

# From the Immateriality of Mediated Communication to Psychosomatic Methexis.

## *Hints about the Importance of Incarnation in Contemporary Culture*

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The covid-19 pandemic has shaken our world, challenged our precarious certainties and -above all- brought loss before us, at speeds previously unknown and with procedures that are frightening enough. It was an era of great insecurity; it challenged and invited us to adapt, to immediately change our way of life and to redefine, even in the short term, our approach to our neighbors, which had to discover new ways and methods. As Julian Stern aptly pointed out in 2020, while the whole world was at the mercy of an uncontrollable, deadly virus: “The ordinary sense in which someone who *acts* like a neighbor *is* a neighbor is being constantly tested by the pandemic”<sup>1</sup>. To be or, in the evangelical sense, to become a neighbor, a brother and a fellow human being implied for everyone an uncanny inversion: often distance was love and proximity a potential threat to the very life of oneself and others.

I believe that in the fury and rage of evil, confinement, exclusion and disease, there was almost no one who, even temporarily, did not feel gratitude for being able to communicate, to work, to teach, through a video call, with the almost daily exchange of messages and photos and

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1. J. Stern, “Editorial. Alone, Together”, *British Journal of Religious Education* 42, 3 (2020), pp. 249-252, here pp. 251-252: “The ordinary sense in which someone who *acts* like a neighbour is a neighbour, is being constantly tested by the pandemic”.



the use of virtual environments having acted as a compensation and certainly not as a substitute for real communication, work or teaching. The technologies of our digital age, in the pandemic, have been a boon, a gift from God, a good thing and a bridge to others; yet the immaterial, the distant, and the virtual have left us all with a sense of absence, incompleteness and unsatisfaction. It seems that the need and desire for close contact with people has not yet diminished, despite our daily exposure to the digital world rather than the physical one. Or should we put a question mark on this rather optimistic but nevertheless positive finding?

Still, I would like to underline another possibility that the pandemic has offered to us; I have chosen to characterize it as an awakening call for ecclesiology and our ecclesiological consciousness, which clearly cannot exist without the ecumenicity of the Christ's body. On various screens, at every moment, for the first time, probably in a pandemic experience, humanity has been able to witness with such intensity the universe as a common body: the interconnectedness of the members of the body, the common tragedy that anxiously sought redemption, ceaselessly calling for the experience of Paul's "co-suffering and rejoicing"<sup>2</sup>; by every member, for every member, worldwide. Of course, if we have to define the limits of the Church to accommodate such an ecumenical consciousness, we have no other option than the one that admits that these are only "the limits of God's love"<sup>3</sup>, which man must of course have to imitate.

The pandemic and, more generally, generally, the effects of the great crises certainly bring to the fore the urgent need to hear –as a "voice in a closed cistern", according to Manos Eleftheriou, or as a persistent whisper in the ears of those who hear– the prophetic voice of theology, as the most orthodox surrealist of our literature, Nikos Gavriil Pentzikis,

2. 1 Cor. 12, 26: «καὶ εἴτε πάσχει ἐν μέλος, συμπάσχει πάντα τὰ μέλη, εἴτε δοξάζεται ἐν μέλος, συγχαίρει πάντα τὰ μέλη».

3. Chr. Stamoulis, «Κατόπιν Ἑορτῆς. Σχόλιο γιὰ τὴν Ἁγία καὶ Μεγάλη Σύνοδο τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης Ἐκκλησίας», in: *Φάγαμε Ἥττα. Κείμενα γιὰ τὸν Αὐτοεγκλωβισμό τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας*, Harmos Publications, Athens 2021, p. 52. The phrase belongs to the late Atanasije Jevtić, and it has been recorded by Chr. Stamoulis from a speech that the great theologian had given at the Theological School of the Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki.



most illuminatingly describes it. Thus, the author from Thessaloniki commenting on Dionysios Solomos and expanding, as is his custom, the field of vision of theology, writes the following:

The poet, I thought, is the conscience that tries to prove the only correct attitude for the neighbor, and is happy after a great event. His speech makes the terrible impression of prophecy, as he tries to define the form of life after the great event, which seems to the bewildered to have destroyed the continuity of human life. The poet asks himself: how tomorrow can I dawn in life, after death, without becoming ephemeral, a hollow shadow, forgetting things past?<sup>4</sup>

Thus, without forgetting the past events, as if they have never happened, for fear that it threatens the habit which, when absolutized, i.e. idolized, means the death of life, the prophetic voice (before, during or after the great event, being fully aware of the decay, imperfection and fickleness of the world and of this age, so as to gestate each subsequent crisis), recognizes the coming change and feels the way it will exist in the future. And lest we think we are simply theorizing, let us remember that a prophet is indeed the one who dares to speak the unpleasant news, focusing on the relationships between human beings: compassion, justice, togetherness, philanthropy – that is, the bonds of the common (ecclesiastical) body in its local and, by extension, in its universal dimensions. The great Kentucky poet, prose writer and essayist Wendell Berry also interprets change as an inevitable precondition of life that calls for new structures and creative renewal, for us to welcoming the new. We read the following characteristic theses, which, if we wanted to locate their ontological core, we would return to the patristic position that nothing that exists (persons or things) is inactive, precisely because inactivity equals to non-existence<sup>5</sup>:

4. N. G. Pentzikis, *Ὁ πεθαμένος καὶ ἡ Ἀνάσταση*, Agra Publications, Athens <sup>2</sup>1987, p. 56.

5. My formulation merges the identical, essentially identical positions of John Damascene and Gregory Palamas: «Οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶ φύσις ἀνενέργητος». John Damascene, «Περὶ ἐνεργειῶν τῶν ἐν τῷ Κυρίῳ ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ», *Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως*, PG 94, 1055AB; «Τὸ δὲ μὴ ἔχον ἐνεργεῖαν ἀνενέργητόν ἐστι, τὸ δὲ ἀνενέργητον καὶ ἀνύπαρκτον». Io. Karmiris, in: «Συνοδικὸς τόμος τοῦ 1351», *Τὰ δογματικὰ καὶ συμβολικὰ μνημεῖα τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου Καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας*, vol. 2, n.p., Athens <sup>2</sup>1960-1968, v. I, p. 385.



Our places change and we change; we change our places and our places change us<sup>6</sup>.

While I am still writing about it (the place), time will change it. After longer periods of time, I'm changing it. Ultimately, it will have changed of what I'm writing, to the extent that I, who have changed my subject (place), I'm changing with what I'm writing about<sup>7</sup>.

Human structures –scientific, artistic, social, economic and political– are captures/perceptions of the imagination. They are not true, not because they are necessarily false, but because they are necessarily incomplete. All our human structures, no matter how inclusive we are trying to make them, ultimately prove to some extent limiting [...].

The present order of things, that it has been disrupted in this way, must accommodate the new knowledge and thus be reconstructed<sup>8</sup>.

One might ask: how could these comments made by Berry –interesting from a social, anthropological and social point of view, but not obviously theological ones– be connected to the discussion that is triggered –at least in my text– by the pandemic, but also by the broader theme of the Conference? My answer is dead clear: I discern an analogy between these comments and the way in which the Church should naturally –as a living and not a mortified body– live and move. To invoke the extremely interesting and potentially fruitful schema proposed by Chrysostomos Stamoulis, that of the “culture of incarnation”, in order for such a culture to exist, for the Church to be built in the Holy Spirit and in dialogue with the world, it must constantly engage in a Christ-imitating struggle of reception and transformation of the present, which will be infused with the eschata<sup>9</sup>.

6. W. Berry, “Agriculture from the Roots Up”, *The Way Of Ignorance and other essays*, Shoemaker & Hoard, Washington 2005, p. 111. The translations of Wendell Berry's texts from English into Greek, presented in the (Greek version of the) current paper, belong to the author.

7. W. Berry, “Damage”, *What Are People For?: Essays*, North Point Press, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York 1990, p. 7.

8. See W. Berry, “Two Minds”, *Citizenship Papers*, Shoemaker & Howard, Washington, DC 2003, p. 85.

9. See Chr. Stamoulis, *Ἡ Γυναίκα τοῦ Λῶτ καὶ ἡ Σύγχρονη Θεολογία*, Indiktos Publications, Athens 2008, pp. 136, 140-141, 149, 156-157, 244; *Ἔρως καὶ θάνατος. Δοκιμὴ γιὰ ἓναν πολιτισμὸ τῆς σάρκωσης*, Akritas Publications, Athens 2009, pp. 120-121, 139, 327, 330-332 (espec.). The basis for such a proposal has been set at the



The means of modern civilization and the possibilities of the technological era characterized by the digitalization of the material world and digital visualization, the fast image, are available to all. The Church and the Churches are using them (we have seen their massive overuse during the pandemic with digital transmissions of Divine services and not only), but we should already have started a debate on the criteria for their reception and use. I therefore return to one of my original comments on the way in which the pandemic and –to broaden the context– any other tragedy is experienced mainly through the Internet on our screens. I pointed out that such a projection of a global test can stimulate universal consciousness, but we should note that there is a danger here of a fleshless universalism, a mediated one, disembodied digital universe; of the image that remains an image, even if it is a shocking one, triggering sensitive thoughts; yet, somewhere here, with plenty of aestheticization, our sympathy dries up and runs out<sup>10</sup>. The body and blood of humanity, which is potentially

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Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki by Professor Nikos Matsoukas, who highlighted and praised the organic and dynamic connection of theology with culture as a whole, with a necessary de-idolization of some of its aspects/historical manifestations. The following passage is quite representative: “Many times, both in theory and in practice, theology wages a war against culture, pointing out that culture is one thing and theology as life and practice is another. Those that are waging this war make the unsubstantiated claim that tradition adopted art forms that have remained unchanged in time! This is a superficial and uncritical view. What we ought to emphasize in this case is that the revelation of God through the theophanies in creation and history has a historical character. This means that the church life is linked with language, letters, art, political power, and in general all aspects of the various cultural traditions”. N. Matsoukas, «Θεολογία και Πολιτισμός», in: Chr. Stamoulis (ed.), *Θεολογία και Τέχνη*, To Palimpsiston Publications, Thessaloniki 2000, p. 81.

10. The truly empathetic attitude –truly human and Christian one–, has been exemplarily described by the acute initiated to sensitivity Manos Hadjidakis, in the following denunciation of ideological and artistic hypocrisy, which is certainly not lacking in our time: “[...] Only a musician would be able to live undisturbed in such a state of unfreedom, and be able to play his violin unperturbed... Did our people not keep their heads down for seven years and play their violins on special occasions? Who was ever bothered by those who now shout and socialize on the safe side? [...] Why hasn't anyone ever learned in any conservatory that when fellow human beings are being tortured, you either owe your support and all your effort to save them, or you keep it inside you, or if you can't do anything, you pray. And if you play, if you have to play your violin, you play it, without forcing yourself to think that everything is fine and dandy”. See Manos Hadjidakis, «Όταν



the body and blood of the incarnate Word; the crucified brothers and sisters around the world, the distant ones as “the only embodiments of the concept of the neighbor”<sup>11</sup>, as Kiki Dimoula used to say, are reduced to statistical figures or images that promote group emotion from a safe distance<sup>12</sup> and its redemption in rates of visitors. Attention is therefore required; the Christian must not forget that beyond the image lives the original.

Based on the foregoing, let us delve for a moment into this new way of living and producing meaning, with the assistance of Theophanis Tasis; in the following extract of one of his books, he accurately depicts a mechanism that ends up in analgesia:

Thus, the virtual subject touches screens more often than touching others or his body. In this way, less and less is touched. But it wants to be touched and wants to touch others. However, as it is more difficult to be touched, it is anxiously engaged in a constant search for all kinds of experiences which it will share on social media in order to be touched by their reception. The virtual subject is mentally hypothermic; therefore, it constantly seeks emotion. In interpersonal relationships it effortlessly borrows intimacy, mortgaging proximity in the long run. The sharing of personal experience is accompanied by the increasing atrophy of empathy – the ability to empathize and sympathize with the other person by acknowledging the latter’s experiences. As a result, it finds it difficult to forgive this person as it inwardly longs to forgive its untouchable self. The decline in the importance of

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ἐλευθερωθοῦμε ἀπὸ τῆ δυναστείας τῶν τεχνῶν καὶ ἀπὸ τῆ δυστυχίας τῶν καλλιτεχνῶν», in: *Τὰ σχόλια τοῦ Τρίτου. Μιὰ νεοελληνικὴ μυθολογία*, Exandas Publications, Athens <sup>5</sup>2003, pp. 165-166.

11. See Kiki Dimoula, *Έρανος σκέψεων. Γιὰ τὴν ἀνέγερση τίτλου ὑπὲρ τῆς ἀστέγου αὐτῆς ὀμιλίας*, Ikaros Publishing, Athens <sup>2</sup>2012, p. 33: “[...] But I worship the unseen God [...] and I love him as a distant one, as I love all the distant ones, as the only embodiment of the meaning of the neighbor”.

12. Extremely interesting and contrary to the remote experience of the tragic events, the enlightening comments of Kapuscinski Ryszard, a great Polish journalist, with a variety of experiences from his international presence: “The war correspondent has his peculiarities. The degree of personal involvement is enormous. To write about war, he has to be in a state of war himself. It can’t be otherwise, by definition, perfect objectivity is impossible. Because if you want to stay somewhere, to do something meaningful, you have to acquire relationships. The decisive thing in these situations is to empathize with people in a non-calculating way”. R. Kapuscinski, *Αὐτοπροσωπογραφία ἐνὸς ρεπόρτερ*, transl. Alexandra Ioannidou, Metaixmio Publications, Athens 2010, pp. 42, 68. The interconnection of community integration, empathy and truth reveals, in our opinion, an analogy between this journalistic risk and incarnation.



touch in everyday life is compounded by the increase in the importance of sight in communication. Still, empathy, forgiveness, as well as the ability to love, are learned and experienced from an early age through emotions, that is, physically. As communication becomes less embodied, taking place mostly in the digital realm, the shared reality in the virtual society is weakened. The temperature of interpersonal relations is dropping and the texture of individual and social time is becoming ever thinner [...]<sup>13</sup>.

In another of his works, Wendell Berry will write, charting an embodied course from the vague and idealistic to the tactile and concrete, from which man starts (as he does on the local level in the Holy Eucharist)<sup>14</sup> to embrace the world:

Love is never abstract. It never sticks to the planet, or the nation, to an institution or a profession, but to the particular sparrows of the road, the lilies of the field. It is “of my brethren of these few”. Love is never heroic by its own desire. It is only heroic if it is forced to be. It exists only by its desire to remain anonymous, humble and unrewarded. The more love matures, the more clearly it becomes aware of its involvement in fragmentation, imperfection, trial, mortality. Even so, it searches for incarnation. She cannot live for much longer with thought alone [...]<sup>15</sup>.

13. Th. Tasis, *Ψηφιακός Ανθρωπισμός. Εικονιστικό ύποκείμενο και τεχνητή νοημοσύνη*, Harmos Publications, Athens 2019, pp. 37-38.

14. J. D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion, Studies in Personhood and the Church*, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, New York 1985, pp. 154-158. It is the catholicity/ecumenicity of the Church, which does not arise cumulatively but when the local ecclesiastical community participates in the Holy Eucharist, united the Living Christ's whole body.

15. I believe that these words of W. Berry, who is not theologian, which lean more towards the side of the ecclesiastical ethos without however forgetting the doctrinal background of a *modus vivendi* oriented towards incarnation, may well be read in parallel and complementarily to the following commentary by the proponent of the “culture of incarnation”, which interweaves doctrine (ontology) with ethos and the salvific content of the divine-human mystery of the Church: “For in the person of Christ, God Himself, in silence and ascetically, becomes man. The Word becomes flesh. The words become flesh. Love becomes flesh, becomes the universal body, the substance of all that is insubstantial, the existence of all that does not exist, the presence of all that is absent, the refuge of all that are under persecution. It becomes the place of the deposit of any moral obsession, in order for the flower, the ethos of society, to blossom. It becomes unworthiness, it becomes a stranger, it becomes an outsider, it becomes an immigrant, a refugee, it condescends and is humbled, so as to transform and transfigure the inglorious body into a glorious one”. See Chr. A. Stamoulis, «Δὸς τῷ Ἀδελφῷ καὶ τῷ Ξένῳ. Μιὰ θεολογικὴ ἀνάγνωση τῆς μετανάστευσης», *Τί γυρεύει ἡ ἄλεπού στὸ παζάρι. Κείμενα γιὰ τὸν διάλογο τῆς*



And woe, if the word was not for love, if it was not an erotic discourse, a desire for universal<sup>16</sup>, psychosomatic union, since such was the way of the incarnation: the former fleshless became flesh, the former invisible «ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ὥφθη καὶ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις συνανεστράφη»<sup>17</sup>; even after the resurrection and renewal of his flesh, «ἐγνώσθη αὐτοῖς ἐν τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου»<sup>18</sup>, through matter, the participation in the Eucharist, in «δεῖπνον ξέον»<sup>19</sup>, as it is most poetically underlined by the Doxasticon, initiating us in this mystagogy. Christ has never let «γεύσασθε καὶ ἴδετε»<sup>20</sup> to wane; either by Thomas the Apostle's touch, that is, tangibly, or by sharing in the good things of the world in a blessed cohabitation promising the eternal life<sup>21</sup>, or by the mere nearness and His word which makes the hearts of the disciples burn as they go along with Him<sup>22</sup>. Biblical simplicity, to which we have deliberately turned, has gestated the essence of life and worshiping congregation as it has unfolded ecclesiastically throughout the ages. Alas, though, because this too, however wonderfully material and equally spiritual our tradition may want it to be, is so often nowadays subject to enchantment and fetishization (we witnessed this with sadness in the time of the pandemic), and at the same time to its transformation into a mere spectacle –due to legions of cameras that voraciously digitize the events– to be immediately consumed on the Internet. Someone will rightly ask: shouldn't there be a measure to all this? But before we get to that, let us ask: What need drives us to such para-liturgical practices?

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*Ὁρθοδοξίας μετὰ τὴν πόλιν, τὴν πολιτικὴν καὶ τὸν πολιτισμό*, Harmos Publications, Athens 2016, pp. 111-112.

16. Cf. N. G. Pentzikis, *Ὁμιλήματα*, Akritas Publications, Athens <sup>2</sup>1992, p. 101: «Θέλω νὰ ζήσω, συντάσσοντας γραπτῶς, τὸ συμβόλαιον τῆς μετὰ τῶν ἄλλων παντοτινῆς ἐνώσεως».

17. «Δοξαστικόν», Ἦχος Πλ. Δ', Ἐσπερινὸς Κυριακῆς, Ἑλληνικὰ Λειτουργικὰ Κείμενα τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης Ἐκκλησίας, <https://glt.goarch.org/texts/Och/Tone8Sun.html> [15.09.2023]

18. *Luke* 24, 35.

19. «Δοξαστικόν» I', Ἦχος πλ. Β', Ἰδιόμελον, Ἑλληνικὰ Λειτουργικὰ Κείμενα τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης Ἐκκλησίας, <https://glt.goarch.org/texts/Och/Eoethina10.html> [16.09.2023].

20. *Psalms* 33, 9.

21. This paraphrases the: «Ἴδου δὴ τί καλόν, ἢ τί τερπνόν, ἀλλ' ἢ τὸ κατοικεῖν ἀδελφοὺς ἅμα; ἐν τούτῳ γὰρ Κύριος, ἐπηγγείλατο ζωὴν αἰωνίαν». «Ἀναβαθμοί», Πλ. Δ', Ὁρθρος Κυριακῆς, Ἑλληνικὰ Λειτουργικὰ Κείμενα τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης Ἐκκλησίας, <https://glt.goarch.org/texts/Och/Tone8Sun.html> [16.09.2023].

22. *Luke* 24, 32: «οὐχὶ ἡ καρδιά ἡμῶν καιομένη ἦν ἐν ἡμῖν, ὡς ἐλάλει ἡμῖν ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ καὶ ὡς διηγοίμεθα ἡμῖν τὰς γραφάς»;



Why such a rush to escape from the incarnation of a mystical, communal congregation to an intangible, staged, digitized communion<sup>23</sup>?

“The divine incarnation is the key to the interpretation of all phenomena”<sup>24</sup>, N. G. Pentzikis will write elsewhere. With such a position, he most certainly opens up paths, as it provides us with a key and a timeless criterion for all phenomena. It also brings us face to face with modern technological culture, technique and its derivatives, in connection of course with the natural factor and human relations, arming the dialogue of theology with the natural factor and human-made environment, so that it is ecclesiastically true. As it can be inferred

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23. See Theophanis Tasis’s most illuminating remarks regarding the elaborate self-referentiality that underpins a modern self-idolized narcissism, acting as a substitute for faith/religion: “The self-image on the internet reveals and at the same time hides the self from oneself and others. It often replaces the self by turning into an idol, i.e. it is autonomous from the image of the subject which, as an idolater, takes care of it at the expense of the embodied self. By worshiping the virtual image, it becomes a curator in the exposition of its life. It chooses clothing, music, travel, sports, gastronomy and food, dramatizing life as a continuous performance for a digital audience [...] in order to claim the visibility of the image of the self. Visibility here means ensuring attention. In virtual society, the concentration of attention is scarce due to the inflation of information and choices produced by the entertainment industry, which makes it a commodity. In order for the attention to be gained, the self-image must be emotionally charged. In this economy of attention, being authentic is the new categorical imperative that is socially imposed. The virtual subject pursues authenticity within the inflationary freedom as a matter of course by staging the self as an image. It takes care of its various social media profiles in an attempt to highlight his uniqueness. But despite the pleasure elicited by directing life as a constant stream of digital videos and photographs, the virtual subject has difficulty in recalling the sensation of an experience because he mainly lived it mainly by turning it into a virtual image it, i.e. by claiming the attention of others. He therefore resorts to the social media representation of the experience in order to revive it. Yet, by recalling experiences as posted digital images, which it has curated [...] or unintentionally censors [...] it only revives them as tools for claiming recognition – as an offering for his idol, i.e. not as meaningful moments in a place but as timeless shadows in the digital internet cave. In this way, the categorical imperative for authenticity in inflationary freedom leads to inauthenticity by making the virtual subject both the victim and the victimizer of the self-image. The digital profile on social media, where one deludes oneself that one is deceiving others by staging one’s truthfulness in order to avoid it, is a place of crime and worship where punishment and redemption are identified”. Th. Tasis, *Ψηφιακός άνθρωπισμός...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 36-37.

24. N. G. Pentzikis, *Αρχαίον. Βιβλίον Ἑρωτος ἥτοι τῆς Ἀγάπης ποὺ χαρίζει ὡς Φῶς οἰκουμενικὸ ὁ Κύριος*, Agrotikes Synetairistikes Ekdoseis, Thessaloniki 1991, p. 193.



from previous comments, the incarnation pattern is not manifested in either the annihilation or the spiritualization of matter, but in the indivisibility of the material and the spiritual, in the holistic nature of anthropology and cosmology, which wishes for the created to be in constant communion with the Uncreated for its preservation<sup>25</sup>; it is also attested in the sanctification through water of every human creation – the result of technological progress and the technique’s achievements –, a practical mystery that leads us to another highly ecclesiastical, anti-Western and anti-Manichean discourse of Pentzikis which remains central to his thought:

The ship, black and red from the outside, yellow in the parts of it that could be seen through the railing [...] it maintained an imposing dead silence with its volume, full of mystery like an animal. All the things of the world, I thought, whatever hands have made them are worthy of our prayers. Nothing exists mechanically just to be useful. Man cannot live with things, animals or iron if they are not full of love [...] <sup>26</sup>.

Thus, the Church encompasses everything, as long it can be functionally integrated into a relationship that starts from all things of the world in order to ascend to the Creator par excellence, the Scientist and Master of them all. Beyond the mechanistic objectification, everything points to the divine, through an erotic knowledge transformed into praise. I would even claim that the playful writer pushes the boundaries of contemporary aesthetics even further, for beyond any aesthetic categories and principles of perceiving beauty, beyond picturesqueness as well, he touches the ontology of tasteful aesthetics, which admits “that one who knows how to see finds beauty everywhere”<sup>27</sup>. So, can theology and the Church endure such a spaciousness? Are we ready to accept that the beauty that can be hidden everywhere and lead to the ineffable beauty of God can be

25. For the transcendence of anthropological and cosmological dualisms leading to the ecclesiology of creation, see our study *Τόπος χρονοποιός. Κοινότητα, φιλοπατρία, έτεροτοπία και ό τόπος τών έσχάτων στα κείμενα τών Νίκου Γαβριήλ Πεντζίκη και Wendell Berry*, Harmos Publications, Athens 2017, pp. 371-448.

26. N. G. Pentzikis, *Τò μυθιστόρημα της κυρίας Έρσης*, Agra Publications, Athens <sup>2</sup>1992, p. 125.

27. N. G. Pentzikis, *Πρός έκκλησιασμόν*, Agrotikes Synetairistikes Ekdoseis, Thessaloniki 1986, p. 44.



revealed in the various technical achievements of the 21st century, which we have already called impersonal, monstrous, cold etc.? There is no doubt, however, that even through the digitized version of the world one can connect, admire and ultimately glorify, as long as he or she has an active memory and senses that are sufficiently trained to recognize the referentiality and commune symbolically with God and people. The loss of referentiality, the isolation through the device<sup>28</sup>, the absence from the present –since one is immersed in the world of an online reality–, constitutes a sin<sup>29</sup>; this last one is the only thing that the Church cannot receive from the world, from the moment that the incarnate Word refuses to receive it<sup>30</sup>.

In conclusion, let me ask some questions, the most open questions of what I have already managed to write down: Could a divine service ever be performed in an augmented reality environment? Could there be a digital Holy Eucharist? Will our senses have the same relevance in 50 or 150 years, given that the planet is heading for rapid environmental

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28. On the contrary, the art of photography, even in its journalistic use, does not transform the machine into a means of distancing itself from the world, the people and their experiences, or a means of alienation; rather, it highlights it as a way to capture reality as a whole, transforming the photographic shot into a symbol, a function that is probably not suspected by most of the digital age's virtual subjects. Thus, good photography serves the purpose of referentiality, as R. Kapuściński explains: "When I have my camera with me, I see the world completely differently than when I am just walking with a colleague, chatting with him. But when I start out with my camera with the aim of photographing the city, the people or certain scenes, then I really focus on the details. And I'm searching, searching... Because photography is detail, a synthesis of details, an attempt to detect the metaphorical element, the symbol, and deepening into it, observing, contemplating; through photography we learn the world and its language. Its message is captured by the eye of the painter or photographer, condensed in detail. For me, reality is the combination of these two elements: the description of a city is the synthesis of its historical aspect, but at the same time of the details that make it up". See. R. Kapuściński, *Αὐτοπροσωπογραφία ἐνὸς Πεπόρτερ*, *op.cit.*, pp. 100-101. Art in general, as a practice of vision and inclusive point of view, which for the Christian ascetic is the basis for the revelation of the divine in the world, has much to offer as an antidote to the speed and generalization of dominant digital images.

29. See Pentzikis, *Τὸ μυθιστόρημα τῆς κυρίας Ἑρσης*, *op.cit.*, p. 15: "To be absent from the present is a sin".

30. *Hebr.* 4, 14: «οὐ γὰρ ἔχομεν ἀρχιερέα μὴ δυνάμενον συμπαθεῖν ταῖς ἀσθενείαις ἡμῶν, πεπειραμένον δὲ κατὰ πάντα καθ' ὁμοιότητα χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας».



changes and, in order for us to survive, we will necessarily adopt new ways? We don't know, just as we don't know whether the future man will be a human creature or not, but to exist he can only have the breath of God. Until then, as «σύμμορφοι τῆς εἰκόνης»<sup>31</sup> of the incarnated Word and looking forward to his archetype, we must live by eating the flesh and drinking the blood of creation with reverence and thanksgiving<sup>32</sup>. According to fr. Alexander Schmemman, we should not, and cannot, throw away our senses<sup>33</sup>, nor can we dumb down our existence, condemning it to commune mainly at a distance, with the touch of a cold screen and not with the warm embrace of the Other, as the hero of the dystopian *Blade Runner 2049* is similarly forced to do, who, having previously been estranged from his vulnerable daughter, who literally lives in a fishbowl to keep her from falling ill, finally manages to communicate with her by placing his palm on the glass and waiting for hers on the other side as an ultimate consolation<sup>34</sup>. It is an image that reminds us of the tragedy of distance during the pandemic, which we would most definitely not wish to relive.

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31. *Rom.* 8, 29.

32. This is a paraphrase of the first sentence of the following quote from Wendell Berry: "To live, we must daily cut the body and shed the blood of creation. When we do it with awareness, love, skill, and respect, then it is a mystery. When we do it ignorantly, greedily, clumsily and destructively, then it is a desecration. With such a desecration we condemn ourselves to spiritual and moral loneliness and the others to penury". W. Berry, "The Gift of Good Land", in: N. Wirzba (ed.), *The Art of The Common-Place. The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, Counterpoint, Berkeley, CA 2003, p. 304. This text by the Protestant Berry is an excellent rendering of the conditions for participation in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist pre-liturgically, so that the post-liturgical life is also connected with the whole of life and the meaning of contact with the material creation.

33. See Al. Schmemmann (fr.), *Ἡμερολόγιο 1973-1983*, transl. Io. Roïlidis, Akritas Publications, Athens 2002. p. 403.

34. For a theological approach to this movie, see Io. Vogiatzis, *Sci-Fi καὶ Θεολογία. Ὁ διάλογος τῶν ταινιῶν ἐπιστημονικῆς φαντασίας καὶ τῆς ὀρθόδοξης θεολογίας*, Harmos Publications, Athens 2022, pp. 219-267.