

# Church history in the Intellectual Landscape of Post-Modernity

By Dimitrios Moschos\*

## The Evolution of Church History until the Beginning of the 20th Century

Church history has been cultivated from the very beginning of the Church's creation as a community of believers and witnesses to the life and resurrection of Jesus Christ within the boundaries of the community itself. Whether it is the *Acts* of the Apostles (which is the basic constitutional text for the historical account of the primitive church community), the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius, or the post 6th century Chroniclers, Church history has been a way of shaping the Church's identity and unity within the "world" and the various historical developments showing that the Second Coming was not imminent and that were likely to lead to persecution, the emergence of schisms and heresies, as well as the final transformation of Roman power into a Christian one. Yet, we must bear in mind that this historical narrative has always been told by the use of the "wordly" method and language and its historiographical tools.

Ecclesiastical history, as a distinct literary genre, flourished during the 4th and 5th centuries; Eusebius was its first proponent, followed by Gelasius of Caesarea, Philip of Side, Philostorgius, Socrates Scholasticus, Sozomen etc. Eusebius had already worked with relevant material in two other works, the *Chronography* and the *Preparatio Evangelica*, where

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he gathered the necessary knowledge of historical material that would enable him to parallel and relate ecclesial historical events to those of the world history<sup>1</sup>. This work had already been done by his teacher Julius Africanus, who had created a kind of world historical encyclopedia (Chronography), of which only parts survive, while the latter in his turn had imitated Hellenistic chroniclers such as Eratosthenes and Apollodorus (2nd century BC), yet he relied on the *Chronicles* of the Egyptian Manetho to parallel them with chronological data from the Old Testament. All this demonstrates that the history of the Church uses the historiographical techniques and methods common to all periods and constitutes the “secular language” (scientific method, spiritual environment, etc.). From this it can be deduced that church history has a dual function: to constitute the community at home and to open itself to the “secular” language abroad, to which it addresses its missionary call (e.g., by arguing apologetically for the Christianity’s antiquity).

As the ecclesiastical organization is completed by differentiating the episcopal authority with administrative structures borrowed from the Roman administration, the major ecclesiastical centers formulate ecclesiastical-historical narratives derived from archives created mainly from the activity of the local bishops; their main task is to document the historical continuity of specific major episcopal thrones (e.g., those of Alexandria and Antioch). This narrative quite often evolved into a product that was “exported” to other regions which these bishops were interested in keeping under their spiritual and canonical jurisdiction. We have codes that combine sections of church history with canonical collections, thus forming a historical framework for understanding the existing canonical relationships. Such a text, for example, seems to have been the Codex Veronensis LX<sup>2</sup> or perhaps the *Liber Pontificalis*

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1. As he writes: «ἤδη μὲν οὖν τούτων καὶ πρότερον ἐν οἷς διετυπωσάμην χρονικοῖς κανόσιν ἐπιτομὴν κατεστησάμην πληρεστάτην δ’ οὖν ὅμως αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος ὠρμήθη τὴν ἀφήγησιν ποιήσασθαι» (Εὐσεβίου, Ἐκκλ. Ἱστ. Α’ 1, 1, 6; see Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. I: Books 1-5, transl. Kirsopp Lake, Loeb Classical Library 153, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1926, p. 10).

2. As A. Camplani has shown in his article, “Setting a Bishopric / Arranging an Archive: Traces of Archival Activity in the Bishopric of Alexandria and Antioch”, in: A. Bausi, C. Brockmann, M. Friedrich, S. Kienitz (eds.), *Manuscripts and Archives. Comparative Views*

according to modern research<sup>3</sup>. In this context we can also understand the simultaneous appearance of the *Donatio Constantini* and the *Decretales Pseudo-Isidorianae* (around the end of the 8th century AD), which establish the broad geographical jurisdiction of the Papal Primacy within the historical conditions of medieval society, because the papal institution had to fight the tendencies of fragmentation and subordination of the ecclesiastical organization to feudalism.

As the “world” –the secular sphere– evolves with the knowledge of the original languages and historical-critical research after the 15th century, the church history –firstly in the West– was adapting to the new conditions. The beginning of this new development came precisely with Lorenzo Valla’s demonstration in 1440, that *Donatio Constantini* was a forgery, which initiated a wave of critical research into the authenticity of episcopal and other records and narratives. Then, ecclesiastical history was again called upon in the new circumstances:

1) internally serving the delimitation of Catholics’ or Protestants’ ecclesiastical identity reciprocally from the respective Other. This resulted in the production of ecclesiastical histories that document the historical and doctrinal continuity of their own ecclesiastical succession in relation to the ancient Church. For the Protestants this work is carried out by the *Magdeburg Centuries* initially compiled by Matthias Flacius Illyricus (1559-1574), to be followed by Gottfried Arnold, Lorenz Mosheim etc.; and, for the Roman Catholics, initially by Caesar Baronius [Cesare Baronio (1538-1607)] with his *Annales Ecclesiastici* (1588-1607), to be followed by Alexander Natalis, Nain de Tillemont etc.; subsequently,

2) answering to the criticism that the Church deceives people with fabricated traditions and teachings. The result was the major critical publications of a series of critical Christian texts, such as the lives of saints, and works of the Church Fathers known to this day (*Acta Sanctorum*, Jean-Paul Migne’s *Patrologies*, etc.).

It should be noted here that in the Orthodox world, too, ecclesiastical history serves mainly apologetic and warlike purposes, emphasizing the

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on *Record-Keeping* (Studies in Manuscript Cultures 11), Berlin 2018, pp. 231-272.

3. See Rosamond McKitterick’s observations in her book, *Rome and the invention of the papacy: the Liber Pontificalis*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2020.

continuity of the presence of Orthodoxy in the Eastern Mediterranean against the onslaught from the Western Roman Catholics and Protestants (mainly on the issue of pilgrimages) and from the Islamic East, which based its truth on its historical reinforcement. Such works are probably the Patriarchal History and especially the *History of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem* by Dositheus II of Jerusalem and other related works of the 18th century. It is the time of a great spiritual confrontation between the Orthodox Greek and Slavic East on the one hand, struggling to define its identity and history, and Western Christianity on the other, confronting the secular Enlightenment and the emerging new type of man<sup>4</sup>.

During the rise of the Enlightenment, the basic internal logic that governed not only ecclesiastical but also secular history from the biblical thought's perspective was preserved: history has a meaning that can be deciphered through its study. Thus, we can observe a remarkable "exchange":

On the one hand, the emerging modern Enlightenment thought establishes the concept of intra-worldly progress, which it took over or borrowed, even if in an inverted version, from the biblical conception of meaning in history<sup>5</sup>. According to the Enlightenment, history is no longer a moralistic life lesson (*historia magistra vitae*) but a chain of events, through which we understand how one event leads to another, and thus finally understand our own identity and reality, at the point where we are finding ourselves now (not once in the past). This identity formation coincided with the time of the emergence of the modern national identities; thus, history became a compulsory school subject for the formation of national identity.

On the other hand, the development of the historical – philological criticism of the sources, the scientific method in the publication of archives and the archaeological excavations gave ecclesiastical history a huge

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4. See the most recent collection of studies on this subject by Stavros Giagkazoglou, *Θεολογία και νεωτερικότητα. Δοκίμια για τη συνάντηση της Ὁρθόδοξης Θεολογίας με τὸν σύγχρονο κόσμο*, Harmos Editions, Athens 2023.

5. See Karl Löwith's older, interesting study, *Τὸ νόημα τῆς ἱστορίας. Ἡ φιλοσοφία τῆς ἱστορίας ἀπὸ τὶς βιβλικές της ἀπαρχές ὡς τοὺς Μάρξ καὶ Μπούρκχαρντ*, transl. (Greek), M. Markidis, Gnosi Publications, Athens 1985 (1st English edition 1949).

impetus that led to historicism and the understanding of Christianity as a historical form. In Orthodox ecclesiastical historiography, where the influence of National Romanticism and related theories in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe lasted longer (for political and social reasons), there has been an overlap between the old goal of the historical continuity of the Church's ecclesiastical – canonical structure and the role of the Orthodox Church in each nation's historical continuity, and consequently, in its identity. We can also observe this state of things in other ecclesiastical histories of local Orthodox Churches, such as in Serbia and Romania. In the Greek-speaking world, however, the course of this ethno-romantic narrative has had a significant development. It began during the first decades of the 20th century with the historiography of the great institutional centers of Orthodoxy, the Patriarchates, as exemplified by the major historical treatises of the great ecclesiastical historian Chrysostomos Papadopoulos (who was later elected Archbishop of Athens): *History of the Church of Jerusalem, Alexandria, etc.*, and continued with the *History of the Ecumenical Patriarchate* written by Maximos of Sardis, Vasilios Stavridis, etc., to finally emergence as an independent topic not of the History of the Church of Greece (which is a methodologically sound delimitation of a historical object, i.e. the history of the Orthodox Church established in the modern Greek state after 1821 within its boundaries), but of the *Ecclesiastical History of Greece*, as Gerasimos Konidaris mainly shaped the term by developing a narrative center, i.e. the Greek geographical space, even before it acquired ecclesiological canonical autonomy as the Church of Greece (i.e. by including everything that happened in “Greece” from the earliest days of Christianity right to the present day in this particular ecclesiastical – historical object)<sup>6</sup>. In these historiographical works, the narrative's crux is the continuity of the Orthodox doctrine – the core of the Orthodox ecclesiastical community, which in turn is its guardian angel. Church history is thus of a strictly theological character.

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6. Ger. Konidaris, *Συμβολή εις την εισαγωγὴν τῆς Ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ἱστορίας τῆς Ἑλλάδος*, Athens 1938.

Again, the nationalist-romantic priorities put the nation at the epicenter of the narrative, so that in the 20th century in Greece the ecclesiastical history is very often a series of ecclesiastical-political events or persons that mainly highlight the nation as a historical subject. It is indicative that a cursory search of the online archives of doctoral dissertations reveals that in the last thirty years at least eighteen doctoral dissertations have had as their subject Heads and Archbishops of the Greek-speaking and Balkan area of the last two centuries<sup>7</sup>. Regardless of the individual evaluation of these works (which has no place in this paper, and we can only assume that it was done according to all the rules of the historical method), as far as our subject is concerned, we observe that in the vast majority of the cases the ecclesiastical persons in question are studied and evaluated (basically positively from the outset) in terms of their contribution to the national struggles of Greece (when they are Greeks), or of their respective national Churches, even if the actions of these persons in many cases –judged by orthodox theological criteria (e.g. participation in armed conflicts)– are highly problematic. Still, those are the criteria by which their ecclesiastical history and activity should normally be judged. The national contribution is either already stated in the title or in the abstract of the dissertation. The Church's contribution to the life (identity or the various struggles) of each nation is of course also highlighted in Romanian church history literature, Serbian, etc., as the national romantic core and the relevant perspective remained intact in historiography, despite the prevalence of communist

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7. In the National Archive of PhD Theses over the past two decades, dissertations have been published on hierarchs of the past two centuries: Primates of Constantinople Gregorios VI Fortouniadis (2006), of Alexandria Theophilos II Pagkostas (2002), of Serbia Gabriel 1938-1950 (2015), of Jerusalem Cyril II (2016), of Romania Justinian 1948-1977 (2017), Germanos of Serbia 1958-1990 (2006), Archbishop Chrysostomos II Chatzistavrou (2008), and the hierarchs Païsius Hagiapostolitis, Metropolitan of Rhodes (2002), of Maroneia Damaskinos Roumeliotis (2019), of Kozani Ioakeim Apostolidis (2018), of Kassandreia Eirinaeos 1907-1945 (2022), of Dimitrios Ioakeim Alexopoulos (1996), of Dryinoupolis (during the Northern Epirus Struggle) Vassilios Papachristou (2001), of Eleftheroupolis Sophronios Stamoulis (2017), Germanos Karavaggelis concerning his tenure as Exarch in Central Europe (1997), of Mytilini Iakovos (2017), of Dryinoupolis et al., Kosmas Eumorfopoulos (2012), of Crete Timotheos Veneris (2017). See [https://www.didaktorika.gr/eadd/\[31.1.2023\]](https://www.didaktorika.gr/eadd/[31.1.2023]).

regimes<sup>8</sup>. For the evolution of the concept of the nation and the latter's role in the contemporary life of the Orthodox Church, as well as for the temptations arising from the occasional proximity to Ethnophiletism, we have a contemporary series of scientific publications; here we mention only those written by the contemporary theologian Pantelis Kalaitzidis<sup>9</sup> and the relevant conferences he organized.

Until now, this has been the course of Church History in Modern Times: Interaction and dialogue with “secular history” – but also parallel paths: the secular history gave emphasis on major political events and ideological currents, kings and wars; the ecclesiastical history gave emphasis on ecclesiastical leaders, ecclesiastical conflicts, theological development and councils. The secular history: defense of the nation's progress; the ecclesiastical history: defense of the Church's purity and triumphal march in history, and its contribution to the nation. And despite the secular history's proclaimed “neutrality” towards events, the fact that the historian produces an interpretation from the historical research that he or she has been conducting, and through it a structured narrative (for otherwise there can be no history), legitimizes the ecclesiastical history to have its own interpretive prism and to defend it against those who consider it as an apology for Christianity. This legitimacy was defended by the great church historian George Florovsky in 1959<sup>10</sup>.

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8. For the Romanian Church History someone might see some of the works written by the great Romanian church historian Mircea Păcurariu: “Biserica Ortodoxă Română - sprijinuitoare a luptei altor popoare pentru libertate și independență națională” [Romanian Orthodox Church – supporter of the struggle of other peoples for freedom and national independence], *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* XCVII/1-2 (1979), pp. 184-196 or “Biserica Ortodoxă Română - slujitoare a păcii în istoria poporului român”, [Romanian Orthodox Church – servant of peace in the history of the Romanian people] *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, XVIII/9-10 (1980), pp. 1020-1046 et al.

9. P. Kalaitzidis, “Orthodox Theology Challenged by Balkan and East European Ethnotheologies”, in: H.-P. Grosshans – P. Kalaitzidis (ed.), *Politics, Society and Culture in Orthodox Theology in a Global Age*, Brill, Leiden 2023, pp. 108-159.

10. Cf. G. Florovsky, «Ἡ δύσκολη θέση τοῦ Χριστιανοῦ ἱστορικοῦ» (The Predicament of Christian Historian), in: *Χριστιανισμός καὶ πολιτισμός*, transl. (Greek) N. Pournaras, P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki 1982, pp. 40-85.

## The Postmodern Landscape

Times, though, are changing. The great crisis that followed the First World War and the dizzying reversals in the sciences, such as non – Euclidean geometries, the theory of relativity, the principle of indeterminacy, led to a critical attitude towards the omnipotence of the Western Man’s rationality. The socio – economic approach of the *longue durée* introduced by French historians collectively known as the “Annales school”, substituting positivist history and the *histoire evenementielle* for the descriptive narrative of structures; the anthropological and cultural studies; all these put history in the postmodern era, of which the first seeds are sown in the interwar period but flourished after the 1960s.

What all these really mean for the church historian? Here we need to cite some examples. Critical theory revitalizes the way we read not only the texts of the NT, but also the so – called apocryphal texts, the study of which (especially after the discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls) is taking off and thus we are getting a more precise picture of the actual Christian community of the early centuries. The despised hagiological texts transformed into a mirror of the mechanisms, perceptions and expectations of society in the work of social anthropologist Peter Brown<sup>11</sup> or modern church historian Susan Ashbrook<sup>12</sup>. Network analysis examines in new ways the relations between Church persons in times of ecclesiastical conflicts using a series of texts such as the epistolaries (e.g. an interesting work by Adam Schor on the recipients of the letters of Theodoret of Cyrus)<sup>13</sup>. As George Demacopoulos has shown, the postcolonial approach illuminates more effectively the impact that the Fourth Crusade had on ecclesiastical relations<sup>14</sup>. Undoubtedly, gender

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11. Cf. P. Brown’s old but equally influential article, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity”, *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971), pp. 80-101 (=repr. in his: *Society and the Holy in late Antiquity*, University of California Press, Berkeley – Los Angeles – Oxford 1982, pp. 103-152).

12. See for example Susan Ashbrook-Harvey, “The sense of a Stylite: Perspectives on Simeon the Elder”, *Vigiliae Christianae* 42, 4 (1988), pp. 376-394.

13. A. M. Schor, *Theodoret’s People. Social Networks and Religious Conflict in Late Roman Syria*, University of California Press, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 2011.

14. G. E. Demacopoulos, *Colonizing Christianity. Greek and Latin Religious Identity in the*



studies interpret in new ways the texts and other historical evidence on the role of women in Christian society in Late Antiquity and the Eastern and Western Middle Ages (as Elizabeth Clark has shown)<sup>15</sup>.

Nevertheless, all these innovative practices and approaches constitute only a fragmentary and external encounter of Church history with postmodernity. As it is well known, the core of postmodernity lies in wiping out the single grand narrative and replacing it with many smaller ones of equivalent and equal value to each other. As far as history is concerned, this means renouncing the dominance of a single historical truth and focusing more on the description of aspects of historical reality, such as social functions, structures, representations of the ideal, etc., and less on their causal interpretation. In relation to our subject, there is a proliferation of works on the history of Christianity that speak of “Christianities”<sup>16</sup>, while many monographs bear the popular title: “The making of...”<sup>17</sup>, pointing out that many historical events and persons are ultimately a kind of a construction – social or other one. Can this be combined with the claim of universality, which the Christian Church, and especially the Orthodox Church, makes by narrating its own historical presence in the way we have presented so far? The answer will emerge from a reflection on the very concept of universality.

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*Era of the Fourth Crusade*, Fordham University Press, New York 2019.

15. See for example Elizabeth A. Clark, “Ascetic renunciation and feminine advancement: a paradox of late ancient christianity”, *Anglican Theological Review* 63, 3 (1981), pp. 240-257.

16. Cf. Th. F. X. Noble – Julia M. H. Smith (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, τ. 3: Early medieval Christianities c. 600–c. 1100, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2008; R. Barreto – R. Sirvent (eds.), *Decolonial Christianities: Latinx and Latin American Perspectives*, Springer International Publishing (Palgrave Macmillan) 2019; M. D. Litwa, *Found Christianities: Remaking the World of the Second Century CE*, T&T Clark, London 2022, et al.

17. See at first P. Brown, *The making of late antiquity*, Cambridge – Massachusetts – London 1978. See also M. Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium, 600-1025*, London 1996, and, of course, D. Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1999, who believes that Christianity and Judaism, as different religions, are “constructed” through the practice of martyrdom that they understood it quite differently, etc.

## Postmodern History and Ecclesiology

Before commenting upon the essential dialogue between Church History and postmodernity, first of all we must point out the following: Before searching for a geographical, ecclesiastical or social or cultural center, which makes visible and guarantees the unity of the Church (e.g. a Patriarchal throne, the Holy Land, an institutional leadership, a charismatic leadership, a holy Nation, etc.), as it has been defined in the as of yet development of ecclesiastical historiography, the unity of the Church (together with the holiness, catholicity and authentic continuity with the apostolic preaching) is an article of faith, present in the Nicene – Constantinople Creed through the signs in which it is manifested, most notably in common baptism and participation in the common chalice. However, it is not limited to the historical present (and the past as memory) and is not restricted to it alone; it has a wider eschatological dimension as it extends into the future, since it originally represented an invitation of the Twelve Disciples to humanity<sup>18</sup> to come to the assembly around the coming Jesus Christ, an image that the Eucharist would later express, as it appears in its primitive blessings: «καὶ ὡς περ ὁ ἄρτος οὗτος ἐσκορπισμένος ἦν ἐπάνω τῶν ὀρέων καὶ συναχθεὶς ἐγένετο εἰς ἓν, οὕτω καὶ τὴν ἀγίαν σου Ἐκκλησίαν σύναξον ἐκ παντὸς ἔθνους καὶ πάσης χώρας καὶ πόλεως καὶ κώμης καὶ οἴκου καὶ ποιήσον μίαν ζῶσαν καθολικὴν ἐκκλησίαν»<sup>19</sup>.

The visible unity marks the safe conduct under the Holy Spirit, ensuring the final unity when humanity will meet Jesus Christ at His Second Coming. Therefore, it is an ongoing and dynamic event within history. On the other hand, it is a product of synthesis through diversity that leads to the Church's "growth". In the well – known metaphor of the Church as a Body with Christ as its head, quoted by the Apostle Paul<sup>20</sup>, the Spirit grants unity through each member's diversity, which

18. The number Twelve seems to reflect this eschatological mission; see L. Cerfaux, «La mission apostolique des Douze et sa portée eschatologique», in: *Mélanges Eugène Tisserant*, Vol. I, Città del Vaticano 1964, pp. 43-64.

19. *Εὐχολόγιον Σεραπίωνος*, εὐχὴ 1, 13-16; see M. Johnson (ed.), *The Prayers of Sarapion of Thmuis. A Literary, Liturgical and Theological Analysis*, Rome 1995, p. 48.

20. *1 Cor.* 12, 27; *Rom.* 12, 4.

must cooperate with the others on an equal basis. At the same time, according to the apostle, this body is built (or, inversely, as building is constantly enlarging) through history «πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων εἰς ἔργον διακονίας, εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, μέχρι καταστήσωμεν οἱ πάντες εἰς τὴν ἐνότητα τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῆς ἐπιγνώσεως τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ, εἰς ἄνδρα τέλειον, εἰς μέτρον ἡλικίας τοῦ πληρώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἵνα μηκέτι ὦμεν νήπιοι, κλυδωνιζόμενοι καὶ περιφερόμενοι παντὶ ἀνέμῳ τῆς διδασκαλίας ἐν τῇ κυβείᾳ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐν πανουργίᾳ πρὸς τὴν μεθοδεῖαν τῆς πλάνης, ἀληθεύοντες δὲ ἐν ἀγάπῃ αὐξήσωμεν εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα, ὅς ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ, Χριστός» (“to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ”)<sup>21</sup>. These elements (call/invitation, march, diversity, growth – formation) interpret the idea of the Church’s unity as the unity of faith at its head<sup>22</sup>. Obviously, no gates of Hades will prevail over divinity or faith in the Christ’s divine nature, but not necessarily over the Church as a historical – institutional entity. In the course of history, the Church may in different times and places be defeated or destroyed. The most typical example is Christianity’s historical progress in its historical cradle, the Middle East.

Therefore, having faith in the crucified, risen and coming Christ must be the objective (to be cultivated and witnessed by every member), so that the Church’s unity as an extrapolated Body of Jesus Christ who will meet its Head at the end of time can be achieved in the Spirit. Visible unity helps faith in Christ, but the final salvation is the work of the sanctifying Head. Institutions, especially the episcopal one, must be

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21. *Eph.* 4, 12-15.

22. *Matth.* 16, 17: «σὺ εἶ Πέτρος καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ οἰκοδομήσω μου τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν καὶ πύλαι Ἰδου οὐ κατισχύσουσιν αὐτῆς».

“transparent” so that through them the believer can behold the risen Christ<sup>23</sup>. It is the due struggle of every generation, every age, every “tendency” or portion within the ecclesial community to ensure a link with Christ, and through Him, to safeguard its unity. The signs of this struggle are the invitation and the opening to the world; we could discern this stance in Apostle Peter’s first sermon in the *Acts of the Apostles*, and in a major book written by Athanasios Papathanasiou, one of the most important modern Greek theologians, which bears the following eloquent title: *The Church is made when it is opened* («*Ἡ Ἐκκλησία γίνεται ὅταν ἀνοίγεται*»)<sup>24</sup>. Signs are still provided when the permanently existing diverse tendencies manage to combine into one synthesis, as we are informed that this occurred from the first moment at the Council of Jerusalem, but also at other occasions during the first three centuries, such as the Passover debate, in the councils of the 3rd century, in Arsinoe of Egypt with Dionysius of Alexandria or in Arabia with Origen, and they are not imposed from above, by a regimented, charismatic or institutional power over the whole body, which in the first centuries does not seem to have existed. All these are mentioned by Eusebius, who tries to decipher the path to the end of the days by describing the litany of martyrs, the Christians’ renovating role within society, or the First Ecumenical Council as a new Pentecost. The same path is followed by other 5th century church historians, who are sober enough when they describe the movements and trends that were eventually condemned as heresies. In any case, as we move towards the realization of a Christian empire, the literary genre of church history seems to disappear, to be replaced by a “constitutional” history of the Christian state centered on Constantinople in the East<sup>25</sup>, with an emphasis to the historical continuity. As it appears, this course of events represents a heavy legacy in an Orthodox church

23. Metropolitan of Pergamon John Zizioulas, «Πνευματολογία καὶ ἐκκλησιολογία», in his: *Ἔργα Α', Ἐκκλησιολογικά μελετήματα*, St. Giagkazoglou (ed.), En plo Publications, Athens 2016, pp. 207-225, here p. 224.

24. Ath. N Papathanasiou, *Ἡ ἐκκλησία γίνεται ὅταν ἀνοίγεται. Ἡ ἱεραποστολή ὡς ἐλπίδα καὶ ὡς ἐφιάλτης*, En plo Publications, Athens 2009.

25. Regarding this subject, see Friedhelm Winkelmann’s remarks in his article: „Rolle und Problematik der Behandlung der Kirchengeschichte in der byzantinischen Historiographie“, *Klio. Beiträge zur alten Geschichte* 66, 1 (1984), pp. 257-269.

history; nevertheless, based on what we have said before, this is a sign of times, an “event”, an “occurrence” where, contrary to its essence, which is the constant eschatological invitation and, through it, the building of unity, it might well change, possibly inviting the historian to criticize or point out contradictions and conflicts without overlooking the mystery of salvation.

Postmodern social history and anthropology can even renew the “orthodox” ecclesiastical history, precisely because they recall aspects necessary for its theological content. The history of the “foreground” – bishops, councils and emperors– must be complemented by the history of the “background” – of pious figures in ascetic groups, charismatic movements, lay fraternities, women, e.tc, the stages in the evolution of worship, of the anonymous communities as we read about them in scrolls, inscriptions or archaeological evidence, which, along with bishops, theologians and monks, form an integral part of the ecclesiastical body. The great theological disputes must be examined both from a cultural<sup>26</sup>, point of view, with contemporary tools (such as network analysis or the role of texts in the formation of communities), as well as a socio-political one, so that history can contribute to the reconciliation and visible reunion of Christian traditions and Churches that do not communicate with each other. How can the papal primacy in the Middle Ages be understood without knowledge of the impact of feudalism on the canonical ecclesiastical structures in the West? Interculturality leads us to study and include in the Greco-Roman, Euro-Mediterranean “center” the ecclesiastical history of the neglected Middle Eastern, African or Caucasian Christian “periphery” (to which the well-known, but so unknown Ancient Eastern Churches belong) through the tremendous advances made not only in the study of languages and material sources but also by implementing modern analytical tools. All of this enables us to narrate an all-inclusive history of Christianity, and, in its turn, will lead to an all-inclusive theology, which will then become a point of reference in the postmodern landscape of fragmented theories and realities.

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26. An interesting example is Elizabeth A. Clark’s book, *The Origenist Controversy. The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate*, Princeton University Press, Princeton – N. Jersey 1992.

To sum up: at a theological conference that has as its subject the postmodernity, speaking about the role of postmodern history in theology, we can argue that in a paradoxical reversal, postmodernity, by *de* – constructing the grand narratives, invites us to a rich, more fruitful *con* – struction of the Church’s body, reiterating and expanding the goals of *Acts of the Apostles*: the early community, having witnessed “God’s greatness” (Oscar Cullman), announces the latter to the external world and differentiate themselves from the world of sin. It guards the “communion of saints” and does not condemn the world and history, as modern fundamentalist “enclosed” histories of the Church do, by building their own pure truth with the condemnation of the Other (the “West”, “ecumenism” etc.) as heretical; on the contrary, it will offer light to the “world”, in opposition to the one “*who does evil*” («ὁ φαῦλα πράσσει») and therefore “*hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed*”<sup>27</sup>.

If modernity is related to a “regimented” ecclesiastical history with an emphasis on institutions and their historical continuity with the past or a rebuff of all the enemies of our (ecclesiastical or even worse, cultural) identity, it is possible that – conversely – post – modernity might correspond to an ecclesiastical history with an emphasis on the variety and the charismatic power of the ecclesiastical body that clarify the eschatological future. A “bright” ecclesiastical history can easily use the (otherwise often narcissistic) mirrors of postmodernity to harmoniously refract its own light, without blinding the modern, confused, man, with regimented or denunciatory language.

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27. *John* 3, 20.