

The Historical-Critical Method and the Holy Fathers

A brief history of a mutual reception with ecumenical implications
at the level of biblical studies

COSMIN DANIEL PRICOP*

This study aims to capture the dynamics of the recent biblical studies in the Orthodox and Western, especially Protestant, theological areas. Both the Orthodox biblical theology and the Western biblical theology are streamlined by research, which can be inspired by each other's experience. Thus, the Orthodox biblical studies are recently shaped in receiving and developing an exegetical method, and in this sense may appeal to the Western experience, especially the historical-critical method. On the other hand, the Western biblical scholars are concerned with bringing into the present the meaning of biblical texts or their update, in a direction close to the Orthodox biblical experience. The solution to these concerns can be rediscovered in the mutual completion with ecumenical connotations.

Keywords: Bible studies, exegesis, Church Fathers, historical-critical method, synthesis, ecumenical approach

“Let us not have, then, the Bible without the Fathers, or the Fathers without the Bible but on the contrary read the whole Tradition of Christianity together for the wisdom and grace it has to offer us”¹

John Anthony McGuckin

1. Introduction

Orthodox Biblical Theology at the academic level has not yet developed an original method of interpreting Holy Scripture, which can be proposed and applied in a graduate context. Original is meant as being in strong agreement with the understanding of Scripture's role and place in believers' lives. Part of the explanation for this serious lack could be the fact that in the Orthodox biblical theology, a necessary distinction between hermeneutics and exegesis or method has not been made. As a matter of fact, hermeneutics has threatened exegesis, that is, methodology, in the sense that so far the preoc-

* Deac. Cosmin Daniel Pricop, PhD, Teach. Assist. at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology Justinian the Patriarch in Bucharest. Address: Str. Trifoi, 15, 030698, Sector 3, Bucuresti; e-mail: pricosmin@yahoo.com

¹ John Anthony McGuckin, *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition*, Tradition (SBEC 9), Lewiston - Queenston 1986, p. 100.

cupations of the most notable Orthodox biblical theologians of international fame have exclusively focused on developing interpretation principles that unfortunately have not been materialised and continued in the development of a method.²

At the same time, the personal approach to the biblical text is limited to adopting the patristic interpretations unreflectively and often crudely, thus a positive intention turning into first class Orthodox scholasticism.³ That is why the current recourse of Orthodox biblical theology to the Holy Fathers can be suggestively summarised from my own point of view by the phrase “Copy-Paste”. While the Holy Fathers could be characterised as pedagogues who hit you on your hand when you are wrong; that is, when you do something differently from what they did or you had the daring to state something

² John Breck, *Scripture in Tradition. The Bible and its Interpretation in the Orthodox Church*, New York 2001, pp. 38-44, proposes eight such hermeneutic principles: 1) The expression “God’s Word” refers to the eternal Logos, Jesus Christ, to the written testimony about Him (The Holy Scripture) and to its preaching; 2) God’s Word, in all its aspects, can only be correctly understood from a trinitarian perspective; 3) God’s Word, understood as Scripture or preaching, must be understood as a theandric reality, similar to the incarnated Logos (Son); 4) The most suitable place for the interpretation, preaching and liturgical celebration of God’s Word is the Church; 5) There is a strong connection between Scripture and the Tradition. Scripture was born within the Tradition; 6) The Old and the New Testament together form a unitary testimony to the history of salvation. Their relationship is illustrated accordingly in the evolution *promise – Fulfillment*; 7) For the interpretation of Scripture, an exegetical reciprocity is needed (*Scriptura Scripturae interpres*). Thus, the inspiration of the whole Scripture by the Holy Spirit is postulated; 8) In the exegetical undertaking, an evolution from the literal to the spiritual meaning is expected and postulated (*sensus plenior*). In the Orthodox biblical theology, Breck’s example was followed by other authors, too. Konstantinos Nikolakopoulos, “An Orthodox Critique of Some Radical Approaches in New Testament Studies”, in: *GOTR* 47 (1-4/2002), pp. 338-341 also offers four principles, formulated as follows: 1) The understanding of Scripture as the written expression of the revelation of God’s plan of salvation; 2) The ecclesiastic character of biblical interpretation, stressed through the Holy Fathers’ interpretation; 3) The liturgical character of the Orthodox interpretation; 4) The defense and accentuation of the true, unchanged faith in the *holy, catholic and apostolic Church*.

John Anthony McGuckin is in the same line of thought in his “Recent Biblical Hermeneutics in Patristic Perspective: The Tradition of Orthodoxy”, in: *GOTR* 47 (1-4/2002), pp. 308-319, which also proposes four principles for an authentic Orthodox interpretation of Scripture: 1) Church reading; 2) The principle of consonance; 3) The principle of authority ; 4) The principle of utility.

³ Savvas Agourides, “The Orthodox Church and Contemporary Biblical Research”, in: James D.G. Dunn, Hans Klein et al. (eds.), *Auslegung der Bibel in Orthodoxer und westlicher Perspektive. Akten des west-östlichen Neutestamentler/innen-Symposiums von Neamt 4. – 11. September 1998* (WUNT I/130), Tübingen 2000, p. 149: “Let us proceed now to a third factor in the explanation of why biblical studies in the Orthodox church are at such a low ebb. The factor is the Scholasticism which still dominates Orthodox theology.”

that had not been stated before. Thus, the exegetic Tradition of the Church becomes a sort of *sola Scriptura*, and the Fathers turn into text distributors, who support various theological concepts. On this issue, the renowned Greek Biblicist Savvas Agourides wrote: “Scholasticism was linked with the Bible mainly because Scholastic theologians used so-called proof-texts, scriptural passages which were frequently irrelevant to their context. [...] In other words, for the Scholastics in the final analysis, Scriptures were nothing more than proof-texts. [...] This use of the sacred texts is unacceptable from the point of view of biblical scholarship for the reasons briefly cited earlier, since such texts are selected primarily as proof without clear understanding of their relevance. According to the theologians of this way of thinking, the biblical proof-texts are followed by patristic proof-texts, and then the evolution of ecclesiastical doctrines is explained in comparison with other views that are differing or heretical, theological or philosophical views of the past or present.”⁴ For this reason, the elaboration of a method by the Orthodox, both regarding biblical exegesis and the systematization and valuation of the patristic legacy at the academic level, is a reform that becomes highly necessary.

On the other side, the landscape of the Western biblical studies remains dominated by the auspices of the historical-critical method, which gradually acquires symbolic value. However, in the aforementioned context, there can be noticed certain attempts of Protestant Biblicists to free biblical research from the domination by criticism and confer a necessary update to the exegetical undertaking. A first step in this direction is represented by the history of the biblical text effects principle (*Wirkungsgeschichte*), developed by Gadamer⁵ and applied to Scriptural text by Ulrich Luz.⁶ This methodological principle is not reduced to the mere function of gathering the patristic interpretations around the biblical text, but aims to follow the significance of a biblical text in history up to the present or until the continuity existing between Scripture and its interpretation is filled. In other words, it is about learning from the interpretive experience that others also had regarding a biblical text or the entire Scripture. Within this interpretive experience, the recourse to the Holy Fathers is absolutely necessary. On the other hand, the attempt was made to

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 149.

⁵ Hans Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, Tübingen 2010, pp. 305-312.

⁶ See: Moysés Mayordomo, “Wirkungsgeschichte als Erinnerung an die Zukunft der Texte (Hinführung)”, in: Moysés Mayordomo (ed.), *Die prägende Kraft der Texte. Hermeneutik und Wirkungsgeschichte des Neuen Testaments* (SBS 199), Stuttgart 2005, p. 12: “Für den Bereich der biblischen Exegese jedoch ist der Begriff der Wirkungsgeschichte untrennbar mit dem Namen Ulrich Luz verbunden.”

update the biblical text by going beyond the archaeological significance that is known as a result of the application of biblical criticism (Scriptural text only offers information regarding a 2000-5000-year-old society or certain religious concepts). The attempt also manifested itself in the Protestant biblical environment by the development of another methodological principle, which stresses the reader's role in receiving and enriching the message of a biblical text – *Rezeptionsästhetik*. Luz calls the two approaches, *Wirkungsgeschichte* and *Rezeptionsästhetik*, sisters⁷ as they equally focus on updating.

The current situation of biblical studies, both Orthodox and Western Protestant, has recently been given a most appropriate description by Marius Reiser. He wrote the following: “Westliche wie östliche Exegese befinden sich derzeit in einer üblen Lage; die eine, weil sie die Verbindung mit Dogmatik, Patristik und Spiritualität *verloren* hat, die andere, weil sie von Dogmatik, Patristik und Spiritualität *erdrückt* wird; die eine, weil sie fast nur noch historisch-kritische und damit beschränkte Auslegung betreibt, die andere, weil sie historisch-kritische Auslegung so gut wie gar nicht kennt; die eine, weil sie den Traditionsbruch der Aufklärung nicht überwunden hat, die andere, weil sie, von Aufklärung unberührt, lebendige Tradition immer wieder mit steriler Konservierung verwechselt.”⁸

In this context, Reiser's problematization, to which I openly subscribe, becomes entirely justified: Is it not possible that the Orthodox should have the remedy for the Protestants' problem at the biblical level, that is, the solution of updating based on the patristic experience, and that the Protestants should have, at the same level, the solution to the Orthodox's difficulty namely, the exercise of conceptualization and of the application of a scriptural interpretation method?⁹

2. The reception of the historical-critical method in the most relevant Orthodox biblical studies at the international level

There is no official decision of the Orthodox Churches regarding the critical study of Scripture.¹⁰ There is also no clear direction established by Orthodox Biblicists in this respect. Most probably, this situation is explicable by

⁷ See: Ulrich Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, Band 1, Mt 1-7 (EKK I,1), Düsseldorf - Zürich – Neukirchen - Vluyn 2002, p. 1110.

⁸ Marius Reiser, *Bibelkritik und Auslegung der Heiligen Schrift. Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese und Hermeneutik* (WUNT II/217), Tübingen 2011, p. 63.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 63: “Könnte es nicht sein, daß die Orthodoxe Seite die Heilmittel für die westlichen Übel besitzt und die westliche Seite die Heilmittel für die östlichen Übel?”

¹⁰ See: Elias Oikonomos, *Bibel und Bibelwissenschaft in der Orthodoxen Kirche* (SBS 81), Stuttgart 1976, p. 53.

the fact that the organisational structure of the Orthodox Churches does not allow statements in the name of the whole of Orthodoxy unless preceded by a pan-Orthodox Council. Nevertheless, some biblical research carried out by Orthodox theologians, especially of the Greek tradition, claim indirectly to represent, unjustly, from my point of view, the perspective on Orthodoxy in general, approaching themes like “Bible and biblical science in the Orthodox Church”¹¹ or “The New Testament from the Orthodox perspective”.¹² From this perspective, it was easier for the Roman Catholic Church to develop a unified answer on the indicated theme.¹³ Thus, this brief presentation of the reception of the historical-critical method in the landscape of the Orthodox biblical studies remains limited because, for one thing, it expresses a Romanian Orthodox theologian’s perspective, and, for another, it is impossible to have access to absolutely all the Orthodox biblical studies, irrespective of the language in which they were written, which have used the historical-critical method, be it *en passant*. The presentation below will take into account the chronology of the publication of the most representative papers authored by Orthodox Biblicists, which adequately illustrate the reception of scriptural criticism at Orthodox level.

2.1. Brief history of reception

Based on the frequent utilisation of text criticism in the Early Church, especially by Origen, the Greek Orthodox Biblicist Elias Oikonomos acknowledges its role (that of text criticism) in the biblical text analysis.¹⁴ On the other hand, the Greek author regards literary criticism suspiciously, because it facilitates the discussion about the later additions to the biblical text. Here, Oikonomos distinguishes between additions and glosses existing within the Revelation, and additions that are outside it. The only criterion that he proposes for the distinction of some additions from others is their theological importance, although it is not defined precisely and is subjectively argued. What authority can appraise the theological character of an addition and how can we know that an addition cannot have a strong theological character?¹⁵

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² See: Theodore G. Stylianopoulos, *The New Testament: An Orthodox Perspective*, Brookline 1997.

¹³ See: The Declaration of the Pontifical Biblical Commission of 1993, called “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church”, also approaching the newer developments in academic biblical studies. See http://catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/PBC_Interp1.htm, accessed 2014.04.07.

¹⁴ E. Oikonomos, *Bibel und Bibelwissenschaft*, p. 52.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 54.

Oikonomos does not mention other aspects of biblical interpretation at the academic level. Although he states the limitation of biblical criticism and implicitly of the historical-critical method at the level of the scientific-academic discussion¹⁶ and the lack of relevance of its results for the faith life of the Church¹⁷, the author concludes, towards the end of his book, that Orthodox exegesis needs a concept that should unify modern biblical science with patristic exegesis, without putting forward any specific proposal in this regard: “Erst wenn es gelungen ist, moderne Bibelwissenschaft zu treiben, ohne mit der exegetischen Tradition zu brechen, wird die Orthodoxe Kirche eine eigene Prägung erhalten, die sie befähigt, anderen Kirchen von ihrem Reichtum mitzuteilen. Bis dahin bedarf es der Zusammenarbeit aller verfügbaren Kräfte.”¹⁸

Veselin Kesich, emeritus professor of New Testament at “St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary”, very clearly states his support of using the historical-critical method in the Orthodox biblical theology¹⁹, although that is neutral in itself. According to the scientific intention with which it is applied, the present method either leads to the awareness of certain drawbacks of the text, or to the opening of new perspectives regarding Scriptural text.²⁰ Kesich possesses the necessary knowledge to analyse the different forms of biblical criticism and to outline their advantages and disadvantages for Orthodox theology. Thus, text criticism has the merit of having established an authoritative text, but can be problematic if the exegete concentrates his entire theology only on the text, leaving aside its message. Text criticism is most easily accepted, in his opinion, by the opponents of biblical criticism.²¹ For source criticism (the synoptical problem), Kesich considers the subjectivity arising inside it as problematic but admits that, in the case of the Gospels, we deal with two or more sources.²² Form criticism minimizes, on the one hand, the evangelist’s involvement in the writing of the work, and, on the other hand,

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 55.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 55.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 73.

¹⁹ See: Veselin Kesich, *The Gospel Image of Christ*, second revised edition, Crestwood 1991, p. 12: “This book is written with the conviction that the proper function of biblical criticism is to build, not to destroy; to illumine, not to obscure; to bring members of the Church to a better understanding of the gospels, not to lead them away from Jesus, whose recording sayings and deeds mirror his image.”

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 38: “In itself, the critical method is neutral. In the hands of some scholars, it reveals their shortcomings. In the hands of others, it has opened many doors that were closed, thereby enormously helping us to enter into the meaning of the words and deeds of Christ.”

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 27.

the criticism has an important role in the identification and classification of literary forms, which a text evinces and which have much to say about its intention.²³ Regarding writing criticism, the author believes that it re-establishes the importance of the biblical author as a theologian for the writing of his own work, eliminating his characterization as a mere compiler.²⁴ Finally, Kesich stresses that the historical-critical method is, despite all the hardships related to its appreciation and adoption, the best existing method for biblical exegesis: "The method of biblical criticism which prevails today is far from being perfect or free of subjectivity; but in spite of its limitations it is still the best method available."²⁵

Next, on the historical-critical method, we hear Theodore Stylianopoulos, professor of the New Testament within the "Greek Orthodox School of Theology *Holy Cross*" in the USA, who makes reference to the academic style of Scripture, understood as a systematic preoccupation of theological universities and faculties in Western Europe and North America, which is progressively extending to the whole world.²⁶ In his opinion, biblical criticism was caused by many factors, the most important of which being a sharp rationalism, which distanced Scripture from its theological importance.²⁷ In his opinion, the image most often associated with biblical criticism is the chaos created by the encounter between different methodologies and philosophical influences.²⁸ However, biblical criticism has dominated the scientific study of Scripture in the last two hundred years²⁹, becoming inevitable for the present-day scholars.³⁰ Stylianopoulos knows all the steps of the historical-critical method, which he outlines. In addition, he also describes the new tendencies in the scientific study of Scripture (*Structuralism, Semiotics, Rezeptionsästhetik*), which, in his opinion, are based on text updating and transcend classical criticism.³¹ Finally, the author makes a remark from the Orthodox biblical criticism point of view, highlighting its advantages and disadvantages.³² If one

²³ *Ibidem*, pp. 29, 32.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 33-34.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 195.

²⁶ See: T. Stylianopoulos, *The New Testament*, p. 67.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 68-69.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 124-125, 128.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 128-129.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 123-125.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 131.

³² *Ibidem*, pp. 135-138. Some of the advantages are: 1) the ideal of honesty based on the philological and historical criteria; 2) linguistics and text criticism studies; 3) detailed

wishes to understand biblical criticism in Orthodoxy, they must consider analysing and correlating three aspects: a) the historical-critical method, b) the patristic interpretation tradition and c) the liturgical dimension of the hermeneutic perspective.³³ His conclusions regarding the critical method of interpreting the Bible are rather positive. The critical studies of Scripture do not have to be renounced, but, as Oikonomos pointed out too, a balance must be struck between critical analysis and the theological testimony of this writing.³⁴

Furthermore, Konstantinos Nikolakopoulos, currently professor of Biblical Theology within the Institute for Orthodox Theology of the University of Munich, analyses the evolution of the historical-critical method in the West European theological context to date.³⁵ He evaluates the method not only from the Orthodox perspective, but also through the questions arising in the Western academic environment, according to which it is absolutely necessary to “reanalyse the theological relevance of the generally accepted historical-critical method.”³⁶ But the author does not present a thorough analysis of all the aspects of the historical-critical method, but limits his argument to the exclusive assessment of the hermeneutic principle propelling it. The Holy Fathers and science, both of which being oriented towards Scripture, are not in contradiction.³⁷ The value of the scientific research of Scripture

knowledge of Scripture and of the world in which it was born, comprised in speciality lexicons, encyclopaedias, commentaries and reference works; 4) the explanation of certain biblical institutions, such as covenants, prophecies, the kingdom of heaven, eschatology; 5) highlighting the variety of ideas in Scripture and of the dynamic character of inspiration and revelation.

In Stylianopoulos’ opinion, the neuralgic points of biblical criticism are: 1) limited access to the theological dimension of scriptural understanding; 2) a sort of professionalism that is trying in vain to recover the spiritual dimension of Scripture, turning into negativism and cynism; 3) increasing mistrust in the reality of Jesus Christ, His Gospel, the Church and the whole Christianity, as a direct influence of Illuminism.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 73.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 144-145.

³⁵ See: K. Nikolakopoulos, *Die “unbekannten” Hymnen des Neuen Testaments. Die Orthodoxe Hermeneutik und die historisch-kritische Methode. Exegetische und theologische Deutung neutestamentlicher Stellen unter Berücksichtigung des Orthodoxen Kultus* (MUS/VIOT 7), Aachen 2000, pp. 25-40.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 38.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 43: “Die Meinung, die Kirchenväter hätten mit den wissenschaftlichen Methoden bei der Interpretation der Heiligen Schrift nichts zu tun gehabt, ist demnach unbegründbar und unzulässig.”; also, p. 44: “Obwohl die Kirchenväter die Schrifttexte anders als die moderne Bibelwissenschaft auslegen, steht ihre Exegese in keinem unüberbrückbaren Widerspruch zur zeitgenössischen Hermeneutik.”

has never been contested by the Orthodox, although the historical-critical method is not the sole criterion for biblical exegesis, but a stage preparing for patristic-spiritual exegesis.³⁸ Despite the prejudices and prejudgements which have characterized over time the mutual understanding of Orthodox and Western exegetes and which have made difficult the fruitful and necessary encounter of the Orthodox with the principles of the historical-critical method, Nikolakopoulos advocates making a harmonious synthesis of these two exegetic approaches, or, in other words, combining traditionalism and ecclesiality with scientificity.³⁹

During 28th October – 1st November 2003, within The Hellenic College/Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Brookline, Massachusetts (USA), a symposium was held on the theme “Sacred Text and Interpretation: Perspectives in Orthodox Biblical Studies,” whose reports were published in the periodical *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*. Four reports are dedicated to the perspective of Orthodox biblical theology on the new developments of biblical science. Firstly, John Anthony McGuckin notices the existence of a gap between the professional reading of Scripture and its reception by the laymen of the Church.⁴⁰ That is why Orthodox biblical theology is facing difficulties regarding the concrete reception of the new academic exegetic developments and especially regarding facing them.⁴¹ McGuckin continues by pleading for the integration of the current exegetic methods into “the Church’s current biblical styles⁴²,” that is, for connecting these methods to the reality and concreteness of church life. Secondly, in his report, Theodore Stylianopoulos identifies and names four “principles of honesty”, which would guarantee, in his opinion, an adequate understanding of Scripture: a) honesty regarding Scriptural testimony; b) honesty regarding Church Tradition; c) honesty regarding the theological study and d) honesty regarding the Holy Spirit, through Whom “the ultimate goal of the reading of Scripture and the appropriation of its spiritual efficacy accomplished in faithful and obedi-

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 42: “Daher aber wird die historisch-kritische Methode für eine wichtige zusätzliche methodische Hilfe zur patristisch-geistlichen Auslegung gehalten.”

³⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 49-50.

⁴⁰ See: J. A. McGuckin, “Recent Biblical Hermeneutics”, in: *GOTR* 47 (1-4/2002), p. 295.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 305: “What will be the Orthodox Church’s collective response to the patterns of biblical criticism as they have been established in Western Europe in the last century, set out by Protestant movement, and partially endorsed by post -Vatican II Roman Catholicism? Can Orthodoxy venture any opinion? Will it have a distinctive attitude to the New Hermeneutic? Will it try to ignore it?”

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 305.

ent hearts.”⁴³ According to Stylianopoulos, biblical criticism has also brought about many positive things, but it has often too easily overlooked the theological component of the Bible. In order to overcome this excess, it is necessary to understand the theological dimension of Scripture, that is, its kerygmatic, liturgical and doctrinal significance, as well as some epistemological meekness, understood as acknowledging the fact that “autonomous reason and imagination do not necessarily have the last word regarding what Scriptures are all about.”⁴⁴ The third report, authored by Konstantinos Nikolakopoulos, makes the distinction between Orthodox exegesis, which the author calls spiritual, and the Western one, which he calls scientific.⁴⁵ Orthodox scriptural interpretation does not reject or exclude the scientific study of the Bible, but it involves it.⁴⁶ However, the historical-critical method cannot be indicated as an ideal method, even if its contribution to biblical studies is significant.⁴⁷ Finally, the last report belongs to Ioannis Karavidopoulos, emeritus professor of New Testament at the University of Thessaloniki and the only Orthodox representative in the editorial boards of the two well-known critical editions of the New Testament, *Nestle Aland Novum Testamentum* and *The Greek New Testament*, underlines the importance of text criticism for Orthodox biblical study⁴⁸ and makes three recommendations for the development of text criticism in the Orthodox biblical space: a) the intensive study of types of texts widely used in Eastern Europe (e.g. Alexandrinus), b) the immediate setup of an Orthodox institute for the study of New Testament texts and c) the rediscovery of the importance of text criticism as an integral part of the biblical interpretive undertaking.⁴⁹

In the landscape of Orthodox biblical studies in Romania, a noteworthy figure is Constantin Oancea, a Biblicist at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Sibiu, who does a critical analysis of the historical-critical method, highlighting its aspects that are useful for Orthodox biblical theology, and its

⁴³ See: Theodore Stylianopoulos, “Perspectives in Orthodox Biblical Interpretation”, in *GOTR* 47 (1-4/2002), p. 325.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 332-333.

⁴⁵ See: K. Nikolakopoulos, “An Orthodox Critique of Some Radical Approaches in New Testament Studies” in: *GOTR* 47 (1-4/2002), pp. 338-353.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 340-341.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 342.

⁴⁸ Ioannes Karavidopoulos, “Textual Criticism in the Orthodox Church. Present State and Future Prospects”, in: *GOTR* 47 (1-4/2002), pp. 379-394.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 392-393.

negative aspects, too.⁵⁰ The author categorizes as problematic the following aspects and principles of this method: the strong inclination towards atheism, that is, the promotion of a critical study in which Scripture is the exclusive product of human interest and of the social context, without God's slightest influence, historicism, the pursuit of originality at all costs, with the involvement of unrealistic hypotheses, which are totally separated from the context of church life, its limited approach caused by the exclusive specialization involved in the proposed exegetic undertaking.⁵¹ However, the method must not be excluded from the exegetic undertaking, the main reason for its acknowledgement in Orthodox biblical theology being, according to the author, "the historicity of revelation"⁵². That refers to the theological truth of God's Incarnation and His historical and social contextualization.⁵³ As Jesus Christ is God incarnated, Who manifested in history with all its components, the same way Scripture has a divine-human character, that is, it attests God's revelations in the political, cultural, social etc. developments of various contexts. For that reason, the trivialization of history is, in Orthodox hermeneutics, an exaggeration, just like diminishing God's role in Scripture.⁵⁴

The latest reception of the historical-critical method in the larger context of the Orthodox biblical studies was undertaken also by K. Nikolakopoulos in 2011⁵⁵, who sustains an ecumenical movement on the base of the Bible.⁵⁶ Even if the merits of the historical-critical exegesis in the explanation of the biblical texts are indisputable, its negative aspects must also be taken into account, such as banishing the spiritual meanings of these texts.⁵⁷ Nikolakopoulos discusses specifically only aspects of the textual criticism, as they are presented in the Western exegetical books. However he

⁵⁰ See: Constantin Oancea, "Exegeza istorico-critică și teologia biblică ortodoxă: o reevaluare", in: *RT* 3 (2007), pp. 187-202.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 193-197.

⁵² *Ibidem.*, p. 199.

⁵³ See: Georges Florovsky, *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View*, Belmont Massachusetts 1972, p. 20.

⁵⁴ C. Oancea, *Exegeza istorico-critică*, p. 199.

⁵⁵ See: K. Nikolakopoulos, *Das Neue Testament in der Orthodoxen Kirche. Grundlegende Fragen einer Einführung in das Neue Testament* (Lehr- und Studienbücher Orthodoxe Theologie 1), Berlin 2011.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 304: "Ich glaube, dass die Konvergenz der westlichen und östlichen Exegese nicht nur doch möglich, sondern für ein globaleres Verständnis der Heiligen Schriften sogar unentbehrlich ist, zumal heutzutage «Ökumene ohne Heilige Schrift als Basis undenkbar ist»."

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 304-305.

manages to highlight the importance of the works of the Church Fathers in preserving the biblical texts.⁵⁸

The point of view outlined above shows that the reception of scientific exegesis is an important theme on the recent Orthodox biblical studies agenda. For international Orthodox biblical studies, scientific exegesis is exclusively associated with the historical-critical method. This reception mainly consists in the Orthodox Biblicists' confrontation both with the hermeneutic principles and repercussions, and with certain methodical steps of biblical criticism. Based on the two ways of analysis, hermeneutical and methodical, the historical-critical method is valued for the context of Orthodox biblical theology, by pointing out its advantages and disadvantages when adopted by the Orthodox.

2.2. Preliminary conclusions

a) Orthodox biblical studies do not reject the historical-critical method categorically. Its importance related to the elucidation of the context, original language, pericope, etc. is acknowledged. After the necessary transformations, that is, after its accommodation with the Orthodox scriptural understanding, the historical-critical method must not be removed from the context of Orthodox biblical studies.⁵⁹

b) Therefore, the historical-critical method cannot be ignored by the Orthodox. Whoever wishes to analyse a biblical text scientifically nowadays, no matter which Christian confession they belong to, invariably resorts to the means and approaches developed and made available by this method.⁶⁰

c) The main reason for the acknowledgement of the historical-critical method by Orthodox biblical theology as a possible interpretive approach is based on a hermeneutic principle much appreciated in the Orthodox space, namely "the historicity of revelation"⁶¹, that is, on the historical context of the world's salvation plan, which cannot be ignored at the exegetical level.⁶² Revelation in general, which includes Scripture, is based on God's manifestation and that of godly things in history: "Recorded revelation, i.e. the Holy Scrip-

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 42: "Neben den alten Übersetzungen des neutestamentlichen Textes gelten auch die Werke der Kirchenväter, deren Werke voll von Zitaten, mittelbaren Bezügen oder Kommentaren zum Neuen Testament sind, als gleichwertige Quellen für die ntl. Textgeschichte. Es ist nämlich zutreffend, was von manchen Forschern betont wird: Auch wenn alle anderen Quellen für die neutestamentliche Textgeschichte und -überlieferung abhanden gekommen wären, würden allein die patristischen Zitate dafür ausreichen, das ganze Neue Testament wiederherzustellen."

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 202.

⁶⁰ See: V. Kesich, *The Gospel Image*, p. 195.

⁶¹ C. Oancea, *Exegeza istorico critică*, p. 199.

⁶² S. Agourides, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 11.

ture, is therefore, above all, history.”⁶³ At the same time, the historical-critical method gains its importance also because the Holy Fathers did biblical criticism at the level existing then and with the instruments available in that context.⁶⁴

d) Despite stressing their value for the understanding of Scripture, scientific exegetic methods are not an exclusive means for Orthodox biblical exegesis. In other words, the historical-critical method introduces patristic-spiritual exegesis⁶⁵, because the former lacks the interest in updating the interpretation for present-day readers or listeners.⁶⁶

e) There is no official decision of the Orthodox Churches concerning the application and use of scientific exegesis. Therefore, its reception in the Orthodox space remains non-unitary. However, an individual reception can be remarked.

f) The hermeneutic solution identified by Orthodox Biblicists for the integration of the historical-critical method into the exegetic undertaking specific to them is making a “harmonious synthesis”⁶⁷ between modern biblical science and patristic exegesis. How this synthesis can be practically made is not explained, though.

g) Facing the historical-critical method, the Orthodox remain at the level of argumentation based on hermeneutic principles, without offering their own method or a specific recommendation for an adequate exegesis. *What must an Orthodox do in order to interpret a biblical text scientifically?* remains an unanswered question.

h) The application of scientific methods in the context of Orthodox biblical theology must be done based on a reflected concept, as Oikonomos proposed in 1976. Such a concept for the reception of modern interpretation methods has never been more urgent and more necessary than today.⁶⁸ That is why the theme of biblical criticism reception remains “a crucial problem for the Orthodox Church today.”⁶⁹

3. The Holy Fathers and scientific biblical exegesis

If in the first part of this study we related Orthodox exegetes to the historical-critical method to discover their position towards this interpretive way,

⁶³ G. Florovsky, *Bible, Church, Tradition*, p. 21.

⁶⁴ See: V. Kesich, *The Gospel Image*, pp. 11-12.

⁶⁵ See: K. Nikolakopoulos, *Die Orthodoxe Hermeneutik*, p. 42.

⁶⁶ See: C. Oancea, *Exegeza istorico-critică*, p. 202.

⁶⁷ K. Nikolakopoulos, *Die Orthodoxe Hermeneutik*, p. 49.

⁶⁸ See: J.A. McGuckin, *Recent Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 305.

⁶⁹ V. Kesich, *The Gospel Image*, 195.

in vogue in the scientific world, then the second part is going to look at the hermeneutic authority of the Church Fathers in the context of Western-Protestant biblical studies.

“The Fathers’ presence”⁷⁰ gradually becomes an important discussion theme in the current theological and philosophical landscape and, despite their apparently inflexible authority⁷¹, it enjoys popularity for several reasons. Some of them, identified by Western scientific research, are: a) approach to Traditional sources; b) acknowledged spiritual and theological authority; c) the importance of the themes approached by them, which always remain up-to-date, such as anthropology or the knowledge and names of God and d) their corrective role.⁷² The relevance of patristics has been systematically analysed not only at the level of academic research, but at the level of the present-day society, too,⁷³ even if this relevance does not correspond one hundred per cent to the expectations and investigations to date.⁷⁴ “Regulating through the Fathers” reinforces and, at the same time, highlights their importance and authority.⁷⁵

3.1. A special case - Ulrich Luz

From my own perspective, the best analysis of the Church Fathers’ importance for the interpretation of Scripture from the Western-Protestant

⁷⁰ Thomas Leinkauf, “Beobachtungen zur Rezeption patristischer Autoren in der frühen Neuzeit”, in: Günther Frank, Thomas Leinkauf et al. (eds.), *Die Patristik in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt 2006, p. 191.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p. 191.

⁷² *Ibidem*, pp. 191-196.

⁷³ An important signal for the reception of the Church Fathers was given by Christoph Marksches, Johannes van Oort (eds.), *Zwischen Altertumswissenschaft und Theologie. Zur Relevanz der Patristik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Leuven 2002.

⁷⁴ Skepticism towards the relevance of Patristics in Protestant theology of the past and present is shown by Hans Christoph Brennecke, “Patristik in der konfessionellen Theologie des 19. Jahrhunderts”, in: C. Marksches, J. van Oort (eds.), *Zwischen Altertumswissenschaft und Theologie*, p. 63: “Die «Studia Patristica» sind schon rein quantitativ ein stolzer Beleg für die inter- und überkonfessionelle patristische Arbeit des letzten halben Jahrhunderts. Aber auch wenn die Teilnehmerzahl der im wesentlichen auf den deutschsprachigen Raum begrenzten und hier das protestantische Erbe vertretenden «Patristischen Arbeitsgemeinschaft» bei jeder der alle zwei Jahre Anfang Januar stattfindenden Tagungen größer und das international die patristische Forschung repräsentierende Bulletin der «Association Internationale d’études patristiques» jährlich dicker wird, ist festzustellen, daß in unserem gegenwärtigen akademischen Theologiebetrieb die Patristik wie überhaupt die Beschäftigung mit dem antiken Christentum und der Alten Kirche kaum Relevanz hat und von der Theologie im Ganzen wenig zur Kenntnis genommen wird.”

⁷⁵ Christoph Marksches, „Normierung durch »Väter« bei Neuplatonikern und Christen. Ein Vergleich”, in: C. Marksches, J. van Oort (eds.), *Zwischen Altertumswissenschaft und Theologie*, pp. 1-30.

perspective (anyway, there are not very many such analyses in the aforementioned theological space) was done by Ulrich Luz in a study elaborating on a report presented by him at a meeting of Western and Eastern exegetes at the Neamț Monastery in 1998.⁷⁶

At the beginning of his study, Luz states that it is a great deficit that Church Fathers have no importance today for Western exegesis and stopped influencing the profile of this exegesis altogether.⁷⁷ The withdrawal of Church Fathers from Western exegesis depends, according to Luz, on the one hand, on the reforming biblical principle which places no significance whatsoever upon their authority, and, on the other hand, on humanism, with its wish to discover the original meaning.⁷⁸ After Luz outlines the exegetic importance of the Church Fathers, he focuses on stressing their hermeneutic valences, based on five observations:

a) The Church Fathers' exegetic initiatives offer the possibility of making certain associations with the new current interpretive undertakings, which complete the historical-critical method.⁷⁹ Luz stresses the necessity of a second methodical step, apart from the scientific analysis, with the aim of bringing the texts back into our concrete reality⁸⁰, of creating a bridge between the literal and allegorical exegeses, that is, between *explanation* and *understanding*.⁸¹ According to the author, for the application or updating of a text through spiritual understanding, Holy Fathers are of great importance.

b) The Church Fathers' various exegeses evince the openness of the texts to various readings.⁸² Each text does not have an original meaning alone and is not closed, as the historical-critical method maintains, but has a meaning which is gradually developed in the context of each reading undertaken. Luz notices a strong connection between the patristic interpretation of Scripture and the current exegesis oriented towards the reader (*die leser-orientierte Exegese*).⁸³

⁷⁶ See: Ulrich Luz, „Die Bedeutung der Kirchenväter für die Auslegung der Bibel. Eine westlich-protestantische Sicht” in: J.D.G. Dunn, H. Klein et al. (eds.), *Auslegung der Bibel*, pp. 29-52.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 29-30.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 31-34.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 37.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 38.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, p. 39.

⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 40.

⁸³ *Ibidem*, pp. 40-41.

c) Next, Luz assumes the existence of a correspondence between the patristic exegetic tradition on the one hand and the history of effects and the history of text reception (*Wirkungsgeschichte*, *Rezeptionsästhetik*) on the other. This tradition is not only a thing of the past, but our past, a context which influences and marks us profoundly.⁸⁴ The history of effects reveals the Fathers' experience with our own identity in all its aspects⁸⁵ and, at the same time, postulates an enlargement and extension of the own horizon to novelty.⁸⁶ In this respect, *Wirkungsgeschichte* is an important contribution to the ecumenical dialogue.⁸⁷

d) For that reason, in order to avoid the rising tendency of historical criticism to atomize Scripture with the aim of discovering its *core*, Luz proposes the exercise of recalling the Fathers, who, beyond the many interpretations of the Bible, postulated an *interpretation communion*, which is the Church.⁸⁸ This communion protects us against becoming our own Fathers.⁸⁹

e) For the reconciliation between the literal scriptural exegesis and the spiritual one, Luz resorts to the Church Fathers' model, which developed the Christological centre of Scripture as a hermeneutic principle. Thus, the literal aspects are not diminished and the spiritual ones are not absolutized either, but history becomes a vehicle for the spirit⁹⁰, based on the teaching about the two natures of Jesus Christ.⁹¹ In this respect, it is absolutely necessary to strike a balance between the two exegetic approaches.⁹²

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 43.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 43: "Wirkungsgeschichte kann uns die Augen öffnen für das, wer wir sind, indem sie uns erzählt, wer wir geworden sind. Darum sind in den östlichen Kirchen die Kirchenväter mit Recht so wichtig."

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 44.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 44: "In diesem Sinn führt sie (die Wirkungsgeschichte) in den ökumenischen Dialog. Das Ziel ist also nicht, dass wir Protestanten uns die Orthodoxe Sichtweise der Kirchenväter zu eigen machen, sondern dass wir durch ihre Sichtweise zu einer neuen eigenen Sichtweise kommen."

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 44: "Ich möchte dies gerade als Protestant betonen: Im Protestantismus ist das Gewicht der Interpretationsgemeinschaft Kirche klein."

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 45.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 46.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 48.

⁹² *Ibidem*, p. 49: "Die Situation heutiger protestantischer Bibelauslegung lässt sich im Gegenüber zu Luther und der Alten Kirche so beschreiben: Die Menschheit Christi hat sich gegenüber seiner Gottheit ebenso verselbstständigt wie die wörtliche, d.h. historisch-kritische Bibelauslegung gegenüber der geistlichen. Dadurch ist der historische Textsinn der Bibeltexte und ihre Bedeutung für uns auseinandergetreten: Der historische

In spite of the encouraging exposition from the point of view of the Orthodox scriptural understanding, Luz defends himself at the end of his study against a possibly rushed interpretation of his point of view⁹³, as if somebody wished to him because of his statements. That is why the author defines his official position as a Protestant, based on three Protestant considerations:⁹⁴

a) His definition of “Church Fathers” includes authors who have been declared heretics by the Church;

b) The Fathers’ interpretation is not a *correct* interpretation of The Bible for him

c) The Church Fathers’ hermeneutic is not a *normative* hermeneutic for him.⁹⁵

3.2. Preliminary conclusions

At this point, an observation is necessary: a resemblance is noted between the two groups of exegetes, Orthodox and Protestant, which refers to the fact that each group deals with a research theme specific to the other group: the Orthodox analyse scientific exegesis and the historical-critical method, and the Protestants try an assessment of the importance of patristic exegesis. Consequently, both themes can be catalogued and valued from an ecumenical perspective, each of them acquiring a significant role in the way of discovering the other.⁹⁶ Not by chance was it stated that the general discussion theme, Church Fathers, can be adequately approached in an ecumenical, international and interdisciplinary context⁹⁷ and that the study of their works

Sinn droht bedeutungslos zu werden, d.h. nicht mehr *für uns* zu sprechen, und die Gegenwartsbedeutung der Texte droht geschichtslos zu werden. Von der christologischen Hermeneutik der Kirchenväter her lässt sich die Aufgabe, beides zusammenzubinden, und die Richtung formulieren, in die unsere neutestamentliche Hermeneutik heute zu gehen hat.”

⁹³ *Ibidem*, p. 50.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 50-51.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 51.

⁹⁶ Wolfgang A. Bienert, „Die Bedeutung der Patristik für das ökumenische Gespräch - aus protestantischer Sicht“, in: C. Marksches, J. van Oort (eds.), *Zwischen Altertumswissenschaft und Theologie*, p. 122: “Und es zeigt sich bei näherer Betrachtung dann auch, daß die Beschäftigung mit den Kirchenvätern, mit der altkirchlichen Tradition, mit Leben und Lehre (Dogmen) der Alten Kirche in der Tat für den ökumenischen Dialog insgesamt notwendig, ja für das gegenseitige Verständnis zwischen den Konfessionen unerlässlich ist.”

⁹⁷ C. Marksches, „Vorwort“, in: C. Marksches, J. van Oort (eds.), *Zwischen Altertums-wissenschaft und Theologie*, p. IX.

is an opportunity for ecumenism⁹⁸, from the Protestant point of view⁹⁹, and also from the Orthodox point of view.¹⁰⁰

4. Proposals for approach

In the exposition of this chapter, I consider the opinion that “the Holy Bible forms the basis and foundation of faith for all Christian Churches and confessions”¹⁰¹ to be of vital importance. This observation can be followed by a question: if all Christians understand Scripture as a firm basis for discussions, especially in the context of inter-confessional theological dialogues, why is there not a more intense preoccupation with developing a hermeneutic and/or exegesis that should mainly take into account the openness of each of the two scriptural understandings towards the features of the other, which can eventually be assumed and integrated? An appreciation postulated in the manner described above is not excluded from the start, as some proposals have already been made, both by Eastern biblical theology and Western biblical theology.

4.1. *Proposals made by the Orthodox*

4.1.1. *Reflected reception and application of biblical criticism results in Orthodox biblical theology.*

As shown above, the Orthodox acknowledge the value of the results of the newest approaches in biblical criticism, mainly understood as the historical-critical method, and expresses her agreement with the reflected, nuanced reception of its results. In this respect, McGuckin wonders “what values could guide Orthodox scholars in considering the New Criticism as a

⁹⁸ W. Bienert, *Die Bedeutung der Patristik*, p. 137. Also Grigorios Larentzakis, „Die Bedeutung der Patristik für das ökumenische Gespräch. Eine Orthodoxe Betrachtung“, in: C. Marksches, J. van Oort (eds.), *Zwischen Altertumswissenschaft und Theologie*, p. 163: “Der große Patristiker Wilhelm Schneemelcher hat das auch richtig erkannt, als er sagte: «Wir sind in der evangelischen Theologie heute besser über die Väter der Kirche unterrichtet und können daher besser verstehen, was die patristische Tradition bedeutet, als es unsere lutherischen Väter vor 400 Jahren konnten.» Diese Einsicht kann uns tatsächlich auf dem Weg des Ökumenismus nachhaltig helfen, wofür ich doch optimistisch bin.”

⁹⁹ W. Bienert, *Die Bedeutung der Patristik*, p. 122: “Die Bedeutung der Patristik für das ökumenische Gespräch und die Verständigung zwischen den Konfessionen insgesamt zeigt sich am deutlichsten in der Begegnung des Protestantismus mit den Orthodoxen Kirchen.”

¹⁰⁰ G. Larentzakis, *Die Bedeutung der Patristik*, p. 151: “[...] sind die Kirchenväter für uns heute Partner im Dialog bei der Behandlung unserer zeitgenössischen Herausforderungen wie auch sehr wichtige Berater in vielen ökumenischen Fragen und nicht nur Untersuchungsobjekte aus wissenschaftlich-theoretischem bzw. historischem Interesse.”

¹⁰¹ K. Nikolakopoulos, *An Orthodox Critique*, p. 337.

collection of very valuable tools, and how selections could be made by Orthodox theologians in such a way that the ideological and theological axioms that underlie so much of Critical theory do not pass unnoticed.”¹⁰² For the above-mentioned theologian, the responsibility of the Orthodox does not consist in developing a new biblical criticism parallel to the existing one, as the value and results of the efforts made by Western biblical theology in that direction can never be equaled and imitated in the landscape of Orthodox biblical studies. In other words, the Orthodox must use the base created by and already existing due to Western biblical science and not make efforts in order to create another type of scientific research in biblical criticism: “This is not to invite Orthodox theologians to develop a principle of biblical criticism, as if to suggest there is not already one actively in place.”¹⁰³ The reception and application of the historical-critical method in Orthodox biblical theology is, for the same author, similar to the integration of the method into the Church, that is, its connection to the concrete reality of ecclesiastic life, a vital necessity: “It is imperative that the achievements of Biblical Criticism are neither avoided because of fears that their underlying hermeneutics are, in many instances, inimical to Orthodox Tradition, nor slavishly adopted without reflection, so as to fill the vacuum of contemporary literature on biblical history and interpretation.”¹⁰⁴

4.1.2. *The integration of scientific methods into the Church*

Next, on behalf of the Orthodox, there comes the proposal of the integration of modern exegetic methods into the Church, as a necessary guarantee for their use by Orthodox biblical theology. On this matter, McGuckin states: “[...] rather it is to invite considerations of how to respond to modern interpretative methods and incorporate them into the Church’s current biblical styles.”¹⁰⁵ A reaction is awaited on behalf of Orthodox biblical theologians regarding the new exegetic methods: “It belongs now to Orthodox commentators, secure in their overarching Tradition, to sift and assess and incorporate where appropriate.”¹⁰⁶ According to the same author, it is not for the first time that the Church has received and used, according to its purposes, new tendencies in science, in this case, in biblical science: “Orthodoxy, in the great patristic centuries, showed that it was more than willing to adopt the latest

¹⁰² J.A. McGuckin, *Recent Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 305.

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*, p. 305.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 319.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 305.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 320.

refinements in interpretative method, and boldly re-expressed Semitic idioms in Hellenistic metaphorical style. The Church's involvement with recent hermeneutical methods will undoubtedly be a very significant aspect of its theological dialogue with the West in the years ahead."¹⁰⁷ But the only difference is that this approach must soon happen: "This is an issue that has been a critical imperative in several ages of the Church previously (most spectacularly when the varied forms of Greek rhetoric were co-opted in the fourth century to become the mainframe of the patristic biblical hermeneutic), but has not been, for many centuries, so pressing a task as it is today."¹⁰⁸ However, the concrete way of achieving it and the incorporation into the Church of the new exegetic methods specific to the Western European space by the Orthodox is not mentioned. Must every Orthodox exegete decide and choose on his own, or does it have to be officially decided?

The use and application of the new exegetic methods and their incorporation into the Church is synonymous with their accommodation or connection to the ultimate goal of the Church, namely believers' salvation. However, the Church-incorporation of the methods must not be understood as a strange mixture or dangerous eclecticism, but rather as a synthetic blending, in an attempt to recover the holistic perspective which characterized the patristic tradition: "This eclectic method has always been descriptive of patristic exegesis (no better example can be found than in Basil's *Hexaemeron*), and so, although Orthodoxy may be using new terms, it is hardly the case that the argument or the process is new."¹⁰⁹

4.1.3. *The development of a new Orthodox exegetic concept, consisting in synthesis*

This concept could be formed following the processing of contemporary scientific biblical exegesis and that of Church Fathers, aiming to bring closer and even reconcile the two approaches to the Holy Scripture text: "Erst wenn es gelungen ist, moderne Bibelwissenschaft zu treiben, ohne mit der exegetischen Tradition zu brechen, wird die Orthodoxe Kirche eine eigene Prägung erhalten, die sie befähigt, anderen Kirchen von ihrem Reichtum mitzuteilen."¹¹⁰ Such an approach, in the sense of common application of the scientific (historical-critical) and patristic exegetic methods would be possible mainly due to the limited perspective according to which each of the two

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 319.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 305.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 320.

¹¹⁰ E. Oikonomos, *Bibel und Bibelwissenschaft*, p. 73.

interpretive approaches are characterized: “Während das Verharren der östlichen Theologie auf den Offenbarungsfaktor konkrete historische Begebenheiten ignorieren oder übersehen kann, besteht im Westen die Gefahr, daß die ausschließliche Gewichtung auf die Historizität den Horizont einer notwendigen Vergegenwärtigung der damals Geschehenen verschwinden lassen kann.”¹¹¹ The synthesis indicated as a solution for methodological approach can be made, at least in the beginning, only in the academic landscape: “Auch wenn die patristische Tradition und die (moderne) historisch-kritische Wissenschaft zwei unterschiedliche Bilder von den Schrifttexten entwerfen, sollte die akademische Theologie die Fähigkeit besitzen, die unter diesen beiden Bildern verborgene Einheit aufzuspüren.”¹¹²

4.1.4. *The completion of the patristic exegetic approach through scientific exegetic methods*

Based on the statement above, the collaboration between the two exegetic lines can be considered a mutual completion: “Daher wird die historisch-kritische Methode für eine wichtige zusätzliche methodische Hilfe zur patristisch-geistlichen Auslegung gehalten. Das Christentum, so wichtig seine Mysteriumsbotschaft sein mag, darf seines weltlichen, kirchlichen und biblisch-historischen Charakter nicht entblößt werden. Genau an diesem Punkt knüpft die Bedeutung der modernen historischen Kritik an, die den Buchstaben und die Geschichte ernst nimmt.”¹¹³ Specifically, from Nikolakopoulos’s point of view, Western biblists could receive the patristic biblical interpretation more intensively, while Orthodox biblical theology could insist more on the historical-critical method: “Ihre hermeneutischen Prinzipien also (der Kirchenväter – a.n.) [...] könnten von den westlichen Exegeten, aber auch allgemein von allen Theologen anderer Konfessionen mehr in Betracht gezogen und ernster genommen werden. Für die Orthodoxe Theologie stellt dies

¹¹¹ K. Nikolakopoulos, *Die Orthodoxe Hermeneutik und die historisch-kritische Methode*, p. 41; and p. 42: “Beide Positionen können nur zum Teil gelungene Auslegungsergebnisse haben, denn beiden drohen einschlägige Gefahren. Die westliche analytische Kritik lenkt manchmal ihre Aufmerksamkeit ausschließlich auf die philologischen und historischen Elemente des Textes und bleibt dabei stehen. Die analytische Erforschung der vielen Textformen kann aber nur auf die konkreten Abschnitte eingeschränkte Ergebnisse haben, die jedoch der Vervollständigung des gesamten Textsinnes nicht dienen. Das Bemühen der Orthodoxen-patristischen Auslegung schöpft sich dagegen im Mysteriumsverständnis der Texte aus. Somit werden aber bedeutsame philologische und historische Gegebenheiten zugunsten der pneumatischen Ebene vernachlässigt.”

¹¹² *Ibidem*, p. 48.

¹¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 42.

eine unverzichtbare Voraussetzung für den weiteren Erfolg der ökumenischen Annäherungsversuche auf der theologischen Ebene dar. Aber auch umgekehrt ist das Festhalten der Orthodoxen Hermeneutik an der im Westen sich entwickelnden historisch-kritischen Methode in Hinsicht auf den interkonfessionellen Dialog sehr notwendig.¹¹⁴ This way, it could be easier to avoid the exegetic exaggerations occurred on both sides.¹¹⁵

4.2. *Proposal on behalf of Western scientific exegesis*

4.2.1. *The proposal to identify a principle of integration or synthesis*

In one of his studies regarding the reception of the new exegetic methods by Orthodox Biblicists, Simon Crisp makes a clear proposal aiming to bring= the Orthodox interpretive methods closer to the Western-scientific ones. Also, the same author analyses, from the point of view of Western European academic exegesis, the advantages of Scriptural interpretive approach specific to Orthodoxy, the most important of which being “a more integrated and inclusive approach to the interpretation of Scripture which holds together historical and theological concerns.”¹¹⁶ This hermeneutic principle, remarked in the context of Orthodox biblical theology, consists, in his opinion, in “historical concerns, theological interpretation and personal commitment”¹¹⁷ and could guarantee “a liberating context for biblical scholarship.”¹¹⁸ At the same time, this principle is also appreciated in that it has the necessary force “to give biblical scholarship a basis for combining academic integrity and ecclesial commitment, and to provide individual biblical scholars with an antidote to the feeling of living in two separate worlds.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 48-49.

¹¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 49: “Durch die harmonische Synthese beider Hermeneutiken könnten Übertreibungen und extreme exegetische Positionen vermieden und überwunden werden. Solche schwachen Punkte sind östlicherseits die bekannten Übertreibungen der allegorischen und der sogenannten *mystischen* Auslegung und die nicht ausreichende Berücksichtigung der philologischen und historischen Gegebenheiten, und es ist westlicherseits der manchmal durch die analytische Isolierung der behandelten Textformen verursachte Verlust des Überblicks über das Gesamtbild der Texte. Nur mittels einer konvergierenden Anwendung beider Hermeneutiken können sich die vertikale Linie des mystischen Offenbarungscharakters und die horizontale Linie der Geschichte und des Buchstabens harmonisch kreuzen und somit kann der Ausgleich beider Größen bewahrt werden.”

¹¹⁶ Simon Crisp, *Orthodox Biblical Scholarship*, p. 131.

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 132.

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

4.2.2. *The mutual completion of the Western-scientific and Orthodox exegetic approaches, based on a patristic-oriented approach*

The eventuality of a mutual enrichment of scientific exegesis through its patristic correspondent is also felt in the Western biblical landscape, especially by Marius Reiser. As in Nikolakopoulos' case, Reiser's starting point, expressed at the beginning of this article, is also the conviction that each of the two exegeses develops specific characteristics, in different directions. What is stressed by one of the sides is not seen with interest by the other. That is why Reiser's question seems to be legitimate, namely whether Orthodox exegesis could have the solution to the difficulties met by Western exegesis, and conversely, whether Western exegesis might offer the right solution to a more specific manifestation of Orthodox exegesis.¹²⁰

The profiling and application of these solutions can be understood as being similar to the proposal made by the Orthodox, regarding the development of a concept, as Oikonomos suggested. This concept of mutual completion could be grounded, in Reiser's opinion, on the patristic interpretive tradition and its allegoric principle: "Nachdem die Patristik durch Ausgaben, Kommentare und Untersuchungen einen guten Teil der exegetischen Literatur der Väter aufgearbeitet hat, sollten die Exegeten diese auch benützen. Eine sinnvolle Benutzung bedürfte allerdings einer hermeneutischen Besinnung, die von heutigen Einsichten her einen neuen Zugang zur Allegorese und zum theologischen Sichten der Väter sucht."¹²¹ For such an initiative, much more time is still needed, as Reiser also notices, showing that neither of the involved partners has an exegetic method or formula of mutual completion in an immediately applicable form.¹²²

5. Final conclusion

The present study aimed to provide an overview of the current tendencies in biblical studies, in both the Eastern Orthodox and the Western-European areas, towards approaching each other. This mutual approach can only be postulated, from my own perspective, by honestly accepting the reality according to which either of the two approaches needs the support of the other.

Therefore, in the Orthodox theological space of biblical studies, the spiritual, updating or applicative dimension of biblical texts and interpretation is constantly stressed, to the detriment of developing an exegetic method

¹²⁰ *Ibidem.*

¹²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 77.

¹²² *Ibidem*, p. 63.

systematically offering familiarization with and access to biblical texts. This lack is suggested as obviously as can be by Orthodox Biblicists of international fame and class, who suggest the total or partial adoption of the methodical system developed in Western Europe, especially in the Protestant space. That adoption is one of the great challenges in the academic Orthodox biblical landscape, because it must be adapted to the Orthodox specific. It is still an unanswered question whether a concept developed in a space and a tradition differing from the Orthodox one can find the necessary resonance in the Orthodox space, characterized by a totally different approach to the biblical text, especially at the level of concrete church life.

On the other hand, the field of Western biblical studies, especially of Protestant orientation, is transmitting certain signals regarding the intention to overcome the historical-critical exegetic undertaking used until now, not in the sense of eliminating it (which would practically be impossible), but in the sense of completing it. Both the principle of *Wirkungsgeschichte* developed by Luz, and that of *Rezeptionsästhetik* evince the Western biblical theologians' preoccupation with the issue of updating biblical text meanings, in the very direction which is so familiar to the Eastern space.

However, Western biblical theologians preoccupied with the extension of the exegetic perspective also to the level of updating will be greatly disappointed to notice that the specifics of the Orthodox interpretive tradition in the direction of updating, with everything that pertains to patristic reception, liturgical, hymnological or iconographic updating is not very well configured and developed in concepts or principles facilitating the understanding or adoption at the academic level.

In the end, the reality of a double dynamic with profound ecumenical valences persists: Orthodox biblical theology needs an exegetic method, and for the development and learning of a method, it can heavily resort (in the future) to the incontestable Western European exegetic experience, while Western biblical theology, seeking a solution to the updating of the exegetic approach, can have the Eastern biblical space as a partner in this dialogue.