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Introduction

The articles of the present volume are based on a selection of talks given at two international conferences which were organised at the University of Eastern Finland (Joensuu, Finland) in 2022 and 2024. It seemed desirable to reestablish the academic gatherings that this northernmost academic institution of Orthodox theological education once hosted until 2006. The first of these new events was dedicated to new trends and methodologies, whereas the second dealt with the use of historical sources in contemporary Orthodox theological discourse. Moreover, these conferences are envisaged to continue biennially, in order to complement the well-established international conferences on Orthodox church music by the ISOCM (International Society for Orthodox Church Music), held at the same university on odd years.

The thematic breadth of both conferences was intentional, with the hope of attracting scholars from various fields of theology, and with the additional desire of bringing in academics from different ecclesiastical jurisdictions and linguistic areas. However, most of the topics ended up naturally coalescing around two central areas of interest – liturgy and patristics – as can be seen from the titles of the articles that make up this volume. The papers are divided into two categories: the first consists of peer-reviewed research articles, while the second is made up of the conference papers more or less as they were presented at both these events.

More specifically, the articles by Fr Chrysostomos Nassis, Harri Huovinen, and myself, deal with the involvement of the laity in liturgical worship. Fr Chrysostomos discusses the 20th-century debate on reading the so-called secret prayers aloud in the liturgy, based on intriguing archival documents that have not been discussed in detail in scholarly literature before, whereas Huovinen reads John Chrysostom's views on 'active participation' in the light of 20th-century discussions on the matter. My own paper is closely linked with this topic, since the notion of 'active participation' was connected very much to the archaeologising tendencies of the previous century directed towards liturgical reform: the problems of such a process form the kernel of my partly empirical contribution.

Also, there are contributions relating to liturgy from a more theological or hermeneutical point of view. Following a more historical approach, Georgi Mitov's paper provides insights into the historical transmission of patristic hermeneutical traditions in Church Slavonic. A more theological analysis is provided in Fr Václav Ježek's article, which offers an inspiring reflection on

John Chrysostom's views on the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and how they might improve the "exegetical imagination" of our times. Fr Mark Roosien, in his contribution, discusses the notion of the 'liturgy after the liturgy' in the thoughts of three writers, all of whom could be labelled under the category 'neopatristic' thinkers.

This brings us, finally, to the category of papers concentrating on different theological ideas and their reception today. Fr Demetrios Bathrellos and the two contributions by Fr Sergio Mainoldi (since he offered papers at both gatherings) deal with the legacy of the neopatristic movement, whereas Fr Serafim Seppälä analyses critically the patristic understanding of animals as ἄλογα.

As one can glean from the contributions to this volume, the topics of the two conferences were indeed accurate for the state of affairs of Orthodox theology in our times. They reflect the struggle between the 'objectivity' of secular academia, and different spiritual, ideological, and political movements influencing the Orthodox Church. What seems to be characteristic of the 2020s is the critical discussion of older, established scholarly narratives. This can be seen particularly from the significant changes in the understanding of Orthodox liturgy, as well as the critical evaluation of the neopatristic legacy in contemporary theological discourse.

Hopefully, the present collection marks the beginning of a continuing series of such conferences, together with the publications that they produce. Thus, in the far North, we can yet again seek to provide a forum for theological discussion, in which academic rigour and ecclesiastical interests can be coupled with a wide range of topics and theological approaches from representatives of different local churches.

Bishop Damaskinos (Olkinuora) of Haapsalu
Guest Editor

PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLES

Fr Chrysostomos Nassis

Elements of a Contemporary Liturgical Debate: Panagiotis Trembelas and Evlogios Kourilas on the Recitation of Priestly Prayers in the Divine Liturgy

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Abstract

In current discussions on liturgical renewal and reform within the Orthodox Church, a significant number of scholars and practitioners strongly advocate for the audible recitation of priestly prayers during the Divine Liturgy. This marks a departure from the long-standing practice observed in Greece until the mid to late 20th century.

Traditionally, it was customary to recite these 'mystikai euchai' in a manner inaudible to the congregation. Throughout the 20th century, however, perspectives regarding this practice gradually evolved. By the mid-20th century, the debate peaked, with proponents arguing for either the audible or the silent recitation of these prayers. This culminated in the 1956 decision by the Synod of the Church of Greece, favoring the older practice in order to counteract the alternative trend.

This paper aims to dissect this debate, focusing specifically on the divergent viewpoints of Panagiotis Trembelas and Eulogios Kourilas Lauriotes. By examining the perspectives of these influential figures, this paper seeks to explore the nuanced layers of this theological discussion, providing valuable insights for contemporary reflection within Orthodox liturgical theology and practice.

Keywords: Divine Liturgy, Recitation of Priestly Prayers, Panagiotis Trembelas, Evlogios Kourilas, Church of Greece

Introduction

Anyone familiar with the internal dynamics of the Orthodox Church knows that doctrine and canons are often at the epicenter of detailed scrutiny and passionate debate, reflecting their deep significance within the faith. Similarly, variant liturgical practices have sparked intense controversies throughout history, shaping the landscape of Orthodox tradition and belief.

In the modern era, the late 17th-century rupture of the Old Believers in post-Nikonian Russia[1] and the early 20th-century Old Calendarist schism in Greece, triggered by the proposal of the 1923 Pan-Orthodox Council under the contentious Patriarch Meletius Metaxakis to adopt the revised Julian Calendar,[2] underscore liturgy's central role in some of Orthodoxy's most persistent contemporary wounds. Even Mount Athos, revered as a bastion for hesychasm and tranquility, has not been immune to such upheavals and distress. The 17th-century tensions over the correct interpretation of the rubrics of the Prothesis Rite, specifically regarding the proper placement of the particle of the Theotokos on the discos "to the right of the Lamb,"[3] and the 18th–19th-century dispute, concerning the frequency of receiving Holy Communion and the prohibition of holding memorial services on Sunday,[4] serve as vivid reminders of the profound meaning attached to liturgical practices. These historical episodes, which to a certain degree continue to challenge the Church, demonstrate the enduring passion that fuels liturgical debates within Orthodoxy.

The appeal to the practice and sources of the past (*ad fontes*) lies at the heart of these conflicts, as opposing sides seek to return to the Church's unadulterated, genuine, and normative tradition. More recently, the ongoing pursuit of liturgical purity and uniformity has become grounded in a presupposed narrative of liturgical history, which follows a pattern of genesis, development, decomposition, collapse, and, ideally, regeneration.[5] Moreover, the motivations behind selecting specific liturgical topics for research and the chosen methodology often stem from an implicit intent among scholars and practitioners to legitimise certain views or practices, or to challenge and

1 Meyendorff 1991.
2 Παρασκευαΐδης 1982.
3 Σκαλτσῆς 2014.
4 Σκρέττας 2008.
5 The title of Robert Taft's article is indicative of this. See Taft 2003.

criticise others, rather than from mere academic curiosity.[6] In this context, tempers flare and accusations of innovation, heresy, deviation, and ignorance are frequently hurled against opponents, underscoring the significant stakes involved in preserving Orthodox liturgical life.

This appeal to the past was succinctly articulated in 1921 by Ambrosios Stavrinos, a learned hierarch of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and a devoted liturgical scholar, aptly dubbed "the Greek Brightman."[7] Like other figures, Ambrosios sought to reclaim the Church's authentic and authoritative liturgical tradition. In the Prologue of his seminal work titled, *The Ancient and Contemporary Liturgies of the Principal Churches of Christ*, Ambrosios, speaking in the third person, expressed his vision of returning to a bygone golden age as follows:

> The author of these words openly expresses his great joy at the opportunity to declare himself among those advocating for reforms in our Church, particularly radical ones. Simultaneously, he proclaims that the reforms he desires and pursues aim at progressively returning the Eastern Orthodox Church to where she stood 17 centuries ago, or at the very least, 15 or 13 centuries ago.[8]

He then continues:

> The Church, which boasts of preserving intact the apostolic tradition entrusted to her by the divine fathers and teachers, holding herself in reverence, must present herself among her sister churches in a newly woven garment – a garment representative of antiquity reshaped – rejecting every reproachable novelty, harmful vanity, and flagrant ignorance that have enticed her in earlier times.[9]

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6 Rouwhorst 2004, 495.

7 Alexopoulos 2012, 377.

8 Σταυρινός 2001, 18: "Ὁ γράφων οὐδόλως ἀποκρύπτει ὅτι χαίρει μεγάλως, διότι δίδοται αὐτῷ εὐκαιρία, ὅπως διακηρύξῃ ὅτι ἀνήκει εἰς τὴν τάξιν τῶν ἐπιδιωκόντων μεταρρυθμίσεις ἐν τῇ ἡμετέρᾳ ἐκκλησίᾳ, καὶ δὴ ριζικάς, διακηρύττει ὅμως ταυτοχρόνως ὅτι αἱ μεταρρυθμίσεις τὰς ὁποίας ποθεῖ καὶ ἐπιδιώκει ἔγκεινται εἰς το πῶς ἡ κατ' Ἀνατολὰς Ὀρθόδοξος Ἐκκλησία ἀνέλθῃ βαθμιαίως ἐκεῖ ὅπου, ἂν μὴ πρὸ 17, πρὸ 15, ἢ 13 ὅμως αἰώνων, εὑρίσκετο." The translations in this article are my own.

9 Σταυρινός 2001, 18–19: "Ἡ Ἐκκλησία, ἡ ὁποία καυχᾶται ὅτι διετήρησεν ἀλώβητον τὴν ἀποστολικὴν παράδοσιν τὴν παρὰ τῶν θείων τῆς Ἐκκλησίας πατέρων καὶ διδασκάλων αὐτῆ διαπιστευθεῖσαν, σεβομένη ἑαυτὴν ὀφείλει, ἀπορρίπτουσα ὅ,τι καινοσπονδία ἐπίμεμπτος, κενοδοξία κακόσινος καὶ ἀμαθία στυγερὰ εἰς χρόνους ἀρχαιοτέρους προσεκόλαψαν αὐτή,

In this context, Ambrosios highlighted several areas of concern, including the issue of "delineating the intensity of the voice of the liturgical celebrants and ministers."[10] He argued that such matters "ought to be the focus of the thought and action of those who seek and pursue reform in the liturgical services and ceremonies of our Church."[11] While Ambrosios recognised the significance of this topic, which pertains to priests, chanters, and readers, he did not explore it further. In contrast, later Greek liturgical scholars, including Panagiotis Trembelas, Ioannis Fountoulis, Georgios Filias, and Panagiotis Skaltsis, concentrated on a specific aspect of the issue: the audible recitation of the priestly prayers during the Divine Liturgy. They argued that these prayers should be heard by the congregation (εἰς ἐπήκοον τοῦ λαοῦ), emphasising what they perceived to be a fundamental step in fostering active participation in the eucharistic celebration.[12]

A review of the relevant literature reveals that the debate over the audible recitation of priestly prayers gained significant momentum in mid-20th-century Greece, largely driven by the efforts of figures such as the aforementioned Panagiotis Trembelas.[13] As the primary advocate for this practice, Trembelas spearheaded the movement to encourage the audible recitation of these prayers. Conversely, Evlogios Kourilas Lavriotis,[14] while addressing the issue more tangentially, offered informed critiques grounded in his deep personal interest in liturgical history and practice. Both figures were highly regarded in their respective academic fields – Trembelas in Practical Theology and Kourilas in History – as well as in ecclesiastical circles. By examining their contrasting positions, this study aims to illuminate the theological and liturgi-

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νὰ προσέλθη ἐν τῷ μέσῳ τῶν ἀδελφῶν ἐκκλησιῶν ἱματισμὸν νεότευκτον μέν, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἀρχαιότητα διαπλασθεῖσαν ἀπεικονίζοντα."

10 Σταυρινός 2001, 19: "ὁ καθορισμὸς τῆς φωνῆς τῶν λειτουργούντων καὶ ὑφυπουργούντων."

11 Σταυρινός 2001, 19: "ὀφείλει νὰ ἀποτελέση τὸ ἀντικείμενον τῆς σκέψεως καὶ ἐνεργείας ἐκείνων, οἵτινες τὴν μεταρρύθμισιν ἐν ταῖς λειτουργικαῖς ἀκολουθίαις καὶ τελεταῖς τῆς ἡμετέρας ἐκκλησίας ἐπιζητοῦσι καὶ ἐπιδιώκουσιν."

12 Certainly, this discussion extends beyond Greek scholarship. For a historical survey of sources on the silent recitation of the Anaphora by a prominent Eastern Catholic scholar of the Byzantine Rite, see Taft 2006.

13 For a comprehensive survey of Trembelas's works, see Θεοδώρου 1971. On Trembelas's contributions to liturgical studies, see Φουντούλης 2006, Τζέρπος 2016, and Καλαϊτζίδης 2016.

14 To date, no comprehensive study exists on the fascinating and complex life and multidisciplinary scholarly contributions of Evlogios Kourilas. For a concise overview of his life and work, refer to Ζαγκλή-Μπόζιου 2009, 10–33. Additionally, see the brief Biographical Notice dedicated to his memory by Τωμαδάκης 1960–1961. A more extensive catalog of Trembelas's publications can be found in Παπαδάκης 1963.

cal principles that framed and fueled this significant debate, establishing the framework for its ongoing discussion.

The research presented here draws on a diverse range of sources, including published theological works, synodal letters, and rare archival materials from the Library of the University of Ioannina and the Synodal Archives of the Church of Greece.[15] These archival materials provide unique and previously unexplored insights that enrich the understanding of this multifaceted issue.

To analyse these materials, the present study employs a historical-critical methodology, focusing on the contextual interpretation of the writings and theological exchanges of Trembelas and Kourilas. Special attention is given to the integration of archival materials and published works, enabling a nuanced exploration of both the public and private dimensions of their theological thought and their influence on the liturgical discourse of their time.

Trembelas on Audible Prayer Recitation and Justinian's Novel 137

To understand Panagiotis Trembela's views on this topic, one can begin by examining his valuable study, *The Roman Liturgical Movement and the Practice of the East*.[16] This work initially appeared as a series of articles in the Church of Greece's periodical, *Ἐκκλησία*, from late 1948 to early 1950.[17] As suggested by its title, Trembelas explored the core principles, goals, and advancements of the Roman Catholic Liturgical Movement, and its connection to the liturgical practices of the East, particularly within the Eastern Orthodox Church.[18]

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15 I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Metropolitan Agathangelos of Phanarion (Charamantidis) for granting me access to the source material kept in the Synodal archives of the Church of Greece. This study would not have been possible without his assistance, provided at the request of Metropolitan Philotheos (Theocharis) of Thessaloniki.

16 Τρεμπέλας 1949.

17 Τρεμπέλας 1948–1950. This means that the 'offprint' was in circulation before the study was fully published in the periodical Ἐκκλησία.

18 Trembelas's study covers a wide range of related themes, including both historical and theological perspectives on liturgical practice and reform. These themes include: 1. The Roman Catholic Liturgical Movement, 2. Principles and Progress of the Liturgical Movement, 3. Origin and Main Purpose of the Liturgical Movement, 4. The Individual Aims of the Liturgical Movement, 5. The Second Aim of the Liturgical Movement, 6. The Third Aim of the Liturgical Movement, 7. General Characteristics of Eastern Worship, 8. The Sacrifice and Offering of the Eucharist in Eastern Orthodox Worship, 9. The Co-Ministry (συνιερουργία) of Clergy and People in Worship, 10. The Concept of Co-Ministry (συνιερουργία), 11. The Audible Recitation of the Prayers, 12. Documentary

Expanding upon this inquiry in the second half of his study, Trembelas outlines the "General Characteristics of Eastern Worship" and investigates several key themes relevant to our topic. Specifically, he scrutinises "The Co-Ministry (συνιερουργία) of Clergy and People in Worship" and discusses "The Concept of Co-Ministry (συνιερουργία)." Subsequently, he addresses "The Audible Recitation of the Prayers." He then furnishes "Documentary Support from the Older Tradition" to bolster his perspective, followed by an examination of the "Evidence in Liturgical Texts and Manuscripts."

More specifically, Trembelas employs key terms such as συνιερουργία and introduces concepts like 'co-sacrifice' (συνθύει) and 'concelebrate' (συλλειτουργεῖ) to emphasise the collective involvement of the entire congregation in the Eucharistic offering. By using these terms and concepts, Trembelas underscores the unified participation of the faithful, both clergy and laity, in the λειτουργία, which he considers a hallmark of the Orthodox liturgical vision. Moreover, this perspective is grounded in his interpretation of the scriptural term 'Royal Priesthood' (1 Peter 2:9), a concept he extensively elaborates on in his other writings.[19] Trembelas's use of these terms and concepts reflects his perspective on the priestly role of all believers and their active participation in the Eucharistic celebration, a primary focus of the Roman Catholic Liturgical Movement.

As previously mentioned, this work initially appeared as a series of articles in the periodical Ἐκκλησία, which featured a column titled "Ἐπιστολαὶ πρὸς τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν (Letters to Ἐκκλησία)." Shortly after the publication of the section on "The Concept of Co-Ministry (συνιερουργία)," a reader named Dionysios Mataragkas, a lawyer by profession, sent a letter to the editor commenting on Trembelas's text. In his letter, Mataragkas writes the following:

> Regarding the article by the esteemed university professor Mr. P. Trembelas, titled "The Concept of Co-Ministry (συνιερουργία)," published in the November 15, 1949, issue of Ἐκκλησία, I believe it is important, from a legal perspective, to reference Justinian's Novel no. 137, promulgated in 565, "Concerning the Ordination of Bishops and Clergy." This can be found in Corpus Juris Civilis, Volume Tertium Novellae, edited by Rudolfus Schoell, Berlin, p. 699. Chapter VI of this Novel, which pertains to the matter under consideration, states the following.[20]

Support from the Older Tradition, 13. Evidence in Liturgical Texts and Manuscripts, 14. Communion as a Seal of Worship, and 15. Changes and Deviations.

19 Τρεμπέλας 1953 and Τρεμπέλας 1957.

20 Ματαράγκας 1950.

At this point, Mataragkas presents a substantial excerpt from Justinian's Novel.

Remarkably, Trembelas incorporates Justinian's Novel into his discussion in the first installment of his study published immediately following Mataragkas's "Letter to *Ἐκκλησία.*" In that section on "The Audible Recitation of the Prayers," Trembelas makes the following assertion:

> In considering the fact that the prayers of this portion of the Divine Liturgy, encompassing the Anaphora, were read audibly (εἰς ἐπήκοον) in the past, numerous compelling arguments emerge. Despite its chronological sequence, let us first begin with Justinian's Novel 137 (or 174, according to some), which directs our focus to the early years of the Church.[21]

At first glance, it might seem plausible that Trembelas became aware of this piece of Byzantine legislation through Mataragkas. However, this is not the case, as Trembelas had already referenced the text in a similar manner in his seminal work *Αἱ τρεῖς λειτουργίαι κατὰ τοὺς ἐν Ἀθήναις κώδικας*, first published in 1935.[22] Both in this earlier work and in his later study on the Roman Liturgical Movement, it is evident that Trembelas did not rely on Schoell's publication of Justinian's Novels but instead used the 1881 Leipzig edition by Karl Eduard Zachariae von Lingenthal.[23]

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21 Τρεμπέλας 1948–1950, 382: "Περὶ τοῦ ὅτι δὲ καὶ αἱ εὐχαὶ τῆς εἰς τὸ τμῆμα αὐτὸ τῆς θείας λειτουργίας περιλαμβανομένης ἀναφορᾶς ἀπηγγέλλον τὸ παλαιότερον εἰς ἐπήκοον, ὑπάρχουσι πολλοὶ οἱ πείθοντες ἡμᾶς λόγοι. Ἂς ἀρχίσωμεν πρωθυστέρως πως ἐκ τῆς 137 (ἢ κατ' ἄλλους 174) Νεαρᾶς τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ παραπεμπούσης ἡμᾶς καὶ εἰς αὐτοῦς τοὺς πρώτους τῆς Ἐκκλησίας χρόνους."

22 Τρεμπέλας 1935, 100, n. 28: "Ὑπάρχουσι πολλοὶ λόγοι πείθοντες περὶ τοῦ ὅτι ἡ ἀναφορὰ ἀπηγγέλλετο ὑπὸ τοῦ λειτουργοῦ γεγονυία τῇ φωνῇ. Πράγματι ἐν τῇ 137 (ἢ 174) Νεαρᾷ τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ ὁρίζεται 'πάντας ἐπισκόπους τε καὶ πρεσβυτέρους μὴ κατὰ τὸ σεσιωπημένον, ἀλλὰ μετὰ φωνῆς τῷ πιστοτάτῳ λαῷ ἐξακουομένης τὴν θείαν προσκομιδὴν καὶ τὴν ἐν τῷ ἁγίῳ βαπτίσματι προσευχὴν ποιεῖσθαι πρὸς τὸ κἀντεῦθεν τὰς τῶν ἀκουόντων ψυχὰς εἰς πλείονα κατάνυξιν καὶ τὴν πρὸς τὸν δεσπότην Θεὸν διανίστασθαι δοξολογίαν. Οὕτως γὰρ ὁ θεῖος ἀπόστολος διδάκσει λέγων [...] ἐπεὶ ἐὰν εὐλογήσῃς τῷ πνεύματι, ὁ ἀναπληρῶν τὸν τόπον τοῦ ἰδιώτου, πῶς ἐρεῖ τὸ ἀμὴν τῷ Θεῷ ἐπὶ τῇ σῇ εὐχαριστίᾳ;' (κεφ. ς΄ ἔκδοσις Λειψίας Teubner, 1881, σελ. 412)." (Emphasis in the original.) Trembelas further elaborates on the term 'προσκομιδή,' arguing that it refers to the prayer of the anaphora rather than the prayer of the Prothesis or the prayer recited by the priest after placing the gifts on the holy altar table following the Great Entrance.

23 Τρεμπέλας 1948–1950, 382 (n.1): "Κεφ. ς΄ ἔκδοσις Λειψίας Teubner, 1881, σελ. 412." Full bibliographic reference: Karl Eduard Zachariae von Lingenthal, *Imp. Justiniani Pp. A. novellae quae vocantur, sive, Constitutiones quae extra codicem supersunt ordine chronologico digestae* (Lipsiae: B.G. Teubner, 1881), 412.

This reliance, however, introduced confusion regarding the numbering of the Novel in question. In the Leipzig edition, the number 174 corresponds to the sequence of texts edited up to that point, while the correct number, 137, is clearly noted in Zachariae von Lingenthal's notes. This discrepancy is evident in Trembelas's phrasing, "[…] Justinian's Novel 137 (or 174, according to some)." The persistence of this discrepancy suggests that Trembelas overlooked Mataragkas's "Letter to *Ἐκκλησία*". A closer examination of this letter might have provided Trembelas with clarity regarding the correct numbering of Justinian's Novel.

Trembelas does not provide an in-depth analysis of Justinian's Novel in either of his studies.[24] Unlike Mataragkas, who offers a more extensive quotation, Trembelas limits his citation of the Novel to the passage from 1 Corinthians, omitting the verse from Romans and the remainder of the text.[25] This selective approach reflects his focus on the connection between prayers recited aloud and the congregational response of "Amen," emphasizing that the practice of audible prayer aligns with the ancient and apostolic tradition of the Church.

To further bolster his argument, Trembelas promptly references Justin Martyr's *First Apology*, specifically chapters 65 and 67,[26] before turning to oth-

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24 In the Preface to Novel 137, which neither Trembelas nor Mataragkas cite, Justinian addresses a critical concern regarding the clergy: their ignorance of both the Divine Liturgy and the rite of Baptism. The Byzantine Emperor attributes this ineptitude to the bishops' failure to convene episcopal synods as mandated by the regulations of the Holy Apostles and Church Fathers. This negligence, he argues, has resulted in insufficient ecclesiastical oversight and inadequate instruction for the clergy. Justinian emphasizes that regular synods are essential for ensuring that clergy not only attain proficiency in the sacred rites but also lead virtuous lives, motivated by the fear of divine judgment under canonical law. To address this, Justinian mandates a specific ordination requirement: "A certificate (libellus) is to be demanded of the prospective ordinand by the one ordaining, which must contain the facts of his orthodox faith, with his signature; and he is also to recite the divine oblation used at the holy communion, the prayer at holy baptism, and the other forms of prayer." This concern forms the basis for Justinian's decree that all bishops and priests must audibly recite the eucharistic and baptismal prayers during services. He believed that such a practice would both foster greater spiritual engagement among the congregation and deepen their appreciation of the divine praises and blessings. For the entire text of Justinian's Novel 137, see Schoell and Kroll 1877, 695-699.

25 Justinian supports his decree with biblical references from 1 Corinthians 14:16–17 (the well-known passage on speaking in tongues) and Romans 10:10 (on confession made with the mouth), emphasizing the significance of audible prayer in communal worship. His directives aim to restore liturgical integrity and doctrinal purity within the Church, ensuring that both clergy and laity are properly instructed and spiritually enriched.

26 Minns and Parvis 2009, 252–263.

er relevant texts regarding this issue. These include liturgical evidence from other Eastern Rites, as well as insights from the manuscript tradition of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine *Euchologia*. By incorporating these sources, Trembelas sought to present a comprehensive defense of the audible recitation of priestly prayers within the broader context of Eastern liturgical practices and historical precedent.

The *Memorandum* of Trembelas and the Draft Notes of Evlogios Kourilas

As previously noted, Trembelas was a key early figure in a broader movement within certain circles of the Church of Greece that advocated for the audible recitation of priestly prayers during the Divine Liturgy. By the time of Trembelas's publication on the Roman Liturgical Movement, this practice had already gained support among the clergy, likely bolstered by his respected position as a Professor at the Theological Faculty of the University of Athens and his influential role as a founding member of the Zoe Brotherhood of Theologians.[27] However, as is often the case with proposed changes to established liturgical traditions, this development provoked concerns and resistance among certain priests and hierarchs.

One such concerned hierarch was Metropolitan Chrysostomos (Chatzistavrou) of Philippi, Neapolis, and Thasos – an alumnus of the Theological School of Halki, disciple of the revered ethno-martyr Chrysostomos of Smyrna, and editor of the esteemed *Saliveros Hierotelestikon*. Metropolitan Chrysostomos raised the issue of the audible recitation of priestly prayers before the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece and engaged directly with Trembelas on the matter. In response, Trembelas submitted a document to the Synod titled *Memorandum on the Method of Reading the Prayers of the Divine Liturgy, to the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece*.[28] This Memorandum was essentially a condensed and refined version of Trembelas's study, The Roman Liturgical Movement and the Practice of the East, incorporating extensive excerpts from this work.[29]

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27 On the Zoe Brotherhood, see Logotheti 2017.

28 Title in Greek: Ὑπόμνημα περὶ τοῦ τρόπου τῆς ἀναγνώσεως τῶν εὐχῶν τῆς θείας λειτουργίας. Πρὸς τὴν Ἱερὰν Σύνοδον τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Ἑλλάδος. Διὰ τοῦ Μακαριωτάτου Ἀρχιεπισκόπου Ἀθηνῶν καὶ πάσης Ἑλλάδος κυρίου Δαμασκηνοῦ.

29 Trembelas's earlier research formed the basis for his French article, "L'audition de l'anaphore

The Memorandum is undated, but its date can be inferred from the protocol number assigned to incoming documents by the Secretariat of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece. This protocol number (Prot. no. 2187) appears on Trembelas's cover letter addressed to Archbishop Damaskinos (1941–1949) – not on the Memorandum itself – and indicates it was received on September 22, 1948.[30] In this cover letter, Trembelas mentions a discussion he had with Metropolitan Chrysostomos on the issue the previous October (presumably October 1947) and refers to the related written inquiry submitted by the Metropolitan to the Synod of the Church of Greece.[31] It is plausible that this inquiry was connected to the preparation of Metropolitan Chrysostomos's *Hierotelestikon,* which was published in 1948.

In addition to seeking Trembelas' perspective, Metropolitan Chrysostomos also consulted his esteemed friend and correspondent Evlogios Kourilas Lavriotis. Kourilas, a monk of the Great Lavra, Protepistatis of Mount Athos,[32] Metropolitan of Korytsa in the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania (appointed by the Ecumenical Patriarchate), and Professor at the Universities of Thessaloniki (1935–1937) and Athens (1942–1949), was known for his staunch opposition to Trembelas's views. Despite their regular correspondence, it appears that Kourilas never formally responded to Chrysostomos on this issue. However, in the personal archives of Kourilas, housed at the University of Ioannina, a draft of his handwritten notes on the topic is preserved, offering valuable insight into his unpublished thoughts.[33] At the head of these notes appears the following text: "Regarding the secret prayers in the Divine Liturgy, at the request of Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Kavala and Neapolis. I did not finish because I am going to the endangered Epirus. January 1, 1948."[34] Notably, a handwritten copy of Trembelas's cover letter and Memo-

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Eucharistique par le people," published in the 1955 Chevetogne volume marking the 900th anniversary of the 1054 schism. This is the text most familiar to Western scholars. See Trembelas 1955.

30 For an English translation of Trembelas's cover letter, see APPENDIX A below.

31 I have not as yet been able to locate Metropolitan Chrysostomos' letter of inquiry submitted to the Holy Synod.

32 According to the Charter of Mount Athos, the Protepistatis, or chief administrator, is one of the four members of the Holy Epistasia, which serves as the executive authority of Mount Athos.

33 Archive no. 5.1.ΛΕΙΤ.12.3.3. Title: Μυστικαί ευχαί. See, Ζαγκλή-Μπόζιου 2009, 398.

34 Origingal Greek text: Περὶ τὴν ἐν τῇ θείᾳ λειτουργίᾳ μυστικῶν εὐχῶν, κατὰ παράκλησιν τοῦ μητροπολίτου Καβάλας καὶ Νεαπόλεως κ. Χρυσοστόμου. Δὲν ἐτελείωσα διότι μεταβαίνω εἰς τὴν κινδυνεύουσαν Ἤπειρον. 1 Ιαν. 1948.

randum is also preserved in the Kourilas archives,[35] suggesting that Kourilas's notes were written intermittently and were likely still being developed even after September 22, 1948.

In his notes, Kourilas argues that the audible recitation of the priestly prayers during the Divine Liturgy is not supported by either the manuscript tradition or the printed editions of the *Euchologion* and the *Hieratikon*. Therefore, he considers this practice an unacceptable innovation. He recalls an incident in which a hieromonk from Mount Athos was suspended by the Ἱερὰ Κοινότητα (Holy Community) – the central self-governing body of Mount Athos – for reciting the prayers of the Divine Liturgy aloud rather than μυστικῶς (silently). Kourilas attributes this deviation from tradition to the hieromonk's heightened emotional state during the celebration of the Liturgy.

Kourilas also suggests that this audible recitation may have originated from concelebration, where the leading priest articulates the prayers loudly enough for his fellow priests to hear. He notes that this practice became particularly evident during Patriarch Joachim III's celebration of the Divine Liturgy at the major feasts and vigils at the Great Lavra while he resided on Mount Athos between his two patriarchal tenures (1878–1884; 1901–1912), specifically from 1884 to 1901. During these occasions, "with 30–40 priests and 20–30 deacons" concelebrating, the Ecumenical Patriarch needed to recite the prayers loudly so that all concelebrants could hear. As a result, some hieromonks began to "imitate" Joachim III, mistakenly believing that this was the proper way to conduct the Liturgy according to the patriarchal tradition.

Drawing from the rubrics of the numerous *diataxeis*[36] available to him, Kourilas claims that this is not the correct way for concelebration. He asserts that each participating priest should recite all the prayers during the Divine Liturgy μυστικῶς (silently) or καθ' ἑαυτόν (to oneself). Evidence supporting this can indeed be found in the manuscripts of the *diataxis*, including those of the Philothean tradition.[37] Additionally, Kourilas offers specific citations from various prayers of the Divine Liturgy to demonstrate that they pertain to the priests themselves. In doing so, he offers a distinct interpretation of the use of the first-person plural in these prayers, suggesting that the priestly nature

35 Archive no. 5.1.ΛΕΙΤ.12.1.9.1-2. Title: Λειτουργικά. See, Ζαγκλή-Μπόζιου 2009, 395.

36 A diataxis (διάταξις; plural: diataxeis) is a liturgical document containing a set of rubrics that provides detailed guidelines for the proper celebration of the Divine Liturgy.

37 The *Diataxis* of Patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos (1353–1354; 1364–1376) is regarded as the authoritative text of the established tradition currently followed.

of these prayers extends beyond the well-known prayer at the Cheroubikon, Οὐδεὶς ἄξιος ("None is worthy"), which is written in the first-person singular.[38]

Consequently, Kourilas argues that each concelebrating priest should recite the prayers καθ' ἑαυτόν (to oneself) during the Divine Liturgy. He refines the understanding of which prayers are reserved for priestly use, emphasising their internal, hieratic function. In contrast to Trembelas, who advocated for audible recitation to highlight the communal dimension of worship and promote congregational participation, Kourilas favored silent recitation, underscoring the theological and ritual significance embedded in the prayers' structure and language.

Official Response and Subsequent Developments

The deliberations on this topic were extensive and involved not only Trembelas, Kourilas, and Metropolitan Chrysostomos, but also a broader range of theologians, clerics, and ecclesiastical leaders.[39] These discussions reflected the deep concerns and differing theological perspectives surrounding the audible recitation of priestly prayers during the Divine Liturgy. In fact, the extensive debate culminated in the issuance of two important encyclicals by the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece: Encyclical 617/499/541, issued on February 16, 1951, *Concerning the Strict Prohibition Against Reading the Prayers of the Divine Liturgy Aloud*, [40] and Encyclical 868/1353/967, issued on June 9, 1956, *Concerning the 'Secret' Reading of the Prayers in the Divine Liturgy and Other Holy Sacraments, and the Melodic Reading of the Apostle and the Holy Gospel*.[41] These encyclicals, which unequivocally called for the silent recitation of the priestly prayers, played a pivotal role in shaping the liturgical practices of the Church during this period, reinforcing the traditional understanding of the Liturgy and its sacred silence.

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38 Τρεμπέλας 1935, 71–76.

39 For a concise discussion of other relevant texts from this period, see Ἀγαθάγγελος 2010, 131–132.

40 Αἱ Συνοδικαὶ Ἐγκύκλιοι, II, 1956, 572: "Περὶ τοῦ ὅτι ἀπαγορεύεται αὐστηρῶς ἡ ἀνάγνωσις ἐκφώνως τῶν εὐχῶν τῆς θείας Λειτουργίας." For an English translation of the Encyclical, see APPENDIX B below.

41 Αἱ Συνοδικαὶ Ἐγκύκλιοι, II, 1956, 850: "Περὶ τῆς ἀναγκώσεως «μυστικῶς» τῶν εὐχῶν τῆς θείας Λειτουργίας καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν ἱερῶν Μυστηρίων καὶ ἐμμελοῦς ἀναγνώσεως τοῦ Ἀποστόλου καὶ τοῦ ἱεροῦ Εὐαγγελίου". For an English translation of the Encyclical, see APPENDIX C below.

Notably, Metropolitan Chrysostomos was among the signatories of the 1956 Encyclical, highlighting his crucial role in both its promulgation and implementation. Chrysostomos – who later became Archbishop of Athens – was also responsible for the 1962 edition of the Hieratikon published by Apostoliki Diakonia at the beginning of his tenure. This edition included an excerpt from the 1956 Encyclical. In fact, the 1956 Encyclical was incorporated, either fully or in part, into every subsequent edition of the Hieratikon published by Apostoliki Diakonia up until the 2002 edition, overseen by the learned Protopresbyter Konstantinos Papagiannis under Archbishop Christodoulos of Athens. In this later edition, which remains the official version for the Church of Greece, the perspective favoring the audible recitation of priestly prayers during the Divine Liturgy, as championed by Trembelas, implicitly prevailed.

Beyond the 2002 edition of the Hieratikon published by Apostoliki Diakonia, the perspective favoring, or at least not discouraging, the audible recitation of the priestly prayers during the Divine Liturgy has been widely adopted by the editors of other recent Greek editions of the Hieratikon. In fact, these editions systematically exclude any reference to the silent recitation of the prayers (μυστικῶς). The first such edition was published by the Athonite Monastery of Simonopetra in 1992, edited in consultation with Ioannis Fountoulis.[42] The practice of audible recitation of priestly prayers has even received official endorsement from the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece under Archbishop Christodoulos. This endorsement was formalised in Encyclical 2784/941/645, issued twenty years ago on March 31, 2004.[43] The directive, which remains the most recent document from the Holy Synod on this matter, states the following:

> The belief that prayers are either recited μυστικῶς or "ἐκφώνως" (as it is commonly stated) is incorrect. A study of the manuscript euchological tradition reveals that only a few, clearly defined prayers are recited either μυστικῶς or ἐκφώνως. Most prayers are recited

42 Other editions include those of the Vatopedi Monastery 2020, the Ecumenical Patriarchate 2021, and the Tatarna Monastery 2023.

43 Αἱ Συνοδικαὶ Ἐγκύκλιοι, VIII, 2021, 222–226. There are subsequent Synodal documents that touch on this issue indirectly, such as Encyclical 2793/2137/1239 of June 30, 2004 (Αἱ Συνοδικαὶ Ἐγκύκλιοι, VIII, 2021, 252–256). However, Encyclical 2784/941/645 remains the most recent document focusing specifically on this question. See also the previous Encyclical 2683/5778/2404/ issued under Archbishop Christodoulos on 8 November 1999; Αἱ Συνοδικαὶ Ἐγκύκλιοι, VII, 2006, 180–183.

> "in a low voice" but εἰς ἐπίκοον τοῦ λαοῦ – that is, within hearing of the people, to be audible by them. This is the liturgical tradition of the Church, which modern liturgical practice is called to embrace.[44]

Many of the arguments of the Encyclical, including reference to Novel 137 of Justinian, are fundamentally rooted in Trembelas's study. Notably, after mentioning what is perceived to be the faulty practice of "the Nestorian Narsai," the Encyclical asserts that, "the Orthodox Church addressed this practice through Justinian's Novel 137 (sic), which confirmed the Catholic tradition (sic) that the prayers of the Liturgy should be recited 'not silently, but in a voice audible to the most faithful congregation.'"[45]

Despite official Synodal pronouncements from the Church of Greece, some of which are diametrically opposed, the debate over the audible recitation of priestly prayers during the Divine Liturgy remains far from being fully resolved.[46] It reflects deeper questions about liturgical tradition and practice within the Orthodox Church, as well as the complexities of balancing historical inquiry with proposals for contemporary liturgical change. Trembelas's

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44 Αἱ Συνοδικαὶ Ἐγκύκλιοι, VIII, 2021, 224: "Εἶναι […] λανθασμένη ἡ ἄποψις ὅτι αἱ εὐχαὶ ἢ ἀναγινώσκονται μυστικῶς ἢ 'ἐκφώνως', ὡς συνηθίζεται νὰ λέγεται. Τὸ ὀρθὸν ἐκ τῆς μελέτης τῆς χειρογράφου εὐχολογιακῆς παραδόσεως εἶναι ὅτι ἐλάχισται – καὶ σαφῶς καθοριζόμεναι – ἀναγινώσκονται μυστικῶς ἢ 'ἐκφώνως', αἱ πλεῖστοι δὲ ἀναγινώσκονται 'χαμηλοφώνως' ἀλλὰ 'εἰς ἐπήκοον' τοῦ λαοῦ, δηλαδὴ νά εἶναι ἀκουσταὶ ἀπὸ τὸν λαόν. Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ λειτουργικὴ παράδοσις τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, τὴν ὁποίαν καλεῖται νὰ ἐνστερνισθῇ ἡ σύγχρονος λειτουργικὴ πρᾶξις."

45 Αἱ Συνοδικαὶ Ἐγκύκλιοι, VIII, 2021, 223.

46 The discussion has not dissipated even in more recent times. Ioannis Fountoulis was a prominent contemporary advocate for the audible recitation of priestly prayers in the Divine Liturgy, a position he articulated in his *Εἰσαγωγή στὴ θεία λατρεία* (*Introduction to Divine Worship*), first published in 1993. In the section titled Ἡ ἀνάγνωση τῶν εὐχῶν, he cites Justinian's Novel yet uncritically reproduces Panagiotis Trembelas's erroneous numbering—an inaccuracy that persisted even in the fourth edition (Φουντούλης 2004, 205): "[…] ἤδη κατὰ τὸν ΣΤ' αἰώνα πρατηρήθηκαν τάσεις 'μυστικῶς' ἀναγνώσεως τῶν εὐχῶν τῆς λειτουργίας καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου βαπτίσματος. Ἡ ἀντίδραση μᾶς εἶναι γνωστὴ ἀπὸ τὴν 137η (174η) Νεαρὰ τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ […]" As noted above, it was Trembelas who first introduced this numerical confusion, which Fountoulis, unwittingly perpetuated. Compare, his earlier and more cautious treatment of the issue in Φουντούλης 1977, 25–26, where he likewise references Justinian's Novel but omits any numbering.

The most systematic study on this issue in Greek liturgical scholarship is that of Φίλιας 1997, which examines the manuscript tradition of the Byzantine Euchologion. For an assessment of the historical evidence supporting the silent recitation of the priestly prayers, see Μπαρούσης 2011c. The debate between Filias and Barousis is discussed in Μπαρούσης 2002; Φίλιας 2003; and Μπαρούσης 2003. Μπαρούσης 2011d also addresses the views of Σκαλτσῆς 2009. An earlier exchange between Barousis and Skaltsis can be found in the widely distributed monthly journal for parish priests in the Church of Greece, *Ἐφημέριος*. See Σκαλτσῆς 2011a; Μπαρούσης 2011a; Σκαλτσῆς 2011b; Μπαρούσης 2011b; and Σκαλτσῆς 2011c.

advocacy for audible recitation and Kourilas's defense of silent recitation both draw on historical precedents and theological principles. Similarly, each scholar made significant contributions to the broader discussion on maintaining the integrity of the Church's worship, highlighting the tension between received tradition and reform.

The ongoing relevance of these debates underscores the dynamic nature of liturgical reform and the continuous search for authenticity within the Church's liturgical practices. As the Church navigates these complex issues, time will reveal how these discussions and practices evolve and shape the future of Orthodox worship, balancing tradition with the changing contexts and needs of the faithful.

APPENDIX A

Cover Letter of Trembelas's Memorandum to Archbishop Damaskinos

To the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Church of Greece, Through His Beatitude, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece, Damaskinos.

In a discussion with His Eminence Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Neapolis and Philippi, held during the past October, I realised that His Eminence, being somewhat uncertain as to whether it would be permissible for the prayers of the Divine Liturgy to be read more audibly so that the faithful might hear them, submitted a written query to the Holy Synod, seeking a definitive answer on this matter. As a professor of Liturgics at our Theological School and considering it my duty and obligation to provide the Holy Synod with evidence that may illuminate this matter, I have the honor of submitting my Memorandum for its consideration.

In doing so, I express my deepest respect to the hierarch who make up the Holy Synod and, accepting their prayers,

I remain a faithful child of the Orthodox Church of Christ.

(signed) P. N. Trembelas
[Holy Synod | Prot.no.: 2187 | Received: 22-9-1948]

APPENDIX B

Concerning Concerning the Strict Prohibition Against Reading the Prayers of the Divine Liturgy Aloud.

KINGDOM OF GREECE
THE HOLY SYNOD OF THE CHURCH OF GREECE
To their Eminences the Hierarchs of the Church of Greece

The Holy and Sacred Synod, having been informed that certain clergy, both in the capital and in the provinces, are reading aloud the prayers of the Divine and Holy Liturgy – a practice not prescribed in the Liturgical Book of the Divine Liturgy approved by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, thereby creating a lack of uniformity in worship – has decided to request the Most Reverend Metropolitans to forbid henceforth those who, within their respective Metropolises, might be reading aloud the aforementioned prayers. They are asked to issue relevant instructions regarding this matter and impose the appropriate penalties on those who violate the above decision, as the audible recitation of these prayers is contrary to the tradition and practice of the Church.

In Athens, 16 February 1951.
† DEMETRIOS of Dryinoupolis, Acting President, † PANTELEIMON of Eddessa and Pella, † KALLINIKOS of Kassandreia, † VASILEIOS of Maroneia and Thassos, † CHRYSOSTOMOS of Messinia, † KYRILLOS of Zixnoi, † AMBROSIOS of Paronaxia, † METHODIOS of Kerkyra and Paxoi, † ANANIAS of Karystia and Skyros, † CHRYSOSTOMOS of Argolis, † CHRISTOPHOROS of Naupaktia and Eyrytania.
The Chief Secretary
Archim. Damaskinos Kotzias

APPENDIX C

Concerning the "Secret" Reading of the Prayers in the Divine Liturgy and Other Holy Sacraments, and the Melodic Reading of the Apostle and the Holy Gospel.

KINGDOM OF GREECE
THE HOLY SYNOD OF THE CHURCH OF GREECE
To their Eminences the Hierarchs of the Church of Greece

Under the sacred Canons and the Charter of the Church, the Holy Synod is obliged to oversee the exact performance of matters pertaining to divine worship. This supervision aims to maintain the accepted and common practice of the Orthodox Church, in accordance with the Apostolic commandment: "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40).

In line with this duty, the Holy Synod has observed a recent trend where certain clergymen loudly recite the prayers of the Divine Liturgy and other sacred Mysteries, contrary to the rubrics and directives in the liturgical books which prescribe these prayers be read "in secret."

Therefore, through this Synodal Encyclical, we have decided to beseech you to issue a circular letter strictly enjoining your clergy to perform the reading of the prayers as prescribed, "in secret," and not audible to the congregation.

This matter is considered both a question of proper order in the Church and respect for liturgical tradition, as well as a matter of discipline in worship. We commend the faithful observance of this Synodal directive to ensure its strict application by the sacred clergy. Additionally, it is resolved that the Apostle and the Holy Gospel be read melodically, provided that such melodic reading does not detract from the meaning of the sacred text.

In Athens, 9 June 1956.
† DOROTHEOS of Athens, President, † ALEXANDROS of Verroia and Naoussa, † CHRYSOSTOMOS of Philippi, Neapolis and Thassos, † AMBROSIOS of Phthiotis, † PROCOPIOS of Hydra, Spetses and Aegina, † EIRENAIOS of Samos and Ikaria, † CONSTANTINOS of Serres and Nigrita, † DEMETRIOS of Larissa, † SERAPHIM of Arta, † DAMASKINOS of Trifilia and Olympia, † KYPRIANOS of Ierissos, the Holy Mountain, and Ardamerion, † HIEROTHEOS of Kefalonia, † DIONYSIOS of Lemnos.
The Chief Secretary
Archim. Chrysostomos Themelis

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Revisiting 'Active Participation' in Orthodox Ecclesial Life: Insights from John Chrysostom

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Abstract

Contemporary Orthodox discourse frequently explores lay participation in liturgical activities, such as congregational singing, public reading, and assisting at the sanctuary. Scholars have observed a correlation between this phenomenon and the directives of Vatican II on "active participation," which not only influenced Roman Catholic theology but also shaped Orthodox perspectives on liturgy, notably advocated by theological figures like Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemann and Archbishop Paul of Finland. One may also ask whether the emphasis on active participation has found particular resonance in cultures influenced by the individualism of early 16th-century Protestant interpretations of the priesthood of all believers or subsequent iterations thereof. Rather than scrutinising these modern or medieval undercurrents beneath contemporary debates, this study redirects attention to the sources, aiming to delineate the essence of active participation as exemplified by a prominent congregational homilist of the Patristic era, John Chrysostom.

The central inquiry concerns the nature of ecclesiastical participation that Chrysostom envisioned for his Christian audiences. A systematic examination of his congregational homilies reveals that Chrysostom outlines minimal expectations regarding the public roles of his audience within the liturgical synaxis. Instead, he emphasises the importance of frequent attendance at liturgical services, earnest reception of ecclesiastical instruction, participation in the Eucharist, and focused prayer, alongside the cultivation of piety, the continuous pursuit of spiritual growth, Christian witness, and material generosity.

Keywords: active participation, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, patristic, Alexander Schmemann, Archbishop Paul, John Chrysostom

Introduction

Contemporary Orthodox discourse frequently explores lay participation in liturgical activities, such as congregational singing, public reading, and assisting at the sanctuary. Some scholars have observed a correlation between this phenomenon and the directives of the Second Vatican council on 'active participation,'[1] which not only influenced Roman Catholic theology but also impacted Orthodox perspectives on liturgical life.[2] One might also ask whether the emphasis on lay participation in ecclesial activities has found particular resonance in cultures influenced by the individualism of early 16th-century Protestant interpretations of the priesthood of all believers, or its subsequent iterations.[3]

Rather than scrutinizing these modern or medieval undercurrents of contemporary debates or engaging with the fundamental discussion on the relationship between laity and ecclesiastical hierarchy,[4] this article redirects attention further *ad fontes*. Its aim is to delineate the essence of 'active participation' in ecclesial life, as exemplified by a prominent congregational homilist

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1 See e.g. Larin 2013.

2 See also Bishop Damaskinos's contribution in the present volume.

3 See especially Martin Luther's 1523 letter *De instituendis ministris Ecclesiae*. In the first part of this work, the Wittenberg scholar famously outlines his view of the priesthood of all believers (WA 12:178–189), and subsequently argues that this view forms the basis for ordained ministry (WA 12:189–194). A detailed discussion of later Protestant interpretations of Luther's views on ministry and laity lies beyond the scope of this study. It is sufficient to note that while the early German Pietists adhered to Luther's basic model, many of their successors appear to have disregarded the theme of the latter part of his epistle – the significance of ordained ministry – thereby focusing primarily on the "priestly" activity of all believers. See references in Wallmann 1990. For a similar tendency in contemporary evangelical thought, see Warren (1995, ch. 19), who links "[t]he designation 'active' member" with what he terms "Every-Member Ministry." For a more balanced interpretation of Luther's understanding of the relationship between the priesthood of all believers and ordained ministry, see Aarts 1972, 227–245.

4 For recent interpretations of late antique relationships between clergy and laity, see Frank 2023, 8–13; Torjesen 2008. The Orthodox position on this relationship is intepreted by Evdokimov (1959, 165–166) as follows: "[L]a conception orthodoxe se situe hors de l'égalitarisme anti-hiérarchique de même qu'elle se situe hors de la coupure cléricaliste de l'unique Corps en deux, et que l'accent est fortement placé sur la participation sacerdotale de tous, mais au moyen de deux modes, de deux sacerdoces. Chacun est établi dans son sacerdoce par Dieu et c'est cette origine divine qui place les deux dans l'économie sacramentelle, les enlève du monde, de la sociologie, mais les situe en tant que ministère charismatique dans le monde et pour le monde." For a more nuanced exposition of the Orthodox understanding of the ecclesiastical roles of laity and the historical backgrounds thereof, see Afanassieff 1975, 35–121. On the vocation and mission of laity in pre- and post-Vatican II Roman Catholic ecclesiology, see Castellucci 2012, 557–584.

of the Patristic era, John Chrysostom (c. 345–407). Naturally, it would be a gargantuan task to produce a comprehensive comparison of approaches to liturgical participation spanning 16 centuries. Nevertheless, an excursion to early Christian sources can help us view modern approaches within a broader historical context. Similarly, given the constraints of a single article, which preclude an exhaustive analysis of Chrysostom's entire corpus, this study will focus on two key series of his congregational homilies that are central to our theme: the homilies on Genesis and the homilies on the Statues.[5]

To fully appreciate the evidence presented by these late fourth-century sources, it is helpful to begin by providing an overview of the relevant perspectives articulated in modern times. Brief discussions will first address 20th-century Roman Catholic statements on active participation, followed by an analysis of corresponding views from contemporary Orthodox authors. Subsequently, the focus will shift to Chrysostom's perspectives on the active roles of his lay hearers. Finally, concluding reflections will be offered based on the findings.

Roman Catholic Views of Active Participation

As is well known, the 20th-century emphasis on a more active role for the laity in ecclesial life both coincided with and was influenced by the "revival of scholarly interest in the sacred liturgy" that began in the late 19th century.[6] The concept of 'active participation' itself originates with *Tra le sollecitudini*, the 1903 *motu proprio* of Pope Pius X.[7] Relevant evidence of subsequent Roman

5 Another study should be devoted to the relevant material found in Chrysostom's twelve extant catechetical homilies, see Eine "Katechese" (aus dem Jahr 387), Reiner Kaczynski (ed.), *Catecheses Baptismales: griechisch, deutsch = Taufkatechesen* I, Fontes Christiani 6/1, Freiburg (im Breisgau) et al.: Herder, 1992; Auguste Piédagnel & Louis Doutreleau (ed.), *Trois catéchèses baptismales*, Sources chrétiennes 366, Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1990; Antoine Wenger (ed.), *Huit catéchèses baptismales inédites*, Sources chrétiennes 50, Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1957. Suffice it to state that for the catechist, active ecclesial participation primarily entails 1) renunciation of one's former lifestyle, 2) repentance, 3) steadfast confession of faith, 4) internal adherence to ecclesiastical dogma, and 5) earnest engagement in the rites of initiation. Through these voluntary acts, adherents are expected to attain full membership of the Church.

6 *MD* 4–5, 7–8.

7 *TLS*, *praef.*: "Essendo, infatti, Nostro vivissimo desiderio che il vero spirito cristiano rifiorisca per ogni modo e si mantenga nei fedeli tutti, è necessario provvedere prima di ogni altra cosa alla santità e dignità del tempio, dove appunto i fedeli si radunano per attingere tale spirito dalla sua

Catholic applications on this concept can be found in *Mediator Dei*, the 1947 papal encyclical by Pius XII, and, famously, in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, particularly *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the 1963 constitution on the sacred liturgy, and *Lumen Gentium*, the 1964 dogmatic constitution on the church. A detailed discussion of the ideas found in these documents is unnecessary here.[8] For the present purposes, it will suffice to make the following four observations.

First, in Roman Catholic understanding, active participation is manifested through frequent participation in liturgical services, particularly in the eucharist. According to the preconciliar Mediator Dei, "the Christian community is in duty bound to participate in the liturgical rites according to their station."[9] The motivation for this approach is clearly focused on the reception of divine gifts, which believers are encouraged to accept "freely and with spontaneity." Simultaneously, "this active and individual participation" is described as "necessary."[10] The *Code of Canon Law* employs similar, if not identical, language: "On Sundays and other holy days of obligation, the faithful are obliged to participate in the Mass."[11]

Secondly, the Roman Catholic view of active participation entails "the unanimous participation of the assembly [in liturgical action] at the designated moments,"[12] particularly the vocal participation of the laity in corporate

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prima ed indispensabile fonte, che è *la partecipazione attiva* ai sacrosanti misteri e alla preghiera pubblica e solenne della Chiesa." Emphasis added. Cf. Pius XI's 1928 Apostolic Constitution *Divini Cultus Sanctitatem*, where the author stresses that laity should be "non tamquam extranei vel muti spectatores," but rather active participants in corporate hymnody, see *DCS* IX.

8 Rather than providing a systematic exposition of active participation, these conciliar documents depict their understanding of the concept through several adjectives. Stuflesser (2015, 150–151) lists the following: "*debita*, *communitatis propria*, *interna* and *externa*, *vera*, *genuina*, *congrua*, *sciens* and *conscia*, *perfecta*, *efficax* and *fructuosa*, *actuosa*, *viva*, *plena* and *pia*." For further discussion on related characterisations of active participation, see Cuva 2002, 184–191. A historical review of the concept of active participation from Pius X to Vatican II is provided by De Clerck 2004. For insights into the backgrounds of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and postconciliar analyses, see Levering 2017, 50–80.

9 *MD* 5.

10 *MD* 77–78, 119. Similar views are echoed in *LG* IV, 42. See also *SC* 10, 55.

11 *CIC*, can. 1247; *CCC* 2180. For further discussion on the necessity of active participation, see Cuva 2002, 180–184.

12 *CCC* 1157. Nearly four decades after *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, some Roman Catholic scholars considered lay participation in corporate hymnody as a given. See e.g. Baroffio (2002, 57) who, after posing the question "Chi canta nella liturgia?" states: "Tutti cantano, è ovvio, nella misura in cui hanno un minimo di capacità vocale e di formazione corale. […] Il patrimonio tradizionale è ricco di tali musiche che per secoli hanno veicolato un'esperienza di fede e che anche oggi potrebbero incidere nella vita di una comunità. L'imperdire in modo assoluto che ciò si realizzi, è un'azione che alla fine sottrae alla Chiesa in preghiera un bene su cui essa vanta diritti."

prayer and hymnody. Through such activities, as Pius XII notes, the liturgy can become "even in an external way a sacred act in which all who are present may share."[13] The ultimate goal is to help the faithful avoid remaining "as if they were outsiders and mute onlookers" and instead enable them to "take a more active part in divine worship."[14] This participation is expected to "foster and promote the people's piety and intimate union with Christ and His visible minister."[15] Alongside the views laid out in Mediator Dei,[16] Sacrosanctum Concilium encourages lay participation in "acclamations, responses, psalmody, antiphons, and songs."[17] Furthermore, it emphasizes that "whenever the sacred action is to be celebrated with song, the whole body of the faithful may be able to contribute that active participation which is rightly theirs."[18]

The *third* mode of active participation pertains to assistance at the altar. However, in comparison to the previous two themes, this aspect is mentioned more briefly, appearing in only two paragraphs of Mediator Dei. These passages advocate careful selection of "good and upright young boys from all classes of citizens who will come generously and spontaneously to serve at the altar with careful zeal and exactness." With appropriate training and encouragement, these acolytes can then be nurtured as potential candidates for the priesthood. The text links these practices to the idea that congregants should take "such an active part in the liturgy that it becomes a truly sacred action of due worship to the eternal Lord in which the priest, chiefly responsible for the souls of his parish, and the ordinary faithful are united together."[19]

Fourthly, the concept of active participation is associated not only with the external activities mentioned above but also with one's inner disposition. In the Roman Catholic documents examined here, these two aspects of 'activity' are inextricably intertwined:

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13 *MD* 105.
14 *MD* 192.
15 *MD* 106.
16 See also *MD* 90, 145, 191, 194.
17 *SC* 30.
18 *SC* 114. See also *SC* 33, 121.
19 *MD* 199–200. Cf. Blasetti (2021, 145–152), who advocates for the revivification of lay participation in church service ("servizi") rather than a narrow focus on ecclesiastical roles ("ruoli"). Regrettably, the author provides little discussion on the practical implications of this view. For further exploration of contemporary Roman Catholic perspectives on laypeople in "pastoral service," see Kasper 2021, 212–213. Additionally, Küng (1969, 377–379), in his monumental work *Die Kirche*, one of the earliest examinations on post-Vatican II Roman Catholic ecclesiology, offers a more radical interpretation of "the priesthood of all believers" than the Council and the abovementioned authors, explicitly endorsing "lay preaching" and "lay theology."

> The worship rendered by the Church to God must be, in its entirety, interior as well as exterior. It is exterior because the nature of man as a composite of body and soul requires it to be so. […] But the chief element of divine worship must be interior. For we must always live in Christ and give ourselves to Him completely, so that in Him, with Him and through Him the heavenly Father may be duly glorified. The sacred liturgy requires, however, that both of these elements be intimately linked with each another [*sic*].[20]

Indeed, for the author of Mediator Dei, "God cannot be honored worthily unless the mind and heart turn to Him in quest of the perfect life."[21] Instead of elaborating further on this topic,[22] it suffices to quote a key passage from Sacrosanctum Concilium:

> But in order that the liturgy may be able to produce its full effects, it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions, that their minds should be attuned to their voices, and that they should cooperate with divine grace lest they receive it in vain. Pastors of souls must therefore realize that, when the liturgy is celebrated, something more is required than the mere observation of the laws governing valid and licit celebration; it is their duty also to ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite, and enriched by its effects.[23]

All things considered, the classic definition provided in the oft-cited Sacrosanctum Concilium 14 can be regarded as a summary of Roman Catholic views on active participation.

> Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. […] In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else; for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit; and therefore pastors of souls must zealously strive to achieve it, by means of the necessary instruction, in all their pastoral work.[24]

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20 *MD* 23–24.
21 *MD* 26.
22 See also *MD* 31, 80, 111, 116, 143, 152.
23 *SC* 11.
24 *SC* 14. Emphases added.

Modern Orthodox Approaches to 'Active Participation'

During the 20th-century liturgical revival, interest in active lay participation intensified not only within the Roman Catholic world but also in the Orthodox Church. The topic was addressed at the Moscow Council of 1917–1918[25] and subsequently explored by Orthodox scholars such as Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemann (1921–1983) and his close acquaintance, Archbishop Paul of Finland (1914–1988).[26] Although neither Schmemann nor Paul produced a comprehensive study specifically on active participation, both criticised what they perceived as a decline in ecclesial life, characterised by the rise of clericalism and the diminishing role of the laity.[27] To counteract these trends, they advocated various forms of lay participation in their writings published both concurrently with and after Vatican II. These works gained international attention and, particularly in Paul's case, exerted significant influence on Finnish Orthodoxy.[28] Two decades before the Vatican II call for active lay participation, Schmemann wrote:

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25 Discussion: Destivelle 2015, 132–134.

26 Another notable 20th-century Orthodox author who discussed active lay participation is Afanassieff, who writes (1958, 259): "In the liturgy the laity are not passive—for those whom God has appointed to the ministry of the royal priesthood cannot be passive. On the contrary, they participate actively; the liturgical acts are performed by the head of the Church with the concelebration of the laity."

27 On clericalism, see Schmemann 2000, 303, 311, 328, 330; Archbishop Paul, *UP* 39–40, 86. Schmemann is notably critical of what he perceives as a decay [*sic*], which is particularly evident in the loss of lay participation in the Eucharist, see e.g. Schmemann 1972, 5–7; 2000, 327–328. Similarly, Paul laments what he views as a sixth-century decline in congregational participation in liturgical prayers, which he believes was common in the early church, and the subsequent rise of "silent" prayers by the clergy, see *MU* 46–47; in English, see *TFWH* 48. These concerns have also been expressed by other scholars. For instance, Afanassieff (1958, 256, 259) argues that the primordial church "(being one body) always acted as a whole," whereas in the post-Constantinian era "the organisation of the Church no longer gave any room to the people's ministry of witness and today it has become practically impossible." More recently, a similar "decay theory" has been endorsed by Chan 1998, 148.

28 Metso (2015, 456–457) has noted that, while Archbishop Paul did not clearly reveal his early influences, he was aware of late 19th-century Russian liturgical scholarship as well as the post-Second World War liturgical movement. For instance, in a 1970s statement, the archbishop refers to Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Anglican scholars from the 1920s–1940s. Later, in his 1986 work on the Eucharist, *Uskon pidot* (*UP*; trans. *The Feast of Faith: An Invitation to the Love Feast of the Kingdom of God*), Paul mentions Orthodox liturgical theologians Emilianos Timiadis, Boris Sove, and Nicos Patrinacos as his influences, along with Schmemann and Afanassieff.

> We think of worship as a specifically clerical sphere of activity. The priest celebrates, the laity attend. One is active, the other passive. It is another error and a serious one at that. The Christian term for worship is leitourgia which means precisely a corporate, common, all embracing action in which all those who are present are active participants. All prayers in the Orthodox Church are always written in terms of the plural we. We offer, we pray, we thank, we adore, we enter, we ascend, we receive. The layman is in a very direct way the co-celebrant of the priest, the latter offering to God the prayers of the Church, representing all people, speaking on their behalf.[29]

Later, Schmemann lamented what he perceived as a consequence of the sidelining of the corporate perspective into the liturgy:

> [T]he individual believer, entering the church, does not feel he is a participant and celebrant of worship, does not known that in this act of worship he, along with the other who together with him are constituting the Church, is called to express the Church as new life and to be transformed again into a member of the Church.[30]

To remedy the "liturgical crisis"[31] evident in these developments, both Schmemann and Archbishop Paul labored to help churchgoers regain a thorough understanding of the liturgy and a more profound sense of themselves as members of the ecclesial body.[32] To this end, they discouraged conducting services with the royal doors and curtains closed, as well as the silent recitation of the Eucharistic prayers.[33] Simultaneously, they actively encouraged congregational singing.[34] In his 1978 encyclical on Orthodox doctrine, Paul pontificated:

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29 Schmemann 1953, 9–10. Emphases original.

30 Schmemann 1986, 30.

31 Schmemann 1986, 28.

32 Intriguingly, in his writings from the 1940s and 1950s, Paul approaches the significance of the Eucharist from a markedly individualistic perspective. The communal and ecclesiological aspects begin to receive greater emphasis in his statements from the 1960s. See discussion in Metso 2015.

33 See e.g. Schmemann 2000, 240; Archbishop Paul, *MU* 46–47, 56; in English, see *TFWH* 48–49, 55. In his 1975 journal, Schmemann (2000, 90) recounts a positive experience of attending an Orthodox service in Kuopio, Finland: "A festive and austere Liturgy that reflects Bishop Paul's discipline. All 'mystical' prayers read aloud: everything is meaningful and thought through. A beautiful service."

34 *MU* 31, 58–59; *UP* 40, 63–64; in English, see *TFWH* 33, 57; *TFOF* 54–55, 81.

> The people standing in the church are not passive followers of the service but are co-servants with the officiating priest or bishop, and they must be able to follow the course of the Liturgy and participate in its prayers. Only in this way can the liturgy be real liturgy – common worship – and the Church an ecclesia – the people of God assembled for the Eucharist.[35]

Another manifestation of the 'activeness' of participation, as advocated by these Orthodox clergymen, is reflected in the frequency of participation in the Eucharist. For instance, Paul repeatedly encouraged weekly attendance. He wrote:

> [During the New Testament era, t]he Christians used to meet regularly on the first day of the week to "break bread," or to celebrate the Eucharist. This day was called the Lord's Day because it was the day of Christ's resurrection. On this day, namely Sunday, we too have a Liturgy in all our congregations, and nothing should prevent us from partaking as an entire family in the Liturgy of the Lord's Day and the sacrament of redemption.[36]

Evidently, the chief aim of such emphases was not ecclesial activism *per se*,[37] but rather a deeper lay engagement in the liturgy and a consequent transformation in the lives of congregants, rather than merely becoming "'customers' of the clerics."[38]

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35 *MU* 48. The English is the author's revision of the Nykänen & Williams translation, see *TFWH* 49. For further evidence of Paul's views on the communal nature of the Eucharistic liturgy, see the sources listed by Metso 2015, 458–460.

36 *MU* 41–42. The English is the author's revision of the Nykänen & Williams translation, see *TFWH* 43. See also *MU* 44; *UP* 109; in English, see *TFWH* 46; *TFOF* 101. For further sources and discussion, see Metso 2015, 461–462.

37 For all his efforts to promote active lay participation in the liturgy, Schmemann (2000, 312–313) in fact discouraged "[t]he temptation of activism in the Church." He writes: "Nowadays, especially in the U.S., the Church is perceived as an enterprise, an activity. The priest constantly harasses people to do something for the Church. And their activism is measured in quantitative criteria: how many meetings, how much money, how much 'doing.' I'm not sure it is all necessary. What is dangerous is not the activity itself, but the reduction of the Church, the identification of this activity with life in the Church. The idea of the Church, the sacramental principle of its life, lies in taking us away from activity ('let us put aside all earthly cares'), in making us commune with a new life, eternity, the Kingdom. And the idea of the Church, the principle of its life, also demands that we would bring *into* the world this experience of a new life so that we would purify this world, illumine it with the non-worldliness of the experience of the Church. Quite often the opposite happens: we bring activism into the Church, the fuss of this world, and submit the Church, poison its life with this incessant fuss. What happens is not that life becomes Church, but the Church becomes worldly."

38 Schmemann 2000, 328.

Clearly, not all modern Orthodox thinkers have approached lay participation in ecclesial life in the manners described above.[39] Nevertheless, decades after the statements of Schmemann and Archbishop Paul, this topic continues to be a subject of discussion within Orthodox circles. For instance, at the turn of the millennium, Paul Meyendorff lamented the apparent unawareness of many Orthodox churchgoers of their priestly role, which he attributed to the practice of silent Eucharistic prayers and the lack of congregational singing, rendering the laity as little more than "passive spectators." Meyendorff raised the valid concern that "because the laity are not engaged in the liturgy, it has little transformational effect on their lives." To address this issue, he suggested promoting frequent communion, the audible recitation of the "secret prayers," overcoming clericalism, and incorporating the laity more directly into the liturgy by, for example, allowing certain parts of the service to be sung congregationally.[40] More recently, it has been proposed that enabling the laity to engage more fully in performative—i.e., visible and/or audible—activities would deepen their engagement in the liturgy and, consequently, foster transformation in their lives.[41]

While a detailed analysis of the underlying reasons for these discussions is beyond the scope of this study, one might wonder whether the promotion of active participation in the recent decades is related to, or even a contributing factor in, the contemporary phenomenon of claiming one's "rights" to be active in the congregation. At any rate, the development of both phenomena appears to have been simultaneous. Indeed, as early as 1953, Schmemann observed that both Orthodox "priests and laymen alike" were claiming that their rights were being denied and that their responsibilities and possibilities of action were being limited.[42] Although Schmemann later criticised the tendency to view ecclesiastical roles from the perspective of "rights,"[43] Sacrosanctum Concilium did indeed identify active participation as the congregants' "right and obligation by reason of their baptism,"[44] or that "which is rightly theirs."[45]

Another association evoked by contemporary discussion on active participation concerns the relationship between the extent of one's activity in

39 Cf. e.g. Cleopa of Sihăstria, *DVV* 166–210; *VS* 145–154; Florovsky 2020, 335–345.
40 Meyendorff 2003, 147–148. See also Fr Chrysostom Nassis' contribution in the present volume.
41 See e.g. Regule 2018, 38.
42 Schmemann 1953, 3–4.
43 Schmemann 2000, 131, 271.
44 *SC* 14.
45 *SC* 114.

ecclesiastical roles and the degree of one's Christianity. This tendency was addressed in the mid-1990s by the then-cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who observed:

> Nowadays the opinion surfaces occasionally even in ecclesiastical circles that a man is more Christian the more he is involved in Church activities. We have a kind of ecclesiastical occupational therapy; a committee, or at any rate some sort of activity in the Church, is sought for everyone. People – according to this way of thinking – must constantly be busy about the Church, they must always be talking about the Church, or doing something to or in her. But a mirror that reflects only itself is no longer a mirror; a window that no longer lets us see the wide open spaces outside, but gets in the way of the view, has lost its reason for being.[46]

In several cases, interpreting "active" participation in the manner discussed above seems to have led to the practical consequence of doing as much as possible in church.[47] Instead of delving into detailed examples, however, we will now turn to our main theme: How would John Chrysostom have approached this subject?

Exhortations to 'Active Participation' in Chrysostom

Needless to say, as a late antique author, Chrysostom cannot be expected to employ the modern concept of 'active participation' when discussing ecclesial life.[48] Nonetheless, the idea itself is prevalent in the sources examined herein. For Chrysostom, "[t]he church service was not supposed to be a passive experience"[49] – a view that clearly presupposes some sort of activity on the part of the congregants. What, then, was the nature of this activity?

In Chrysostom's homilies on Genesis and Statues, relevant evidence re-

46 Ratzinger 1996, 145.

47 Cf. Lamberts 2004, 10.

48 Moreover, in Chrysostom, as in most ecclesiastical authors of his era, such references are hardly intended to form a systematic exposition of their theme. Therefore, relevant information must be gleaned both from positive statements encouraging correct ecclesial behavior and from denunciations of the misbehavior of the hearers. Cf. Sheerin 2008, 718. The literature on Chrysostomian views of the nature of, and the processes enabling, ecclesial and liturgical participation is too vast to list here. See e.g. Frank 2023; Huovinen 2022; Maxwell 2006; De Roten 2005; Knupp 1995.

49 Maxwell 2006, 90.

garding what might be described as 'active participation' can be categorized into four groups. *First*, the homilist encourages his lay audiences to participate frequently in the services. In this context, Chrysostom, unlike modern Roman Catholic documents, seldom uses terminology of obligation. Nonetheless, for him, frequent participation is crucial, as it is in church that Christians can receive the treasures of Scriptural instruction, which not only nourish them but also prepare them for Christian witness.[50] Indeed, Chrysostom likens the church to a school, where the congregation is summoned daily, like children, to receive salutary teaching.[51] He further emphasises this point by employing medical imagery, a motif frequently used by him.

> Do you see how it is possible to find in Scripture a remedy appropriate to every trouble afflicting the human race and go off healed, to dispel every depression that life causes and not be brought low by any circumstance befalling us? For this reason I beseech you to make your way here frequently, and attend carefully to the reading of the Holy Scriptures […].[52]

Chrysostom encourages frequent attendance despite his hearers' bodily weakness, urging them "not to deprive themselves of this spiritual instruction but rather to show greater zeal for it."[53] Conversely, he considers it desirable to attend church even if one is unable to observe the preparatory fast.[54] For Chrysostom, the chief goal of ecclesial attendance is spiritual transformation. Therefore, if congregants return home from church unchanged, with none of their defects corrected, their attendance will have been in vain.[55]

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50 Chrysostom, *In Gen. hom.* 4.10; 5.1. In this sense, it may be an overstatement that for Chrysostom, "[r]egular church attendance […] was not completely necessary, […] since people who did not attend church were still considered part of the religious community." So Maxwell 2006, 135.

51 *In Gen. hom.* 11.3.

52 *In Gen. hom.* 29.2: Ἴδετε πῶς δυνατὸν ἑκάστης συμφορᾶς τῆς συνεχούσης τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην φύσιν κατάλληλον ἐντεῦθεν φάρμακον λαβόντα ἀπελθεῖν, καὶ πᾶσαν ἀπώσασθαι ἀθυμίαν βιωτικὴν, καὶ ὑπὸ μηδενὸς συστέλλεσθαι τῶν συμπιπτόντων; Διὰ τοῦτο παρακαλῶ καὶ συνεχῶς ἐνταῦθα βαδίζειν, καὶ μετὰ ἀκριβείας προσέχειν τῇ τῶν θείων Γραφῶν ἀναγνώσει, […]. The English translation by Hill, see FOTC 82:201. For variations on the same theme, see e.g. *In Gen. hom.* 31.2; 32.1; *In Ioh. hom.* 2.5; *In 2 Cor. hom.* 15.5. For further discussion on the use of medical imagery in Chrysostom and other late fourth-century Patristic authors, see Huovinen 2020. Cf. Basil of Caesarea, who encourages daily or at least frequent participation in the Eucharist, see *Ep*. 93.

53 Chrysostom, *In Gen. hom.* 10.1. The English translation by Hill, see FOTC 74:128–129.

54 *De stat.* 10.1.

55 *De stat.* 5.7; *In Gen. hom.* 11.3.

Secondly, Chrysostom places considerable emphasis on the proper disposition for receiving the Christian kerygma. He would hardly stress this theme so significantly if he did not feel that the receptiveness of his audiences was in some way impaired. What, then, impeded the hearers' ability to receive his message? First of all, Chrysostom acknowledges the distracting effects of the turmoil following the overthrow of the statues of Emperor Theodosius in Antioch in 387.[56] The homilist seeks to console his listeners who have endured these events and redirect their focus to the word of God.

> But afford me your attention! Lend me your ears awhile! Shake off this despondency! Let us return to our former custom; and as we have been used always to meet here with gladness, so let us also do now, casting all upon God. And this will contribute towards our actual deliverance from calamity. For should the Lord see that His words are listened to carefully; and that our love of divine wisdom stands the trial of the difficulty of these times, He will quickly take us up again, and will make out of the present tempest a calm and happy change.[57]

Nevertheless, it is not only the political situation that may hinder believers' attention to the Gospel. Chrysostom is also aware of the potentially distracting effects of his hearers' secular vocations.

> Apply your attention to the utmost, I beseech you, put aside all worldly thoughts, and let us study these words with precision so that nothing may escape us but rather we should proceed to their deepest meaning and be able to light upon the treasure concealed in these brief phrases.[58]

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56 For the dating of *De stat.*, see Kelly 1995, 72.

57 *De stat.* 2.3: Ἀλλ' ἐπίδοτέ μοι τὴν ψυχὴν τὴν ὑμετέραν, ἐπίδοτέ μοι τὴν ἀκοὴν μικρόν· ἀποτινάξασθε τὴν ἀθυμίαν· ἐπὶ τὸ πρότερον ἔθος ἐπανέλθωμεν, καὶ ὥσπερ εἰώθαμεν ἀεὶ μετ' εὐθυμίας ἐνταῦθα παραγίνεσθαι, οὕτω καὶ νῦν ποιῶμεν, τὸ πᾶν ἐπὶ τὸν Θεὸν ῥίψαντες. Τοῦτο καὶ πρὸς αὐτὴν ἡμῖν τῆς συμφορᾶς συμβαλεῖται τὴν λύσιν. Ἂν γὰρ ἴδῃ μετὰ ἀκριβείας ἀκροωμένους τῶν αὐτοῦ λόγων, καὶ τὴν φιλοσοφίαν ἡμῖν οὐκ ἐλεγχομένην τῇ τοῦ καιροῦ δυσκολίᾳ, ταχέως ἀντιλήψεται, καὶ ποιήσει τὴν γαλήνην καὶ μεταβολὴν ἀγαθὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ παρόντος χειμῶνος. The English translation by Stephens, see NPNF 9:346.

58 *In Gen. hom.* 20.2: Συντείνατέ μοι τὴν διάνοιαν, παρακαλῶ, καὶ πάντα τὸν βιωτικὸν λογισμὸν ἀπωσάμενοι, μετὰ ἀκριβείας τὰ εἰρημένα διερευνησώμεθα, ἵνα μηδὲν ἡμᾶς λαθεῖν δυνηθῇ, ἀλλ᾽ ὅσον ἡμῖν οἷόν τε πρὸς τὸ βάθος αὐτὸ καθιέντες ἑαυτούς, θηρᾶσαι δυνηθῶμεν τὸν ἐγκεκρυμμένον θησαυρὸν τοῖς βραχέσι τούτοις ῥήμασιν. The English translation by Hill, see FOTC 82:38–39. See also *In Gen. hom.* 24.1.

For Chrysostom, focusing on worldly thoughts and concerns obscures one's mental "vision," so to speak, making the discovery of spiritual treasures impossible.[59] He explains:

> Hence I beseech you, now above all times let us dispel all worldly thoughts, keep the eye of our mind clear and alert, and in this fashion attend here; let no one come to church cluttered up with worldly concerns if the purpose is to gain the due reward of our effort and thus go off home.[60]

On the other hand, dispelling earthly concerns and approaching the ecclesiastical kerygma with attentiveness facilitates the reception of divine grace.

> [W]henever the Spirit sees an ardent desire and a watchful mind, he freely grants it abundant grace. So step aside from your daily preoccupations and from things that threaten to suffocate your thinking like weeds, and let us give free rein to spiritual desires so that we may gain great advantage from this consideration and receive much benefit; then we can go home.[61]

Ultimately, it is not merely his hearers' focus on earthly concerns but rather their general indifference and inattentiveness to spiritual matters that Chrysostom seeks to address. He views the human soul as prone to sluggishness,[62] which leads many in his audience to waste time in unprofitable conversation and to pay scant attention to his preaching.[63] Therefore, Chrysostom is

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59 For further discussion on the notion of spiritual vision in Chrysostom, see Huovinen 2025, *forthcoming*.

60 *In Gen. hom.* 30.1: Διὰ τοῦτο παρακαλῶ, νῦν μᾶλλον, εἰ καί ποτε ἄλλοτε, πάντα λογισμὸν βιωτικὸν ἀπωσάμενοι, καὶ τὸ τῆς διανοίας ὄμμα καθαρὸν καὶ διεγηγερμένον ἔχοντες, οὕτως ἐνταῦθα παραγενώμεθα, καὶ μηδεὶς εἰσιὼν εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν βιωτικὰς ἐπισυρέσθω φροντίδας, ἵνα ἀξίαν τῶν πόνων τὴν ἀμοιβὴν λαβών, οὕτως οἴκαδε ἐπανέλθῃ. The English translation by Hill, see FOTC 82:221–222.

61 *In Gen. hom.* 3.1: Ὅταν γὰρ ἴδῃ ἡ τοῦ Πνεύματος χάρις πόθον ζέοντα, καὶ διεγηγερμένην διάνοιαν, πλουσίαν τὴν παρ' ἑαυτῆς δωρεῖται χάριν. Ἀποστήσαντες τοίνυν ἑαυτοὺς πάντων τῶν βιωτικῶν, καὶ τὰς φροντίδας τὰς ἀκανθῶν δίκην συμπνίγειν δυναμένας, τὸν ἡμέτερον λογισμὸν ἐκτέμνοντες, ὅλην ἑαυτῶν τὴν διάνοιαν μεταστήσωμεν εἰς τὴν τῶν πνευματικῶν ἐπιθυμίαν, ἵνα πολλὴν ἐντεῦθεν δεξάμενοι τὴν ὠφέλειαν, καὶ κερδάναντές τι μέγα καὶ γενναῖον, οὕτως ἐξέλθωμεν. The English translation by Hill, see FOTC 74:40.

62 *In Gen. hom.* 4.6: Δεῖται γὰρ ἡμῶν ἡ ψυχὴ ῥᾳθυμος οὖσα συνεχούς τῆς ὑπομνήσεως.

63 *In Gen. hom.* 29.2. In Maxwell's (2006, 134) interpretation, Chrysostom "feared that the social attraction of belonging to the body of the church would become dominant at the religious services. He warned them to focus on spiritual learning rather than the latest news from their neighbors."

prepared to persist in preaching similar themes to lead his audience "to a better state of mind, drawing them from their frenzied stupor which avarice brought upon them by dulling their intellect."[64] Accordingly, he repeatedly exhorts Christians to overcome their slothfulness:

> So attend carefully, I beseech you: let everyone give an alert attention, I ask you, no one sluggish, no one drowsy; let no one be distracted in thinking of outside concerns, or bring here the worries of daily life and stay wrapt in them. Instead, consider the dignity of this spiritual gathering and the fact that we are listening to God speaking to us through the tongue of the inspired authors.[65]

Alertness is essential, as it is not merely the homilist or his purportedly trivial tales that the audience is about to hear,[66] but the heavenly King Himself. If it is customary for citizens to remain silent during the reading of imperial letters, Christians should "stand in fear and trembling" during the ecclesiastical delivery of divine words and "maintain utter silence," clearing their minds of confusion to fully grasp the message.[67] They should receive the salutary message with great enthusiasm,[68] zealously seeking, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, the treasure hidden in the Scriptural words.[69] Chrysostom underscores the urgency of attentiveness to spiritual matters by suggesting that time for such engagement is running out – an implicit reference to the fleeting nature of earthly life.[70]

Such a view appears to be echoed in the recent argument that fourth-century Greek Patristic authors – including Chrysostom – "lay the chief emphasis on the theological aspect of membership that is based upon participation in the mysteries of the church, and further manifested in the members' adherence to ecclesiastical dogma as well as a renewed way of life. They pay considerably less attention to the sociological aspects of membership such as the rights or duties of members, or the interpersonal dynamics of ecclesial communion." See Huovinen 2022, 60.

64 *In Gen. hom.* 3.6. The English translation by Hill, see FOTC 74:50.

65 *In Gen. hom.* 15.1: Προσέχετε οὖν, παρακαλῶ, μετὰ ἀκριβείας· μηδεὶς νωθής, μηδεὶς ὑπνηλός, πάντες διεγηγερμένην μοι τὴν διάνοιαν παρέχετε μηδεὶς ἔξω ῥεμβέσθω τὸν λογισμὸν, μηδὲ φροντίδας βιωτικάς ἐπισυρόμενος ἐνταῦθα στηκέτω, ἀλλ' ἐννοῶν τῆς πνευματικῆς ταύτης συνόδου τὸ ἀξίωμα, καὶ ὅτι διὰ τῆς τῶν προφητῶν γλώττης τοῦ Θεοῦ πρὸς ἡμᾶς διαλεγομένου ἀκούομεν· The English translation by Hill, see FOTC 74:195. See also *In Gen. hom.* 8.1.

66 Cf. *In Gen. hom.* 3.6: Καὶ οἶδα, ὅτι πολλοὶ οὐ μόνον οὐ προσίενται τὰ παρ᾽ ἡμῶν λεγόμενα, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὡς λῆρόν τινα καὶ μῦθον ἀκούοντες, οὐ προσέχουσι τοῖς ἡμετέροις λόγοις.

67 *In Gen. hom.* 14.2.

68 *In Gen. hom.* 1.1. See also 2.5; 16.1.

69 *In Gen. hom.* 21.1. Chrysostom's view in this passage is strikingly reminiscent of Origen's Scriptural interpretation. A similar approach recurs frequently in the homilies of the Antiochene, see e.g. *In Gen. hom.* 32.1; *De stat.* 1.1.

70 *In Gen. hom.* 11.3.

Thirdly, a similar approach is taken toward prayer. In his exposition of Psalm 4, Chrysostom contrasts his audiences' attitudes in the presence of a person of worldly renown with their attitude towards God Himself.

> I mean, if someone has an association with a remarkable person and gains much benefit from the interchange, much more is this the case in conversing incessantly with God. We are, however, not as aware as we should be of the benefit of prayer, for the reason that we neither apply ourselves to it with assiduity nor have recourse to it in accord with God's laws. Instead, when on the point of conversing with some people of a class above us, we ensure our appearance and gait and attire are as they should be, and dialogue with them in this fashion. In approaching God, by contrast, we yawn, scratch ourselves, look this way and that, pay little attention, loll on the ground, do the shopping. If on the contrary we were to approach him with due reverence and prepare ourselves to converse with him as God, then we would know, even before receiving what we asked, how much benefit we gain.[71]

While these expectations may seem demanding, the homilist does not require more from his hearers than they are capable of. Rather, to have their prayers heard, Christians need only "a sober attitude, with no obstacle to being close to God."[72]

Up to this point, we have examined Chrysostom's attempts to engage his hearers internally. In this regard, his view of 'active participation' does indeed resemble the Vatican II emphasis on conscious (*conscia*) participation,

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71 Chrysostom, *Exp. in ps.* 4.2: Εἰ γὰρ ἀνθρώπῳ τις συγγινόμενος θαυμαστῷ, πολλὰ καρποῦται ἐκ τῆς συνουσίας, πολλῷ μᾶλλον ὁ Θεῷ διηνεκῶς ὁμιλῶν. Ἀλλ᾽ οὐκ ἴσμεν τῆς εὐχῆς τὸ κέρδος ὡς χρὴ, ἐπειδὴ μηδὲ προσέχομεν αὐτῇ μετὰ ἀκριβείας, μηδὲ χρώμεθα κατὰ τοὺς τοῦ Θεοῦ νόμους. Ἀλλ᾽ ἀνθρώποις μὲν μέλλοντες διαλέγεσθαί τισι τῶν ὑπὲρ ἡμᾶς, καὶ σχῆμα, καὶ βάδισμα, καὶ στολὴν, καὶ πάντα ῥυθμίσαντες εἰς τὸ δέον, οὕτω διαλεγόμεθα· Θεῷ δὲ προσιόντες χασμώμεθα, κνώμεθα, περιστρεφόμεθα, βαθυμοῦμεν· τῶν γονάτων χαμαὶ κειμένων, ἐπὶ τῆς ἀγορᾶς πλανώμεθα. Εἰ δὲ μετὰ τῆς προσηκούσης εὐλαβείας, καὶ ὡς Θεῷ διαλέξεσθαι μέλλοντες, οὕτω προσήειμεν, τότε ἂν ἔγνωμεν, καὶ πρὸ τοῦ λαβεῖν ἅπερ ἠτοῦμεν, ἡλίκον κέρδος καρπούμεθα. The English translation by Hill, see COTP 1:47. Corresponding symptoms of inattentiveness are depicted in *De stat.* 9.1. Probably less than two decades later, Paulinus of Nola expressed similar sentiments, *Ep.* 32.19: "Quid igitur miseri nunc quiescimus oscitantes et quasi non conducti mercennarii in tumultuoso huius saeculi foro vacua manu stamus […]." In ACW 36:152, Walsh translates: "Why, then, do we poor souls remain idle and yawning? Why do we stand inactive in the noisy forum of this world as though we were not hired labourers?"

72 *Exp. in ps.* 4.2: Ἐνταῦθα δὲ οὐδενὸς δεῖται, ἀλλὰ γνώμης μόνης νηφούσης, καὶ οὐδὲν τὸ κωλύον εἶναι ἐγγὺς τοῦ Θεοῦ. The English translation by Hill, see COTP 1:48.

which pertains to "the effect on the deepest layers of the psyche, of the heart, an effect that expresses itself, out of an inner necessity, through taking part in prayer and song."[73] However, since the conciliar view of active participation includes both internal and external aspects,[74] another question arises: Did Chrysostom have anything to say about the outward or practical activities in which the laity might have engaged within church?

To address this question – *fourthly* – Chrysostom does occasionally allude to ecclesiastical music-making. As one might expect from a fourth-century homilist, he provides limited detail on the specific organisation of singing in his church.[75] Nonetheless, he seems to anticipate not only authorized singers but also his lay hearers to participate in corporate hymnody. For instance, Chrysostom describes the church as a place where psalms are sung, and "all alike join in praising our God."[76] More explicitly, he refers to a Psalm passage, noting that his congregation has "all this day sung together" these words.[77] Unfortunately, the sources offer scant information of the practical implications of these views or their possible relation to the mid-fourth-century canonical statement of the Laodicaean Synod, which restricted lay participation in hymnody.[78]

Concluding Reflections

If one were to ask Chrysostom to summarise his understanding on what we have termed 'active participation,' how might he respond? It is conceivable that he would encapsulate his views in a passage from his tenth homily on Genesis, where he discusses Lenten fasting:

> *The sober listener*, even after dining, would be in a suitable condition for this spiritual gathering, just as by the same token the slothful and dilatory person

73 Stuflesser 2015, 154.

74 Stuflesser 2015, 156.

75 For a similar approach in Cyril of Jerusalem as well as further references to Chrysostom, see Huovinen 2023, 9–10.

76 *De stat.* 15.1: νυνὶ δὲ πάντες ἐκεῖθεν εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν κατέφυγον, καὶ τὸν ἡμέτερον ἅπαντες ἐνυμνοῦσι Θεόν. The English translation by Stephens, see NPNF 9:439.

77 *De stat.* 17.1: Εἰς καιρὸν ὑπεψήλαμεν ἅπαντες κοινῇ τήμερον· *Εὐλογητός Κύριος ὁ Θεὸς τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ, ὁ ποιῶν θαυμάσια μόνος.* Cf. Ps 72:18 LXX.

78 *Laod* 15.

> even on an empty stomach would get no benefit from it. I'm not making this point to undermine the importance of fasting – God forbid: on the contrary, I'm all in favor of it. Instead, my intention is to teach you *to take a part in spiritual matters* with alert mind, not just follow along out of habit. The shameful thing, you see, is not *attendance at this spiritual teaching* after partaking of food, but attendance with an attitude of sloth, addiction to passion, and failure to control the movements of the flesh.[79]

In this passage, three points are noteworthy. Chrysostom emphasises:

1. Attendance at ecclesiastical synaxes;
2. Listening attentively with a sober mind;
3. Active participation in spiritual matters with an alert mind.

Regarding these themes, Chrysostom's approach appears largely consonant with some 20th-century Roman Catholic statements on 'active participation' as well as contemporary Orthodox views. However, there are also notable differences.

As noted above, Chrysostom presupposes some degree of lay participation in corporate psalmody but provides no detailed descriptions of this praxis. He also seems to offer few explicit encouragements for joining in corporate chanting.[80] Indeed, in his approach to congregational singing he demonstrates more hesitation than his modern Roman Catholic or Orthodox successors.

Furthermore, the Chrysostomian sources examined herein provide little evidence to support modern Orthodox views – either for or against – on whether the liturgy should be conducted with open or closed doors, or

79 *In Gen. hom.* 10.1: Ὁ νήφων ἀκροατής, κἂν ἠριστηκὼς ᾖ, ἄξιος ἂν εἴη τοῦ συλλόγου τούτου τοῦ πνευματικοῦ, ὥσπερ οὖν ὁ ῥᾳθυμος καὶ ἀναπεπτωκώς, κἂν ἄσιτος διαμείνῃ, οὐδεμίαν ἐντεῦθεν δέξεται τὴν ὠφέλειαν. Καὶ ταῦτα λέγω οὐ τὸν τόνον τῆς νηστείας ἐκλύων, μή γένοιτο, ἀλλὰ καὶ σφόδρα ἐπαινῶν καὶ ἀπου δεχόμενος τοὺς νηστεύοντας· ἀλλὰ βουλόμενος διδάξαι ὑμᾶς, λογισμῷ τινι νήφοντι μετιέναι τὰ πνευματικά, καὶ μὴ συνηθείᾳ κατακολουθεῖν. Οὐ γὰρ τὸν μεταλαβόντα τροφῆς αἰσχρὸν παραλαβεῖν τῇ πνευματικῇ ταύτῃ διδασκαλίᾳ, ἀλλὰ τὸ ῥαθυμούσῃ διανοίᾳ, καὶ τὸ ὑπὸ τῶν παθῶν πολιορκεῖσθαι, καὶ μὴ καταστέλλειν τὰ τῆς σαρκὸς σκιρτήματα. The Hill translation (FOTC 74:127–128) revised by the present author. Emphases added.

80 At any rate, the occasional exhortations to singing, praise, and Scripture reading found in his catechetical homilies appear more directed *against* worldly discourse than *towards* promoting lay participation in public liturgical activities. In this regard, Chrysostom is not unique among Greek-speaking Christian homilists of his time.

whether Eucharistic prayers should be recited audibly or silently. The apparent reason for this is that, in Chrysostom's day, both the eucharistic prayers and the iconostasis (with its doors) had yet to be developed in their modern form. Moreover, the topic of the congregants' involvement in executive roles in other liturgical activities is also unaddressed in the sources. For instance, one is hard-pressed to find a passage where Chrysostom mentions the laity – whether male or female – assisting at the sanctuary or participating in the public recitation of prayers or other liturgical texts. In this regard, his approach aligns with that of many other Christian authors of late antiquity.

In summary, Chrysostom's emphasis on what has been termed 'active participation' is scarcely motivated by a desire to address the distinction between ecclesiastical hierarchy and laity by promoting individual congregants' "rights" to activity. His focus is not intended as a solution to what has recently been characterized as "a real need felt by the laity to *do something* during liturgy"[81] – particularly if "something" refers to outward actions. While Chrysostom does indeed aim to encourage his hearers to "do something," this is not through busying themselves in church-related activities but by turning their focus inwards.[82] The homilist seeks to counteract his hearers' tendency to concentrate solely on secular "activities" and their lack of interest in the vitality of their spiritual life. His understanding of 'active participation' is primarily concerned with an unceasing and earnest inner focus on and reception of Scriptural instruction, along with a holistic devotion to diligent prayer.[83]

81 Larin 2013, 86. In his description of the Vatican II view, Stuflesser (2015, 157) seems to agree: "'Active' participation does not mean that every participant in the liturgy must constantly undertake something extraordinary or engage in some external actions. Doing things for the sake of keeping busy is not what the Council had in mind here […]. A 'movement of externalization' whose criterion is 'everybody should have something to do', cannot base itself on the spirit or letters of the Council. Accordingly, we must once again clarify that the word 'participation' does not refer to mere external activity during the celebration. Mindless actionism is not the same as spiritual and fruitful participation." Similarly, Ratzinger (2000, 147) laments superficial interpretations that view active participation as little more than engagement in outward activities.

82 This would be in line with Boyer's post-Vatican II interpretation of active participation of the laity as a "doing" as primarily an interior action, see Levering 2017, 69.

83 In fact, Jackson (2008, 118) argues that "the council fathers intended that this [active participation] should be understood above all as an interior participation." Similarly Levering (2017, 67–68), who underscores that "the active participation of the laity in the liturgy requires much more than just performing *external* actions," and that "*interior* participation is required if the liturgy is to efficaciously build up each believer, and the whole community, into 'a holy temple in the Lord.'" Emphases added. Cf. the Finnish Orthodox Bishop Aleksi (1941–1984), who, during Archbishop Paul's tenure, consistently encouraged the hearers of his congregational homilies to embody their role "living" as "active" members of the church, a status which they already held by virtue of

Concurrently, it is difficult to find Chrysostom advocating for lay participation in external or performative activities as a means to deepen engagement in the liturgy and transform the lives of his congregants. The essence of his approach could be encapsulated by citing Jackson's depiction of the liturgical theology of Vatican II: "In order for the liturgy to be fully effective in the lives of the faithful, they must have the proper dispositions to enter into it with integrity and be able to cooperate with the grace poured forth in it."[84]

Evidently, these observations open a broader perspective on Chrysostom's ideal of lay activities. One area deserving further exploration is his view that active participation in receiving ecclesiastical instruction and engaging in diligent prayer may cultivate Christian virtues in believers and inspire them to practice divine exhortations in between liturgical synaxes.[85] For Chrysostom, such a response could manifest in various activities: domestic delivery of and mutual encouragement in adhering to spiritual instruction,[86] Christian apology and spiritual edification of those outside of the church,[87] as well as almsgiving and charity towards those in need,[88] among others. However, a more comprehensive examination of Chrysostom's views on these activities must be left for future studies.

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their baptism. Aleksi emphasized that such activeness included regular participation in and inner concentration on the liturgy, participation in the mysteries, repentance and genuine faith, fasting, ascesis, vigilant daily prayer, spiritual reading, making the sign of the cross, veneration of icons, and charity towards those in need. For him, these practices were pathways to sanctification and union with God. However, unlike Archbishop Paul, Bishop Aleksi did not address vocal participation of congregants or their roles in the enactment or assistance of the liturgy in his homilies. While his orations do not explicitly reveal the reasons behind his approach to active participation, one wonders whether it may have been influenced by his evident emphasis on Chrysostom over other Patristic authors. See *UEV*, *passim*.

84 Jackson 2008, 104.

85 *In Gen. hom.* 27.3. For Chrysostom, indeed, it would be of no benefit to plainly hear the divine message without a practical response, see *In Gen. hom.* 19.6: οὐδὲν γὰρ ὄφελος τῆς ἀκροάσεως μόνης ἄνευ τῆς διὰ τῶν ἔργων ὑπακοῆς.

86 *In Gen. hom.* 2.4; *De stat.* 3.7; 5.7; 6.7.

87 *In Gen. hom.* 8.4; 14.22; *De stat.* 1.12.

88 In Chrysostom's homilies on Genesis, the theme of almsgiving is nearly ubiquitous, see e.g. *In Gen. hom.* 15.5; 20.5; 21.6; 34.3; 35.8; 42.7. See also *De stat.* 2.7.

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— *In Gen. hom.* = *In Genesim homiliae.* PG 53, 54.

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Liturgical Archaeologism in an Orthodox Context: Trends and Dangers

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Abstract

Liturgical archaeologism refers to the revival of older liturgical forms on the basis of "returning to the roots," a practice debated not only in the Orthodox Church, but also other denominations, as the Roman Catholic Church. In 1947, Pope Pius XII warns against careless archaeologism, but the liturgical reforms of Vatican II, based on the movement of "ressourcement," ensured the continuation of this debate in the Roman Catholic context up until our days. Likewise, Orthodox liturgical reforms of the 20th century can also be traced back to this same liturgical movement. The present article discusses the problems and challenges of archaeologism both from the point of view of general theological reflection and two case studies: Mount Athos and Finland.

Keywords: Antiquarianism, Diaconate, Finland, Mount Athos, Liturgy, *Ressourcement*

Introduction

This study deals with the notion of 'liturgical archaeologism,' a topic that could be approached from the various points of view of liturgical history, sociology and pastoral theology, among other disciplines. I understand the notion of this term in the sense of reforming the received tradition of liturgy with an awareness of historical sources and a wish to return to a "more ancient" practice.

The impetus for this study, however, comes from the two very different sources of my own practical liturgical experience: Firstly, I grew up since my teenage years as an active parishioner of the Finnish Orthodox Church – an autonomous local Orthodox Church giving much emphasis to liturgical reforms – and secondly, more recently until my episcopal ordination in early 2025, as an Athonite hieromonk, witnessing both the adamant liturgical conservatism on one hand and, on the other hand, the more subtle liturgical reforms of the Holy Mountain during the past couple of decades. Therefore, this essay is, I would say, also an empirical reflection by a liturgical scholar in these two very different liturgical contexts, where my experiences are approached through the lens of scholarship on liturgical archaeologism in both Roman Catholic and Orthodox contexts.

Indeed, it is important to consider the contribution of Roman Catholic scholarship here, since so many of the Orthodox church's liturgical reforms in the 20th century have been motivated by the *Liturgical Movement* of the Roman Catholic church, closely connected to the ideas of *Nouvelle Théologie* and *Ressourcement*.[1] Most of the ecclesiological implications of liturgical archaeologism noted by Roman Catholic theologians also apply to the Orthodox idea of what the Church is.[2] It all comes back to what tradition is, or (more importantly) what it is not, since the main impetus of liturgical archaeology seems to revolve around the retrieval or recreation of Holy Tradition. The character and essence of tradition is a matter that has been discussed exhaustively by both academic scholars and churchmen, but no definitive answer can be given, because there simply is none that is possible to offer. The amorphous character of tradition actually prevents its own definition.[3]

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1 For a comprehensive presentation of the Ressourcement and Nouvelle Théologie, see Flynn & Murray 2011; for an introduction to the Liturgical Movement, see Kocik 2016.

2 This was the topic of an academic conference at Yale, published in the volume Berger & Spinks (2016). See also a more recent contribution by Alexander Turpin (2023).

3 Cf. Turpin 2023, 212.

In this article, I first present the phenomenon of liturgical archaeology both in Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox contexts, after which I move to my description on the case studies of Mount Athos and Finland: the latter is demonstrated especially through the case of archaeologism in liturgical chant. Finally, I shall address some of the challenges and problems of liturgical archaeology.

Background

I am by no means the first person to discuss the problems of liturgical archaeology (or antiquarianism), even though the question has been a more burning one in the Roman Catholic church in the 20th century, and continues to be so even today in the debates regarding the Tridentine Mass. As a reaction to the liturgical movements of the early 20th century, already in 1947 pope Pius XII wrote an encyclical *Mediator Dei* where he warned against "exaggerated and senseless antiquarianism" in the reform of the Sacred Liturgy.[4] At the heart of Roman Catholic antiquarianism, or what is more commonly called archaeologism, is the question of the preferred period of archaeological liturgy: in the 20th century Roman Catholic context of the Liturgical Movement it meant that practices from the patristic period came to be preferred over medieval liturgy, as can be seen from the decisions of the *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.[5]

More specifically, it was thought that too many liturgical gestures and ritualistic elements had "covered" the true kernel of liturgy, which is in fact the (somewhat fancifully imagined and romanticised) participation of the laity.[6] But Pope Pius XII, who on one hand wanted to explain the importance (and limits) of participation by the laity in liturgy through his Mediator Dei, saw archaeologism to be actually harmful to the soul. In the same document he notes that "perverse designs and ventures of this sort [in other words, ex-

4 Mediator Dei §64.

5 Cf. Sacrosanctum Concilium §50: "For this purpose the rites are to be simplified, due care being taken to preserve their substance; elements which, with the passage of time, came to be duplicated, or were added with but little advantage, are now to be discarded; other elements which have suffered injury through accidents of history are now to be restored to the vigor which they had in the days of the holy Fathers, as may seem useful or necessary."

6 See Sacrosanctum Concilium §14–20. This passage sees the active, conscious, and "full" participation of the laity as an integral part of "restoring" the sacred liturgy as it was used to be. However, the argumentation is not based on any concrete historical sources or argumentation.

cessive antiquarianism] tend to paralyze and weaken that process of sanctification by which the sacred liturgy directs the sons of adoption to their Heavenly Father of their souls' salvation."[7] The theological problem in this excessive antiquarianism is its implication that the Holy Spirit has not provided its fullness to liturgy throughout history – and, in other words, the fullness of the Church would have been lost. What implications does this carry for the rest of the history of the Church? Has She been devoid of the fullness of God's grace for centuries? I shall return to some recent Roman Catholic discussion on the matter later on.

When considering the Eastern Orthodox tradition, it is well known that the 20th century witnessed a strong liturgical movement among Orthodox churches, as well, with various points of contact with the parallel Western movements. These include the work of Fr Alexander Schmemann (1921–1983) who was strongly influenced by the Roman Catholic liturgical movement,[8] and perhaps the more historically oriented influence of Ioannes Fountoules (1927–2007), trained academically at the Catholic University of Leuven and other Western institutions, and others in Greece, such as Panagiotes Trembelas (1886–1977). This also resulted in liturgical reforms, such as the practice of the audible recitation of mystical prayers,[9] or the locally recreated Holy Week of St Demetrios based on two 15th century manuscripts,[10] and the use of other liturgies than those of John Chrysostom and Basil the Great that are usually celebrated in Orthodox churches around the world. Schmemann's thinking seems to have been directed mainly towards pastoral concerns, whereas Fountoules was more concerned about historical awareness but still coupled with pastoral theology. I will return specifically to Schmemann and his influence on liturgical practices in Finland, but first it would be helpful to consider the perceived need for liturgical reforms on a broader basis in the East.

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7 Mediator Dei §64.

8 Grisbrooke 1993, 145–148.

9 See Φίλιας 1997.

10 Φουντούλης 1986. The offices of this "Holy Week" are celebrated only in the cathedral of St Demetrios in Thessaloniki, Greece.

Orthodox Arguments for and against Liturgical Archaeology: The Cases of Mount Athos and Finland

The late Fr Dositheos (1936–2023), abbot of the monastery of Tatarna, prepared a publication of the Hieratikon, a priestly manual, that was released recently.[11] In the accompanying commentary volume, he has the following to say about the set of petitions after the anaphora in the liturgies of John Chrysostom and Basil, repeating many petitions that have preceded the anaphora and are therefore often omitted in parish usage:

> Some people omit these petitions, because they claim they do not exist in old manuscripts (even though in several old manuscripts they do exist). It is noteworthy that those who want to omit them bound with haste (only when the question is about omitting something) like deer to the water springs of manuscripts in order to find justification. Some people want to omit these in order to be quick or because they seem to repeat something that was said before. If the argument is "brevity," I want to repeat once again, that brevity can be acquired when the priests recite their parts modestly and simply. If one omits these petitions on the basis of avoiding toilsome repetition, how many verses of the Chairetismoi to the Theotokos in the Akathistos hymn should we omit, numbering 156 altogether?[12]

Indeed, there have clearly been attempts of drawing from historical sources to justify liturgical brevity. I will begin my survey paradoxically from newer to older examples of such attempts, because the most recent examples of liturgical reform are naturally very aware of the earlier work and argue their desires more clearly than previous reforming generations did. Such an example can be found in the recent anaphorae written by Nicholas Denysenko for his *New Order* of the liturgy, published in 2021 in the journal *Worship*, the elements of which have been used occasionally in a liturgical – at least to my knowledge – in my native Finland, at the Sofia Cultural Centre's Chapel in Helsinki. (The Sofia Centre is an independent cultural centre, providing also courses in Orthodox church arts and theology.) As Denysenko notes in the introduction of his work, the liturgy is "similar to the writing of a new icon or the composition of a musical setting in that it follows patterns presented by

11 Ιερατικόν 2023.
12 Αρχιμανδρίτης Δοσίθεος 2023, 62, footnote 74.

tradition, but does not merely copy the most recent antecedent, and permits the artist's originality."[13] However, this originality is coupled with a certain archaeologism in his work:

> This order of the Divine Liturgy establishes balance among the traditional components it has retained. In other words, the new order avoids emphasizing certain liturgical components that have expanded throughout history and therefore overshadow or mute others. The practical implications of establishing balance result in a noticeable reduction of elements that have expanded without any restrictions over centuries.[14]

Denysenko states that "the intent was not to shorten or abbreviate the existing liturgy,"[15] a claim that I am critical of, because in his next phrase he reveals that he does think the present received liturgy is too long: the new order only "contains the necessary components for the celebration of the Eucharist,"[16] implying that many elements of the received liturgy are unnecessary (can prayer really be unnecessary?). By his own claim, nevertheless, Denysenko is aware of the dangers of antiquarianism and avoids it through retaining the service's medieval structures but reforming them in his own way. Thus he avoids the possible criticism some would level against projects which attempt "to return to a variant of the Liturgy as it existed at some point in history."[17] But I find this method to be somewhat disingenuous, as many of the principles at play are identical to Roman Catholic archaeologism: the main motive of this new liturgy is to emphasise the role of the laity and to increase the number of biblical texts in the liturgy, as opposed to hymns and prayers, not to mention the very name New Order, a crystal-clear allusion to the *Novus ordo* rooted in the liturgical reforms of Vatican II.

However, as amusing and sometimes accurate as Fr Dositheos's previously quoted comment on exploiting manuscript study in order to abbreviate offices is, brevity is not always the main impetus for drawing influence from ancient liturgical sources. This is the case for communities on the Holy Mountain, famous for their long services. The Athonite joke claiming

13 Denysenko 2021a, 12.
14 Denysenko 2021a, 12.
15 Denysenko 2021a, 13.
16 Denysenko 2021a, 13.
17 Denysenko 2021a, 13.

"the only thing that is above the Holy Trinity is the typikon" describes the rigid attitude Athonite monks have towards liturgical rubrics.

There is, nevertheless, an organic dichotomy between the written sources and a community's living practice, both considered a part of the typikon, and here I must recall my own experiences being a monk of the Holy Mountain. At each monastery, there is a monk called *typikares* whose job it is to keep the flow of the service going. At my own monastic community, for instance, he bases his work on the two typika we have: one from 1794, the other one with additions compiled by our present brotherhood, a book that is constantly re-edited. Both texts remain unpublished. I remember I was once chanting next to a chanter, and there was a rubrical disagreement between him and the typikares regarding the number of stanzas that should be sung. The typikares referred to the written source, and the chanter answered: "Then the typikon is wrong, because our practice is to sing them like this." Here, the orally transmitted rule superseded the written rule.[18]

This type of dichotomy has become apparent with many new liturgical publications. The Hieratika published by Simonopetra, with the assistance of the late professor of liturgy Ioannes Fountoules and in many cases returning to the practices of patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos (1300–1379) and his Diataxis dating from 1347, when he still was the abbot of the Athonite monastery of the Great Lavra, have been generally accepted for liturgical use at the Holy Mountain.[19] Even in this case, nevertheless, oral practice still holds a primary position. When I was ordained a priest at our monastery, I was given a copy of the Simonopetra Hieratikon, but when I faithfully followed its text in one of the first liturgies I celebrated, some of the older fathers came to correct me and said "the right way to say it is this way," and then provided me with his own variant. So, the book is there only to support the orally received tradition. The largest monastic house of the Holy Mountain, the Vatopedi monastery, has however taken a different stance. Their recent Hieratikon, an attempt to return to older liturgical practices transmitted in early manuscripts, instead of the generally received way of celebrating the liturgy on the Holy Mountain,[20] as well as other liturgical practices, such as the Office of the Foot Washing on Holy Thursday (an office not celebrated in other Athonite monasteries), or

18 Some of these differences in oral tradition have been documented: see, for example, Μεθόδιος Ἱερομόναχος 2016 ja Ἁγιορείτικον Τυπικόν 1997.

19 *Ἱερατικόν* 1992.

20 *Θεία Λειτουργία: Συλλείτουργον* 2020 ja *Θεία Λειτουργία: Σύντομα σχόλια* 2020.

celebrating the Liturgy of St James,[21] have met a lot of opposition among other Athonite monks. By their opponents, these things are not considered tradition; whereas the promoters of these books consider them tradition, because they are found in the manuscripts.

In Finland, the atmosphere and receptivity for liturgical reforms is different, even though polarised. Whereas a recent poll showed that a clear majority of the employees and persons of trust of the church seem to prefer stability and familiarity in liturgical order,[22] a significant number of them are still willing to experiment, which can be seen from liturgical innovations such as celebrating vesperal liturgies, or using the liturgy of St James (a standard in most Finnish parishes for the saint's feast day). I would speculate the sociological reason for this willingness to experiment is that the short history of Orthodox services celebrated in Finnish has been full of reforms of translations, new musical arrangements and liturgical practices, dating back to the nationalising influence of pre-war Finland and the liturgical reforms of Archbishop Paul (1914–1988) in the 1960s and 70s, supported by the strong connections between the Orthodox Church of Finland and the OCA, and Archbishop Paul and Fr Alexander Schmemann personally. Paul wanted to retrieve the original spirit of the ancient church.[23] Schmemann's influence on Paul's thought resulted in a Hieratikon of the divine liturgies of John Chrysostom and Basil the Great, providing suggestions for reading the mystical prayers aloud, but in an abbreviated form.[24] In most of the churches where I have participated in a liturgy served by several priests (in all the three Finnish dioceses), especially in the case of the liturgy of Basil, the practical effect of this has been to completely omit the parts that are not read aloud, resulting in a truncated form of the anaphora.

The reforms, however, were not universally embraced but were also met with opposition. The diocese of Helsinki, run by then Metropolitan (and later on Paul's successor on the archbishop's throne) John (1923–2010), was always reserved towards Paul's revised liturgical manual, and especially after the death of Paul there have been counter-movements, where some clergymen are adamant about closing the royal doors for liturgy and avoiding the

21 *Η Θεία Λειτουργία του Αγίου Αποστόλου Ιακώβου, Αδελφού του Κυρίου και Πρώτου Αρχιεπισκόπου Ιερουσαλήμ* 2023.
22 Metso, Takala-Roszczenko & Ahonen 2024, 30.
23 See Metso 2015.
24 *Jumalallinen liturgia* 1984.

abbreviations he suggested. Naturally, this debate is not exclusively Finnish, and the same matters are discussed in other countries, as well:[25] in Finland the reforms have been so broadly accepted, however, that the debate affects the whole church and is a particularly visible and audible one. The reason probably is that the clergy of the Finnish Orthodox church has been educated in the diocese of Karelia (later known as diocese of Kuopio and Karelia) since 1961, and archbishop Paul was personally involved with the education organised in Kuopio until his death and the closure of the seminary in 1988, before the clerical education was transferred to the University of Joensuu.

Still, especially among older generations and in the diocese of Kuopio and Karelia where Paul was active, the willingness to apply his reforms remains vibrant, but some of his students even want to continue reforming the liturgy. I experienced this personally as a student of the University of Joensuu roughly two decades ago, when our education promoted strong liturgical experiments, including a full reform of the rubrics of Vespers and Matins. We were told that Compline is an example of "monastic piety" and should not be used by laymen; that the Menaion is of low hymnographic quality and its use should be discouraged whereas the Oktoechos should be preferred; and that any kind of allegorical understanding of the liturgy is "ahistorical" and therefore should also be discouraged. In other words, liturgy had to be stripped of its "posterior" monastic elements and brought back to the urban "lay" setting, devoid of mystical contemplation. The Constantinopolitan cathedral rite was talked very fondly of. However, already then, but especially today, these views can be seen to be based on an outdated understanding of liturgical history: the clear distinction between "cathedral" and "monastic," promoted in the 20th century by scholars such as Robert Taft, has been criticised by many in liturgical scholarship.[26] In other words, based on ideas of archaeologism, our teacher wanted to support the distinction of "monastic" and "cathedral" offices by removing elements that he thought were monastic, but in the light of our understanding of liturgical history today, such a pursuit is ahistorical and, indeed, "non-archaeological."

Unfortunately, no extensive research on this recent afterlife of Pauline-Schmemannian liturgical reforms or opposition to them has been conducted in the Finnish context, so my testimony remains anecdotal. However, observ-

25 For instance, in the Greek context, see Φίλιας 1997 on the question of reciting the prayers aloud; and the recent polemical pamphlet by Panagiotes Papademetriou (Παπαδημητρίου 2024).
26 See Frøyshov 2007.

ing myself, I can also state that our generation, raised academically in this spirit, has also expressed counter-reactions – including those of my own.

The Example of Liturgical Music

A case study which helps shed light on the debates over the essence of tradition is the introduction of Byzantine chant into the Finnish liturgical world, initiated by Archbishop Paul but continued by others after him, as well: this is a matter that has also been dealt with in scholarship, both by myself and Maria Takala-Roszczenko.[27] Even though this discussion does not directly touch on liturgical structures, it is useful to describe it at length, because it is a particularly characteristic example of archaeologism, different views on it, and its varying reception.

Not trained in Byzantine chant, but still very much interested in reviving it in order to promote the liturgical experience of the ancient church, Archbishop Paul not only wanted to create a Finnicised, polyphonic setting of hymns based on ancient, monodic melodies suitable for his vision of the Divine Liturgy (first published in 1964 and to be called as the "Plastic Liturgy," thanks to its plastic cover),[28] but also commissioned Finnish arrangements of what he saw as 'authentic' Byzantine chant in its monodic form. However, due to lack of contact with Greek chanters and the living tradition, and very much in the spirit of archaeologism and returning to the written sources, these arrangements were based on the *Monumenta Musicae Byzantinae* (MMB) transcriptions, published at the University of Copenhagen in Denmark.[29] In 1957, a Finnish arrangement of the Hymns of Ascents (*anabathmoi*), faithful to the transcriptional methods of the MMB, were published in a Vigil anthology. In the introduction to these hymns, there is a clear reference to a wish to return to "ancient" liturgy in the spirit of archaeologism: "Byzantine melodies unite us in the divine service to sing with the past generations […] They strengthen in us the feeling of the unity and timelessness of the Church and help us find a true spirit of prayer." [30] Despite the publication of these hymns

27 Takala-Roszczenko 2015; Takala-Roszczenko 2013; Olkinuora 2010; Olkinuora & Takala-Roszczenko 2007.

28 More on this process, see Olkinuora 2011 and Olkinuora & Takala-Roszczenko 2007, 564–565.

29 Egon Wellesz (1962, 15–28), a major contributor to the MMB, provides a useful survey on the background and principles of the project.

30 *Sunnuntaivigilia kahdeksansävelmistöineen* 1957. See also Olkinuora & Takala-Roszczenko 2007,

in a book that was universally adopted into liturgical use in Finnish parishes, these Byzantine melodies seem to never have been regularly employed.

The MMB project was, as was the movement of researching Byzantine chant in general, influenced by the Gregorian musicological movement of restoring plainchant in the West, aprocess which began at the monastery of Solesmes in France in the 19th century, resulting in editions of Gregorian chant that became to be known as "mainstream Gregorian chant."[31] The main editors of the first period of the MMB thought that they were restoring medieval Byzantine chant, and they were not considering post-1453 music at all. This was tempting to Paul, who wanted to restore the ancient, pure chant traditions, and bring them to a new Finnish context, and indeed Finland is one of the very few cases where these transcriptions were attempted liturgically.

As Maria Takala-Roszczenko has summarised in her studies, Byzantine chant served as a kind of substitute for the lack of a distinct Finnish tradition of liturgical music, but it was "Finnicised" through the arrangement process, especially through harmonisation that was, instead of fully monodic chant, more familiar to the Finnish faithful. An attempt to identify tradition as something Finnish – in other words, local – can be detected in archbishop Paul's thought, even though he searched for the tradition beyond Finnish culture.[32] In the 1960s, a critique of Paul's work mentioned that these new melodies were not suitable for the spirit of

> Karelian [Eastern Finnish] liturgy […] The Byzantine material in the form it can be detected in our Plastic Liturgy does not belong to our tradition (it is not our own). It is something detached, "imported on a jet-plane" from Southern Europe to our territory. For the Byzantines themselves it is, of course, tradition, but not for us […] Transforming this unfamiliar music to our conditions does not raise it to the status of our tradition.[33]

More recently, I myself (as a representative or even a central character of the so-called third wave of the Byzantine chant movement, as Takala-Roszczenko notes, producing a lot of Finnish adaptations of Byzantine chant for liturgi-

562–564; Takala-Roszczenko 2013, 75–77 and 79–83; and Takala-Roszczenko 2015, 306–308.

31 The parallels between the work done in Solesmes and the rising interest towards Byzantine chant was noted already by Egon Wellesz (1962, 12–13).

32 Takala-Roszczenko 2013, 77–78; Takala-Roszczenko 2015, 306–308.

33 Published in the Finnish Orthodox magazine *Aamun Koitto* 2/1969, 17–18, quoted in and the English translation taken from Takala-Roszczenko 2015, 311.

cal needs, based on my own experience as a chanter trained in Greece)[34] encountered opposition to my work of adapting Byzantine chant into Finnish, when monodic chant was called "New Age" by a Finnish musicologist: this, according to him, distorts the core of the Orthodox tradition.[35] And at the same time, I was encouraged by my Athonite brothers to promote Byzantine chant in Finland, because that is "the ultimate musical tradition" that expresses Orthodox Liturgy in the best possible way. Because of my obedience to my monastic brotherhood, and also because of my own spiritual experience, I agree with my brothers.

From the beginning of this paper, readers might have got a sense that I am rather cautious on the practices of liturgical archaeology, but at the same time my work on 'reviving' Byzantine chant in Finland is a sort of revivalist project. Liturgical archaeology should not completely be condemned, but it should be applied with care.[36] Even though I think at times returning to old liturgical traditions is commendable – however, in the living forms that have been transmitted to us – I have one simple argument against carelessly returning to 'historical' practices, when this means imagined re-enactments of lost traditions preserved only in manuscripts, and that is the constant flux in which the process of understanding the history of liturgy finds itself. The story of Byzantine chant in Finland is a characteristic example of this problem. The first adaptations of monodic Byzantine chant based on the *Monumenta* transcriptions, commissioned by Archbishop Paul and written by professor Heikki Kirkinen, were supposed to represent the *true* and *authentic* Byzantine tradition, as we saw. However, the MMB project has since then bridged the gap between Greek and Western Byzantine musicology, and has become less critical about the Greek living tradition, completely changing its methodology of transcribing old Byzantine manuscripts.[37] Now it seems that the transcription method of Ioannis Arvanitis has taken the place of the older tran-

34 Takala-Roszczenko 2013, 71.

35 See Räntilä 2012, where the late musicologist Jopi Harri gives this negative judgement regarding the use of monodic chant in Finland. I have discussed the reception of the 'Third Wave' of Byzantine Chant in Finland in my thus far unpublished paper Η αποδοχή της βυζαντινής μουσικής στην Ορθόδοξη Αρχιεπισκοπή της Φιλλανδίας, originally delivered at the International Conference on Byzantine Music organised by the Institute of Byzantine Musicology of the Church of Greece, Athens, October 2015.

36 This is also the main tenet of Turpin (2023) in the Roman Catholic context.

37 The new transcription method of MMB, not thought to be fully descriptive of how the chant sounded but merely as an aid for researching the original neumatic notation, has been coined in Troelsgård 2011.

scription method as a modern musical interpretation of these manuscripts,[38] and is often abhorred by "traditional chanters" in Greece, since it is not a direct continuation to the living tradition of Byzantine chant. But that is only the current state of things – at some point in the future, Arvanitis's method will itself again be replaced by some new method of transcription. Likewise, I have heard the MMB transcriptions being sung occasionally at some Finnish Orthodox communities, including Tapiola and Hämeenlinna, and they are still abhorred by many of the faithful.

Problems of Archaeologism

The same goes for the history of liturgy in general. A characteristic example is the restoration of the liturgy of St James (that I will not summarise here too much) that is often promoted as an "archaic" liturgy, as if it would give us a glimpse into something more authentic than the liturgies of Chrysostom or Basil could ever do. In Finland, this kind of thinking has become widespread. However, the standard leaflets used in both Greece and Finland,[39] and elsewhere, represent a recreation of St James that was never celebrated in the past, and as Fr Stefanos Alexopoulos noted in his brief Orthodox intervention in a conference on Roman Catholic liturgical archaeologism organised at Yale, the lack of coherent information on the way of celebrating it has resulted in a variety of practices.[40] In Finland, a lot of emphasis is given to the way that communion is here distributed to the faithful, separately, and its similarity to the way clergy regularly receives communion is emphasised.[41] It can be claimed that this matter is underlined in order to fight some kind of vague 'clericalism,' to dissolve the border between the clergy and the laity. As beautiful as this feels, it should be noted that the use of a communion spoon historically began from the liturgy of St James and not from the liturgy of Chrysostom.[42] Recently, Vitaly Permiakov published a revised version of the

38 The method has been explained in English in Arvanitis 1997.

39 *Pyhän apostoli Jaakobin, Herran veljen, jumalallinen liturgia* 1989; *Ἡ θεία λειτουργία τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἰακώβου τοῦ Ἀδελφοθέου* 1959.

40 This unpublished talk was an Orthodox response to the papers presented in the volume Berger & Spinks 2016.

41 See, for example, *Jaakobin liturgia* 2024.

42 This was noted by Daniel Galadza during the covid-19 pandemic, when the way of distributing communion was debated: see Galadza 2020.

liturgy of St James, as well as the liturgy of pre-sanctified gifts according to St James, meant for liturgical use, and strongly revised our present understanding of the sources for this liturgy.[43] Despite its improved sensitivity to both the source material and actual liturgical practice, and despite my suggestions to the leading clergy of the parish of Helsinki to begin using this instead of the "old way," this has only resulted in their opposition because it is against our established tradition – represented by historically non-existant form of celebrating St James, on the basis of the leaflet published in the 1980s.

To put it briefly, archaeologism has created this rather inorganic dichotomy that often exists between 'ecclesiastical' and 'academic' liturgical studies, since the study of liturgy has consequences not only for scholarly discussion, but also ecclesiastical and pastoral life. It is problematic when an outdated scholarly hypothesis of liturgical history has become a part of 'Holy Tradition' and is repeated not only in seminary schoolbooks of liturgical history but even semi-liturgical texts such as Synaxaria. This is the problem of liturgical archeology practiced in living liturgy: it changes over time based on both new research and new interpretations, and when this clashes with the established way of celebrating liturgy, controversies arise. Earlier on, I mentioned the problem of removing 'monastic' elements from our offices as undesirable. If we went on removing what has been seen as 'monastic' in the offices, it would be very hard to argue for those changes now with the information we have available to us. And this would create an immense pastoral problem: even now, with the quick pace of conscious and deliberately targeted liturgical reforms that have happened through the past century, these controversies accumulate, and instead of concentrating on uniting with Christ in the liturgy, we discuss and criticise rubrics.

Another major problem that archaeologism brings with it is that it is often coupled with some background ideology that we want to realise in a practical way. This can be seen in the recent debate regarding the revival of the female diaconate in the Orthodox Church – another historical practice that has fallen out of use but is now promoted by some to be re-established in order to accommodate more contemporary ideals of gender equality. Even though it is often presented as a revival of the diaconate, it is rather telling that it is usually discussed in seminars that deal with the role of women in the Orthodox Church.

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43 *The Divine Liturgies of the Holy Apostle James, Brother of the Lord: Slavonic-English Parallel Text* 2020.

Regardless of what one thinks about the matter, I recently came across a rather poignant example of the theological problem of archaeologism as presenting history being devoid of the grace of the Holy Spirit. The event that I deal with here is the ordination of a female deacon in the Metropolis of Zimbabwe by its Metropolitan Seraphim on May 2, 2024. Carrie Frederick Frost, one of the main promoters of the female diaconate,[44] was present at the ordination and wrote a report on it. In her final note she states: "[my daughter] Annie said there was a sense of something that had been missing falling into exactly the right place. We agreed that we were, for the first time, witnessing the Church in its fullness."[45] But if tradition is the "handing on" of the right faith in the form of right doctrine and right worship,[46] all expressions of it (when approved by the Church as a whole) must show fidelity to these principles, and it is the way we Orthodox approach liturgy. The paradox between the constant change and the stability and unchanging nature of divine Grace distributed through these "changing liturgies" also means that the "fullness of the Church" is present everywhere where these legitimate offices are served, even though the "legitimacy" in the Orthodox context is a much more fluxuating term than in Roman Catholic theology.[47] This must be the case, even according to Schmemann's strong and correct emphasis on the principle of lex orandi est lex credendi, when he says: "The Church's leitourgia, a term incidentally much more comprehensive and adequate than 'worship' or 'cult,' is the full and adequate epiphany–expression, manifestation, fulfillment of that in which the Church believes, or what constitutes her faith."[48] If we really believe this, we cannot accept the notion of a "corrupt" liturgy, or "corrupt" icons, for example,[49] neither can we think that the fullness of the Church is absent for centuries and suddenly reappears, as Frost seems to imply.

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44 Frost is the chair of the St Phoebe Center for the Deaconess, and she has also dealt with the topic in written publications; see, for example, her problematic work *Church of our Granddaughters* (Frost 2023) – problematic, in my opinion, because of the lacking use of patristic and canonical sources and the generalising claims for female experience based on anecdotal cases that could easily be undone with other anecdotal stories.

45 Frost 2024.

46 Cf. Turpin 2023, 213–214.

47 Cf. Turpin 2023.

48 Schmemann 1990, 39.

49 It is noteworthy that the notion of "corrupt" icons was promoted especially by Russian emigrant scholars in Paris, and they received their inspiration from the same source in Schmemann. However, the *ad fontes* ideology of these theologians of the icon, most importantly Léonid Ouspensky, was in many ways anti-patristic and more influenced by Western modernism: see Freeman 2015.

We can, naturally, speak of pastorally better ways of expressing things in a particular context, because at the same time the fullness of faith and the fullness of liturgy cannot be fully comprehended or received by the faithful, but liturgy provides glimpses and hints of this, the reception of which is also dependent on the recipient's spiritual state. That is why our liturgical tradition is so repetitive: as the Byzantine theories about memory state, we need repetition in order to seal these positive imprints on our soul, fill our senses with reminders that fight against oblivion – the worst enemy of spiritual life.[50] And the manner of this repetition gradually changes from time to time – that is tradition.

These ecclesiological considerations are of primary importance and absolutely essential, and this is a counter-argument I have had against liturgical scholars, including Denysenko who couples, in a recent paper, the decline of liturgics with the fact that professors of systematics have begun to teach courses in liturgy (my academic job title is University Lecturer in Systematic Theology and Patristics!), and claims that "the pitfall of inter-, multi-disciplinarity is the absence of a solid foundation in liturgy. Liturgical studies is the ultimate field for the practice of slow reading and the method of studying texts in contexts (and vice versa),"[51] something that often results in a very protective attitude among liturgists against the other. Not being formally trained in liturgical studies myself, such a protective attitude can be seen in reactions to a recently published paper that I presented to a large group of liturgists at the biannual conference of the Society of Oriental Liturgy in June 2022. The feedback at the conference was at times even aggressive, because of arguments I made against some basic, rather uncritical assumptions that a number of liturgists have in their work.[52] It is worth summarising the main points of my paper here.

Much of my critique was against the obsession that many liturgists have towards texts (this can even be seen by the comment of Denysenko that I quoted, a sign of a hubris of liturgical scholars, I would say – that they are the the theologians *par excellence* who can read texts). I warned in my study of the fact that a manuscript is not liturgy. It becomes liturgy only when performed.[53] This also means that we should not be obsessive about finding some kind of

50 See Papalexandrou 2010.
51 Denysenko 2021b, 294.
52 See Olkinuora 2025.
53 Cf. Turpin 2023, 193–195.

Urtext, or thinking that a critical edition of a certain text is a definite prerequisite for understanding a prayer, a hymn, or a sermon. I have, nevertheless, even been cautioned by liturgists in trying to theologically interpret texts that have not been critically edited (and one must note here that in many cases the editor's Urtext is imagined and reconstructed, not attested to by any actual textual source). After my presentation at the conference, a certain liturgist got rather upset with me, thinking that all their work had been in vain, because they had dealt in their scholarship only with textual history. Naturally, I do not mean textual history is useless, but it must be coupled with a broader understanding of what liturgy actually is.

Nevertheless, long before me, many others, such as Achim Budde in his study of the anaphora of St Basil, have argued that liturgy does not really have an Urtext, because each text becomes an Urtext for the community that uses it.[54] The same goes for patristic sermons: as Nikolai Lipatov-Chicherin has noted, each sermon always has an editorial history and none of the written sermons that we have is the Urtext, if by that Urtext we mean the originally performed oral version of the sermon.[55] And therefore each manuscript is evidence of what that particular community considered as tradition, and that form of the text has been formative and authoritative to them. Textual studies are essential in the sense that they provide us with glimpses into the experience of communities in history, all over the world, but they must be interpreted in the context of our own communities in their particular points in history.

Instead of a Conclusion

This essay has been a combination of personal reflection and scholarly consideration, which is not to undermine its value for scholarship, but actually to reinforce it. Understanding liturgy and the effects of archaeologism can never be detached from the spiritual life in the Orthodox Church, a life in which I myself take part as a bishop. Therefore, my conclusions must also enter the world of pastoral care.

I think, as a bishop and as a monk, that I dare to take this in yet another direction: some form and extent of archaeologism is understandable, and is

54 Budde 2004 and 2006.
55 Lipatov-Chicherin 2013.

by no means a new phenomenon. We want to keep the traditions that we have and use the richness that has been preserved for us in manuscripts. At the same time, we must understand that all expressions of Orthodox liturgy provide glimpses into the fullness of tradition, and we should not reject the variety of forms it takes by the excuse that it is not *our own* tradition. Using again a musical example, the Irmologion of Suprasl in Poland, dating from 1598 to 1601, includes several different chant traditions, probably as an import by visiting churchmen.[56] Even though the context here is very different, it seems that chant has been imported also before "on a jet plane" with great success, despite the opposition of the Finnish criticist.

But my pastoral concern here is that liturgical reforms today are often based on historical critical thinking that, by virtue of what it is as an academic discipline, must itself be constantly re-considered and re-formed by new scholarship. And scholarship, by virtue of what *it* is, suffers increasingly from the pressures of politics and ideologies. Most churchmen simply cannot keep up with it, and the increasing volume of scholarship and publications advocate for more and more reform and change, each of them causing a controversy of their own in the church; a good example of this is the case of the liturgy of St James in the Finnish context, where an outdated 'scholarly' edition of the text has become a part of ecclesiastical tradition, even though scholarship does not consider it scholarly accurate anymore.

Often, reforms are imposed by synods under pressure from scholars, rather than results of personal encounters that historically have acted as the platform of cultural exchange. There, learning new traditions comes together with encountering another image of God, often through communion in a liturgical context. This is the platform on which tradition is truly formed and re-formed, not through open access academic articles, YouTube experiments, or polemic university lectures.

56 On this musical manuscript and its employment in the revival of monodic chant in our days, see Abijski 2010.

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Fr Mark Roosien

Rethinking the 'Liturgy after the Liturgy' with Schmemann, Zizioulas, and Bulgakov

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Abstract

Contemporary Orthodox thinking about the role of church in society is fragmented. Is it possible to give an Orthodox theological justification for social action? What kind of actions or arrangements would it recommend? Today, Orthodox political theologies range from United Nations-style liberalism to militarist versions of neo-Byzantine symphonia, to reactionary pockets of apocalyptic sectarianism. Although there is no single approach for how Orthodox Christians should act in society, there is one concept that seems to comprise a promising theological starting point for Orthodox social action: the 'liturgy after the liturgy.' This concept, formulated in the twentieth century, represents an attempt to unite what Christians do outside the walls of the church with what the church does inside, in worship. Modern Orthodox theologians hold that the church is called to manifest the Kingdom of God in its liturgy. Can extra-liturgical Christian social action also manifest the Kingdom of God? The notion of the 'liturgy after the liturgy' answers in the affirmative. While maintaining that liturgical worship holds a place of primacy as the church's chief act, it frames extra-liturgical action as an important and necessary aspect of the church's mission in the world. But as this article argues, despite its promise, the concept is too imprecise and under-theorised to demarcate the boundaries of appropriate Christian social action, and thus can used to justify almost any extra-liturgical action, no matter how objectionable, if it is blessed by church authorities. A better way to think through Orthodox Christian engagement in society, this article holds, is to focus on the notion of the Kingdom of God, which the liturgy, and perhaps the 'liturgy after the liturgy,' are supposed to manifest. The Kingdom of God is of major theological concern for modern Orthodox thinkers, three of whom are brought into conversation here: Alexander Schmemann, John Zizioulas, and Sergius Bulgakov. Each of them locates the liturgy as the primary site of the manifestation of the Kingdom of God in history, but they differ on the extent to which extra-liturgical social action can also manifest the Kingdom. The conversation staged between these thinkers sharpens the questions at play in the discussion of the relationship between liturgy and social action in Orthodox theology.

Keywords: theology, liturgy, social action, Orthodoxy, Alexander Schmemann, John Zizioulas, Sergius Bulgakov

Introduction

Contemporary Orthodox theological thinking about the role of the Church in modern society is fragmented. Does Orthodox theology possess a rigorous and authentic basis for social action? What kind of action would such a theology recommend? There is no single, official approach or recommendation for how to answer these questions.[1] Today, Orthodox social theologies draw inspiration from a range of perspectives, from United Nations-style liberalism to militarist versions of neo-Byzantine symphonia, to reactionary apocalyptic sectarianism.[2] However, one popular notion seems to offer a promising starting point for Orthodox social theology: the 'liturgy after the liturgy.' This phrase, formulated in the 20th century, represents an attempt to integrate what Christians do outside the walls of the church with what they do inside, in worship. Modern Orthodox theologians, drawing from the insights of 20th-century eucharistic ecclesiology, hold that the Church makes present the Kingdom of God in its liturgy, especially in the eucharist. Can extra-liturgical social action also manifest the Kingdom of God? While retaining the conviction that liturgical worship holds a place of primacy as the Church's chief act, the notion of 'liturgy after the liturgy' tacitly frames extra-liturgical action as an extension of that act, and thus an authentic expression of the Church's life and mission.

But as I show in this essay, the concept is too imprecise and under-theorised to ground and demarcate the boundaries of appropriate social action, and could be used to justify almost any extra-liturgical action, no matter how objectionable, if it is blessed by church authorities. It also obscures the distinction between liturgical and non-liturgical action. A better starting point for Orthodox Christian social theology, I propose, is to clarify the notion of the Kingdom of God, which the liturgy, and perhaps also the 'liturgy after the liturgy,' are supposed to reveal and manifest. The Kingdom of God is a major theological category for modern Orthodox thinkers, three of whom I bring into conversation in this essay: Alexander Schmemann, John Zizioulas,

1 The two main official documents on Orthodox social teaching from the 21st century are Department of External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate 2000 and Hart and Chryssavgis (ed.) 2020. Neither of these documents rise to the level of detail or theological rigor as, for example, the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* in Roman Catholicism. See Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 2004.

2 See Hovorun 2022a, 347–356. On apocalyptic sectarianism among converts to Orthodox Christianity in the United States, see Riccardi-Swartz 2022.

and Sergius Bulgakov. Each designates the liturgy as the primary site of the manifestation of the Kingdom of God, but they differ on the extent to which extra-liturgical social action can also make the Kingdom present in history. The conversation I stage between these thinkers sharpens the questions at play in the search for a rigorous and authentic social theology in Orthodox Christianity.

The 'Liturgy after the Liturgy'

In his 1996 book, *Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective*, Romanian theologian Ion Bria provides an account of the origins of the notion of the 'liturgy after the liturgy.' It has roots in Russian Orthodox émigré theology and eucharistic ecclesiology but emerged formally in consultations of Orthodox members of the World Council of Churches in 1974 and 1975.[3] Participants in the consultations wrote that the liturgy both gives the church its unity and identity and contains an injunction to social action. "Prayer and the eucharist," one document reads, "whereby Christians overcome their selfish ways, impel them also to become involved in the social and political life of their respective countries."[4] The participants used the concept of the 'liturgy after the liturgy' as shorthand for the link between liturgy and social action. Here is Bria's account of their reasoning:

> The dynamics of the liturgy go beyond the boundaries of the eucharistic assembly to serve the community at large. The eucharistic liturgy is not an escape into an inner realm of prayer, a pious turning away from social realities; rather, it 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.[5]

The notion of the 'liturgy after the liturgy' seeks to integrate the Church's worship with all the other things the Church might do. Bria writes that any

3 Bria 1996, 19. George Fedotov articulates the notion of the 'liturgy after the liturgy' in Федотов 1939, 62–83. Nicholas Afanasiev was a key thinker in the emergence of eucharistic ecclesiology in the 1940s and 1950s. See Afanasiev 2007.

4 Bria 1996, 20.

5 Bria 1996, 20. On the sacrament of the brother as a concept in Orthodox social thought, see Clément, 1980.

attempt to articulate a social teaching that severs the connection between "the Church's liturgical and diaconal functions," is bound to be defective.[6] As an extension of the Church's worship, Christian social action witnesses to the Kingdom of God that is revealed firstly in the liturgy. Bria writes,

> Preaching the good news of the *basileia* of God means challenging the unjust and totalitarian structures of society […] Because the *basileia* is invoked [in the liturgy], Christian witness as struggle and confrontation must never be allowed to disappear from the horizon of the liturgy.[7]

For Bria, the Church must critically examine how it "is or is not overcoming barriers to justice, freedom and solidarity, of how it is or is not an effective sign of something greater than the liturgical assembly."[8] Since its articulation in the 1970s, the notion of the 'liturgy after the liturgy' has become a catch-all term for nearly everything that Christians do outside the liturgical assembly, including evangelisation, education, social ethics, spirituality, ecological action, and even 'coffee hour' meals among parishioners after liturgical services.[9]

Despite its wide proliferation in Orthodox circles, very little theoretical depth has been added to the notion of the 'liturgy after the liturgy' since its formulation in the 1970s. Indeed, the recent document promulgated by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, *For the Life of the World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church*, unreflectively assumes that the liturgy supports the social vision the document's authors expound without explaining why this might be the case.[10] The under-theorisation of the concept results in two major problems. The first is that the use of the word 'liturgy' (or 'eucharist' and 'eucharistic') in this context conflates worship and social action to the extent that they both risk losing their distinctiveness. It is important to be clear about what liturgy is and what it is not. By describing extra-liturgical actions as a kind of 'liturgy,' the actual liturgical worship of the Church risks losing its specificity

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6 Bria 1996, 21.

7 Bria 1996, 23–24. Hart and Chryssavgis (ed.) 2020, 9, similarly reads, "The Eucharist is a prophetic sign as well, at once a critique of all political regimes insofar as they fall short of divine love and an invitation to all peoples to seek first the Kingdom of God and its justice."

8 Bria 1996, 16.

9 Bria 1996, 21. See also Yannoulatos 2010.

10 See, e.g., Hart and Chryssavgis (eds.) 2020, xvii, 2, 4, 5, 9, 14, 60, 101, 106. See the discussion in Harper 2022, 336–339.

as the ritual space of symbolic exchange of sacrifice between God and humanity, to borrow terms from Louis-Marie Chauvet. Extra-liturgical social actions are not symbolic in this way but are rather (ideally speaking) concrete acts of sacrifice in imitation of Christ's sacrifice.[11] If even the liturgy can or does inform how Christians act in the world, those actions are not, strictly speaking, liturgical. The second problem with the 'liturgy after the liturgy' is that it can fall prey to the reigning ideology of a given culture. One can detect in Bria's account the optimistic ethos of liberal theology from the 1970s that permeated the World Council of Churches.[12] Certainly, the aims of freedom, justice, solidarity, ecological action, hearing and heeding the cry of the poor and marginalised are laudable and arguably should be pursued by the Church. But there is no clear reason, in the absence of further theological explanation, how and why these actions might be 'liturgical' or inspired by the liturgy.[13] Can any extra-liturgical action blessed by church officials become legitimised as a 'liturgy after the liturgy,' and ushered into Orthodox social teaching? Is the Russian bombing of hospitals and schools in Ukraine since 2022 a 'liturgy after the liturgy,' since many leaders of the Moscow Patriarchate preach that the Russian invasion of Ukraine is for the triumph of the Kingdom of God?[14]

Despite its shortcomings, the notion of the 'liturgy after the liturgy' rightly seeks to link the Church's liturgical life and social mission. But given the notion's inveterate lack of depth, I propose a shift in focus to better ground a theology of social action and its relationship to the liturgy: to clarify the theological concept of the Kingdom of God. This is a key concept used by several modern theologians that implicates both liturgy and social action, and whose manifestation is the Church's ultimate objective and purpose in all it does.[15] As I analyze the writings of Schmemann, Zizioulas, and Bulgakov on the Kingdom of God, my intention is to clear the ground for a more rigorous theological justification of Orthodox social action, exploring the connection between the liturgical manifestation of the Kingdom of God and the possibility of extra-liturgical manifestations of the Kingdom in history.

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11 See Chauvet 2001, 69-96.

12 FitzGerald 2004, 105–134. Hovorun argues that the *For the Life of the World* document continues this line of thought. See Hovorun 2022a, 350.

13 For a critical discussion of the relationship of Orthodox liturgical worship to ecological action, see Gschwandtner 2018.

14 See Hovorun 2022b, 1–10. For a recent statement on the "Russian world" ideology that frames Russia's role in Ukraine and the broader world as the "Restrainer," from 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7, who holds back the reign of the "man of lawlessness" or antichrist, see Russian Orthodox Church 2024.

15 See the discussion in Louth 2007, 233–247.

Alexander Schmemann

Alexander Schmemann (1921–1983) is best known for his influence on the field of liturgical theology. For him, it is in the Church and her liturgy that the eschatological presence of the Kingdom of God is manifested on earth: "Each time that Christians 'assemble as the Church' they witness before the whole world that Christ is King and Lord, that his kingdom has already been revealed and given to man and that a new and immortal life has begun."[16] Already in this world, "we confirm the possibility of communion with the kingdom, of entrance into its radiance, truth and joy."[17] Such an awareness of the presence of the Kingdom of God, Schmemann argues, was especially present among the early Christians: "For the first Christians the all-encompassing joy, the truly startling novelty of their faith lay in the fact that the kingdom was *at hand*. It *had appeared*, and although it remained hidden and unseen for 'this world,' it was already present, its light had already shone, it was already at work in the world."[18] Although Christians' heightened awareness of the presence of the Kingdom of God waned over time, the liturgy, he argues, preserves and manifests its presence.

For Schmemann, the liturgy witnesses to a world undergoing *transfiguration*, a term he uses to describe the effects of the Kingdom of God in the world, which Zizioulas and Bulgakov use also, as we will see.[19] The transfiguring presence of the Kingdom is symbolised in the rhythms of liturgical time. He writes that Sunday, the "Lord's Day," is the eschatological, eternal day that is manifest through the eucharist, a witness to the Kingdom of God breaking into the world and transfiguring it from within. However, though Schmemann makes much of the sanctification of time in liturgical prayer, he denies any outward sanctification of *history* writ large.[20] Instead, he asserts, the presence and transfiguring effects of the Kingdom are *hidden*: "The kingdom of Christ is accepted by faith and is hidden 'within us.' The King himself came in the form of a servant and reigned only through the cross. There are no

16 Schmemann 1988, 48.

17 Schmemann 1988, 47–48.

18 Schmemann 1988, 42.

19 The transfiguration of the world as part of the liturgy and social mission of the Orthodox Church is a major theme in Hart and Chryssavgis (ed.) 2020. See 4, 9, 19, 24, 27, 28, 41, 92, 93, 100–101, 103, 111.

20 On sanctification of time, see Schmemann 1966, 69–72.

external signs of this kingdom on earth."[21] The hidden transfiguration of the world is revealed only in the liturgy, and even then, only partially.[22]

Schmemann assures us that God is transfiguring creation, but it is a reality which believers merely 'witness to' in the liturgy. Other than liturgical celebration, the human role is passive: he rejects the suggestion that social action outside the liturgy has any bearing on the manifestation of the Kingdom of God and the transfiguration of the world in history.[23] The lack of a social dimension in Schmemann's thought has to do with his disdain for theologies of liberation influential in the 1960s and 1970s. He writes in the preface to his book on the eucharist,

> Not faith, but ideology and utopian escapism are determining the spiritual state of the world. At a certain point, western Christianity accepted this point of view: almost at once one or another 'theology of liberation' was born. Issues related to economics, politics and psychology have replaced a Christian vision of the world at the service of God.[24]

Schmemann was writing in reaction to theological trends of his day, including the kind of liberal theology that influenced the World Council of Churches at the time the notion of the 'liturgy after the liturgy' was formulated.[25] Yet in his reaction against what he saw as efforts to reduce Christianity to yet another kind of 'help' for a suffering world, Schmemann undermines his own ideas about the transfiguring presence of the Kingdom of God in history. Even if the transfiguration of the world is a reality that is hidden from the view of most people, it is arbitrary to restrict the signs of the present Kingdom to the liturgy alone without justifying the reason for such a restriction. Questioning this inconsistency within Schmemann's thought, Bruce Morrill asks, "Are the signs of the kingdom *only* evident in the liturgy?" He answers, "No, signs of the kingdom, while only fragmentary now in the time or history of this world, are nonetheless powerfully real for people who see with the eyes of faith."[26] While Morrill holds out hope that Schmemann's theology could justify Christian social action despite his pessimism, it remains the case that Schmemann's

21 Schmemann 1988, 41.
22 Schmemann 1988, 33–34.
23 See Schmemann 1988, 107–108.
24 Schmemann 1988, 10.
25 See Morrill 2019, 183–200.
26 Morrill 2000, 134.

view of the transfiguration of the world is decidedly "impersonal," looking solely for the eschatological work of God in history without explicit human involvement or cooperation here and now.[27] I turn now to John Zizioulas, whose thinking on the Kingdom of God seems to unite the liturgical and extra-liturgical more fully.

John Zizioulas

Like Schmemann, John Zizioulas (1931–2023) sees the Kingdom of God as manifest on earth in the liturgy, especially the eucharist. The eucharistic liturgy, for Zizioulas, is first and foremost an eschatological reality. It is a foretaste of the future Kingdom of God, and "draws from its being and its truth."[28] While Zizioulas shares with Schmemann this strongly eschatological understanding of the liturgy, he finds traces of the Kingdom of God in the eucharist's social and communal dimensions:

> The Kingdom of God, the eschatological community, will be a gathering (of the 'people of God' and the 'many') […] The variety and multiplicity which [nevertheless] does not break up the unity of the body but holds it together will assuredly be a characteristic of the Kingdom as it is of the Church. All these things are 'imaged' by the Divine Eucharist as an image of the Kingdom.[29]

For Zizioulas, the eucharist is the revelation of the Kingdom of God as the "community of the last times."[30] The eschatological character of the eucharist informs the eschatological character of love between persons, which, he writes, "is the experiential quintessence of the Kingdom."[31] In contrast to the 'individual,' whose existence is constituted abstractly by rights and property according to modern thought and politics, the 'person' is constituted by concrete encounter with the other. This encounter occurs primordially in the eucharist; the liturgy is an eschatological encounter in which I see the other "not

27 For the language of "impersonal" regarding hyper-eschatological approaches to transfiguration in history, see Harper 2022, 340.
28 Zizioulas 2011, 45.
29 Zizioulas 2011, 70.
30 Zizioulas 2011, 69.
31 Zizioulas 2011, 76.

as he was yesterday or is today, but as he will be in the future in the last times, which means as a member and our neighbour in the Kingdom."[32] In this way, the Kingdom of God manifested in the eucharistic liturgy is, for Zizioulas, "essentially social" while inexorably eschatological.[33]

Zizioulas, like Schmemann, uses the word transfiguration to refer to the effects of the Kingdom of God in history, but seems more willing to accentuate its social dimensions. He writes, "What we have in the Eucharist is not a flight or deliverance from space and time or from history, but the biblical perspective of the transfiguration of place and time, as indeed of all the creation which God's love made 'very good.'"[34] He goes beyond Schmemann in affirming, in theory, the pertinence of social action in conjunction with liturgical worship, writing, "Worship and social action, sacred and profane, are no longer two different domains [...] the mission of the Church is not an *attitude vis-à-vis* the world, but a compassionate and sanctifying *presence* in it."[35] However, when it comes to the question of what extra-liturgical action accomplishes and what it might look like, Zizioulas is silent, stopping short for fear of identifying the eschaton with history.[36] Indeed, at times Zizioulas states, like Schmemann, that it is *only* in the eucharistic assembly that one sees signs of the Kingdom of God.[37] Within Zizioulas's writing, there is only one clear extra-liturgical exception, one manifestation of the Kingdom outside of what he calls the "sacramental structures"[38] of the Church: the reconciliation of a person with their enemy.[39]

Zizioulas's limitation of the manifestation of the Kingdom of God to the liturgy (with the possible exception of enemy-love) contradicts his own understanding of what the Church is and does, which is not limited to the celebration of the liturgy alone. The Church, for him, is a pre-eternal reality called to the cosmic and complex task of the union of the created and uncreated.[40] The Church is the context in which fallen humankind can complete the task that was given to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. "Man was cre-

32 Zizioulas 2011, 78.
33 Zizioulas 2011, 127.
34 Zizioulas 2011, 81.
35 Zizioulas 2010, 88.
36 Zizioulas 2010, 88.
37 Zizioulas 2011, 68.
38 Zizioulas 2010, 88.
39 Zizioulas 2011, 76.
40 See Zizioulas 2011, 68.

ated," Zizioulas writes, "[…] so that he would bring all that is created to the uncreated God and unite them in permanent relationship."[41] Human beings are the hypostatic center of creation, uniquely endowed with the freedom to act to bring about this union; they are the condition of possibility for the uniting of the created and uncreated.[42] To unite creation with God is an active calling and historical task that cannot be limited solely to liturgical celebration. However, Zizioulas's writing on extra-liturgical action in the world remains hampered by a hyper-eschatological orientation that renders social action all but theologically meaningless.[43] I turn now to Sergius Bulgakov for a stronger articulation of the theological basis for social action.

Sergius Bulgakov

The creative and controversial theological writings of Sergius Bulgakov (1871–1944) predate those of Schmemann and Zizioulas and the theories of eucharistic ecclesiology that inspired them, but provides a corrective to their eschatologism.[44] Like Schmemann and Zizioulas, Bulgakov believes the Kingdom of God is manifested primarily in the liturgy.[45] For him, the Kingdom of God is at hand because of the Incarnation of Christ, which is extended in history via the Church and manifested above all in its sacramental rites. He writes,

> [Through] the entire grace-bestowing life of the Church, with her prayers, liturgies, sacraments we enter into the kingdom, we commune with it. And this must be said especially of the sacraments, in which the grace of the Holy Spirit is continually given, and in the first place and most of all concerning the Eucharist, the sacrament of the incarnation. The Divine Liturgy is the coming kingdom of God, which is essentially the incarnation.[46]

41 Zizioulas 2008, 90.

42 Zizioulas 2008, 94.

43 Demetrios Harper rightly critiques Zizioulas's ideal thus: "If we as Orthodox are to be capable of articulating a social ethos that can truly grant a foretaste of eschatological life in history, the Eucharistic ideal of 'being as communion' must be more than an ecstatic or even transcendental ideal; it must be planted in the very soil of history while, at the same time, maintaining a constant mindfulness of humanity's ultimate destiny." Harper 2022, 341.

44 Bulgakov is best known for his theology of Sophia, the Wisdom of God, which was controversial in his day and remains so. On the theological issues surrounding Sophiology, see De La Noval 2020. I avoid discussing Sophiology directly in this essay. While the ideas here discussed are part of Bulgakov's overall Sophiological vision, for my purposes they can be readily understood without reference to the intricate metaphysics that undergird them.

45 Bulgakov 2021a, 9–10.

46 Bulgakov 2021a, 14.

At the heart of Bulgakov's thinking about the Kingdom of God lies the question: What is the task of the Church in history?[47] The Incarnation of Christ formed a bridge between the created and uncreated, a bridge that carried over into the Church: "The Incarnation of Christ accomplishes the unification of divine and creaturely life, man's deification, which is precisely the power of the heavenly Church manifested in the earthly Church."[48] Bulgakov's notion of the Church as a continuing Incarnation, subsisting in the world as an unconfused union of the human and divine, is the hallmark of his approach to the Kingdom of God in history.[49] The Church abides in two natures, heavenly and earthly, as in the Christological definition of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD. But, crucially, it also abides in two *wills*, divine and human, as affirmed of Christ at the Sixth Ecumenical Council of 680–681 AD in Constantinople.[50] Not only is it the task of each individual Christian to unite their will with the divine will but it is also the Church's. The uniting of the divine will and the created will, accomplished in Christ, is a task to be accomplished by the church in every historical epoch. Bulgakov writes, "History is a divine-human affair: the divine power is combined with human freedom, as the dogma of dithelitism makes clear. As the common work, history is a synergism."[51] Insofar as the Church is the dynamic meeting point of divine and human, it is also the inner meaning of history.

Like Schmemann and Zizioulas, Bulgakov uses the word 'transfiguration' to describe the effect of the Kingdom of God in history. Unlike them, it is something he sees in both liturgical and extra-liturgical actions. For him, the transfiguration of the the world is, paradoxically, a historical process with an eschatological fulfillment. It does not remain suspended in the static antinomy of the 'already' and the 'not yet,' but operates as a dynamic *becoming* in time and history that nevertheless cannot be fully completed within history's immanent horizon.[52] Just as the two wills in Christ are distinct and unconfused

47 He writes, "Does *history* exist at all for Christianity, or is it an inconquerable duration of *empty* time in which there is already nothing left to accomplish, 'the *last* days?'" Bulgakov 2021b, 34.

48 Bulgakov 2002, 257.

49 A perspective he shared with Georges Florovsky and Dumitru Stăniloae. See Florovsky 1952, 52. On Stăniloae, see Coman 2018, 203–224.

50 The notion of the Church as not only "dyophysite" but also "dyothelite" is an original and productive aspect of Bulgakov's ecclesiology, distinguishing it from, for example, the Chalcedonian ecclesiology of Florovsky. See Florovsky 1989, 62.

51 Bulgakov 2002, 343. Dithelitism (or dyothelitism) is the dogma of the two wills of Christ, human and divine.

52 Bulgakov 2002, 318.

according to the dogma of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, the boundary between heavenly and earthly in the Church's life marks the boundary between history and eschatology, which are also not to be confused. Bulgakov levels a harsh critique of those he calls "godless progressivists" who chase after social progress and technological immortality in hopes of achieving "the triumph of immanentism by assuring the possibility of definitively making oneself at home on the earth."[53] For him, the ongoing transfiguration of the world in both liturgy and extra-liturgical acts is not linear or progressive. Yet, despite sin and corruption, luminous glimpses of alignments between the heavenly and earthly are possible; possible, but not permanent, since the Church "remains dual in the world process until the end of the world."[54]

However, if the transfiguration of the world, the manifestation of Kingdom of God in history, does not unfold progressively with tangible, ever-improving results, then what is the point of extra-liturgical action? Bulgakov writes that social action in the world is a *necessary condition* for the Kingdom's full eschatological manifestation. He writes,

> The building of the city of God in history does not *diminish* the significance of God's new creative act in the transfiguration of the world [in the eschaton] but *prepares* for the world the material that is the content of history, its creative activity. The new city is not created out of nothing but is the transfiguration of history.[55]

For him, the inbreaking of Kingdom of God on the eschatological day of the Lord requires the raw material of social action by the Church now, even if some of those efforts are ultimately thwarted or abandoned.[56] Bulgakov's idea that the Church contributes to the transfiguration of the world through social action is rooted in the idea of human beings as co-creators with God, a theme that is present but somewhat muted in Schmemann's and Zizioulas's writings.[57] Bulgakov writes, "Having created man in the fullness of his potential tasks, God entrusts to him their fulfillment. In this sense, the world created by God is completed by man, not as a creator 'out of nothing' of course, but as the

53 Bulgakov 2002, 345.
54 Bulgakov 2002, 264.
55 Bulgakov 2002, 326–327.
56 Invoking the book of Revelation, Bulgakov writes, "History is a tragedy, the confrontation of two powers, which by the end of history reaches its fullest intensity and maturity." Bulgakov 2021a, 25.
57 Bulgakov 2002, 320.

accomplisher of God's designs […]" And here is the crucial point: "Without this [human] accomplishment the fullness of the universe *cannot be manifested,* and the universe *cannot attain its end* and its ultimate transfiguration, the passage to the new state of the future age."[58] For Bulgakov, in contrast with Zizioulas and especially Schmemann, to act outside the liturgy with a view toward the manifestation of the Kingdom of God is not only possible, it is the Church's "duty."[59] This, for him, is a truly Orthodox approach to history as opposed to the "pseudo-ascetic – Manichean rather than Christian – view which takes away Christian responsibility for history while expecting everything to happen by divine activity."[60] There is no place for passively waiting around for the Kingdom of God to come, safe inside the walls of the Church.

Bulgakov uses organic metaphors to describe how the Kingdom of God is manifest in history through extra-liturgical action: "It is by these creative efforts of man, which are stamped with Holy Spirit's gifts of grace, that the kingdom of God is realized in history, *ripens* in history like a plant grown from a seed, like a vineyard entrusted to the workers, as in the Gospel parable [Matt 20:1–16]."[61] Elsewhere he draws upon the metaphor of the tree, from John 15, which bears healthy branches that will endure and enter into the final transfiguration of the world, while its sick branches must be cut off and will burn in the fire of the day of the Lord.[62] The connection between history and eschatology is open and porous, but it remains "unfathomable for us in this world. On the one hand, a *transcensus*, an act of 'new creation,' passes between them, although it is based on the original creation […] Transfigured history is in fact eschatology."[63]

Bulgakov's positive, if somewhat pessimistic, assessment of Christian social action is rooted in his understanding of the Church as a dyothelitic institution, called to align the human will with the divine will, the heavenly with the earthly, and accomplish the task described congenially by Zizioulas as the uniting of creation with the uncreated. This leads Bulgakov to envision the manifestation of the Kingdom of God not only as a liturgical reality, but also an extra-liturgical reality of creative social action, action which is incum-

58 Bulgakov 2002, 321. Emphasis added.

59 Bulgakov 2002, 332.

60 He goes on, "In practice this means reconciling with the power of sin and evil in its crassest form, and even worse – consenting to it." Bulgakov 2021a, 25–26.

61 Bulgakov 2021a, 26.

62 Bulgakov 2002, 332.

63 Bulgakov 2002, 347.

bent upon the Church as much as the liturgy is. What shape would that social action take in the modern world?

Bulgakov does not offer prescriptions for specific social initiatives but rather provides three "basic maxims of practical eschatological historicism."[64] First, "nothing earthly should be absolutized."[65] Surveying various attempts to "enchurch" history, culture, and society, be it through the Holy Roman Empire in Western Europe or the symphonia of Church and state in Byzantium and Rus', Bulgakov argues that they correctly sought the transfiguration of life and history. But these medieval approaches have been shown to be ultimately inadequate because of their failure to appreciate the freedom of the person. Bulgakov writes,

> [Today], the Church strives with new strength for the sanctification of life, for life's rebirth in the Church, yet not from without but from within. The Church must not and cannot strive to once again pick up or possess the sword of government after it was wrested from its hand by the judgment of history. It is a harmful and deceptive utopia to hope to restore the old order, for the clock of history shows that it is already the last hour […] the old, coercive theocracy must give way to freedom.[66]

Bulgakov finds a renewed approach for the Church in modern society "from below" in what he calls the "soul" of socialism: "History is not made by the sober prosaics but by dreamers, people of faith, prophets, 'utopians.'"[67] The goal is not an immanent Utopia with a capital "U," as Schmemann argues and Bulgakov agrees is a demonic impulse embodied by the horrific methods of Bolshevism, but little "utopias,"[68] imagined and created to respond to changing historical circumstances. Broadly speaking, the task of Christian social action is "the achievement of social justice with personal freedom,"[69] a process that will take different forms depending on time and place, and certainly need not conform to the demands and assumption of bourgeois liberal individualism.[70]

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64 Bulgakov 2002, 347.
65 Bulgakov 2002, 347.
66 Bulgakov 2021a, 23.
67 Bulgakov 2021b, 31.
68 Bulgakov 2021b, 37.
69 Bulgakov 2021b, 31.
70 Harper justifiably worries that the For the Life of the World document does not question, and

Bulgakov's second maxim is this: "Man's likeness to God is actualized in historical creative activity. In God's world, man creates his own historical world."[71] This maxim affirms human attempts at world-building, imagining communities, and creating forms of life that preserve the freedom and dignity of persons made in the image of God. The emphasis in this maxim is on the word *creative*, which implies a perpetual state of incompletion. It is important that social arrangements do not remain stagnant, resting upon a set of founding principles with no possibility of change or evolution. Such social arrangements forget that the call of human society is to strive for the Kingdom of God, not to simply 'settle' in this world, a settling he sees especially in "'petty bourgeois' comfort and satisfaction" that fails to call human beings "onward and upward."[72]

Bulgakov's third and final maxim: "All earthly things must be perceived in light of the coming end, the eschatological culmination."[73] In other words, any social action or political arrangement must be undertaken with a view toward its contribution to the final transfiguration of all things. Whatever a given social arrangement favored in a particular time and place may be, it is impermanent and will be subject to the purifying fires of the *Parousia*. Yet this maxim also affirms that social action is serious work. It gives significance to history and forms the basis of its final transfiguration, even if the ultimate value of particular actions will only become clear at the Last Judgment.[74]

Conclusion

The notion of the 'liturgy after the liturgy' in 20th-century Orthodox theology rightly seeks to integrate the Church's social mission with its primary act, the liturgy, but it suffers from a lack of theological depth and rigour. The theological basis for social action can be better formulated and grounded by framing extra-liturgical action in terms of the Church's ultimate referent, the Kingdom of God. Each of the three modern Orthodox thinkers I have put into conversation in this article holds that the Kingdom of God is present in this world in

thereby tacitly blesses, the assumptions of liberal individualism. See Harper 2022, 337–338.

71 Bulgakov 2002, 348.

72 Bulgakov 2002, 348.

73 Bulgakov 2002, 348.

74 Bulgakov 2002, 347–348.

some sense, transfiguring it, a transfiguration that is revealed and manifested in the liturgy above all. Both Alexander Schmemann and John Zizioulas limit the possibility of the Kingdom's manifestation to the liturgy only, which, I have argued, contradicts their own thinking about the transfiguring force of the Kingdom of God in history through the Church.

By contrast, Sergius Bulgakov makes a robust case not only for the possibility of extra-liturgical manifestations of the Kingdom in social action, but indeed for the *responsibility* of the Church to undertake such action. Bulgakov advocates for a qualified utopianism: Christians should strive to enact social justice "from below," without resorting to political coercion, and respect the absolute dignity and freedom of the human person. In practice, Bulgakov's vision is congenial to small-scale Christian activist communities like the Orthodox Action organisation of his disciple Mother Maria Skobtsova, or the Catholic Worker movement founded by Dorothy Day. Bulgakov is careful to separate earthly from heavenly, divine from human, and historical from eschatological, though in the church these antinomies are always present simultaneously. Keeping in mind that any seeds planted by the Church in the world for its future, final transfiguration may not blossom and grow, Christians must nevertheless plant them, dream up creative forms of life, and make 'little utopias,' responding to the needs and circumstances of time and place, even if ultimately it is God who determines the final shape of His Kingdom.

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Georgi Mitov

Preaching with the Fathers: The Example of the Old Church Slavonic *Učitelno Evangelie (Didactic Gospel)* by Constantine of Preslav[1]

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Abstract

The article examines the question of the usage of patristic exegetical texts in the composition of homilies, focusing on one historical examples, the so-called Učitelno Evangelie (Didactic Gospel). *This is a corpus of fifty-one Slavonic exegetical homilies composed by Constantine of Preslav in late-ninth-century Bulgaria. They were written on the basis of excerpts from patristic biblical commentaries included in Greek New Testament catenae manuscripts, which were translated by Constantine of Preslav from Greek into Old Church Slavonic. The Didactic Gospel presents a practical example of how the rich Greek patristic exegetical tradition can be fruitfully employed in pastoral practice.*

Keywords: Patristics, Greek New Testament catenae, Constantine of Preslav

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Introduction

In his paper presented at the First Congress of Orthodox Theologians, which took place in Athens in 1936, Fr Georges Florovsky somewhat reluctantly remarked that "to go *back*, back to the *past ages*, is still very unpopular among our theological students."[1] Almost a century later, one can argue that the situation has changed and nowadays modern Orthodox theology can be best describes as profoundly marked by the return back to the past ages. It should be stressed, however, that this return is not simply an attempt to revive certain aspects of the tradition of the early Christian Church. The term 'neo-patristic synthesis,' propagated by Florovsky himself, has been generally used in reference to this approach to the patristic heritage.[2] It takes two main directions: first going back to the Fathers before proceeding forward with the Fathers.[3] This approach naturally raises the question of how we go back to the Fathers, so that we can acquire something from them and bring it forward in a fruitful way.

Recently, Fr Andrew Louth, commenting on the patristic heritage in the Orthodox Church highlighted that there are two main ways of approaching the Fathers. The first one can be broadly defined as an intellectual approach, which is practiced in Orthodox and non-Orthodox academic circles alike. Thus, by reading the Fathers of the Church "we are immersing ourselves in the tradition of the Church."[4] However, this "is not the only way of immersing ourselves in the tradition of the Church: the liturgical services of the Church are also a repository of tradition, but we think of that, too, as patristic. We regard the two principle Eucharistic liturgies as compositions of two of the Fathers, St John Chrysostom and St Basil the Great, and very many of the songs and troparia we sing are composed by Fathers of the Church, such as St John Damascene, and furthermore are composed of passages taken from patristic writings, especially the homilies of St Gregory the Theologian."[5] Thus, it has been emphasised that the Church with its services and hymnography

1 Florovsky 2019, 153. Emphases in the original.

2 The bibliography on 'neo-patristic synthesis' is quite vast but some recent publications, such as Louth 2008, Casiday 2014, and Ladoucer 2019, 95–122, can provide a good starting point. See also Fr Sergio Mainoldi's contributions in the present volume.

3 For instance, see Casiday 2014, 141: "[W]hen Orthodox theologians go 'back to the Fathers,' they do so in order to move *forward* with the Fathers." Emphasis in the original.

4 Louth 2023, 23.

5 Louth 2023, 23–24.

can also serve as a place for engaging with the Fathers. Despite the fact that most of the ecclesiastical hymnography interprets biblical texts poetically, the biblical readings for the day are interpreted mainly in the exegetical sermon. If the services and hymnographical works present largely a part of the patristic heritage, is this also applicable to the nature of exegetical sermons in the contemporary Orthodox practice. Biblical commentaries constitute by far one of the largest branches of Greek patristic and later Byzantine theological literature. However, nowadays they are primarily an object of academic study and have rarely been used in ecclesiastical settings. In the present article, I will provide a historical example of how the immense patristic exegetical tradition can potentially be employed in church practice, namely in the composition of homilies.

In the patristic period and even later on in Byzantium, biblical commentaries in Greek were produced in different forms and genres, such as theological treatises commenting on specific biblical passages and books, exegetical homilies, and collections of questions and answers.[6] It has been argued that in this plethora of exegetical texts, commentaries now known as biblical catenae "became one of the most popular and enduring literary forms for biblical study and spread throughout the Byzantine world and beyond."[7] In the medieval Greek tradition, these collections were usually called: ἐκλογαὶ ἐξηγητικαί (exegetical extracts); συναγωγὴ τῶν ἐξηγητικῶν ἐκλογῶν (collection of exegetical extracts); or simply συναγωγὴ ἐξηγήσεων (collection of exegeses).[8] In them, a verse (or a group of verses) from a biblical book is supplemented by one or more exegetical commentaries from various patristic writings.[9]

It has been hypothesised that in Byzantium biblical catenae were used mainly as an auxiliary tool in studying the Scriptures, as well as for the preparation of exegetical homilies.[10] Gilles Dorival pointed out, without proceeding further in analysing the material, that in the mediaeval Greek tradition, there are only a few instances, in which biblical catenae manuscripts were used for

6 Royé 2007, 65–68. For some of the major early Christian exegetical genres see, for instance, the recent overall studies of Lössl 2019, Meyer 2019, Perrone 2019.

7 Constas 2021, 116.

8 Devreesse 1927, 1087–1089; Dorival 1985, 209–210.

9 See most recently Kannengiesser 2004, 978–987; Layton 2019, as well as the catalogue of Greek New Testament catenae manuscripts, see Parpulov 2021.

10 For instance, Constas 2021, 116.

the production of exegetical homiletic texts.[11] Unfortunately, this aspect of the 'literary posterity,' to use Dorival's expression, of Greek biblical catenae in Byzantium has remained largely understudied. Nevertheless, a corpus of fifty-one Old Church Slavonic exegetical homilies, composed by Constantine of Preslav between 886 and 894 and known as the *Učitelno Evangelie (Didactic Gospel)*,[12] sheds more light on the usage of Greek biblical catenae as a material for the production of homilies in early medieval Bulgaria, which even though was beyond the political boundaries of Byzantium was still deeply immersed in the Byzantine spiritual and cultural heritage. It should be mentioned that Bulgaria was christianised as a result of Byzantine religious missions in the middle of the ninth century and was, thus, deeply influenced by Byzantium, especially in regards to cultural and ecclesiastical matters.[13] This is most evident from the vast number of Greek theological texts translated into Old Church Slavonic between the end of the ninth and the beginning of the eleventh centuries. It was in this context that Constantine of Preslav produced his Didactic Gospel. The analysis of the homilies clearly demonstrated that they are not entirely an original work of Constantine but, instead, are largely based on excerpts from Greek New Testament catenae, which were translated from Greek into Old Church Slavonic by Constantine and with some additions and adaptations, were transformed into exegetical homilies.[14]

Therefore, the present article will address the question of how Greek New Testament catenae were used for the composition of homilies in early mediaeval Bulgaria. In regards to its structure, my article will be divided into two parts. The first part will briefly present the main characteristics of the Greek New Testament catenae manuscripts, without any claim to provide an exhaustive overview on the topic, given the vast material evidence. In the second part of the article, the Didactic Gospel by Constantine of Preslav will be introduced and some concrete examples of how Greek New Testament catenae manuscripts, as well as other patristic homilies, were used for the production of homilies in Old Church Slavonic will be given.

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11 Dorival 1985, 223–225.

12 For Constantine of Preslav and his Didactic Gospel, see Podskalsky 2000, 185–186; Галлучи 2001a; Galluci 2001b; Тихова 2012, XI-LV, as well as the contributions in the recently published volume on the Didactic Gospel of Constantine of Preslav and the South Slavonic homiletic tradition, see Taseva, Rabus & Petrov (ed.) 2024.

13 For an overview, see the classical interpretation in Dvornik 1970, esp. 1–48, 230–282.

14 See Митов 2022.

Some Remarks on the Usage of Biblical Catenae in Byzantium

Traditionally, the origins of the biblical catenae are associated with the literary activity of Procopius of Gaza (c. 465–c. 528), who described in the prologue of his *Catena in Octateuchum* (CPG 7430) the process, whereby he compiled his biblical catenae:

> Previously [….] we gathered the explications of the Octateuch by the Fathers and the others, collecting them from commentaries and various discourses. Since, however, the excerpts we selected were in their very own words, whether or not they agreed with one another, and since our volume was stretching beyond limit, I presently set out to reduce the composition to a convenient size. Consequently, it is necessary to say only once whatever is agreed to by all interpreters, and so that one text might appear from all of them, we have set forth the voices of all as if by a single speaker.[15]

Even though recent scholarship has questioned whether Procopius of Gaza was, indeed, the person behind the creation of the first biblical catenae,[16] the prologue to the Catena in Octateuchum provides some important first-hand evidence on the process of their composition. According to Procopius's account, selected excerpts from the "commentaries and various writings" of "the Fathers and from others" were collected irrespective of whether these agreed with each other or not. It should be stressed that he commenced the project by compiling complete and unabridged extracts, but due to the voluminous length, he considerably alternated and paraphrased the excerpts and, thus, modified and summarised his sources, and, eventually, omitted those passages that did not bring anything new to the commentary. Therefore, it

15 Procopius of Gaza, *Catena in Octateuchum*, ed.: Metzler 2015, 1: Ἤδη μὲν καὶ πρότερον […] τὰς καταβεβλημένας ἐκ τῶν πατέρων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων εἰς τὴν Ὀκτάτευχον ἐξηγήσεις συνελεξάμεθα ἐξ ὑπομνημάτων καὶ διαφόρων λόγων ταύτας ἐρανισάμενοι. ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ τὰς ῥήσεις αὐτὰς τῶν ἐκθεμένων ἐπὶ λέξεως ἐξεθέμεθα, εἴτε σύμφωνοι πρὸς ἀλλήλας ἐτύγχανον εἴτε καὶ μή, καὶ πρὸς πλῆθος ἄπειρον ἡμῖν ἐντεῦθεν τὸ σύγγραμμα παρετείνετο, συνεῖδον νῦν πρὸς μέτρον εὐσταλὲς συνελεῖν τὴν γραφὴν ἐπειγόμενος, εἰ μέν τι σύμφωνον εἴρηται ἅπασιν, τοῦτο προσάπαξ εἰπεῖν· εἰ δέ τι διάφορον, καὶ τοῦτο συντόμως ἐκθέσθαι πρὸς τὸ διὰ πάντων ἓν γενέσθαι σῶμα τῆς συγγραφῆς ὡς ἑνὸς καὶ μόνου τὰς ἁπάντων ἡμῖν ἐκθεμένου φωνάς. The English translation is from Layton 2019, 223.

16 For instance, see Lamb 2016, 278–279 and Layton 2019, 223–224.

is important to emphasise that the origin of biblical catenae was – at least to some extent – connected to the attempt to systematise the large exegetical production in the previous centuries.[17]

Commenting on the usage of biblical catenae in Byzantium, Fr Maximos Constas remarked that they were first and foremost used for private and devotional study of the Scriptures but also for the preparation of sermons.[18] For instance, in his *Bibliotheca*, the Constantinopolitan patriarch Photius (ca. 810–after 893) provided a brief account of how he used biblical catenae for a private theological study and, thus, greatly benefited from the reading of certain exegetical catenae:

> I have read the exegetical scholia of Procopius the Sophist *On the Octateuch of the Old Testament* and *On Kings*, as well as *On Chronicles*. This commentator is detailed and extensive, however, he does not waste time in unnecessary and irrelevant deviations. He, instead, often records differences of opinions on the same question.[19]

Thus, it becomes evident that Photius valued the "exegetical scholia of Procopius the Sophist" mainly due to the fact that they provided him with a succinct yet detailed overview of different exegetical interpretations of certain biblical books.

The second main usage of biblical catenae in the Byzantine world, according to Constas, is closely linked with the composition of exegetical homilies. Dorival observed that in the tenth century the phenomenon of transforming exegetical commentaries from Greek biblical catenae into "other more

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17 For instance, Fr Maximos Constas aptly pointed out that "[n]o individual or single school, church, or monastery could have a library containing all the exegetical writings of the church fathers" (Constas 2021, 117).

18 Constas 2021, 117: "The catenae, on the other hand, which were compiled under the direction of competent textual critics, exegetes, and theologians, were eminently useful for *study*, for the *preparation of sermons*, and, not least, for the clarification of disputes concerning the meaning of a biblical passage and the refutation of theological heresies." Emphases here are my own. In his overall study on biblical hermeneutics in Byzantium, Constas did not provide any examples or references of how biblical catenae were used for the outlined purposes.

19 Photius, *Bibliotheca*; ed.: Henry 1962, 104–105: Ἀνεγνώσθη Προκοπίου σοφιστοῦ ἐξηγητικαὶ σχολαὶ εἴς τε τὴν Ὀκτάτευχον τῶν παλαιῶν γραμμάτων καὶ εἰς τὰς Βασιλείας καὶ δὴ καὶ τὰ Παραλειπόμενα. Πολύχους μὲν οὗτος καὶ πολύστιχος ὁ ἐξηγητής, πλὴν οὐκ εἰς περιττάς τινας καὶ ἐξαγωνίους ἀποδιατρίβων παρεκδρομάς, ἀλλὰ τῷ διαφορὰς δοξῶν περὶ τῆς αὐτῆς ὑποθέσεως ἀναγράφειν πολλάκις. The translation is loosely based on Wilson 1994, 185.

traditional forms of exegesis," such as homilies, was already underway.[20] He underlined that in the medieval Greek tradition there were only three instances of such literary transformations and all the examples are homiletic texts commenting on the Psalms.[21]

Patristic Exegetical Tradition in the Didactic Gospel of Constantine of Preslav

Regrettably, the question of the usage of Greek biblical catenae for the production of exegetical homilies in Byzantium has not been sufficiently explored. Nevertheless, the Didactic Gospel of Constantine of Preslav reveals some more aspects of how the vast amount of Greek New Testament catenae was used for the composition of homilies in early mediaeval Bulgaria. The period immediately after the conversion of the Bulgarian ruler Boris-Michael I (852–889) was marked by an intensive literary activity, as a result of which numerous writings, especially theological in their nature, were translated from Greek into Old Church Slavonic as well as original Slavonic texts were produced, based on Byzantine models.[22]

This is the time when Constantine of Preslav lived. He authored the so-called *Istorija vŭ kratŭcě* (*Outline of History*), based on the *Chornographia* by the Constantinopolitan patriarch Nikephoros (ca. 758–828). Moreover, he translated from Greek into Slavonic the *Contra Arianos* (CPG 2093, 2230) by Athanasius of Alexandria.[23] It should be mentioned that Constantine was also the author of some hymnographical texts that were added to the Slavonic transla-

20 Dorival 1985, 213.

21 Dorival 1985, 223.

22 For an overview of the translated literature from Greek into Old Church Slavonic during this period, see Yovcheva & Taseva 2012, 278–284. The vast majority of these texts were theological in character. A useful guide to the corpus of translated literature into Old Church Slavonic is the *Checklist of Slavonic Translations* by Francis J. Thomson (2018). In order to illustrate the type of Greek theological texts translated into Old Church Slavonic in the period in question, I will briefly mention some of them. According to the *Checklist of Slavonic Translation* (Thomson 2018, 43–57), a large number of homilies by John Chrysostom, as well as various homilies and theological treatises by the fourth-century Cappadocian Fathers were translated into Slavonic, copied, and widely transmitted during this early period. The monastic rules of Basil of Caesarea and a few of his epistles and excerpts from his *Liber de Spiritu Sancto* (CPG 2839) were known in tenth-century Bulgaria. A full Slavonic translation of most of the *Orationes* (CPG 3010) by Gregory of Nazianzus was also produced.

23 Podskalsky 2000, 185 (with the bibliography).

tion of the Greek *Triodion*.[24] Undoubtedly, however, the greatest achievement of Constantine was the composition of the Didactic Gospel, regarded as "the first systematic homiletic corpus in Old Church Slavonic."[25] It consists of fifty-one exegetical homilies for each Sunday of the ecclesiastical year covering the period from Pascha to Palm Sunday. As Eleonora Gallucci demonstrated, the readings in the Didactic Gospel follow the established order of Sunday Gospel readings of the Great Church in Constantinople.[26] The text of the Didactic Gospel is fully preserved in four mediaeval Slavonic manuscripts: Moscow, GIM Sin. slav. 262 (11th–13th c.); Moscow, RGB Gilf. 32 (1286 AD); Mt Athos, Hilendar slav. 385 (1344 AD); Vienna, ÖNB slav. 12 (14th c.).[27]

In the prologue to his Didactic Gospel, Constantine clearly stated what compelled him to compose his homilies:

> It is good, brethren, always to begin with God and finish with God, as Gregory the Theologian said, to instruct ourselves in the divine law day and night […] For that reason I, the humble Constantine, reassured by your pleading as well, brother Naum, and by the commandments mentioned above, bowed to your humility. And you, brothers, fathers, and sons who desire instruction do not criticize me, the daring one, but try to enjoy it and be prepared to listen. […] Therefore I, the humble one, urged, as I said, *to translate the interpretation of the Holy Gospel from Greek into Slavonic* and as I saw words so much above my understanding and powers, feared and trembled. However, […] I began with […] the Sunday Gospels.[28]

Furthermore, this passage makes clear that the Didactic Gospel is – at least in its major part – not an original exegetical work of Constantine but rather a composition based on biblical commentaries translated from Greek into Old Church Slavonic. This was emphasised already in the 19th century by the first

24 Попов 1985.

25 Вадковский 1885, 168.

26 Галлучи 2001a.

27 For the critical edition of the Slavonic text of the *Didactic Gospel*, see Тихова 2012 and esp. xvi–xxix for a description of the manuscript tradition. There are still some discussion about the date of the earliest manuscript witness. For instance, Gallucci suggested that it should be dated to the period between the second half of the 12th and the beginning of the 13th century (Gallucci 2001b, 50), whereas Tihova proposed an earlier date, viz. between the 11th and the 12th centuries (Тихова 2012, XVI).

28 Petkov 2008, 58-59 (with some modifications, emphasis added).

scholars, who studied the Didactic Gospel. Thus, for instance, Alexander Gorskij and Kapiton Nevostruev hypothesised that Constantine might have used some of the exegetical homilies by John Chrysostom, of which he had selected passages and translated them into Old Church Slavonic in order to use them as a basis for his Sunday homilies. Additionally, they suggested that Constantine might have used other sources or 'abridged versions' of the homilies by Chrysostom without – however – being able to fully identify the sources for the homilies.[29] Later on, Anthonij Vadkovskij published the Slavonic text of 19 homilies from the Didactic Gospel and compared them with the Greek New Testament catena texts, edited by John Cramer. Vadkovskij concluded that for the main part of most of his homilies Constantine of Preslav must have used some kind of catenae commentaries, similar to the ones edited by Cramer, and not simply already existing Greek patristic homilies.[30] This opinion had been generally accepted in scholarship and re-affirmed more recently in a series of studies by Dobriela Kotova and Ivan P. Petrov, who examined further the question of the Greek sources of the Didactic Gospel.[31]

Nonetheless, the composition of the homilies in the Didactic Gospel should not be regarded as a mere translation of Greek New Testament commentaries, which were used in the ecclesiastical practice of Constantine of Preslav for preaching and interpreting the Gospel readings for each Sunday of the liturgical year. Constantine of Preslav not only translated from Greek into Old Church Slavonic exegetical texts from catenae and homilies but he also added some original parts and, thus, produced a coherent homiletic text.[32] It can be summarised that all the homilies in the Didactic Gospel have a three-fold structure, consisting of an introduction, a main exegetical part, and a conclusion.[33] Whereas the introductions and the conclusions are considered

29 Горский & Невоструев 1859, 409, 423–424.

30 Вадковский 1885, 36–40. Vadkovskij referred to the multi-volume edition of New Testament catenae by John Cramer (Cramer 1840-1841). It should be noted that Cramer's edition was based only on a limited number of Greek New Testament biblical catenae manuscripts on the Gospels, viz. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Coislin 23 [Diktyon: 49165]; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Grec 178 [Diktyon: 49747]; Oxford Bodleian Library, Auct. T.1.4 [Diktyon: 47130]; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud. gr. 33 [Diktyon: 48255], which represent only a small part of the entire rich tradition, viz. the so-called *Catena integra in Matthaeum* (CPG C 110.4), *Recensio secunda* of the *Catenae in Marcum* (CPG C 125.2), *Catena typus B in Lucam* (CPG C 131), and *Catena integrea in Iohannem* (CPG C 140.4).

31 For instance, Котова 2022a, 2022b, 2023, 2024; Petrov 2022.

32 For some of the composition techniques used by Constantine of Preslav, see Митов 2022.

33 For the structure of the homilies, see Вадковский 1885, 40–45 with the examples provided therein.

to be original parts written by Constantine of Preslav,[34] the main exegetical part is the Slavonic translation of excerpts from the Greek New Testament catenae and – in a few instances – patristic exegetical homilies.

There have been some discussions about the exact type of Greek New Testament catenae manuscripts used by Constantine of Preslav. For most of the homilies, Constantine selected excerpts from Greek New Testament catenae, attributed to John Chrysostom and Cyril of Alexandria.[35] Kotova argued that for the commentaries on Matthew and John, Constantine utilised the so-called *catena prima*. In addition to this type, Constantine used also another catena type, the so-called *catena integra*, which contains excerpts from the exegetical writings of patristic authors, such as Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, Isidore of Pelusium, Origen, and Titus of Bostra. For the pericopes from the Gospel of Luke, catena manuscripts of the so-called *typus A* (CPG C 130) were used, with excerpts from the homilies of John Chrysostom and other ecclesiastical authors.[36]

Therefore, each of the homilies of the Didactic Gospel can be seen as a tapestry of Greek exegetical patristic texts masterfully sewn together by Constantine of Preslav. In this regard, the thirty-fifth homily can serve as a good example. The homily is given on the twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost and deals with the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10: 25-37). The first part of the main exegetical section of the homily corresponds to a Greek text by John Chrysostom (inc.: Τίνος ἕνεκεν ὁ Ματθαῖος φησὶν, ὅτι πειράζων ἠρώτησεν οὗτος ὁ νομικός), as it is attested in the biblical catena:

> Why does Matthew say that this lawyer questioned Jesus in order to test Him, while Mark, on the contrary, says, "knowing that He had answered wisely, he said to Him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God'?" The Evangelists are not contradicting each other in this, but are, in fact, in complete harmony. He questioned in order to test Jesus at the beginning, but, having been edified by Christ's response, he was praised. For Jesus did not praise him at the outset, but only after he said, "To love one's neighbour is greater than all burnt offerings," did he hear, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." [37]

34 Котова 2024.
35 Galluci 2001, 53–54.
36 Котова 2023а, 26–31.
37 For the Slavonic texts and the Greek sources, see Тихова 2012, 319. The translation here is mine.

The small section that followed is – in fact – taken from the exegetical homilies of Cyril of Alexandria (inc.: Ἐπαινεθεὶς ὑπὸ τοῦ Σωτῆρος ὁ νομικὸς, τὴν ἀλαζονείαν ἐξέρρηξεν):

> Praised by the Savior, the lawyer cast off his arrogance, considering no one to be his neighbour, as if no one could be equal to him in righteousness. This is what the Evangelist indicates by saying, "But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, *And who is my neighbor*?"[38]

The third section, however, contains an exegetical letter by Isidore of Pelusium (ep. 1959/ lib. IV, ep. 123, inc.: Ὁ νομικὸς πλησίον μόνον ἐνόμιζεν εἶναι τὸν δίκαιον τῷ δικαίῳ).[39] This transition from the interpretation of one patristic author to another is not indicated in the text of the Slavonic homily, even though most of the Greek New Testament catenae manuscripts from the type, used by Constantine of Preslav, clearly indicate where the first patristic commentary ends and the following one begins: "The lawyer considered only the righteous to be neighbours with the righteous, and the lofty to be neighbours with the lofty – by virtue, I mean […]."[40]

After this short insertion from the letters of Isidore of Pelusium, another commentary by John Chrysostom follows. Thus, the thirty-fifth homily from the Didactic Gospel of Constantine of Preslav is only one example of the manner, in which the patristic biblical commentaries served as a basis for the composition of exegetical homilies, used for pastoral purposes in the newly-christianised Bulgaria. The four Southern and Eastern Slavonic manuscripts, mentioned above, containing the full text of all the fifty-one homilies from the Didactic Gospel, as well as the large number of other Slavonic manuscripts, which transmit only separate homilies from the whole corpus,[41] clearly illustrate the popularity of these homilies in the mediaeval period.

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38 For the Slavonic texts and the Greek sources, see Тихова 2012, 321. The translation here is mine.
39 For this recently identified letter of Isidore of Pelusium included in the Didactic Gospel, see Mitov 2024.
40 For the Slavonic texts and the Greek sources, see Тихова 2012, 322. The translation here is mine.
41 For instance, see Спасова 2014.

Conclusion

It has been argued that one of the main purposes of Greek New Testament catenae in the Byzantine world was connected with the composition of homiletic texts. There are a few examples of medieval Greek exegetical homilies composed on the basis of catenae manuscripts. Unfortunately, in the field of Byzantine studies this issue has remained largely understudied. Nonetheless, the Didactic Gospel of Constantine of Preslav, a corpus of fifty-one Slavonic exegetical homilies, composed in the last decades of the ninth century in the capital of the First Bulgarian Kingdom sheds some more light on the question of how preachers used Greek New Testament catenae manuscripts in their pastoral practice in order to produce exegetical homiletic texts.

Thus, the example of the Didactic Gospel demonstrates that the Greek patristic exegetical tradition profoundly influenced the composition of exegetical homilies in early medieval Bulgaria. Patristic exegetical commentaries – mainly in the form of Greek New Testament catenae and only in fewer cases exegetical homilies, served as a basis for all the fifty-one homilies composed and delivered by Constantine of Preslav. This can be seen as an illustration of how the patristic exegetical legacy was productively incorporated in the preaching practice in early mediaeval Bulgaria. The question of whether and how similar approaches to the patristic biblical exegesis can be still fruitfully applied remains open.

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Animals as ἄλογα: A Critical Appraisal of a Murky Concept

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Abstract

In our times, phenomena such as industrial animal agriculture, increased meat consumption, and the loss of species necessitate an urgent shift in human attitudes towards animals. Within the Orthodox Church, there seems to exist some discrepancy concerning different approaches to animals. On the one hand, the ideals and praxis of monastic saints demonstrates a harmonious relationship with animals, supported by the idea of a return to the original paradisiacal state. On the other hand, this seems to have minimal impact on the broader Church, or its teachings.

The patristic, hymnographic, and even modern Orthodox discourses are inherently linked with the concept of animals as ἀλόγα, beings lacking the faculty of reason. Historically, this notion has frequently been used to justify human entitlement to treat animals as objects of consumption and mistreatment. The validity of this argument was debated already in antiquity, and its integration into patristic theology created some tensions with the paradisiacal ideals. The notion of animals as ἄλογα is problematic in several ways related to its semantic ambiguity, inconsistent applications, and practical realities. Therefore, the argument requires reinterpretation in the light of contemporary concerns and modern scientific discoveries regarding animal cognition. This paper seeks to trace and examine the principal uses, applications, and problematic aspects of the idea of animals as ἀλόγα, focusing on patristic sources with some reference to Greek antiquity, in addition to some insights of modern natural science.

Keywords: animals, rationality, patristic, Orthodox, theology

Introduction

The Orthodox tradition seems to have some inconsistency between different approaches to animals, and this applies to theoretical views as well as practical actions. On the one hand, the stories and praxes of monastic saints have demonstrated a harmonious relationship with animals throughout history, supported by the idea of return to the original paradisiacal state, which in turn is profoundly integrated to the Orthodox anthropology. On the other hand, in the big picture this appears to have remained not much more than a hagiographical curiosity with minimal impact on the Church as a whole. In a traditional Orthodox culture like Greece, Paschal joy is demonstrated through the grotesque massacre of sheep, with no sign of paradise or harmonious relationships.

This tension has always existed, but in our times the question has become relevant and urgent in a new way. Phenomena such as industrial animal agriculture, increased meat consumption, and the irreversible loss of species[1] demand an urgent shift in human attitudes towards animals.

The way theologians deal with this question does not appear fully coherent. Whenever there is a need for an Orthodox paper in ecological forums, theologians are apt to construct a rhetorical space in which the practices of saints are enumerated and admired, and the ideals of paradise are brought up. However, abstract speculations on spiritual ideals or cosmic transfiguration have aroused very little theoretical reflection on animals, not to mention practical action for their welfare or protection. In short, the Church and her theologians, despite their profound ecological interests and commitment to ascetic ideals, have been rather quiet on the fate of animals.[2]

Nonetheless, the 'animal question' has been discussed at length by Catholic, Protestant and non-religious scholars alike in dozens of books on 'animal theology.'[3] From a methodological point of view, the material ap-

1 As it is customary to react to these questions by presenting justifications for one's own meat consumption, it must be emphasised that these all are distinct issues from whether human individuals are permitted (by the Orthodox tradition) to consume animal products at all.

2 A noteworthy Orthodox contribution of recent times is that of Kallistos Ware (2019). A representative example of the traditional, somewhat prejudiced, approach is Koios 2019. While there is a massive output of Orthodox writings on ecological issues, much of it remains at a general theological level, with surprisingly little to say on animals. Orthodox perspectives, and their problems, have recently been explored in Nellist (2017), who approaches the matter from various angles.

3 The best introduction to the topic may still be found in Andrew Linzey's oeuvre, notably

pears somewhat confusing. The argumentation may be based on the Old or New Testaments, rational reasoning based on theological principles, theological reasoning based on philosophical or ethical principles, or discoveries of natural scientists. Patristic sources, in particular, are often used in rather imbalanced ways; there may be some random references to Augustine and Aquinas, while the most fruitful patristic sources are neglected altogether.[4] Furthermore, secular works on animal ethics often criticise Christianity for portraying animals as soulless and irrational objects, thereby justifying their merciless treatment. Additionally, caricatures of the Church's anti-scientific superstitions are occasionally mocked.[5]

A definitive Orthodox animal theology has yet to be written. Since Orthodox theology cannot be developed without a patristic foundation, a comprehensive review of patristic literature is necessary to reassess its relevance to animal theology. In this article, I focus on the question of the (lack of a) rational element in animals, which seems to be the kernel of the matter in the history of thought, both Greek and Western. In traditional theoretical approaches, the subordination and mistreatment of animals seems to be fundamentally based on the idea that they lack a certain mental, immaterial component, which makes them valueless objects rather than sentient beings whose lives have inherent worth. This component has usually been called 'rationality,' λόγος, which already in Antiquity was considered so crucial that ἄλογα become a standard term for animals in the Greek language.

Background: The Two Positions in Antiquity

The story is about as long as the history of thought in general. Distinguishing between sound (φωνή) and (rational) speech (λόγος), Aristotle used the lack of λόγος, or νοῦς, as a central premise to position humans at the top of the hi-

Linzey 1994; Linzey & Cohn-Sherbok 1997; and Linzey & Yamamoto 1998. For Roman Catholic perspectives, see Steck 2019. For a more philosophical approach, see Wennberg 2003. For animals in Early Christianity, see Grant 1999; Gilhus 2006.

4 This observation applies particularly to Theodoret of Cyrrhus, but even the main authorities such as Basil the Great and John Chrysostom have been left to margins in some studies on Early Christian approach to animals (e.g. Gilhus 1998). Respectively, the most important early Christian treatise on animals, *Physiologus* (Zucker 2005) seems to be largely unknown to Orthodox theologians and even patristic scholars.

5 E.g. Birkhead 2009, 274, 299; Viitala 2015, 195.

erarchical ladder of existence. This consequently relegated animals to a lower ontological status, rendering them as objects that can be utilised for human benefit in any way that serves the humans.[6] The potential problem here is not the order of species *per se*, or even the status granted to humans, but the absolute ontological gap between humans and animals, which reduces animals to objects devoid of inherent value. Consequently, the actual problem is the insensitivity to animal suffering.

Similar notions can be found in the poetry of Hesiod, in the rhetoric of Isocrates, and so forth. This remained the predominant line of thinking, but there were notable exceptions as well. Although Plato showed little interest in animals, the Platonic tradition, with its tendency towards sensitivity and profundity, provided a more fertile ground for granting more value to animal life.

Issues related to animal rights were raised by certain philosophers, the most famous cases being Plutarch (d. after 119 AD) and Porphyry (d. 305 AD). For Plutarch, animals are to some extent rational, or more precisely, "all animals in some way participate (μετέχειν) in understanding (διάνοια) and thought (λογισμός)."[7] Moreover, animals also partake in the λόγος.[8] This is possible because of their soul, which is by nature perceptive.[9] Furthermore, animals have characteristics such as purposiveness and goal-directedness (πρόθεσις), preparation (παρασκευή), acts of memory (μνήμη, pl. μνῆμαι), and feelings (πάθη). This approach offers a model of employing classical Greek vocabulary in a manner sensitive to animal cognition and mentality, including λόγος.[10]

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6 Aristotle's vast output on animals consists of *De Generatione Animalium* (Περὶ ζῴων γενέσεως), *Historia Animalium* (Τῶν περὶ τὰ ζῷα ἱστοριῶν), *De motu animalium* (Περὶ ζώων κινήσεως), *De Partibus Animalium* (Περὶ ζῴων μορίων), and *De incessu animalium* (Περὶ πορείας ζώων), all published in Loeb Classical Library series. However, his most famous remarks on animals are perhaps those in *Politics,* book I.

7 Plutarch, *De sollertia animalium* 960a. Plutarch's approach to animals is discussed in Newmyer 1992, 38, 45–46; Newmyer's views are further developed in Horky 2017; see also Newmyer 2014.

8 Plutarch, *De sollertia animalium* 966b. For Plutarch, the rationality of animals is evident in their actions (i.e. in sustaining themselves, caring for their offspring, fleeing from hunters), but it is also reflected in human actions: dogs and horses are punished so that they might repent and improve (961d).

9 "Every creature endowed with a soul (μψυχον) comes to birth capable of sensation and possessing imagination." Plutarch, *De sollertia animalium* 960d.

10 Plutarch, *De sollertia animalium* 960a–961c, 966b. For discussion, see Horky 2017.

Similar views were sustained and developed by the Neo-Platonist Porphyry of Tyre, whose discourse on animals *On Abstinence from Killing Animals* (Περὶ ἀποχῆς ἐμψύχων) is one of the most important surviving works on the topic. Moreover, the text was at least known or even read by several Church Fathers (Eusebios, Cyril of Alexandria, Theodoret of Cyrrhus, Augustine), though they were more interested in its anti-Christian remarks than animal rights. For Porphyry, λόγος encompasses two distinct aspects: the ability to think and the ability to communicate. He argued that animals have their share in both. The difference between the rational abilities of humans and animals is not absolute but only a matter of degree. Consequently, he concluded that the ethical obligation of justice (δικαιοσύνη) extends to animals.[11]

Curiously, the third noteworthy advocate of animal rights in Late Antiquity has remained less known, despite the great fame of the author. In his lesser-known work *Dialogue on Animals*, Philo of Alexandria presents animal-friendly views through the character of Alexander, a historical figure whose approach resembles Plutarch and Porphyrios. However, it is perhaps telling that this is one of the few writings of Philo that have survived only in an Armenian translation. The lack of interest among Greek readers contrasts with its popularity in the Armenian tradition, where it has been preserved in 28 manuscripts.[12]

Unfortunately, the patristic authors positioned themselves closer to the former camp, and the main argument was precisely the lack of rationality in animals.

Origen: Christian Anthropomorphism

One of the earliest Christian discussions on the rationality of animals appears in Origen's *Contra Celsum*. However, the arguments and examples that Origen and Celsus employed can be considered already conventional.[13] This is why Plutarch, Porphyry, and Philo, along with Aristotle and his followers, are im-

11 Porphyry of Tyre, *De abstinentia* 3:2–18, 3:26.

12 Terian 1981, 15, 25–28, 30–32.

13 See Grant (1999, 72) who offers a helpful introduction to patristic writings on animals. For a more in-depth analysis, the best work is still Gilhus 1998, especially regarding animal offerings. However, Gilhus' evaluation of the Christian approach to animals relies heavily on the *metaphorical* depiction of animals in literature, which somewhat misses the mark. Furthermore, Gilhus leaves to margins the most important patristic authors on animals, particularly Basil, Chrysostom, and Theodoret.

portant for understanding Origen and other early Christian sources. In other words, elements of early 'animal theology' were largely adopted from existing discussions, then seasoned with some biblical verses or Christian ideas. This is not unexpected as such, given that animals were not a major religious or even philosophical issue.

In polemical encounters, protagonists easily end up opposing each other even when it would not be necessary, resulting in vain arguments and needless off-topic quarrels. This seems to be the case in Origen's discussion on animals as well. Celsus blamed Christians for anthropocentrism, maintaining that the cosmos has been made as much for animals as for humans. One could well admit this claim even while considering the animals as irrational. However, Origen exacerbated the disagreement by not denying the anthropocentrism but confirming it instead, arguing that animals, lacking reason, act only by "a natural instinct," as the FC (1957) translation has it.[14] However, the modern key concept 'instinct' does not exist in Greek; instead, Origen uses the phrase 'according to nature' (ἀπό φύσεως). In his discourse, Origen seems almost possessed by the idea of animals as ἄλογα:

> For he who looks from heaven will see among irrational (τοῖς ἀλόγοις) creatures, however large their bodies, no other principle than, so to speak, irrationality (ἀλογίαν); while among rational beings (λογικοῖς) he will discover reason (λόγον), the common possession of men, and of divine and heavenly beings, and perhaps of the Supreme God Himself, on account of which man is said to have been created in the image of God, for the image of the Supreme God is his reason (Λόγος).[15]

This exemplifies well how early Christian argumentation focused on the rationality of animals. The word ἄλογα often appears as a general term referring to animals and is often translated as 'animals' or 'brutes.' This implies that the potential problem is not the use of the term ἄλογα as such, but the significance and interpretations attributed to this concept.

14 Origen, *Contra Celsum* 4:98.
15 Origen, *Contra Celsum* 4:85.

Augustine: Anthropomorphism with Nuances

Jumping from Origen to Augustine is not as haphazard as it may seem, as it has been shown that Augustine's views on animals were directly influenced by Ambrose of Milan,[16] who in his turn was significantly influenced by Origen.

As the primary authority for the Western tradition and a foundational figure for the mediaeval and even modern views in the West, Augustine's lack of interest in animals is already quite telling. Nonetheless, when he needed to explain and define why humans are superior to animals, his basic argument was precisely that humans have rationality (*ratio*), animals do not.[17] For Augustine, this was an essential and fundamental truth, more decisive in estimating the value of animals than the fact that animals do feel pain.[18] This kind of reasoning is one-sided and questionable, and would lead into absurdities if applied to humans.[19]

In his *Dialogue on the Free Will*, Augustine nailed the principle and its rationale: animals lack rationality, and this is evidenced by the fact that humans can tame animals, but animals cannot tame humans. While this notion may reflect power dynamics more than rationality per se, Augustine nonetheless argued, based on Gen 1:26, that humanity's ability to rule over animals represents the image of God.[20] Unfortunately, this argument has often been taken as a justification for crude and exploitative forms of dominion.

Another problem with Augustine's argument is that he seems to suggest that humans are superior to animals when it comes to rationality, and therefore, animals possess no rationality at all. This position is of course inconsistent, as it assumes that being *inferior* equates to being *devoid* (of rationality). What is missing is the possibility that animals might possess some specific forms of rationality or rationality to some degree. Augustine even goes so far as to claim that animals cannot know that they are alive, due to the lack of rationality; they can be aware that they perceive but without knowing that they perceive.[21] This, in turn, could be taken either as a psychological stance or merely as an observation regarding the use of the concept of knowing.

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16 Clark 1998, 70–71.

17 Augustine, *83 Quest.* 13. Analysed in Clark 1998, 67–70.

18 See the discussion in Hartman 2017, 74–79.

19 If applied to humans, it would mean that the suffering of speechless humans, such as infants or cognitively impaired ones, is ethically acceptable, as their life is devoid of inherent value.

20 Augustine, *83 Quest.* 13; *On Free Choice* 1:9.

21 Augustine, *On Free Choice,* 1:7 (54–58), 2:3–4 (31–41).

On the other hand, Augustine was not fixated on terminology. For him, the point was that animals lack something essential in their inner being, and this lacking entity could be called 'reason,' 'mind,' or 'intelligence' – that is, with terms such as *ratio, mens,* or *intelligentia*. Despite the ambiguity, this something is exactly the aspect that is capable of being in contact and communion with God, and as animals lack it, they have no possibility to get into any kind of contact or communion with God. Be that as it may, one can perhaps hear some echoes of Manicheanism here: the world is so hopelessly outside the divine that one must exit biological, physiological, and even psychic life in order to get into contact with the divine in some pure, noetic sphere. However that may be, it is important to note that even the inability to be in contact with the divine does not justify ill-treatment, neither logically nor spiritually.

Nevertheless, Augustine acknowledged that animals and humans share much in common; particularly in their sense perception and physical activity that are fundamentally similar. Regarding cognition, Augustine acknowledged that animals possess an inner sense that observes and coordinates the impressions perceived by their five senses, but he also stressed that animals are unable to develop evaluations, theorisations, or reflections from these impressions.[22] For Augustine, the inner life of animals seems to consist solely of a mechanistic drive for bodily pleasure and the avoidance of pain.

Furthermore, Augustine acknowledged that animals may surpass humans in some respects, as they are free of certain passions, such as the desire for power and vainglory. However, he regarded this primarily as a coincidental result of their lack of inner faculties rather than a genuine embodiment of exemplary virtues. This suggests that even the most splendid patristic praises of the virtuous traits in animal behaviour do not necessarily reflect a profound respect for animals themselves. Instead, they may merely emphasise the human capacity to discern and interpret figurative or analogical phenomena in the animal world.

Ultimately, this applies to all Church fathers: their eulogies on animal behaviour and virtues do not necessarily imply that they attribute inherent value or virtuousness to animals, or acknowledge their right to live, to use a modern formulation. However, if these same fathers make definitive and

22 Augustine, *Dial*. book 2. Interestingly, this seems to imply that in the case of humans, their evaluations, theorisations and reflections is crucial for the ability to be in contact with God and live eternally.

consistent statements on the value of animals in other contexts,[23] their praise of animal virtues can accordingly be read with more weight.

In sum, the main line from Aristotle to Augustine strongly rejects *logos*-rationality in animals. Perhaps one could argue that this is simply the Greek (and Latin) way of defining and applying the concept. More troubling, however, is that this stance often fosters a cold and indifferent attitude toward animals. In the long run, this perspective has justified treating animals as mere objects for human consumption and contributed to species loss by perpetuating indifference; likewise, it has served to not question the prevalent reality and the development of cruel and indifferent practices in the modern era. For both Origen and Augustine, however, the irrationality of animals often functions somewhat like a banner or slogan, thrown into the discussion without full consideration or elaboration.

As for the argument regarding the lack of *logos*-rationality, there is no real alternative in patristic sources – so unanimous it is. Nevertheless, there are alternatives for this indifferent attitude. There are also patristic authors with more nuanced discussion and more positive approach to animals, the most remarkable ones being Basil the Great and Theodoret of Cyrrhus. However, the whole field is still not properly studied.[24]

Basil the Great: Wonder and Appreciation

Basil the Great is certainly one of the most interesting patristic authorities for this topic due to his detailed interest in animals in his famous homilies on Hexaemeron; his nuanced approach, sympathetic to animals; and his authoritative position in the Orthodox tradition.

Basil aligns with the traditional view by considering animals as ἄλογα, but at the same time, he strives to attribute as many mental activities to them as possible, placing them nearly on par with humans. He also avoids the error of treating all animals as a single, monolithic group; instead, he highlights and describes their unique characteristics. For example, when Basil asserts that all animals possess a soul, he notes that fish have a lesser degree of soul compared to birds and beasts. The relevant point here is not that animals are

23 This is the case with Theodoret of Cyrrhus; see Seppälä 2024.

24 E.g. Gilhus 2006, as noted above. Chrysostom's views are discussed in Leyerle's articles (2005, 2019), but a fully comprehensive study is still lacking.

said to have a soul, something that all patristic authors would acknowledge,[25] but that the concept of soul is explicitly understood as gradational.

For Basil as well, animals' 'irrationality' is self-evident and does not require justification or proof. He uses the term ἄλογα as a synonym of animals, tautologically stating that the ἄλογα "have one and the same soul (ψυχή), characterised by the absence of reason."[26] Moreover, Basil saw nothing in animals that could enable them to live forever, but he did not explicitly base this argument on their lack of λόγος. Specifically, he did not present the absence of reason as the cause for their inability to live eternally; rather, he attributed it to the earthly nature of their existence, maintaining that their soul is of the earth.[27] Indeed, patristic authors generally believed that animals lack the kind of substance required for eternal life. But what should one conclude from this? Should this not, instead, highlight the value of their brief lives and sufferings in our eyes?

Basil's main contribution to our topic lies in his acknowledgment that although animals have no "reason," they may still possess corresponding abilities. For instance, a dog is "not endowed with a share of reason (λόγου μεν ἄμοιρος), but has instinct (literally, "sensing," αἴσθησιν) which holds the equal power to reason (ἰσοδυναμοῦσαν δὲ ὅμως τῷ λόγῳ)."[28] Basil argues that God has compensated for "the lack of understanding (τοῦ λόγου ἔλλειψιν) with extraordinary senses (αἰσθητηρίων περιουσίας)."[29] Thus, despite their lack of reason and speech, animals possess abilities and skills such as cleverness and cunning.[30]

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25 This is due to the wide semantic field of the Greek ψυχή, covering phenomena from rather physical breath of life to 'rational soul;' the latter would not be applied to animals.

26 Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 9:3. The translation is mine.

27 Interestingly, this implies that in humans there is something that is not of the earth, namely the supranatural divine breath. As for the soul of animals, Basil bases his view on Lev 17:11, "the soul of the flesh is in the blood," explaining how in biological life the soul turns into flesh and, after death, into soil. The soul belongs to the blood, the blood belongs to the flesh, and flesh to the earth. From this, Basil concludes that the soul of animals is something earthly, and therefore, it cannot endure once the flesh has decayed, nor is it older than the bodily essence (Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 8:2). For more discussion, see Radde-Gallwitz 2017, 216.

28 Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 9:4. The translation is mine.

29 Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 9:4.

30 For instance, even a crab "takes by cunning" what he cannot achieve by force (namely, when opening oysters). Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 7:3.

In his homilies, Basil illustrates how animals display determination and planning skills, using classical examples such as bees[31] and ants;[32] even the fish "know how to provide for the future."[33] Likewise, vultures, when following armies, estimate the outcomes of military preparations, and their calculations "very nearly approach human reasoning."[34]

Basil also attributes to animals πολιτεία, social life and order.[35] He observes a "wise and marvellous order" even among fish.[36] In the case of bees, the "activity of all the individuals centres in one common end (τὸ πρός ἕν πέρας κοινόν συννεύειν)," and they act in full order under one king, whereas humans often put "the worst man in power," due to ignorance.[37]

In other words, although Basil excludes the concept of rationality (λόγος), it does not mean that animals could not have similar abilities and activities, albeit we label them differently. This is the basic strategy how Basil manages to offer a more nuanced and considerate view that does more justice to animals while maintaining their classification as ἄλογα.

Theodoret of Cyrrhus: Animal-Friendly Theology?

One of the most underrated and understudied Church Fathers, Theodoret of Cyrrhus (Cyrus) is essential to this discussion due to his profound interest in animals and their role in the divine plan. Fittingly for our purposes, he was also aware of Porphyry's ideas and influenced by Basil. Overall, Basil and Theodoret approach animals in a rather similar manner, with Theodoret's praise of bees particularly reflecting Basil's influence. As I have recently studied Theodoret's views on animals elsewhere,[38] I will now summarise only the most important ideas.

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31 "See how the discoveries of geometry are mere by-works to the wise bee!" Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 8:4.

32 "The ant during summer collects treasures for winter. […] With what wise foresight it manages so as to keep its provisions as long as possible! With its pincers it cuts the grains in half, for fear lest they should germinate and not serve for its food. If they are damp it dries them; and it does not spread them out in all weathers, but when it feels that the air will keep of a mild temperature. Be sure that you will never see rain fall from the clouds so long as the ant has left the grain out." Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 9:3.

33 Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 7:5.

34 Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 8:7.

35 "Some of these unreasoning creatures even have a government (εἰπερ πολιτείας ἴδιον), if the feature of government is to make the activity of all the individuals centre in one common end (τὸ πρὸς ἕν πέρας κοινὸν συννεύειν)." Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 8:4.

36 Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 7:3.

37 Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 8:4.

38 Seppälä 2024.

Theodoret discussed animals in different genres including biblical commentaries, rhetorical orations, and hagiography; the views ultimately make a coherent whole and complement each other. If we had, say, only his religious-philosophical eulogy on spiders' webs,[39] one could easily conclude that he merely exaggerates the role of animals for rhetorical purposes. Given his broader interest in animals, however, it is relevant to consider the implications of all his remarks, even those that are flavoured with evident rhetorical embellishment. Theodoret's notions are oftentimes rich in their implications and preconditions.[40]

Echoing Gregory of Nyssa, Theodoret notes that animals' bodily structure, such as paws, is unfitting for rational activities, being designed for more practical activity; their length, sharpness and strength make a natural armour which is not apt for discovering sciences or techniques.[41] Today, the same could be said of the anatomical structure of the vocal tracts: apes are known to be able to comprehend some verbal concepts, but their physical structure does not permit the production of sounds akin to those of humans.

For Theodoret as well, animals are by definition ἄλογα, but this does not imply valuelessness, not even lack of spiritual worth. First, animals are rich in their own inner faculties, which Theodoret does not attempt to name but refers to them loosely as a "certain natural gift" (φυσικῇ τινι πλεονεξίᾳ).[42] Though Theodoret's perspective as a whole is human-centred, he repeatedly grants remarkable spiritual functions to animals in carrying out divine plans, and this has interesting implications for the understanding of the relationship between God and animals in broader terms. Consequently, Theodoret says more about animals than most Church Fathers, and implies even more between the lines. Animals may be subjects implementing divine providence,[43] and they may be included in charismatic activities such as healing, anointing, and blessing.[44] In his section on spiders' webs, he praises the aesthetic touch and level of knowledge among the animal species.[45]

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39 *De providentia* 5:15–19.

40 For instance, Theodoret argues that God, after the flood, allowed humans to eat animals "to put stop to idolatry, since only the worst fools will worship what they eat" (*Q.Oct.* 55), which seems to imply that when idolatry disappears, there will be no need to consume meat. Seppälä 2024, 260.

41 Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *De Providentia* 4:16. Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *De hominis opificio* 7:1–8:1, 8:8–9:3. Seppälä 2024, 260–261.

42 Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *De Providentia* 5:31. The term πλεονεξία, 'share,' translated as 'gift' by Thomas Halton (ACW 49, 69) is often used negatively, but this does not seem to be the case here. Seppälä 2024, 260–261.

43 Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *De Providentia* 5; *Q. Ex.* 58.

44 Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia religiosa* 6:2 (tr. 64), 8:11–12 (tr. 77–78), 28:5 (tr. 181–182).

45 Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *De Providentia* 5:15. Seppälä 2024, 267–269.

Most importantly, however, Theodoret maintains that animals have a relationship of their own with God. Remarkably, they are obedient to the divine will and only through this they may end up being obedient to humans.[46] This notion clarifies their spiritual status remarkably. For Theodoret, animals even fulfil their own place in creation better than humans do theirs.[47] While most humans are subject to passions, in the case of animals such cases are exceptions, Theodoret claims. This means that animals, as a rule, are closer to their original role in paradise than humans are theirs.[48]

Overall, Theodoret is probably the most fruitful patristic authority for animal theology. Respectively, though he confirmed the absence of λόγος, he did not build his thinking on this notion, and he certainly did not use the concept as a banner against what are nowadays called animal rights. Moreover, Theodoret, like many other Church Fathers, stressed the fact that the ideal state of being in paradise knew no enmity between humans and animals, and this ideal should and could be realised also in our present reality.[49]

The Lion Who Lived Like a Saint but Had No λόγος

In the Early Church, Basil and Theodoret were not alone in their sensitivity towards animals, nor were they extreme cases. Within the world of the desert fathers, there were notable voices advocating respect for all creatures. Perhaps the most striking example is the story of Abba Macarius, who, after accidentally killing a mosquito, considered it so grave an iniquity that he spent six months in a swamp, allowing himself to be bitten by mosquitoes as penance.[50] This story represents an extreme example of profound appreciation and reverence for animal life.

Even today, the phrase "animals and the Orthodox Church" likely evokes images of ascetic saints and their harmonious relationships with animals. Accordingly, the recent document *For the Life of the World* highlights several of these examples, though it stops short of clearly defining the lessons they offer. Moreover, these cases are presented from a human perspective,

46 Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *De Providentia* 5:33.
47 Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *De Providentia* 5:22–23.
48 Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *De Providentia* 5:33. Seppälä 2024, 266–267.
49 Seppälä 2024, 258–260, 269.
50 Palladios, *Historia Lausiaca* 18:4.

emphasising the achievements of the saints rather than considering the animals themselves. Indeed, the document even portrays the beasts associated with saints as "normally horrifying or hostile,"[51] failing to show genuine sympathy or respect.

The most famous animal of the patristic era in the Orthodox Church is certainly the lion of St Gerasimos. Depicted in countless icons and frescoes, even in mosaics and statues, the lion owes its fame to the extraordinary characteristics attributed to him by John Moschos, who first narrated the tale. However, even in this celebrated example, the question of λόγος is not ignored.

In John Moschus's famous story, the lion follows Saint Gerasimos after being healed by him, adopting a role akin to that of a disciple. The lion remained with the Saint, embraced monastic vegetarian diet, was given a personal name (Jordanes); thus in practical terms, he became part of the monastic brotherhood. In Moschus's hagiographical account, the lion was even falsely accused of a sin – that is, eating a donkey – only to redeem his reputation by recovering the donkey from the Arabs who had stolen it.[52] False accusations, of course, are a well-known *topos* in the lives of holy ascetics. In a sense, the narrative presents an animal who nearly became a saint himself – at least in the eyes of John Moschos and the generations that followed.

However, even in this case, John Moschos is unable to conclude his narrative without emphasising that this "did not occur due to the lion possessing a rational soul" (οὐχ ὡς ψυχὴν λογικὴν ἔχοντος τοῦ λέοντος); instead, he explains that the story's purpose is to demonstrate that beasts were subject to Adam before the Fall.[53] The tendency to underscore the lack of λόγος appears to be a conventional manoeuvre among the Greek authors. Nevertheless, by implying that the lion was in no way exceptional, Moschos suggests that ordinary animals are, in principle, capable of such pre-lapsarian relationships, if humans only are willing to permit it.

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51 People are encouraged to "rejoice in the goodness and beauty" of creation, and even "reconciliation with animals," leaving the practical implications of this for the reader to decide. *For the Life of the World*, 77–78.

52 John Moschos, *Pratum Spirituale* 107, PG 87iii, 2968. For discussion, see Leyerle 2005, 159–161.

53 John Moschos, *Pratum Spirituale* 107, PG 87iii: 2969.

A Critical Appraisal: Animals as ἄλογα Problematised

At this point, it is timely to clarify why the concept of animals as ἄλογα is problematic. I argue that it is both elusive and troubling in at least six ways.

First, there is the obvious semantic issue: the term λόγος refers to both 'word' and 'rationality.' In the sense of 'rationality,' it also denotes two distinct phenomena: 'internal reason' (λόγος ἐνδιάθετος), which pertains to thought, and 'external reason' (λόγος προφορικός), which manifests in speech. The difference is occasionally maintained in philosophy and is completely clear in theory, but is rarely made explicit. In practice, these two aspects are often intertwined and confused, leading to the result that being speechless is seen as synonymous with being irrational. This has created considerable confusion, which is often implicit rather than explicit.

Second, the idea of animals being ἄλογα appears to be in curious contradiction, or at least in tension, with the prevalent Orthodox view of the presence of λόγοι in creation. The classical view and its development from Justin the Martyr to Maximus the Confessor are well known and need not be repeated here. However, it is worth noting that, even if this tension were merely verbal and therefore somewhat incidental, it still suggests that the notion of animals as ἄλογα is not necessarily an integral part of Orthodox thought. Instead, it seems to have been adopted, perhaps unconsciously, from the Aristotelian paradigm and popular opinion, rather than developed through theological reflection.

Third, the idea of animals as ἄλογα has often been used in problematic ways. In Late Antiquity discussions, a simple logical issue becomes apparent: many thinkers seem to presuppose that entities must be either fully 'rational' or entirely 'irrational,' with an entity called λόγος either wholly present or entirely absent, leaving no room for gradation.[54] This reflects an *a priori* understanding of the concept, where the absence of λόγος serves as the paradigmatic defining principle for animals, rather than a conclusion drawn from observation and reflection. Such an approach reveals not only a logical flaw but also a clumsy ontology that is overly reliant on linguistic categories. Here, reality seems constrained by semantic boundaries – as if it were dependent on the stock of vocabulary and definitions within a given language.

54 Modern critics of this idea have often ignored the fact that the binarism is neither a Christian invention nor limited to Christianity; see the matter discussed in Porphyry, *De l'abstinence* 3.18.1.

Fourth, the claim gives rise to another conceptual and ontological issue: to assert that animals are something presupposes the existence of a distinct entity called 'animal,' whose rationality can then be defined or denied. Yet, can a gorilla, an osprey, an octopus, and a worm truly be labelled with the same conceptual label, and granted the same ontological status, given that their mental capacities and abilities differ vastly in all respects?[55]

Fifth, the idea is problematic according to contemporary scientific knowledge (see below). This needs to be considered seriously, as the mental status of animals cannot be defined solely by patristic or philosophical argumentation; it must also align with empirical reality. While it is easy to label animals as ἄλογα, traditional attempts to define this term with precise claims about their mental activities are often contradicted by modern studies of animal behaviour. In particular, research on animal communication deserves serious attention from theologians, as it undermines many assumptions that prevailed in Late Antiquity, including those held by patristic authors.

Sixth, the historical applications of the idea are deeply troubling. It has contributed to animals being treated merely as objects to be stored, killed, and consumed, even though this problem has intensified especially in post-Christian times, during the era of modernity and industrialisation. While the idea is not the sole cause of the mistreatment of animals and their environments, it remains a fundamental factor, at least within the realm of textual discourses.

Nonetheless, even without delving into specific arguments one should also question the question, as the premises and relevance of the entire discussion remain thoroughly debatable. The actual value of living, feeling, and suffering beings should not, in the first place, be judged solely by the presence or absence of conceptual entities, and ontological conjectures, such as λόγος or νοῦς.

The most critical point is to recognise animals' intrinsic value and inherent right to live and exist.[56] Moreover, this should not be judged solely on the principle "the more one resembles humans, the more value they have and the

55 This critique is a recurring issue in nearly all philosophical approaches to animals, even though the same authors continue to use the term in the very same writings, due to its handiness and functionality. This, in fact, shows that the critique is somewhat artificial. The real problem lies not in the existence of general terms such as 'animals' (or 'Jews,' or 'women,' for that matter), but in the underlying ontological assumptions and their practical implications. The solution does not lie in a linguistic purge of vocabulary but in a deeper understanding of the limitations inherent in terminology.

56 This is suggested by the etymology in Greek and many other languages: if animals are ζῷα, their primary function is to 'live' (ζῆν).

more they deserve to live." In this sense, the entire discussion on the absence or presence of λόγος does not hold the decisive significance traditionally attributed to it.

In wider terms, the idea of animals as ἄλογα is rooted in an anthropocentric framework that continues to influence not only churches but also modern research. Even in "animal friendly" studies, essential methodological problems persist concerning starting points and fundamental aims, as the value of animals is frequently assessed based on their degree of similarity to humans. For instance, animal communicative abilities have traditionally been measured against human language. Studies on animal communication have often been merely attempts to teach English to apes or parrots rather than examining communication among the animals themselves. If humans are presumed to represent perfection and serve as the benchmark, animals are inevitably perceived as perpetually deficient in some respect.

The Contribution of Modern Science

How, then, should one incorporate the natural sciences into this discussion? The "rationality" of animals cannot be determined a priori from philosophical or theological postulates; rather, any estimation of the inner nature of animals must be consistent with the facts provided by natural sciences. Today, we know far more about the cognitive and other inner abilities of animals than fifty years ago, let alone in Late Antiquity. There are now numerous solid reasons to question whether the entire notion of animals having absolutely no rationality was simply mistaken.

First, as for cognitive abilities, studies in animal cognition have shown that many species possess cognitive abilities once thought to be exclusive to humans. Already in 1950s, Len Howard (1894–1973)[57] demonstrated the evidence of individual intelligence versus instinctive behaviour in the case of birds. Since then, various animal species have been shown to exhibit problem-solving skills, memory, and the ability to learn from experience.[58] Animals

57 Howard 1952 & 1956.

58 In antiquity, the memory of animals was acknowledged by various authors such as Plutarch (see above); Basil denied it for fish but affirmed it for camels (*Hexaemeron* 8:1); perhaps surprisingly, Augustine recognised the memory of fish. Modern studies have highlighted the memory of animals such as pigs, sheep (Meijer 2018, 104–105), sharks, hummingbirds and rats (see the articles in Part II of Kaufman, Call & Kaufman 2021). For the problem-solving of animals, see part VI in Kaufman,

possess the ability to learn from their environment and adapt their behaviour accordingly. This flexibility suggests a level of cognitive processing and decision-making that goes far beyond simple instinctual responses.

Second, studies on animal communication have taken huge steps forward. While animals do not have language in the same sense as humans, they often exhibit sophisticated communication systems involving vocalisations, gestures, and various other forms of signalling. Research in this area has shed light on the complexity and richness of these systems,[59] particularly among birds and dolphins. Some species have proven able to comprehend or use words and even short combinations of words meaningfully.[60] The most recent studies have shown the use of names, or "name-like calls" among elephants,[61] and a similar phenomenon was discovered among dolphins decades ago.[62] This curiously challenges Augustine's reading of Gen 1:26, as names can no longer be considered fully exclusive to humans.

Third, tool use was once considered a uniquely human trait, but numerous studies have documented tool use among various animal species, including apes, crows, storks, and even otters. This suggests a capacity for innovation and problem-solving; moreover, this capacity also varies among individuals within the same species. Even more fascinatingly, certain species have demonstrated the ability to construct simple tools,[63] a skill that was long considered unique to humans.

Fourth, research has shown that animals experience a wide range of emotions, including joy, fear, sadness, empathy, and doubt. Observations of animal behaviour in both natural settings and controlled experiments have

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Call & Kaufman 2021.

59 See the articles in Kaufman, Call & Kaufman 2021, 5–55, 74–114.

60 The ground-breaking studies, nowadays classics in the field, are Konrad Lorenz's studies on geese and Irine Pepperberg's (2002, 2021) work with the parrot Alex, who not only repeated phonetic forms of words but was also able to combine and use them meaningfully. There are also a plenty of studies on the communication of cats, pigs, sheep, and horses; see Meijer 2018, 97; Telkänranta 2020, 160–161. In the 1980s and 1990s, Louis Herman demonstrated that dolphins could understand not just individual words but also some syntactical structures in three-word sentences. Telkänranta 2020, 160.

61 Recent studies have shown that elephants communicate partly through infrasonic sounds, with frequencies too low for human ears to detect. See Pardo, Fristrup & Lolchuragi et al. 2024; Oxford 2024. Elephants' remarkable cognitive abilities are not surprising, given that their brains are 3–4 times larger than those of humans.

62 Telkänranta 2020, 159.

63 Telkänranta 2020, 131, 145–147. On tool construction by crows, see Bayern, Danel & Auersperg et al. 2018.

provided evidence of emotional responses to various stimuli.[64] This, too, softens the distinction between animal and human minds, especially given that modern standards emphasise the role of emotions.

Fifth, many animals exhibit complex social behaviours and structures, indicating a level of social intelligence. We now know much more of their communication systems, cooperation in hunting or in raising offspring, formation of alliances or social hierarchies, and so forth.[65] Elephants and crows even display a kind of funerary rites,[66] suggesting that animals can be aware of their mortality, contrary to traditional assumptions.

Finally, advances in neuroscience have provided insights into the similarities between the brains of humans and animals. Comparative neuroanatomy and studies of brain function have highlighted commonalities in brain structure and the neural processes underlying behaviour and cognition.[67] The relevance of neuroscience to theology is a somewhat capricious matter, but it does at least demonstrate that there is a 'biological infrastructure' for rational activities in animals.

What should we conclude of this all? The evidence clearly downplays the likelihood of an absolute ontological difference, making both λογικά and ἄλογα appear more like conceptual labels than existing realities or subsisting entities. This challenges the notion of a rigid ontological boundary between humans and animals in terms of mental faculties, as there evidently is much common in mental activities. Then again, the compelling evidence for the cognitive and emotional capacities of animals does not imply that animals possess human-like reasoning or consciousness in all respects. Rather, there seems to be considerable diversity of cognitive abilities and communication systems across the animal kingdom.

Scientific facts help us to comprehend animal cognition, but this does not solve the fundamental problem, if the discussion is still limited to esti-

64 The study of emotions is methodologically challenging, even in the case of humans. Since emotions are private experiences, research can only focus on their verbal expressions and interpretations, or physiological and behavioural manifestations, none of which is equal to the experience itself. Additionally, animals, such as horses (e.g. Meijer 2018, 128–130), often have a more refined ability to observe and interpret micro-expressions than humans, further complicating the methodological challenges.

65 For social aspects in general and the cases of birds, fish, ants, and chimpanzees, see the articles in the part IV of Kaufman, Call & Kaufman 2021.

66 For elephants, see Kashwan & Roy 2024; for crows, see Ahuja 2023.

67 A modern classic on neuroscience and animals is Butler & Hodos 2005.

mating the amount of rationality. Even if it were demonstrated that a certain animal possesses, say, "13% of logos-rationality," there is no justification for *valuing* the animal based on this metric. And even if there was, should Christians not prioritise the appreciation and protection of the most vulnerable beings over the stronger ones and advocate for their right to live and exist?

Towards a Patristic Theology of Animals: How to Proceed?

Given the situation, what kind of solutions or possibilities could the patristic tradition offer for contemporary discussions on animals and their rights? Instead of repeating what has been said above, I will conclude by outlining some potential ways forward.

While the concept of animal rights can be contentious and provoke irritation in many, it does not suggest that animals should be granted rights equal to those of humans. Rather, the fundamental right they need is the right to live, which is their basic function, and to do so in their natural circumstances. It just happens that in our time this seemingly modest claim has enormous implications for food production, environmental issues, construction of human infrastructure, and our overall way of life. The unprecedented loss of species and the dramatic reduce in numbers of wildlife populations are caused by our everyday solutions that are considered fully rational and culturally acceptable.[68]

As the main line of patristic thought remains somewhat entrenched in the idea of animals as ἄλογα, and is clearly in need of updating, I believe the most valuable patristic insights are likely to come from the two ends of the spectrum: the most theoretical and the most practical approaches.

Firstly, at the theoretical end of the spectrum there is the Pseudo-Dionysian vision of existence as a holistic hierarchy without unsurpassable ontological gaps.[69] His vision of existence does not build on differences but emphasises the ontological continuities and the category of participation. On all levels of existence, there is life, light, and knowledge, emanating from the divine and yearning for return to its source, the participation being stronger when one is nearer to God.

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68 According to the WWF, the wildlife populations have decreased about 73 per cent in 50 years. WWF 2024, 24.

69 The Pseudo-Dionysian contribution to animal theology and environmental issues has been addressed by Eric D. Perl (2013).

The practical application of this vision is the recognition that animals and humans share something of essential importance: common life. Perhaps surprisingly, this idea happens to be expressed and applied in practical terms in Evagrius's controversial *Κεφάλαια γνωστικά*, a fascinating work with contemplative insights to all reality:

> When we are formed in the belly, we live the life of plants; when we are born, the life of animals; but when we have become adults, we live the life of angels or the life of demons. The cause of the first life is ensouled nature; of the second, sense perception; and of the third that we will be receptive to virtue or to vice.[70]

Secondly, there is the ascetic approach that we began with – the example of saints. Ultimately, the most significant contribution of the Orthodox tradition for animal theology – nay, for animals themselves – is the example set by the holy ascetics. This is a practical matter to begin with, but it is also something idealistic, holistic, and extremely traditional. In fact, it is so idealistic, holistic, and traditional that the challenge lies in making it practical.

Ascetics, by definition, abstain from eating meat, and many are reported to have maintained a harmonious relationship with animals. While such cases are exceptional in the big picture, they are relevant for representing the ideal. The significance of ascetics' vegetarianism, therefore, extends beyond combating passions or other intra-human pursuits; it embodies an ideal state of being – the vision of paradise. This ideal state of being is characterised by the absence of enmity, mistrust, and the exploitation of animals, replaced by harmony and respect. The lives of ascetic saints exemplify this ideal, which should hold relevance for all Christian life and teaching. However, Orthodox theology and praxis often exhibit indolence and disregard in efforts to actualise these paradisiacal ideals in relation to animals in the present reality.

Nevertheless, I believe that the notion of paradise provides the most relevant theoretical foundation and conceptual space for defining and developing Orthodox 'animal theology' and its associated attitudes. Here, 'paradise' does not mean a mere biblical reference or an eschatological utopia, but rather a constant state of ideal life – a perfect approach to existence and relationships

70 Evagrius, *Kephalaia gnostika* 3:76. English translation according to Young et al., *Gnostic Trilogy*, 294–295. This line of thought happens to be in line with Aristotle (*On the Generation of Animals* 2.3 [736b]), one of the intellectual influences of Evagrius.

with all beings. This aligns with patristic ideals, as various Church Fathers have understood the paradisiacal state as one of harmony, free from mistrust and fear among the animals, which they saw as characteristic of the saints.[71] Theophilus of Antioch and Irenaeus even suggested that carnivorous animals participated in the fall, losing their original vegetarian state – a condition they believed would be restored in the eschatological future.[72]

Finally, an Orthodox approach cannot disregard the fact that the spiritual, paradisical attitude of "reconciliation with animals"[73] is most vividly expressed in the language of icons. One of the most remarkable examples is the renowned 16th-century fresco *Adam Naming the Animals* by Theophanes the Cretan, located in the Monastery of Nicholas Anapausas in Meteora. The Christ-like Adam depicted by the Cretan master embodies a vision of humanity that neither confines animals to small cages nor promotes their slaughter, nor does it cut down the trees where they nest or pollute the streams they inhabit.

For the time being, such humanity is a distant dream, though present every here and there. Often outside the Church.

71 E.g. John Chrysostom, *In Epist. ad I Cor (4:6)*, *Hom*. 12.

72 Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Aut.* 2:16–18. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses.* 5.33.4.; *Demonstr.* 34; cf. *Adv. haer.* 5.18.3. Discussion in Steenberg 2008, 93–94. Theophilus and Irenaeus were followed in this respect by Theodoret of Cyrrhus (*Q. Gen.* 51; tr. 111); Seppälä 2024, 259–260.

73 The expression used in *For the Life of the World*, 77.

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The Reception of Chalcedon: Georges Florovsky and John Zizioulas on the Existential Significance of Chalcedonian Christology

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Abstract

Chalcedonian Christology is central to the Orthodox Christological doctrine. Whereas in modern western Christology its reception has been sometimes ambivalent, in Orthodox theology it has generally been positive. Two of the most prominent Orthodox theologians, Georges Florovsky and John Zizioulas, attempted to highlight the existential significance of this Christology. Florovsky underlined the personal involvement of God in the misery and tragedy of human life and its redemptive effect. He associated this with man's deliverance from both sin and death, which was accomplished not only at the incarnation but also at the cross (and by implication the resurrection), which is the highpoint of the Gospel. He also explained how Chalcedonian Christology may be used in order to shape our theological epistemology. Zizioulas, by contrast, focused one-sidedly on the problem of death, emphasised the incarnation and the resurrection and neglected both the problem of sin and the importance of the cross. Thus, he failed to highlight the existential significance of Chalcedonian Christology in a balanced and theologically satisfactory way.

Keywords: cross, George Florovsky, incarnation, John Zizioulas, neopatristic synthesis, phronema

Introduction to Chalcedonian Christology and Its Reception

It is not (only) about us.[1] We are certainly not the only Christians and we are almost certainly not the best Christians that have ever existed. There have been Christians before us (as there will be Christians after us) and these Christians have often asked the same questions and struggled with the same problems as we do. What is more, they often came up with very good answers, some of which have stood the test of time and become classic formulations of the Christian faith. They have been enshrined in the theological tradition of the Christian Church and are constant points of reference for Christian theology. Their reception is not only a matter of the Christian past but continues to take place through successive generations of theologians who seek to make the best possible sense of Christianity.

One such doctrinal point of reference is the *Definition of Faith* of the Council of Chalcedon, a classic summary of the Christological doctrine.[2] The Council of Chalcedon was convened in 451 AD, twenty years after the Council of Ephesus, which had dealt with Nestorius and his Christological teaching, and was later recognised as the Third Ecumenical Council. Nestorius's condemnation was eventually accepted by all parties involved in the Council but there remained a lingering disagreement between Cyril of Alexandria and John of Antioch over the exact wording of their common faith in Christ. However, two years after Ephesus, in 433, both subscribed to the so-called *Formula of Union*. Among other things, this document, first, acknowledged the double consubstantiality of Christ. In the Formula's own words, Christ is "consubstantial with the Father in divinity and consubstantial with us in humanity."[3] Second, it recognised, perhaps somewhat implicitly but unambiguously, *the existence of two natures in Christ after the union*. As the Formula put it,

> as to the expressions about the Lord in the Gospels and apostolic writings, we know that theologians treat some in common, as of one person, and divide others, as of two natures, and interpret the God befitting ones in accordance with Christ's divinity, while the lowly ones in accordance with his humanity.[4]

1 I am paraphrasing the famous first sentence of Warren 2002, 17.
2 For the *Definition of Faith* of the Council, see Norris 1980, 155–159.
3 Norris 1980, 142, modified.
4 Norris 1980, 142, modified.

One might be inclined to think that this would have sufficed for a satisfactory confession of Christological Orthodoxy. However, fifteen years later, Eutyches, a self-confessed follower of Cyril, seemed to be dissatisfied with the Christology of the Formula. Accused of heresy, he was summoned to appear before the Home Synod in Constantinople, in order to give necessary explanations. Eutyches initially denied the consubstantiality of Christ with us but later, under pressure, he accepted it. However, he was unwavering in his refusal to accept the doctrine of Christ's two natures. As a result, the Home Synod condemned him.

This, however, was far from being the end of the story. In the so-called Robber Council of Ephesus in 449, presided over by Dioscorus of Alexandria,[5] Eutyches was rehabilitated, while Flavian, the Archbishop of Constantinople who had presided over the Constantinopolitan Home Synod, was condemned. These and other relevant developments led two years later to the Council of Chalcedon,[6] which condemned both Eutyches and Dioscorus and produced its famous *Definition of Faith*. The following passage contains the main points of the Christological doctrine of Chalcedon:

> Following, therefore, the Holy Fathers, we all with one voice confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the very same perfect in divinity and the very same perfect in humanity, the very same truly God and the very same truly man, composed of a rational soul and a body, consubstantial with the Father as to his divinity and the very same consubstantial with us as to his humanity, like us in every respect apart from sin. As to his divinity, he was begotten from the Father before the ages, but as to his humanity, the very same one was born in the last days from the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, for us and for our salvation: one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only Begotten, acknowledged to be unconfusedly, unalterably, undividedly, inseparably in two natures, since the difference of the natures is not destroyed because of the union, but on the contrary, the property of each nature is preserved and comes together in one person and one hypostasis, not divided or torn into two persons but one and the same only-begotten Son, God, Logos, Lord Jesus Christ – just as in earlier times the prophets and also the Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us about him, and the Creed of our Fathers transmitted to us.[7]

5 For a recent account of Dioscorus and his role in the Christological controversy of his time, see Menze 2023.

6 For a helpful account of the above, see Price and Gaddis 2005, 24–40.

7 Norris 1980, 159, modified.

There is neither space nor need to offer even a brief analysis of this passage, which is probably the best known and most influential statement on Christology ever produced. Suffice it to say that despite its achievements, or perhaps because of them, Chalcedon proved controversial already from its inception. An uncompromising anti-Chalcedonian reaction began immediately and eventually led to the establishment of several 'anti-Chalcedonian' or, as they are currently called, Oriental Orthodox Churches, which have continued to reject Chalcedon to this day.[8]

Chalcedon has also been controversial in modern theology. For example, in the 19th century, Schleiermacher expressed his deep dissatisfaction with the conceptuality and terminology of 'one person – two natures,'[9] which is characteristic of Chalcedon. In the following century, Wolfhart Pannenberg, perhaps the most prominent Protestant systematic theologian of recent decades, argued in his acclaimed Christological study, *Jesus – God and Man*, that Chalcedon was an unsuccessful compromise between Alexandrian and Antiochian Christology.[10] Others, such as Karl Barth, have been far more open to Chalcedon, but interpreted it in ways that are not always compatible with the Christology of this Council.[11] Conversely, in both the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox worlds the authority and orthodoxy of Chalcedon has by and large been taken for granted. But this brings us to our next question. In what ways has Chalcedon been received in modern and contemporary Orthodox theology? The following section will address this issue.

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8 At this point, it should be noted that important progress has been made in the rapprochement between the Eastern Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, resulting in two Agreed Statements (1989 and 1990). For a comprehensive account, see Chaillot (ed.) 2006. Despite the agreements, no further steps have been taken.

9 Schleiermacher 1989, 391ff.

10 Pannenberg 1996, 287 and *passim*. However, this assessment depended on Pannenberg's own version of Christology, which Chalcedon would have rejected as Nestorian.

11 For example, Barth denied the sinlessness of the human nature of Christ referred to by Chalcedon's short phrase "apart from sin" (χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας); see, for instance, Barth 2004, 151–159. On the question of the compatibility of Barth's Christology with Chalcedon, see also McCormack 2008, 201–233.

The Reception of Chalcedon and Its Existential Significance: From Sergius Bulgakov to Georges Florovsky and John Zizioulas

Sergius Bulgakov and the undermining of Chalcedonian Christology

Before moving on to Georges Florovsky, it is worth making a brief reference to Sergius Bulgakov's reception of Chalcedon in order to sketch out the theological background from which Florovsky's theology emerged. Reading Bulgakov, it is easy to see that Chalcedon was not without its implicit critics, even in the Orthodox world. More precisely, Bulgakov's attitude to Chalcedon was ambivalent – to say the least. On the one hand, he characterised Chalcedon's Definition of Faith as a "dogmatic miracle."[12] On the other, he contended that "this miracle turns out to consist in a compromise, an external, mechanical union of two heterogeneous and mutually antagonistic conceptions that unexpectedly and miraculously yielded a chemical (instead of mechanical) union, forming a dogmatic crystal."[13] Moreover, Bulgakov undermined Chalcedonian Christology with his bizarre theory of Sophia and divine humanity.[14] It would take us too far afield to analyse Bulgakov's theory in detail or to expose its shortcomings. For the time being, it is sufficient to quote the following passage:

> It is thus necessary to conclude that, insofar as it hypostasizes the human nature, the hypostasis of the Logos *is*, in a special sense, a human hypostasis too, that it is proper not only to God but also to Man, that is, to the God-Man. In order to be a human hypostasis, the hypostasis of the Logos must be human or, more precisely, *co-human*; and for this reason the hypostatization of man's nature by this hypostasis does not destroy or coerce it but corresponds to a primordial interrelation between the two. On the other hand, man must also be capable of *receiving* and *encompassing* within himself, in the capacity of the human hypostasis, the divine hypostasis. In other words, by his initial essence man must already be divine-human in this sense; he must bear hypostatic divine-humanity within himself and represent, in this capacity, an ontological 'site' for the hypostasis of the Logos.[15]

12 Bulgakov 2008, 68.

13 Bulgakov 2008, 61–62.

14 Brandon Gallaher attempts to mitigate or even deny Bulgakov's pantheism by referring to his Chalcedonian ontology. However, such an attempt is doomed to failure. Bulgakov's pantheism is too obvious to be denied. For Gallaher's brave, learned, and sophisticated but ultimately unsuccessful attempt, see Gallaher 2014, 381–408.

15 Bulgakov 2008, 186; italics in the original, underlining added.

So, God is somehow human and man is divine,[16] even before and irrespective of the incarnation. This form of pantheism undermines Chalcedon. Bulgakov's aforementioned quotations imply that Chalcedon, as Bulgakov allegedly discovered some fifteen centuries later, had unconsciously and miraculously produced a Christological version of Bulgakov's own theory of eternal 'divine humanity' ahead of its time. Such an assumption is deeply unconvincing – to say the least. Bulgakov read Chalcedon through the lens of his own theological presuppositions. Zizioulas would later do something similar. But before we say more about this, it is necessary to turn our attention to the work of Georges Florovsky.

The reception of Chalcedon by Georges Florovsky

Florovsky was a friend and colleague of Sergius Bulgakov, who was also briefly his confessor, and it was Bulgakov who invited him to teach patristics at St Serge in Paris. However, Florovsky became highly critical of Bulgakov's 'sophiology,' although he refrained from mentioning Bulgakov by name in his critique. Florovsky would suggest a very different approach reflecting his wider theological project, known as 'neo-patristic synthesis.' As Florovsky famously claimed back in 1948, "we are perhaps on the eve of a new synthesis in theology – of a *neopatristic* synthesis […]. Theological tradition must be reintegrated, not simply summed up or accumulated. This seems to be one of the immediate objectives of the Church in our age."[17] So, according to Florovsky, this synthesis must first of all be patristic, it must "follow the Fathers."[18] But for Florovsky, "'to follow' the Fathers did not mean just 'to quote' them. 'To follow' the Fathers meant to acquire their 'mind,' their *phronēma*".[19] Florovsky was not arguing for a "theology of repetition." This is why his synthesis was not merely patristic but "*neo*-patristic." His "return to the Fathers" had to be a creative return.[20] 'Neo-patristic synthesis' was a creative reformulation of patristic theology in response to the diverse challenges of the modern era.[21]

16 For Bulgakov, "man consists of an uncreated, divine spirit, hypostatized by the creaturely I, and of a created soul and body;" Bulgakov 2008, 186, n. 1.

17 Florovsky 2020a, 191; italics in the original. The phrase 'neopatristic synthesis' appears in written form for the first time in 1947; on this, see Gallaher and Ladouceur (ed.) 2020, 1, n. 2.

18 Florovsky emphasised repeatedly the importance that Chalcedon attached to the authority of the Fathers; see, for instance, Florovsky 1972a, 103 and Florovsky 2020b, 221.

19 Florovsky 2020b, 224–225.

20 Florovsky 2020c, 297.

21 Williams 1993, 294.

Christology was a key component of this synthesis. In Florovsky's own words, "the synthesis must begin with the central vision of the Christian faith: Christ Jesus, as God and Redeemer, Humiliated and Glorified, the Victim and the Victor *on the Cross*."[22] According to Florovsky, "Christ's mystery is the centre of Orthodox faith, as it is also its starting point and its aim and climax."[23]

More precisely, for Florovsky Christology means Chalcedonian Christology. Florovsky believed that "the Chalcedonian dogma on the unity of the God-man is the true heart of revelation, the experience of faith and Christian contemplation."[24] He would go so far as to argue that "one can evolve the whole body of Orthodox belief out of the dogma of Chalcedon."[25] This, however, must not be understood in a restrictive sense, as if the Church now lived in an iron age and had only to look in awe at the life and legacy of the first Christian centuries. For Florovsky, "the current overemphasis on the 'first five centuries' dangerously distorts theological vision, and prevents the right understanding of the Chalcedonian dogma itself."[26] This implies that the doctrine of Chalcedon can be understood in the best possible way only in the light of the entire history and theology of the Church. And this brings us, I think, to Florovsky's own attempt to highlight *the existential significance* of the Christological doctrine of Chalcedon.

Florovsky believes that the Definition of Faith of the Council of Chalcedon is neither "a piece of poetry," nor "a metaphysical statement," or even "a metaphysical miracle." It is a "statement of faith" and even "an existential statement."[27] The existential significance of Chalcedonian Christology lies in the fact that "our Redeemer is *not* a man but God *himself*."[28] The fact that God "intervene[d] *in person* in the chaos and misery of [our] lost life" not only reveals "the true character of God" but also establishes "a *personal* relationship

22 Florovsky 2020c, 297; italics added.
23 Florovsky2020c, 298.
24 Florovsky 2020d, 123.
25 Florovsky 2020c, 298.
26 Florovsky 2020b, 226.
27 Florovsky 1972b, 12–13. Gallaher and Ladouceur suggest that Florovsky may have been influenced by his former Paris student John Meyendorff, who, under the spell of French existentialism and personalism, contrasted rationalist scholastic theology with 'existential' Christian theology, especially in its Palamite hesychastic form; see Florovsky 2020b, 224, n. 7. However, in this article Florovsky makes it clear that St Gregory Palamas' "'existentialist theology' […] differed radically from those modern conceptions, which are currently denoted by this label" (232).
28 Florovsky 1972b, 13; italics in the original; cf. Florovsky 2020e, 83.

between God and man." God's providence is not exercised from "an august distance" but through his loving identification with the destiny of man, of every man, including "'the little ones,'" with whose "destiny" God is "so intimately concerned."[29]

This identification, however, culminates in the cross. For Florovsky, "*the climax of the Incarnation was the cross.*" This was "*the turning point of human destiny.*"[30] This would not have been the case, of course, if the crucified were not the Son of God. If the incarnation is God's personal entrance into the misery of human life, the cross is His personal entrance into the tragedy of human death. This, however, brought about the defeat of death and the inauguration of everlasting life.[31] For Florovsky, the incarnation, the cross, and the resurrection are inherently and intimately connected. Christ's death is, for Florovsky, "a resurrecting death."[32] Through personal communion with the incarnate, crucified, and risen Christ man is redeemed and inherits everlasting life.

For Florovsky, all of this has specific implications for modern man, who often oscillates between "a new Nestorianism" and "a new Monophysitism" – the two Christological heresies condemned by Chalcedon. According to this "new Nestorianism," modern man

> does not take the Incarnation in earnest. He does not dare to believe that Christ is a divine person. He wants to have a *human* redeemer, only assisted by God. He is more interested in the human psychology of the Redeemer than in the mystery of the divine love. Because, in the last resort, he believes optimistically in the dignity of man.[33]

Conversely, according to Florovsky, a new Monophysitism appears in theology and Church life whenever "man is reduced to complete passivity and is allowed only to listen and to hope."[34] This dilemma, which is evident in the theological tension between liberal and 'neo-Orthodox' theology, was for Florovsky "a re-enactment of the old Christological struggle on a new existential level."[35] This existential predicament cannot be overcome unless proper at-

29 Florovsky 1972b, 13; italics in the original.
30 Florovsky1972b, 13; italics added.
31 Florovsky 1972b, 13–14.
32 Florovsky 2020c, 300.
33 Florovsky 1972b, 14.
34 Florovsky 1972b, 14–15.
35 Florovsky 1972b, 15.

tention is given to theology and in particular to Chalcedonian Christology. In Florovsky's opinion, the existential alternative to this is death.[36]

Finally, for Florovsky, Chalcedonian Christology is bound up with ecclesiology. Florovsky claimed that "the theology of the Church is but a chapter, indeed a crucial chapter, of Christology."[37] Florovsky used to emphasise that the whole Christ includes His body, the Church, and one of his favorite passages was Augustine's "*totus Christus, caput et corpus*."[38] He believed that the existential significance of Chalcedonian Christology is to be found only in the Church, through an encounter with "the divine Redeemer" who is "in the midst of his faithful flock."[39]

The reception of Chalcedon by John Zizioulas

John Zizioulas studied under Florovsky at Harvard. The latter's influence on the former (as well as the former's departure from the theology of the latter) can easily be seen on many aspects of Zizioulas's theological production. So, in a well-known article on the existential significance of Chalcedonian Christology,[40] Zizioulas criticised, in a way reminiscent of Florovsky, the "dogmatism [that] is expressed in formulas which we learn by heart without ever searching out their existential meaning."[41] He, on the other hand, sought to uncover and highlight the existential meaning of Chalcedonian Christology.

Zizioulas's main argument was based on the doctrine of creation. For Zizioulas, the fact that creation came into existence out of nothing means that it is constantly threatened by the prospect of annihilation. Creation is subject to the tragedy of death.[42] Zizioulas associated death not with the fact that we are sinners but with the fact that we are created. In this way, he seems somehow to conflate creation and the fall. If, however, our tragedy is due to our being created, is not, therefore, the Creator responsible for it? Zizioulas's answer to this question would probably be that as long as man was in communion with God, death was kept at bay. But after the fall and the disruption

36 Florovsky 1972b, 15.
37 Florovsky 2021, 277.
38 Florovsky 1972b, 16.
39 Florovsky 1972b, 16.
40 Zizioulas 2006a, 250–269. See also the Appendix, which includes his conversation with Philip Sherrard, 270–285.
41 Zizioulas 2006a, 284.
42 Zizioulas 2006a, 257.

of this communion, man, and along with him the entirety of creation, succumbed to the tragic reality of death, which is creation's natural condition.[43] However, if this is so, without qualification,[44] one might ask with Panagiotis Kantartzis, "then why is the devil still alive?"[45]

At any rate, for Zizioulas, Chalcedonian Christology is the solution to the problem, for it highlights the union of God and man in Christ. This union of created and hence mortal human nature with the uncreated and immortal God bestows immortality to humanity and the world. Understandably, the key event in this process is Christ's Resurrection. However, in contrast to Florovsky, Zizioulas has nothing to say about the cross. In his opinion, "Christ is 'the Saviour of the world' *not because he sacrificed himself on the Cross, thereby wiping away the sins of the world*, but because 'he is risen from the dead having trampled death by death.'"[46] This surprisingly restrictive claim is followed by a typical criticism of Western theology:

> The West (Catholic and Protestant) has viewed the problem of the world as a moral problem (transgression of a commandment and punishment) and has made of the Cross of Christ the epicenter of faith and worship. However, Orthodoxy continues to insist upon the Resurrection as the centre of its whole life precisely because it sees that the problem of the created is not moral but ontological; it is the problem of the existence […] of the world, the problem of death.[47]

So, for Zizioulas, the emphasis on the cross is a typical feature of moralistic and forensic Western theology and must therefore be rejected. For him, the real problem is not, as the West pretends, sin but death and therefore the emphasis should not be on the cross but on the incarnation and the Resurrection. "How is the world to live?" asks Zizioulas. And he answers: "I would say that the answer lies in a Christology which puts emphasis on the

43 On this, see also Zizioulas 2008, 88–101.

44 See the nuanced discussion in Florovsky 1976a, 104–105. Florovsky makes it clear that the body dies – the soul is immortal (105).

45 Kantartzis 2021, 38. Sherrard asked Zizioulas an easier question, namely whether angels and human souls, which are created, are also mortal (Zizioulas 2006, 272). Zizioulas replied that he had never denied the immortality of the soul (Zizioulas 2006, 279–281).

46 Zizioulas 2006a, 261; italics added.

47 Zizioulas 2006a, 261.

Resurrection."[48] While this is certainly true, Zizioulas's tendency to neglect sin and the cross seems to justify the criticism of Eastern theology which sees in it an anti-evangelical theory of purely natural redemption. And indeed, if the Gospels are anything like "passion narratives with extended introductions," as Martin Kähler famously put it,[49] then to remove the cross from one's Christology is certainly not in conformity with the Gospel. Florovsky is much closer to the mark when he claims that "the highpoint of the Gospel is the Cross; the death of the incarnated."[50] For Florovsky, "salvation is completed on Golgotha."[51] This, however, does not mean that Florovsky downplays the importance of the resurrection. On the contrary, he believes that "the fulfilment of redemption is in the resurrection."[52] In fact, Florovsky attributes our salvation to both the cross and the resurrection. In his own words, "the ultimate victory is wrought […] by death and resurrection."[53] However, the resurrection depends on the cross, because, according to Florovsky, "the Resurrection only reveals and sets forth the victory achieved on the Cross."[54]

Zizioulas, like Florovsky, moves on from Christ to the Church. As Christ has a divine hypostasis, man must likewise acquire a new hypostasis, through baptism, in order to escape death, which is the result of his created, biological hypostasis. Zizioulas concludes his article by asserting that "if Christ saves us from anything, it is from death."[55] His underestimation of Christ's sacrifice on the cross is also reflected in his sacramental theology, when he claims, for example, that "the priestly aspect of the Eucharist did not consist in the notion of sacrifice, as it came to be understood in the Middle Ages, but in that of offering back to God His own creation. It is a great pity, indeed, that sacrificial notions came to occupy the meaning of priesthood for centuries […]"[56] On this point, too, he parts company with Florovsky, who believes that priesthood and the Eucharist must be understood in sacrificial terms.[57]

48 Zizioulas 2006a, 267.
49 Kähler 1964, 80, n. 11.
50 Florovsky 2016, 144. Florovsky makes exactly the same point in 1976a, 96.
51 Florovsky 1976a, 99.
52 Florovsky 1976a, 109.
53 Florovsky 1976a, 104.
54 Florovsky 1976a, 138.
55 Zizioulas 2006a, 269.
56 Zizioulas 2021, 104. Thanks go to Fr Chrysostomos Nassis for reminding me of the connection between Christology and the sacraments in this context.
57 On this, see Florovsky 1976a, 156–159.

In addition, Zizioulas interprets the Definition of Faith of the Council of Chalcedon in unconventional ways. For example, he associates the Chalcedonian adverb ἀσυγχύτως ('without confusion') with freedom.[58] This is a strange association. This adverb was used to indicate that the two natures of Christ, although united "without division," were not confused with one another; divinity remained divinity and humanity remained humanity. Zizioulas, however, uses it in order to identify freedom with otherness, and more precisely with "natural" otherness, that is to say, with the preservation of the "otherness" of the two natures of Christ. However, in other writings, for example in his celebrated *Being as Communion*, he would identify freedom with personhood. In this context, he would claim that Jesus Christ is our savior "because He realizes in history *the very reality of the person*." Moreover, he would point out that this is an existential issue and he would credit Chalcedon with identifying person "with the *hypostasis of the Son of the Trinity.*"[59] Zizioulas understands this 'reality of the person' largely as freedom *from natural necessity*.[60] Elsewhere, too, Zizioulas would conceive human freedom in a way analogous to God's, that is, as freedom from anything that may exist independently of our will. For example, he would write that understanding the Church as an institution is problematic, because "the 'institution' is something presented to us as a fact, more or less a *fait-accomplit*. As such, it is a provocation to our freedom."[61] Zizioulas's understanding of freedom differs from Florovsky's. According to the latter,

> Indeed, man is granted freedom, but it is not a freedom of indifference. Man's freedom is essentially a responsive freedom – a freedom to accept God's will. "Pure freedom" can be professed only by atheists. "To man is entrusted, of man is expected, merely the echo, the subsequent completion, of a decision which God has already made about him and for him". There is but one fair option for man—-to obey; there is no real dilemma. Man's purpose and goal are fixed by God.[62]

58 Zizioulas 2006a, 260.

59 Zizioulas 1985, 54 and 55; italics in the original.

60 See, for instance, Zizioulas 1985, 55–65. For Zizioulas, "the person belongs to an entirely different category from the nature – it belongs to the realm of freedom;" Zizioulas 2006, 277. By contrast, "nature entails necessity by definition" (278).

61 Zizioulas 1985, 140.

62 Florovsky, 1976b, 256. The quotation is taken from Brunner 1954, 178.

Zizioulas and Florovsky seem to represent the poles of the dilemma between an absolute freedom of indifference bordering on hubris, on the one hand, and the positive freedom to respond to God's will, on the other. The voluntary crucifixion of Christ, as a free, loving response to the will of God the Father to sacrifice Himself for the salvation of the world, grounds the concept of freedom proposed by Florovsky.

Comparison and Conclusions

There are important convergences and divergences between Florovsky's and Zizioulas's reception of Chalcedon. Both are opposed to Bulgakov's pantheistic attitude and affirm the absolute distinction between God and creation. Both take a positive attitude towards the Christological teaching of Chalcedon. Both seek to show and highlight its existential significance. And both move from Christology to ecclesiology, which, at least for Florovsky, is a chapter of Christology.

However, from that point on their paths diverge. Florovsky expressed the classical theology of the Church in a well-balanced way. The incarnation is significant, but its climax is the cross, as well as, of course, the resurrection. Our redemption is the redemption from both sin and death. Furthermore, Florovsky drew an analogy between the Nestorian–Monophysite dilemma and the modern tension between liberal theology and neo-Orthodoxy.

Zizioulas, for his part, allowed his reception of Chalcedon to be shaped, at least in part, by an existentialist agenda. For him, sin appears as almost insignificant. He does not emphasise the fact that we are sinners but the fact that we are created and, therefore, in his opinion, mortal. Death is not presented as the result of our fall through sin, but of the fact that we are created. Therefore, the incarnation is salvific not because, as Florovsky would underline,[63] it brings about the healing of our humanity – since, in the words of St Gregory the Theologian, "what is not assumed is not healed"[64] – but only because it secures our immortality through union with God, who is immortal by nature. Unlike Florovsky,[65] Zizioulas does not emphasise *theosis* as sanctifica-

63 Florovsky 2020e, 84–85.
64 Florovsky insists on this point; see for instance Florovsky 1976a, 95–96.
65 Florovsky 2020e, 86.

tion through ascesis and participation in the divine life.[66] Furthermore, while Zizioulas considers the resurrection to be of paramount importance because it signifies the destruction of death, the cross of Christ, on which, according to Florovsky, he redeemed us from sin,[67] seems insignificant. For Florovsky, "the only true key to the story of the Gospels is precisely the Cross."[68] In Zizioulas, this key seems to have been lost. One wonders why, according to Zizioulas, Christ had to die *on the cross* or whether immortality in sin and hell is a *desideratum*.[69] Zizioulas builds the argument of his article on the existential significance of Chalcedon largely on Athanasius's classic treatise *On the Incarnation of the Word*.[70] In this treatise, however, Athanasius gives due weight to man's fall and sin as well as to the meaning and significance of Christ's crucifixion. Zizioulas, by contrast, criticises such emphasis as a moralistic trait of Western theology that must be rejected.

In addition, in Zizioulas the dialectic between sin and redemption is largely replaced by the dialectic between natural necessity and personal freedom. The point is not so much to become holy as to become person, which is largely understood as freedom from natural necessity and biological death. Characteristically, Zizioulas does not understand baptism in terms of the remission of sins but as giving human beings "a new identity different from that which nature gives them through their biological birth."[71] In this context, spiritual death, for Zizioulas, is not due to our fall into sin but to "a fall to essential anonymity," in which we receive our identity "not from the hypostasis-relationship with God, but from nature."[72]

In conclusion, Zizioulas took on from his teacher not only the vision of the 'neo-patristic synthesis' but also specific ideas, which he sought to develop further. For example, his focus on the existential significance of Chalcedonian Christology and his treatment of it on the basis on Athanasius's *On*

66 Zizioulas sporadically refers to this issue; see, for instance, Zizioulas 2006a, 81–88 and 2006b, 301–306. It is certainly not one of his main concerns. Zizioulas does address such issues in his posthumous book, Zizioulas 2024a, but this was published too late for me to consider it.

67 Florovsky 2020e, 86.

68 Florovsky 2020e, 85.

69 Zizioulas rejects this but without adequately and satisfactorily explaining how it fits with the main argument of his article; see Zizioulas 2006a, 281. In a later, posthumously published work, Zizioulas argues, with good reason, for the traditional Christian belief in the eternity of hell; see Zizioulas 2024b, 235–244.

70 For the Greek text and English translation, see Athanasius, *De Incarnatione* 1971, 134–277.

71 Zizioulas 2006a, 278.

72 Zizioulas 2006a, 282.

the Incarnation of the Word were taken directly from Florovsky.[73] But Zizioulas lacked Florovsky's Orthodox intuition. As a result, his theology is not always fully in line with either the patristic tradition or with the teaching of Florovsky. His synthesis is more 'neo' and less 'patristic.' It is true that Zizioulas has offered us some occasional but valuable treatments of the meaning and significance of the cross of Christ.[74] But these were not adequately integrated into his theology. Consequently, in contrast to Florovsky, Zizioulas's reception of Chalcedon reflects neither the patristic *phronema* nor the teaching of the Church in their catholicity.

73 See, for instance, Florovsky 1972b, 13 and 1976a, 104–107.

74 See, for example, two of his sermons in a book published shortly after his death: Zizioulas 2023, 176–183 and 479–485.

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CONFERENCE PAPERS

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Neopatristic Synthesis between Unity and Identity in Orthodox Theology

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Abstract

Neopatristic synthesis has constituted the mainstream in Orthodox theology during the twentieth century, making the motto "return to the Fathers," launched in 1936 by Fr George Florovsky, its banner. The polemical intent underlying Florovsky's appeal undoubtedly make of the call to the Fathers an identity element, which played an important role in the confrontation with Western theology triggered by the Orthodox diaspora during last century. Beyond the polemical and apologetic motive, the neo-Patristic synthesis was plainly accepted in all orthodox theological schools and animated the most significant movements of revitalisation of the theological studies. This success, however, has created the perception of methodological fragmentation and has prompted criticism that the focus on the Fathers has stifled other fields of theological studies, e.g., biblical studies. In this contribution I will try to highlight from a historiographical point of view the constant presence of the patristic paradigm in the Orthodox tradition (and beyond), which has produced recurrent returns to the Fathers; secondly I will attempt to highlight from a theological point of view the aspects that make it an element of unity from both a historical and methodological point of view, moving beyond the mere identity motif with which it is usually approached.

Keywords: George Florovsky, historiography, neopatristic synthesis, pseudomorphosis, revival

In the Beginning Was Florovsky (?)

The so-called 'neopatristic synthesis,' also referred to as 'neopatristic revival,' since the first decades of the last century has imposed itself as the veritable paradigm through which the proper methodology and the trustworthy transmission of doctrinal truth within the Orthodox tradition are disclosed in the most appropriate way. From a historiographical point of view, there is unanimity in tracing back the beginnings of the neopatristic renewal to the Russian emigré theologian Fr George Florovsky (1893–1979), who, in the 1930s, emphasised the need for Orthodox theology to return to the Fathers. Since then the 'return to the Fathers' has become a universal motto and has constituted a fundamental element of the Orthodox self- consciousness during the whole 20th century.[1]

In particular, this motto was customarily evoked in the dialogue with – and more or less tacitly in opposition to – other Christian confessions. In the interconfessional dialogue that has involved the Orthodox world diaspora, Orthodox theologians were called to respond both to the Protestant Bible-oriented theology and to the Catholic Magisterium and Scholasticism.[2] This response was mostly intended as a declaration of identity, and it consisted above all on the confession of its fidelity to the theology of the Fathers.[3]

Accordingly, the aim of the following pages will be reviewing the question of the role of the Fathers in Orthodox theology, in the light of Fr Florovsky's appeal, assessing its reception and the criticisms that have been levelled at both it and the 'vulgate' of its reception. By reviewing the many returns to the Fathers that have recurred throughout the history of post-Byzantine Orthodox theology, I wish to emphasise that Florovsky's call for a 'return to the Fathers' cannot be considered either a novelty or an oddity, neither methodological nor content-related, but rather a structural aspect of the historical consciousness of Orthodox theology. This review will move within an epistemological framework defined by the concepts of continuity and discontinuity, universality and unanimity, with the intention of grasping the essential elements that allow to understand how to define the Orthodox theological identity in the light of the *ethos* and the unity of the ecclesial

1 An insightful presentation of the problems of neopatristic theology and its historiographical reception is offered in Ladouceur 2012.

2 See footnotes 12 and 13 below.

3 Florovsky 1950, 285; Gallaher & Ladouceur 2019, 23.

tradition. The notion of 'canon' will be employed as delineating a non-rigid model, capable of taking into account the historical variability of the language of theology (which is liable to variations in the course of history and is always open to external influences) and encompassing its mutations without losing sight of the persistence of the elements on which the identity of the tradition is grounded. At the end of this path, the notion of Fatherhood will be outlined as an essential principle of Orthodox ecclesial and theological identity.

Florovsky appealed to the return to the Fathers while he was already living in the diaspora, but his main intent in formulating this appeal was not to magnify Orthodox identity in the context of interconfessional dialogue; rather, he intended his appeal as a call to a change of paradigm with respect to the troubled paths of Orthodox theology in Russia, looking back at the history of his motherland from the top of the ruins of the Church under the atheist regime. Florovsky appealed for the "return to the fathers" at the first international congress of Orthodox theology, which was held in Athens in 1936, where he gave a paper significantly titled *Western Influences in Russian Theology*.[4]

The motto became widespread after the publication of Florovsky's influential book, *The Ways of Russian Theology* in 1937.[5] Here the return to the Fathers was envisaged as an answer to the spiritual crisis that had struck the Church in Russia, whose roots Florovsky recognised all along Russian history until the Revolution that forced crowds of Christians, among whom himself, to find repose abroad in diaspora.

In the Ways of Russian theology, Florovsky launched three expressions that had become iconic in the 20th-century Orthodox discourse: the first, the "return to the Fathers" became his workhorse. The other two were borrowed from other authors: the locution "Babylonian captivity" was an expression that has been employed by Martin Luther to deprecate the Hellenisation of Christianity and the loss of the pretended purity of the supposed Bible-centered theology of the Apostolic age;[6] Florovsky used this expression in relation to Russian theology of the 17th century, particularly referring to the state of the Russian Church after the demolition of the patriarchal system, decreed by Peter the Great.

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4 Florovsky 1937. However, even if less known, the very first appeal for the return to the Fathers made by Florovsky appeared in the essay "On Righteous and Sinful Patriotism," which he presented at a conference dedicated to Eurasianism in 1922; see Gavriliuk 2014, 79.

5 Флоровский 1983 [1937].

6 Martin Luther, *De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae praeludium*. See also Harnack 1901, XII, and footnote 48 below.

The second expression was the "pseudomorphosis" of Orthodox theology.[7] This expression referred in particular to the Latin influence on Russian theology after the time and the work of the Metropolitan of Kiev, Peter Mogila (1596–1646): "Mogila's legacy also includes a drastic 'Romanisation' of the Orthodox Church. He brought Orthodoxy to what might be called a Latin 'pseudomorphosis'."[8] Florovsky took up the concept of pseudomorphosis from Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*.[9] This concept comes from mineralogy (Oswald Spengler's father was in fact a mineralogist): it indicates the phenomenon of a mineral that assumes the shape of another mineral, assuming its crystalline structure but remaining the same mineral, since it maintains the same chemical composition. Florovsky openly indicates his source in one of his essays devoted to the ecumenical movement:

> At the same time the Orthodox Church was compelled to clarify its position in the raging conflict between Rome and the Reformation. It became usual at that time to use Protestant arguments against Rome and Roman arguments against Protestants, without checking either carefully in the light of Eastern tradition. This was the root of a "pseudomorphosis" of Orthodox thought. This term was used by Oswald Spengler "to designate those cases in which an older alien culture lies so massively over the land that a young culture, born in this land, cannot get its breath and fails not only to achieve pure and specific expression-forms, but even to develop fully its own self-consciousness." We may use the term also in a wider sense. "Pseudomorphosis" may become a kind of schism in the soul, in cases where an alien language or symbolism, for some imperative reason, is adopted as a means of self-expression. "Thus," to continue the quotation from Spengler, "there arise distorted forms, crystals whose inner structure contradicts their external shape, stones of one kind presenting the appearance of stones of another kind."[10]

From Spengler, Florovsky adopted not only the paradigm of the crisis of civilisation, but also his anti-Western vision.[11] Since the return to the Fathers sup-

7 Florovsky used this expression first in his presentation at the conference of Athens in 1936. See Gallaher & Ladouceur 2019, 137, n. 38.
8 Florovsky 1972–1989, 5, 72.
9 Spengler 1920–1922.
10 Florovsky 1954, 181.
11 The idea of crisis is found as widespread in philosophy as in early 20th-century literature, in the long wave of Nietzscheanism – in addition to Spengler, see Husserl 1954 and Musil 1952.

posed a previous distancing from the Fathers, we may affirm that all three expressions have a critical and negative significance. As Paul Gavriliuk writes:

> The *Ways of Russian Theology* was an exercise in theological boundary-making and a trial of Russian Orthodoxy's western deviations. Florovsky drew the boundary between Eastern Orthodoxy and Western heterodoxy with the persistence and moral ferocity characteristic of the Slavophile and Eurasian writings.[12]

That boundary-making attitude has been one of the most noticeable aspects of the reception of Florovsky's appeal for the "return to the Fathers:"

> Par conséquent, les jeunes théologiens orthodoxes, en particulier dans les pays d'Orthodoxie traditionnelle, ont non seulement appris le modèle interprétatif qui oppose l'Est orthodoxe à l'Ouest hérétique, mais ont aussi pris l'habitude, désormais courante, d'opposer la meilleure version de l'Orthodoxie (avec les Pères cappadociens, Maxime le Confesseur, la théologie « mystique », saint Grégoire Palamas, la théologie russe de la Diaspora, etc.) à la version la plus vétuste de l'Occident (avec sa théologie scolastique, Thomas d'Aquin, l'Inquisition, une théologie faite de légalisme et de piétisme, etc.).[13]

It's also a little ironic that Florovsky took the words by which he criticised the Western influence on Orthodox theology from such two major Western thinkers, as it is also

> ironic that a Russian theologian, born in the southern Ukraine and residing in France, would come to Greece to deliver his first communication in German and his second communication in English in order to protest the "Western captivity" of Orthodox theology.[14]

The return to the Fathers was indicated by Florovsky as the remedy to the long-lasting crisis of Russian Byzantinism that he recognised as the old cause of the troubled ways of the Russian Church until the 20th century's catastrophe. Although Florovsky referred to the particular situation of Russian

12 Gavriliuk 2014, 184.
13 Kalaïtzidis 2011, 239.
14 Gavrilyuk 2013, 110.

theology since the 17th century, his appeal was welcomed as a call to the whole Orthodoxy, as if the Fathers had been forgotten everywhere for centuries.

The idea of crisis and secular oblivion of the Fathers is also present on the basis of the Trinitarian neopatristic theology of Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon, who was a pupil of Florovsky at Harvard from 1956 to 1960. According to Zizioulas modern Greek theology, as in Russia, was in a state of captivity, proceeding as a variant of Western Scholasticism, which forgets that the Church is not a message, a set of ideas, but the experience of the encounter with the living person of Christ.[15]

The Eternal Return to the Fathers

The criterion of the return to the Fathers has become a *Leitmotiv* in Orthodox historiography, aimed at highlighting the recurrent moment of revival and revitalisation occurred in the history of local orthodox theology. Florovsky does not fail to highlight these moments in the Ways of Russian Theology.[16] Following his presentation, it is useful to review the main ones, in order to assess the extension of the recurrent phenomenon of neopatristic revivals.

In the second half of the 16th century, an appeal to the study of the Fathers was made by the monk Artemy, abbot of the Holy Trinity Lavra near Moscow, who was condemned for heresy in Russia and then escaped to Lithuania (1554), where he opposed Protestant customs and theology, claiming the importance of maintaining the teachings of the Fathers. Remarkable in that time was also the figure of Prince Andrey Kurbsky (1528–1583), who was likewise expelled from Russia, becoming a refugee in Volynia. He complained that the Orthodox did not read the Fathers and bemoaned the lack of translations of their works into Slavonic.[17]

Another remarkable theologian of this period was Zinovy Olensky (†1568), a valid polemicist who was concerned about patristic studies in Russia, to which he resorted in his polemic against Protestantism. Basing on the Scriptures and the Fathers, Zinovy expounded the doctrine of the Trinity, and developed anthropology from the perspective of the soul as the image of God in man. From the Fathers he also took arguments to defend main Orthodox traditions, referring to the eremitic monasticism of Nil Sorsky.[18]

15 Stavrou 2015, 481.
16 Florovsky 1972–1989.
17 Florovsky 1972–1989, V, 39–42.
18 Florovsky 1972–1989, V, 31–32.

The most important figure of the patristic renewal in modern Russia has been Paisi Velichkovsky (1722–1794). After having abandoned the theological academy of Kiev, he retired to monastic life in Moldavia and then arrived at Mount Athos. He rediscovered Byzantine monastic rules and the thought of Nil Sorsky, becoming thus aware of the importance of a return to the Byzantine Fathers. Consequently, he revised existing Slavonic translations of ascetical treatises, and once back in Moldavia, he gathered a team of translators, sending also students to learn Greek in Bucharest. Thus, his attempts made the monastery of Niamets a radiating literary centre of ascetic theology and translation activities. The main output of this enterprise was the Russian translation of the *Philokalia* (*Dobrotolyubie*), which has been a fundamental event in the history of Russian monasticism and in the history of Russian culture.[19]

In the generation of Russian theologians and religious thinkers before Florovsky, some attention to the Fathers was paid by Alexey Khomiakov (1804–1860) and more broadly by the Slavophiles. After the Russian Revolution, in the Russian diaspora in France, Fr Sergius Bulgakov, although being contrasted by the same Florovsky on account of his Sophiology, showed in his later works that he acknowledged the need to give a patristic foundation to his reflections; his shift from the methodology and the influence of German idealism of his early writings to his late production can be seen as a success of the neopatristic revival.[20] Also the main exponents of the second generation of the Russian diaspora in France, in the wake of Florovsky, plainly adhered to the neopatristic paradigm and put the Fathers at the centre of their theological production, whether systematic or historical. The most important figures in this strain of thought were Vladimir Lossky (1903–1958), John Meyendorff (1926–1992), and Pavel N. Evdokimov (1901–1970).

Turning our attention to Greek Orthodoxy, neopatristic revivals were likewise recurrent since the post-Byzantine age.[21] In the West, the theologian Elias Miniatis (1669–1714), preacher at the Church of St George of the Greeks in Venice, gave a strong patristic fundament to his works, in particular in his *Stone of Scandal*, where he purposed a systematic confrontation between Greek and Latin theology. In the age of Enlightenment Vikentios Damodos (1679–1752), educated in the Venetian Republic, launched at his turn dog-

19 Florovsky 1972–1989, V, 146–147.
20 See Plested 2022, 35–57, 224–227.
21 See Spiteris 1992.

matic confrontations with Latin theology on the basis of patristic awareness. He was been the first theologian to take an academic position in defence of Palamism in the neo-Hellenic age.[22]

Around the middle of the 18th century, the traditionalist movement of the *Kollyvades* arose on Mount Athos, giving an impetus to the study of the Fathers. Their most fruitful work was the *Philokalia*. Compiled by St Nicodemus the Hagiorite and St Macarius of Corinth, published in 1782, we may claim that its resonance was similar in importance and popularity to the post-Florovsky trend of returning to the Fathers.[23]

In Greek theology, it was not until the 1960s that a systematic movement of returning to the Fathers took place, but even in the previous period, characterised by scholasticism and academic systematic compilations, there was no absolute lack of pro-patristic voices such as that of Grigorios Papamichaìl (1874–1956), who pointed to Hesychasm and Gregory Palamas as expressions of a true Orthodox identity.[24] In the world of Greek theology of the 1960s, the return to the Fathers took on the tones of the magnification of the Greek roots of Orthodox theology and thought it necessary to purify theology from scholastic academicism shaped by Western influences.[25]

The current neopatristic trend has been accompanied by important institutional and editorial initiatives that sealed its worldwide reception: such was the founding of the Patriarchal Centre for Patristic Studies, at the Vlatadon Monastery in Thessaloniki, by the Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople in 1966. Important works were promoted by this centre, such as the edition of the works of Saint Gregory Palamas, and the *Ἑλληνικὴ Πατρολογία*, whose first editor-in-chief was Panagiotis Christou.[26] Other promoters of the neopatristic revival were also the figures of Ioannis Karmiris (1903–1992) and Panagiotis Nellas (1939–1986), or in the field of the so called neo-orthodox theology, Christos Yannaras (1935–2024), and the Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon (1931–2023).[27]

The apologetic motif is constant in neopatristic revivals and in their related historiography. This is true also in the case of neopatristic revivals in the Catholic context: in the 16th century 98 editions of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*

22 Spiteris 1992, 59–63.
23 Spiteris 1992, 68–70.
24 Spiteris 1992, 160–162.
25 Spiteris 1992, 225–227.
26 Filiotis-Vlachavas 2015, 429–430.
27 Spiteris 1992, 243, 256, 304, 369.

were printed in Western Europe, fuelled by the debate on the true identity of its author, which found a negative attitude in the Protestant sphere, contrasted by the Catholic apologetics for its apostolic authenticity.[28] As for the 19th century, one should remember the enterprise of the Abbot Jacques-Paul Migne (1800–1875) with the publication of the *Patrologia Latina* in 221 volumes (1844–1845), and the *Patrologia Graeca* in 157 volumes (1856–1866). This implied an apologetic intent on the part of its editor – who was a traditionalist Catholic – against "new times," and as a response to the encyclopaedias published in the spirit of Enlightenment.[29]

As we have already noticed, a common feature of all patristic revivals is their connection with editorial or institutional initiatives. This is true in the cases of Nicodemus and Macarius's *Philokalia*, or Migne's *Patrologiae*, or Vlatadon publications. To these we can add the *Sources Chrétiennes* series of patristic editions, founded in 1942 by the future Roman Catholic Cardinal Jean Daniélou, and the organisation of the Oxford Patristics conference since 1951 every four years. This event constitutes an extraordinary laboratory for discussion on the Fathers up to the Byzantine age and has given rise to an immense scholarly literary production, published in the hundreds of volumes of the *Studia Patristica*; and, finally, the establishment of the Pontificium Institutum Augustinianum in Rome, inaugurated in 1969, dedicated to patristic education and studies.[30]

The publishing and institutional initiatives undertaken in the West had an important academic spin-off, incorporating patristic studies into academic curricula. However, we may pose the question if such an academic revival has contributed to a true patristic renewal – that is, theological and ecclesial – that would have brought the teaching of the Fathers back to the centre of Western theology, while in the Orthodox sphere, the patristics paradigm has constantly been emphasised more or less in the interpretation of the history of local theology and as the keypoint of religious renaissances. Definitely, in the case of the patristic revivals in Orthodoxy we may speak – more appropriately – of an *eternal return to the Fathers*, which from age to age has been evoked to revitalise the Orthodox identity in opposition to secular culture or influences foreign to the Church's tradition.

28 Mainoldi 2016, 221.

29 Hamman 1975, 39–50.

30 Pontificium Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum. Cenni storici.

Continuity and Discontinuity

Since we speak about a recurrent return to the Fathers in Orthodox theology, should we admit a recurrent turning away from the Fathers? Would this mean that Orthodox theology has relied from time to time on non-patristicic grounds, until neopatristic revivals have taken place? First of all, we should try to focus on this complex issue by not exaggerating the forms and methodologies that theological teaching and reflection may have assumed from age to age, according to the cultural and epistemic trends of each era. Instead, we should focus on its contents and consider its *ethos*, since both are based on the intimate consciousness of the Orthodox identity, whose first tenet is that of "being Orthodox" or, correspondingly, "not being heterodox." According to Florovsky, the principle of following the Holy Fathers – that is, emphasising continuity in the Church's tradition – has always constituted an identitarian trait of Orthodoxy:

> *Following the Holy Fathers*… It was usual in the ancient Church to introduce doctrinal statements by phrases like this. […] Obviously, it was more than just an appeal to 'antiquity.' Indeed, the Church always stresses the identity of her faith throughout the ages. This identity and permanence, from Apostolic times, is indeed the most conspicuous token and sign of right faith.[31]

Orthodox identity is preserved by the Church's body in several ways and forms, but its basic tenets are embedded in the general framework, according to which Orthodoxy is the truthful continuation of the tradition of the Apostles, subsequently transmitted by the Father in every age without dropping "a single iota." The blurred boundaries of this framework derive their consistency from the paradigm of continuity, which provides a systematic justification of its rationale and the explanation of the exceptions to it:

> The Church is equally committed to the kerygma of the Apostles and to the dogmata of the Fathers. Both belong together inseparably. The Church is indeed 'Apostolic'. But the Church is also 'Patristic.' And only by being 'Patristic' is the Church continuously 'Apostolic.'[32]

31 Florovsky 1960, 292.
32 Florovsky 1960, 293.

On the other hand, tradition is supposed to systematically apply a caesura with respect to the secular *ethos* and the visions that are not derived from revelation or the inspiration of the Holy Spirit – considering also heterodox theologies as more or less falling out from this sacred circle and surrendering oneself to the worldly mindset. This principle may be defined as the paradigm of discontinuity.[33]

Based on the paradigms of continuity and discontinuity, the Orthodox tradition establishes its criteria of identity and unity. This process defines, first, the basic difference with respect both to other Christian confessions and to all other religious or philosophical systems, even if the existence of influences and loans from these systems can be admitted and recognised *a posteriori* based on philological evidence. Nevertheless, the evaluation of the weight of these influences depends on the point of view: assessing the heterogenous elements, the borrowings from other traditions etc. from the perspective of the Orthodox tradition, means keeping in sight the criteria of identity and unity. This gives weight to acknowledging the basic discontinuity within the dogmatic core and the ethical purpose of the other traditions, while the Orthodox tradition is considered strong enough to assimilate all heterogeneous elements without being changed, faithful to its principle of continuity. Evidently, establishing these criteria as hermeneutics principles can only lead to the lack of unanimous assessments.

An instance of this hermeneutical issue may be seen in the different evaluations that the relationship between the Fathers and Greek philosophy in late antiquity respectively received by Western and Orthodox scholarship. According to the Western perspective, the reception of terminology and concepts, no matter how deeply they were reinterpreted and adapted, has meant transforming influence and cultural assimilation – that is continuity – , while according to the Orthodox understanding, the Fathers were well aware of the paradigmatic difference – that is, discontinuity – between Christianity and the pagan Neoplatonic worldview. Accordingly they radically reinterpreted Neoplatonic terminology and concepts in order to illustrate the Christian faith in the heresiological debates.[34]

The Orthodox assessment of this debt is framed under the paradigm of identity, from which a canon of themes and authors is derived, relying on the

33 I refer to the in-depth analysis of the historical dialectic between continuity and discontinuity offered in Meyendorff 1993.

34 See Gersh 1978; Beierwaltes 1998; Mainoldi 2021.

unity and continuity of the ecclesial tradition. In modern Western scholarship, instead, the philological argument took the floor and authors that recurred to philosophical arguments – particularly in the field of ontology – were suspected of succumbing to heterogeneous influences, such as St Dionysius the Areopagite and Saint St Palamas, or the whole Greek Patristic tradition in the views of the Protestant theologians and dogmatic historians, from Luther up to von Harnack.[35]

What defines identity supposes differences and standing points, but first of all it presupposes a particular *ethos*, a concept that is quite difficult to circumscribe within a simple definition. If the Spenglerian crystal remains always the same species of mineral even under a new form, after a pseudomorphosis has occurred, we may speak of substantial continuity. Greek ontology was encompassed in the formulation of Christian dogmas at least since the Council of Nicaea, but it was reinterpreted and adapted to the Christian theological and ecclesial aims. Even if the philosophical form remained the same, it does not mean that it would have affected the authentic Christian inspiration of theological thinking or diminished the paradigmatic coherence of the dogmas.

The same problem concerning identity can be seen in the domain of iconography, where external influences, but also the lack of the creative inspiration of the iconographers, have caused several pseudomorphoses in different historical contexts, altering the style of icon painting (sometime shifting away from the Byzantine canon and sometime betraying the theological meaning of what an icon should be). However, these icons have always been considered icons, since their liturgical and symbolical function remained faithful to the spirit of the Orthodox tradition.[36]

Florovsky was a historical theologian and in the Ways he proceeded as an historian of theological historiography, holding a critical approach and a pessimistic view, which were the consequences of the need he felt to identify the roots of the deviations from the genuine tradition that had occurred in Russian Orthodoxy until the catastrophe of the 20th century. These, Florovsky acknowledged as Russian Byzantinism. Nevertheless, these historical parameters were disregarded in the aftermath of Florovsky's appeal, where the call to return to the Fathers from the desert of "Babylonian" theology was generally endorsed, particularly in the diaspora.

35 See footnote 6 above.
36 See Freeman 2015.

The paradigm of the patristic identity of Orthodox theology was often assumed without a theological deepening of what the role of the Fathers should be, and what the contour of a "patristic method" should be. This approach consequently led to many misunderstandings. First, it naively implied that such a return should recover the ideal purity of the Orthodox tradition, which has been reached at some point of a glorious past, but afterward it was lost for centuries. This assumption introduces a sort of theological historicism that loses sight of the fact that Orthodoxy is a living tradition, incarnated in human history, where the past and the future are directed toward Salvation under the unceasing guidance of the Holy Spirit. Thus, crises and renewals, and consequently pseudomorphoses and adaptations, are part of this history, and should be rejected not in the name of the supposed formal imitation of the purity of the past, but only if continuities are not useful to – or even contrasting – the very ultimate scope of the Church, namely Salvation.[37]

The idea of a return to a supposed golden age is contradictory to the eschatological background of the Church's path through history. It poses the risk to idealise the history of theology in some of its segments, as if in some of them the whole Church would have enjoyed the divine message in its purity thanks to the Fathers and, after the Fathers, would have disappeared from the scene. This approach also forgets the historical struggle that the Fathers in every age, according to their possibilities, devoted to preaching the Gospel and confuting heresies, even by adopting what can be judged under the category of pseudomorphosis, as it was the case with Neoplatonic philosophy or Aristotelian ontology. Theological activities have been always bound in a particular time and space of human history, and adopted the language and the methodologies that were current in that particular context. This does not necessarily instantiate a betrayal of the Orthodox truth, or a shift into heterodoxy.

The same Florovsky, coming back to the question the role of the Fathers in a lecture entitled "The Ethos of the Orthodox Church," that he gave in 1960 at an ecumenical conference in Greece, expressed himself in a less dramatic way than in his earliest appeals to the return to the Fathers and to escape the Babylonian captivity of Western influence. In fact, while recalling the pseudomorphosis that affected Orthodox theology in Russia during the 17th century, he stated that "in the life of the Church, the tradition of the Fathers has never been interrupted. The whole structure of Eastern Liturgy, in an inclusive sense of the word, is still thoroughly patristic."[38]

37 See also Meyendorff 1993, 73.

38 This paper was presented at the "Faith and Order Orthodox Consultation," held in Kifissia,

Unanimity and Universality

According to the New Testament, history unfolds in the aftermath of the fall of the humanity; for this reason, heresy and divisions are the consequence of sin (1 Corinthians 11:19). Hence, since the apostolic age, theological debates have emerged in contexts of crises, either on the ecumenical scale or within local communities, and the main concern expressed by stakeholders was about the continuity regarding the genuine apostolic teaching. This principle established the criterion for understanding the unity of the Orthodox tradition as *unanimity*, that is universal consent on his believe and rites, and concordance according to its *ethos*.

Now, the ultimate criterion of unanimity is maintaining the same words to express tenets of faith. However, the course of the history of theology has shown that unanimity cannot rely on the very same words received from the past tradition, and this has always raised the problem of the reception of a new dogmatic formulation of the Faith. This was the case, for instance, for the word *homoousion*, which, as a non-biblical term, had to wait until the theological interpretation of St Athanasius the Great in order to serve as a basis for the unanimity to come, once the theological continuity supposed by the choice of this term was universally acknowledged.[39] The same problem occurred after the Council of Chalcedon, the reception of which was a matter of debate, since its formula of Faith was seen as a novelty with respect to the Symbol of Faith of Nicaea-Constantinople.[40]

The notions of pseudomorphosis and Babylonian captivity instantiate a geo-theology, focused on historical contexts marked by interconfessional clashes, where different theological traditions are confronting and revendicating the correctness of the differences that they hold as distinctive of their respective identities. Nonetheless, the Church is called to overcome these kinds of divisions; accordingly, the struggle for keeping or restoring the unity of the local curches, traditions, and jurisdictions must find paradigms for establishing unanimity, even in the case of interdenominational pseudomorphoses. Consequently, the problem can be configured in these terms: how to recognise where to draw the line whereby continuity becomes discontinuity, not only in the case of pseudomorphoses, but also in the context of a theology of repetition?

Greece, on August 16–18, 1959; now reprinted in Gallaher & Ladouceur 2019, 289–302. See also footnote 58 below.

39 Beatrice 2002.

40 Meyendorff 1993, 71–72.

The Canon(s) of Orthodoxy

The problem of continuity and the rejection of novelties with respect to tradition must be approached by considering that the life of the Church unfolds in history, giving rise, in different eras, to ecclesial canons that characterise the ecclesial tradition in its various aspects. The notion of 'canon' that I adopt here denotes an accepted set of concepts, texts, and authors, whose formation is not due to an *a priori* criterion, but grows progressively and is defined by their ecclesiastical reception. As an analogy, one can refer to the formation of the Scriptural canon, due to the long process it took in history, and to canon law itself, which by its very nature is subject to progressive growth, through conciliar definitions and interpretations.[41]

The theological tradition of the Church has encompassed the development of different canons reflecting different aspects of the ecclesial life (theology, ecclesiology, liturgy etc.) and were formed in different periods, embodying its language and complementing previous canons without substituting them or denying their truth, nor losing their value with respect to the canons that would have been defined subsequently. The recourse to the concept of the ecclesial canon can help us to understand the contribution of different and heterogeneous languages and methodologies. At the same time, it defines how a pseudomorphosis should be understood, since the rigorous application of this concept to the history of theology likely leads to justifying the fragmentation of the Church in the light of a boundary-keeping perspective, and conceiving the ecclesial canon as an enclosed set of words and concepts that should exclude the introduction of any other element.

The ecclesial canon is basically composed of three series: authorial, theological–thematic, and liturgical, all three historically interrelated since their formation. Focusing on the canon of authors that have been incorporated into the New Testament, we may figure out the largely accepted scenario, according to which their writings were acknowledged as true expressions of the Church's tradition, based on the true words (*logia*) of Christ, and corresponding to a common doctrinal canon, lived and shared through faith and the sacramental life practised in local churches.

This canon established the earliest profile of Christian doctrine, moving from the teaching of Jesus, emanated into the text of the Gospel through an ec-

41 On the scriptural canon, concept and history, see Sanders 1987; Beckwith 1985.

clesiastical reception of the event of Passion-and-Resurrection. It likewise established fundamental theological concepts, such as salvation, grace, mercy, passion, resurrection, sacrifice, etc. in the light of the economy of the Incarnation and the economy of Salvation, outlining the principles that any theological discipline cannot renounce; such are unity, communion, and concord in liturgy, theology and ecclesiology. The Old Testament's contribution to the constitution of this canon was passed through a tropological reinterpretation in the light the history of Salvation. The Prophets were to be read in the light of the Christ-event. This was a reinterpretation that, by the way, was inaugurated by Christ himself (Luke 4:16–21).

The ecclesial canon of the early Church, constituting the ineliminable foundation of Christian faith, doctrine, and rite, was destined to be progressively expanded to accommodate ecclesial needs in different eras. We can think of the additions made to the early canon since the Patristic age as its natural extension, encompassing new formulations of the theological concepts that were *already part* of the original canon, either for catechetical or for apologetic purposes. The result of this extension defined what we can call the "Patristic canon:" words such as deification, being, *ousia*, *energeia*, *hypostasis*, etc. These were not terminologically absent from the Scripture but were not characteristic of its canon either, and thus they constituted the new façade of theological discourse. Similarly, liturgical theology has been equipped with new words to denote the expansion and reorganisation of liturgical rites.

It is worth noting that none of the progressive versions of the ecclesial canons can claim absolute priority according to their formal, linguistic shape, as their structural function is to assimilate the words that the Church chooses as keywords to denote her understanding of the experience of Salvation. The Pauline admonition that "the letter kills, but the spirit gives life" is precisely related to the apostolic task of proclaiming the New Covenant (2 Cor 3:6). This was not irrelevant to the formation of a new doctrinal canon based on the words of the Old Testament tradition, reinterpreted in the light of Christ.

The correct interpretation of the concept of ecclesial canon according to its formal profile, is that no terminological canon can claim universality either towards the past or towards the future, since the very notion of canon is endowed with a flexibility that allows ecclesiastical thought to adapt to the conditions encountered by the ecclesiastical tradition during its journey in history. The terminological formation of the canon is always based on the Pauline appeal to revive the letter through the spirit. This was true for the

transition from the Old to the New Testament at the time of the formation of the earliest canon of the New Testament, and it was also true in the case of the exploitation of Greek philosophy since the Apostolic age.

Evidently the principle of the extension of the canon can be iterated from age to age and find application in every time. After all, this dynamic responds precisely to that patristic spirit that Florovsky invoked, warning against referring to the tradition by making theology of repetition. We can thus go so far as to identify the bad pseudomorphosis Florovsky spoke of in the unsuccessful attempts to extend the theological canon within an ecclesiastical context where East confronted West and where the dialectic between continuity and discontinuity were at stake in order to preserve Orthodox identity.[42]

A similar issue occurred in Byzantine theology with the return of Platonising thought that led to iconoclasm in the eighth–ninth centuries and to anti-Palamism in the 14th century, not to mention the openly Platonising revivals that occurred in Byzantine culture in the 11th and 14th centuries. Here, the question of identity and discontinuity rose not in a geographical sense, but on the historical-cultural borderline with respect to ancient Hellenic thought.[43]

We may conclude that the ecclesial canon has a referential function for the unity and the continuity of the Orthodox tradition. Its formation is historical, but it relies on a theological paradigm that serves as a foundation for the reinterpretation of eccentricities and their reconveyance to doctrinal unanimity.

The Corrective Criterion: the Case of Pseudo-Dionysius

An example of the role of the ecclesiastical canon in the Orthodox tradition can be found in the case of Pseudo-Dionysius. This author, in fact, has become object of frequent suspicions due to his strong commitment to Greek philosophy (essentially Neoplatonism) and his unprecise Christological position. The full orthodoxy of this Father was not questioned for a thousand years, not because historical and philological doubts would never have emerged, but since he was firmly numbered into the canon of Orthodoxy as one of the Apostolic Fathers, after the successful spreading of the sixth-century pseudo-epigraphic project that made "Dionysius" into the first Father.[44]

42 For a defence of Peter Mogila's true commitment to Orthodoxy and a critic to Florovsky for failing to do full justice to Mogila's ecclesial aims, see Thomson 1993.

43 Meyendorff 1974, 61–65; Lauritzen 2017.

44 For a hypothesis on the Dionysian pseudo-epigraphic project, the doubts, and the earliest reception of the Corpus Dionysiacum, see Mainoldi 2018, 56–96.

When, in the humanistic age, the pseudo-epigraphic identity of the author of the Corpus Dionysiacum was exposed on the basis of philological arguments by Lorenzo Valla, and finally at the beginning of the 20th century more philological evidences demonstrated the dependence of some of the Dionysian texts from the Neoplatonic philosopher Proclus, the theological doctrine of this Father began progressively to raise doubts among Orthodox scholars concerning the weight of his supposed Neoplatonic mindset and his possible Christological heterodoxy (being suspected of Miaphysitism).[45] Accordingly, in order to justify the unquestionable centuries-old position of Dionysius in the canon of the Orthodox Fathers and the influence that his writings have exerted for centuries on Orthodox theology, contemporary scholars have recurred to the idea of a "corrective," that is, a hermeneutical straightening of some of the supposedly eccentric aspects of Dionysian thought that would have been applied by Byzantine Fathers in order to "normalise" his doctrine.

The idea that Dionysius' thought needed some "corrective" in order to fit perfectly into the frame of Orthodox theology was first expressed by Fr John Meyendorff, who attributed to St Maximus the Confessor and to St Gregory Palamas a sort of safe approach to the Pseudo-Dionysian *Corpus*.[46] Meyendorff's position on the Dionysian issue was affected by the philological advancements of Western historiography, highlighting the textual debts of the Pseudo-Dionysian writings to Neoplatonic philosophy and their earliest exploitation by the Monophysites.

This reading did not touch other influential Orthodox theologians and scholars, such as Vladimir Lossky, who picked Dionysius as a milestone of patristic thought; nevertheless, the unsolved enigma of Dionysius's identity, and the progressive discoveries regarding his links with the Neoplatonic school of Athens, were destined to exert a deep influence on forthcoming scholarship. Adolf Martin Ritter, one of the editors of the Göttingen critical edition of the Corpus Dionysiacum, relaunched the "corrective" thesis in the case of Palamas's reading of Dionysius.[47] Martin Luther's dismissal of Dionysius as *plus platonisans quam christianisans* resonated more and more loudly, admonishing over Dionysius's genuine Christian inspiration.[48]

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45 See Lankila 2011.

46 Meyendorff 1964, 189, 206: "[Gregory Palamas] applied to the Areopagite a fundamental Christological corrective which relegated Dionysius's universe to the field of 'natural' cosmology anterior to the Incarnation. This proceeding affected not only the system of hierarchies, but equally 'apophatic theology'."

47 Ritter 1997.

48 Martin Luther, *De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae praeludium*, 562: "In "Theologia" vero "mystica", quam sic inflant ignorantissimi quidam Theologistae, etiam pernitiosissimus est, plus platonisans quam Christianisans;" see also Malysz 2008.

In reality, the idea of a "corrective" was an unnecessary historiographical escamotage, not even justified by the texts of Byzantine authors, as Bishop Alexander Golitzin has underlined, firmly rejecting the thesis of the corrective:

> I wish to register, first, my view that the 'corrective' is not only not 'incontestable', but that it is an illusion, a scholarly invention. The origins of this theological phantom lie, second, in a widespread, indeed practically universal misapprehension of the meaning and function of the Dionysian hierarchies as the unfortunate result of dependence on late pagan Neoplatonism.[49]

Golitzin precisely identifies the historiographic roots of all of the tendentious readings of Dionysius:

> It is, secondly, against this larger and strictly Western debate, which is still in progress, that we are to understand the matter of the 'Christological correctives' supposedly added to Dionysius by St. Gregory or, earlier, by St. Maximus or, in the most recent scholarship, earlier still by the Scholia of John of Scythopolis. As I hope my close examination of a few selected texts from both SS Gregory and Dionysius has helped to show, these 'correctives' are an illusion, and what I should like further to suggest is that this mirage is in fact the projection onto both saints of that same internal, Western debate.[50]

The reception of Pseudo-Dionysius in non-Orthodox historiography is striking, since the recurrent attempts to remove this author from the list of the Fathers ended up with the hypothesis that considered him to be a pagan who wrote in Christian disguise, labelling him as a "crypto-pagan." In other words, he would have been someone who professed himself as a Christian by means of opportunism, while his true goal was that of safeguarding Neoplatonic philosophy.[51]

The Orthodox patrologist Joost Van Rossum returned on the hypothesis of the Christological corrective that would have been applied by St Gregory Palamas, proposing a moderate version of this paradigm and focusing on the absence of references to the system of hierarchies in Palamas as a supposed

49 Golitzin 2002, 167.
50 Golitzin 2002, 186.
51 For bibliographical references see Mainoldi 2018, 112.

Christological correction to the "ambiguous ecclesiology" of Dionysus.[52] In addition to Neoplatonic influences and Christology, another Dionysian theme that has encountered a difficult reception was indeed the hierarchical paradigm. Recently, Fr Maximos Constas relaunched the idea of a soft-corrective applied by St Maximus the Confessor to the system of hierarchies:

> While this is not exactly the sort of 'Christological corrective' that some scholars have posited, it nonetheless marks a significant Christological reframing of both Dionysian thought and the Neoplatonic tradition more generally, for it was a massive reinscription of the Dionysian worldview within the framework of the Confessor's Christocentric cosmology.[53]

Constas' reading received an insightful answer by the Athonite monk Fr Evgenios Iverites, who claims in favour of the harmony between Maximus and Dionysius on the issue of hierarchy.[54]

The Christological corrective hypothesised by Meyendorff resembles Florovsky's neopatristic paradigm, aiming at establishing demarcations, continuities with the ones, and discontinuities with the others. Moving from the confessional boundaries perspective, Florovsky tried to solve eccentricities related to the theological canon of Orthodoxy by seeking refuge in the concept of pseudomorphosis, while Meyendorff, influenced by the Western historiographical paradigm of the so called "Christian Neoplatonism" (to which Dionysius was fully ascribed), tried to justify the central position of this latter in the canon of Orthodox Fathers and the influence he exerted, drawing support from the thesis of a "corrective."[55]

What is important to note is that for Orthodox theologians – also for Orthodox academic scholars – the importance of the Patristic canon, identified with the ecclesial tradition itself, remains unquestionable. The authorial

52 Van Rossum 2006.

53 Constas 2017, 7.

54 Iverites 2020.

55 Meyendorff also applied the idea of reception through a Christological corrective to Origen and Evagrius (see Meyendorff 1964, 136), because of the role that these authors attributed to the intellect in theological knowledge and on the path to deification. Since they were excluded – unlike Dionysius – from the canon of the Fathers after their condemnation decreed by the Fifth Ecumenical Council (553), it must be noted that this was not due to the philosophical language adopted by these three authors, but rather to the paradigmatic orientation of their theological thought. This lead to the acknowledgement of Dionysius as fully Orthodox, while Origen and Evagrius were condemned as heterodox in many aspects.

canon is implicitly assumed as a guarantee of Orthodoxy, and if words and formulas elaborated by some of the Fathers represent a novelty in relation to traditional terminology, doctrinal interpretation that results in normalising formal discrepancies is always possible. This helps the forthcoming ecclesiastical tradition to harmonise the terminological and thematic canon to the authorial one.

Looking beyond the case of Dionysius, one of the most emblematic examples of this issue is represented by the formula μία φύσις τοῦ Θεοῦ Λόγου σεσαρκωμένη, introduced into the Christological debate by St Cyril of Alexandria, while he believed it was originally stated by St Athanasius the Great. In reality, the formula was first presented by the initial advocate of Monophysitism, Apollinaris of Laodicea.[56] During the long and harsh debate that followed the Council of Chalcedon (451), this formula, even if problematic, could not be rejected because of its alleged author, so it was accepted through the neo-Chalcedonian Diophysite interpretation decreed by the Fifth Ecumenical Council (553).[57] Hence, we may conclude that, according to the paradigm of unanimity and continuity in which the ecclesial tradition gazes at its identity, the canon always prevails and dictates the Orthodox interpretation of doctrinal formulas over their letter.

Patristics as an Academic Discipline and the Issue of Methodology

The contemporary interest shown towards the Fathers is largely embedded into the frame of academic research: the Fathers are studied from a historical and philological point of view. Consequently, Patristics fall into the perimeter of an academic discipline with well-defined methodological boundaries, not presupposing ecclesiastical aims. Also Florovsky was aware of this gap between academic theology and living ecclesiastical experience:

> But we have to keep in mind that it was the school theology that went astray – the worshipping Church kept close to the patristic tradition. A certain tension, divorce, and opposition between piety and teaching was the most unhappy outcome of this historical adventure. This tension and divorce were overcome to a great extent in the heroic struggles of the nineteenth century.[58]

56 Κουτσουρούμπα 2019.
57 Perrone 1980, 213–222.
58 Florovsky 1949, 68.

Even though the theme of the return to the Fathers has been central to the Orthodox discourse since the past century until now, some voices have raised radical criticism, according to which the Neopatristic paradigm has mostly brought negative consequences. One of these voices was lifted up by Pantelis Kalaitzidis, according to whom the hegemonic focus on the Fathers has led Orthodox theology to the devaluation of biblical studies, to an anti-historical approach to theology, to the transformation of tradition into traditionalism, to the sterile polarisation between East and West, and to a closure in front of the challenges of the modern world.[59] Criticising Florovsky, or rather the uncritical and triumphant reception of the slogan of the return to the Fathers, Kalaitzidis poses the question whether Orthodox theology could be non-patristic or post-patristic.[60] An answer to this challenging question came from Paul Ladouceur, who, reconstructing a recent debate on post-patristics in Greek theology during the early 2010s, pointed at a moderate synthesis of the positions that have emerged, and, while remarking the relativity of slogans, he evoked Augustine Casiday's motto "forward with the Fathers."[61]

Every stance of criticism requires a thorough theological answer and cannot just limit to express a merely apologetical attitude. As we have observed, the return to the Fathers has been in fact confined on the one side within the frame of apologetics and, on the other side, within the schemes of academic research. The lack of a theological comprehension of what the Fathers mean in the economy of the Church is a sign of weakness, and this weakness is precisely mirrored by Kalaitzidis's critique, which frames patristics as a discipline the potential of which is limited both by the sterile aims of academics and by the polemical and apologetical role it received in the aftermath of Florovsky.

Academic patristics has answered to the need for a return to the study of the Fathers, but has returned a parcelled vision of theology, where disciplinary distinctions, even though useful for educational purposes, have been fixed as specialised academic disciplines, paying a debt to academic bureaucracy and careerism. The post-Florovsky revival in Orthodox patristic studies is also based on methodologies that have been developed in Western universities. Does this allow to speak of a Babylonian-academic captivity?

59 Kalaïtzidis 2011, 234.
60 Kalaïtzidis 2011, 248.
61 Ladouceur 2024, 107.

This compels us to reflect on the ecclesiastical function of the Fathers and the approach by which it is possible to frame their theological contribution. This leads us to two conclusions: first of all, Florovsky's polemical mottos, aimed at defending the supposed purity of Orthodoxy, miss the fact that Orthodox identity survived even under pseudomorphoses, a fact of which – as we have seen – the same Florovsky was aware.[62] Pseudomorphoses in fact are not heresies.[63]

On the other hand, the doctrinal unity of Orthodox theology should not be neglected even if in some periods academic curricula may have appeared unbalanced, focusing more on systematics than on the teachings of the Fathers. However, even from a methodological point of view, systematic theology was always based on the dogmatic truth decreed by the Councils and elaborated by the Fathers. Secondly, as we have seen, patristic revivals were more frequent – and more "structural" – than Florovsky's presentation and his followers have left to believe. Reversely, we may ask if it is possible to conceive biblical theology separately from the teachings of the Fathers, and whether dogmatics can be taught without any reference to the thought of any particular Fathers. There is a risk in patristic theology to lose sight of the historical context in which the Fathers acted, naïvely conceiving the teachings of the Fathers and *consensus patrum* through the voice of one single Father – who would act as a sort of mythological God-Father. This would consequently shift into impersonal metaphysics (which is also the risk of dogmatic theology),[64] and Biblical theology that is approached outside the living and inspired ecclesiastical transmission from the Fathers to the Sons; this would, in its turn, downgrade the Scripture to its letter, destined to remain enclosed in the past of his literary and historical composition.[65]

The first conclusion is that from a theological point of view the unity of theological truth comes first, while disciplinary subdivisions are for educational purposes. Orthodox identity is not merely defined by methodologies, or by doctrines that are in terminological continuity with the tradition, but relies on continuity with respect to the theological *ethos* and the apostolic function of preaching of the Gospel of Christ.[66]

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62 See footnotes 38 and 58 above.

63 Gavrilyuk 2013, 124: "The difference between the theological 'grammars' of the East and the West is not a sufficient ground for forever guarding our theology against all Western influences."

64 See also Kalaïtzidis 2011, 235.

65 See also Filiotis-Vlachavas 2015, 433–434.

66 Florovsky 1960, 292: "There is above all an ultimate spiritual and ontological identity, the same

Secondly, we should ask ourselves: do the Fathers represent merely a historical phenomenon, or should their role be defined according to an ecclesiastical principle, namely that of Fatherhood in the Church?[67] The deepening of this topic will finally help us to better understand the position of the Fathers in the Orthodox tradition, not merely from a historical perspective, but from a theological and mystagogical point of view.

Whence the Fathers: the Theological Notion of Fatherhood

The notion of Fatherhood, as it is expressed in the Christian tradition, has a significance that is much more than merely doxastic or related to the principle of authority in the Church, or even connected to the monastic notion of spiritual fatherhood; rather, it embodies the hierarchical principle of ecclesiastical relationships in the context of participating in the "good and perfect gift from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights" (James 1:17). The "spiritually generative" function of Fatherhood is clearly expressed in the following words of Apostle Paul: "Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel" (1 Cor 4:15).

The earliest mentions of the "fathers" in Christian literature are given by Irenaeus of Lyon and Clemens of Alexandria, who name "fathers" those who have the role of instructors within Christian communities; accordingly, the title of "father" was also attributed to the bishop, who was in charge of educating his flock.[68] Nonetheless, the notion of "father" does not seem to refer to an ecclesiastical function here. This thought emerged after the Council of Nicaea, usually referred to by post-Nicaean sources as the "Council of the 318 Fathers".

The growth of consciousness about the role of the Fathers in the Church can be seen in St Cyril of Alexandria, and at the Third Ecumenical Council in Ephesus (431); in this meeting, for the first time in history, a patristic *florile-*

faith, the same spirit, the same ethos. And this constitutes the distinctive mark of Orthodoxy. 'This is the Apostolic faith, this is the faith of the Fathers, this is the Orthodox faith, this faith has established the universe.'" This last is a quotation from the Vespers of the Sunday of Orthodoxy (the first Sunday of the Great Lent).

67 Here and in the following pages Fatherhood will be written capitalised, since this term is intended exclusively in the sense of spiritual and ecclesiastical fatherhood.

68 Quasten 1962, 1, 9–12.

gium was presented by the secretary of the council, the *primicerius* Peter.[69] He cites mainly fourth-century Fathers, such as Athanasius of Alexandria, Ambrose of Milan, Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzus, not mentioning however any Fathers of the first centuries, like Irenaeus.[70] This phenomenon demonstrates the historical fluidity of the patristic canon.

In the same years, Vincent of Lerin, in his *Commonitorium* (434), articulated the understanding of the "Fathers" as an ecclesiastical function, being the *corpus* of those who have received the Catholic truth and have the duty to guard and transmit it; thus, the Fathers became Holy Fathers.[71] Leontius of Byzantium (485–543) seems to have been the first to use the expression "Fathers of the Church" (Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας), mainly referring to the great theologians of the fourth century, who defended the Orthodox Christological doctrine.[72]

The notion of Fatherhood refers to an ecclesiastical function that can be crystallised in the following points: the Fathers are the living and historical successors of the Apostles; they incarnate the constitutional principle of Apostolicity, which defines the borders of the Church, according to the Symbol of Faith of Nicaea-Constantinople. The Church is in fact entrusted by Christ to His disciples as a divine-human organism and not as a sovra-human institution directed by the Holy Spirit. Despite having experienced martyrdom, the main function of the Apostles was kerygmatic, since their mission was devoted to announcing the Kingdom of God, preaching the word of God, and spreading the Gospel of Christ. The Fathers are successors of the Apostles according to their kerygmatic function.[73]

Accordingly, the principle of Fatherhood responds to the necessary presence and continuation of Apostolicity in the life of the Church. Since Apostolicity is synergic with the Holy Spirit in pushing ahead the Church towards its ultimate goals (Acts 15:28), the Fathers incarnate the conciliarity of the Church as collaborators of the Holy Spirit. From the historical-doctrinal

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69 Russell 2000, 46, 50.

70 See Russell 2000, 219, n. 89.

71 Vicentius Lerinenesis, *Commonitorium* XXXIII (134.11).

72 *Contra Aphthartodocetas*, Preface to the Excerpts, 386, 12.

73 Florovsky 1960, 293: "The Fathers testify to the Apostolicity of the tradition. There are two basic stages in the proclamation of the Christian faith. *Our simple faith had to acquire composition*. There was an inner urge, an inner logic, an internal necessity, in this transition – from *kerygma* to *dogma* . Indeed, the *dogmata* of the Fathers are essentially the same 'simple' *kerygma* , which had been once delivered and deposited by the Apostles, once, for ever."

point of view, they defined ecclesiastical Truth by formulating dogmas of the Orthodox Faith in the Ecumenical Councils. They elaborated on the results of their divine inspiration with *florilegia patristica* as their foundation; in these, the uninterrupted path of the theological reflection embedded in the body of the Church is documented, and significantly, as they witness the historical continuity of the patristic function, these *florilegia* were included in the acts of the Councils. From an ecclesiological point of view, Fatherhood expresses the hierarchical existence of the Church; a corollary of this is that the Fathers are in absolute majority members of the episcopacy, even if episcopate is not a *conditio sine qua non* of Fatherhood, like the cases of Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus show, for instance.

Understanding the ecclesiastical function of the Fathers means essentially understanding how the Fathers in all ages are entrusted with the task of mediating between identity and unity within the tradition of the Church. They explicitly show the fidelity of the Church to the message of the Gospel and express the catholic and unanimous conscience of the Church. The Nicaean-Constantinopolitan definition of the Church as One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic, encompasses the ecclesiastical function and responsibility of the Fathers, who are the guarantors of the continuity between past, present, and future in the Church. They witness to the eschatological consciousness of tradition, experienced in the unending present of sacramental and ecclesiastical life in Christ. Accepting the principle of Fatherhood simultaneously means acknowledging the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church, while this is based on the synergy between God and His collaborators in leading the Church according to the ontological freedom derived from its divine-human constitution.

Conclusion

What I have tried to outline here can be defined as the ecclesiastical-institutional function of Fatherhood. The second fundamental trait of Fatherhood in the Orthodox tradition is its correspondence with the principle of hierarchy; the latter should not be understood merely as a principle of ecclesiastical order, but as the outcome of the spiritual function of Fatherhood. This function is related to the understanding of hierarchy as a communion defined by the relationships between its members. In fact, hierarchical relationships

essentially are the transmission of divine illuminations. Personal hypostases that form the hierarchy are brought into deification through these divine illuminations. Ecclesiastical Fatherhood must also be coupled with Sonship, entailing a relationship according to the image of the divine and archetypal relationship between the Father and the Son. This is the paradigm of every Fatherhood and Sonship in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, as Pseudo-Dionysius has clearly set out:

> 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 God-like 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.[74]

Coming finally to the issue of defining the paradigm of patristic theology – if any: as I have said before, it is better to look for a flexible canon of doctrines and themes, rather than to search for a unique methodological criterion. Patristic theology is based on the principle of tradition, according to which past, present and future are different dimensions entailed by the protological and eschatological activity of the divine *logoi*. Tradition ensures the historical continuity of the Church's doctrines and teachings in front of the concrete challenges that Christian communities encounter from age to age, but first of all relies on experience and *ethos*. Consequently, patristic theology is oriented towards realism rather than idealism; it is not tempted to organise the theological knowledge as a rational system. This also explains why the Orthodox Fathers have never conceived theology as a science, unlike Western Scholastics.[75]

Theology avulsed from the ascetic *ethos* of deification, deprived of the liturgical *ethos* that vivifies local communities. Thus, it became a system always in need of reformations, according to opportunities and secular waves, whereas patristic theology constantly assesses and experiences the need for the continuity of the tradition (in which it recognises the supra-historical action of the Holy Spirit) and at the same time the discontinuity between the

74 Pseudo-Dionysius, *On the divine names*, II, 8, 645BC.
75 Chenu 1969.

essential goal of the Church, i.e. Salvation, and secularist thinking that would reduce the Church to a worldly institution.

Definitely neither the Church, nor Orthodox theology can be non-patristic or post-patristic. It is not just a question of cultural and historical identity, but a feature deriving from the very ontology of the Church of Christ.

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The Holy Spirit in John Chrysostom's Fourth Homily on Acts: Implications for Exegetical Imagination

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Abstract

In this brief account we offer an analysis of John Chrysostom's exegesis of the book of Acts, the chapter on Pentecost in particular. We see a central thesis emerging: the Holy Spirit is free, the apostles such as Peter and Paul have limits, and that while the Holy Spirit is here, we certainly do not automatically receive it, but have to be worthy of its activity (or at least worthy to discern its gifts, which are in a sense, always given). Chrysostom's ideas can liberate contemporary Orthodox theology from the inability to offer creative theology (as it has always done in the patristic age). And this is achieved by providing complete exegetical freedom, while remaining firmly set in the "tradition". We further see that in other patristic sources, this thesis is the same.

Keywords: Cyril of Jerusalem, exegesis, Holy Spirit, John Chrysostom, Orthodoxy.

"For they did not go forth to argue with Pharaoh, but to wrestle with the devil."[1]

Introduction

The following contribution is a brief synopsis of John Chrysostom's theology regarding the Holy Spirit in relation to his interpretation of the feast of Pentecost. The role of the Holy Spirit in biblical exegesis – especially in Orthodox theology – is largely underappreciated in contemporary reflection. Generally, theology seems to lack that "moment of exegetical imagination" so clearly evident in ancient authors, such as those associated with the Alexandrian exegetical tradition or, for that matter, in rabbinic Judaism and exegesis.

It is obvious to anyone dealing with the theology of the Holy Spirit that one can easily fall into extremes, either advocating an unrestricted freedom or, on the contrary, imposing a more restrictive limitation on the Holy Spirit's activity. This can also be a problem in relation to exegesis. As we shall see, Chrysostom brilliantly resolves this tension by finding a way forward that neither denies freedom nor endorses limitless freedom – both in the activity of the Holy Spirit and its role in exegesis.[2]

Freedom and Unity

The feast of Pentecost carries significant implications for an overall theology of the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts provides a brief yet enigmatic account:

> When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1–4).

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1 John Chrysostom, *Homily 4 On Acts*, 2, PG 60, 45.

2 Chrysostom is beginning to attract more attention among scholars as an exegete, even if this attraction is largely based on especially his rhetorical work. His theological originality and exegetical work are yet to be systematically studied. See for example, Pomeroy 2022, or Despotis & Buchanan Wallace 2024.

Generally, in the patristic tradition, the feast of Pentecost is understood as a symbol of the inherent subjectivity of human knowledge. The Holy Spirit reveals the fundamental limits of human understanding, particularly regarding the Incarnation and its implications. Even the Mother of God attains a "full understanding" of her Sons salvific role during this feast. The apostles began to speak in languages, signifying a newfound freedom of expression – one that remained intrinsically linked to Christ and his offer of unity. The new freedom "to harvest" is also rooted in Christ. Chrysostom, drawing on other passages in the Gospels, emphasises this Christological dimension. He exclaims:

> What is the Pentecost? (Is it the moment) when the sickle is set to the harvest and the gathering of fruits takes place? Do you see the type? Look again at the truth, when it was necessary to put in the sickle of the word. For just as a sharpened sickle, the Holy Spirit descended to reap the harvest. Hear the words of Christ! He said: "Lift up your eyes, and look at the fields, for they are white full of ripe harvest" (John 4:35). And again: "A rich harvest but a small number of workers" (Mt 9: 38). But He was the first to take on the sickle, taking up our human [nature] as the First fruit.[3]

The work of the Holy Spirit is intrinsically linked to Christ, who serves as its foundation. In this context, "lifting up" human nature signifies that the Holy Spirit – or God – is building upon what already exists, using the human material that is already present. In other words, the work of the Holy Spirit is not an ecstatic departure from all that exists, but rather a "reworking" of the material at hand. Therefore, the process of reflection is not only discerning what may appear, so to speak, "from heaven," but also about exploring the gifts that already exist – even if they have yet to be recognised or understood. The Holy Spirit does not destroy our identity but, on the contrary, it builds on

3 The translations of Chrysostom in this article are my own. John Chrysostom, *Homily 4 On Acts*, 1, PG 60, 41: Τίς ἐστιν αὕτη ἡ Πεντηκοστή; Ὅτε τὸ δρέπανον ἐπιβάλλειν ἔδει τῷ ἀμητῷ· ὅτε τοὺς καρποὺς συνάγειν ἐχρῆν. Εἶδες τὸν τύπον; Βλέπε πάλιν τὴν ἀλήθειαν. Ὅτε τὸ δρέπανον ἐπιβάλλειν ἔδει τοῦ λόγου, ὅτε τὸν ἀμητὸν συλλέγειν, τότε καθάπερ δρέπανον τὸ Πνεῦμα ἠκονημένον ἐφίπταται. Ἄκουε γὰρ τοῦ Χριστοῦ λέγοντος· Ἐπάρατε τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ὑμῶν, καὶ θεάσασθε τὰς χώρας, ὅτι λευκαί εἰσι πρὸς θερισμὸν ἤδη· καὶ πάλιν, Ὁ μὲν θερισμὸς πολὺς, οἱ δὲ ἐργάται ὀλίγοι. Ὥστε αὐτὸς ἐπέβαλε τὸ δρέπανον πρότερος. Αὐτὸς γὰρ ἀνήγαγεν εἰς οὐρανοὺς ἀπαρχὴν, τὸ ἡμῶν προσλαβών.

it, "settles in." "It sat on each one of them, here *remaining, settling in*."[4] Chrysostom emphasises the words "remaining" and "settling".

Paradoxically, though the Holy Spirit "does what it wants" – appearing as fire in one instance and as a dove in another – it is permanent; it is here to stay. Chrysostom's point is clear: interpretation may be made freely, but its foundation remains firmly anchored and unshakable. There is a direct correlation between the presence of the Holy Spirit and one's spiritual disposition. The Holy Spirit did not descend on the apostles by mere chance; rather its freedom to do so was linked to their preparedness. This distinguishes Chrysostom from the purely fatalistic or liberal understanding of the Holy Spirit found in some modern theological trends. Freedom is something that needs to be "deserved". This is achieved through prayer, works and charity. He writes: "Observe, how these [figures] weere first shown to be worthy, and then the Spirit descended. For example, David, tending the sheepfolds, continued in his humility even after his victory and triumph, demonstrating the pure and absolute simplicity of his faith."[5]

The work of the Holy Spirit can only take place in each individual if they have the spirit of acceptance – an openness to Gods words, that excludes subjectivism and egoisms of every kind. The spirit of openness to God's grace was already present during the Old Testament period. The acceptance of God's grace forms a link between the New and Old Testaments, where the Holy Spirit's work can also be discerned. Profound understanding is indeed given by God through grace, as highlighted by Chrysostom. He writes:

> Observe, how when one is persevering in prayer, when one has love, the Spirit draws near. He offers them a different vision, since he states: As a fire, he appeared in the bush. To each one of them, the Spirit gave utterance (Exodus 3:2). For the things spoken by them were profound utterances. As it recalls, there were pious Jewish men dwelling in Jerusalem (Acts 2:5). This dwelling of theirs, was a sign of their piety.[6]

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4 John Chrysostom, *Homily 4 On Acts*, 1, PG 60, 43: Ὅτε μὲν γὰρ Ἰωάννῃ ἔδει γνωρισθῆναι τὸ Πνεῦμα, ὡς ἐν εἴδει περιστερᾶς ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν ἦλθε τοῦ Χριστοῦ· νῦν δὲ ὅτε πλῆθος ὅλον ἐπιστραφῆναι ἐχρῆν, ὡσεὶ πυρός. Καὶ ἐκάθισεν ἐφ' ἕνα ἕκαστον αὐτῶν· τουτέστι, παρέμεινεν, ἐπανεπαύσατο.

5 John Chrysostom, *Homily 4 On Acts*, 2, PG 60, 44: Ὅρα δὲ καὶ ἐκείνους πρῶτον δειχθέντας ἀξίους, καὶ τότε Πνεύματος καταξιωθέντας· οἷον ὥσπερ ὁ Δαυῒδ· ἅπερ γὰρ ἐν ταῖς ποίμναις εἰργάζετο, ταῦτα καὶ μετὰ τὴν νίκην καὶ τὸ τρόπαιον, ἵνα δειχθῇ αὐτοῦ γυμνὴ ἡ πίστις.

6 John Chrysostom, *Homily 4 On Acts*, 1, PG 60, 43: Σκόπει δέ μοι, πῶς, ὅταν προσκαρτερῶσι

The concept of seeing things profoundly also implies seeing them in various and essentially unpredictable perspectives, and ties into piety, belief, and community. Chrysostom observes: "As the Spirit gave them utterance, (ἀποφθέγγεσθαι), (Exodus 3:2). For the things spoken by them were profound utterances (ἀποφθέγματα)."[7]

Christians, therefore, not only draw from the various gifts and activities of the Holy Spirit, but also participate in its freedom and unpredictable movement – movement driven by love, which, in itself, is unpredictable by its nature. It is important to emphasise that knowledge can never be static like an encyclopedic fact, that, on its own, represents the fullness of its meaning (in the sense of isolated autonomy apart from relationships). Knowledge remains relative, yet it is simultaneously complete in its content. Thus, the Spirit "filled all the house" (Acts 2:2). Every object and moment in the cosmos is part of the divine plan; there is no place in the house that is not related to this plan.

The filling of the house relates to being filled by the Holy Spirit, which is truly present everywhere. Chrysostom brilliantly distinguishes between receiving the Spirit and being filled by it. In a sense, receiving something implies that you already possess something, and what you receive only adds to it. Being filled means that our entire being is transformed, and any previous content is touched or altered by that which fills us. It is a change in perspective, not in content. We can receive things, but this does not mean that we will change according to what we receive. To be filled is to be in a situation with no escape. Being filled means that all our components and knowledge are oriented toward this fulfillment. Chrysostom stresses: "He says, filled all. Not merely received the Spirits grace but were filled by it."[8] As we see, Chrysostom emphasises not only the "giving" but also the "filling."

These utterances, along with the ability to speak in tongues, are linked to a specific goal and a broader purpose of unity. As Chrysostom highlights, all are gathered in Jerusalem to listen and be saved. There is a distinction between this gathering and the one around the Babylonian Tower. The Tower

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τῇ δεήσει, ὅταν ἀγάπην ἔχωσι, τότε τὸ Πνεῦμα παραγίνεται. Ἀνέμνησε δὲ αὐτοὺς καὶ ἑτέρας ὄψεως, εἰπὼν, Ὡσεὶ πυρός. Ὡς πῦρ γὰρ ἐφάνη καὶ ἐν τῇ βάτῳ. Καθὼς τὸ Πνεῦμα ἐδίδου αὐτοῖς ἀποφθέγγεσθαι. Ἀποφθέγματα γὰρ ἦν τὰ παρ' αὐτῶν λεγόμενα. Ἦσαν δὲ, φησὶν, ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ κατοικοῦντες Ἰουδαῖοι ἄνδρες εὐλαβεῖς. Τὸ κατοικεῖν, εὐλαβείας ἦν σημεῖον.

7 John Chrysostom, *Homily 4 On Acts*, 1, PG 60, 44: Καθὼς τὸ Πνεῦμα ἐδίδου αὐτοῖς ἀποφθέγγεσθαι. Ἀποφθέγματα γὰρ ἦν τὰ παρ' αὐτῶν λεγόμενα.

8 John Chrysostom, Homily 4 On Acts, 1, PG 60, 44: *Καὶ ἐπλήσθησαν*, φησὶν, *ἅπαντες*. Οὐχ ἁπλῶς ἔλαβον τοῦ Πνεύματος τὴν χάριν, ἀλλ᾽ ἐπλήσθησαν.

of Babel was built solely through human effort, coupled with subjectivity and underlined by the goal of reaching God through human means alone. The Pentecostal gathering was one of people open to God and the Spirit, united in Jerusalem.

In terms of exegesis, human effort alone, without God, works against the community. One's interpretation becomes a stumbling block to the salvation of others, even when framed within a linear "developmentalist" perspective. The exegete who works in the Holy Spirit –essentially one who has an open heart to God – looks at a passage and relates it to the primary salvific reality in Christ, which holds a cosmic significance. However, the "moment" – the exegetical purpose and goal – means that the exegete is liberated from the text itself, not in the sense of denying it, or disputing its truth, but referring to it with freedom, a referral rooted in the Holy Spirit. The exegete seeks the objectification of the passage, and thus "understanding." This is not merely a matter of working with facts, names, or terms, or replacing one fact with another. Facts do not "explain." Here, explanation is not the result of intellectual inquiry alone; it touches the ontological being of the human person, aligning it with the salvific role of Christ. The symbol of being drunk, symbolises this freedom to "let go."

Chrysostom associates the Spirit with life, while referring to John 4:14. This life is everlasting. Life is not static; it does not stop at a single moment but continues and overflows. Therefore, through the Spirit we not only have various interpretations, but no interpretation is ever final. It lacks finality, because life is endless and insatiable. Chrysostom writes: "And not only through the fire it showed the multiple grace, but each one received the everlasting fountain of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, as was said that everyone believing in him will receive the fountain of everlasting water (John 4: 14).[9]"

Here, Chrysostom clearly implies that the Holy Spirit can never be possessed unconditionally. The Holy Spirit does whatever it wills and dwells in whomever it chooses. This does not imply a change in the frequency or quality of the Holy Spirit, but rather that its manifestation and possession are undetermined, much like life itself. In a sense, strangely enough life itself has the potential and power to destroy evil. Paradoxically, even those who crucified Christ are full of wine. Chrysostom observes:

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9 John Chrysostom, *Homily 4 On Acts,* 2, PG 60, 45: Καὶ γὰρ διὰ τοῦ πυρὸς οὐ μόνον τὸ δαψιλὲς τῆς χάριτος ἐδείκνητο, ἀλλὰ καὶ πυγὴν ἕκαστος ἐλάμβανε, Πνεύματος· ὥσπερ οὖν καὶ αὐτὸς πυγὴν ὕδατος ἁλλομένου εἰ ζωὴν ἀιώνιον ἔφησεν ἕξειν τοὺς πιστεύοντας ἐπ᾽ αὐτόν. Here, we can be reminded that in the Gospel of John, the Holy Spirit is associated with the term "Paraclete," which is relatively rare.

> What folly! Oh so much evil; for, it was the season of sweet wine, it was the Pentecost. And it was even worse, since everyone was confessing – Romans, proselytes, even those who perhaps had crucified him. After all this, all these (signs and occurrences), it was said that they were drunk with wine […] But let us see what has been said above. It filled, it says, the house. That wind was like a pool of water. This signified abundance, as signified by the vehemence of the wine.[10]

Chrysostom observes that the situation was different with the prophets.[11]

Again, Chrysostom sees a salvific trajectory extending from the Old Testament onward, because essentially the same processes were and are at work. The Holy Spirit does not appear out of nowhere; it was always present – where form and substance coincided. Here, "form" and "substance" denote the absolute unity of outward expression and inner meaning. Chrysostom references a story from Ezechiel.

The story in Ezechiel describes how the prophet ate the book given to him. In essence, this means that Ezechiel was completely "identified" with what he proclaimed. There was no distinction between what he believed and what he uttered. Chrysostom writes:

> Nowhere else had this happened with the prophets, but with this prophecy it was different. A chapter of a book was given to him, and he ate it, expressing the same words he had consumed. It is said that it became, in his mouth, as sweet as honey (γλυκάζον).[12]

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10 John Chrysostom, *Homily 4 On Acts*, 2, PG 60, 44: «Ὢ τῆς ἀνοίας»! ὦ τῆς κακίας τῆς πολλῆς! Καίτοι οὐδὲ καιρὸς ἦν οὗτος τοῦ γλεύκους· Πεντηκοστὴ γὰρ ἦν. Καὶ τὸ δεινότερον, ὅτι πάντων ὁμολογούντων, Ῥωμαίων ὄντων , προσηλύτων ὄντων, τῶν σταυρωσάντων ἴσως, ἐκεῖνοι μετὰ τοσαῦτα λέγουσιν, ὅτι *Γλεύκους μεμεστωμένοι εἰσίν* […] Ἀλλ᾽ ἴδωμεν ἄνωθεν τὰ εἰρημένα. *Ἐπλήρωσε*, φησὶ, τὸν *οἶκον*. Ἡ πνοὴ καθάπερ κολυμβήθρα γέγονεν ὕδατος. Τῆς δαψιλείας δὲ τοῦτο τεκμήριον καὶ τῆς σφοδρότητος τὸ πῦρ.

11 In Migne's edition, the sentence offered by the translation of Walker & Sheppard, & Browne, revised by Stevens, seems to be missing, here "for to uninebriated souls such accesses are attended with much disturbance; but when they have well drunken, then indeed it is as here, but with the Prophets it is otherwise;" see Walker & Sheppard & Browne, revised by Stevens 1889.

12 John Chrysostom, *Homily 4 On Acts*, 2, PG 60, 44: Οὐδαμοῦ τοιοῦτο γέγονεν ἐπὶ τῶν προφητῶν ἀλλὰ τότε μὲν οὕτως ἐκείνοις, τοῖς προφήταις δὲ ἑτέρως. Κεφαλὶς γὰρ βιβλίου δίδοται τῷ Ἰεζεκιὴλ, καὶ ἐσθίει ἃ ἔμελλε λέγειν· *Ἐγένετο* γὰρ, φησὶν, *ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτοῦ ὡς μέλι γλυκάζον*.

Further: "And again, the hand of God touches the tongue of another Prophet, but this time it is the Holy Spirit. This serves to demonstrate the Spirit's equal honor with the Father and the Son. (Jer 1:9)."[13]

The main emphasis and paradox here is that, both in the Old and New Testaments, the Holy Spirit used various and different means of expression or manifestation, yet remained essentially the same, expressing the same truths. This offers a new exegetical opportunity, where one can speak differently and still convey the same essential, importantly truthful meaning. The Prophets are a prime example, as they spoke in a specific period to address specific situations. The message of the Divine often needs to be adapted for the people to help them understand. Thus, Chrysostom uses terms such as similitudes, paradigms, and examples in this regard. He continues:

> And again (Ezechiel 2:10), he calls them lamentation, mourning and woe. For them, it may be in the form of a book, since they needed paradigms. They had to deal with only one nation—their own household nation. But these men were entrusted with the entire world, even those they did not know. Elisha received grace through a mantle (2 Kings 13), another through oil, as David, (1 Samuel 16:13), and Moses through the burning bush (Exodus 3:2). But in this case, it is different, since we hear that the fire sat on them. Why did the fire not appear as filling the house? Because they would have been astounded. But the story makes it clear that this case and the others are the same case. So do not stop here and say that they appeared to them in cloven tongues; rather, recognise that they were fire – a fire capable of igniting any material. It is good that he said Cloven, since they were from one root, so that you may understand that this is the energy sent from the Comforter.[14]

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13 John Chrysostom, *Homily 4 On Acts*, 2, PG 60, 44: Καὶ πάλιν ἡ χεὶρ ἅπτεται τοῦ θεοῦ τῆς γλώσσης ἑτέρου προφήτου. Ἐνταῦθα δὲ αὐτὸ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον· οὕτως ὁμότιμον τυγχάνει Πατρὶ και Υἱῷ.

14 John Chrysostom, *Homily 4 On Acts*, 2, PG 60, 44: Καὶ πάλιν ἑτερώθι ἄλλως· Κατάλεγμα, καὶ μέλος, καὶ οὐαί. Ἐκείνοις μὲν οὖν εἰκότως ἐν Βιβλίῳ· ἔτι γὰρ αὐτοῖς παραδειγμάτων ἔδει· πρὸς ἓν ἔθνος εἶχον ἐκείνοι μόνον, καὶ τοὺς οἰκείους· οὗτοι δὲ καὶ πρὸς τὴν οἰκουμένην ἅπασαν, καὶ τοῦς οὐδέποτε γνωρισθέντες. Ἑλλισσαῖος δὲ διὰ μηλωτῆς λαμβάνει τὴν χάριν, ἄλλος δ᾽ ἐλαίου, ὡς ὁ Δαβίδ, Μωῦσῆς δὲ, διὰ πυρὸς τῆς βάτου καλεῖται. Ἀλλ᾽ ἐνταῦθα οὐχ οὕτως, ἀλλ᾽ αὐτὸ τὸ πῦρ ἐνεκάθισε. Διατί δὲ μὴ ἐφάνη πῦρ οἶκον πληροῦν; Ὅτι ἐξέστησαν ἄν. Ἀλλὰ δείκνυσιν ὅτι τοῦτο ἐκεῖνό ἐστι. Μὴ γὰρ τῷ λέγειν, ὅτι Ὠφθησαν αὐτοῖς διαμεριζόμεναι γλῶσσαι, πρόσχηςδ ἀλλ᾽ὅτι πυρός. Τοσοῦτον πῦρ μυρίαν ὕλην ἀνάψαι δύναται. Καὶ καλῶς εἶπε Διαμεριζόμεναι.Ἐκ μιᾶς γὰρ ἦν ρίζης ὁ ἵνα μαθης, ὅτι ἐνέργειά ἐστιν ἀπὸ τοῦ Παρακλήτου πεμφεῖσα.

The Holy Spirit has operated throughout history and is not limited to the New Testament period. Its work has always had the singular purpose, though expressed through various means. Chrysostom connects the Jewish people with the people of God, who are united with Christ.

Here, there is clearly one substance – one foundational matter – that underlies everything. Other Church Fathers emphasise this as the Christological dimension. However, the Holy Spirit is unique in that it offers life itself, and this life is inherently "positive." For us, who are accustomed to the tragic dimensions of this life, the term "life" carries an ambivalent meaning, implying both positive and negative aspects. However, life in the Holy Spirit is purely positive while also being diverse – yet this diversity is never threatened by evil. The energy described in Acts, sent into the world, is life itself, given by the Comforter.

Freedom in diversity is essentially good, as it enables the possibility of relationship. Relationships form the foundation of the community. For example, if I want to talk to Peter, I do not need to erase my identity, or cease to exist as a person; rather, I must adopt a form of communication that Peter will understand. Here too, fire can be associated with knowledge – knowledge that is relational, enriching both myself and others.

As Chrysostom remarks, the Holy Spirit appeared in a way that did not provoke fear in the Apostles. He continues further to explain even the practical form of the Spirit's appearance, noting that it "sat on them." This is an important insight, as we might naturally ask why – just as the iconographic tradition suggests – the symbolism of the Holy Spirit is associated with the heads of the protagonists. Furthermore, the "personal" flame on each apostle's head represents the unique way the Holy Spirit is expressed through each individual. Every apostle has his own mission and life experiences, and the Holy Spirit works through each one accordingly. Thus, each apostle received "his" flame.

Being Worthy of the Holy Spirit

As we have already suggested, Chrysostom's main argument is stating that one must be worthy of receiving the Holy Spirit. While Holy Spirit is given freely, not everyone is prepared to perceive it. This perspective effectively absolves Chrysostom from any accusations of spiritual relativism and liberal-

ism. "But observe how those men were first shown to be worthy, and then received the Spirit as worthy – for example, David."[15] In other words, the Holy Spirit is everywhere and always present, but receiving it is not automatic. This has far-reaching implications for Pneumatology, but especially here, it is even more serious for exegetical understandings. Discerning God's signs and work requires preparation and "worthiness." "Even Saul, having first obtained witness that he was good, thereafter received the Spirit."[16] Further Moses experienced a "diminution, when the spirit became manifest in others."[17]

Chrysostom's Pneumatology aligns with that of the Church Fathers, including Cyril of Jerusalem, with the shared emphasis on the necessity of being worthy to receive the Holy Spirit. In his sixteenth catechesis, Cyril observes: "But He structures himself, adapting in the most suitable manner according to the constitution of each thing, making it suitable for every possible purpose."[18] The Holy Spirit is holy, one in kind and simple, indivisible, yet distributing His grace to each and every one according to His will (1 Cor 12:11). This implies a diversity in unity. Cyril further adds the condition of repentance (μετανοία), for the sinful soul (ψυχή), to become worthy of the Spirit. Being one and simple, He, interestingly enough, works out many virtues (ἀρετὰς ἐνεργεῖ) by the will of God and in the name of Christ. He grants various gifts, such as prophecy, self-control, almsgiving, and, importantly, the ability to "interpret Scriptures" (ἑρμηνεῦσαι τὰς θείας Γραφάς). Again, Cyril observes, that the Spirit "energises and works for each one according to what is suitable, is present in the midst, sees the temper of each one, beholds his reasoning and his conscience – what we say and what we think."[19]

Mark the Hermit offers a similar exegesis of the Holy Spirit as Chrysostom, particularly regarding its unity in diversity and the necessity for being deemed worthy to receive it. Mark writes:

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15 John Chrysostom, *Homily 4 On Acts*, 2, PG 60, 44: Ὅρα δὲ καὶ ἐκείνους πρῶτον δειχθέντας ἀξίους, καὶ τότε Πνεύματος καταξιωθέντας οἷον ὥσπερ ὁ Δαβίδ.

16 John Chrysostom, *Homily 4 On Acts*, 2, PG 60, 44: μαρτυρηθεὶς ἀγαθὸς εἶναι τότε τὸ Πνεῦμα ἔλαβον.

17 John Chrysostom, *Homily 4 On Acts*, 2, PG 60, 45: Ἐκεῖνος γὰρ ὅτε ἔδει ἑτέρους γενέσθαι πνευματικοὺς, ἡλλατοῦτο αὐτός.

18 Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis 16*, PG 33, 933A: ἀλλὰ τῇ τῶν ὑποδεχομένων κατασκευῇ συμπεριφερόμενος, ἑκάστῳ τὸ πρόσφορον γίνεται. Οὕτω καὶ τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, ἓν ὂν μονοειδὲς καὶ ἀδιαίρετον, ἑκάστῳ διαιρεῖ τὴν χάριν καθὼς βούλεται.

19 Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis 16*, PG 33, 948C: Ἑκάστῳ προσφόρως ἐνεργεῖ· καὶ μέσον παρὸν, βλέπει ἑκάστου τὸν τρόπον, βλέπει καὶ τὸν λογισμὸν, καὶ τὴν συνείδησιν, καὶ τί λαλοῦμεν καὶ τί νοοῦμεν.

> […] but instead – believe, – according to the manner described, that the Holy Spirit is unvarying, unchanging, and all-powerful. He remains consistent through all his energies, retaining what He is, and to each person, He bestows salvific means in a divine manner according to their needs. We are each illumined in proportion to which we remove our passions, that darken us. Likewise, to the extent to which we love these passions and engage with them, we remain in darkness.[20]

Furthermore, he writes:

> When you hear the Holy Scriptures state that he will award each person according to their works (Matt. 16: 27), this means that the works alone do not merit the Kingdom or Hell. Instead, rewards are given to each person only through Christ. Moreover, He is not bound by contract like a dealer, but as our Creator and Redeemer.[21]

In the last sentences Mark very eloquently accentuates the ultimate freedom of God, highlighting that He is not bound by any set rules, or compulsion to give rewards in proportion to works, as in a pagan framework. Of course, God will always love us and grant us rewards we do not deserve, transcending our logic. For those of us accustomed to the logic of mercantile capitalism, this way thinking is often beyond comprehension.

Similarly, Macarius-Symeon continues to explore the interrelationship between preparedness and God's grace. There is a connection between God's grace, our conversion, and our ability to combat evil. In his *Sermon* 23, the author writes:

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20 Mark the Hermit, *Opusculum 2*, PG 65, 110, 945C–D: Ὅταν δὴ οὖν ἀκούσεις τῆς ἁγίας Γραφῆς λεγούσης περὶ τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος ὅτι «ἐκάθισεν ἑφ᾽ ἕνα ἕκαστον τῶν ἀποστόλων (Πραξ. 2,3) ἢ ὅτι ἐφήλατο ἐπὶ τὸν προφήτην, ἢ ἐνεργεῖ, ἢ λυπεῖται, ἢ σβένηται, ἢ παραξύνεται· καὶ πάλιν, τοὺς μὲν ἀπαρχὴν ἔχοντας· τοὺς δὲ, πλήρεις Πνεύματος· ἁγίου, μὴ τομὴν, ἢ ἀλλοίωσίν τινα ἐννοήσῃς ἐπί τοῦ Πνεύματος· ἀλλὰ πίστευε, καθ᾽ ὅν προειρήκαμεν τρόπον ἄτρεπτον καὶ ἀναλλοίωτον παντοδύναμον, δ᾽ ὅν ἐν ταῖς ἐνεργίας καὶ μένει ὅ ἐστι, καὶ ἑκάστῳ τὸ δέον ἀποσώζει θεοπρεπῶς. Αὐτὸ μὲν γὰρ ἡλίου δίκην ἐπὶ τοὺς βαπτισθέντες, ἐκκέχηται, τελείως. Ἕκαστος δὲ ἡμῶν, καθ᾽ ὅν ἂν τὰ ἐπισκοτοῦντα πάθη μισήσας, περιαρῇ, ἀναλόγως φωτίζεταιδ καθ᾽ ὃ δὲ ἂν ἀγαπῶν αὐτὰ διαλογίζηται, ὁμοίως σκοτίζεται.

21 Mark the Hermit, *Opusculum* 2, 21, PG 65, 933B: Ὅταν ἀκούσῃς τῆς Γραφῆς λεγούσης, ὅτι ἀποδώσει ἑκάστῳ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα λέγει γεένης ἢ βασιλείας ἀντάξιαδ ἀλλδ ἔργα τῆς ἐαυτοῦ ἀπιστίας ἤ πίστεως, ἃ Χριστὸς ἀποδίδωσιν ἑκαστῳ, οὐκ ὡς συναλλάκτης πραγμάτων, ἀλλ᾽ ὡςΘεὸς κτίστης, καὶ ἀγοραστὴς ἡμῶν.

> No one is automatically worthy to partake in the values of grace, the gifts of the Spirit, and in the heavenly gifts of God, unless they first exercise their nous by cultivating good thoughts, carefully following the commandments, and placing complete trust in God. Only then are they worthy to receive grace and the heavenly weapons of the Spirit. With great certainty, they gain a reputation for fighting against the spirit of evil, remaining in harmony and united with the gift of God's grace, becoming an ally and a co-fighter in the war against the evil. Through all pain, contests, and trials in this battle, they endure. When the victory against the enemy, achieved through virtues, is at hand, we will be found worthy of the divine, heavenly, honorable, glorified and spiritual King, strengthened in the war of teaching and edification.[22]

The Holy Spirit can be associated with light and fire, as these are powerful symbols that convey unpredictability or freedom – an essential characteristic of the Holy Spirit. These symbols have been utilised by many theologians, including Symeon the New Theologian. Symeon fully acknowledges the difficulty and challenge of living in God. Thus the images of fire and light, rooted in biblical literature, serve as mediums *par excellence* for expressing these truths. Referring to 1 Thess 5:19, Symeon observes:

> Paul exhorts us, "do not quench the Spirit." Having said this, the goal of the passage is not to highlight the ignorance. For, when he is saying, "do not quench the lamp," he is not commenting on the light that has already been extinguished, but rather on the one that is already burning and shining. That applies to those who are already bearing it.[23]

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22 Macarius-Symeon, *Sermon* 23, 125: τὰ ἀξιώματα τῆς χάριτος καὶ τῆς δωρεᾶς τοῦ πνεύματος καὶ τὰ οὐράνια παρὰ θεοῦ δόματα οὐδεὶς καταξιοῦται εὐθὺς λαμβάνειν, ἐὰν μὴ πρότερον ἐγγυμνάζηται διὰ παντὸς ὁ νοῦς τῇ τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἐννοιῶν μελέτῃ καὶ τῇ τῶν ἁγίων ἐντολῶν προσοχῇ καὶ τῇ πρὸς θεὸν πεποιθήσει, καὶ οὕτω καταξιωθῇ χάριτος καὶ λάβῃ οὐράνιον ὅπλον (αὐτὸ τὸ πνεῦμα) καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ μεγάλως εὐδοκιμήσῃ κατὰ τῶν πνευμάτων «τῆς πονηρίας»· ἀγωνιζόμενος, καὶ συμφωνῶν καὶ συνενούμενος τῇ δοθείσῃ αὐτῷ παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ χάριτι καὶ τῷ οὐρανίῳ ὅπλῳ σύμμαχος καὶ συμπολεμιστὴς κατὰ τῆς κακίας διὰ παντὸς γεγονὼς καὶ τροπωσάμενος διὰ πολλῶν πόνων καὶ ἀγώνων καὶ δοκιμασιῶν τὸν «πρὸς τὰ πνευματικὰ τῆς πονηρίας» πόλεμον. καὶ ὅτε τὴν νίκην ἄρηται κατὰ τῶν ἐχθρῶν, τότε ἀξιωμάτων θείων καὶ ἐπουρανίων καὶ τιμῶν ἐνδόξων καὶ πνευματικῶν παρὰ τῷ ἐπουρανίῳ βασιλεῖ τυχεῖν καταξιοῦται, δυνάμενος οὗτος καὶ ἑτέρους λοιπὸν καταρτίζειν καὶ διδάσκειν πόλεμον. There are other patristic sources where the link between human worthiness (conscience) and good acts and Gods action and grace is made; see Ginter 1995.

23 Symeon the New Theologian, *Oration* 5, *Φιλοκαλία τῶν ἱερῶν νηπτικῶν* 19B, 210: Εἶτα φασί· "Τό Πνεῦμα μή σβέννυτε" ὁ Παῦλος διακελεύεται. Καί τοῦτο λέγοντες, τόν σκοπόν τῶν λεγομένων μή ἐπιστάμενοι, τήν ἑαυτῶν ἄγνοιαν ἐμφανίζουσιν· ὁ γάρ λέγων τινί· "Μή σβέσῃς, φησί, τήν

As we see, Symeon continues the tradition by emphasising the necessity of self-reflection and penance for the ability "to see" through the Holy Spirit. Essentially, Symeon is urging us never to give up on life, regardless of the circumstances. In both Symeon and Mark, we observe an extraordinary mystical transcendentalism, where categories of freedom and life transcend any human classifications.

Remaking of Oneself through the Holy Spirit

In addition to this, there is essentially a reversal in the movement of the Holy Spirit. Just as the Spirit comes and fills everything, the human person must move beyond its own egoistic bodily desires and selfish spirit to allow the Spirit to come and fill its being. This clearly does not mean a reversal or destruction of the person involved, but rather that it must be liberated from the imagery and negativity that could hinder healing and the work of the Holy Spirit. The challenge, however, lies in understanding what it means to be "liberated" in this way.

The key point here to recognise that one's attachments can be an obstacle to "seeing" God's work and his Holy Spirit. One cannot limit the vision of the Holy Spirit through the lens of personal biases. Chrysostom, in another passage, observes how important salvific figures remained humble. David, for example, had a simple and pure faith, and did not change in spirit from being a humble shepherd even after having received his victory and "trophy" (τρόπαιον). His faith was simple (here γυμνὴ might be also translated as "naked," not "simple," since we are not speaking of the intellectual notion of simple faith) and absolute. Nudity signifies not being covered by the clothes of subjectivity. Samuel (1 Sam 3:3) and Elisha (1 Kings 19:21) are further examples of individuals who remained humble. Importantly, Moses humbled himself to the tribulations of leading people for forty years (δημαγωγίας ἀπτόμενον, Exodus 2:11). The key point is that they left everything behind. They had to leave their preconceived notions behind in order to leave room

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λαμπάδα", οὐ περί τῆς ἤδη ἐσβεσμένης αὐτῷ πάντως λέγει, ἀλλά περί τῆς ἔτι καιομένης καί ἀστράπτον ἐχούσης τό φῶς. Ἀλλά γάρ αὖθις πρός αὐτούς ὧδε ἀνθυποφέρομεν. Similarly, Cyril of Jerusalem in his *Catechesis 17* (PG 33, 988A) writes: "They partook of the fire, not the burning fire but the fire which saves, purifying the thorn of our sins, brightening our soul" (Πυρὸς μετέλαβον, οὐ καταφλεκτικοῦ, ἀλλά σωτηριώδους, πυρὸς, ἀφανίζοντος μὲν ἀκάνθους ἁμαρτιῶν, λαμπρύνοντος δὲ τὴν ψυχήν).

for the reinterpretation through the Holy Spirit: "All this happened, after which everything became clear. Since they all endured this, they partook of the Spirit, as their virtue had been revealed.[24]"

The Communal Aspect of the Work of the Holy Spirit

Chrysostom describes the house of the Pentecost as the world itself, with the Spirit rushing in, "smashing everything" in its way, so to speak. In other words, all interpretations and conceptions are shattered in order to make way for new understandings based on Christ. To perceive and accept this, one must have a humble disposition. Those who are unprepared see the apostles as drunk, while those who know better, recognise that, in this seemingly illogical situation, there lies the "most logical of all." "Look at their piety – see how they avoid hasty judgement and remain perplexed instead, while the others judged them as drunk."[25] A person who is open and free form their own preconceptions and egoistic predispositions remains open to receive suggestions, without making hasty judgements. Those who are not liberated, on the other hand, tend to be immediately judgmental. Likewise, in any exegetical interpretation, we cannot simply adopt the immediate and obvious meaning; rather, we must allow for a healthy sense of perplexity.

The Holy Spirit essentially breaks down preconceived social and communal barriers, as it reveals new possibilities for the individual to serve within the community and for the community to work through the individual. This presents an alternative to the hierarchical model of the community found, for example, in some Fathers. Such is the afore-mentioned Mark the Hermit, in whose work, in contrast to Chrysostom, there exists a rigid mystical topography that dictates how we approach and understand the mysteries in relation to communal experience: "Moses the Great, standing outside the solidified hosts of his tent, symbolises perception and thought beyond the visible. After having bowed to God, he enters into the place of darkness of human knowledge and speech, where he stands, accomplishing the divine rites."[26]

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24 John Chrysostom, *Homily 4 On Acts*, 2, PG 60, 44: Ὅτε δὲ ὕυτω συνέβαινε, καὶ ἐκ τῶν μετὰ ταῦτα δῆλον καὶ γὰρ καὶ οὗτοι πάντα εἴασαν τὰ αὐτῶν. Διὰ τοῦτο τότε τὸ Πνεῦμα λαμβάνουσιν, ὅτε τὴν οἰκείαν ἀρετὴν ἐπεδείξαντο.

25 John Chrysostom, *Homily 4 On Acts*, 2, PG 60, 45: Ὁρᾷς τὴν τούτων εὐλάβειαν, καὶ πῶς οὐκ εὐθέως ἀποφαίνονται ἀλλ᾽ ἐν ἀπορίᾳ εἰσίν λέγοντες; Ἐκεῖνοι δὲ οἱ ἀγνώμενος ἀποφαίνονται ὅτι Γλεύκους εἰσὶ μεμεστωμένοι.

26 Mark the Hermit, *Opusculum VI*, 10, PG 65, 1057C: Μωσῆς ὁ Μέγας ἔξω τῆς παρεμβολῆς πηξάμενος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ σκηνὴν, τοῦτ᾽ ἔστι τὴν γνώμην καὶ τὴν διάνοιαν ἱδρυσάμενος ἔξω τῶν

The diversity of gifts and their relationship to the community is a theme explored elsewhere in Scriptures as well. In 1 Corinthians 12:4–11, Paul exposes his theology of the diversity of gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit. He writes that, through the Spirit, various gifts are given "to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individuality as he wills" (1 Cor 12:10–11). The gifts and the work of the Holy Spirit must always be understood in relation to the community and its needs. The individual's gifts serve the community, just as the community, in turn, gives context and meaning to the individual's gifts.

The theme of the community as the ultimate authority for interpretation and discernment is evident in various biblical contexts. A striking example is found in the account in Nehemiah, where after a period of crisis, the people needed to relearn and understand the Law. In response, Ezra brought out the book of the Law before the assembly, and the Levites assisted by explaining its meaning. This process involved an extended period of reading and explanation before the gathered people (Neh 8). The Law was both received and reinterpreted in a communal setting.

Here, the emphasis is not on achieving victory in intellectual debates. The ability to perceive truth transcends mere intellectual argumentation, as seen in the continuation of the passage quoted above: "They did not go forth to argue with the Pharaoh, but to wrestle with the devil."[27] Victory in a syllogistic contest is not essential, even if that victory upholds an intellectually valid truth. What truly matters is the defeat of evil. Here, the central idea is that, paradoxically, there is no guarantee that a logical and truthful conclusion is reached solely through logical and truthful arguments. For modern science, this perspective may seem unusual, since our contemporary understanding assumes that arguments and conclusions are decisively true if the method and premises are correct. However, evil can "hide" within various concepts, even those that appear "logical" or "rational" at first glance, and in doing so, it can disrupt the community.

The Holy Spirit has the ability to discern what is truly useful and truthful for the community. No individual holds the ultimate authority. In this

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ὁρωμένων, προσκυνεῖν τὸν θεὸν ἄρχεται, καὶ εἰς τὸν γνόφον εἰσελθὼν τὸν ἀηδῆ καὶ ἄϋλον τῆς γνώσεως τόπον, ἐκεῖ μένει τελούμενος τὰς ἱερωτάτας τελετάς.

27 John Chrysostom, *Homily 4 On Acts*, 2, PG 60, 45: Οὐ γὰρ τῷ Φαραὼ διαλεξόμενοι ἀπήεσαν, ἀλλὰ τῷ διαβόλῳ παλαίσοντες.

context, Chrysostom's criticisms of the Apostles Peter and Paul are particularly striking. Chrysostom navigates a delicate balance with Peter, alternatively praising him and then humbling him to the extreme[28]. This, however, is not merely a rhetorical device but directly aligns with the agenda at hand. In other words, no one can claim the absolute authority over truth indefinitely; even Peter, the crown of the apostles, can be made a complete fool. Thus, Chrysostom writes:

> Peter, standing among the eleven, raises his voice and speaks to them. Do you not see, even here, this attentiveness and a newfound courage with which he proclaims these things? They were surprised and amazed, but is it not also a wonder, that he, an essentially uneducated and simple man, was granted such a powerful voice among these people![29]

Regardless of the situation, Peter can just as easily fall into the deepest depths of incomprehension. The same holds true for Paul; even he did not attain knowledge immediately. The fact that Chrysostom refers to Peter as "dumb" speaks volumes in itself. Furthermore, we read: "You see Paul; not even he received knowledge immediately, but only after it was made manifest that he was good."[30]

Interestingly, a similar statement appears in the first homily of the same commentary on Acts: "So with Paul, the grace did not come immediately, but after three days in between, and during these days he was blind, washed and readied by fear.[31]" Clearly, these criticisms are not incidental, but are systematically aligned with Chrysostom's overarching concern for the community. Regardless of any situation, the Holy Spirit has the power to change people and circumstances at will. Chrysostom exclaims:

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28 For Chrysostom's insights and treatment of Paul and Peter, see Verheyden 2023. Perhaps Verheyden concentrates too much on the rhetorical perspective. The theology here is more complex.

29 John Chrysostom, *Homily 4 On Acts*, 3, PG 60, 46: Σταθεὶς δὲ ὁ Πέτρος σὺν τοῖς ἕνδεκα, ἐπῆρε τὴν φωνὴν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἀπεφθέγξατο αὐτοῖς. Ὁρᾷς ἐκεῖ τὴν κηδεμονίαν, ἐνταῦθα δὲ τὴν ἀνδρείαν. Εἰ γὰρ ἐθαύμαζον, εἰ γὰρ ἐξεπλήττοντο, οὐχὶ καὶ οὕτω θαυμαστὸν ἦν, τὸ δυνηθῆναι μεταξὺ τοσούτων ῥῆξαι φωνὴν ἄνθρωπον ἀγράμματον καὶ ἰδιώτην.

30 John Chrysostom, *Homily 4 On Acts*, 2, PG 60, 44: Οὕτω καὶ Σαοὺλ πρότερον μαρτυρηθεὶς ἀγαθὸς εἶναι, τότε τὸ Πνεῦμα ἔλαβον.

31 John Chrysostom, *Homily 1 On Acts*, 2, PG 60, 22: Οὕτω καὶ ἐπὶ Παύλου· οὐκ εὐθέως ἡ χάρις ἦλθεν, ἀλλὰ τρεῖς ἡμέραι ἐγένοντο μεταξὺ, ἐν αἷς ἦν τυφλὸς, ὑπὸ τοῦ φόβου σμηχόμενος καὶ προπαρασκευαζόμενος.

> For wherever the Spirit is present, he transforms and elevates all that is earthly. He turns men of clay into men of gold. Observe Peter now – the once timid and unintelligent one, the fearful coward whom Christ Himself rebuked, saying: "Are you also still without understanding?" (Mt 15:12). Even more astonishing after his extraordinary confession, he was still called Satan (Mt 16:23). Consider the unanimity of the Apostles! They gave Peter the opportunity to speak. They remained silent because it was not necessary for all to speak. Peter, lifting his voice loudly, addressed them with great courage. This is what truly means to be a spiritual man.[32]

Chrysostom's dynamic view of the Holy Spirit is crucial, especially in contexts where there is a risk of perceiving the Spirit in more static terms, for example, in relation to Chrismation.[33] For Chrysostom, baptismal terms such

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32 John Chrysostom, *Homily 4 On Acts,* 3, PG 60, 46: Τῇ γὰρ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ Πνεύματος ἤδη μετεσκευάσθησαν, καὶ ἀνώτεροι τῶν σωματικῶν πάντων ὑπῆρχον. Ἔνθα δὲ ἂν παραγένηται τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, χρυσοῦς ἀντὶ πηλίνων ἐργάζεται. Ὅρα μοι λοιπὸν τὸν Πέτρον, καὶ ἐξέταζε τὸν δειλὸν, τὸν ἀσύνετον, καθάπερ ὁ Χριστός φησιν· Ἀκμὴν καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀσύνετοί ἐστε· τὸν μετὰ τὴν ὁμολογίαν ἐκείνην τὴν θαυμαστὴν Σατᾶν κληθέντα. Σκόπει δὲ καὶ τῶν ἀποστόλων τὴν ὁμόνοιαν. Αὐτοὶ παραχωροῦσιν αὐτῷ τῆς δημηγορίας· οὐ γὰρ ἔδει πάντας φθέγγεσθαι. Καὶ ἐπῆρε, φησὶ, τὴν φωνὴν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἀπεφθέγξατο αὐτοῖς μετὰ πολλῆς τῆς παῤῥησίας. Τοιοῦτόν ἐστιν ἄνδρα εἶναι πνευματικόν.

Chrysostom cannot be accused of any anti-intellectualism. His references against pagan philosophers and others, must be seen in the context of their "limiting freedom" by their own subjective and closed intellectual systems. He writes (John Chrysostom, *Homily 4 On Acts,* 3, PG 60, 47): "And imagine, they battled their armed adversaries with naked bodies, against rulers who had power against them – as inexperienced, without skills with the tongue, and especially well-disposed with ordinary means against magicians, against wanderers in error, against sophists, against rhetors, against the multitude of philosophers, who had become rotted in the Academy, against the Peripatetics, confronting all and fighting them" (Καὶ τὸ θαυμαστὸν, ὅτι γυμνῷ τῷ σώματι παρετάτοντο πρὸς ὡπλισμένους, πρός ἄρχοντας κατὰ αὐτῶν ἔχοντας ἐξουσίαν, ἄπειροι, ἄγλωττοι, καὶ ἰδιοτικώτερον διακείμενοι, πρὸς γόητας, πρὸς πλάνους, πρὸς σοφιστῶν, πρὸς ῥητόρων, πρὸς φιλοσόφων πλῆθος, τῶν κατασαπέντων ἐν Ακαδημίᾳ καὶ Περιπάτεις, ἐνίσταντό τε καὶ ἀπεμάχοντο).

A similar idea is present in Cyril of Jerusalem's *Catechesis 17* (PG 33, 988C), where the Holy Spirit supersedes all the pagans because it offers knowledge in an immediate and objective way. He writes: "The Holy Spirit however, at once taught them many languages which until then they never knew" (Τὸ δὲ Πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἅμα διδάσκει πολλάς γλώσσας ἅσπερ ἐν παντὶ τῷ χρόνῳ ἐκείνοι οὐκ οἴδασι).

33 In a discussion on Chrismation and Baptism, in the section of his work *The Seal of the Spirit*, Lampe attempts to draw a bridge between the simultaneously proactive and static Holy Spirit (static in the sense of always present, "as life"). The terms 'seal' and 'chrismation' are viewed with suspicion by him, which we can understand as a natural consequence of the inability to liberate oneself, in light of the inherent 'freedom' of the Holy Spirit emphasised by the patristic tradition. However, Lampe rightly concludes that the Holy Spirit is not an unconditional gift, but rather is linked to a longer process of spiritual and dynamic growth. See Lampe 1967, 316.

as 'Seal,' 'Chrismation,' 'Fountain,' and even 'Paraclete,' must always to be understood within the ongoing, transformative work of Christ and the incarnation. The theology of openness and awe that we encounter in Chrysostom is also reflected in the baptismal service, where we read: "Open the eyes of his (or: her) mind, so that the illumination (φωτισμόν) of your Gospel may shine within him (or: her)."[34] Interestingly, this passage is not explicitly linked to the Holy Spirit; rather, the prayer is addressed to the Father or the Son.

In other Fathers of the Church, the hermeneutics of freedom and unity, which we have so vividly observed in the Pneumatological perspective, can also be linked to a Christological dimension. For Maximus the Confessor, Christ is the key to understanding. Just as the Holy Spirit adapts to each person's capacity to perceive and be united with Him, Christ too is present everywhere and reveals Himself according to one's ability to receive Him.[35] Origen also presents a Christological perspective on unity in freedom, with the emphasis of the connection of the Spirit to love. Knowledge in love is fundamentally different from knowledge acquired by reason alone. Belief does not automatically produce love. Similarly, Maximus the Confessor underscores the relationship between the preparation and capacity of the believer and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. [36] The Spirit's *charismata* extend beyond rational knowledge; they are deeply rooted in love.[37]

Conclusion

In my rather brief commentary on Chrysostom's reflections regarding the book of Acts and the Pentecost, we can offer some conclusions with exegetical implications. First and foremost, Chrysostom presents an alternative to moral and exegetical relativism. While he acknowledges the work of the Holy Spirit

34 Ἅγιον βάπτισμα 2008, 17.

35 Regarding Maximus the Confessor, Salés (2018) makes the correct observation about Christ being the hermeneutical key for understanding everything.

36 Maximus the Confessor, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 29, PG 90, 365A: Εἰ τοίνυν κατὰ τὸ μέτρον τῆς ἑκάστῳ πίστεως δίδοται ἡ φανέρωσις τοῦ Πνεύματος, ἐν τῇ μετοχῇ τοῦ τοιοῦδε χαρίσματος.

37 Maximus the Confessor, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 29, PG 90, 365B: Οὐκοῦν ὥσπερ ὁ μὲν λαμβάνει λόγον σοφίας, ὁ δὲ, λόγον γνώσεως, ἕτερος δὲ πίστεως, καὶ ἄλλος ἄλλο [...] οὕτως ὅ μὲν δέχεσθαι διὰ τοῦ Πνεύματος χάρισμα τῆς τελείας καὶ ἀμέσου πρὸς Θεὸν, καὶ μηδὲν ἐχούσης ὑλικὸν ἀγάπης, κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως. ἕτερος δὲ διὰ τοῦ αὐτοῦ Πνεύματος, τῆς τελείας πρὸς τὸν πλησίον ἀγάπης, χάρισμα, καὶ ἄλλος ἄλλο τι κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ Πνεῦμα, ὡς ἔφην, ἔχοντος ἕκαστου ἐνεργούμενος τὸ οἰκεῖον χάρισμα.

in all things and everywhere, this freedom does not equate to moral, spiritual, or exegetical relativism. The reason for this is clear: the Holy Spirit is anchored in the unity of Christ, and, more specifically, in the community of God. More importantly, the freedom of the Holy Spirit is not granted automatically; rather, it is received only by those who are worthy. This principle carries serious exegetical implications. However, Chrysostom is surprisingly not alone in this concern. Even more fascinatingly, the emphasis on action over mere theory is also found in pagan philosophy, particularly in Aristotle.[38]

The Scriptures can be understood in many ways, but interpreting them through the Holy Spirit offers a different perspective – one that is not solely dependent on the truthfulness of intellectual arguments.[39] This is especially important to recognise in contemporary Orthodox theology and exegesis, where there is arguably a lack of exegetical imagination, which in turn affects the ability to engage with contemporary challenges in a theological way. For theology to remain truthful to its essence, it cannot simply descend into either liberal or conservative rationalisms. Instead, it must remain open, as Chrysostom understood, through the Holy Spirit.

Interpretation and the activity of the Holy Spirit yield "knowledge," but paradoxically, this knowledge is always relative, since there is no absolute goal, we can attain in God. This concept mirrors science, which is also relative in its nature. While science only offers "forms," theology offers substance, which is linked to what is truly beneficial for both individual and the ecclesial communion, rooted in human ontological being. By not being limited to human reason or constructions, yet expressing them in their fullness, the Holy Spirit transcends wisdom of any given time. This gives us a new perspective

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38 In Nicomachean ethics, Aristotle mentions people resorting (καταφεύγοντες) to discussions (λόγον) about virtue, instead of carrying out acts of virtue, implying that this philosophising alone will suffice to transform them into good men. Comparable to those are the sick, who take the advice of the doctors, but never actually carry out their orders. In this way, the soul will not be healed, just as in the former case the body will not be healed (ὥσπερ οὖν οὐδ᾽ ἐκεῖνοι εὖ ἕξουσι τὸ σῶμα οὕτο θεραπευόμενοι, οὐδ᾽ οὕτοι τὴν ψυχὴν, οὕτω φιλοσοφοῦντες) See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1105b, 11–18; II 4–5, 29.

39 We are reminded of Gregory of Nazianzus, who, for example, in his fourth theological oration, claims to have overthrown the arguments of his opponents by the power of the Spirit. The message here is that the Holy Spirit overthrows the inadequate use of the Scriptures. Arguments, facts or other features within the Bible do not suffice on their own to "understand the Bible." See Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 30, PG 36, 104C. Ἐπειδή σοι τὰς μὲν ἐκ τῶν λογισμῶν στροφὰς καὶ πλοκὰς ἱκανῶς διεσείσαμεν τῇ δυνάμει τοῦ πνεύματος, τὰς δὲ παρὰ τῶν θείων γραφῶν ἐνστάσεις τε καὶ ἀντιθέσεις […].

of the word "development" both in an economical and any other possible sense. Not everything deemed as development is necessarily "positive;" there is no automatic, linear progression, be it economical, capitalist, or socialist, toward some better form. In fact, at any given moment of time, the fullness was available. As Paul writes: "God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God" (1 Cor 2:10).

Just as Chrysostom, so too other Fathers of the Church, affirm the central thesis that it is not possible to gain the Holy Spirit or acquire the ability to interpret Scripture solely through theoretical abilities. Virtue is essential in this process. This is not an expression of anti-intellectualism or anti-rationalism, but rather a recognition of the inherent limitations of the human person. It underscores that we cannot raise ourselves to God or the Holy Spirit through our own abilities alone. Rather, this view acknowledges the reality of God's grace and descent.[40] This line of thought stands in stark contrast to the contemporary emphasis on the individual's ability to achieve anything without God, relying solely on self-sufficiency and human effort.

Chrysostom, just like the other Fathers of the Church, emphasises the "openness" to God and his grace. In this context, the Holy Spirit offers content. For example, Cyril of Jerusalem echoes this in his *Catechesis 17*:

> If you believe, you will not only receive remission of sins, but even things surpassing human power; you will be made worthy of the grace of prophetic power. You will receive this grace, according to your capacity, not according to what I say. The Paraclete will care for you as for his own soldier, protecting you.[41]

Cyril of Jerusalem emphasises an important aspect of the Holy Spirit's work when he writes: "Not only does He take away ignorance, but He awards knowledge."[42] Paradoxically the more one cooperates with God, the freer is

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40 For example, Mark the Hermit observes in his *Opusculum* 1, 88, PG 65, 916C: "Read the words of Scripture through practice, not by lofty words, being puffed up by the height of your theoretical explanations" (Τῆς Γραφῆς τὰ ῥήματα διὰ πράξεων ἀναγίνωσκε, καὶ μὴ πλατυλόγει, ἐπὶ ψιλοῖς τοῖς νοήμασι εἰκῆ φυσιούμενος).

41 Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis 17*, 1012A: Ἐὰν πιστεύσῃς, οὐ μόνον λαμβάνεις ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν, ἀλλὰ ποιεῖς καὶ τὰ ὑπὲρ ἄνθρωπον· γένοιτο δὲ σε ἄξιον εἶναι καὶ προφητικοῦ χαρίσματος. Λαμβάνεις γὰρ τοσοῦτον, τῆς χάριτος, ὅσον χωρεῖς, καὶ οὐχ ὅσον ἐγώ λέγω. Παραμένει σοι διὰ παντὸς ὁ φρουρὸς ὁ Παράκλητος· περὶ σοῦ μεριμνᾷ ὥσπερ ἰδίου στρατιῶτου."

42 Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis 16*, 944A: πῶς οὐ μόνον περιαρεῖ τὴν ἀγνωσίαν, ἀλλὰ καὶ γνῶσιν,

his or her exegesis. Structuring theological knowledge on subjective concepts dependent on causal and internal structures albeit self sufficient logical structures limits the freedom of exegesis and its potential to interact with the needs of creative theology.

ἐντίθησι.

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Rediscovering the Importance of the Theology of Language in the Contemporary Orthodox Discourse

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Abstract

Orthodox theology, starting with the post-Nicene Fathers, has firmly linked its development to ontological thought, on the basis of which dogmatic theology has been progressively defined and the understanding of the divine economy has been deepened. Ontology, however, presupposes an inseparable relationship with logic on the one hand, and with the theory of language on the other. Since the Middle Ages, the Christian West has given importance to the logical foundation of theology, reinterpreting its ontological foundations, while the theory of language, in its applications to theology, has followed its developments accordingly. Orthodox theology, on the other hand, has developed a theology of language that is functional to the ontological arguments that have recurred in dogmatic debates. A theology of language independent of ontology was never developed in the patristic era. Developments in Orthodox theology over the last two centuries, however, have highlighted the problem of the theological understanding of the linguistic fact, as a result of which, in the 20th century, there have been attempts to define a theology of language. The recovery and development of this reflection sheds light on several problems that contemporary Orthodoxy is called to face, from the crisis of ontology that is rampant not only in secular thought but also in worldview and contemporary customs, to the ecclesiological nominalism that emerges in the background of the ecclesiastical diatribes of the present time.

Keywords: theology of language, onomatodox debate.

Ongoing Scenarios

Reflection on language played a key role in shaping the cultural profile of the 20th century. At the same time, a renewed interest in the issue of language has been raised in Orthodox theology, particularly in early 20th century Russian theology. Theological reflection in this field, however, did not register any subsequent systematic developments, nor did it occupy a special place in subsequent academic interests. This state of the art is possibly due to the fact that the Fathers did not produce a reflection specifically devoted to the nature of language, contrary to what they did in the fields of ontology and logic.

It is my intention to propose, in the following pages, a short reflection on the role of language in relation to some of the areas that are at the centre of the debate in contemporary Orthodox theology: from the theology of personhood to neo-patristics, from the challenges of trans-humanist secularism to the problems of ecclesiology, from the advancing role of technology to the role of man in the preservation of the cosmos. The approach that I will follow will finally bring problems to light rather than suggest solutions, while emphasising the value that a theological reflection on the nature of language could cast new light on considering these thematic areas and the problems related to them.

Linguistic Perspectives in Contemporary Philosophy and Artificial Languages

Contemporary philosophy has been marked by the importance that the reflection on language has assumed in a wide variety of fields. From the developments of scientific linguistics fostered by De Saussure, Jakobson, and Chomsky, to philosophical speculation on the nature of language and its relation to Being pursued by philosophers such as Heidegger, Cassirer, and Jaspers,[1] not to mention the linguistic turn undertaken in the domains of philosophical hermeneutics and structuralism, which had repercussions in the most diverse domains of knowledge, the language-based paradigm has assumed a predominant position in orienting thought: "In both structuralism and hermeneutics, language is seen as an autonomous, suprapersonal entity capable of dominating speakers."[2]

1 See Robins 1967; Rorty 1992.

2 D'Agostini 1997, 140. According to this scholar it is possible to acknowledge four main paths in the linguistic thought of the last century: 1) the neo-Kantian, phenomenological-existential

The linguistic perspective in the 20th century has replaced metaphysics, reinterpreting the latter as both a theory of formal representation of concepts and a theory of the subject, which, by virtue of its inner life, cannot be reduced to the objective parameters of the physical world. This paradigm led to investigating the role of linguistic patterns in thinking processes, claiming that the epistemic foundation of thought relied on linguistic structures.

Nonetheless, the dominant epistemic position kept by the language began soon to be submitted to criticism. According to phenomenology, the suspension of the categorial comprehension of the reality, which is proper to the faculty of the intellect, also entails the suspension of language. The reflection on the pre-categorial and the pre-linguistic knowledge marked then the overcoming of the positivistic conception of the language according to its capability to fully encompass the reality.

Finally, we have to take a look at computer languages, which are showing the power of language in creating virtual realities in which all aspects of human life tend to be progressively incorporated. The digital revolution involves a qualitative upgrade of the utilisation of technology, which no longer consists in the transformation of the forces of nature, based on the analogy between natural energies and the work (ἔργον) that is exposed, but rather consists in the translation and definition into the machine language of the energy and the *ergon*. If we consider analogy as a natural mimetic principle, we may conclude that imitation is no longer natural and analogical, but rather a non-analogical and artificial representation relying on artificial languages handled by algorithms.

Nowadays, the so-called Artificial Intelligence (AI) exploits the manipulation of language through digital technologies and is oriented at an appropriative imitation that is meant to define new parameters for what should be conceived as real, no matter on what has been known as real or natural until now. The need to retranslate procedures and artefacts that were perfectly functional in their pre-digital form – such, for instance, as thermometers or kitchen balances – into digital languages is not only a matter originating in the economy of industrial production, but a matter of an evolution responding to the metaphysical need to duplicate the existing technologies with technologies controlled through artificial languages.

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and hermeneutic trend; 2) structuralism and poststructuralism; 3) the neo-positivistic, Popperian and post-positivistic epistemological trend; 4) the properly "analytic" current, with variants: philosophers of ideal and ordinary language, referentialists and anti-referentialists, constructionists and descriptivists, theorists of "dissolution" and "solution"; see D'Agostini 1997, 156.

Orthodox Theology and the Issue of Language

During the 20th century, Orthodox theology has been called at its turn to deal with the issue of language. What generated this interest is a concrete episode that gave life to a harsh controversy, the affair of the movement of the so-called "name-worshippers" (ὀνοματόδοξοι/ὀνοματολάτρες, имяславцы/имеславцы).[3] This movement began in 1907 at the Athonite monastery of St Panteleimon, the *Rossikon*, on the occasion of the publication of a book by the monk Hilarion Domratchev (1845–1916), titled *On the Mountains of the Caucasus* (*На горахъ Кавказа*). This book was an account of the eremitic life that its author led on the mountains of Abkhazia, while being focused on the Jesus Prayer: it was a report of ascetic life like many others, except for its claim to expose a "new and not yet revealed dogma," whose formulation is articulated as "the name of God is God Himself." This claim immediately met harsh criticism, but also the defence of devout supporters. The affair grew up until it resulted in its condemnation by the Holy Synod of Constantinople, and finally by the Russian Synod, as "onomatolatry," which led, in a belligerent *crescendo*, to the military deportation of the Onomatodox monks from the Rossikon in 1914.[4]

However, the theological protagonist in this affair was not its initiator, Fr Hilarion, who soon withdrew from the polemic and retired to hesychast life, but the Russian hieromonk Antoniy Boulatovich (1870–1919), who tried to provide this doctrine with a theological justification. Boulatovich spread his works in Russia, finding as interlocutors, among the others, Michail Novoselov and Pavel Florensky. By the former Boulatovich was invited to rethink the Onomatodox doctrine in the light of Palamite theology, transposing the distinction between essence and energies into the distinction between the Unnamed name (неименуемое имя), corresponding to the essence, and named names (именуемые имена), corresponding to the energies or attributes.[5]

Nonetheless, the problem of internal distinctions in the divine nature was not grasped by Boulatovich, who lacked a solid theological education, since he insisted on defending the original and principal Onomatodox viewpoint, stating that "in the named attributes we have the whole essence of

3 For the reconstruction of the onomatodox debate and its doctrinal implications see Nivière 2015. For the denominations of this movement, see pages 17–18.
4 Nivière 2015, 79–84.
5 Nivière 2015, 280.

God."[6] He also acknowledged a hypostatic value to the divine names, conceiving them at the same time as energies. In some ways this hypostatisation of the name of God is reminiscent of the more heterodox aspects of Russian sophiology.[7]

It was indeed in the circle of the last generation of Russian sophiologists where Onomatodox theories aroused interest, sympathy, and developments. Pavel Florensky, who also was among Boulatovich's interlocutors, wrote on the meaning of language on several occasions, pursuing a Neoplatonic linguistic approach. This recognised language as the expression of the idea, thus arriving at problematic formulations such as the affirmation of the "magical value of the word" or, in relation to the Onomatodox issue, such as the statement that "The divine name is God, but God is not the name."[8] Fr Sergei Bulgakov, in his turn, in the wake of the resonance that the controversy raised in Russia, felt the need to reflect on the nature of language in several of his writings, the most notable of which was the book *The Philosophy of Name and Verb*.[9]

The Issue of Language and the Theology of Personhood

It is remarkable to note that a debate on language involving theological themes had developments only in the context of Russian religious philosophy. It was raised in the pre-revolutionary period, continued scholarly in the diaspora, and received attention in contemporary scholarship mainly from Russian scholars. In contrast to other themes that have emerged in the theological debate during the 20th century, as for instance the theology of personhood, which received contributions from different areas of Orthodoxy, the linguistic issue has remained confined to one specific cultural area, very likely due to the controversy it caused. This aspect is reminiscent of the case of sophiology.[10] The main explanation comes perhaps from the fact that this

6 Nivière 2015, 280.

7 Plested 2022, 58–69.

8 Nivière 2015, 293. In the years 1920–1922 Florensky wrote a series of essays that he intended to collect in a volume titled *Мысль и язык* (*Thought and language*). This appeared, however, only posthumously in 1990. One of these essays was titled "The magical value of the word;" see Florensky 2003.

9 Bulgakov 1991.

10 Plested 2022, 13–23.

polemic and its developments failed to systematically return to the patristic tradition, and remained confined in the ambiguities of idealistic philosophy, since it was not aimed at a clear theological purpose, in contrast to what happened in the case of the theology of personhood.

The theological debate on personhood has not failed to focus on the Fathers, especially on the Cappadocians, as can be seen in the interpretations of the late Metropolitan of Pergamon, John (Zizioulas), and generated a comparative debate on the developments in the Byzantine and Latin traditions, arriving to the fruitful outcome of delineating the ecclesial being of man under the perspective of personhood.[11] By the way, the return to the Fathers acted not only as a mere methodological appeal, but entailed a general focus on personhood broadened to many aspects of the Orthodox tradition (ontology, ecclesiology etc.), approached far from abstract and systematic pretensions, but relying on the living ecclesial experience, of which the Fathers were interpreters.[12]

The theology of personhood responded in a certain way to the spirit of the time that predominated a century ago. That spirit was characterised by an anthropological vision based on collectivisation and the Promethean intoxication of the massive technological transformation of human life. In the face of the immanentist soteriology of the ideologies of collectivisation and the pan-economicist and productivist struggle of the industrial society, ignited by the clash of social forces in rivalry for the conquest of secular glorification and social hegemony, relying on the contrast between profit and salary, Orthodox theology has turned its gaze to the personal soteriology of the Gospel, whereby Christ did not come to serve the rights of groups, nor to save social classes, but human persons.[13]

Today, the collectivisation of social life is no longer the result of the atheism outlined by the ideological vision advocated by the outcomes of Hegelian dialectic, as in the early 20th century, according to its positivist or Marxist versions, but it is the product of the reversal of the relationship between man and technology. This relationship is firstly submitted to the correspondence between language and truth; consequently a theological reflection on the relational power of language is nowadays most welcome in order to under-

11 Russell 2003; Chiappetti 2021.

12 See my other paper "Neopatristic Synthesis between Unity and Identity in Orthodox Theology" in this same volume.

13 See Mounier 1989.

stand the challenges that are raised by secularism, on the one hand, and post-secular ideologies that appeal to the religious language, on the other. Both have shifted from the evangelical way that preaches the salvation of persons of good will in respect of their spiritual freedom, leading to a religious misunderstanding of salvation as a neo-Manichean division between people on the basis of ideologies, ethnicity, and genres.

Technology, Language, and Beauty

Technology, from being a tool available to men to fulfil the divine commandment to "work the ground" (Gen 2:5, 3:23), has become an instrument aimed at transforming man in the name of a purported prosperity to come. In recent decades, an epochal shift has emerged, leading from man transforming the world by means of technology to technology transforming man, challenging his innermost ontological self-comprehension by advocating trans-ontologies, which are the premise of trans-humanism and gender ideology.[14] Hence, we may perceive the importance of recovering the theological rationale of language in order to understand the epochal transformations of our time. We shall move from considering what kind of link subsists between technology and language.

Technology is pursuing of the commandment given to man in the beginning to take care, cultivate, and keep the Paradise of delights, a commandment that has maintained its validity even after the fall (Gen 3:23). The commandment to "tend and keep" the "garden of Eden" (Gen 2:15) enshrines both the role of technology and language. Technology is what changes the relation between words and things. Technology transforms things, while the word keeps them. By its transforming power technology brings things to being something else, and this is a prerogative of all of the living beings by virtue of their ability to transform things through their organs: jaws, fingers, lungs, stomach, physiological processes etc.

In Genesis 2:19, God brings all the animals to Adam to see what name he would give them. Adam's name-giving shows his synergic role in the work of God, by manifesting the proper identity of the species created by God through spoken words. Through names Adam manifests the technical skill

14 See Smyrnaios 2016; Mainoldi 2024.

of each animal and at the same time establishes his pastoral relationship with them, making them participants in the transformation of the world under his leadership as their name-giver and shepherd.

The cosmic function of the soul is to participate in this transformation: animated beings transform the created being of things, while God alone brings things from non-being into being, according to their predefined *logos*. Every technique has been given to living beings as imitation of the divine energies within creation. However, if all animals have their proper technical skill and their transforming power, man alone, by virtue of language, has the power to keep the being of things that are no longer or are not yet.

Technology, consequently, derives its ontological rationale and its ethical justification from its participation in the providential order that governs the cosmos, established according to the divine *logoi*. What keeps technology in the order of God's providential good, and guards the balance between word and technology, is *beauty*. Beauty is the energy of God that makes the *logos* of every individual being shine in the union of form and matter, according to its proprium, identity, and limits.

The Role of Language in the Contemporary Spiritual Crisis

Expressing beauty is consequent to the capability of maintaining the equilibrium between the word that preserves and the technology that transforms. The difficulty, if not the inability, that the current global technological civilisation encounters in expressing beauty in most contexts appears as one of the main symptoms of the ongoing spiritual crisis that features our time, whose ultimate cause can be identified in the loss of the role of beauty in harmonising the relationship between word and technology.[15]

The neglect of beauty as the ultimate goal of art and technology entails the removal of the notion of limit as an inescapable ontological condition. The spiritual and psychological attitude expressed by the culture and arts of our time consequently ignore the human responsibility to keep and wisely transform the world according to the divine mandate. This leads to concealing the beauty of natural models, which are the product of the divine Wisdom. The buzzwords of our time finally justify the removal of the notion of limit and natural order itself.[16]

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15 On the impact of technology on arts in current post-modern cultural trends see Rigopoulou 2024.
16 See also Stoyadinov 2024.

Ultimately, the current spiritual crisis is fostered by the distorted and seductive use of words, manifesting a misleading conception about the responsibility of man in keeping peace and equilibrium in the creation according to respect towards its natural beauty. The understanding of the truth of things can only be born out of truthful words, which only divine revelation and the guidance of the Holy Spirit can inspire in man.

Nevertheless, the current crisis does not only involve the loss of the paradigm of beauty in the realm of artistic creation and technological production, but also a subtle crisis of the *episteme*, marked by the demise of the worldview based on scientific knowledge on nature. Words are in fact no longer an instrument of the classical scientific logic, based on the principle that what is natural is objective and defines the reality on the basis of the knowledge of natural limits of beings and things. Logic is no longer used to describe the cosmos and to depict a scientific rationale of the immanent world, but rather is devoted to the abusive affirmation of a project of transforming the cosmos. The main focus of this is on the trans-humanist project.[17]

Delving into the Theological and Ontological Rationale of Language

The word is the manifestation of hypostatic relationships, through which the energies of the essence are directed according to the will of rational natures (where 'rational' means λογικός, that is endowed with speech). As the divine Word is the revelation of the love of the Father out of the mystery of His hypostasis without beginning, the uncreated *logoi* are the divine wills kept by the divine Logos, instantiating a hypostatic relationship between the Logos and all created beings. Accordingly, the divine *logoi* are the means of the relationship between God and all of the creatures, whose uncreated *logoi* are brought into being by the divine energies, which are the names of God – revealed in His operation *ad extra*. In rational creatures, words are the result of their being created in the image of God, and consequently they are the means of their hypostatic relationship with God and with all other beings. Finally, the spoken or written word constitutes the external dimension – both in form and matter – of the manifestation of the ontological relationship between those endowed

17 Gallaher 2019; Mainoldi 2024.

with speech and the divine *logoi.* This manifestation takes shape through linguistic morphology and the physical medium through which it is articulated.

Based on these assumptions, human speech manifests and creates relationships. The word owes its power not to its form or sound, but to the fact that it is relational. Divine creation proceeds in fact from the divine pronunciation of the words by which God establishes the *ousiai* of every created being, which are the uttered output of a bundle of unuttered *logoi*, as we can learn from St Maximus the Confessor.[18]

The Fathers and the Theology of Language

A thorough re-examination of the efforts made by Orthodox theologians during the last century around the issue of language that would also embrace patristic reflection on language from an in-depth theological perspective – and not merely a documentary or anthological one – has yet to be done.

The Fathers had no need to construct systematic reflections on the argumentative tools that they employed in creating their theological discourse, such as a theory of language or ontology. But this does not mean that the Fathers would not have had theorical insights into these fields, even if unsystematically, while exploiting words and concepts for the needs of their theological argumentation, especially with the purpose of apologetics.

The Fathers not only had no need to build a systematic theory of language and ontology, but on the contrary they understood the risk of such a task, since every theorisation outside of theological discourse would have led to a metaphysical understanding of the world independent of Revelation, and they would have headed back to the attempts made by philosophers of antiquity to build a rational, systematic, and auto-sufficient theory of the whole.[19] For the Fathers ontology did not constitute a structure of reality, and ontological language cannot by itself explain the structure of reality (as it is, for example, in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*). Nonetheless, ontology was a suitable language for describing the output of God's creative energies without exhausting the mystery of the creation as revelation of God's will.

18 See Valiavitcharska 2021, 374–377, 384.

19 For the Patristic and Byzantine discussions on the nature of the *logos* and on uttered/unuttered language see Panaccio 2017, 28–57; Valiavitcharska 2021.

Just as the Fathers used ontological concepts to deepen their understanding of the theological truth without being aimed at a systematic treatment of these concepts, so they did not develop a theology of language either, although they developed arguments based on the theological understanding of the role of language. The earliest steps of theology in the apostolic age moved forward from the tropological exegesis of the divine names as documented in the Scriptures.[20] Nothing less systematic can be conceived, but an in-depth analysis of the use of divine names in Scriptures shows evidence of a structured theological thought expressed through non-systematic narrative.

Speculative theology from Nicaea onward, entering into the golden age of patristics, intertwined ontology and theology of language, leaving aside the epistemological concern about these disciplines that were exploited as tools for the theological argumentation. The most important outcome of that trend was the theology of the divine names elaborated by the Cappadocian Fathers and Pseudo-Dionysius, as well as the theory of the *logoi* that was developed by Maximus the Confessor, developping on pseudo-Dionysian teaching.[21]

Apophaticism and the impossibility to speak out the divine mysteries, often emphasised as the flagship of Orthodox theology, should not make us forget the divine gift of the speech that enables theology to speak the truth and the liturgical word to be efficacious. Dionysius the Areopagite, after the most radical apophatic statement in which he affirmed that "no unity or trinity, no number or oneness, no fruitfulness, indeed, nothing that is or is known can proclaim that hiddenness beyond every mind and reason of the transcendent Godhead which transcends every being. There is no name for it nor expression." He also affirms that the possibility of truly speaking of the divine realities is guaranteed, being a gift from God: "So if what I have said is right and if, somehow, I have correctly understood and explicated something of the names of God, the work must be ascribed to the cause of all good things for having given me the words to speak and the power to use them well."[22]

Following Dionysius, Barlaam of Calabria sustained a radical apophatic vision, by distinguishing between knowing things and naming things, and assuming that apodictic knowledge is related to things and not to names. Accordingly, he excluded the possibility of an apodictic knowledge of God, assuming that nothing can be affirmed properly of God. In order to oppose to

20 Cullmann 1963; Dunn 1989.

21 Tollefsen 2008, 35–40, 68–81, 157–158.

22 De divinis nominibus, XIII, in Luibheid & Rorem 187, 129–130.

the extreme apophaticist position held by Barlaam, St Gregory Palamas reaffirmed the possibility of predicating the truth about God, acknowledging the ontological implication of language.[23]

Recalling that Barlaam's earliest writings were aimed at contrasting Scholastic-Thomistic gnoseology, which admitted the possibility of knowing God's essence,[24] we should focus on the historiographic assumption according to which Eastern theology is basically different from Western scholasticism due to its apophatic orientation in theological knowledge. This assumption has led to an overevaluation of apophaticism as the key of Eastern theology, fostering a misleading interpretation of language, due to the gnoseological perspective entailed by apophaticism.[25] At the light of the gnoseology based on negation, language is perceived as a sensible and exterior expression of the truth that basically hides it, being supposedly related to an inferior ontological level, a result that is reminiscent of Platonic idealism.

As a matter of fact, the Greek-speaking Fathers adopted a balanced approach to gnoseology grounded on both the apophatic and the cataphatic perspectives, relying on the distinction between *hypostasis*, *ousia*, and energies within God's nature. Gnoseology involved ontology and logics, and was developed through the exploitation of the terminology and the concepts inherited from the philosophical tradition, readapted to the need of outlining the experience of communion with the Triune God and the Incarnated Logos, disclosed in the Church living tradition.[26] Nevertheless the polarity between created and Uncreated, which Christian thought acquired from the Biblical revelation, required a new comprehensions of ontology as meontology – or, better said, hyperontology – resorting to apophatic logic, in order to escape onto-theology and adapting to the paradigm of a tri-personal principle, endowed with will, acting by love, and not according to cosmic necessity. This perspective also shaped the methodology of theological argumentation by encompassing the meta-logics of antinomies.[27] This development was possible

23 Fyrigos 2005, 82–90.

24 Meyendorff 1974, 76–77, 105.

25 For a historiographical focus and criticism on the hegemony of the apophaticist paradigm in contemporary Orthodox theology, see Kalaïtzidis 2012. For a critical stance on applying a panapophatic reading to the most emblematic author of the apophatic tradition, i.e. Pseudo-Dionysius, see Knepper 2014.

26 For the systematic and historiographic framing of these concepts see Tollefsen 2012.

27 For the antinomic character of the Eastern Patristic and Orthodox theological method, see Lossky 1957, 26, 46, 69, 77.

on the basis of the theology of language, since human is gifted of the possibility of rightly speech the truth, not on the basis of a correspondence between language and onto-noetic knowledge, but resorting to his being word-keeper as a consequence of his creation in the image of God.

The Three Ways of Circumscribing Reality through Words According to the Christian Worldview

The three ways of approaching the relationship between knowledge and theological truth can be referred to as the disciplines of ontology, logics, and theology of language. Even if these three ways, as disciplines, are grounded in the terminology and concepts elaborated in the philosophical tradition, they should be understood not as merely self-standing sets of structured knowledge, but as three approaches that allow to understand in different domains the relational and creative power of the word.[28]

In relation to the function of the word, ontology may be understood as the comprehension of the structure of the world as a product of the divine creative energies, which are the divine names, so that we may affirm that the words-energies reveal the reality spreading light on both its proper and differences and its unique cause. Logics, then, is the definition of the knowledge of the reality according to rules that express its permanent providential order. Finally, theology of language (which should be distinguished from the philosophy of language, which is a discipline that investigates the truth of enunciations) is the understanding, based on revelation, of words and names as uncreated outputs of the divine will, which manifest the creational power of this latter as the true cause of the whole reality.[29]

These three ways are intertwined but should be kept in their mutual distinction. While ontology and logics can have a non-theological development, in relation to the knowledge of the world, theology of language can be approached only according to the Trinitarian doctrine and Chalcedonian Christology, in order to avoid its reduction to logics or to philosophy of language. In

28 For the philosophical framing of this issue see Macquarrie 1979; Bulgakov 1991; Hallett 2011. Concerning theology of language see Bulgakov 1991; Breck 1996. We may add that while a vast literature on the names of God is available (see Alfeyev 2007, with bibliography), a proper reflection on the nature of language from an Orthodox theological perspective is still to be fully developed.
29 See Lycan 2008; Frede & Inwood (ed.) 2005, 1–13.

its relation to the other two ways, in fact, language constitutes the primordial element, from which the notion of being comes, predicated antinomically to God as super-being, and to created beings as subjected to the laws of necessity, which are to be investigated *a posteriori* by logics.

Relying on Trinitarian theology, language is understood as the means through which revelation allow man to learn the ineffable ways of God's acts of will and His operations. They emerge from the love of the Father, and through the mystery of the divine *ousia* and hypostatic *perichoresis* are directed *ad extra* by the Word of God. It is by virtue of the revealed word that the superontological distinctions in the divine nature – that is, between the three divine hypostases and between the divine *ousia* and the energies – can be affirmed, while the divine nature is always to be understood as ontologically simple. In the domain of Christology, the mystery of the Incarnation is antinomically uttered by the Chalcedonian formula via negative adverbs that define the Incarnation of the Logos in one hypostasis and two natures, but avoid expressing the mysterious mode of this union: "we confess […] one and the same Christ; Son, Lord, Only-begotten, made known [recognised] in two natures, unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably".[30]

Language is the expression of the will and creative power of God, through which He defined the archetypes of all beings as *logoi* in the divine Logos, before bringing them into being. While ontology and logics have a gnoseological purpose aimed at understanding, as far as it is possible for human intellect and language, the divine nature and its operation, the theology of language is not only related to the doctrine of creation by means of conceiving the divine acts of will as *logoi*, but also has major implications in liturgical theology and in ecclesiology, to which I will return later.

According to its essence, language must be approached not just as a tool for describing the dialectical structure of the reality and its ontological counterpart, but as the means by which human will turns into energy and through which man establishes his conditions of existence in the world, exerting his blessed dominion on the physical word (Gen 1:26; 2:15), and creating relations between persons and things. The theology of language helps to understand all of the wide implications of the centrality of the word in human existence, since language is not just a tool developed by human brain during the millennia of his biological evolution, as supposed by the theory of evolution, but is a gift consequent to his creation in the image of God.

30 Need 1996, 47.

Ancient idealistic philosophy tried to construct a metaphysics of the word as manifestation of ideas. This theory, which conceives ideas as ontological archetypes, was overpassed by the Christian conception of the paradigms as divine wills, and divine energies as divine names, always referred to as an enhypostatic transcendent being.[31] The word never stands on its own, as it must be pronounced by someone, not by a impersonal being but by a personal willing being. According to the Platonist conception, the idea is a noetic entity, self-sufficient and pre-existing, endowed with the causal power to produce emanation of itself.[32] No one can utter it or describe the idea according to its essence as it is conceived by the intellect. Instead, the word is *ad extra*, is relational, but at the same time it is *ad intra*, being associated with the divine *logoi*, and having the power of manifesting them.

The Power of the Word

The efficacy of the word uttered by one person relies on the words kept by the memory of the listener. A word in fact evokes a whole series of thoughts and emotions and touches unconscious aspects of the psyche, connected either with spiritual energies or sin. The power that the word has to preserve being is translated into the "solar" – if I may recur to the astronomical metaphor – conscious memory, and counterbalances the "lunar", unconscious memory, which is related to the non-speaking phases of human life, from the sleep of Adam (Gen 2:21) to the sleep in the mother womb, from the ordinary sleep of the living animated being to the sleep before the resurrection of the dead, a condition which is unnatural and has been caused by the fall of the forefathers. In the sleep state, the word still acts oneirically as a primordial and foundational element of human life, even if it seems to act irrationally and to be ineffective in organising inner life. To the ineffective and corrupted word that is submerged in the subconscious, the spiritual tradition opposes the prayer of the heart, based on the name of Jesus.[33]

The divine word only is ontopoietic, while man's word has ontomimetic and relational power. Human words do not have God's creative power, but God oversees and legitimises them, as attested in the episode of the naming

31 See Tollefsen 2012, 107.

32 See Tollefsen 2012, 13–31.

33 On the notion of spiritual unconscious, see Larchet 2005.

of animals, which we have recalled above (Gen 2:19). This duality, which encompasses the relationship and the ontological difference between the divine and the human word, is reflected by the eucharist. The Words of Institution (which are a mimesis of Christ's words) reveal a truth that is not yet ontologically realised, i.e. "the Eucharistic bread is the body of Christ," since its profession requires, in order to become ontologically true, divine intervention, invoked through the words of the *epiklesis*. The words that unlock the memorial require the epicletic invocation that, in its turn, re-actualises the eucharistic relationship between God and man by changing the bread into Christ's body: the epiclesis realises the ontological change in the space and time of the particular eucharistic synaxis, while the words of the institution reveal a super-ontological truth, namely that the eternal essence of the Church is eucharistic.[34]

It is not insignificant to reflect on the Latin tradition that attributes to the Words of Institution the power of changing the bread and the wine into Christ's Body and Blood. This essential aspect of Latin liturgical theology relies on the acknowledgement of the power of the language, where the mimesis of the words pronounced by Christ at the Last Supper under the right ritual conditions is believed to be sufficient to actualise the Eucharist presence. Nonetheless the difference with the Eastern tradition, even if we will not admit a sort of pre-epiclesis in the prayer *Supplices ergo te, Domine, deprecamur* that has been added to the Roman rite,[35] we have to recognise that both traditions acknowledge the power of the language in breaking the ordinary ontological dynamics and introducing the external factor, that is the divine operation: in the Latin rite the eternal validity of Christ's institutional words, or, in the Eastern tradition, the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in the epiklesis. Nevertheless, the epiklesis should be understood as a factor that fully manifests the synergy between the human and the divine word, as a perfect instance of Chalcedonian theology.

The theology of language, finding spiritual witnesses for the efficacy of the word as a theomimetic God-given gift for the purpose of deification in liturgical theology and the Jesus prayer, has the duty to recall the salvific power of the word as synergy between the divine and the human word. The human word has the possibility to evoke the creative and transforming energies of the divine word, whence they are uttered in the spirit of obedience. On the contrary, when human word pretends to possess a content of truth or creative

34 On the sacramental power of the word, see Breck 1996.
35 Missale Parvum 1977, 58.

power by itself on behalf of individuals and their secular goals, contrasting to the truth of the real existential conditions, the uttered word becomse false and generates illusion.

This reminds us of the dialogue in which the serpent seduced the forefathers according to Gen 3:1 ("the serpent […] said to the woman"). The knowledge of good and evil was indeed introduced on the basis of a preceding not-yet-known duality, that between words of truth and deceit of words. Accordingly, every action undertaken by the devil for the fall of man always moves from *logomachia*, as this was clear to the teachers of the ascetic tradition, who framed the assault of the spiritual enemy as *logismos*.[36]

Logomachia and the Ecclesiological Crisis

In similar terms, we may reflect on the crisis of ecclesiology that have affected the life of the Church, leading to the historical and still ongoing schisms, and currently affecting worldwide Orthodoxy. Ecclesiological crisis stems from the disavowal of the inseparable link between the words professing the Orthodox faith and the Chalice of the Holy Communion. The deep causes of this state of things can be seen in the loss of the words that should guard the ecclesial being.

Not only the words of the canons of the Holy Councils are no longer observed as binding and epicletic, consequently being destined to become "letter that kills" (2 Cor 3:6), but even the words of the Gospel asking for "mercy" instead of "sacrifice" (Matthew 9:13) are no more bounding for many exponents of the Church, leading to more and more exacerbate jurisdictional conflicts and involvement of the local Churches in secular politics.

Indeed, many members of the Orthodox Church, if not entire areas of Orthodoxy, have still to purify themselves from archaic religious thought, based on sacrificing the other and violent appropriation. This attitude can be exemplified by the schism declared by the Russian Church against the Orthodox Churches that recognise the autocephalous Church in Ukraine, in the pro-war propaganda fostered by the same Russian Church, recurring to a sort of rhetoric remindful of the crusade-language (paired by the silence on this issue kept by many other Orthodox Churches), in the disunion – if not ri-

36 Chryssavgis 2016, 187–190.

valry – between ecclesiastic jurisdictions in the diaspora, which resembles the concurrency between business companies, in widening divisions in the flock of Christ by diffusing superstitions and hate-speech, often declared from the ambo and relaunched worldwide through the Internet.

As in the case of the above-referred crisis of *episteme*, with *logomachia* as its basis, aimed at transforming the reality into a false, unnatural, and demonic world, we constate also hateful *logomachia* at work within Orthodoxy, responding to a trans-ecclesiological project destined to lead to a sort of trans-Orthodoxy in which the words of the Gospel and the Canons are no longer bound to the truth, but rather become the instrument of secular visions, according to which the epiphanic bond between the Church and the divine Logos is definitely lost.

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