

**“PATRISTIC THEOLOGY
AND POST-PATRISTIC HERESY”**

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Unorthodox Orthodoxy?

Moments in Contemporary Greek Theological Expression and Marks of

Post-Theological Moments

[to the sacred memory of my parents

Fr. Georgios and Presvytera Christina...]

A. Characteristics of modern theological thought

Discolorations in the modern inter-Christian dialogues.

Introductory

The 20th century was, admittedly, characterized by the institutional dialogical relationship of the Orthodox Church with the WCC. Unfortunately, there are no specialist monographs in Greece by institutional representatives and researchers of the Orthodox side which, in a theological/dogmatic context, would help us see in depth what really happened on this path¹, during which great volumes of texts were

¹ See also G. Laimopoulos, *Δομή και Λειτουργία τοῦ Παγκοσμίου Συμβουλίου Ἐκκλησιῶν*, Thessaloniki 2012, p. 17.

produced². There are more historical and sociological references in specialist books on the above dialogue and anyone interested in the theological/dogmatic problematics should, for a fuller picture, probably seek the theological correlations in combination with monitoring the path taken by the leading representatives of the Orthodox Church in modern and contemporary dialogical practice.

In the present study, I shall not, of course, expand into specialist analyses but, rather, describe the main motions of a post-theological appraisal of our times, which seems to be systematized and to offer Greece corresponding educational practices- though it is based, to a great extent, on generalities and jargon- which are expected, by their supporters, to lend meaning to the proposed pedagogical practices. What makes an impression is that the prime users of this neo-terminology behave dismissively towards the contribution of modern Greek theology (academic and charismatic) and disparagingly towards the critical discourse which distinguishes and notes the differences between West and East as regards the understanding of theological truth³. In a most

² Two studies by contemporary scholars which are interesting from the point of view of the theology of inter-Christian dialogues are: I.O. Nikolopoulos, *Οί Θέσεις τῶν Ὀρθοδόξων Ἐκκλησιῶν* in Λίμα, Thessaloniki 2006; A. Baïraktaris, *Βάπτισμα καὶ ὁ οἰκουμενικὸς διάλογος: Μία ὀρθόδοξη προσέγγιση*, Thessaloniki 2010.

³ I have the feeling that much of the treatment of the distinction between East and West in the work of Ch. Yannaras has been aimed at compressing the criticism into a narrow framework. Naturally this stark contrast ignores the fact that Yannaras' thought is not sterile, but open to an internal dialogue with Western thinking, from which he takes elements and subjects them to criticism on his own terms. This may be why there is an interpretational dissonance regarding his work. Thus we have Metropolitan Ioannis (Zizioulas) of Pergamum considering that Yannaras introduces views from Heidegger (see Yannaras, *Ἐξὶ φιλοσοφικῆς ζωγραφιᾶς*, Athens 2011, p. 135 ff. where there is a reaction to this view), which is also attributed in Western bibliography to his Eminence himself! [See D. H. Knight, *The Theology of John Zizioulas*, Ashgate e-book

generalizing fashion, they identify modern and contemporary Orthodoxy with the attitude of the past, with nationalism and with a lack of contact with the present, in a contradictory manner since they show- certainly deliberately- that they believe simultaneously in the contribution of the avant-garde representation of Orthodox theology at inter-Christian dialogues in the 20th century⁴. Others who espouse the above representation take a positive stance towards the eschatological influences of Protestant theology⁵.

It appears, therefore, that a movement is growing in Greece which has recently delivered a final account of the theology of Greek theologians of the generation of the 1960s. The theologians of the 1990s, then, should we wish to call them that, have decided that the neo-Patristic synthesis, within which the generation of the 1960s operated, was a prescription obsolete for the ecumenical needs of today and favour

2007, p. 6] P. Kalaitzidis, Ἀπὸ τὴν «ἐπιστροφή στους πατέρες» στὸ αἴτημα γιὰ μιὰ σύγχρονη ὀρθόδοξη θεολογία in Σύνταξη, vol. 113 (2010) pp. 25-39, here p. 32, note 6. This work- with minor alterations- also appeared as From the “Return to the Fathers” to the Need for a Modern Orthodox Theology, St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly 54 (2010) pp. 5-36. Also, his doctoral thesis, Ἑλληνικότητα καὶ ἀντιδυτικισμὸς στὴ θεολογία τοῦ ’60, Department of Theology, A.U.Th., Thessaloniki, 2008, pp. 530-535, presents Yannaras as anti-Western! It is, I feel, probable that Yannaras is considered anti-Western because he does not take part in systematized dialogues, preferring to formulate his own response regarding the relationship between Orthodoxy and the Western tradition and spirituality.

⁴ In his article “Challenges of Renewal and Reformation Facing the Orthodox Church” (in *The Ecumenical Review*, 61 2009) Pandelis Kalaitzidis claims that Orthodoxy is not forward-looking and he builds a split within Orthodoxy, ignoring the multi-nuanced expressions of Orthodoxy, which are truly ecumenical. He seeks the “very body of Christ” in the corrupt person rather than in the incorrupt God. He concludes with this Spirit-centred expression, which de-spiritualizes tradition: “... the word ‘reformation’ might also find its rightful place in a church which defines itself not simply as a church of tradition, but also as the church of the Holy Spirit”.

⁵ See Kourembeles, Ἀνατράξεις ἐπὶ ἀνατράξεων in Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς 93, pp. 569-84, here mainly 579-81.

the post-Patristic option as a way out of the earlier, neo-Patristic direction. It would appear to be no coincidence that Florovsky's expression "return to the Fathers"⁶ has been demonized and disconnected from the ontological context of its comprehension. But in this way, what has been brushed aside is Florovsky's own understanding of the expression in question as accompanying the Fathers in the ecclesiastical developments of life⁷, and no precedence is given to the concern of the late Russian theologian that there might be an outbreak of theology from a Sophist point of view, which causes its descent into intellectualism.

But let us investigate briefly where it is that the tendencies for theological expression appear in the context of inter-Christian dialogue, which clearly accompany what we shall note is being expressed by contemporary Greek post-theology.

2. From the dialogue with the Roman Catholics...

(and Episcopocentric theology...)

As is well-known, Episcopocentric Eucharistology was used as a tool in the dialogue with Rome, so that the issue of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome could be discussed from this perspective. The principal expression of this theological proposal among Orthodox theologians was put forward positively within this scheme of things regarding the

⁶ See "Western Influences on Russian Theology" in G. Florovsky, *Collected Works*. Volume 4: *Aspects of Church History*. B. Gallaher ["Waiting for the Barbarians": Identity and polemism in the neo-patristic synthesis of Georges Florovsky, in *Modern Theology* 27:4 (2011) pp. 659-91, here p. 659] refers to him as the greatest Orthodox theologian of the 20th century who "has become the dominant paradigm for Orthodox theology and ecumenical activity".

⁷ Conversely, Kalaitzidis (*Ἀπὸ τὴν ἐπιστροφή*, p. 28), although he sees in Florovsky the combination "back to the Fathers" and "forward with the Fathers", believes that the absence of the perspective "beyond the Fathers" renders his theology of little value for the future.

identification of the Church and the Eucharist, under the Episcopal presidency over the Eucharist. Within this context, it is possible that (deliberately or not) the theanthropic ontology of the Eucharist may be lessened and become subject to the above identification in a static eschatology, if the kingdom of God is also considered to be within the same framework of identification (of Church and Eucharist). There have been efforts to analyze this issue in specific references to it⁸, as also to evaluate the dialogue theologically with the tradition of the Church of Rome⁹ and its “ecumenical outlook”¹⁰. There is neither the time nor the space for me to return to these at length here.

In this particular instance, I would like to make the following observation/ appraisal: it is not unlikely that, in the dialogue with the Roman Catholics, the Orthodox perspective will be projected as a static eschatology, founded upon the identification of the Church and the Eucharist under the bishop; and in the case of the dialogue with the Protestants we shall observe an increasingly intense movement towards a Pneumatic Trinitocentrism and a Pneumatic eschatology, which perhaps would not be the final goal, according to the expression of Eucharistic ecclesiology, but which is clearly manifest now in the context of its

⁸ See Kourembeles, *Λόγος Θεολογίας*, vol. I, Thessaloniki 2009, pp. 97 ff. See also idem, *Ἀναπαράξεις ἐπὶ ἀναπαράξεων*, op. cit., particularly p. 581.

⁹ See idem, *Ἡ εὐχαριστία στὸν διάλογο μεταξύ Ὁρθοδόξων καὶ Ρωμαιοκαθολικῶν*, in *Ὁ κόσμος τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας στὸ παρελθὸν καὶ στὸ παρὸν*, Thessaloniki 2006, pp. 741-777.

¹⁰ On this, see idem, *Estimates regarding the use of roman catholic ecclesiological terminology*, in *«Εἰς μαρτύριον τοῖς ἔθνεσι»: Τόμος Χαριστήριος εἰς τὸν Οἶκ. Πατριάρχην κ. κ. Βαρθολομαῖον*, Thessaloniki 2011, pp. 293-402.

contemporary post-Patristic proposal and interpretation¹¹. In other words, even if Eucharistic ecclesiology might initially have constituted a creative proposal based on Orthodox life and theology, this does not mean that it can be transferred *mutatis mutandis*, and then applied on an inter-Christian level, particularly, of course, when its theological ontology has been eroded.

Let us not forget that in this Trinitocentrism to which we referred, eschatology becomes the instrument of an understanding of the Church as a society, parallel to Trinitology, and it is also noticeable that the carnate divine subject of participation in the Eucharist is ignored to the benefit of a potential, proportionate implementation, on an inter-Christian level, of the above Eucharistology. That is, the vertical view of the mystery of the incarnation of God by condescension is marginalized, clearly because it is considered a historical encumbrance to a Christianity which has to show its inherent intercommunion in some unhistoric

¹¹ There is no room in this present study for an exhaustive discussion of this issue. But we ought to see the way the works of theologians of Eucharistic theology such as His Eminence Ioannis Zizioulas are being read, since his contemporary Western students seem to understand him within the context of the Neo-Patristic synthesis (see for example, Knight, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-3, 26 and 32). Zizioulas does not see Christ as responsible for history and the Holy Spirit as responsible for the last times. Rather, the Eucharist is an entry of the Holy Trinity into the Church (the world), and cannot be simplified into the above areas of responsibilities. There is a tendency among post-Patristic theologians to “appropriate” those of the ’60s as being interested in a back-door entry into ecumenism. R. Turner (*op. cit.*, p. 34), has this to say about Zizioulas’ views: “The eucharist is the most fruitful event in history to celebrate as ecclesiology. Zizioulas does not reduce ecclesial communion to the eucharist, for the object of theology remains the mystery of salvation, not the establishment of the theological system itself. Zizioulas goes beyond an apophatic approach because he rejects the primacy of epistemology in theology. He is able to do this, by speaking about the personal communion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, because of the vision of the truth in the life of the historical Christ. The mystery of salvation is revealed in the person of Christ as a communion of the divine persons”.

context. Let us not forget that, within this context, it is perfectly possible for the old view of N. Afanassieff, and the contemporary one of His Eminence Ilarion Alfayev, to flourish, as these are expressed in a study by Nicolas Ferencz, according to which, acceptance of the Ecumenical Synods is not a *sine qua non* requirement for Christian unity, since there is no “locus of highest authority” in the Church¹².

3. ... in the dialogue with Protestantism...

(... and the Eucharist as Spiritual Trinitocentrism)

At the beginning of the life of the W.C.C., in the dialogue with Protestantism, the Orthodox stood against the fragmented Protestant vehicle through the issue of theological principle. Initially they wanted to privilege Trinitocentricity over Christocentricity. And recently they have shown that they have succeeded entirely in this perspective¹³. That is, instead of exercising themselves firmly in promoting a Christosomatic Trinitology, since formal Christological and Trinitological references exist in the texts of the dialogues¹⁴, they have operated more within a Spiritual Trinitocentrism and a parallel connection of (the triune) God and the Church.

¹² See a related reference to Ferencz’s article Bishop and Eucharist as Criteria for Ecumenical Dialogue in St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly 51:1 (2007) pp. 5-21. He stresses that correlating “bishop” with the eucharist and the church in terms of autonomy is an aberration. He says: “I do not think it is possible to retain the Eucharist in the center of one’s worship and prayer (lex orandi) if one’s belief is faulty or incomplete. The acceptance and celebration of the mystical power and presence of the Eucharist rests squarely upon belief in a full catholic understanding of the truth of who Jesus is. Outside such a belief, the Eucharist becomes less meaningful, even meaningless, and so loses its centrality in the worship life of the community”.

¹³ See also S. Tsombanidis, Ἡ συμβολὴ τῆς ὀρθόδοξης ἐκκλησίας καὶ θεολογίας στὸ παγκόσμιο συμβούλιο ἐκκλησιῶν, Thessaloniki 2008, pp. 252-3. See also p. 299.

¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 301-2.

Regarding contact with this thinking, it is worth reading an article by John Behr [*The Trinitarian Being of the Church*, in Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly 48:1 (2003, pp. 67-87)]. At the outset, the author poses the problem which arises from the correlation of Trinitarian theology and Ecclesiology, which came about through Eucharistic ecclesiology (without a connecting bond): "Another way of putting this, using terms which are themselves problematic, would be to say that communion ecclesiology sees the Church as parallel to the 'immanent Trinity': it is the three persons in communion, the One God in relational being that the Church is said to 'reflect'. This results in a horizontal notion of communion, or perhaps better, parallel 'communions' without being clear about how the two intersect"¹⁵.

Without disregarding the attempt to link Pneumatology with Christology in the proposal by His Eminence Ioannis Zizioulas, Behr notes the relativity which dominates it under the principal term of the Eucharist and the parallel relationship between the Trinity and Church, highlighting the proposal by Bruce Marshall in relation to the Cappadocian view and his own concern with the Christian expression of the Fathers (4th century)¹⁶. He thus refers to the three primary scriptural images for the Church- the people of God, the body of Christ and the temple of the Spirit¹⁷- and seeks an overall perspective of theology (Trinity, Incarnation, Passion, Soteriology, Ecclesiology)¹⁸. Indeed, on page 74 of this study, Behr notes the changing understanding of the

¹⁵ Behr, *The Trinitarian Being*, p. 68.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 69-70.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 71 ff.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 73.

ordained ministry, with a reference to Ignatius of Antioch, to demonstrate that, behind his words concerning bishops, there is a clear Christology and a holistic perspective of the Church¹⁹.

To return to the initial reflection of this part of my address, it might be considered a success, within the parallel association of the Trinitarian God and the Church, that the Western Christian confessions, in dialogue and in common prayer, avoid the *filioque*, doubtless because separate elevation of the Spirit as a divine hypostatic entity suited their purposes. It may even have been this thrust which was the reason why Orthodox theologians engaged in institutional dialogue with Western Christian traditions have turned to the demonstration of the synthesis which is required between Christology and Pneumatology²⁰.

We must certainly investigate whether it is this piecemeal correlation (which, in the end, necessarily becomes prosthetic for the Orthodox in the dialogue) which is what forces the move to a kind of (unnatural) patromonistic expression in Trinitarian theology and (correspondingly) to the severance of human life from physical reality²¹. Be that as it may, the (disconnected or confused) dislocations reflect the fact that when, in today's inter-Christian dialogues, mention is made of

¹⁹ He closes this part of his argument by saying: "The Church is not just a communion of persons in relations, but the body of Christ giving thanks to the Father in the Spirit" (p. 78), going on, through this perspective, to stress the importance of eschatology (p. 78 ff.).

²⁰ On the subject of this synthesis, see J. Z. Skira, "The Synthesis Between Christology and Pneumatology in Modern Orthodox Theology", in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 68 (2002), pp. 435-65.

²¹ Certainly, much as been written about this. Ch. Stamoulis, for example, criticizes Zizioulas for downplaying nature and the creation and "ideologizing" the faith, while removing the real meaning of life Ἡ γυναίκα τοῦ Λῶτ καὶ ἡ σύγχρονη θεολογία, Athens 2008, (p.163).

Christ, this does not necessarily mean that He shares the same energy as the other Persons of the Holy Trinity, and that they (the Orthodox theologians) must (or have the feeling they must) complete Christology “revealing” Pneumatology along the way with other Christians as well as the necessity of their synthesis (their addition).

Indeed, is it the case that the identification of the Eucharist with the Church and the concomitant “Eucharistic ecclesiology”²² which sought, within this theological climate (in the dialogue with Protestantism) a “liturgy after the liturgy”, is today interpreted, as it seems, by the unconnected (parallel) relationship of Economy/Theology and not from their liturgical viewpoint²³?

It is my view that, unless people scrutinize critically the course of the dialogues and of the representatives of the Orthodox Churches involved therein, and, in the dialogue with Roman Catholicism, the moves towards bishop-centredness, they will think that they can become involved also in the dialogue with Protestantism, highlighting here, of course, a bodiless Eucharist, in which the presence of Christ is considered to be no more than a recollection. This may be why there is a need for

²² See Tsombanidis, *op. cit.*, 281 ff.

²³ Tsombanidis, *op. cit.*, p. 290, claims that the abandonment of Christocentric universality and the establishment of Christian mission in Trinitarian dogma led to the abandonment of the imperialist and expansionist tactics of the Christian mission in the 19th and early 20th centuries and the adoption of a more well-rounded and holistic conduct of Christian witness. But in this way Christology and Trinitology can easily become tools of ideologies and theology itself can lose its true purpose of salvation and be subjected to other interests.

the verbal pyrotechnics of eschatology as the absolute measure of Christian completion of the ecclesiastical future²⁴.

So, in the case where the Orthodox theology of modern inter-Christian dialogues is considered to be involved at this level and in this theological context, adding its own contribution, it is clear that within this loose and parallel relationship of Economy-Theology (Trinitology), what is, in the end, preferred for discussion is an economy of the Spirit and a Spiritual, though bodiless (sterile) Eucharist, even if, from the terminology, the expression “body of Christ” is not omitted in the Ecumenical texts²⁵.

Is it then the case that the Holy Spirit, without the *filioque* now, is preferable so that there is a divine enshrinement of a syncretistic theocentrism, since (it is considered) that Christ, who was very demanding in His historical humanity, may be waiting at the door or that He should be tried, having been humiliated, as an imperialist? I believe, therefore, that we should note the theological truth that the Holy Spirit,

²⁴ Kalaïtzidis believes in a renewal of Orthodoxy “emanating from the future” (Challenges of Renewal, p. 148). I would agree with the idea of reformation if this were seen in terms of salvation and not merely of the future. If this mystery of the transformation of people and the world through fertile recreation in Christ were taken as being not merely an intellectual process and logical response to the needs of the time. Referring to Zizioulas’ eschatology, Turner says: “It must be remembered that the truth of this historical existence is eschatological and the importance of the eschatological truth in history is the ontological meaning of salvation (Knight, op. cit., p. 29). He goes on to say: “Zizioulas’ theological principles and his ecclesiology reflect the development of a neo-patristic theological approach in Greece since the 1930s. Zizioulas’ work represents a commitment to setting out the original theological contribution of Orthodoxy, especially in its application to ecclesiology” (p. 33).

²⁵ On the term “communion” in modern dialogical language, see Kourembeles, ‘Η «κοινωνία» ὡς ἐκκλησιαστικὸ θέμα στὸ διαλογικὸ κείμενο «Φύση καὶ σκοπὸς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας» in Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ οἰκουμενικὸς διάλογος, Apostoliki Diakonia Athens 2005, pp. 95-111.

if we believe in His divinity in the Trinity, is ontologically demanding (hypostasized in the Trinity) and not abstract and Word-less. I hope that my observations will contribute to the clearer realization that setting up an ecumenical encounter at a bodiless Eucharist may assist at a spiritually ideological meeting, but not at an incarnate encounter with the Word, involving people in the Spirit, at which God remains the dominant Person, as being active in the Trinity, in the ecumenical flesh of His condescending Word.

B. Post-theological terminology

1. “Post-Patristic theology”

Discussions today about post-Patristic theology have centred around the thinking about Florovsky’s expression “a return to the Fathers”. Even though it is clear and accepted from the expression of this novel post-Patristic view that Florovsky does not restrict this return to the past, but links it with its function in the present and the future, the post-Patristic view eliminates this observation of his and claims that this great Russian theologian should have been moving in a direction which would have defined it as “beyond the Fathers”²⁶. This is why the post-Patristic view claims that “the corresponding movement of ‘return’, which is represented by the neo-Patristic school which triumphed in its contention with the ‘Russian’ or ‘Parisian’ school will function as a bulwark against innovation”²⁷. We should note that it is not considered a critical juxtaposition as regards innovation, but a bulwark!

²⁶ See Kalaitzidis, *Ἀπὸ τὴν ἐπιστροφή*, pp. 27-8.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

It is precisely here that one can see that modern Greek theological thinking is affected by a view more than a century late: it is a tribute to a tendency in the views of A. von Harnack (perhaps we might use the term “obsolete Harnackism”) that the Greekness of Christianity is a weight on the theology of the Scriptures²⁸. And so there is constructed, with the post-Patristic view, an eccentric support of Biblical studies which, in essence, are placed in opposition to Patristics²⁹. It is as if to say that reading the Fathers is no more than the outside door of Scripture³⁰, even if it is said, contrariwise, that the Fathers “were, above all, great interpreters of Scripture”³¹. Or perhaps it is no contradiction at all and is

²⁸ This Protestant evaluation of the ancient ecclesiastical tradition has long met with scathing criticism from the last Pope, Benedict XVI, who has written in support of the particular significance of the combination of reason and faith, of Hellenism and Christianity, for the fruitful transmission of the Christian message which occurs in the Patristic writings. In *Jesus von Nazareth* (Freiburg-Basel-Wien 2011), Pope Benedict, the pontiff emeritus writes: “Natürlich ist diese Verbindung zweier ganz unterschiedlichen Weisen von Hermeneutik eine immer neue zu bewältigende Aufgabe. Aber sie ist möglich, und durch sie werden in einem neuen Kontext die grossen Einsichten der Väter Exegese wieder zur Wirkung kommen können”. In relation to this, Oda Wischmeyer states: “Er [Ratzinger] versucht, die Hermeneutik der historisch-kritischen Exegese mit der Hermeneutik des Glaubens zu verbinden, wie sie bereits in den neutestamentlichen Schriften selbst vorliegt und von den Kirchenväter weiter ausgearbeitet wurde”. (Der Prozess Jesu aus der Sicht des Papstes, in Th. Söhring (Hg.), *Tod und Auferstehung Jesu. Theologische Antworten auf das Buch des Papstes*, Freiburg-Basel Wien 2011, p. 35. On Benedict’s view of the importance of the Fathers for inter-Christian dialogue, see J. Ratzinger, *Die Bedeutung der Väter für die gegenwärtige Theologie* in *Theologische Quartalschrift* 149 (1968), pp. 257-82. Also in Michels, *Geschichte der Theologie*, Salzburg/München 1970 and in Ratzinger, *Theologische Prinzipienlehre, Bausteine zur Fundamentaltheologie*, München 1982, pp. 139-59.

²⁹ Ἀπὸ τὴν ἐπιστροφή, p. 29.

³⁰ Against this, see the article by Triandafyllos Sioulis: «Πατερικὸς φουνταμενταλισμὸς» ἢ «μετα-πατερικὴ θεολογικὴ θολούρα»; at <http://www.zoiforos.gr>.

³¹ Ἀπὸ τὴν ἐπιστροφή, pp. 29-30. On this contradiction, see Fr. G. Anagnostopoulos, Ἡ πατερικὴ θεολογία, in *Σύναξη* 116 (2010) pp. 101-6. See also Fr. N. Loudovikos, *Ὁ μόχθος τῆς μετοχής*, Armos, Athens 2010, p. 8.

aimed at stressing a mere cognitive relationship of the Fathers with Scripture?

The odd thing in fact is that, although, on the part of the post-Patristic view, there is mention of “an unhistorical approach of Patristic theology”, there is no reference to particular examples of this theological approach. The generalized characterization of some of the supporters of this view that this “return to the Fathers” is neo-conservative is indicative of the lack of rigour which is typical of the post-Patristic view. I actually have the feeling that, while the post-Patristic idea has the self-impression that it is positive towards alterity, which it deduces to be a measure of the success of Christian unity, in practice it proves to be opposed to this expression³² since it calls its opponents neo-conservatives *a priori*.

I personally am troubled by the reason why this view is not supported with proper references and instead simply makes use of generalizations and “buzzwords”. So if the post-Patristic discourse characterizes the “return to the Fathers” as neo-conservative, then its own turning away from the Fathers is neo-relativistic. Therefore the post-Patristic bilingual reasoning glamorizes the publishing efforts regarding works of the Fathers in the West in order to tell us that the West has returned us to the Fathers and so there is no need to oppose it. Imagine, though how many “ideologically sound interpretations” of the Fathers have been written in such publications and studies, with the result that, today, a great deal of work is required, by the very nature of

³² See, for example, Kalaitzidis, *Challenges of Renewal*, p. 163, where there are references to Zizioulas, Kalpsis and Yangazoglou.

things, on the part of non-ideological scholars in order to transmit and interpret their theology properly.

Without wishing to discredit the efforts of Western theologians in Patristic theology, I do not think I could say that without the “nouvelle Théologie” “the Orthodox movement towards a return to the Fathers would probably be impossible”³³. Beyond the internal contradiction of this generalized assessment, post-Patristic thinking embellishes the Western theological expression of the 20th century, no doubt impressed by the discovery of its vast bibliography, and gallingly detracts from modern Orthodox charismatic and academic theology³⁴. What would post-Patristic discourse have to say, however, to the finding by important modern Western theologians³⁵ that, despite all of this monumental production, Western theology in fact has not really been able to speak essentially about Christ and the Christian faith.

So it is no coincidence that post-Patristic thought considers that “the return to the Fathers” constructed the polarization of East and West and the rejection of the West. Clutching at straws, it believes that the person who introduced the “return”, Fr. Georges Florovsky was in dialogue with the Western currents and did not accept this polarization, since he himself was engaged in ecumenical thinking³⁶. But if this was positive in Florovsky, why was he not in the fore, as an example, right

³³ Ἀπὸ τὴν ἐπιστροφή, p. 31

³⁴ Ibid. Essentially, then, the centre of gravity of post-Patristic theory is not even Biblical theology, but what S. Gounelas calls “Biblish theology”.

³⁵ Armin Kreiner in *Das wahre Antlitz Gottes- oder was wir meinen wenn wir Gott sagen*, (Verlag Herder, Freiburg 2006), notes that the crisis in modern Christian expression (in Western theology) has arisen because this expression is not convincing in presenting the incarnation of the Word of God.

³⁶ See Ἀπὸ τὴν ἐπιστροφή, p. 32

from the beginning, rather than being landed with the deficiency of not having a perspective “beyond the Fathers”? Is it, perhaps, because the ecumenical disposition of Florovsky was linked to research and study of the Fathers? Why is Florovsky artificially separated from those who supposedly were a negative drag on this “return to the Fathers”, i.e. Lossky, Staniloae and Popovic³⁷? What does this negative charge appear to be and what are its criteria? It is the above three theologians who supposedly idolized Patristic theology, conducting “apologetics without meaning”³⁸.

I, of course, am of the opinion that idolization of the Fathers is the twin sister of relativization, even if the latter refuses to see this. I mean a relativization that is attempted with the enlisted aid of “post-Patristic theory”. This wants to persuade us that Orthodoxy has lost out by not recognizing modernity and has not plunged into post-modernity³⁹. But I would return this assessment with another reasonable, generalizing question: Why is it that modernity has not lost out by not knowing the depth of the Eucharistic Orthodoxy of the Holy Fathers, instead of merely being acquainted with an incongruous Eucharistic ecclesiology?

Post-Patristic thinking accepts that “Contemporary Orthodox theology, inspired mainly by the spirit of the Fathers, re-formulated, in the 20th century, is a wonderful theology of the Humanization and

³⁷ Ibid. John Behr (The Trinitarian Being of the Church, pp. 77-8) mentions Florovsky’s view that the Orthodox Church “is in very truth the Church, i.e. the true Church and the only true Church” so that he considers that “Christian reunion is simply conversion to Orthodoxy”. See also, *ibid*, pp. 79, 80-1 and 84-5. Kalaitzidis (Challenges of Renewal) on the other hand, believes: “Today we live in a completely postmodern world, and yet Orthodox Christianity still has not come to terms with modernity”.

³⁸ Ἀπὸ τὴν ἐπιστροφή, p. 32.

³⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 33-4.

Incarnation”⁴⁰. But it no doubt considers this too little, since it believes that it is important that, among other things, weight was not given to issues such as “the carnality and spiritual function of sexuality”⁴¹.

Recent theologians have shown that they have misinterpreted the “theology of the Incarnation”, so that, in the present instance, they probably do not mean the incarnation of God but of the Gospel word, that is as script rather than divine hypostasis which interacts with people on a consubstantial level and in the body⁴². And so people end up today meaning that acceptance of bodily passions is an extension of the incarnation, with the notion and fear, perhaps even the secret wish (?), that the Fathers are Platonists⁴³. It is no accident that post-Patristic thought seeks support, in monist fashion, in eschatology.⁴⁴ The perspective is clear: there should be an Orthodox theology which is not Patristic⁴⁵, thanks to the post-modern pluralistic world and to relativization; that theology should be transcended⁴⁶, as being outmoded, in order for the books of the post-Patristic authors to please the louche morals of post-modernity!

The post-Patristic idea, however, is nothing new. So I am at a loss to understand why it has become so important recently to relay it extensively, even though it was already present in the realm of university

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 34.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid, p. 36: “... the demand for a new incarnation of the word and of the eternal truth of the Gospel”.

⁴³ N. Matsoukas observes that the views which hold that Byzantine Orthodox spirituality is dominated by Platonic or Neo-Platonic mysticism are very crude. See his *Δογματική και συμβολική θεολογία*, vol. 3, p. 131.

⁴⁴ *Από την έπιστροφή*, pp. 37-8.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 38.

⁴⁶ Ibid p. 39.

theological culture. It is worth remarking that, in my opinion, P. Kalaitzidis, the harbinger of the modern post-Patristic idea, does not provide a reference in his article in Greek to his contemporary post-Patristic source, but does so (why not initially?) nonchalantly in the English version of his article, thus “betraying” the *fons et origens* of the post-Patristic-post-theological idea, by quoting a point in a book by P. Vasileiadis⁴⁷, who is also the father of the fanciful term “post-liturgy”.

2. “Post-Patristic theology” is not unattached

(the matter of the term “post-liturgy”)

While the term post-Patristic theology made an impression, another term, “post-liturgy”, has gone almost unnoticed. But here we have a misconception of the dogmatic truth that the liturgy of the Church is the very liturgy (=functioning) of the world and the God-inspired love for the rational humanity of Christ⁴⁸. Certainly I ought to

⁴⁷ P. Vasileiadis, Ἑρμηνεία τῶν εὐαγγελίων, Thessaloniki 1990, p. 7. “That is to say, to dare to transcend the traditional “Patristic” theology, just as the Patristic theology essentially transcended the Proto-Christian and the latter transcended the Judeo-Christian. This, however, does not imply desertion of the spirit or the tone of the Patristic age, nor does it entail a rejection of the Greek philosophical way of thinking in favour of a modern one, only a dynamic transcendence of both. Besides, this is the legacy of the great Fathers of Orthodoxy”. Vasileiadis’ expression is extremely vague here, as he promotes retraction as a practice of the Fathers, only to justify retraction of the Fathers themselves! In order to comprehend the discrepancy between this approach and one which perceives cohesion and continuity in Christian history, I will quote N. Matsoukas and his illustrative remark (question): “how are we to cast the Old Testament out of the unrivalled Byzantine iconography?” (N. Matsoukas, Νεοελληνικός πολιτισμός και διανόηση, Thessaloniki 2006, p. 70).

⁴⁸ See also A. Keselopoulos, Ὁ λόγος τῆς ἐρήμου καὶ ἡ ἀλογία τοῦ κόσμου, in a reprint from ΠΡΑΚΤΙΚΑ ΠΑΝΕΛΛΗΝΙΟΥ ΜΟΝΑΣΤΙΚΟΥ ΣΥΝΕΔΡΙΟΥ, Holy Meteora, 1990, pp. 253-66, here pp. 260-1 and p. 264. Idem, Die Diakonie in der spirituellen Tradition des Ostens, in Ἐπιστημονικὴ Ἐπετηρίδα τῆς Θεολογικῆς Σχολῆς, (Department of Theology), 7 (1997) pp. 133-46, here p. 141.

make clear from the outset that when we are speaking about the liturgy as a Eucharistic event, it is not a meaningless gathering which then takes on its liturgical role and its active hypostasis.

I personally consider it no accident that the term “post-liturgy” appears today to be being reproduced by the same source which, in essence, produced the term “post-Patristic theology”, and that it misrepresents the older expression “liturgy after the liturgy”⁴⁹ (familiar from His Beatitude Anastasios Yannoulatos and J. Bria). We should pay particular attention to the fact that “post” is now dimensional and is separated from the word “liturgy” by a hyphen. This modern transcription/misrepresentation is, in my opinion, a tendency towards the desire to be innovative by the overstretching of the separator “post-”. By

⁴⁹ The use of the term “post-liturgy” by S. Tsobanidis is, in my opinion, an unfortunate transcription of the former title of his doctoral thesis, “Liturgy after the Liturgy” (unpub. Doc. Dissert., Thessaloniki 1996). On p. 245 of a recent publication of his work (Post-liturgy, Thessaloniki, 2009), before he even mentions (elaborates on) the significance of the expression “liturgy after the Liturgy” he makes a reference (in just the second line), where he writes that the term “post-liturgy” is more recent but “has the same meaning”! At this point the author states that he has adopted this term as the title of his thesis after P. Vasileiadis. I am of the opinion that the ontological interpretation of the term that was first and foremost coined by His Beatitude Anastasios (Yannoulatos) is not in accordance with P. Vasileiadis’ perception of the post-Eucharist. This can be established by the fact that Vasileiadis has favoured the concept of the transcendence of the Fathers since 1990 (P. Vasileiadis, *Ἑρμηνεία τῶν εὐαγγελίων*, Thessaloniki 1990, p. 7), thus establishing himself as the forefather (and pastor) in Greece of post-theologism and the barrage of terminology unwisely hurled by some of his younger spiritual “disciples”. At this point, it would be appropriate to mention that, for instance, in his analysis of Paul’s Eucharistology, Vasileiadis favours a monistic interpretation of the Eucharist with an eschatological perspective, thus depriving it of its salvific significance (see *Παῦλος: Τομές στη θεολογία του*, Thessaloniki, 2006, p. 154). Without actually providing specific reference, Vasileiadis interprets the Eucharist in Paul from a rationalist viewpoint, suggesting its commemorative nature (see, for example, *op. cit.*, p. 206). Therefore, one should not rush into adopting Vasileiadis’ terms, which are characterized by a specific interpretation of the mystery of the Eucharist and which are distinguished by their monistic eschatology, without bearing in mind the above arguments.

grammatical compulsion, this denotes later time and place as a necessary term for Christians gathering in social activism (and on an idealistic level) rather than liturgical participation at a particular time and place⁵⁰, as an alignment of people with the theandric energy which is shared in lasting communion and expressed as such by those who experience it truly and substantially in the Eucharistic God/Man. The idolization of the Eucharist which occurred in the globalized dialogue platforms now seeks (additionally) another, idol-like global Eucharist, without the supra-essential, incarnate Creator⁵¹.

I should note that many recent theologians, Greek and foreign lovers of the socio-moral inter-Christian dialogue of the World Council of Churches, with greed beyond reason, have used Fathers such as, for instance, Saint John Chrysostom, seeing Christ only in part in his writings, i.e. the Christ of the materially poor, but not the God/Man Himself of all defiled people⁵².

⁵⁰ Within this idealistic context, one may come to operate in a secularization after the secularization. In his reference to secularization, we may recall Father Alexander Schmemmann, the late liturgist, who wisely points out that if secularization is heresy according to theological terminology, then it is primarily a heresy that relates to people. It is the rejection of people as *Homo Adorans*: a rejection of people, for whom adoration is a substantial practice that “confirms” and at the same time completes their human nature. Regarding Schmemmann’s perception, I would focus on the significance of the liturgical person, rather than on a secularized (unsubstantial) post-liturgy, which would seek a reformation of the liturgy for the sake of the aspirations of secularized people. Yet, I would echo the meaning of the liturgy when he says that its singularity lies in the fact that it emanates from faith in the Incarnation, the great, universal mystery of “the Word became flesh”.

⁵¹ I refer here to J. Behr (*The Trinitarian Being of the Church*, pp. 82-3), who appears to comprehend this idolization favoured by the communion ecclesiology and to argue with J. Erickson’s corresponding view, in consistency with G. Limouris’ exclusively Eucharistic view.

⁵² It is, of course, gratifying that Fathers such as Saint Basil the Great or Saint John Chrysostom have been studied and become an object of social reflection by great

This use of Patristic writings in the cause of a flesh-less and Word-less “post-liturgy” indicates a breakdown of the theanthropic functionality and will require, (if it has not already done so) as its opponent, a moralistic pre-liturgy if it is to survive ideologically itself as something which post-liturgizes. The theanthropic Christ will be kept on hold and the post-theologians will create (even if they do not exist) pre-theologians so that they themselves will exist (What an existence is that!) as a counterweight to the pre-barbarians. In this way, the dynamism of the life of the Fathers is relegated to the moral level⁵³, as in the case of

Protestant theologians, so that a more profound viewing and theological reflection can exist as a challenge (see more in Fr. Th. Zisis’ *Ἡ σωτηρία τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ τοῦ κόσμου κατὰ τὸν ἅγιον Ἰωάννην Χρυσόστομον*, Thessaloniki 1992, p. 150, where the ontological dimension of Chrysostomian love is stressed).

⁵³ B. Gallaher describes the faith of the fathers as a “pre-modern faith” (see “Waiting for the Barbarians”, pp. 680-681), as if this faith has changed and is no longer contemporary. Therefore, he views the neo-Patristic synthesis as a reiterative theology, in order to associate it with the duty of modern theology, which, according to him, is its development within an ecumeni(sti)c context (the parenthetical clarification on the word is mine), (“That such a modest proposal of a new way forward for Orthodox theology is accomplished within an ecumenical context is not by accident, for Orthodox theology if it is to survive and even flourish in the contemporary West must become truly ecumenical”) (p. 680), as though Orthodoxy does not actively participate in a salvific ecumenical-ecclesiastical event, which is manifested as such in its life and theology. It is no accident that Gallaher refers to a Biblical reestablishment of the neo-Patristic synthesis (p. 681). In any event, he is mainly interested in overcoming the polarization of East and West and this makes his proposal debatable, as long as he does not invalidate tradition in favour of this Biblical reestablishment, which is exactly what P. Kalaitzidis does: “It would be a re-envisioning of neo-Patristic methodology, grounded in an engagement with the Eastern Patristic corpus and the liturgy, for an Orthodox theology that goes ‘beyond the Fathers’ is a contradiction in terms. But now with this new paradigm, it is called to step out beyond the sterile polarity of East and West” (p. 683). However, his proposal that the East should picture itself, as well as real life, in the West (p. 683), is a generalization, when he, in fact, favours the need for a transition to a “post-Florovskian Orthodox theology”. Kalaitzidis’ post-Patristic proposal here becomes a proposal for a “post-Florovskian Orthodox theology”. At this point I would certainly like to clarify the following: the term neo-Patristic can only be authentic in a Patristic sense, thus expressing post-Patricity as Patricity in time. See also below, note 76, my reference to Karmiris.

Saint John Chrysostom, who believed, as far as I understand him, in liturgical participation by people in the theanthropic Person⁵⁴, Who does not have any “before” and “after”: but is He Who was, is and shall be from before all ages⁵⁵.

It would appear that, these days, we are being invaded by a coordinated dynamic of socio-politically aligned epistemology which seeks to set aside the ontological and therefore enduring and ecumenical significance of Patristic theology as experience which is lived and undergone⁵⁶, de-sanctifying and de-Churching it. Indeed, the problem comes when people insist upon de-sanctifying or de-Churching the Liturgy (Eucharist), so that its theanthropic content is replaced by collective individualisms, which promise economic salvation for us. Consideration is clearly being given here, not to universal salvation in Christ, which heals everything as a whole, but to economic pseudo-salvation in Christianity (or by Christianity)⁵⁷.

⁵⁴ To fully grasp this participation in general, see also G. Mantzaridis, *Ἡ ἐμπειρική θεολογία στὴν οἰκολογία καὶ τὴν πολιτική*, Thessaloniki 1994, pp. 61-2, pp. 112-113, (and p. 112, as well as p. 133 on the support of social justice by the “free” church), esp. pp. 130-1.

⁵⁵ For some key points of my assessment of the fluctuating way of thinking of Orthodox Christians who participate in the modern dialogues see Kourembeles, *Λόγος Θεολογίας*, vol. I, Thessaloniki 2009, p. 170ff. Also, I would refer the reader – following an imaginary line connecting St. John Chrysostom with Dostoyevsky – to the ecumenical interpretation of the Christian (ideal) in F. Dostoyevsky (see Soloviov who points out, in relation to Dostoyevsky that for him, Christ was not a thing of the past, a distant inconceivable miracle).

⁵⁶ At this point it would be interesting to examine the concept of spiritual paternity, in order to understand the spiritual background of Patristic theology. I would refer anyone interested to G. D. Martzelos, *Ὁ Μ. Βασίλειος ὡς πρότυπο πνευματικῆς πατρότητος*; idem, *Ὁρθόδοξο δόγμα καὶ θεολογικὸς προβληματισμός*, vol. IV, Thessaloniki 2011, pp. 63-102, here pp. 64-5, and bibliographic indications.

⁵⁷ It is therefore no accident that the modern ecumenical texts abound in imperatives and the ethical rules of an inter-Christian elite, which will (promise to) save the

One may note, then, in theology in Greece, too, the impression that what has gained dominance as a generally accepted truth is an intense (anti-Patristic) relativism which, in essence, I believe meets theological totalitarianism. Indeed, the encounter between relativism and totalitarianism does not concede to others the right to theologize with their own identity and particular experience of faith. It may be that Florovsky's phrase about the "return to the Fathers" is now an apt exhortation also for the relativist "orthodox" theologians, who are blinded by the lights of the complex of inter-religious corridors, without, it seems, being interested in the rich armoury of the ecumenical Orthodox tradition and without seeing its coherence in a theandric Person, which makes it Patristic and, at every time, really interactive with the salvation of all people⁵⁸.

economically weak by lending its God (or gods), even though their (literary) language cannot reach the humble, diligent person, who, of course, does not have to be economically deprived in order to be deprived. Studies on modern ecumenical texts are also fraught with imperatives, as they now explicitly reject theological reflection and invest in transcriptional-transcriptive representations of a pluralist religious faith.

⁵⁸ In the study *Waiting for the barbarians*, by B. Gallaher, esp. p. 679, an interested party will encounter Florovsky's main style of expression. We ought to point out that Florovsky referred to the ecclesification of knowledge and life and it was from this perspective that he understood the creativity of the living church (see for example op. cit. P. 671). In this study, Florovsky is said to have drawn upon the work of Russian, as well as Western thinkers, such as the German Möhler (see p. 674ff.); through the latter's work he is said to refer to the living tradition of the saints, the living continuation of spiritual life (p. 676). Yet it is a fact that even such a representation could not surmount Florovsky's Christological interpretation of theology and the church, let alone the criticism he exercises against those who overemphasized Pneumatology independently of the fact of Christ, the hypostatic centre of ecclesiastical life (see p. 678). I am of the opinion that, while B. Gallaher believes that Florovsky has invented barbarians in order to validate his own critique of Western theology, he nevertheless ignores in practice the significance of Florovsky's Christocentric theology for his critique of Western theology and spirituality, by reducing his reference to it to a single page (678). What Gallaher wants to say is that Florovsky borrowed from Western thought and tried to dispute it with what he had borrowed. However, this

C. The Lesson of Religious Education in Schools

In a climate, therefore, where totalitarian relativism sees tradition as a threat, doubtless because it (also) looks at culture with an intellectualist eye⁵⁹, theologians of a particular and un-Christological post-Patristic view become the tools for supporting the notion that the lesson of religious education in schools should not be of a confessional nature. How, though, do they understand “confessionality”, when they understand culture through intellectualism.

In every instance, they consider that, since it is difficult for syncretistic thought to pierce the block of the institutional Church, which is indifferent to it, it might be easier to have it pass through the state, which is indifferent to the conflicts between theologians, and through the state’s mechanistic education system. The nature of the lesson, they say, should be cultural⁶⁰. Here, of course, we see an extension

simplification is a rather savage interpretation of the late Russian theologian and we ought to be sceptical about Gallaher’s ultimate proposal for a modern Orthodox theology: “Critics of modern Orthodox theology need to go beyond the all-too-common stereotype that while Bulgakov was beholden to idealism and sundry tainted Western sources, Florovsky’s theology was a creature merely of the Fathers” (p. 679).

⁵⁹ N. Matsoukas, (see more in his book Πολιτισμός αὐραὶς λεπτή, Thessaloniki 2000, pp. 75-140) wisely points out that the blame is to be found in our inadequate and defective education system, which teaches us that civilization means nothing but battles, heroes and revolutions. He states emphatically that tradition and culture involve an unquenchable and uninterrupted fermentation process and impetus for ideas and actions over the whole length and breadth of a society, and even more so, ecclesiastical society. See below my specific references to Matsoukas’ perception of the “Greek-Christian culture”. What I ought to note here is that the detailed reference to Matsoukas on my part in this section is fully intentional, as I observe a misuse of his discourse on such serious matters as education and culture.

⁶⁰ See P. Kalaitzidis, Τα θρησκευτικά ως πολιτιστικό μάθημα, in Σύναξη 74, (2000) pp. 69-83. In this text, the author speaks of the historic end of the subject of religious education as a lesson of Orthodox catechism and of the historic privileges of the Orthodoxy (p. 69). Therefore, he suggests that the lesson be cultural (p. 70). Now what does this mean? Culture becomes the criterion for the lesson (p. 70). Culture as a

and attempt at the practical application of the whole school of thought we have been looking at, which now has to pass on to the level of the education of young people in Greece. Clearly those who do not have the power to look into the eyes of and delight in a rich and vital tradition, and chant slogans from positions of strength which they seek frantically, may yet cause irreparable damage with the legitimization of their slogans.

So the issue is no longer so unimportant that we can be indifferent to its consequences, for fear the relativists might call us conservatives, which is the norm in today's institutional dialogue terminology, in order to avoid real critical dialogue and the self-criticism of those who call

modern pluralistic fact and reality, rather than an ecclesiastical product, whose life and history reflect an ontology and point to this interaction with education. As such, from an epistemological perspective (through a descriptive, historical-hermeneutical approach), theology ought to give answers through a lesson that should not be associated with the Greek nation but should be a "lesson on Orthodoxy rather than on Greek Orthodox culture" (p. 72). In fact, the author even questions the constitutional and legislative validity of the lesson (pp. 73-74); Clearly the author does not want others to be content with being appointed by the state (p. 73) and, in my opinion, he goes on to preach the ideology behind a multi-cultural lesson of Religious Education (p. 74). It is not merely a cultural lesson but a multi-cultural one, which ought to be de-Hellenized in order to address this need. The problem the author sees when thinking of (imagining) Greece full of immigrants is the following: "Who are we going to teach the confessional-catechistic lesson to?" (p. 75). The above author perceives Religious Education as an educational lesson, rather than a catechistic-confessional one. This, however, makes him ignore the ontological background of a lesson which conveys the freedom in Christ as an everlasting reality. And here is another pseudo-dilemma regarding the question as to what kind of lesson we want: "A catechistic-confessional lesson which will be optional? Or a cultural-historical-hermeneutical and, therefore, compulsory lesson?". If the catechistic-confessional lesson is associated with freedom more than the other, then I would personally choose a confessional one. What I mean to say, in jest, is that from the absolutism of confessionalism, one is led to the other extreme, the relativization of truth and the epistemological monism that is proposed by those who defend religious freedom. I certainly cannot deny the epistemological nature of the lesson; it is the absolutization of this character that I fear, and the "epistemologically orthodox" who refer to the incarnation of the word (p. 77) and definitely not of God's Word.

themselves something else⁶¹. It is the Church which is hypostasized by participation in the very flesh of God and does not need post-fridges or post-freezers⁶² to be saved and to save, to create culture and to create, in its proper identity, from the experience of human cultures. In its incarnation in this flesh, Patristic theology remains Patristic and testifies in any context, to true and unfeigned affection for the whole world and concern for the existential destitution of all people. As such, this theology remains assumptive, knowing what it brings with it and what it really has to offer, through its theanthropic experience, to humanist learning in Greece, which ignores this perspective:

“And, indeed, even to this day, the lesson of religious education is a caricature of moralistic and abstract metaphysical aphorisms, while the

⁶¹ It makes an impression that, while the “weight” of the conservatives is given as a reason for the failure of a combined quantitative participation of the Orthodox in the WCC, in G. Laimopoulos’ book *Δομή*, pp. 55-6, ultimate failure is ascribed to the “North Atlantic, Anglo-Saxon, Reformed dominance in the Council”. In any case, when we are not talking about participation in a quality destination, why is it necessary, a priori, to divide the Eucharistic body of the Orthodox church into conservatives and progressives, thus leading to a potentially explosive situation for the ecclesiastical communion of the Orthodox? So we cannot but notice that, while some profess “orthodox Orthodoxy”, others profess (what kind of profession is that!) “Eucharistic unification” (of which Orthodoxy really?) with the heterodox traditions that dominate the confessional councils in quantitative terms. Is it perhaps the time (after a century of novel and modern or post-modern, inter-Christian contacts) to look to the significance of inter-Orthodox Eucharist communion as an exercise in ecumenical practice? Orthodox theology is a theology of sincerity hypostasized in the incarnate, unfeigned God. The practice of Orthodox, diligent sincerity is what we are searching for in the truly ecumenical behavior taught by the history of Patristic tradition, which is disregarded today, not fortuitously in my opinion, by the pretentious post-Patristic or post-liturgical ideology.

⁶² It is Kalaitzidis’ view that the Orthodox Church “...often finds itself trapped and frozen in a “fundamentalism of tradition”, which makes it hard for its pneumatology and its charismatic dimension to be worked out in practice”. [Challenges of Renewal and Reformation Facing the Orthodox Church, in *The Ecumenical Review* 61 (2009), pp. 136-4, here p. 137].

culture of Orthodoxy remains inaccessible to students in such a way that they do not get so much as a whiff of the fact that a great, historical legacy exists”⁶³.

One suspects that the object of the thinking of those who support the relativist view we are discussing is not the global event of Christ, but culture as “art for art’s sake”, a pretentious art. It seems to be a committed theological view, which, in the end, attempts, in its confusion of mind, to find support in the declared position of the late Professor Matsoukas regarding the cultural religious lesson. It does so to find a reference and to give itself some sort of existence⁶⁴. In other words, to save itself, rather than theology, as the candid and indwelling life in a world which is reeling and needs it as a valid branch of knowledge. Beyond the fact that no reference is, in itself, salvation, especially if it has not been investigated in depth⁶⁵, the cultural theologians forget that the culture of

⁶³ See Matsoukas, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

⁶⁴ For this use of Matsoukas by Stamoulis, see his website (<http://antidosis.wordpress.com/2011/12/12/τα-θρησκευτικά-ως-μάθημα-πολιτισμού/#more-11>) (25/1/12), where, with regard to his proposal on the lesson of religious education, there is a reference to the following characteristics: “By claiming that the time when the lesson had a confessional and catechistic aspect is gone forever, Stamoulis describes the monumental proposal that was submitted by the late Professor Matsoukas of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki as a milestone for the lesson of religious education, in the 1st Conference of Theologians of Northern Greece (May 1981). Based on this proposal- to which the Theology Department of AUTH and eminent contemporary thinkers also lean- the lesson of religious education, unfettered by extreme ideologies and incorporated into an open school context, must be free from any kind of moral, catechistic and confessional bonds and become a lesson of culture, with an entirely epistemological content. Its primary subject matter should be the Bible, Patristic and liturgical texts, all monumental works of art and ecclesiastical history that reveal the person of Christ, which ought to be the focal point of the lesson.

⁶⁵ In his well-known study on the lesson of religious education, N. Matsoukas was perfectly clear from the outset: “The universal and timeless nature of the lesson does not disregard the given historical background and ecclesiastical life, while at the same time it can be placed among the general objectives of Education” [A theological

interpretation of the objectives of the lesson of religious education, in *Κοινωνία* 24 (1981) pp. 307-320, here p. 307. Matsoukas points out the particularity of Orthodox life and of our cultural tradition (p. 311). He is against the moralistic and confessional nature of religious education in the West (p. 311), as he perceives its confessional aspect as something that is opposed to cultural tradition, as well as to Christian life and its universal message (p. 311). Therefore, Matsoukas does not seem to prefer religious education with an epistemological nature. He underlines the need to be free from the Western model of religious education that has been followed by the Greek system and calls for a connection between knowledge and faith (p. 311-2). He writes: "It can be readily understood that the objective of the lesson of religious education, which in our case is to foster the Orthodox spirit, cannot be achieved if the wealth of our Byzantine tradition, as well as the teachers who will inspire a love for it, are not present. It is, of course, a prerequisite to keep the Christian spirit alive, a spirit that will be reflected in the practice of worship" (p. 313). He goes on, then, to talk about epistemological content, after having associated it with ontology and he objects to the absolutization of epistemological soteriology. In fact, he refers to the teacher as the embodiment of morality, thus associating knowledge with ethos, and raises objections to the dissociation of knowledge and faith or knowledge and morality, which we see in the Western approach (p. 313). Therefore, for Matsoukas, "confessional" is that which refers to the fragmentation of being and seeks the disruption of man. This is not what compromises faith, which, for Matsoukas, is one with reason ("because faith, though it can never be a function of a self-governed reason, is yet a manifestation of the whole being, where reason is always present. This is why, according to a dominant trend in Patristic theology, knowledge is realized "in deed" and action in "reason", pp. 313-4). So, in this case, confessional is dogmatic (from the word "dogmatism"). And so, the great Matsoukas defends the piety of the unlearned while he opposes the dialectic of the West, which is still coveted today by contemporary academic theologians, as is clear from my references in this work. This is why he refers to a "historical learning and familiarization with the cultural artefacts that are associated with Christian life" (p. 314) and disputes the cold moralism, that, in my opinion, characterises totalitarianists and relativists alike. On this account, he equates Orthodox asceticism with culture, within the context of ecclesiastical culture [see his work *Ὁ θαμβὸς καθρέφτης*, Thessaloniki 2000, p. 26; see also his work *Εὐρώπη ὠδίνουσα*, Thessaloniki 1998, pp. 266-7, on the cultural value of asceticism].

I am tempted to relate several of Matsoukas' theories, knowing well that those who quote him on their views concerning the lesson of religious education do not fully comprehend him and actually misquote him. I will, at this point, cite a passage, indicative of his views: "As a result, the objective of the lesson of religious education cannot be achieved unless it is dictated by the Orthodox cultural tradition of Byzantium and unless we realize that the lesson must in a plain and lively manner represent the secondary aspect of our tradition, which is the culture of Byzantium...we observe the dominance of the Greek Orthodox tradition which is in fact the Byzantine culture that we experience in ecclesiastical life..." (p. 315). Matsoukas wants contemporary thinkers to relate to this culture and fertilize it here and now. It is no accident that he says: "Neither the defenders nor the opponents have ever realized that Greek Christian

the homiletic tradition, of hymnography, iconography, ecclesiastical literature in general, and of life are museum style exhibits only for those who treat them as such⁶⁶.

culture, if we wish to adopt this undue and misused term, is in fact the Greek Orthodox tradition or Byzantine culture in its specific traditional landmarks and its current life form, even more so in living ecclesiastical tradition and liturgical life” (p. 316). This is Matsoukas responds to the neologism “Greek Christian culture”, which was condemned by modernist theologians, in the same way as Patricity has been condemned by today by post-Patristic, modern and post-modern theologians.

On this account, he refers to a Byzantine art that is closely knit to the Greek character and Christianity (p. 316), art that springs from experiencing the mystery of Christian life, where theology (dogma) and culture are interwoven (see for example, *Μυστήριον ἐπὶ τῶν ἱερῶς κεκοιμημένων καὶ ἄλλα μελετήματα*, Thessaloniki 1992, pp. 83-101, and pp. 271-88). For Matsoukas, the theological prerequisite is experiential, a specific act that appropriates the Greek expression morphologically, without assimilating the morphology (pp. 316-7). He wonders “Is it perhaps because of this that, during the Ottoman occupation, when those who lost their Greek tongue were still considered Greek, whereas those who lost their Orthodox faith were by no means considered Greek?” (p. 317). Matsoukas stressed the rift between Greekness and Christianity in our contemporary society as a way of life that was responsible for the distortion of the Greek identity. The focal point of his thought is living Orthodoxy, which he associates with the modern Greek identity [*Πολιτισμὸς αὐραὸς λεπτῆς*, Thessaloniki 2000, pp. 2256, p. 232 (in fact, in this work Kosmas Aetolos is depicted as “the real Byzantine Greek”) see also Matsoukas, *Σκέψεις καὶ σχόλια στὰ Οράματα καὶ Θάματα τοῦ στρατηγοῦ Μακρυγιάννη*, in *Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς 699*, (1984), pp. 135-149]. He claims that Orthodoxy in Greece was attacked by the Greek Enlightenment and the thinkers who virtually rejected Greek Byzantine culture, thus aiming at an uncritical dependency on the West, instead of a dialogue. He discerned the moralist and puritan side of the West in the advocates of the Greek Enlightenment and I am sure that he would attribute it without hesitation to the modern socialist and post-Patristic theologians, some of which actually identify him as their mentor, just as he would attribute to them, based on his criteria, a degradation to neo-idolatry and neo-demystification.

⁶⁶ Since Matsoukas did not treat them as such and because of his belief that the main reason for the disagreement between thinkers and theologians was the existence of this confessional aspect in both Departments of Theology in Greece, which hindered the carrying out of original scientific research, he does not hesitate to suggest that the two Departments of Theology be subsumed under the Faculty of Philosophy (*Νεοελληνικὸς πολιτισμὸς καὶ διανόηση*, pp. 40-41). Clearly, he is afraid of committed theological research (either conservative or progressive), which will eventually contend with an uncommitted Orthodox research prospect.

Cultural theologians today equate the confessional aspect with the Patristic-theological-traditional⁶⁷ and the existential declaration of faith, giving greater emphasis to the de-constructed faiths within the epistemological arena of multiculturalism. Clearly, this cultural view of the lesson has in mind its detachment from educational ontology, from the ontology in Christ, of Christ Who is always experienced in the Church. And so it is fighting on the side of religious personalities and cultures, and supports its epistemological all-round education, making a caricature and, if the reader will permit me the expression, a literary confusion of Christ, the condescending God.

So, great weight should be given, in a traditional understanding of the lesson, to not misconstruing the meaning of tradition, so that it does not appear that it functions in life as an un-Christologized pre-liturgy, which the post-Patristic, post-liturgical theologians who are seeking a post-theological lesson are ready to declare officially to be the enemy. As mistaken as the post-Patristic, post-liturgical theologians are in their views, equally so are the traditionalist theologians who see the traditional without Christ, Who contains its and its holy Fathers; Christ the dismembered but not divided God, Who invites us continuously and creatively to the culture of His corporeality⁶⁸ for the sake of all humankind and its cultures⁶⁹.

⁶⁷ Matsoukas was right to foresee and understand (Εὐρώπη ὠδίνουσα, p. 167) that “tradition wants yet to live, it holds on in anguish to the hearts of men, so that it does not perish” and to stress that “if we lose it, we will certainly lose an essential part of our existence, of our roots”.

⁶⁸ Here I use corporeality not by accident but because the culture of incarnation that is favoured by cultural theologians appears to be covert support of the view of Patristic Platonism, while at the same time these theologians seem to favour a Platonic

In this misconstrued expression of a post-Patristic, or post-Patristic and pre-liturgical, or post-liturgical apportionment, theology works as an ideology and seeks supporters and new alignments, flags and slogans, electrical cables for the one to shock the other, using Christ either as the only traditional religious leader or as one of the many religious leaders in the world.

Instead of an epilogue

There are times when modern post-theology of the views which I have described reminds me- it and its opponents, which it *a priori* imagines and creates ideologically- that it deals with Patristic theology as if it were a bag left on the belt at the luggage claim of a closed airport with no-one there to claim it. Some would probably like it to be stuck on the belt, while others fear that it is packed with explosives and other obstacles to their personal success⁷⁰. I am of the view that Patristic

relationship between epistemology and the ecclesiastical and charismatic theology of the Fathers. I thereby dissociate myself from the fleshly perception of the Christian culture as a sin-friendly culture.

⁶⁹ The point is that one should embrace the idea that the church is able to create culture, rather than believe, as is usually the case, that it is impossible to produce something of a cultural nature under the auspices of a conservative and fundamentalist community, as the ecclesiastical community is perceived, according to Matsoukas, by some intellectuals, mostly foreign, and also by those who have no relation to the church whatsoever (see these views in *Νεοελληνικός πολιτισμός και διανόηση*, pp. 35-40). Matsoukas is against the division between the cultural and ecclesiastical world, as is evident, for example, in his critical attitude towards the separation of the theological from the literary that he detects in Elytis' critique of ecclesiastical writers (see Matsoukas, *Πολιτισμός αὐραὶς λεπτή*, pp. 371-4).

⁷⁰ Here I will repeat Matsoukas' apposite remark: "I wish to emphasize that history is neither written by Little Red Riding Hoods nor judged by one-sided choices of a Puritan nature at will" (*Μυστήριον ἐπὶ τῶν ἱερῶς κεκοιμημένων*, p. 273) which I shall link, not randomly but indissolubly to his other remark: "there is no such thing as a discontinuous culture, therefore, conservatism [...] is signified by the previous bridges,

theology is the theology of the holy Fathers, which certainly seems not to attract the modernist-friendly theologians of late modernity, to use their own terminology. If some supporters of the Patristic tradition want it to be stuck on the belt, they are at fault, as are they who do not wish to accept that the only (and certainly resurrectional) explosive material it contains is the incarnation of God and the possibility of people's deification (glorification). As long as theologians remain forcibly closed to this mystery they will post-philosophize with many ulterior motives and not a few post-theologies.

In the age of computers and the era of TLG, many theologians want their nourishment ready-chewed and vapidly mutilate their imagination with electronic search-engines⁷¹, underestimating the value

while progressiveness by the next ones" (Matsoukas, *Νεοελληνικός πολιτισμός και διανόηση*, pp. 16-7). I will let the reader draw their own conclusions as to my views- by means of a conscious association of the above remarks.

⁷¹ Originally, there was no reference at this point of my text, wearisomely yet necessarily full of references. Just before I had it sent to those responsible for the publication of the Proceedings of the Meeting where it was delivered, I was informed on the internet of the Memorandum that was sent by the Academy of Volos to the Standing Holy Synod of the Church of Greece (see the text in <http://www.acadimia.gr/content/view/417/1/lang,el/>). In it, it is said that "we ought to bear in mind that the Academy of Theological Studies was not the first to use the term "post-Patristic" theology. Ioannis Karmiris, the eminent dogmatologist and Professor of the Department of Theology of the University of Athens, used it in his classic work: *Ὁρθόδοξος Ἐκκλησιολογία (Δογματικῆς, Τμήμα Ε'*, Athens 1973, p. 679 and *passim*). Regarding the reasons for which his work *Μυστικισμός, Ἀποφατισμός, Καταφακτικὴ Θεολογία* (Athens 1974, p. 5) was compiled, Panagiotis Trembelas, another eminent Orthodox theologian, explicitly states that: "Frequently in his recently published important work *Ἐκκλησιολογία*, Ioannis Karmiris prompts the contemporary generation of Greek-Orthodox theologians to make a great effort to develop a post-Patristic theology". Alexander Schmemmann, the eminent Orthodox theologian and liturgist of the 20th century, talks about post-Patristic theology as well (see *Russian Theology: 1920-1972. An Introductory Survey*, SVTQ, 16 [1972], p. 178)". The wary reader will clearly understand that "modern Greek post-Patristic theory" cannot be saved from its belly-flop by an amputated-forged epistemology unless it engages in

of it exercising itself actively in Christ and really re-creating from the experience of the holy Fathers and their theology⁷². But Orthodoxy is

really fasting self-criticism. What we are dealing with here is definitely an effort to mislead. As I believe that this distortion ought to be the reason for a specific study, I will, at this point, mention in a few words that in his work, Schmemmann was actually referring to the movements that had been dominant since the beginning of the 20th century, without actually using the term himself. He refers to the first theological trend, which ought to go “beyond the Fathers” “while staying true to its Patristic roots”, as well as to a second trend which urged the “return to the Fathers” and the rediscovery of their creative spirit (a spirit that was connected to the Greek ways of theological creation). This is Schmemmann’s descriptive reference to the movements mentioned above. As far as Trembelas is concerned, he is aware of Karmiris’ study, which urges the need for the development of a post-Patristic theology, without (on the part of Trembelas) showing any particular interest in this term (he simply transmits Karmiris’ words). What he is interested in, is associating Karmiris’ exhortation with the need for an apophatic theology (that is derived from the Fathers) (here the term post-Patristic theology is not an ideological term that Trembelas is interested in, as we are today because of the “post-Patristic theory”). In fact Karmiris, who is obviously aware- as his references reveal- of the period of ferment in Russian theology and the theological movements of his time, associates the neo-Patristic with the post-Patristic and the modern state of theology (of his time), so as to weld them with the blowgun of Patricity and eventually to claim that Orthodox theology ought to turn to the Fathers themselves. That is, he perceives a post-Patristic theory that needs to follow after Patricity (I would say Patricity after Patricity as an uninterrupted event). However, this is his way of taking a stand against the extreme cataphatic trends in Western theology, through his proposal for a combination of what he himself (not moved by ideology) calls post-Patristic theology with the “return to the great Orthodox Fathers” and through the use of the “Patristic theological way of thinking to a great extent and in depth” (p. 679). On p. 680 he goes on to clarify: “We deem it absolutely the broad and in depth use of traditional Patristic thought by modern theology in general to be absolutely..., as tradition is not a dead entity, rather a life-bearing spirit...”. It is clear that Karmiris’ ontological/theological considerations bear no relation whatsoever to that of the Greek modern “post-Patristic theology”, which would understand Florovsky’s anxiety for the Greek Patristic spirit as a true ecumenical spirit if these older texts had been taken into account and it would not, as an aspiring theory, differentiate between what is Greek and what is Christian. I do not believe that anyone might claim (now or in the future) that I agree with this theory, just because I, not, of course, as an eminent theologian, have often used the term “post-Patristic” theology in this text.

⁷² In a characteristic remark, in *Θεολογία καὶ πολιτισμὸς* (in the collective work *Θεολογία καὶ τέχνη*, Thessaloniki 1998. Pp. 80-85), Matsoukas talks about the attuned sense organs of the Scriptures and of Patristic theology that are collected in the Byzantine tradition, as he clarifies elsewhere the non-static nature of the content of the

unorthodox, like Christ's mother, and His Church is a bride unwedded, because it gives birth to the incarnate God and is born from Him sacramentally⁷³.

If, therefore, Orthodoxy is understood in the context of extreme human affirmation and of the logical necessity for relevancy, then it becomes dogmatism. Orthodoxy certainly needs to co-mingle with the strange Christ, in order to exist in fact as an explosion of our logic within the unorthodoxy of the union between the divine and the human, in which true ecumenicity is experienced. Only thus can we speak of Orthodoxy, when we conceive of it as experienced para-dox, which seems to be something entirely ignored in the post-theological views (or pre-theological intentions) to which I referred above in brief and with my admittedly poor critical faculties.

To Sum Up

In what has been said above, there was movement along three axes towards a critical reading centred on the expression of contemporary post-theological terminology:

a) in the progression from the dialogue with Roman Catholicism and static eschatology to pneumatic eschatology, which favours dialogue with the Protestantism; b) in the introduction of newly-coined terms

Scriptures and of theology (see Χριστιανισμός και τεχνολογία, in Ὁρθόδοξος Ἐπιστολὴ 300 (1975), pp. 60-61).

⁷³ See also Behr, *The Trinitarian Being of the Church*, p. 88: "The Church, as the body of Christ and the temple of the Spirit, incarnates the presence of God in this world, and does so also as the mother of the baptized, in travail with them until their death in confession of Christ, to be raised with him, as the fulfillment of their baptism and the celebration of the eucharist".

into theological thought and into this dialogical direction which is being activated by modern theologians; and c) in the problematics created today about the lesson of religion education in schools. Let us look at them briefly.

In the first part, a view is given of the kinesiology of the theological dialogue in the form of institutional Eucharistology, which was used as a tool for dialogue with Roman Catholicism until the post-Patristic proposal. The latter shows a preference for “Pneumatic Trinitocentrism” which is used as a lever of communication with Protestant ecclesiology and inter-religious thinking. It is precisely here that a parallel route of Trinitology and Ecclesiology seems to thrive, one which is in a loose or even indifferent relationship with the ontology of the Eucharistic life.

The terms post-Patristic theology and post-liturgy, as they are analyzed, indicate that they are in organic affinity with the tendency among modern theologians to act in the margins of theology (in the context of a post-theology) and to seek this post-theology as a more promising prospect for inter-Christian (or inter-religious) dialogue in today’s multi-cultural age. The criticism levelled at the above terms focuses on the field of their paternity and where their content leaves behind unanswered theological questions, that is, where the actual theology of the Fathers is ignored as the true ecumenical theology. The fanatical slogan “beyond the Fathers”, as well as an un-Christologized post-liturgy are judged by the use of the proposition “post”, in the sense that, for those who employ it, it clearly means “later time” and moving away from Patristic and liturgical theology to superseding the incarnated

theology itself and the historical flesh of God, which the liturgical life of the Church brings with it.

The third part highlights the thinking concerning the lesson of religious education and the new tortuous paths this leads to when it is looked at in post-theological terms. The use of its concept as a cultural, religious lesson has received criticism from the point of view of the dangers that lurk in its epistemological exclusivization. Therefore it is considered that the lesson as a cognitive object is in mutual dependence with the Church experience, with the ontology (and not exclusively the epistemology) of Orthodox culture, something which also demonstrates the importance of the indivisible relationship between charismatic and academic theology and their unconfused union.

Finally, the characteristic element which is stressed emphatically is the paradoxical fact of the divine incarnation as an event of co-mingling Eucharistically and of importance educationally. This is why the paradoxical form “Unorthodox Orthodoxy” was chosen for our title, with a positive meaning, in order to note, as a theological refrain in the study, the feebleness of human logic in the face of the strangeness of the divine incarnation, which wants people to respond positively to God the Word in logical faith. The lack of this perspective in the ideological snapshots of modern post-theological patterns and systems demonstrates how weak and non-existent their soteriology is. Soteriology is actually experienced and expressed ecumenically and truly dialogically by the ever-alive tradition of the holy Fathers and the theanthropic culture of its saints.