing as an 'individual' Christian, the gospel creates a community. Now, if this is going to have any effect at all, this truth should start at the local parish.

Getting back to the ecumenical challenge, here, too, the New Perspective has something big to offer. N.T. Wright believes that justification, according to the new perspective, is in fact the great ecumenical doctrine. Wright puts things in this way:

*"Paul's doctrine of justification by faith impels the churches in their current fragmented state, into the ecumenical task. It cannot be right that the very doctrine which declares that all who believe in Jesus belong at the same table (Galatians 2) should be used as a way of saying that some, who define the doctrine of justification differently, belong at a different table"<sup>26</sup>*

Now, if we do learn – to some extent – at the level of the local church to accept one another in Christ and because of Christ only, there will be progress in Church relationships first within the limits of each church family; deeper unity among Protestants, deeper unity among Orthodox, deeper unity among Catholics.

Well, if one wishes to push this to the next level, that would mean that at least those from all three Christian traditions who embrace the New Perspective in Pauline studies should show the rest of world that they truly believe it. They should be accepting other Christians as brothers and sisters, only on the basis of faith in Christ. To the extent that Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant theologians embrace the social aspect of justification (Evangelicals of course affirming the forensic aspect of it), they have to ask themselves the hard questions. If we believe that the other person is accepted by God in Christ, with everything that this entails, then, at the minimum, those that are involved in the New Perspective dialogue and in other subjects too, should be conciliar in tone, loving, listening, forgiving, praying for each other.

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<sup>26</sup> N.T. Wright, *What St. Paul Really Said*, p. 158

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After all, what is the point of working together for the common good of the refugees, the poor, the vulnerable, the outcast, the victims of trafficking, what is the point of proclaiming God's kingdom to them and accepting them, if we cannot accept one-another solely because they are in Christ?

The World is watching us.

The banner features a blue background with a central photograph of a modern building with large glass windows. The building has the International Hellenic University logo and name on its facade. To the left of the building is a portrait of Rev. Dr. George Adam. Text on the banner includes the university name, the lecture title, the speaker's name, the date and time, and a YouTube channel link.

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MASTER IN ORTHODOX ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY

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02-APRIL  
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"THE NEW PERSPECTIVE IN PAULINE STUDIES AND ITS ECUMENICAL CHALLENGES"

REV. DR. GEORGE ADAM

Prof. Petros Vassiliadis will respond and monitor the discussion

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## Chapter 32

### **A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON BEING CHRISTIAN IN THE MIDDLE EAST. AN ECUMENICAL AND INTER-RELIGIOUS TESTIMONY\***

*Dr. Nikos Kouremenos*

#### *a) Geographical boundaries and mainly features.*

If we want to give, in modern terms, a possible comprehensive definition for the Middle East, we would say that it is defined as the geographical area that covers the modern Arab world, the province of Anatolia in Central and Southeastern Turkey without excluding Iran. In this very area, there are Christian populations who have sought and continue to seek or even struggle to experience and apply the Gospel's message that they have received since almost the apostolic age or little later. In other words, being Christian in this particular geographic context implies an interrupted continuity since the first Christian communities in the 1st and 2nd centuries C.E. On the contrary to what is valid for the Byzantine, Armenian, Ethiopian, and Western Christianity, where the Christian Church became an institutionalised entity of an imperial structure and Christians for long periods enjoyed a privileged civilian status, in Middle East, Christians have lived almost always as a minority. In this sense should be understood the eloquent title *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* of the distinguished scholar Sydney Griffith's book<sup>1</sup>. It is indeed a milestone in Christian-Arabic studies and an excellent introduction to the history of Christian-Muslim dialogue. In these pages, one can find the non-European expression of Christian faith and the prolific encounter between Christianity and Islam that was advantageous for both sides. The three distinctive features of Middle Eastern Christianity can be schematically summarised as follows: i) multiformity or even diversity, ii) response to the challenge of Islam, and iii) search for identity on multiple levels.

#### *b) Multiformity: multiple centres*

Regarding the multiformity, we could note that Christianity in the Middle East was spread out in Late Antiquity through various centers' missionary activity, having particular and distinctive features. First in line and importance comes the city of Antioch, on the banks of the Orontes River (in present-day Turkey), an important administrative and cultural center of the Roman Empire in the East. According to

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\* The present paper is largely based on H. Teule, "Les chrétiens du Moyen-Orient: quelques réflexions", *Irenikon* 93 (2020) 231-253, which served as text material for the course on Middle-Eastern Christianity.

<sup>1</sup> Princeton 2008.

biblical tradition, this is the place where the term “Christians” was used for the first time to describe the followers of Christ<sup>2</sup>. A further center that played an essential role in the spread of Christianity in the region was the ancient city of Edessa, east of Antioch, more or less where the town of Urfa in Turkey stands today. Despite the relatively close geographical distance, what distinguishes the Christianity of Antioch from that of Edessa is the use of the Syriac language. Indeed, Syriac, a dialect of Aramaic, the language of Jesus himself, was centered in the city of Edessa. Although being a local variation of Aramaic, it eventually resulted in the vehicle for the spread of Christianity on the fringes of the Greco-Roman world and outside its cultural boundaries in the Mesopotamian valley words, in the core of the Middle East. Further east of Edessa, in eastern Mesopotamia, lays an area that more or less coincides with the borders of present-day Iraq. While maintaining the linguistic and cultural characteristics of a Semitic, Syriac-speaking Christianity, it was a province that gradually differentiated in doctrinal matters developing a distinct Christian and theological expression. Last but not least comes the great city of Alexandria. Hellenistic port in the Mediterranean in North East Africa became a renowned center of Greek culture and education in the ancient world, with a significant Hellenised Jewish minority that influenced the later Christianisation of the broader geographical area.

*c) Aphraat the Persian and Ephrem the Syrian: two non-hellenised Christian authors.*

Thus, the spread of Christianity by multiple and culturally distinct centers resulted in a non-uniformed expression of the Christian experience in the wider geographical area of the Middle East. For example, the cultural phenomenon of “Hellenisation” that marked Christians in the regions of the Eastern Roman Empire (i.e., Palestine, Syria, and Egypt ) has hardly affected Christians in Mesopotamia. The case of Aphraat (c. 280 - c. 345 C.E.), the so-called wise Persian, a Christian author who originated from Nisibis (also in present-day Turkey), could be informative enough to confirm the for-mentioned position. In the first of his *Demonstrations* dedicated to the subject of faith, Aphraat includes his *Confession of Faith*, in other words, his version of short exposition of the Christian doctrine<sup>3</sup>.

Written in Syriac, more or less during the same period, when the Council of Nicaea (325 C.E.) composed its own *Credo*, Aphraat’s confession remained closer to the biblical tradition, according to which Christ was perceived in line with the Old Testament prophets. Moreover, there is almost no philosophical terminology, e.g., the Nicaean term *ομοούσιος* [= consubstantial] is absent. Furthermore, the *deeds of faith*, that is to say, the keeping of the divine commandments, are considered equal with any intellectual formulation of the creed. Aphraat’s adherence to the biblical tradition and its Semitic background can be found in Ephrem the Syrian writings, a Christian author and poet who lived a few decades later than Aphraat. Ephrem developed more a

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<sup>2</sup> Acts, 11:26.

<sup>3</sup> For the Syriac text, see J. Parisot, *Aphraatis Sapientis Persae Demonstrationes*, Patrologia Syriaca 1, Paris 1894, pp 44-45. On the Semitic background of Aphraates’s doctrine, see E. Lizorkin, *Aphraat’s Demonstrations: A Conversation with the Jews of Mesopotamia*, CSCO Subs 129, Leuven 2012.

symbolic theological approach than an analytical one. For this reason, he prefers poetic discourse as a way of theological expression rather than analytical treatises<sup>4</sup>.

*d) Christological controversies in 5th c.: the first schisms*

During the 5th century of the C.E., the so-called Christological controversies dominated the theological discourse and ecclesiastical matters. Christian who speak Syriac participated decisively in the debates and the disputes. These controversies would cause the first significant schisms in the historical course of Christianity. The Council of Chalcedon (451 C.E.) that described the way of unity between the divinity and the humanity in Jesus Christ, using the four (4) well-known in the history of Christian doctrine adverbs: *ασυγχύτως, απρέπτως, αδιαιρέτως και αχωρίστως* [= without confusion, change, division, or separation] was essentially a compromise. On the one hand, the dyo-physitism, namely the permanent existence of two distinct natures (δύο φύσεις), one divine and another human, in Jesus Christ as expressed by Nestorius, Archbishop of Constantinople, was rejected in Chalcedon as an exaggerated Christological expression. On the other hand, the Cyrillian formula *μία του Θεού Λόγου φύσις σεσαρκωμένη* [= one incarnated nature of God the Word] was not accepted as the only appropriate or valid expression for the mystery regarding the unity between divinity and humanity in the person of Christ. To this doctrinal tradition, they would remain faithful, those Christians that during the upcoming centuries would be called Copts and Syro-orthodox. At the same period, beyond the borders of the Roman Empire, a dyo-physitic theological tradition was developed within the Sassanid Persia that gradually would be formed into the nowadays called Assyrian Church of the East<sup>5</sup>.

About a century later, at the beginning of the 7th c., the confessional borderlines among the three major ecclesial currents, i.e., i) the Chalcedonians or Melchites, namely those who accepted the doctrinal teaching of the Council of Chalcedon, ii) the Miaphysites, namely those who having once rejected the doctrine of Chalcedon, remained faithful to the Cyrillian formula confessing *one incarnated nature of God the Word* and iii) Nestorians, or better to say the members of the Assyrian Church of the East, namely those who continued to express their faith in terms of the existence of two natures even after the union of humanity and divinity in Jesus Christ, were getting stabilised, although some unsuccessful efforts of a compromise like the one of Monothelism supported by emperor Heraclius were attempted. From these efforts, they would arise later on the so-called Maronites<sup>6</sup>. An immediate result of these Christological controversies was the production of a vast polemical literature, of a limited, however, doctrinal interest. Even during the early Islamic period, Christian authors had as main purpose to demonstrate to their new rulers that their community could be more admmissive in the new reality in regard to the other Christian communities.

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<sup>4</sup> On Ephrem the Syriac and his poetic symbolic theology, see E. Narinskaya, *The poetic hymns of Saint Ephrem the Syrian: a study in the religious use of poetry in fourth-century Christianity*, Lewiston 2013.

<sup>5</sup> On the historical development of the Assyrian Church of the East, see W. Baum – D. Winkler, *The Church of East: a Concise History*, London 2003.

<sup>6</sup> On the Maronites, see M. de Ghantuz Cubbe, “I Maroniti” in A. Ferrari (ed.), *Popoli e Chiese dell’Oriente Cristiano*, Roma 2008, pp. 177-218.

*e) Examples of confessional syncretism.*

At the beginning of the 2nd millennium C.E., however, an unexpected and less studied development took place, which could be considered the origin of an ecumenical theological thought. In what follows, I will attempt to outline four typical examples of confessional syncretism, fruits of the so-called renaissance of Christian-Arabic literature (11th-14th c.).

The first case was Ali ibn Dawud al-Arfadi (11th c.), an Arab-speaking, Syro-Orthodox theologian, originated from Aleppo in Syria. Having before his eyes the fragmentation of the Christian communities and attempting to understand the causes and consequences of Christological controversies, al-Arfadi arrived at a double conclusion. First, he tried to distinguish between doctrinal purity and the expression of the Christian cult. According to him, each ecclesial community, Chalcedonian, Syro-orthodox, or Nestorian, has its liturgical customs and tradition of cult that essentially remain unrelated to the very substance of the Christian faith. Consequently, these liturgical differences could be considered a legitimate and acceptable diversity regarding the Christian cult and not as a cause of further doctrinal disputes. The second and more important conclusion of Al-Arfadi was his attempt to overcome the traditional Christological terminology. Thus, since one accepts perfect and undivided humanity and divinity in Christ, then professing one nature or one hypostasis, two natures and two hypostases make no difference in the very essence of the Christian doctrine<sup>7</sup>. However, the most surprising of all was that al-Arfadi was not just the exception that would confirm the rule.

A further example in the line of al-Arfadi was another prelate, this time belonging to the Assyrian Church of the East, known as Abdisho' bar Brikha (d. 1318), metropolitan of Nisibis<sup>8</sup>. He made overtures towards the Chalcedonian (otherwise Byzantine or Melchite) tradition to establish communication and potential doctrinal reconciliation. The central point of this theological argumentation was that the Greek term "hypostasis" does not correspond exactly to the Syriac term "qnoma". For a fuller understanding of this innovative approach, it is worth noting that the Greek philosophical terms "hypostasis" was traditionally translated into Syriac with the term qnoma. Relativizing the possibility that two terms could be fully identified in two different languages, bar Brikha eventually accepted as legitimate and valid a Christology of "one hypostasis". However, he remained faithful to the doctrinal tradition of his Church confessing "two natures and two gnomes" in Jesus Christ. In other words, bar Briha concluded that two similar terms could function in different ways within different linguistic contexts. Surprisingly or not, it was the application of this theological principle towards the end of the last century by André de Halleux (1929-1994) who supported the potentiality of a reciprocal recognition regarding the

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<sup>7</sup> On the theological thought of al-Arfadi, see G. Troupeau, "Le lire de l'unanimité de la foi de Ali ibn Dawud al-Arfadi", *Parole de l'Orient* 5 (1969) 197-219.

<sup>8</sup> On Abdisho' bar Brikha, see J.-B. Chabot, *Littérature syriaque*, Bibliothèque catholique des sciences religieuses, Paris 1934, pp. 139-141.

"orthodoxy" of the Christological formulations between the Roman-Catholic and the Assyrian Church of the East<sup>9</sup>.

More conservative to his approach but also following the same way of thinking was Yasho'yahb bar Malkon (d. 1232)<sup>10</sup>. Living almost one century earlier than bar Brikha, he was too a member of the Assyrian Church of the East and predecessor on the metropolitan throne of Nisibis. His originality of thought is based on invoking the philosophy of language to approach the issues related to doctrinal questions regarding the other ecclesial communities. He remarked, for example, that the Assyrian Church prefers to call Mary, the mother of Jesus, *Christotokos*, that is the one who gives birth to Christ) and not *Theotokos*, that is the one who gives birth to God, because the term "God" may be applied in various conceptual contexts, for example, in the case of the Trinity. Thus, according to bar Malkon, Christians who call Mary *Theotokos* are not to be considered heretics; they are just applying a less precise terminology, and consequently, it is possible to enter into a theological discussion with them.

Concluding this indicative outline of Christian authors of Renaissance of the Christian-Arabic literature, it would be an omission not to mention Gregory bar Hebraeus (1226-1286), the most prolific and illustrious Christian author of the 13th century in Syriac literature. Bar Hebraeus, known primarily for his *Chronicle*, left us many fruits of his intellectual and theological reflection. In the *Book of the Dove*, an ascetical-mystical treatise, bar Hebraeus adopts the position expressed previously by al-Arfadi, according to which it is necessary to overcome the traditional terminology in Christology:

[...]When I had given much thought and pondered on the matter, I became convinced that these quarrels among the different Christian Churches are not a matter of factual substance, but of words and terminology; for they all confess Christ our Lord to be perfect God and perfect human, without any commingling, mixing, or confusion of the natures [...] Thus I saw all the Christian communities, with their different Christological positions, as possessing a single common ground that is without any difference between them [...]<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, in another theological treatise, the *Lamp of the Sanctuary*, he rejected the label heretic both for Nestorians and Chalcedonians (of Melchites)<sup>12</sup>.

The question that reasonably arises is how this early development of a genuine ecumenical thought was born in the view of these Christian authors. Sydney Griffith suggested that Christians between the 12th-13th centuries realised their minority status within a dynamic and sometimes hostile against them Islam environment. Thus, they

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<sup>9</sup> See, *Common Christological Declaration between the Roman-Catholic and the Assyrian Church of the East*, November 1994.

<sup>10</sup> On this author, see H. Teule, "A Theological Treatise by Iso'yahb bar Malkon Preservers in the Theological Compendium Asfar al-Asrar", *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 58 (2006) 235-252.

<sup>11</sup> A. J. Wensinck (ed.), *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, Leyden, 1919, p. 60.

<sup>12</sup> For the text of this work, see the edition by F. Graffin, "Le Candélabre du Sanctuaire de Grégoire Abou'lfaradj dit Barhebraeus. Troisième base : De la théologie" in *Patrologia Orientalis* 27, PO 27. Paris, 1957, pp. 451-626.

decided that it could be better for them to be presented in front of their rulers as a united entity<sup>13</sup>. It seems, however, that these works were an internal issue within the Christian communities since there is no reference to Islam in them. On the contrary, the development of various philosophical currents within this Islamic intellectual reality significantly influenced Christian literary production. This hypothesis may be confirmed at least in the case of bar Malkon who was influenced by the thought of the well-known Islamic philosopher, Avicenna.

*f) Latin presence in the Middle East.*

During the Crusades, an additional factor entered the scene of the Middle-Eastern reality, namely Western Christianity. Although Latin Christians were present even before the 11th c, it was with the formation of the Latin Kingdoms that a particular ecclesial structure was developed. Few years after the Great Schism between Rome and Constantinople (1054), Chalcedonian or Melchite bishops had to be put in an inferior position if not expelled from their bishoprics. The formation of a new network of Latin bishops and monks imposed on the indigenous one did not facilitate any form of inter-confessional approach<sup>14</sup>. Among the other indigenous Christian denominations, the Maronites, a Syriac-speaking community of Monothelitic tendency, settled around the region of Mount Lebanon, passed under the papal jurisdiction in the 12th c., becoming, in this way, the first Oriental Christian community united with Latin Christianity in the second millennium.

*g) Contacts with Rome*

Within the climate of confessional toleration or ecumenical openness that we saw previously, the Latin presence in the Middle East facilitated the contacts between the primates of the Oriental Churches (Syro-Orthodox or Assyrian) and the Church of Rome. Under these circumstances, however, a great misunderstanding took place. Latin missionaries tended to interpret the spirit of openness in the theological and ecclesial tradition of the Oriental ecclesial communities as accepting papal authority and abandoning their proper Christological and doctrinal, in general, tradition. However, acknowledging the doctrinal formulation of other ecclesial communities as legitimate does not necessarily mean that one contests or disputes the validity of its own doctrinal tradition.

The following example could be informative enough to clarify this peculiar situation. It concerns the correspondence between the Assyrian patriarchate Yahbalaha III (d. 1317) with pope Boniface VII (1294-1303) and his successor Benedict XI (1303-1304)<sup>15</sup>. Certain Latin prelates tended to interpret the attitude of Yahbalaha as a sort of submission to the Holy See. However, the study of the correspondence in the original

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<sup>13</sup> Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, pp. 140-142.

<sup>14</sup> On this subject, see the old but still reliable study by A. Papadakis - J. Meyendorff, *The Christian East and the Rise of the Papacy: The Church 1071-1453 A.D.*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, New York 1994.

<sup>15</sup> On Yahballaha III and the contacts of the Church of East with the West, see P. G. Borbone, *Un ambassadeur du Khan Argun en Occident. Histoire de Mar Yahballaha III et de Rabban Sauma (1281-1317)*, Paris 2008.

language and not in the Latin translation demonstrates that the Assyrian primate did not want to sacrifice his own ecclesial identity neither his ancestral dogmatic formulation.

Towards the end of the 13th and the beginning of the 14th century, the political and social developments in the broader region of Middle East put an end to any attempt of original theological thought. Thus, it began a period called an “obscure night” during which every theological production is almost ceased. Even when the region passed under the Ottoman dominion, at the beginning of the 16th c., the situation remained invariable; the intellectual horizon of Middle-Eastern Christianity remained extremely limited.

*h) Formation of Oriental-Catholic communities.*

Between the 16th and the 17th centuries, a significant number of Christians turned towards Rome, which through the intervention of France or some Italian city-states commercially active in the Middle-Eastern region, started a systematic missionary activity within the Arab world. As a result, there was an internal division in each of the doctrinally distinguished ecclesial communities. Thus, for each fraction that abandoned his particular doctrinal tradition to enter in communion with Rome, another one remained faithful to his own “orthodoxy”. Consequently, new ecclesial communities united to Rome were formed —following the example of Maronites—, and in this way, the Greek-catholic, the Syro-catholic, the Chaldean community, and later on the Coptic-catholic community have appeared<sup>16</sup>. The formation of these Eastern/Oriental-catholic communities has contributed to the further fragmentation of the Christian presence in the Middle East and oriented many Christians toward Europe, facilitating the formation of the contemporary Middle-Eastern Christian diaspora.

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<sup>16</sup> For the formation of these ecclesial communities and their historical development, see A. Elli, *Breve storia delle chiese cattoliche orientali in Medio Oriente*, Milano 2010.



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