

EUCCHARISTIC THEOLOGY CONTEXTUALIZED?

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The Volos Theological Academy's (and its partners') courage to raise the issue of the "Post-Patristic" character of contemporary Orthodox theology, both in the sense of our historical reality, and in more profound theological terms, brought into the fore at a first level the tension between our precious and invaluable theological past (patristic theology) and its application into our present mission (Orthodox witness), and at a second level the legitimacy of a contemporary autonomous Orthodox theology and practice in our modern and post-modern condition (contextual theology). Although the former tension seemed to have been solved almost a century ago by the famous "neo-patristic theology", suggested by the late Fr. Georges Florovsky with his plea to follow the "spirit" and not the "letter" of the Fathers, the latter is still haunting as a ghost, conditioned by the prevailing view that Orthodoxy is the Christian "confession" that is mainly characterized by its faithfulness to the "tradition". All efforts to solve this latter tension are limited to the "interpretation" of the patristic theology; even when the question "can Orthodox theology be contextual?" was answered in a positive way.

In my view, the inability of our Church, and by extension her current Orthodox theology, to meet this challenge is mainly due to their neglect of the biblical tradition,¹ at least to the extent the patristic tradition is revered, and the insufficient concern about the imperative of mission, at least to the same extent the preservation of our tradition is pursued. With regard to the former, in the bottom line lies the perennial question asked by Pontius Pilate: What is the "truth"? (*Τί ἐστὶν ἀλήθεια*): the Gospel (Bible) or its interpretation (Fathers). As to the latter, and in fact as a result of the above question, the issue at stake is: how significant is the "truth", even in its "interpreted" form (patristic theology), if it is not made relevant to the present context?

In order to properly answer all the above questions it is necessary to carefully address: (a) the profound meaning of (Orthodox) "tradition", (b) the new methodology of "contextuality", and (c) the "Eucharistic ecclesiology"; only then (d) can one respond to the question posed in the title.

¹ From my own personal experience, when more than 30 years ago as a young scholar I introduced the idea of a post-patristic Orthodox theology in a biblical seminar (*Biblicum*) in front of my biblical professors in Thessaloniki ("Biblical Criticism and Orthodoxy," *ΕΕΘΣΘ* 25 [1980], 337-377), there was no negative reaction at all. Ten years later, while speaking in an Orthodox Seminary in the US at a wider audience, I repeated my views ("Greek Theology in the making. Trends and Facts in the 80's-Vision for the 90's," *SVTQ* 35 [1991], 33-52), and I discerned some honest concern, since at that time the Greek Fathers still presented for the Orthodox migrants the stronghold of their identity, which is understandable. But when even 20 years later Dr. Kalaitzidis presented my views as one stream in current Orthodox theology in his *SVTQ* article (on which the first conference in Volos on the theme, "Neo-patristic Synthesis or Post-modern Theology" was based), the row was enormous, especially in Greece, but also abroad, exported by the fundamentalists.

(a) TRADITION

Tradition (in Greek *παράδοσις*=*paradosis*) is the entire set of historical facts, beliefs, experiences, social and religious practices, and even philosophical doctrines or aesthetic conceptions, which form an entity transmitted from one generation to another either orally or in a written and even in artistic form. Thus, tradition - we may safely say - constitutes a fundamental element for the existence, coherence and advancement of human culture in any given context.

In the wider religious sphere – taking into consideration that *culture* is in some way connected with *cult* – tradition has to do more or less with the religious practices, i.e. with the *liturgy* of a given religious system, rather than with the religious *beliefs* that theoretically express or presuppose these practices, without of course excluding them.

In Christianity, paradoxically, tradition was for quite an extensive period of time confined only to the oral form of Christian faith, or more precisely the non-biblical part of it, both written in later Christian literature or transmitted in various ways from one generation to another. Thus, tradition has come to be determined by the post-reformation and post-Trentine dialectic opposition to the Bible, which has taken the oversimplified form: Bible and/or (even *versus*) Tradition. Only recently, from the beginning of the ecumenical era, has tradition acquired a new wider sense and understanding, which nevertheless has always been the authentic understanding in the ancient Church. Tradition no longer has a fragmented meaning connected to one only segment of Christian faith; it refers to the whole of Christian faith: not only the Christian doctrine but also to worship.

It is not a coincidence that the two main references in the Bible of the term in the sense of “receiving” (in Gr. *παραλαμβάνειν*) and “transmitting” (in Gr. *παραδίδοναι*) as recorded by St. Paul in his 1st epistle to Corinthians (ch.11 and 15) cover both the *kerygma* (doctrine in the wider sense) and the *Eucharist* (the heart of Christian worship).

Thus the importance of tradition in Christianity underlines a sense of a living continuity with the Church of the ancient times, of the apostolic period. Behind it lies the same determination that kept the unity of the two Testaments against the Gnostic (Marcion) attempt to reject the O.T. Tradition in this sense is not viewed as something in addition to, or over against, the Bible. Scripture and Tradition are not treated as two different things, two distinct sources of the Christian faith. Scripture exists within Tradition, which although it gives a unique pre-eminence to the Bible, it also includes further developments - of course in the form of clarification and explication, not of addition - of the apostolic faith.

In a catalytic statement world Christianity, across confessional boundaries, has admitted that “*we exist as Christians by the Tradition (paradosis) of the Gospel (evangelion, kerygma), testified in Scripture, transmitted in and by the Church, through the power of the Holy Spirit*” (IV World Conference on Faith and Order of WCC, Montreal, 1963). Tradition (with capital T) is distinguished from the various local or regional or even temporal traditions (with small t), which obviously cannot claim a universal authority in the life of the Church. Yet, there is a close connection between the two. “*The traditions in Christian history are distinct from, yet connected with, the Tradition. They are expressions and manifestations in diverse historical terms of the one truth and reality which is in Christ*” (ibid).

At first glance the very concept of tradition seems to be a contradiction, since the

Holy Spirit who guides the Church to all truth (Jn 16:13), cannot be limited by traditional values only, for the “*pneuma blows wherever he (or she) wishes*” (Jn 3:8). If we take the Trinitarian and eschatological principles of Christian faith seriously into account, the Church as a *koinonia* proleptically manifesting the glory of the coming Kingdom of God, i.e. as a movement forward, toward the eschaton, a movement of continuous renewal, can hardly be conditioned by what has been set in the past, with the exception of course of the living continuity and of the communion with all humanity - in fact with all the created world - both in space and in time.

Thus, tradition can hardly be considered as a static entity; it is rather a dynamic reality, it is not a dead acceptance of the past, but a living experience of the Holy Spirit in the present. In other words it is a *relational* principle, completely incompatible with all kinds of individualism and with the absolute and strict sense of objectivism. In G. Florovsky's words, “*Tradition is the witness of the Spirit; the Spirit's unceasing revelation and preaching of the Good news... It is not only a protective, conservative principle, but primarily the principle of growth and renewal*”.

According to this dynamic understanding of tradition the importance of mission becomes more than evident, and with it the “contextual” character of our theology. In contrast to our “classical” or “traditional” understanding of theology, the emphasis is not so much whether and to what extent our Orthodox theology is in agreement with the *tradition*, but if it has any dynamic reference and relation at all to the given conditions of today's world. Accordingly, even the acquisition, reception and preservation of the “truth” is of little value if it is ineffectively witnessed to the world. After all, the Church, and her theology, is not meant for herself but for the world. A characteristic example taken from the area of Christian mission is the shift that has taken place in the content of our witness. The same holds true on a purely theological level: nothing can serve as an authoritative basis for the quest of the “truth”, even if attested by “tradition” (Holy Scripture, or Church tradition in general, or Patristic theology in particular), since every experience of the Church is conditioned by a certain (and therefore relative?) context. Some argue that the argument “*from tradition*” no longer constitutes an unshakable and unchangeable point of reference in all contested issues in our present day global theological discussions. Therefore, the issue of contextuality, of contextual theology (or *-ies*), of contextual methodology etc. is extremely important for our discussion.²

(b) CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

Contextual theology is an important achievement in the field of theological hermeneutics at a world level, and the wide application from the 70s onwards of the *contextual methodology* has in effect suggested the *contextual character of any theology*. This great

² See more in my “Tradition,” *Dictionnaire Oecumenique de la Missiologie. 100 Mots pour la Mission*, Cerf/Labor et Fides, Paris/Geneva 2001, *ad loc.* Also Ion Bria, *The Sense of Ecumenical Tradition: The Ecumenical Witness and Vision of the Orthodox*. Genève: COE, 1991. Yves Congar, “L' Ecriture, la Tradition et les traditions,” Document de Montréal 1963, in L. Vischer (ed.), *Foi et Constitution : Textes et Documents, 1910-1963*. Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1968, pp. 171-185. G. Florovsky, “The Function of Tradition in the Ancient Church,” *GOTR* 9 (1963), pp. 181-200. R. Hoekman, “A Missiological Understanding of Tradition,” *Angelicum*, 61 (1984), pp. 649-670. K. Ware, “Tradition,” in N. Lossky and others (eds.), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, *ad loc.*

achievement has created an unabridged psychological gap between the traditional Churches (mainly the Orthodox) and the new and most vibrant younger Christian communities. The main reason for this development in the ecumenical movement was the relativization of any stable point of reference of all authentic criteria in the search for the ultimate *truth*, in other words with Orthodoxy, in fact any “orthodoxy”.

The 7th General Assembly of the WCC in Canberra (February, 1991) dramatically demonstrated the problem.³ And this was true in spite of the fact that the previous General Assembly of the W.C.C. in Vancouver (1983) had recommended the development of a "vital, coherent theology" capable of creatively blending *classical* theology with *contextual* theology, the theoretical with the practical, the continuing (tradition) with the relative (current problems, issues). In fact in Canberra two antithetical theologies came into conflict.⁴ The confrontation came about not so much because of the two diametrically opposite main presentations at the Assembly - the “orthodox”, “classical”, theological, “academic” presentation by the late Orthodox Patriarch of Alexandria Parthenios, and the “sound and light”, “contextual”, non-traditional presentation by the South Korean Presbyterian Professor Chung Hyun-Kyung - as much as it came from the reaction which followed, above all from the Orthodox,⁵ who gave the impression - not entirely correctly - that Orthodox theology and contextual theology are in conflict.⁶ Those familiar with the issue know that the debate concerns methodology, and only by coincidence it was related to Orthodoxy as such. Even the joint Canberra-Chambésy statement by the Orthodox,⁷ though it has had a positive effect on redefining the WCC's priorities, did not touch upon, or even

³ See one of the most interesting assessments, the article by L. Vischer, "Ist das wirklich die 'Einheit' die wir suchen?" ÖR 41 (1992), 7-24. In Greek, see the extremely enlightening publication by G. Lemopoulos, *The 7th General Assembly of the WCC: Canberra, February 1991: Chronicle-Documents-Evaluations*, Katerini, 1992; also G. Limouris, "The 7th General Assembly of the WCC: It's Theological Problems and the Orthodox Presence and Witness", *Gregorios o Palamas* 74 (1991), 345 ff.

⁴ It is tragic that the conflict between the traditional Orthodoxy and the newer churches and theological trends (contextual theologies) which as a rule have taken as their point of departure the dynamics of the Third World, has spilled over into the debate purely on Pneumatology, which had been something the Orthodox had previously been anticipating so eagerly. See the Orthodox contribution to the subject in “Come Holy Spirit, Renew All Creation,” in G. Lemopoulos (ed.), *Come Holy Spirit, Renew All Creation*, (in Greek) 1991, 188.

⁵ See “Reflection of the Orthodox Delegates” (from Canberra), and “The Orthodox Churches and the World Council of Churches” (Chambésy, 12-16 September 1991), in *The 7th General Assembly*, 77ff, 93ff respectively (in Greek). Also characteristic are the remarks by Dr. Yeow Choo Lak, “After the 7th Assembly What?” *Ministerial Formation* 54 (1991) 2-6. In his evaluation of Canberra he emphasized that Prof. Chung's presentation “was followed in shrill pursuit by the cry of 'Syncretism!' This time, however, the accusation comes not from those conservative fundamentalists who without a trace of sensitivity were demonstrating outside the main entrance of the conference center, but from our Orthodox brothers (I did not hear a single criticism from the Orthodox sisters). I was disappointed by the accusation.” (p. 3).

⁶ Among the studies/assessments of the 7th General Assembly of the WCC, included in the Greek anthology by G. Lemopoulos, only the final essay by my colleague from Boston, Fr. E. Clapsis, focuses especially on methodology, “What the Spirit Says to the Churches: Implications for Mission of the 7th General Assembly of the WCC,” 239-264 (in Greek).

⁷ See above. The Chambesy document is further rewording of the “Reflections” of Canberra.

slightly refer to, the problem of theological methodology.⁸ The late Fr. Ion Bria very rightly emphasized that “the basic framework in which many ecumenical subjects are discussed is not home to the Eastern Churches...We need more clarity in defining the unity of tradition since many aspects of Orthodox rhetoric concerning the unity of the Church can easily be misunderstood.”⁹ I do not pretend in this paper to answer the question concerning the relation between *Orthodox* theology and *contextual* theologies: I shall simply attempt to open the subject, since I believe that the future creative contribution and substantive participation of the Orthodox Church in, and the contribution of the Orthodox theology to, the ecumenical dialogue, depend very much on recognizing, understanding and finding a dynamic solution to this burning methodological issue.¹⁰

Contextual theology itself is closely linked with the problem of theological methodology; on how to “do theology”; how to work out the use of theology as a tool for Church unity. Indeed, during the triennium 1972-1974 the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey hosted a series of three conferences on the general theme “Dogmatic or Contextual Theology.”¹¹ In order to better understand the current methodological problematic, it is necessary to briefly review the history of theological methodology in the ecumenical dialogue and to point out the successive trends that have dominated the theological dialogue, since these methodologies continue to be used¹² in the process of the Churches’ search for visible unity.

Of extreme importance for our present subject, especially concerning the creative and

⁸ See M. Kinnamon-J. Nicole, “The Challenge of Canberra for Theological Education,” *Ministerial Formation* 54 (1991), 7ff.

⁹ Ion Bria, *The Sense of Ecumenical Tradition: The Ecumenical Witness and Vision of the Orthodox*, Geneva, 1991, 46-48.

¹⁰ The only substantial attempt within the Orthodox theological world to address this issue at that time was by N. Nissiotis in his work, *The Defense of Hope* (in Greek), Athens, 1975 (first appeared as a series in the journal *Theologia* 46 [1974], 41ff, 273ff, 482ff). Characteristically, this leading subject in the ecumenical dialogue did not succeed in getting attention at the 2nd Conference of Orthodox Theological Schools, which met in Athens the very next year, in spite of the positive contribution made by N. Nissiotis in his introduction to the main theme of the conference (“Introduction to the theme of the 2nd Conference of Orthodox Theological Schools: The Theology of the Church and its Realization,” *Praktika [Minutes]* (63-76), 67. After this genuine introduction, the sole contribution to this theme was by another leading ecumenist of Orthodoxy, Prof. B. Istavridis, “The Ecumenical Dimension of Orthodoxy,” *ibid.*, (539-556) 546. See his concluding remarks as well 553ff. See also A. Papadopoulos, *The Witness and Service of Orthodoxy Today*, Thessaloniki, 1983, 86ff (in Greek).

¹¹ Cf. the section on “Reflections on the Methodology of Faith and Order Study,” in the meeting which immediately followed in Accra, Ghana (*Accra--Uniting in Hope: Reports and Documents from the Meeting of the Faith and Order Commission, 23 July-5 August 1974, University of Ghana, Legon (FO II 71)*), 66-82. Also Choan-Seng Song (ed.), *Doing Theology Today*, Madras 1976, together with the minutes of the above Bossey conferences, where there is a considerable Orthodox contribution by N. Nissiotis entitled “Ecclesial Theology in Context,” 101-124. Cf. also the special issue of *Study Encounter*, Vol. VIII No. 3 (1972); also M. Begzos, “‘The Account of Hope’: the Report of the ‘Faith and Order’ Conference of the WCC,” *Ekklisia* 57 (1980), 58ff., 85ff. (in Greek).

¹² Lukas Vischer very rightly underlined the fact that while each stage of the dialogue is marked by a specific methodology, the various methodologies have continued to co-exist. He made this point in the prologue to Kuncheria Pathil’s relevant work, *Models in Ecumenical Dialogue: A Study of the Methodological Development in the Commission on ‘Faith and Order’ of the World Council of Churches*, Bangalore 1981, p. xiiiiff.

constructive relations between Orthodox theology and the non-Orthodox Christian world, is the Louvain Conference of the Faith and Order commission in 1971, which marked the first use of contextual terminology in a formal statement of the ecumenical dialogue: “intercontextual method” and “inter-contextual approach.”¹³ This schematic differentiation between two periods of Orthodox participation in the Ecumenical Movement¹⁴ has been noted also by a number of important Orthodox theologians involved in the Ecumenical Movement. According to the late Fr. Ion Bria, the first period, typified by the Toronto Statement entitled “The Church, the Churches, and the World Council of Churches,”¹⁵ was the stage of introductions, of coming to know others. During the second period, however, the interest shifted from theory to practice, from theology to anthropology, and the emphasis was unquestionably put on the social Christian witness.¹⁶ The clear awareness of responsibility for correcting the historical divisions, the scandal of schism and the fragmentation of the oneness of the “body of Christ,” now gave its place to interest in, and showing solidarity with, those (the *laos*) engaged in the struggle for justice, peace and liberation. The uneasiness of the Orthodox - which became increasingly conspicuous even toward the end of the first period - toward the explicit dualism that was dominating the ecumenical movement (horizontal-vertical dimension of salvation, visible-invisible Church, institutional-empirical etc.), was now transformed into complete opposition. Indeed, 1973 marked a point of almost open break with the WCC, on the issue of contextual theology.¹⁷

¹³ See the working papers of the Louvain conference, perhaps the sole meeting in the history of WCC not to publish official reports, from John Deschner, *Faith and Order Louvain 1971: Study, Reports and Documents* (FO II 59), Geneva 1971, 184-199 and 194-198. This was the point from which the Orthodox generally began to take a more guarded and even critical attitude toward the various programs of WCC, while at the same time this foremost ecumenical body was clearly observed to be turning in the direction of the wider community and other issues of humanity. It was a tragic irony that the Louvain conference almost led to a break because of the Orthodox presence, specifically with the presidential address of the then head of the Faith and Order Commission, the late Fr. John Meyendorff, who was one of the leading Orthodox theologians and pioneers in the ecumenical dialogue: and now almost twenty years later, with the initiative of an Orthodox theological institution (the Theological Department of the University of Thessaloniki) an attempt was made to find a relationship between the Orthodox theology and the nearly dominant theological methodology within WCC.

¹⁴ Another critical moment was in 1961 at the 3rd General Assembly of WCC in New Delhi, when the basis of the Charter of WCC was changed from Christological to Trinitarian, and the entirety of Orthodoxy officially joined the WCC.

¹⁵ See the interesting article by the Russian theologian Fr. Vitaly Borovoy, “The Ecclesiastical Significance of the WCC: The Legacy and Promise of Toronto,” *ER* 40 (1988) (Commemorating Amsterdam 1948: 40 Years of the WCC), 504-518.

¹⁶ A characteristic example is the document *Common Witness* (by the Joint Working Group of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches) Geneva 1981; also, the importance of BEM, a purely theological document, also with participation of the Roman Catholic Church, cannot be overestimated.

¹⁷ Ion Bria, *The Sense of Ecumenical Tradition*, 25. See also A. Papadopoulos, *Witness and Service* (Gk.), 126ff. At this point we must remind ourselves that at that critical moment, when the very presence of the Orthodox in the WCC and the ecumenical movement was at risk, it was judged necessary to convene an *ad hoc* Orthodox consultation at New Valaamo in Finland (1977). There, with the backing of historical and theological evidence, the ecumenical character and orientation of the Orthodox Church was once again reaffirmed. As far as Orthodox theology is concerned there have

But how did the WCC over the last twenty years gradually come to adopt almost exclusively the method of contextual theology in its discussions and, more importantly, in its policymaking? Here we must remember that all the preceding methodologies which were used as tools for dialogue in the first stage of the ecumenical movement, proved to be ineffective in sustaining the initial optimism for overcoming the divisions of the Christian world. Both the *comparative method*, necessary and extremely constructive for the initial stage of the dialogue, and the *Dialectical* one, after a proposal by Karl Barth, proved inadequate. So, a third methodology (the *Christological method*) was adopted at the Third International Faith and Order Consultation in Lund (1952).¹⁸ This had an Archimedean effect and once again the ecumenical world was set in motion. Using “the Christ event” as the point of departure, the Churches - the essential partners in the dialogue - agreed to abandon the comparative and dialectical approaches and the various presuppositions attached to them, and started instead “to show the points of agreement that form the basis for the gift of unity (in Christ) and to apply this to the entire range of divisions until such time that the very last pocket of dispute that prevents confessional unity is erased.”¹⁹

But this method, in spite of the invaluable help it gave in approaching basic issues, and especially in the drafting of theological studies and the formulation of ecclesiological positions for progress towards visible unity,²⁰ also quickly proved inadequate.²¹ Its main weakness was the over-emphasis on *christocentricity*, which underestimated the Trinitarian and Pneumatological foundations of Christian faith. The Fourth General Assembly of the WCC in Uppsala, Sweden in 1968 further developed this trend, although the members of the Faith and Order section had recommended something quite different, when they met in Bristol the previous year. The present conflict among the Churches, they urged, needed to be seriously examined and seen as a consequence of “differing, however legitimate, interpretations of one and the same Gospel.”²² In spite of this, the General Assembly decided instead to propose a “study of

been a number of meetings (1972 in Thessaloniki, the regular gatherings of the Orthodox Theological Society of America, the Second Conference of Orthodox Theologians in 1976) at which the ecumenical perspective of Orthodoxy was upheld. What is known as the New Valaamo Report forms also the basis for the resolution on “The Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Movement” of the 3rd Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Consultation.

¹⁸ For this reason it is also known in later documents as the “Lund method” or “Lund methodology” (Kuncheria Pathil, *Models in Ecumenical Dialogue*, 314, note 1).

¹⁹ T.F. Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement in the Church*, vol. 1, 1959, 202.

²⁰ Among the classic achievements of the period are the affirmations that unity is not our own hypothesis but a given fact of the Holy Spirit (given unity); the Church as “event” and not institution; the predominance of the “body of Christ” view of the Church's identity, etc.

²¹ It was not only New Testament scholars who pointed out the ecclesiological diversity in the New Testament (see the much discussed introduction by E. Kaeseman at the 4th International Conference of the Section on Faith and Order, Montreal, 1963 on the theme: “Unity and Diversity in New Testament Ecclesiology,” *FO II* 42, 16, and *NT* 6 (1963), 290ff., and the discussion following; other points of view, particularly the anglo-saxon, criticized the excessive meta-historical character of his views which gradually came to dominate all theological discussion, as if the churches were located outside this world.

²² See *New Directions in Faith and Order: Bristol 1967. Reports-Minutes-Documents* (FO II 50), Geneva 1968, 41.

the unity of the Church within the context of the unity of humankind.”²³

It was at this point, so critical for the continuation of the ecumenical dialogue, that we find the experimental use, and final adoption of, the methodology that came to be called *contextual* or *intercontextual*, together with its derivative, *contextual theology*.²⁴ Every tradition (every theological position, and indeed every text), is now seen to be connected to a specific setting. “*Every text has a context*,” became the characteristic motto.²⁵ But this context is not merely something external to the tradition (or theological position, or text) that simply modifies it, but is understood instead to constitute an integral part of it. All traditions - especially of the “traditional” churches such as the Orthodox - are inseparably linked to a specific historical, social-cultural, political, and even economic and psychological context. This means that theology and tradition are made relative. The traditional data can no longer be used as a rationale for an abstract universal theology that carries absolute and unlimited authority. What takes the place of this is a wide range of theologies appropriate to the multiple varieties of human contexts.

At this point we must acknowledge that many factors have helped shape this contextual understanding of theology. Pluralism, contemporary views of humanity, of the world, of the meaning of human experience, and above all of the *theological* significance of social and cultural context, have all had a dramatic influence on the above understanding of theology, its role, as well as the method (contextual) with which it is pursued.

While pluralism is an important aspect of contextual theology, its most prominent feature is the significance it gives to human *experience*. If theology, as K. Pathil pointed out, is an intellectual concept based on the data of revelation and faith, at the same time it is also a concept of human experience, a concept of the human being as the one who “theologizes,” since revelation and faith become tangible realities here and now only in and through human experience. In this way, the human being is not only the subject but also the object of theological reflection: s/he is not only the context but also the content of theology. This means that no “one” theology - whether apostolic, or patristic, or Byzantine etc. - is capable of being the authentic self-evident eternal truth that can serve for all times and everywhere as the reference point in the quest for the unity of the Church.²⁶ Therefore, in almost all theological discussions in that latest period it was

²³ Significantly, the minutes of the Uppsala consultation were published with the title “Unity of Mankind,” Geneva 1969. For this reason also in 1971 the meeting in Louvain--where for the first time this method met with success – had as its main theme “Unity of the Church-Unity of Mankind”.

²⁴ “Theologizing in context” as it was termed by the late Nikos Nissiotis in the only Greek reference which treated this subject systematically a generation ago (*The Defense of Hope*, see above). Classical theology, in contrast, is associated in ecumenical circles with theological work that depended more or less on the earlier methodologies.

²⁵ K. Pathil, *Models in Ecumenical Dialogue*, 346.

²⁶ K. Pathil, *Models in Ecumenical Dialogue*, 363-64. According to N. Matsoukas in the Orthodox tradition we can find a dual theological methodology. In the first theological method the human being comes to know the uncreated God and the related mystery in the vision of God, in the direct vision of the divine glory, while in the second process knowledge approaches knowledge of all created reality through science (see his recent introduction to Inter-Christian Symposium of the Theological Faculty and the Ateneum Antonianum Spirituality Institute of Rome on the theme “The Vision of God and Prayer”, entitled “The Theophanies in the History of Israel and the Church as Sources of

more and more often maintained that human experience is both the only approach to the divine and the only safety valve that can check the excesses of theology and keep it healthy. But here too, the obvious variety of human experiences, formed in differing social, cultural, economic, political and psychological contexts eliminates the very possibility of a single “universal” theology. A given theology is thus transformed into something “local,” “temporal,” or to use the categories of classical or academic theology, into practical theology, or theology of struggle (for liberation, for hope etc.), or theology of spirituality and ascetic life, or liturgical theology and so forth. Thus, all theologies inevitably become “contextual.”²⁷

A characteristic example taken from the area of Christian witness is at this point is quite illuminating. In the earlier ecumenical period the Churches were interested in *charitable diaconia*, with concrete expressions that were directed toward the *results* of social indifference and injustice. After some time, an interest in *social diaconia* began to develop within the WCC, and the concrete expressions of that interest likewise shifted toward the *causes* of social indifference and injustice.²⁸ The same holds true on the purely *theological* level: nothing can serve as an authoritative basis for dialogue, even if attested by Holy Scripture or the Church Tradition, since every experience of the Church is conditioned by a certain (and therefore relative) context. For no contested issue - for instance the question of the ordination of women, or of the inclusive language, or even the Trinitarian basis of Christian faith - does the argument “from tradition” any longer constitute an unshakeable and unchangeable part of contemporary ecumenical dialogue. Contextual theology, taking as its point of departure the certainty that the Church is a “sign” of the Kingdom of God and of the “given by the triune God unity”, calls into question the ability of the established institutions to advance on the road toward an egalitarian community of men and women, both within the Church and in the society at large.²⁹ Similar questions might be raised about the relationship between the eternal and inviolable “Gospel” and finite “culture;” and even more pointedly about the dialogue of Christianity with other living religions.

As I indicated at the beginning of my paper, it was the merit of this series of conferences to bring more than a generation later the question of the relationship between *Contextual theology and Orthodoxy*, and with it the very delicate and thorny issue on how to make the legitimate variety of experiences of other Christian traditions acceptable to all, without sacrificing its theological understanding of the catholicity or

the Vision and Knowledge of God”, published in *Antipelargesis: Essays in Honor of Archbishop Chrysostom of Cyprus on the 25th Anniversary of his Episcopal Service*, Leukosia 1993, 323-331, (in Greek), and also his three-volume work, *Dogmatic and Symbolic Theology*, Thessaloniki 1985, vol. 1, 181ff.) (also in Greek).

²⁷ Within Orthodoxy something analogous was the discovery of an authentic “liturgical theology”. In addition, at the FO Conference in Lund (1952) it was emphasized officially by the Orthodox that “Christianity is a liturgical religion. The Church is above all a worshipping community. Worship comes first, doctrine and discipline second. The *lex orandi* (the rule of prayer) has priority in the life of the Christian Church. The *lex credendi* (the rule of faith) proceeds from the worshipping experience and vision of the Church” (G. Florovsky, “Orthodox Worship,” *Themes of Orthodox Theology*, Greek translation 1973, 159-173, p. 159).

²⁸ Cf. the WCC initiatives in the Program to Combat Racism, and Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation etc.

²⁹ E.g. “The Ecumenical Decade: 1988-1998, the Churches in Solidarity with Women”.

completeness of its ecclesial identity. And something further: how can Orthodox theology remain critically tied to the Orthodox tradition, to the eastern (Byzantine, cultural, historical etc.) context, without being merely and exclusively a conventional expression of this context? How, in other words, will it acquire a “catholic” and “ecumenical” character, given the fact that salvation is certainly offered by Christ to all creation? And at the bottom line lies, of course, the question of this present conference: “Can Orthodox theology be contextual?” I have myself no doubt that a candid dialogue of Orthodox theology, the primary Christian theology “from above”, with the various contemporary contextual theologies “from below” will prove to be beneficial to both parties.³⁰ There is, however, something more. The Orthodox Church should witness in the midst of the non-Orthodox her right vision of *communion* and *otherness* (taken out of its Trinitarian, Pneumatological, cosmic and above all Eucharistic vision of existence), at a time when *communion* with the *other* is becoming extremely difficult, not only outside the Orthodox Church, but unfortunately very often inside her.³¹

Nevertheless, before closing this part of my paper I need draw our attention to the need of a *common point of reference*. Otherwise, we run the danger to view any local context and experience as an authentic expression of our Christian faith.³² Allow me at this point to bring to our memory the accurate observation by the late Nikos Nissiotis, that we must not exclude the possibility of a universally and fully authoritative theology, perhaps even on the basis of the transcendent anthropology of contextual theology,³³ which suggests possibilities for making corrective adjustments to the contextual methodology. Coherence is important in that it expresses the authenticity and distinctiveness of different contextual theologies, as well as the need to bring these contextual theologies into inter-relationship with others.

(c) EUCHARISTIC ECCLESIOLOGY

In many occasions have I argued³⁴ that out of the three main characteristics that generally constitute the Orthodox theology, namely its “Eucharistic”, “Trinitarian”, and

³⁰ This was the conclusion of the symposium jointly organized by the Department of Theology of the University of Thessaloniki and the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey in Thessaloniki (2-3 October 1992) on the subject: “Classical Theology and Contextual Theology: The Role of Orthodox Theology in the Post-Canberra Ecumenical Movement”.

³¹ Metr. of Pergamon John Zizioulas in his paper on “Communion and Otherness”, delivered in the 8th Orthodox Congress in Western Europe, Blankenberge, 29 Oct - 1 Nov 1993) argued that “individual Orthodox Christians may fail...but the Church as a whole should not...When the “other” is rejected on account of natural, sexual, racial, social, ethic or even moral - in other words *contextual* - differences, Orthodox witness is destroyed.”

³² Cf. K. Pathil, *Models in Ecumenical Dialogue*, pp. 393ff; also Konrad Raiser, *Identität und Sozialität*, Muechen 1971; and *Ecumenism in Transition*, Geneva 1991 (also in Greek, *To μέλλον του οικουμενισμού. Αλλαγή παραδείγματος στην οικουμενική κίνηση*; EKO 10, Thessaloniki 1995).

³³ Nikos Nissiotis, “Ecclesial Theology in Context,” in Choan-Seng Song (ed.), *Doing Theology Today*, Madras 1976, (minutes of the Bossey conferences, 101-124, p. 124. Cf. also the special issue of *Study Encounter*, Vol. VIII No. 3 [1972]).

³⁴ Cf. my “The Eucharistic Perspective of the Church’s Mission,” *Eucharist and Witness. Orthodox Perspectives on the Unity and Mission of the Church*, WCC/Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Geneva/Boston 1998, pp. 49-66, p. 50.

“Hesyhastic” dimension, only the first one can bear a universal and ecumenical significance. If the last dimension and important feature marks a decisive development in eastern Christian theology and spirituality after the final Schism between East and West, a development that has determined, together with other factors, almost exclusively the mission of the Orthodox Church in recent history; and if the Trinitarian dimension constitutes the supreme expression of Christian theology, ever produced by human thought in its attempt to grasp the mystery of God, after Christianity’s dynamic encounter with the Greek culture; it was, nevertheless, only because of the Eucharistic experience, the matrix of all theology and spirituality of Christianity, that all theological and spiritual climaxes in our Church have been actually achieved.

The importance of Eucharist, and of the “Eucharistic ecclesiology”, has only recently been rediscovered and realized.³⁵ The proper understanding of the Eucharist has been always a stumbling block in Christian theology and life; not only at the start of the Christian community, when the Church had to struggle against a multitude of mystery cults, but also much later, even within the ecumenical era. In vain distinguished theologians (mainly in the East) attempted to redefine the Christian sacramental theology on the basis of the Trinitarian theology. Seen from a modern theological perspective, this was a desperate attempt to reject certain tendencies which overemphasized the importance of Christology at the expense of the importance of the role of the Holy Spirit. The theological issues of *filioque* and the *epiclesis* have no doubt thoroughly discussed and a great progress has been achieved in recent years through initiatives commonly undertaken by the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church; but their real consequences to our Orthodox theology have yet to be fully and systematically examined. The Eucharist is not only *the* Mystery of Church, but also a projection of the inner dynamics (love, communion, equality, diaconia, sharing etc.) of the Holy Trinity into the world and cosmic realities. And the Eucharistic theology, and especially the Eucharistic ecclesiology, is the *primary* theology of the Orthodox Church, as I argued above.

“Eucharistic ecclesiology”, is a term coined for the first time in 1957 by N. Afanassieff,³⁶ in his intervention to the deliberation of the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church. Afanassieff had successfully argued for the existence from the very old times of the Church’s life of two clearly distinguished views about the Church: the widespread – even today – “universal ecclesiology”, and the “Eucharistic ecclesiology”. More importantly, he has convincingly proved the priority and the authenticity of the latter. According to Afanassieff the effect of the universal ecclesiology was so strong, that for centuries it seemed the only possible option, almost an ecclesiological axiom, without which every single thought about the Church seemed impossible. However, Afanassieff went on, the universal ecclesiology was *not* the only one. And what is even more important, it was not the primitive ecclesiology; it took the place of a different ecclesiology, (which Afanassieff for the first time) called

³⁵ Cf. my book *Lex Orandi-Lex Credendi. Liturgical Theology and Liturgical Renewal*, Idiomela 5, Indiktos Press: Athens 2005 (in Greek).

³⁶ “The Church Which Presides in Love,” J. Meyendorff (ed.), *The Primacy of Peter. Essays in Ecclesiology and the Early Church*, New York 1992, 91-143, whence all references hereafter (1963, pp. 57-110). Afanassieff’s views had appeared earlier in a shorter form in French (“La doctrine de la primauté à la lumière de l’ecclésiologie”, *Istina* 4 [1957] 401-420).

“Eucharistic”,³⁷ thus creating a new era in the ecumenical and ecclesiological discussions.³⁸

I do not propose to enter into more details of this radical ecclesiological view; I only want to underline that, by using the Eucharistic ecclesiology as a tool, the Eucharist remains the basic criterion of all theological and ecclesiastical constructions, the only expression of unity of the Church, and the point of reference of all the other mysteries (and of course of the priesthood and of the office of the bishop). That is why the catholicity of the Church is manifested completely in every local Church. “Wherever there is a Eucharistic meeting there lives Christ too, there is also the Church of God in Christ”.³⁹

On the other hand, the “universal ecclesiology” (the beginnings of which are to be found in Cyprian of Carthage⁴⁰) having as point of departure the fact that the whole is made up by parts,⁴¹ understands the Church as having a strictly hierarchical structure (hence the theological importance of “primacy”⁴²). But in this case first in importance and extremely determinative is the role of the bishop, whose office constitutes the preeminent expression of the unity of the Church, and consequently the Eucharist one of his functions.⁴³

The focal point of the Eucharistic ecclesiology (and by extension also the Eucharistic theology) in all its expressions and variations, is the concept of the *communion* (hence the importance of *Pneumatology*), in contrast with the “universal ecclesiology”, which is characterized by the priority it gives to the *external structure* (hence the importance of *Christology*, and by extension of the role of the bishop, and consequently of primacy). In addition, the Eucharistic theology underlines the *eschatological* dimension of the Church; that is why it understands all the offices of the Church, especially those of the ordained priesthood, not as authorities or offices in the conventional sense, but as *images* of the

³⁷ “The Church Which Presides in Love,” pp. 106f.

³⁸ Cf. e.g. M. Edmund Hussey, “Nicholas Afanassiev’s Eucharistic Ecclesiology: A Roman Catholic Viewpoint,” *JES* 12 (1975) 235- 252; P. McPartlan, “Eucharistic Ecclesiology,” *One in Christ* 22 (1986) 314-331; K. Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition*, Geneva 1991, pp. 97ff. Also J. Zizioulas, *The Unity of the Church in the Eucharist and the Bishop in the First Three Centuries*, Athens ¹1965 ²1990 (in Greek); cf. nevertheless the traditionalist reaction by P. Trembelas, “Unacceptable Theories on the *Unam Sanctam*,” *Ekklesia* 41 (1964) pp. 167ff (in Greek); etc. Also my “The Biblical Background of the Eucharistic Ecclesiology,” in *KAIROS. Festschrift to Prof. D. Doikos*, Thessaloniki 1994, 61-83 (in Greek).

³⁹ N. Afanassieff, “Una Sancta,” *Irenikon* 36 (1963) 436-475, p. 459.

⁴⁰ Cyprian of Carthage provided for the first time the theological foundation of the universal ecclesiology...while the connection between the Roman Empire and the Roman pontiff on the one hand, and the religious life from the time of Constantine the Great onwards on the other, facilitated its wide acceptance. N. Afanassieff, “The Church...,” p. 141.

⁴¹ “Deus unus est et Christus unus, et una ecclesia” (*Epistula* XLIII, 5, 2) and “ecclesia per totum mundum in multa membra divisa” (*Epistula* LV, 14, 2).

⁴² N. Afanassieff, referring to the theological discussion between East and West on the issue of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome, has rightly suggested that the starting point for any solution must be sought in ecclesiology: i.e. whether any idea of primacy is necessary for the identity of the Church (“The Church...,” p. 91).

⁴³ This was the view finally adopted in Vatican II. Cf. however the substantial change in recent years, especially the adoption of the famous *Ravenna document* (2007), and indirectly the present Pope’s choice to use “Bishop of Rome” as his title (see *Annuario 2013*).

authentic eschatological Kingdom of God. In opposition to this, the universal ecclesiology, having as its point of departure the *historical* expression of the Church, understands the unity and catholicity of the Church, as well as the apostolic succession, in a *linear way*,⁴⁴ that is why the bishop, even when interpreted as type and image of Christ, has priority over the Eucharistic community. Thus, the Sacrament of Priesthood theoretically surpasses the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

This “Eucharistic vision”, thanks to the contribution of the Orthodox, has also been the guiding principle of the ecumenical movement, ever since the VI assembly of the WCC (Vancouver 1983). As it was officially stated, “Our Eucharistic vision... encompasses the whole reality of Christian worship, life and witness.”⁴⁵

Since Afanasiëff, a lot of progress has been made in redefining the “Eucharistic ecclesiology”, most notably by Metr. of Pergamon John Zizioulas,⁴⁶ whose understanding was in almost every detail adopted by the official theological dialogue between Orthodox and the Catholic Churches. There is, however, a lively discussion for a further articulation of it,⁴⁷ and an interesting suggestion by Radu Bordeianu, “that Afanasiëff’s eucharistic ecclesiology can be retrieved and improved in light of Zizioulas and Staniloae to provide a valuable tool for the long journey towards communion ecclesiology and, ultimately, towards Christian unity.”⁴⁸

(d) CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE EUCHARISTIC ECCLESIOLOGY?

In view of this process it is important to recall the biblical foundation of the Eucharistic ecclesiology, not in the proper sense of its contextualization, but as a supporting biblical evidence of it. The core of Jesus’ teaching is based on the basic principles of the Old Testament, something which we Orthodox usually forget, using the First Testament only as an exclusive pre-figuration of the Christ event. However, Jesus Christ himself had a different and more prophetic view (cf. e.g. his inaugural speech at the Nazareth synagogue, Lk 4:16ff), and the First Christians have developed their liturgical, and especially their Eucharistic, behavior in accordance with the idea of the covenant (or covenants), particularly through the commitment of the people with God and with one another to the memory of events the Exodus, when the Israelites experienced the liberating grace of God. The liturgy, therefore, was originally understood as the obligation to worship God, who had led them in particular historical circumstances to liberation, salvation and peace (šalôm).

⁴⁴ More on this in J. Zizioulas, “Apostolic Continuity and Orthodox Theology: Towards a Synthesis of Two Perspectives”, *SVTQ* 19 (1975), 75-108.

⁴⁵ From the back cover of my book, *Eucharist and Witness* (n. 33 above), where I argue for a “costly Eucharistic vision”.

⁴⁶ *Being as Communion. Studies in Personhood and the Church*, New York 1985, see especially the introductory remarks by the late Fr. John Meyendorff. Also (Metropolitan of Pergamon) Joannis Zizioulas, “Recent Discussions on Primacy in Orthodox Theology,” in Walter Kasper (ed.), *Il ministero petrino. Cattolici e Ortodossi in dialogo*, Citta nuova: Roma 2004, σελ. 249-264. Also Maximos Vgenopoulos, *Primacy in the Church from Vatican I to Vatican II: A Greek Orthodox Perspective*, (Ph.D. dissertation at Heythrop College), London 2008.

⁴⁷ See e.g. the collective volume G. E. Thiessen (ed.), *Ecumenical Ecclesiology. Unity, Diversity and Otherness in a Fragmented World*, T & T Clark 2009.

⁴⁸ “Retrieving Eucharistic Ecclesiology,” in G. E. Thiessen (ed.), *Ecumenical Ecclesiology*, 128-142.

The concept of the Church as a communion of the people of God was manifested in the O.T. primarily as a *thanksgiving liturgy* for their liberation from the oppression of the Egyptians, but their liturgy was also a constant reminder of a commitment to a moral and ethical life, and an obligation for resistance against any oppression and exploitation of their fellow man and women. In this sense, the *worshiping* (and Eucharistic in the wider sense, thanksgiving) community was also a *witnessing* community. The same is true with the Eucharist of the early Christians, which was incomprehensible without its social dimension (see Acts 2:42ff., 1 Cor 11:1ff., Heb 13:10-16; Justin, *1 Apology* 67; Irenaeus, *Adver. Her.* 18:1, etc.).

When, however, the social and political conditions in Israel began to change and a monarchical system was imposed upon God's people, there was also a tragic change in their concept of communion, and consequently in their liturgy. After the imposition of monarchical structures the charismatic personalities that led the people of God as a society with federal establishment, were replaced by authoritarian rules with new economic conditions. The Law of God and the Covenant or successive Covenants (adamic, noachic, Sinai, etc.) have been replaced by the law of the kingdom, and of course the federal standing that manifested only with the worship of the one God was replaced by the concept of the "nation", the future of which was now depended on political alliances and social and religious syncretism, usually at the expense of the "communion" with God, and never on trust in Him and the Law, expressed through the traditional worship. The latter lost its communal character and gradually was institutionalized. With the construction of the Temple of Solomon the religious life of the community turned into a cult incumbent with the necessary professional priesthood and the necessary financial transactions. Jesus' action against the money changers is quite indicative of the new situation. His repeated appeal to "mercy/ charity/ *eleon* instead of sacrifice is yet another reminder of the real purpose of the true worship.

It has been convincingly argued that the Israel under the Monarchy slipped into three dangerous situations: (a) the greed of those in power led to financial exploitation of the weak; (b) a hierarchical social order was imposed, which in turn led to the political oppression of the weak for the sake of the emerging state; and (c), and most importantly, the establishment of formal worship, agreed to serve the kingdom and its political allies.⁴⁹ In chapter 8 of First Book of Kings the conversation of Yahweh with Samuel is highly instructive underlining the implications of this radical change in the relationship between God and his people.

All these were the consequence (among others) of the imposition of private property in Israel, which, as it is well known, caused a strong protest, and action by the Prophets. Previously the governing principle was divine ownership of all the material wealth, according to the Psalmist's affirmation: "*the Earth is the Lord's and everything in it* (Psalm 24: 1). The focus, in other words, with the imposition of economic injustice shifted from the justice of God to the personal accumulation of wealth. Amos and Hosea in the Northern Kingdom before its dissolution in 722 BC, and Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk and Ezekiel in Judea, began to speak of the main components of liturgy: i.e. Law and Justice, values that were lost because of the new ownership, which changed the traditional concept of society and completely changed the real purpose of worship. For

⁴⁹ See more in W. Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, Philadelphia 1978.

the Prophets of the Old Testament the abolition of justice and cancellation rights of the poor above all meant rejection of God Himself. For example, Prophet Jeremiah insisted that knowing God was identical with being fair towards the poor (Jer 22:16). And Prophet Isaiah even carries further his criticism, on the issue of expropriation of the fields, and the greed and avarice as manifested by the accumulation of land, which was a result of the introduction of individual property: "*Woe to those who add to their home and joins the field with the field, so that now there is no other place for them to stay and the only country holding*", 5:8). The prophet himself does not hesitate to characterize the greedy landlords "thieves" (1:23) and characterize the confiscation of the land of indebted farmers grab at the expense of the poor.⁵⁰

The Liturgy, as a social critique by the Prophets, was combined with the call for a return to the Law of Moses as an alternative conception of society, since the faith and life of wandering in the wilderness was deeply rooted in a politics of equality and an economy of the enough (cf. the story of the manna in Exodus, ch. 16). And that obviously recalls that the notion of society that emerged from the 7th century in Israel was in direct opposition to the profound meaning of worship and the will of God, as revealed to Moses in Exodus.

This highly social and prophetic dimension of liturgy is clearly reaffirmed in the teaching, life and work of Historical Jesus, which of course cannot be properly understood without reference to the eschatological expectations of Judaism. Without entering the complexities of Jewish eschatology, we could say very briefly that it was interwoven with the expectation of the coming of the Messiah. In the "last days" of history (the *eschaton*) he would establish his kingdom by calling the dispersed and afflicted people of God into one place to become one body united around him. The statement in the Gospel of John about the Messiah's role is extremely important. There, the author interprets the words of the Jewish High Priest by affirming that "*he prophesied that Jesus should die... not for the nation only but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.*"⁵¹

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus identifies himself with this Messiah. We see this in the various Messianic titles he chose for himself ("Son of man," "Son of God," etc., most of which had a collective meaning, whence the Christology of "corporate personality"). We see it as well in the parables of the kingdom, which summarize his teaching, proclaiming that his coming initiates the new world of the Kingdom of God; we see it in the Lord's Prayer, but also in his conscious acts (e.g. the selection of the twelve, etc.) In short, Christ identified himself with the Messiah of the *eschaton*, who would be the center of the gathering of the dispersed people of God in a state of peace and justice.

The spirituality, therefore, which stems from the awareness of this eschatological nature of the Church, and the original prophetic and social dimension of her liturgy, point to a dynamic, radical, and corporate understanding of our Orthodox self-consciousness. The missiological imperatives of the early Church, her witness to the

⁵⁰ Is 3:14-15. See the detailed analysis of the problem by Ulrich Duchrow and Franz Hinkelammert in their book *Property for People, Not for Profit: Alternatives to the Global Tyranny of Capital*, London 2004, as well as their more recent one, *Transcending Greedy Money. Interreligious Solidarity for Just Relations*, New Approaches to Religion and Power, Palgrave Macmillan: New York 2012.

⁵¹ Regarding this Messianic perception, see Is 66:18; Mt 25:32; Rom 12:16; *Didache* 9:4b; *Marl. Polyc.* 22:3b; Clement of Rome, 1 Cor 12:6 etc.

Good News proclaimed by Jesus of Nazareth, and consequently the witness of the Orthodox Church, has to do with the witness of the Kingdom of God “*on earth as it is in heaven*” (Mt. 6:10 par).⁵² One should never forget that the Apostles were commissioned to proclaim not a set of given religious convictions, doctrines, moral commands etc., but the coming Kingdom, the Good News of a new eschatological reality, which had as its center the crucified and resurrected Christ, the incarnation of God the Logos and His dwelling among us human beings, and his continuous presence through the Holy Spirit, in a life of communion. In this way Christ was – and today should be – understood as a “Universal Savior” (cf. later in the Church history also the title “*Pantocrator*”), not as a religious leader in exclusive terms. That is why the faithful were called holy (ἅγιοι); because they belonged to that chosen race of the people of God. That is why they were considered royal priesthood (βασιλειον ιεράτευμα); because all of them, without exception (not just some special caste, such as the priests or levites) have priestly and spiritual authority to practice in the diaspora the work of the priestly class, reminded at the same time to be worthy of their election though their exemplary life and works.”⁵³ That is why they were called to walk towards unity (“*so that they may become perfectly one,*” Jn. 17:23), to abandon all deeds of darkness and to perfect themselves, because the one who called them out of darkness into light, “*from nonexistence into being,*” who took them as non-members of the people of God and made them into genuine members of the new eschatological community, to be holy and perfect (cf. 1 Pet 2:10, “*Once you were no people, now you are God’s people,*” Jn. 17:19; “*I sanctify myself that they also may be sanctified in truth,*” Mt 5:48; “*You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect*”).

No doubt, this initial *horizontal historical eschatology* - which identifies the Church not by what she is in the present, but by what she will become in the *eschaton* - determines the struggle of humankind for perfection on the ground of the dynamic journey of the people of God as a whole towards the *eschaton*. It has, nevertheless, become interwoven from the very first days of the Church’s life with a *vertical* one, which put the emphasis on a more personal understanding of salvation. No matter for what reasons,⁵⁴ there has been a shift of the center of gravity from the (*Eucharistic*) *experience* to the (*Christian*) *message*, from *eschatology* to *Christology* (and further and consequently to *soteriology*), from the *event* (the *Kingdom of God*), to the *bearer* and *center* of this event (*Christ*, and more precisely

⁵² See St. John Chrysostom’s comment on the relevant petition of the Lord’s Prayer: “(Christ) did not say ‘Your will be done’ in me, or in us, but everywhere on earth, so that error may be destroyed, and truth implanted, and all wickedness cast out, and virtue return, and no difference in this respect be henceforth between heaven and earth” (PG 57 Col. 280).

⁵³ J. H. Elliott, *The Elect and the Holy*, Leiden: Brill 1966, has determined on the part of Protestant biblical theology the real meaning of the term “βασιλειον ιεράτευμα,” which has so vigorously discussed since the time of Luther. Cf. R. Brown, *Priest and Bishop: Biblical Reflections*, Chapman: London 1971.

⁵⁴ D. Passakos, in his doctoral dissertation under my supervision (*The Eucharist and Mission. Sociological Presuppositions of the Pauline Theology*, 1997), tried to analyze this “paradigm shift” at that crucial moment of early Christianity and claimed that “the Eucharist in Paul was understood not only as an icon of the *eschaton*, but also as a missionary event with cosmic and social consequences. The Eucharist for him was not only the sacrament of the Church, but also the sacrament of the world. Within the Pauline communities the Eucharist had a double orientation (in contrast to the overall eschatological and otherworldly dimension of it in earlier tradition): towards the world as *diastolic* movement, and towards God as a *systolic* movement” (p. 268). According to Passakos, “*the Eucharist for Paul is at the same time an experience of the eschaton, and a movement toward the eschaton*” (p. 269).

his sacrifice on the cross).⁵⁵ And this is what led a number of contemporary Orthodox theologians (certainly the fundamentalists, but also some traditionalists, conservatives etc) pay more attention, and place more emphasis, on our Church's *past* (patristic theology, as some western Christians revere the biblical theology), than on the *eschaton*, the primary *locus* of which is the Eucharist, and its driving force the life-giving Holy Spirit.

In my view, one of the main reasons of the inability of modern Orthodoxy to adapt to the contextual reality is the issue of the criteria of truth. And this is due to the inability to reconcile contextuality with the text/reason syndrome of modern Christian theology, to which unconsciously traditional Orthodox theologians ally. It is time, I think, to distance ourselves as much as possible from the dominant to modern (and at the same time "Orthodox"!) syndrome of the priority of the texts over the experience, of *theology* over *ecclesiology*, of *kerygma* and mission over the *Eucharist*. There are many scholars who cling to the dogma, imposed by the post-Enlightenment and post-Reformation hegemony over all scholarly theological outlook (and not only in the field of biblical scholarship or of western and in particular Protestant theology), which can be summarized as follows: what constitutes the core of our Christian faith, should be based exclusively on a certain *depositum fidei*, be it the Bible, the writings of the Fathers, the canons and certain decisions of the Councils, denominational declarations etc.; very rarely is there any serious reference to the *Eucharistic communion event*, which after all has been responsible and produced this *depositum fidei*.

The ecclesiological problem is a matter not so much of church organization and structure, as it is a matter of *eschatological orientation*. The whole Christian tradition from Jesus' preaching the coming of the Kingdom of God, through the Ignatian concept of the Church as a Eucharistic community (with the Bishop as the image of Christ), and down to the later Christian tradition (which, by the way, understands the Eucharist as *the* mystery of the Church and not *a* mystery among others), reveals that it is the eschatological and not the hierarchical (episcopal, conciliar, congregational etc.) nature of the Church that it was stressed.

Should we not remind ourselves again that the Church does not draw her identity from what she *is*, or from what it *was given* to her as institution or as a concrete doctrinal faith, but from what she *will be*, i.e. from the *eschaton*? Should we not reaffirm our understanding of the Church as portraying the Kingdom of God on earth, in fact as being a glimpse or foretaste of the Kingdom to come? After all the main concern of all great theologians of the apostolic, post-apostolic, and even most of our Fathers, was to maintain clearly the vision of that Kingdom before the eyes of God's people. And the episcopo-*centric* (and by no means episcopo-*cratic*) structure of the Church – the main stumbling block for the titanic effort towards the visible unity of the Church – was an essential part of that vision. The bishop as presiding in love in the Eucharist is not a vicar or representative, or ambassador of Christ, but an image of Christ. So with the rest

⁵⁵ See my *Cross and Salvation. The Soteriological Background of St. Paul's Teaching about the Cross in the Light of the Pre-pauline Interpretation of Jesus' Death*, Thessaloniki, 1983 (in Greek), an English summary of which can be found in a paper of mine delivered at the 1984 annual Leuven Colloquium "Στωικόζ: Centre of Pauline Soteriology and Apostolic Ministry," A. Vanhoye (ed.), *L' Apotre Paul: Personnalite, Style et Conception du Ministers*, Leuven University Press: Leuven 1986, 246-253.

of the ministries of the Church: in their authentic expression they are not parallel to, or given by, but identical with those of, Christ.⁵⁶ That is also why Orthodox theology and life always refers to the resurrection. The Church exists not because Christ died on the cross but because he was raised from the dead, thus becoming the *aparche* of all humanity.

⁵⁶ J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, p. 163.