

The Social Dimension of the Orthodox Liturgy: From Biblical Dynamism to a Doxological Liturgism

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A historical and theological journey in 12 steps, from the early Biblical origin to later Patristic and contemporary expression of the Orthodox liturgy, in order to uncover the social dimension of Christian liturgy. Some of the causes are analyzed in brief: the marginalization of the Antiochene tradition, an overdose eschatology, the “modern” understanding of the Bible, the gradual loss of the prophetic character of the Church, which is more evident in the Bible, and the marginalization – until the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church – of its witnessing responsibility, have resulted in a significant legacy that hinders any real Biblical and liturgical renewal. The experiment of the Church of Greece that launched nearly 20 years ago an official, albeit unsuccessful, liturgical renewal project. The final proposal is a combination of both this neglected prophetic character and the prevailing eschatological dimension of the Orthodox faith, with all that these imply for an authentic and genuine Orthodox liturgical practice.

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I propose to critically approach this delicate and extremely important issue from an Orthodox perspective. I will try to analyse the development of the Orthodox liturgy both historically and theologically: historically, by focusing on the early Biblical origin, the later Patristic development and the recent experiment in the Church of Greece; and theologically by referring to recent Orthodox theological constructions *vis-a-vis* the *desideratum* of liturgical renewal. I will do this in 12 steps, combining the two approaches.

1. To proceed to an Orthodox critical approach in any issue is an extremely difficult task. On what ground and from what sources can one really establish it? The Roman Catholics have Vatican II to draw from; the

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Orthodox did not have till quite recently, i.e. up to the convocation of their Pan-orthodox Holy and Great Council. The Lutherans have an Augsburg Confession of their own; the Orthodox – at least their conservative members, and for that reason supposedly closer to their liturgical tradition – constantly undermine both any attempt for liturgical renewal and this higher doctrinal conciliar authority. The only authoritative so-called “sources” the Orthodox in fact possess are common to all other Christians: the Bible and Tradition. How can one establish a distinctly Orthodox approach on a basis which is common to non-Orthodox as well?

Another issue which makes an “Orthodox approach” problematic is that Orthodoxy always appears as something “exotic”, an interesting “eastern phenomenon” *vis-à-vis* the “western” modern and individualistic mentality, provoking the curiosity and enriching the knowledge of Western believers and theologians.

According to an eminent Orthodox theologian, this role has been played enough up to now.¹

In addition, there are contemporary Orthodox theologians, who define Orthodoxy as meaning the wholeness of the people of God who share the right conviction (*orthe doxa*=right opinion) concerning the event of God’s salvation in Christ and his Church, and the right expression (*orthopraxia*) of this faith. Everyone is, therefore, invited by Orthodoxy to transcend confessions and inflexible institutions without necessarily denying them. Orthodoxy is not to be identified only with us Orthodox in the historical sense and with all our limitations and shortcomings, especially the scholarly ones. The term was originally given to the Church as a whole over against the heretics who, of their own choice, split from the main body of the Church. The term is, thus, *exclusive* for all those, who willingly fall away from the historical stream of life of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, but it is *inclusive* for those who profess their spiritual belonging to that stream.² There are still other prominent Orthodox theologians who identify the Orthodox Church as the Christian Church with the “right” liturgy, interpreting the *orthe doxa* not as the “right opinion”,

¹ See Metropolitan John Zizioulas’ (of Pergamon) introduction to his *Being as Communion. Studies in Personhood and the Church*, Crestwood, SVS Press 1985.

² Nikos Nissiotis, “Interpreting Orthodoxy”, in: *ER* 14 (1961) 1-27, p. 26. See also the notion of *sobornicitatea* (open catholicity) advanced by Dumitru Stăniloae, *Theology and the Church*, p. 7. More on this in: Nicolae Mosoiu, *Taina prezenței lui Dumnezeu în viața umană. Viziunea creatoare a Părintelui Profesor Dumitru Stăniloae*, Pitești – Brașov – Cluj-Napoca, Paralela 45 2000, p. 246ff.

but as the “right glory”.³ Either way, Orthodoxy has *ecclesial* rather than *confessional* or even *historical* connotations.⁴

2. Despite all I said above as the necessary preliminary introductory remarks, the Orthodox (in fact the undivided Church, i.e. the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, to which the Orthodox of our time believe they are faithful) have issued *official conciliar statements* in the Holy and Great Council concerning their liturgical identity, which under certain theological conditions can lend authority to an Orthodox critical approach.⁵

The Church of Christ exists *in the world*, but is *not of the world* (cf. Jn 17:11, 14-15). The Church as the Body of the incarnate Logos of God...constitutes the living “presence” as the sign and image of the Kingdom of the Triune God in history, proclaims the good news...of a world in which ...*there shall be no more pain* (Rev 21:4-5). Such hope is experienced and foretasted by the Church, especially each time the Divine Eucharist is celebrated, bringing *together* (I Cor 11:20) the *scattered children of God* (Jn 11:52) without regard to race, sex, age, social, or any other condition into a single body, where *there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female* (Gal 3:28; cf. Col 3:11)... Finding constant inspiration in this expectation and foretaste of the Kingdom of God, the Church cannot remain indifferent to the problems of humanity in each period. On the contrary, she shares in our anguish and existential problems, taking upon herself—as the Lord did—our suffering and wounds, which are caused by evil in the world and, like the Good Samaritan, pouring oil and wine upon our wounds through words of *patience and comfort* (Rom 15:4; Heb 13:22), and through love in practice. The word addressed to the world is not primarily meant to judge and condemn the world (cf. Jn 3:17; 12:47), but rather to offer to the world the guidance of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God—namely, the hope and assurance that evil, no matter its form, does not have the last word in history and must not be allowed to dictate its course”. (*The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today’s World*, preamble)

³ Georges Florovsky, “The Elements of Liturgy”, in: Constantin G. Patelos (ed.), *The Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva, WCC Publications 1978, p. 172-182, p. 172.

⁴ Petros Vassiliadis, (ed.), “Introductory remarks”, in: idem, *Orthodox Perspectives on Mission*, Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series 17, Oxford, Regnum 2013, p. 1-13, p. 3.

⁵ From the official site of the Holy and Great Council <https://www.holycouncil.org/official-documents>. viewed on 29.6.17.

Participating in the Holy Eucharist and praying for the whole world, we must continue the 'liturgy after the Divine Liturgy' and give the witness of faith to those near and those far off, in accordance with the Lord's clear command before His ascension, "And you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth (Ac. 1: 8)." The re-evangelization of God's people in modern, secularized societies and the evangelization of those who have still not come to know Christ remain an unceasing obligation for the Church. (*Message of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church*, 2)

Participation in the Holy Eucharist is a source of missionary zeal for the evangelization of the world. By participating in the holy Eucharist and praying in the Sacred *Synaxis* for the whole world (*oikoumene*), we are called to continue the "liturgy after the Liturgy" and to offer witness concerning the truth of our faith before God and mankind, sharing God's gifts with all mankind, in obedience to the explicit commandment of our Lord before His Ascension: "And you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1.8) (*Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church*, 6).

In my view, this understanding of the Eucharistic identity of the Orthodox Church, a unique phenomenon in the process of the Judeo-Christian religious thinking, was the result of the Early Christian Pneumatology, with which Christianity opened up new dimensions in the understanding of the mystery of the divine revelation. For the first time humankind ceased to look backwards to past authorities; instead they turned their attention to the future, to the *eschaton*, experienced in the liturgical *synsxeis*. The past no longer suppressed the present, but it was dynamically reinterpreted in order to give new meaning and new perspective to the present, and of course, to the future. By placing the Holy Spirit on an equal status in the Trinitarian dogma with the Father and the Son, later Christian theology of the early undivided Church broke the chains of fear and dependence on the past, at least in theory. The conciliar declaration of the divinity of the Holy Spirit was undoubtedly one of the most radical considerations of the mystery of deity, which however came up short with regard to the real consequences of the authentic liturgical practice.⁶

⁶ See P. Vassiliadis, "Canon and Authority of Scripture: An Orthodox Hermeneutical Perspective", in: Ivan Z. Dimitrov et al. (eds.), *Das Alte Testament als christliche Bibel in orthodoxer und westlicher Sicht*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck 2004, pp. 259-276, p. 274. Also in: Jean-Michel Poffet (ed.), *L' autorité de l' Écriture*, Paris, Édition du Cerf 2002, pp. 113- 135.

3. With regard to the Orthodox liturgy the *decline of the Antiochene tradition* played a significant (and I would add catalytic) role.⁷ An objective historian will certainly give some credit to the *altera pars*, namely to those who vigorously insist on no change whatsoever in liturgical matters, opposing at the same time any rehabilitation of the Biblical basis of the Orthodox faith. But such a credit can only be given historically, not theologically. I think the answer to this inherent ambiguity is latent since the early years, stemming especially from the confrontation between the two major theological centers of the religion emerging at that time: the Alexandrian and the Antiochian schools, but not on the basis of a different interpretation (allegory or not), but with far deeper theological reasons.

This confrontation continued unabated until after the 4th Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon and although it emerged at a plainly interpretational level it shifted to a theological and Christological one, with excesses on both sides.⁸ The Antiochians consistently emphasized the historical dimension of the Word of God, which brought them close to the “rational” appropriation of the divine mystery, and the existence of the two natures of Christ, human (“Son of Mary”) and divine (“Son of God”) as opposed to the identity of God the Word with the Historical Jesus, developed by the Alexandrian school, followed by the entire ecclesiastical tradition, with a particular ferocity in the Orthodox East, after the theological controversy between Gregory Palamas and Barlaam of Calabria.

Although the positions of the Antiochians brought them into conflict with the Alexandrian Monophysitism, they also led them to a mostly tolerant attitude toward Nestorianism, something that resulted in the final discrediting of the school and its final end after the 5th century c.e. This essentially contributed to an almost minimal effect on subsequent theological production. Some of their representatives (Theodore of Mompuestia and Theodoret of Cyre) were posthumously condemned by a synodical decision in the 6th century in the famous anathema of “Three Chapters” (the third one was Ivas of Edessa, also from the area of Antioch, in eastern Syria). This,

See also P. Vassiliadis, “The Problem of Ethics in the Early Church: The Trajectory from Q to John via Paul”, a paper presented in the “Ecclesia and Ethics” webinar conference, and posted in academia.edu/3576189.

⁷ I have analysed this issue in more detail in the article dedicated to the memory of Patriarch of Antioch Ignatios IV: P. Vassiliadis, “Economy, Poverty, Wealth, and Ecology: Contemporary Biblical Scholarship and the Marginalized Tradition of Antioch”, published in his Memorial volume and posted in academia.edu/2281300.

⁸ The important study by the late Fr. John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology. Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, New York, Fordham University Press 1974¹ (1987²), has accurately addressed this issue.

in fact contributed to the final victory in all later Christian interpretations of the *a-historical* (allegorical and spiritual) method of the Alexandrian School, at the expense of the *historical* one of the Antiochene tradition. Only St Chrysostom remained unaffected and his works continue to maintain the flame of historical, critical and mostly reasonable approaches to sacred texts up to modern times, when the universal prevalence of the historical-critical principle in the interpretation of the Bible again brought back to the fore the invaluable contribution of Antiochene theological thinking, and with it the liturgical radicalism of the Bible in the life of the Church.

The predominance of the subsequent Church practice and theology of the Alexandrian, against the Antiochene, theological and interpretative tradition, had another deplorable side effect: it prevented the formation of a consistent Christian anthropology, based on the radical and innovative teaching on the resurrection by St. Paul (I Cor 15:24-26), especially his point that all believers have a share in the resurrected body of the living Christ. The diametrically opposite views of Dionysius of Alexandria (canon 2) and those of the *Apostolic Diatages* (Canon VI. 27) of Antiochian origin, but also of St. John Chrysostom (*Homily on Hebrews*, PG 63, 227ff, comment on Heb 13:4), regarding the validity in the Christian Church of the purity regulations of Leviticus regarding participation of women in the Eucharist, is quite characteristic. What is certain is that including *en bloc* the canons of Dionysius of Alexandria in the Synod in Trullo, and simultaneously rejecting the more liberal canons from the Antiochene tradition on this issue, preserved the theological inconsistency between “theological” on the one hand and “liturgical” and “canonical” tradition in the Orthodox East, thus resulting in an ineffective witness in the contemporary world.⁹

4. Another significant recent development in our theological argumentation was the *over-dose of eschatology*, which has indirectly affected the quite prominent role of the Bible and its social message in the Liturgy.¹⁰

⁹ See: P. Vassiliadis, “Ο Ιερός Αυγουστίνος ως Ερμηνευτής του Αποστόλου Παύλου και το Πρόβλημα της Ανθρώπινης Σεξουαλικότητας (St Augustine as an Interpreter of St. Paul and the Problem of Human Sexuality)”, in: *Θεολογία* 81 (2010) pp. 129-158. See. Also: Valerie Karras “Orthodox Theologies of Women and Ordained Ministry”, in: Aristotele Papanikolaou, Elizabeth H. Prodromou (eds.), *Thinking through Faith: New Perspectives from Orthodox Christian Scholars*, Crestwood, SVS Press 2008, pp. 113-158.

¹⁰ See: P. Vassiliadis, “L’ Eschatologie dans la Vie de l’ Église: Une Perspective Chrétien Orthodoxe et son Impact sur la Vie de la Société”, in : *Irénikon* 73 (2000), pp. 316-334; and also the other Orthodox contributions in the same issue of *Irénikon*: Jean Zizioulas, “Eschatologie et société”, pp. 278-297; Ioan Sauca, “Eschatologie et société aujourd’hui: questions et perspectives. Une approche orthodoxe”, pp. 359-373.

The rediscovery of eschatology in understanding the profound meaning of the Eucharist (with some patristic attestation [Maximus the Confessor]), in opposition to the (Antiochian “mystagogical”) “historical” of the Patriarch Germanos of Constantinople and the (Alexandrian/neo-Platonic?) “Anagogical” of the Ps-Dionysian school, is of course welcome; but its extension to the highly evangelistic first part of the Divine Liturgy, the so-called “Liturgy of the Word”, an inseparable part of the Eucharist, has created a further problem.

All Western Christians who have for the first time attended an Orthodox liturgy are astonished and dismayed (some of them are even shocked) that the Biblical “readings” (*anagnosmata*) are not read but chanted, as if they were designed not so much to enable the faithful to understand the word of God as to glorify an event, the eschatological kingdom of God, and the centre of that event, Christ himself. This is one of the reasons why the Orthodox, although traditionally always in favor of the translation of the Bible (and not only) into a language that people can understand (cf. the disagreement in the period of the Patriarch of Constantinople Photios between Rome and Constantinople on the legitimacy of the use of the Slavonic language, i.e. a language outside the three “holy” ones: Hebrew, Greek, Latin), are generally reluctant to use the Prophetic, Apostolic and Gospel readings from a modern translation in their official liturgical services.

Today among many systematic theologians there is a widespread view (fortunately still a *theologoumenon*) that the entire Divine Liturgy, i.e. both the “Liturgy of the Word” and the “Eucharistic Liturgy”, is oriented toward the *eschaton*. Some great Orthodox theologians still hold the view that during the Liturgy of the Word - which in the Orthodox Church is inseparable from the Eucharistic Liturgy - it is not Jesus Christ in his First Coming, who proclaims the Good News, the “word of God” through the reading of the Bible, but the glorified Lord in his Second Coming!

5. Closely related to the over-dose of eschatology, with regard to the use and the role of the Bible in the Orthodox liturgy, are the obvious defects of the prevailing *modern understanding of the Bible*.¹¹ According to the standards of modernism the Bible can be interpreted authentically: (a) by a “magisterium”, apparently because some clerics are considered to have received the power and the right from Christ Himself to represent Him as successors of the Apostles. In this way, the word of God is interpreted authentically

¹¹ More on this in P. Vassiliadis, “The Word of God and the Church from an Orthodox Perspective”, in: *Χριστόδουλος, Αφιερωματικός Τόμος*, Athens, Holy Synod of the Church of Greece 2010, pp. 539-561.

only by a clergyman, mainly a bishop, and finally the Pope – always as a person, and under any circumstances whatsoever. Or (b) through the word of God itself, which means – as most Protestants still believe – the Scripture is interpreted through the Scripture alone (*sola scriptura*), and it is a matter of proper scientific research to find its authentic meaning.

This kind of “modern” approach to the Bible has created many problems indeed. With regard to the first approach (Roman Catholic, but to a certain degree also Orthodox), the natural question which is raised is: why should a bishop be regarded as infallible, or why should an entire synod of bishops be considered infallible, or why should the Pope be infallible? As to the second (mainly Protestant) position, another problem is raised, which today preoccupies everyone, at least among the academics. How can the Bible be interpreted by the Bible and by scientific analysis, when we all know that it was also subject to certain historical and cultural influences, which do not continue to apply forever? This is why some Protestants today are forced to look for a canon within the canon, seeking certain criteria on the basis of which they can locate whether something in the Holy Bible is truly authentic.

All these have as their starting point the *modern approach to the truth*,¹² which places the essence of the Church and the essence of the truth in decrees that were shaped in the past (including the Bible and even the synodical decisions). A norm is defined, decided and imposed in the past, and we now struggle to adhere to it faithfully. It is on the surface of this perception that all the problems regarding the hermeneutics of the Bible, but also the authority of the bishop, of the Synods, of the Pope etc., are located. This problem was very seldom raised in the undivided Church, where the Scriptures were interpreted within the congregating Church. There what mattered was not just the narration of how things *happened*; it was the way things *will* happen, and *will* be. There the word of God always had an eschatological nuance, coming to us not from the past, but from the future. What can the Holy Bible tell us, outside the congregation of the Church? It will tell us other things. St. John Chrysostom, analyzing the term “syllable” (in Greek συλλαβή=conception, arresting) says that “syllabizing” signifies that which

¹² P. Vassiliadis, “Ο Θεολογικός Προβληματισμός για τις Μεταφράσεις των Εκκλησιαστικών Κειμένων. Διάλογος με τους Μητροπολίτες Πρεβέζης και Ναυπάκτου (The Theological Problem on the Translation of the Liturgical Texts. A Dialogue with the Metropolitans of Preveza and Nafpaktos)”, in: *ΔΒΜ* 28 (2010) pp. 34-48. Some of the above arguments were taken from Metropolitan of Pergamon John Zizioulas’ book, still unpublished in Greek under the title *Comments on Western Ecclesiology*, University notes, Thessaloniki 1986. However, one can have access to it in a digital form: <http://www.oodegr.com/english/dogmatiki1/F3c.htm>. viewed on 29.6.17

the mind conceives/grasps noetically, therefore normal reading is a conceptualizing by the *nous*. But the word of God can never be conceived/grasped, because it is far greater than us. It is the word of God that conceives/grasps us. And St. John Chrysostom goes on saying that through chanting (instead of reading), the word of God is opened up; the syllable is opened up and it incorporates us, as opposed to us “conquering” it!¹³ This reminds us of the Pauline “knowing God, but rather being known by God” (Gal 4:9).

This conquering tendency of knowledge that we apply to things is the same one that we apply every time we strive to make the Scriptural readings *comprehensible*, to apprehend the readings! Can one truly apprehend the word of God, or comprehend it? Some Orthodox insist that the most appropriate method of knowledge is the one based on the *communion of persons*, and not just on the *work of the mind*. The Bible cannot speak to us in the same manner when we read it at home, as compared to when the word of God is read and heard in the Church. There was a time when a slogan was widespread in the Orthodox Church, that the greatest destroyers of the word of God in the Church are the preachers! Theologically speaking, therefore, any attempt to apprehend or comprehend the word of God is not a spiritual but a “modern” phenomenon. And the Gospel for the Orthodox is never just a book one can open and read. It is almost a *person*. One kneels before it, during the (small) “entrance” of the Gospel the people make the sign of the Cross and kiss it, gestures that surely signify something deeper. All these have devalued the witnessing dynamism of the liturgy.

6. With all these heavy theological legacies, the most vibrant Greek-speaking Autocephalous Orthodox Church, the Church of Greece, has quite recently decided at a high Synodical level to proceed to a *Liturgical Renewal*.¹⁴ According to most Orthodox theologians of our time the Church fulfills its proper saving mission, not by what she normally *does* (social and moral ethics), or by what she *says* (dogmatic teaching), but mainly by what she *is*. This *esse*, in other words her identity and self-consciousness, is nothing else than the vision of a new world different from the conventional one we live in, the vision of the expected Kingdom of God. And this vision is in effect the transcendent and ultimate reality expected at the *eschaton*, different and beyond our present, created, conventional, unjust and

¹³ *Ibidem*. The above mentioned comment by St. John Chrysostom has not been found either in his authentic works or in any other widely known patristic one. Nevertheless the argument is sound, at least on a biblical or Byzantine liturgical basis.

¹⁴ A more detailed treatment of this issue in P. Vassiliadis, *Lex Orandi. Liturgical Theology and Liturgical Renewal*, Idioma 5, Athens, Indiktos Publications 2005 (in Greek).

perishable reality. This alternative reality is authentically expressed by the Church in the liturgy, more precisely in the Eucharist, in which the faithful experience as a glimpse and foretaste the glory of God's Kingdom, called at the same time, i.e. in the *Liturgy after the liturgy* to witness it to the world. Church without this holy "mission" is not simply a Church. Although for many Christians it may seem paradoxical, the Church does not exist for herself but for the world¹⁵.

Liturgical Renewal, as an ecclesial *desideratum* is of course a relatively new phenomenon in the Church's life, mainly motivated by the stagnation and the loss of the original meaning of the community's liturgical communal acts.¹⁶ Many of the problems of modern society are partly due to the loss of deep symbols, i.e. those values with which each society defines itself and fulfills its aspirations. These values define the faith, ethics and action of community members, form the consciousness of individuals, and maintain the cohesion of the society. In modern society these symbols, which are fundamental to the spiritual existence and survival of humanity, have been marginalized to such an extent that it is almost impossible to reactivate them. For this reason modern people should either redefine these symbols, or learn to live without them.¹⁷

Of course, the term which was chosen in order to set the limits and to determine the role of this commission refers to a much wider area than the liturgical life of the Church. The liturgical renewal in the contemporary theological discipline is not limited to *how* the Church should worship God, but is also extended to *what* the liturgical event is all about. In other words, it covers all the necessary steps or measures, which all Orthodox (in fact all Christian) Churches must constantly take, in order to redefine their identity. It is, therefore, an *ecclesiological* imperative. One can even argue that in theological terms it can (or rather better should) be applied to all areas of the theological discipline, from the purely practical to the strictly theological ones, thus also becoming a *missiological* imperative. The primary components of the newly developed discipline, that of "liturgical theology, are: (a) the importance of the "ecclesial"/"Eucharistic" event, over and above any "theological" production of the Christian community; (b) the priority of the "experience" over the "word"/"reason"; (c) the uniqueness of "communion"

¹⁵ The Holy and Great Council has stated this explicitly (in its Message and Encyclical) and implicitly throughout its decisions.

¹⁶ See also idem, *Eucharist and Witness. Orthodox Perspectives on the Unity and Witness of the Church*, Geneva - Massachusetts, WCC Publications/HCO Press 1998.

¹⁷ Edward Farley, *Deep Symbols. Their Postmodern Effacement and Reclamation*, Valley Forge, Trinity Press International 1996, p. 3.

compared to the “message”/“*kerygma*”, or “confession”; and (d) a redefined relationship between “liturgy” and “witness”.

The *Leitourgia* (λειτουργία=έργον+λαός=act of the people), i.e., the common worship of the community (as opposed to individual prayer), and especially the Eucharist as its central and identifying bond, which nowadays is the only liturgical service attended by the vast majority of the Orthodox, became the subject of extensive reflection.

7. Of course, there was a certain *pre-history* in Greece¹⁸ concerning the renewal of Church life, focusing on the liturgy through a campaign for Biblical awareness on the part of the Greek public, not to mention of course the Biblical renaissance that took place in the academic field, and a Biblical renewal at the grassroots with Biblical studies. Certain efforts had already been made by religious organizations, which by the way were the first to publish a translation into Modern Greek of the entire Divine Liturgy, having in addition widely disseminated their translated Bibles (mainly N.T.) for private use. They had also tried to teach how the Bible readings should be performed in the liturgical services, making them again *anagnosmata*. But no attempt has been made, nor was any thought given, to the lectionary, the selection and the sequence of Biblical readings in all daily and sacramental services. I have even recommended the use of Bible readings from a translation, participation of women in their reading, change of the lectionary from a 1- to a 2- or 3-year cycle, in order that more didactic pericopae be included. It is an unhealthy situation not to listen, e.g., to the Sermon on the Mount (!), repeating instead only miracle stories; there are still no readings in any liturgical service from the book of Revelation, the most liturgical book of the N.T. (!) etc.. In addition to the above recommendations there is certainly also a need for more readings on the themes of unity, communion etc., and the introduction of more “Biblical” songs, in daily services in addition to the “patristic” (mostly “monastic”) ones.

Suddenly, out of the clear blue sky, the late Archbishop Christodoulos introduced as a pilot measure, and only in his own archdiocese (the Athens city center), the reading of the Gospel and Apostolic pericopae both from the original (patriarchal text of 1904) and from our translation, from an edition published by the Church with the permission of the Bible Society

¹⁸ See on this P. Vassiliadis, “La rinascita liturgica e la Chiesa Greca”, in: Hervé Legrand et al. (eds.), *Nicola Cabasilas e la divina liturgia*, Bose, edizione Qiqajon 2007, pp. 253-281; and its updated form in: idem, “The Liturgical Renewal and the Church of Greece”, in: *Holy Scripture and Ancient World. Fs to Prof. John Galanis*, Thessaloniki, Pournaras Press 2010, pp. 537-565.

in one small volume called *Eklogadion*, containing the Gospel and Apostolic readings of the whole year (2003). By the way, when our translation of the New Testament (from the critical text), published by the Greek Bible Society, was presented almost 20 years earlier (1985) to the Greek ecclesiastical and wider public, it was met with strong reaction and a...Synodical condemnation, which in some dioceses was even read during the Sunday Eucharistic services in the place of the ... homily! The condemnation was lifted after some concessions were made in the second edition (1989) with some more traditional interpretations and adapted to the 1904 patriarchal text, and, of course, a clear note that it was not meant for liturgical use!

The Archbishop's experiment lasted only one year, after the strong reaction by a tiny but vocal minority of a conservative and mostly anti-ecumenical united front. The Metropolitan of Dimitrias and Almyros (present-day Volos) Mgr. Ignatius courageously tried to repeat this renewing attempt in his diocese by reading himself in some Great Vespers the Prophetic and other O.T. readings directly from the then newly finished translation of the O.T., from a similar edition, called *Prophetologion*, this time published not by the Church, but by the Greek Bible Society (2008). We experienced the same reaction by the same people, mostly imported from other dioceses. This prompted a strong letter by the Faculty of Theology of the University of Thessaloniki to the Holy Synod, unfortunately with no result. The reactionaries belong to the same group that instigate reaction and plea for condemnation of the decisions of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church.

8. In addition to this – more or less positive – pre-history with regard to a *Biblical* and *liturgical* renewal in the Church of Greece,¹⁹ there was also a *negative background*, which, by the way, especially in liturgical matters affected the entire Greek-speaking Orthodox community, from the Autocephalous Churches of the Patriarchates of Alexandria and Jerusalem, and the Church of Cyprus, to all the Greek Orthodox in diaspora, tradition-

¹⁹ A detailed presentation of the liturgical renewal experiment in the Church of Greece in (Metropolitan of Kessariani, Vyrion and Ymettos) Daniel Pourtsouklis, “Ανοίκειος αναγωγή ή Απάντησις εις ανατιολόγητον έλεγχον υποτιθεμένων κακοδοξιών”, *Εκκλησία* 80 issue 3 (2003), pp. 183-189; Dimitrios Tzerpos, “Προς μία ανανέωση της εκκλησιαστικής μας λατρείας”, in: *Εκκλησία* 76 issue 12 (1999), pp. 270ff; also in: idem, *Λειτουργική Ανανέωση. Δοκίμια Λειτουργικής Αγωγής Κλήρου και Λαού Α΄*, Tinos 2001, pp. 11-29; and the Proceedings of the II Liturgical Symposium of members of Holy Dioceses of Greece, entitled: *Λατρεύσωμεν ευαρέστως τω Θεώ. Το αίτημα της λειτουργικής ανανέωσης στην Ορθόδοξη Εκκλησία (Let us Properly Worship God: The desideratum of a Liturgical Renewal in the Orthodox Church)*, Athens, Apostoliki Diakonia 2003, p. 31.

ally under the *omophorion* (jurisdiction) of the first in rank among all the Orthodox Churches Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. For more than three generations the Greek society all over the world was split on the issue of the use of the *vernacular* language into two bitterly opposed fronts: on the one hand the progressive, intellectual, center-left political etc. and all the non-Orthodox minority communities, and on the other hand the conservatives, mostly religious people, right and extreme-right political, the ecclesiastical establishment etc. In addition, within the Ecumenical Patriarchate, there was always a reluctance to accept the use of the national/or local languages, because from the 19th c. onwards it was used as a tool to promote phyletic and nationalist secessionist movements, which eventually undermined the unity of the Orthodox Church (cf. the Bulgarian schism, and to a lesser extent the adoption of the Arabic language by the Patriarchate of Antioch), and most importantly to undermine the very existence of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the case of the so-called “Turkish” Patriarchate of the notorious Papa-Eftim.

During the period of the official campaign of the Church of Greece for a liturgical renewal (1999 onwards), which would entail a more Biblical renewal in liturgical matters, including the use of translated reading and beyond, in addition to the cultural (the classical Greek of both the Bible and the Liturgy was considered as the main element of preserving the national identity) and political, a further argument was added: an anti-ecumenical one; translation of the Bible was seen as an inclination toward the Protestant tradition, whereas the entire set of liturgical renewal, which indirectly supported a translated liturgy with translated Bible readings, was accused of being an imitation of the measures taken by the Vatican II Council of the Catholic Church.

Along these anti-ecumenical lines the anti-biblical/anti-liturgical-renewal theological group invented an additional argument, which has unconsciously convinced almost the entire ecclesiastical establishment. In simple terms the argument runs as follows: the western, non-Orthodox, approach to the truth, and by extension to the liturgy and the comprehension of the word of God/Bible/liturgy, is normally through reason, an understanding (*katanoesis*), whereas the Orthodox (?) through *methexis*, a mystical and spiritual participation in the mystery of salvation without the medium of reason! This kind of ridiculous argumentation was retrieved from the anti-western armory of the late John Romanidis. It is not accidental that the only timid reaction in America, especially in OCA, to the liturgical reforms promoted by Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, the most radical of them all being the uttering of the prayers of the Eucharistic *anaphora* loudly (and not se-

cretly by the clergy alone), was taken from the silent prayer of Hannah in 1 Sam 1:13. In Greece this kind of argument was avoided as coming from the “heretic” Protestant tradition. Instead, all kinds of “mystical” arguments paraded to prevent the only “official” (initiated by Church authorities) decision for a liturgical (and indirectly biblical) renewal in today’s Orthodox world.

At that moment an unexpected initiative was undertaken in a remote rural diocese, that of the apostolic city of Nikopolis (and Preveza), by its bishop (now repose) Meletios (Kalamaras) and almost all of his priests (among them a retired professor of the School of Athens, K. Beys) and monastics. Without publicity, they started step by step not only using all the priestly prayers from a Modern Greek translation, but uttering them loudly, using of course our translated Bible for the Bible readings in all liturgical services. The most extraordinary thing about this case is that Metropolitan Meletios was one of the most revered, traditional, highly educated and ascetic personalities of the Church establishment, who had previously served in the Synodical Commission for Inter-Orthodox and Inter-Christian Relations of the Church of Greece. Even more extraordinary was that he was recruited by some conservatives within the Church to make a lengthy report to the Holy Synod, recommending that the Church of Greece withdraw her eventual blessing of the 2nd edition of the 1989 translation of the N.T., which he did! However, he had the courage to publicly acknowledge his mistake and for pastoral purposes not only made use of it but also introduced, together with his clergy (among whom his *protosyggelos*, Fr. Theodosius Martzouchos, played a leading role) the translation of the Eucharistic liturgy. Before his death (2012) he even published a book, with the telling title *Methexi or Understanding*,²⁰ arguing with comprehensive, concentrated Biblical and patristic views, that the translation of Biblical and liturgical texts, as well as their use in the Orthodox worship, was not only theologically legitimate, but absolutely necessary. With his death his initiative, the last promising sign for a liturgical renewal in the Church of Greece, came to an end. The majority of Church hierarchical establishment even punished the local community by rejecting the election of Fr. Theodosius Martzouchos, who was their – and the late Metropolitan’s – preference.

A few years earlier, the Holy Synod (on the request by some unknown lay people, paradoxically highly valued but the higher authority, unlike the letter of the professors of Theology for the reaction against Metropolitan Ignatius) even summoned Metropolitan Meletios for undertaking this initiative, an unusual measure for a bishop. A similar summoning, also for using

²⁰ Holy Diocese of Nikopolis and Preveza: Preveza 2011.

a translation for the priestly prayers in the Divine Liturgy for young students (!), was made to the late Metropolitan of Kilkis, Apostolos.

9. I argued some 30 years ago that it was not accidental that the early Church has eventually adopted for the daily morning (changeable) services in *Orthros* (*Matins*) the biblical *Kanons*, modeled after the 9 *Odes* (eight from the O.T. plus the *Magnificat* [and parallel to that of Zachariah]), and not the highly eloquent *Kontakia*, produced on the model of the most famous hymn writer, *St. Romanos Melodos*. Quite recently, during my research to present a paper about the “contextualization” of one of the most widespread theological constructions within the Orthodox world, the “Eucharistic Ecclesiology”, I realized that these original Biblical, and socially oriented prophetic hymns (*Kanons*) have been gradually overwhelmed in most cases by individualistic prayers/hymns, mostly composed by monastics to meet their struggle against the Devil. Thus, the primary aim of the *Kanons*, especially the first and leading one, which praises the liberating God for leading his people out of the Egyptian oppression and slavery, with all that this remembrance entails for the witness of the Church, almost disappeared.

In addition, all the O.T. readings, which had a prominent place in all ancient Eucharistic Liturgies, were gradually removed from the Divine Liturgy and pushed to the Vespers. This change seems to be intentional, and theologically motivated. In late Byzantium a theory was developed that the three main daily liturgical services, (Vespers, *Matins/Orthros*, Divine Liturgy), especially on Sundays and in the great feasts (i.e. with a Eucharistic liturgy) follow the three-partite model of shadow (O.T.-Vespers) – Image (N.T. - present reality - *Orthros*, expressed mainly in its resurrection themes) – Truth (eschaton-Eucharist), first expressed in the Letter to the Hebrews (11:1ff) and further elaborated by St. Maximus the Confessor. With this scheme, however, all the dynamism of the prophetic word of the O.T. was eventually relegated. And not only this; even under this structure the radical message of the Prophets for the contemporary life of the people of God was step by step marginalized. At best the Prophetic texts were replaced by those that pre-figure the major feasts of the Church. At worst, they were replaced or overshadowed by less dynamic, and mostly individualistic, texts from the (Deutero-canonical) Sophiological literature.

Needless to say, a thorough reform of the Orthodox lectionary is urgent for a proper liturgical life, and especially for a *liturgy after the liturgy!* The only Orthodox community that adopted a modest (not very radical) new 2-year-cycle lectionary is the monastic community of the New Skete in the USA!

10. All these, especially the reluctance of our Church to proceed to a radical reform in the *lectionary* as the minimum for a comprehensive liturgical renewal, are the result of the loss of the *Biblical, missionary and contextual* character of our ecclesial self-consciousness. At the bottom of this development was the unconscious *loss of the prophetic character of the Church*. Ironically, these very elements (the centrality of the biblical message, the emphasis on witnessing to, rather than preserving, the traditional faith, and of course the radical adaptation of the contemporary context, borrowing even the philosophical language and the cultural environment, and above all the critical/prophetic voice to the world) were the basic spiritual means that helped a tiny Jewish sect conquer the mighty Roman Empire. To take the argument to the extreme one can fairly argue that our Church (and this applies to all Christian Churches) has gradually, step by step, marginalized the very characteristics of the Church we confess in the Creed, i.e. her oneness, her holiness, her catholicity and her apostolicity.

Without applying a “critical theology” to the present situation, in order that we survive in our “modern” and especially “post-modern” condition, we need to rediscover the very meaning of the “liturgy”; and this can be done only by retrieving the lost elements of the O.T. Is this not what the Fathers of the Church in the Golden Age *mutatis mutandis* actually did? Only by going back to the origins of the liturgical practice of the people of God can we explain what happened and the Christian liturgy from a *radical* event of Christian witness became an *end in itself*, losing almost all its dynamism. Only in this way can one realize the importance of the Bible in our Church’s witness, and of course reject the appalling fundamentalist hermeneutics.

The first Christians developed their liturgical behavior in accordance with the idea of the covenant, particularly through the commitment of the people with God and with one another to the memory of the events of 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, justice and peace. The liturgy, however, of the people of God 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 men and women. In this sense, the *worshiping* community was also a *witnessing* community.

When, however, the social and political conditions in Israel began to change and a monarchical system was imposed, a tragic change in their concept of communion emerged, and consequently a complete change in the meaning of their liturgy. The Law of God and the Covenant have been

replaced by the law of the kingdom (and the Davidic covenant), 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 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 in the traditional liturgy. The latter lost its communal character and was gradually 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 liturgy.

It has been convincingly argued that Israel under the Monarchy slipped into three dangerous situations that perverted the original meaning of liturgy: (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 a formal and conventional worship, agreed to serve the kingdom and its political allies.²¹ In chapter 8 of the First Book of Samuel the conversation of Yahweh with Samuel is highly instructive, underlining the implications of this radical change in the relationship between God and his people, when they asked him to provide them with a king.

All these were the consequence of, or resulted in, the imposition of private property in Israel, which 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 all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it*” (Psalm 24:1). Economic injustice replaced the justice of God, and personal accumulation of wealth replaced equality in acquiring the necessary material goods for survival. 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 conception of ownership, which changed the traditional concept of society and completely perverted the real purpose of liturgy.

For the Prophets of the Old Testament the abolition of justice and the cancellation of the rights of the poor meant above all rejection of God Him-

²¹ See more in Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press 1978.

self. For example, Prophet Jeremiah insisted that knowing God was identical with being fair towards the poor (Jer 22:16). Prophet Isaiah carried his criticism against the introduction of individual property even further, when he spoke about the greed and avarice manifested by the accumulation of land: “Woe to those who add to their home and join the field with the field, so that now there is no other place for them to stay” (Is 5:8). The prophet himself does not hesitate to characterize the greedy landlords as “thieves” (1:23) confiscating the land of indebted farmers, grabbed at the expense of the poor.²²

11. It is true that the mystery of the Church is authentically lived in a devotional liturgical life, through which the faithful are led to, and proleptically partake in, the Kingdom of God. Given the “liturgical” character of Orthodox theology, and the persistence of almost all Orthodox at the ecumenical dialogue in the importance of *liturgy*, sometimes even above and beyond the importance of the *word* of God, the exact meaning and theological significance of the Christian liturgy, as described above, is imperative. And the development of the theological understanding from the radical dynamism of the Bible down to our present doxological *liturgism* (I borrow the term from Fr. Theodore Stylianopoulos²³) is a *sine qua non*.

The early Christian Church, therefore, was dramatically different from all other religions in the Roman world through the fact that it did not worship statues, temples, or sacrifice, or even the usual musical accompaniment. The Christian religion was primarily verbal in nature, and in this respect was similar to that of the Jewish synagogue, which has strong historical ties.

The early Christians had religious gatherings, where various types of rituals were held. Gathered in the so-called Lord’s Supper, they congregated to baptize new members, read the scriptures, listen to the word of God, pray and sing hymns of praise and thanks to God. Although their roots were in the Jewish tradition, the Christian religion gradually distanced itself from Judaism creating, like all religious systems, a new ethic, a new worship and a new narrative, based on the Jesus of History’s teachings. The concept therefore the Church as a community of the people of God - who in the later New Testament writings and Christian tradition acquired Trinitarian expressions:

²² See the detailed analysis of the problem in: Ulrich Duchrow, Franz Hinkelammert, *Property for People, Not for Profit: Alternatives to the Global Tyranny of Capital*, London, Zed Books 2004; and above all in their most recent work, idem, *Transcending Greedy Money. Interreligious Solidarity for Just Relations*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan 2012, pp. 47ff. Also P. Vassiliadis, “The Biblical Perspective of Economy (Η Βιβλική Θεώρηση της Οικονομίας)”, in: *Θεολογία* 83 (2012) pp. 25-36.

²³ Theodore Stylianopoulos, *The New Testament: An Orthodox Perspective. Volume One: Scripture, Tradition, Hermeneutics*, Boston, HC Orthodox Press 1997, esp. pp. 63, 173.

people of God, body of Christ, communion of the Holy Spirit – maintained the O.T. ethos.

In the oldest layers of the Gospel tradition the preaching of Jesus, though it focused on the traditional messianic expectation of God's Kingdom, emphasized the intimacy of the relation to God as "father" (*abba*) rather than as "king". Heirs after all of God's Kingdom were primarily the "poor", while those who acquired riches through all kinds of mechanisms, even associated with conventional worship (cf. the incidents of fasting, purity standards, codes in common social meals etc.), were severely criticized by the Jesus of History.

Starting from the earliest synoptic source Q (the common link between Matthew and Luke, besides Mark), written around 50 AD, I can very briefly mention: the Beatitudes, particularly the "Blessed are the poor", the dominical saying about terrestrial goods and real bonanza in heaven, and especially the incompatibility of a parallel worship of God and of Mammon.

From Markan tradition (the oldest Gospel written around 70 AD) I choose the interpretation of the parable of the sower, mainly for its subtle critique of wealth: "those sown among the thorns: these are the ones who hear the word, but the cares of the world, *and the lure of wealth*, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word" (Mk 4:18-19)"; and of course the characterization of the money changers in the institutional worship at the Temple as "bandits".

We now come to the specific traditions of the later Synoptists (between 80 and 90 AD). Of particular source of Luke (L), I isolate the programmatic teaching of Jesus in Nazareth, and the parables of the foolish rich man, and the rich and the poor Lazarus, while of Matthew (M), the pericope of the final judgment, which is rightly characterized as the Magna Charta of Christian doctrine and ethics.

It is inescapable that all the layers of the primitive Gospel tradition present the Historical Jesus faithfully following the tradition of the Prophets, proclaiming in every way, his opposition to established worship with its economic mechanisms that disrupt the fair functioning of society, and projecting an economy not of an unfair accumulation of wealth, but the daily "adequacy", urging his disciples to worship God by praying to him: "give us our daily bread".

If we now add the New Testament testimonies from the life of the early Church the institution of common ownership in the early Christian community, the political and social dimensions of the visions of the seer/prophet of the book of Revelation, the radical ethic of the letter of James (by the way, unjustly characterized as a "straw" by Luther!), and especially the in-

novative Pauline Collection project, the theological consequences of which were “equality” and “equal sharing and communion of material wealth”, then undoubtedly the Biblical view of liturgy cannot be other than a liturgy determined by the law of the God of justice, the respect of human beings (and not mammon), of self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*) (leading to sustainable development) and not of profit and accumulation of wealth. In other words a “spiritual and reasonable worship”.

Such a liturgy, with clearly ethical and social dimensions, exceed any associating correlations with contemporary capitalism-socialism political bipolar economic theory, since it focuses not on the process of production and distribution of material wealth, but on their *source*, since *the Earth is the Lord's and all that is in it*” (Ps 24: 1).

The ethical and social implications for the Biblical understanding of liturgy is demonstrated even more clearly, if we take into account the institutions of the Day of Sabbath, the Sabbath year, of Jubilee Year, and if we consider the theological implications of the Pauline teaching on “greed”.²⁴

Until the Golden Age of Christianity the perception of liturgy, but also the liturgical experience of Christian community, were inconceivable without its social dimension. This dimension, evidenced so clearly in the New Testament, was applied and further updated in the works of St. Justin an Irenaeus, and particularly of the major figures that have shaped the liturgy of the Church: St. Basil the Great and St. John Chrysostom. It even lasted until the time of Hilary of Poitiers, who preserved a quite interesting reminder: “We are forced to attempt what is unattainable...and instead of simple worship, we are obliged to trust even the serious issues of faith to the risk of human expressions”

Fr. George Florovsky and Alexander Schmemmann consider this period of the Church's life (i.e. until its recognition of the Church as the Roman Empire's official religion), and by implication this understanding of liturgy as expressing authentic Orthodoxy. For many reasons the Church gradually abandoned her missionary perspective, but also traditional Biblical understanding of Christian liturgy in favor of a more theological and high doxological liturgical mentality.

Even the majestic traditional religious architecture of the *Basilica*, with its intense mission-oriented symbolism of the Church as a sailing boat (cf. the Church as the νοητή ναῦς, hence “*Naos*” (Nave) etc.), in the East

²⁴ More in P. Vassiliadis, “Beyond *theologia crucis*: Jesus of Nazareth from Q to John *via* Paul (or John as a Radical Reinterpretation of Jesus of Nazareth”, in: Th. Stylianopoulos (ed.), *Sacred Text and Interpretation. Essays in Orthodox Biblical Studies in Honor of Savas Agourides*, Brookline, HC Orthodox Press, Ma. 2005, pp. 139-163.

was almost completely replaced by the architectural miracle of St. Sophia, which symbolizes a way not *forward* but *upward* (connecting the lower with the higher), almost abandoning the missionary responsibility in history. Ironically enough the only major missionary achievement of the Byzantine Church followed this path, as it is recorded in the famous Chronicle of the Christianization of the Russians. A similar trajectory was followed in the West, where the mission-oriented architecture was replaced by the skythrows of the Gothic edifices etc.

It is an honor to modern Orthodox theology, which by divine providence and the guidance of the Holy Spirit has restored in modern Church life the missionary/witnessing responsibility of the Orthodox Church, neglected for centuries, in the concept of the *Liturgy after the liturgy*²⁵ and the care for the environment.²⁶

12. After the above zigzag historical and theological journey in the Orthodox liturgy, allow me to present my personal view, developed out of my concern for the future of our Christian witness. This view is motivated by a combination of the *prophetic* and the *eschatological* dimension of our faith.

With no thorough liturgical renewal the groaning of creation (Rom 8:23) and the cries of people in poverty (Jer 14:2-7) will never alert the faithful to just how much their current social, economic, and ecological state of emergency run counter to God's vision for life in abundance (Jn 10:10). Especially today many of us construct divisions, barriers, and boundaries to distance ourselves from other Christians, from our neighbor, from nature, and from God's justice. Communities are fragmented and relationships broken. Our greed and self-centeredness endanger both people and planet Earth. All these have to be urgently included in Orthodox Prayer life. And this can only be done with a thorough *Biblical and liturgical renewal*.

As to the eschatological dimension, I propose to focus only on the real nature of our Christian (and of course Orthodox) eschatology, which I think is the interpretative key to decode all the issues we addressed above, only, of course, if we avoid extreme and un-theological overdose trajectories. Firstly, it should be emphasized that Christian eschatology is neither a *denial* of his-

²⁵ Archbishop of Albania Anastasios (Yannoulatos), *Mission in Christ's Way*, Massachusetts - Geneva, HCOP/WCC 2010; Ion Bria, *Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective*, Geneva, WCC Publications 1996.

²⁶ His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, *Encountering the Mystery. Understanding Orthodox Christianity Today*, New York - London - Toronto - Sydney - Auckland, Doubleday 2008.

tory, nor something like an *addition* to history and the past. The eschatology in its authentic Christian understanding is rather an *invasion* of the *eschaton* into our *historical reality*. The *eschaton* “invades” history through the Holy Spirit, especially during the Eucharist. That is why a liturgical (and at the same time Biblical) renewal is an imperative!

It is within this context that concepts like “word of God”, “Bible”, but also other elements of the life and mission of the Church, even priesthood, canonical tradition, ecclesiology etc., acquire their true meaning. Underlining the eschatological dimension of the Church, by no means do we deny the reasonable and critical scientific process as such; and of course we do not reject the scientific interpretation of the Bible. We only question scientific knowledge as the only and proper way in which the Bible is recognized as a word of God by the faithful. The Church has a different context in which she places the Bible, so that it can eventually “speak” to the faithful as God’s word. All subjects, therefore, associated with the Bible, not as a literary product of humanity, but as “the” Book of the Church, are conditioned by *eschatology*, and of course are closely related to *ecclesiology*. The key issue for the Church is the *relational* rather than the *cognitive* dimension of a worshiping community, coming together to prefigure the perfect eschatological reality of God’s Kingdom, with a task (mission) to transform the world.

With the penetration of scholasticism, and later of extreme modernism, in our theological thinking this invasion of the *End Times* in historical reality was canceled, or at least marginalized. This resulted in a history completely unhooked from eschatology. The latter either: (a) has come to refer only to the “realm beyond history” (cf. *e.g.* almost all dogmatic handbooks of the past, including some Orthodox); or (b) is subconsciously identified with some charismatic experience of an elite, who are isolated from the historical context of the ecclesial community, considered (as in our distant past by some heretical groups) of second class. Such an understanding of eschatology completely destroys ecclesiology. By dissociating the unity of the Church of Saints from the historical Church community, the “triumphant” from the “militant” Church, it is doubtful if we can call “Church” any historical Church community.