

About Infallibility –
Creation and Evolution of the Term
in the Framework of Christianity:
Special Meanings, and Use by the Orthodox Church

By Charidimos Koutris*

Introduction

The concept of infallibility is undoubtedly one of the most important and fundamental concepts of the Christian Church and common to all Christian confessions. As *infallibility* we characterize the exclusion of the possibility of error by someone¹ and as a concept is closely linked to authenticity and authority.

For Christianity, the Church acquires these qualities through the constant presence of the Holy Spirit who guarantees the infallible interpretation of the dogmatic and moral truths that are contained in the Holy Scripture². They are essentially God's gift to the Church, through the illumination of the Holy Spirit and thanks to the fact that it is a body with Christ³ Himself as its head. In general, most Christian confessions

* Charidimos Koutris is Assist. Professor of the History of Doctrines at the School of Theology of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

1. See *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, vol. 2, Eerdmans-Brill 2000, pp. 698-699; cf. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 12, Encyclopaedia Britannica Company, Ltd., USA ¹⁴1929-1930, p. 318.

2. See *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, Zehnter Band, Teufel bis Zypern, Verlag Herder, Freiburg 1965, pp. 482-488; see *Μεγάλη Αμερικανική Έγκυκλοπαίδεια/Megali Amerikaniki Engkyklopaideia*, vol. B', Emmanouil-Kitsia & SIA Publications, Athens 1968, p. 100; see also P. Drandakis (ed.), *Μεγάλη Ελληνική Έγκυκλοπαίδεια/Megali Helliniki Engkyklopaideia*, vol. 3, Phoenix Publications, Athens ²1956, pp. 364-365.

3. See *John* 14, 16-17, 16, 13; *Matthew* 28, 20; *1 Cor.* 12, 27; *Eph.* 1, 23, 4, 11, 5, 23; *Col.*

accept the Synods as the basic instrument of expression of the authority or infallibility of the Church, following the example of the Apostolic Synod of the 49/51 A.D.⁴

However, apart from the acknowledgement of the infallible character of the Church and the important role of the Ecumenical Councils⁵, most confessions differ as to the highest and final instrument of expression or even of the definition of its infallibility. It is exactly this differentiation that makes this issue so important, especially in the Ecumenical dialogue⁶.

1, 18, 2, 19; 1 *Tim.* 3, 15.

4. See *Acts* 15, 1-29; *Gal.* 2, 1-10; *The Church, Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper No. 214, World Council of Churches Publishing, pp. 27-32; rendering in Greek Vassiliki H. Stathokosta, pp. 34-40. For the authenticity of tradition see Marina Kolovopoulou, *Η Παράδοση της Εκκλησίας στις Οικουμενικές Συνόδους*, vol. Α', *Συμβολή στην Ιστοριοδογματική διερεύνηση της περι παραδόσεως διδασκαλίας της Ὁρθόδοξου Εκκλησίας*, Ennoia Publications, Athens 2019, pp. 136-146, while for the criteria of authenticity of the Holy tradition see pp. 194-244.

5. The observation of Styl. Tsompanidis on how the concept of «Οἰκουμένη»/“Oecumene” evolved and ended up to “express that which has universal ecclesiastical authenticity”. See St. Tsompanidis, *Ἰπὲρ τῆς οἰκουμένης*, Ostrakon Publishing, Thessaloniki 2014, p. 31; also see W. A. Visser't Hooft, “‘The Word Ecumenical’ – Its History and Use”, in: Ruth Rouse – St. Ch. Neil (eds.), *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948*, v. 1, WCC, Geneva 1986, Appendix I, pp. 735-740.

6. See Chr. Konstantinidis, Metropolitan of Myra, *Ὁρθόδοξοι Κατόψεις*, vol. Α': *Θεολογία*, Tertios Publications, Katerini 1991, pp. 148-149; cf. J.-Y. Lacoste, *Dictionnaire critique de théologie*, Quadrige, PUF, 1998, p. 573; Chr. Stamoulis, *Ἐρωσ καὶ Θάνατος – Δοκιμή γιὰ ἓναν πολιτισμὸ τῆς σάρκωσης*, Akritas Publications, Athens 2009, pp. 224-225, note 35. For the authenticity of the Ecumenical Synods see also *The Church, Towards a Common Vision*, pp. 30-32; in Greek, pp. 38-40, and Marina Kolovopoulou, *op.cit.*, pp. 178-194; and K. Ware, *Ὁρθόδοξη ἐκκλησία*, transl. Io. Roilidis, Akritas Publications, Athens 1998. The issue of the infallibility in the other Christian traditions is especially broad and complicated to be analyzed here. However, if someone wants to see indicatively, he can resort to the above: a) Roman Catholicism, Catechism of the Catholic Church – Christ's Faithful – Hierarchy, Laity, Consecrated Life, in: https://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p123a9p4.htm. *Dei verbum*, in: http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html. *Lumen gentium*, in: http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html [01/09/2021]. See also *The Encyclopedia of Christianity, op.cit.*, pp. 698-699; *Encyclopaedia Britannica, op.cit.*, p. 318; J. D. Douglas (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1974, p. 508; see also *Μεγάλη Ἀμερικανική Ἐγκυκλοπαίδεια/Megali Amerikaniki Engkyklopaideia, op.cit.*, p. 100; P. Drandakis (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp. 364-365; D. Tselengidis, *Δυτική Θεολογία*

The Infallibility in Modern Orthodox Theology

The Orthodox Church, despite its individual differences, accepts the infallible character of the entire Church as a body (clergy and laity). The Ecumenical Council is the instrument of the expression of infallibility, where the entire Church is represented through the bishops⁷. The Ecumenical Councils are not infallible in themselves, but they draw infallibility from the life of the body of the Church itself, which is

καὶ Πνευματικότητα. Σημειώσεις ἀπὸ τὶς πανεπιστημιακὲς παραδόσεις, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Publications Department, Thessaloniki, pp. 16, 18, 43-44; N. A. Matsoukas, *Οἰκουμενικὴ Κίνησις, Ἱστορία – Θεολογία*, Φ.Θ.Β. 4, P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki 1996, pp. 120-121; cf. J.-Y. Lacoste, *op.cit.*, pp. 573-574; N. Gr., Zacharopoulos, *Ἐπίτομο Ἱστορικό-Θεολογικὸ Λεξικό*, University Studio Press, Thessaloniki 2003, pp. 38-39. On the movement of Conciliarism see H. Küng, *Infallible? An Enquiry*, translated from the German by E. Mosbacher, Collins, St. James's Place, London 1971; *The Church – Maintained in Truth, A Theological Meditation*, SCM Press Ltd, London 1980; also see Fr. Oakley, "Conciliarism at the Fifth Lateran Council?", *Church History* 41, 4 (Dec. 1972), pp. 452-463; *Council over Pope?*, Herder and Herder, New York 1969; *The Conciliarist tradition*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2003. For a rival assessment on the infallibility of the Pope see also A. B. Hasler, *How the Pope Became Infallible: Pius IX and the Politics of Persuasion*, Sheldon Press, Hachette U.K. 1982. Cf. fr. G. D. Metallinos, *Πῶς ἔγινε ὁ Πάπας ἀλάθητος*, Prototypes Thessalikes Ekdoseis Publications, Athens – Trikala 2002. For Papal primacy see Chr. Savvatos (now Metrop. of Messinia), *Τὸ παπικὸ πρωτεῖο στὸν διάλογο μετὰξὺ Ὁρθοδόξων καὶ Ρωμαιοκαθολικῶν*, Athens 2006. Ap. Giannopoulos, *Τὸ Πρωτεῖο τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου Ρώμης στὴν Οἰκουμένη τοῦ 21ου αἰῶνα*, M.A. Dissertation, Dpt. of Theology, Theological School, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki 2013. For the "primacy" and infallibility, see also G. Martzelos, *Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ σύγχρονοι διάλογοι*, Φ.Θ.Β. 61, P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki 2008, p. 305. b) Protestantism, *Catholic Encyclopedia, Protestantism*, in: <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12495a.htm> [01/09/2021]; see also P. Drandakis, *op.cit.*, p. 364; see also D. Tselengidis, *op.cit.*, pp. 17, 45; cf. J.-Y. Lacoste, *op.cit.*, p. 573; *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, *op.cit.*, pp. 698-699. c) Anglicanism, *Anglicans Online, The Thirty-Nine Articles*, in: <http://anglicansonline.org/basics/thirty-nine-articles.html>; cf. J.-Y. Lacoste, *op.cit.*, p. 573 and Newman Reader – Prophetic Office – Lecture 8, in: <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/viamedia/volume1/lecture8.html> [01/09/2021]. d) Old Catholic Movement, *Saint Matthew Ecumenical Catholic Church, History of Old Catholic Movement*; *Saint Matthew Ecumenical Catholic Church*, in: <https://saint-matthew.org/about/old-catholic-history/> [01/09/2021].

7. See K. Skouteris, *Ἱστορία Δογμάτων, ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη δογματικὴ διδασκαλία καὶ οἱ νοθεύσεις τῆς ἀπὸ τὶς ἀρχὲς τοῦ τέταρτου αἰῶνα μέχρι καὶ τὴν Τρίτη Οἰκουμενικὴ Σύνοδο*, vol. 2, Athens 2004, p. 93.

illuminated by the constant presence of the Holy Spirit and has Christ Himself⁸ as its head. Thanks to these two factors, but also through the dynamic character of the tradition and its entire life, the Church interprets the Holy Scripture, develops its dogmatic teaching and formulates it authentically and officially in its Ecumenical Councils⁹. The Ecumenical Councils do not produce dogmatic teaching from scratch, but clarify the already existing with symbols, creeds and decisions, in order to protect it from heretical deviations and erosions¹⁰. Finally, the Holy Scripture is infallible only under the light of tradition¹¹.

However, as it was mentioned above the issue of infallibility also presents variations in the bosom of the Orthodox Church. Of course that is not without precedent for Orthodox theology, since, as Stamoulis and Alfeyev point out, although the general patristic consensus prevails in the Church, there are also many individual differences between the Fathers in matters of detail¹², which proves that inspiration by God is not a “magical energy” that supposedly catalyzes the subject and person-bearer of the divine inspiration¹³. On the contrary, it is a process that highlights the inner truth of every person and which helps him to express it through shapes and images of his modern era. For, the revealed truths may remain unchanged within the Church, however they depend directly on the historical conditions in which they are revealed. That is why there is only a certain “relative analogy” between the doctrines and the truths they reveal. This is the reason why infallible doctrines

8. See D. Tselengidis, *op.cit.*, p. 44; see also N. G. Xexakis, *Προλεγόμενα εἰς τὴν Ὁρθόδοξον Δογματικὴν*, [n.p.], Athens 2000, pp. 149-150; and St. Papadopoulos, *Ἀθανάσιος ὁ Μέγας καὶ ἡ θεολογία τῆς Οἰκουμενικῆς Συνόδου*, Athens 1975, pp. 29-43; cf. G. Florovsky, *Nicaea and the Ecumenical Council, The Byzantine Fathers of the Fifth Century*, Belmont Mass, 1987, p. 146 ff.

9. See D. Tselengidis, *op.cit.*, p. 18.

10. See N. A. Matsoukas, *Οἰκουμενικὴ θεολογία, ἔκθεσις τῆς χριστιανικῆς πίστεως, προϋποθέσεις ἐνὸς οἰκουμενικοῦ διαλόγου*, Φ.Θ.Β. 55, P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki 2005, p. 424; see also Chr. Stamoulis, *op.cit.*, p. 230.

11. See D. Tselengidis, *op.cit.*, p. 15.

12. See Chr. Stamoulis, *op.cit.*, pp. 223-224, and H. H. Alfeyev, “The Patristic Heritage and Modernity”, *The Ecumenical Review* 54, 1 (Geneva 2002), pp. 91-111. For *consensus* see also K. Skouteris, *op.cit.*, pp. 753-755.

13. Chr. Stamoulis, *op.cit.*, pp. 223-228.

cannot express with absolute precision the content of the supernatural truths they describe. Besides as Stamoulis points out “the limits of our language are not the limits of our truth”¹⁴.

Therefore, in an attempt to categorize –even through some necessary generalization– the tendencies that prevail in the field of Orthodox theology, it is worth pointing out the following:

a) There are those who prefer the *superiority of the body of the Church* (clergy and laity) over the synods and bishops, but also any person¹⁵. They also argue that this body is not only the defender of religion but also has the duty to verify and confirm the decisions of the Councils through its own experience¹⁶.

14. For more see Chr. Stamoulis, *op.cit.*, pp. 223-228; I. Dilman, *Language and Reality. Modern Perspectives on Wittgenstein*, Peeters, Leuven, 1998; cf. J. Ritter & K. Gründer (eds.), *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Band 4, Schwabe & Co., Basel/Stuttgart 1976, pp. 343-344; cf. J.-Y. Lacoste, *op.cit.*, p. 573; Rev. G. Mastrantonis, *The Fundamental Teachings of the Eastern Orthodox Church – Introduction to Orthodoxy Articles – Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, Church – the Depository of Revealed Truths*, in: <http://www.goarch.org/ourfaith/ourfaith7063> [01/09/2021].

15. The answer of the Orthodox Patriarchs to the papal Circular Pope Pius IX in 1848 is characteristic: “Neither Patriarchs, nor Synods have ever been able to introduced new [dogmas and teachings] to us, because the defender of religion is the body of the Church itself, that is, the people themselves”. See Io. Karmiris, *Τὰ δογματικά καὶ συμβολικά μνημεῖα τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας*, vol. Β’, Athens 1960, p. 920 and Rev. Pr. L. Cleenewerck, *An Orthodox Reply to “Why I Didn’t Convert to Eastern Orthodoxy”*, in: <https://orthocath.wordpress.com/2012/04/04/an-orthodox-reply-to-why-i-didnt-convert-to-eastern-orthodoxy/>, also S. Bulgakov, *Excerpts from “The Orthodox Church”*, in: http://www.holytrinitymission.org/books/english/orthodox_church_s_bulgakov.htm [01/09/2021]. See N. A. Matsoukas, *Δογματική καὶ Συμβολική Θεολογία Β’*, Ἐκθεση τῆς ὀρθόδοξης πίστεως σὲ ἀντιπαράθεση μὲ τὴ δυτικὴ χριστιανοσύνη, Φ.Θ.Β. 3, P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki 1999, pp. 445-447. On the contrary G. Florovsky notes that truth was not discovered by the Synods because it was never lost; see G. Florovsky, *Le corps du Christ vivant. La sainte Église Universelle: Confrontation œcuménique*, [Cahiers Théologiques de L’actualité Protestante, Hors-Série 4], Neuchâtel – Paris 1948, p. 51; Chr. Stamoulis, *op.cit.*, pp. 227, 230, as also that the truth can be expressed by a few Saints, that is the minority and not just the majority, whereas a little later he adds that the truth can be formulated without a council; see G. Florovsky, *Ἁγία Γραφή, Ἐκκλησία, Παράδοσις*, transl. D. Tsamis, P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki ²1991, pp. 72-73.

16. See fr. G. Florovsky, *Θέματα Ὁρθοδόξου Θεολογίας*, Artos Zois Publications, Athens 1973, pp. 207-208.

b) Others, as Saint Nicodemus the Athonite, prefer *the superiority of the Ecumenical Councils* in relation to the Holy Scripture as the ultimate judge of the ecclesiastical affairs¹⁷.

c) Other theologians speak of *superiority of the Ecumenical Councils and Bishops* over the body of the Church and especially the people. Characteristic on this subject are the views of the late Stylianos Harkianakis, who argues that in cases of risk of falsification of the truth of the faith, the Church convenes the Ecumenical Councils, which do not express so much the life of the body, since people are not always ready to take a position on dogmatic issues, but they essentially determine with their decisions the correct teaching of the Church and transfer it to the people¹⁸.

d) Moreover, there are those, while recognizing the character of infallibility *to the entire body of the Church*, emphasize more the role of the bishops, both in the Ecumenical Councils, and in relation to the people. Among them are Nikolaos Xexakis, Kallistos Ware, Alexander Schmemmann and others¹⁹.

17. See *Πηδάλιον*, Papadimitriou Publications, Athens 1970, p. 120.

18. For more see Archim. Stylianos Harkianakis, *Περί τῷ Ἀλάθητον τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἐν τῇ Ὁρθοδόξῳ Θεολογίᾳ*, Ἐναίσιμος ἐπὶ διδασκατορία διατριβή, ὑποβληθεῖσα εἰς τὴν Θεολογικὴν Σχολὴν τοῦ Ἐθνικοῦ καὶ Καποδιστριακοῦ Πανεπιστημίου Ἀθηνῶν, Logos Publications, Athens 1965. Stylianos Harkianakis, Archbishop of Australia, *The Infallibility of the Church in Orthodox Theology*; transl. from the Greek by Ph. Kariatlis, ATF Press & St Andrew's Orthodox Press, Adelaide, Sydney 2008, p. 71; Chr. Androutsos, *Συμβολικὴ ἔξ ἐπόψεως ὀρθοδόξου*, Alevropoulos Press, Athens 1930, p. 120; cf. N. A. Matsoukas, *Δογματικὴ καὶ Συμβολικὴ Θεολογία Β΄*, Ἐκθεσὴ τῆς ὀρθόδοξης πίστεως σὲ ἀντιπαράθεσιν μὲ τὴ δυτικὴ χριστιανοσύνη, *op.cit.*, p. 441; see also Chr. Stamoulis, *op.cit.*, p. 227.

19. See N. G. Xexakis, *op.cit.*, pp. 152-155 and 165-166; see K. Ware, *op.cit.*, pp. 392-395; see Al. Schmemmann, *Ἡ ἀποστολὴ τῆς ἐκκλησίας στὸ σύγχρονο κόσμος*, Akritis Publications, Athens 1983, pp. 216-217. Admittedly however, this view seems to be quite inclined towards the distinction made by the Roman-Catholic Church between the active infallibility (*infallibilitas activa*) of the *magisterium*, which is the gift of correct teaching and passive infallibility (*infallibilitas passiva*) of the faithful, which is the gift of the correct understanding of the doctrine. This discrimination is extremely dangerous, since it can easily lead to the blind obedience of the people to the *magisterium*; for more see R. Murray, "Who or What is Infallible?," in: *Infallibility in the Church, An Anglican-Catholic Dialogue*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London 1968, p. 32; S. J. Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, N.Y. 1988, p. 57.

e) Others identify the infallibility in individual persons-saints, who play a decisive role in the Ecumenical Councils, as also in the life of the Church in general. Characteristic is the opinion of father John Romanides, who does not hesitate to openly question the concept of infallibility of the Ecumenical Councils and to emphasize that it was the Fathers who made the Councils infallible and not the other way round²⁰.

f) However, Orthodoxy is not lacking in approaches to the issue in a different light. For example, P. Trepelas, after distinguishing between divine inspiration and infallibility²¹, points out that bearer of infallibility is the whole body of the Church²², for even in times of temporary error, the core of truth is always preserved²³. For Trepelas, this is proved by the common history of the first eight centuries of the Church, which is preserved in a very large part of the world, as also by the fact that, while the Christian confessions diverge only in only a few points, they nevertheless retain the Entire Creed of faith and confess as savior the incarnate Son of God.

On the other hand, N. Matsoukas shifts the center of gravity of the discussion and points out that the issue is not infallibility, but the life of the Church. We cannot talk about infallibility and its bearers, if life itself is not present. The question is how much one participates in the body

20. See protopr. Io. S. Romanides, *Πατερική Θεολογία*, Parakatathiki Publications, Thessaloniki 2004, pp. 118-120; Gregory Palamas, *Ρωμαίοι ἢ Ρωμηοὶ Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας*, protopr. Io. S. Romanides (ed.), vol. A', P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki 1991, p. 6; protopr. Io. S. Romanides, «Κριτική θεώρησις τῶν ἐφαρμογῶν τῆς Θεολογίας» in: *Πρακτικά τοῦ Β' Συνεδρίου Ὁρθόδοξης Θεολογίας*, p. 434; Ἰησοῦς Χριστός – Ἡ Ζωὴ τοῦ Κόσμου, *Xenia Ecumenica* 39 (Helsinki 1983), pp. 232-275; see more Archim. Hier. S. Vlachos, *Ἡ ἀποκάλυψη τοῦ Θεοῦ*, The Birth of the Theotokos Holy Monastery (Pelagias) Publications, Levadeia 1991, p. 62; see also *Χαριστήρια εἰς τιμὴν τοῦ Μητροπολίτου Γέροντος Χαλκηδόνου Μελίτωνος*, The Patriarchal Foundation for Patristic Studies Publications, Thessaloniki 1977, p. 498; cf. N. A. Matsoukas, *Δογματικὴ καὶ Συμβολικὴ Θεολογία Β'*, Ἐκθεση τῆς ὀρθόδοξης πίστεως σὲ ἀντιπαράθεση μὲ τὴ δυτικὴ χριστιανοσύνη, *op.cit.*, p. 436 (note. 66), 441; Chr. Stamoulis, *op.cit.*, p. 226.

21. See P. Trepelas, *Δογματικὴ τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας*, vol. B', Zoi Publications, Athens 1959, p. 364.

22. See P. Trepelas, *Δογματικὴ τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας*, *op.cit.*, pp. 366-367; and S. J. Bulgakov, *L' Orthodoxie, essai sur la doctrine de l'Église*, transl. from the Russian by C. Andronikof, L'Age d'homme, Lausanne 1980, pp. 65-101.

23. See P. Trepelas, *Δογματικὴ τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας*, *op.cit.*, p. 369.

of the Church and in the glory of the Kingdom of God²⁴. Priority must be given to the content of infallibility, that is, the participation of the members of the Church in the uncreated glory of the divine Kingdom, and not to the bearer²⁵.

Respectively, Chr. Stamoulis goes beyond this question, by emphasizing that the problem lies not so much in infallibility and its bearer, but in how it is used. If it is used, that is, to strengthen the life of the Church or to impose a sterile authoritarianism, which was also a basic concern and worry of Calvin and the Protestants²⁶. For Stamoulis, “the infallibility is not related to terms and dogmas, but to living persons”, who are constantly changing and who strive to experience a communion of love around the person of the incarnate Christ²⁷.

Through all these discussions around the concept and the bearers of infallibility, the timeless importance of the issue both at a universal and local level becomes clear, through the theoretical and practical dimension of the issue. However, there seems to be a lack of thorough research that studies the term *infallibility*, at the time when it first appeared, how it was originally used, and evolved and how it is used today. The main sources of this research should be the Proceedings of the Ecumenical Councils, and of the minor councils of the ancient Church, the texts of the Apostolic Canons, the canonical letters, the Holy Scripture and the writings of the Fathers of the Church²⁸. Some of the basic questions that need to be answered by this research are: What is infallibility? Who are its bearers? When did this term first appear? How was it used then? How is it used today? What is the self-consciousness of the Ecumenical

24. See N. A. Matsoukas, *Δογματική και Συμβολική Θεολογία Β΄, Ἐκθεση τῆς ὀρθόδοξης πίστεως...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 438-439; see also Chr. Stamoulis, *op.cit.*, p. 230.

25. See N. A. Matsoukas, *Δογματική και Συμβολική Θεολογία Β΄, Ἐκθεση τῆς ὀρθόδοξης πίστεως...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 438-439; see also Chr. Stamoulis, *op.cit.*, p. 231.

26. See Chr. Stamoulis, *op.cit.*, pp. 233-234 and *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, *op.cit.*, p. 698.

27. See Chr. Stamoulis, *op.cit.*, p. 228.

28. See John Rinne bishop of Helsinki, *Ἐνότης και Ὁμοιομορφία ἐν τῇ Ἐκκλησίᾳ κατὰ τὸ πνεῦμα τῶν Οἰκουμενικῶν Συνόδων*, διατριβὴ ἐπὶ διδακτορία, Ἐπιστημονικὴ Ἐπετηρὶς Θεολογικῆς Σχολῆς Α.Π.Θ./*Epistimoniki Epetiris Theologikis Scholis Aristoteleiou Panepistimiou Thessalonikis*, Appendix no. 7, Vol. IE', Thessaloniki 1971, pp. 14-16.

Councils about their character? What consequences does this term have on our lives?

All these questions are impossible to answer in this article. However, they are partially answered in other of our works, although with different focus²⁹. In this article, however, the existence and use of the term *infallibility* in the ancient Greek and Patristic Literature will be examined. This venture is important, on the one hand, because such a contribution has not been made in the past; and on the other hand, because given our desire in Orthodox theology to remain faithful to the patristic teaching, it is important to be well aware of the terminology that the Fathers use to describe persons and situations.

The Term *Infallibility* in the Ancient Greek and Ecclesiastical Literature

Despite the vast volume of ancient Greek and Patristic literature, the term *infallibility* is found only 45 times in total: of these 37 are found in works by ecclesiastical writers, and only 8 in works by ancient Greek and foreign writers, or commentaries on them. In the majority of these works (34 times) the term is used in its basic sense to describe “the one who does not make a mistake”, while the rest of the times it is used in its less widespread sense as synonym for «ἀληστος» (“unforgettable”) to denote “the one who cannot be forgotten”.

29. See indicatively our article: “The Authority of the Council of Nicaea according to Athanasius of Alexandria”, in: *Scientific Annals of “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” – Orthodox Theology* 29, 2 (University of Iasi), that analyzes the authority of the First Ecumenical Council according to Athanasius the Great, as also the criteria that he himself cites and which give authority to this Council. Respectively see our study in English on the use of the Gospel by Saint Cyril of Alexandria at the Third Ecumenical Council, in order to demonstrate the presence and presidency of Christ in the midst the Council and its guidance in making divinely inspired decisions, as also the adoption of this practice by the Fourth Ecumenical Council in the same study of the authority and the presence of the Gospel in the Councils of the 5th century. See *The Presence & Authority of the Gospel-Book in the fifth-century Church Councils*, in: <https://theses.dur.ac.uk/12194/> [01/09/2021].

Starting from the second sense, in order to focus later on the first, we observe that the *Σούδα* (or *Σουΐδα*) *Dictionary*, one of the most valuable Greek writings of the 10th century, records the alternative interpretation of the term as «ἄληστος; ἀλάθητος» (“infallible”)³⁰. Among the ecclesiastical writers, Saint John Chrysostom Archbishop of Constantinople from the 4th century mentions speaks of the love and memory of the Lord: «Ὁ δὲ ἀγαπῶν τὸν Κύριον ἐν ὅλῃ καρδίᾳ, καὶ ἔχων τὴν αὐτοῦ μνήμην ἀλάθητον»³¹. Saint Photios, Patriarch of Constantinople in the 9th century, commenting on the letter to the *Hebrews* 11, 4 explains why Abel is unforgettable: «αὕτη γὰρ γέγονεν αἰτία τοῦ ἀείμνηστον καὶ ἀλάθητον εἶναι τὸν Ἄβελ»³². While the *Πάτρια Κωνσταντινουπόλεως*, a work from the 11th century that records among other things the history and monuments of Constantinople, mentions the columns that Constantin the Great built: «ἀπὸ πασῶν τῶν πόλεων ἀνατολῆς καὶ δύσεως ἦκασι διάφοροι στήλαι παρὰ τοῦ μεγάλου Κωνσταντίνου, αἱ καὶ ἐτέθησαν καὶ ἐστηλώθησαν, ἐν ᾧ οἱ διερχόμενοι ταῦτα καὶ πεπειραμένοι ἔχωσιν τὸ ἀλάθητον τῶν ἐσχάτων»³³. In the same sense, Eustathius of Thessaloniki (12th century) uses the term twice in his work *Παρεκβολαὶ εἰς τὴν Ὀμήρου Ἰλιάδα καὶ Ὀδύσειαν*. The first time to characterize calamities: «Ἐπαλαστεῖν δὲ λέγεται, τὸ δεινοπαθεῖν ὡς ἐπὶ ἀλάστοις καὶ ἀλαθήτοις κακοῖς»³⁴ and the second time to describe Hector: «Ὅρα δὲ, ὡς ἠρκέσθη νῦν σωφρόνως ὁ Ἀχιλλεὺς ἄλαστον εἶπεῖν τὸν Ἔκτορα, ὡς ἀλάθητα λυπήσαντα»³⁵.

However, most of the times, as we have said, the term *ἀλάθητο* is used in the ancient Greek and Patristic literature to denote the one who does

30. Suidae (Souda), *Λεξικόν*. A similar use of the term exists in *Scholia in Aeschylum*, of Francesco Robortello (16th c.), where it is mentioned «[ἄλαστα] ἀλάθητα». See Francesco Robortello, *Σχόλια στὸν Αἰσχύλο, Ὑπόθεσις τῆς τοῦ Αἰσχύλου τραγωδίας ἢ ἐπιγράφεται Πέρσαι*.

31. John Chrysostom, *Λόγος παραινεντικός περὶ μετανοίας*, PG 60, 684 [Migne's Patrology classifies the work as spurious].

32. Photios I of Constantinople, *Τεμάχια εἰς τὴν ἐπιστολὴν πρὸς Ἑβραίους*, p. 50.

33. Pseudo-Codinus, *Πάτρια Κωνσταντινουπόλεως* 2, 73.

34. Eustathius of Thessaloniki, *Παρεκβολαὶ εἰς τὴν Ὀμήρου Ἰλιάδα καὶ Ὀδύσειαν* 1, 55.

35. Eustathius of Thessaloniki, *Παρεκβολαὶ εἰς τὴν Ὀμήρου Ἰλιάδα καὶ Ὀδύσειαν* 4, 613.

not make mistakes. In this sense, the term is usually attributed to God (26 times), while more rarely to a person (two times), or an object or energy (six times).

Possibly, the first time that the term is recorded in Greek literature is in order to describe the attribute of God in two myths of Aesop (6th century B.C.) the leading representative of ancient didactic mythology. In the myth of the malevolent man, a cunning man places a bet with a friend that he will prove that the Oracle of Delphi does not know the truth. He visits the Oracle and stands in front of the statue of the God. He holds in his hand a bird hidden. In order to test God, he intends to ask him if the bird that he holds in his hands is alive or dead. If God answers that it is dead, then man will open his hand and present it alive. While if God replies that it is alive, then man will clench his hand secretly to drown it and present it as dead, thus making God a “liar”. God understood this and replied that man should not test God, since the fate of the bird depended on man, so that Aesop would conclude with the conclusion: «ὁ μῦθος δηλοῖ, ὅτι τὸ θεῖον ἀπαρεγχείρητον καὶ ἀλάθητόν ἐστι»³⁶. Similarly, in another myth, two young people go to a kitchen and when at some point the cook is not careful, a young man takes a pork leg and puts it in the bosom of the other. As soon as the cook realizes that the leg is missing, he accuses the young people of theft and they deny it. So, the cook replies that even if they deceive him, they cannot hide from God himself. This omniscience of god is attested by Aesop himself at the end of the story with the following phrase: «ὁ μῦθος δηλοῖ, ὅτι, καὶ ἂν ἀνθρώπους διακρουσώμεθα ἐπισημαίνοντες, θεὸν δὲ οὐδαμῶς ἀλάθητον γὰρ τὸ θεῖον». These two examples are extremely interesting and important, if one considers that they speak of the infallibility and the omniscience of god, in a period dominated by the twelve gods, whose deities brought human passions and weaknesses and were in no way considered to have any kind of infallibility or omniscience, given their finite existence³⁷. In antiquity, the term is also found in *Μαντεῖες* of Astrampsychus (before the 4th century), but this

36. Aesop, *Μῦθοι*, *Ἄνηρ κακοπράγμων* 36, 2-3.

37. Aesop, *Μῦθοι*, *Νεανίσκοι καὶ μάγειρος* 67, 2.

time not to describe god as infallible, but to predict the perfect escape somewhere: «ἀλάθητος ἔσται σου ὁ δρασμός»³⁸.

In Patristic literature, as we have already said, the term is referred to as a characteristic mainly of God, but without missing some exceptions. In fact, during the first centuries of the Church, the emphasis on the infallibility of God is made by Fathers who come from the school of Alexandria, some of whom played a catalytic role in the Ecumenical Councils, such as Athanasius the Great in the First Ecumenical Council of Nice (325) and Saint Cyril of Alexandria in the Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus (431). More specifically:

Didymus the Blind theologian, ecclesiastical writer and teacher at the catechetical school of Alexandria in the 4th century, is the first Father to make use of the term to describe God as omniscient, from whom one cannot hide. In his work *Περὶ Τριάδος* mentions about the fall of the first-created humans: «ὁ μετὰ ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος Θεός, ὁ πάλαι εἰπὼν Ἀδάμ, ποῦ εἶ; [...] ὁ Ἀδάμ ὁ τῷ ἀλαθήτῳ Θεῷ ἀποκρινόμενος· Γυμνός εἰμι, καὶ ἐκρύβην»³⁹.

Similarly, Athanasius the Great (4th century) interpreting *Psalms* 10, clarifies that when the psalmist refers to the eyes of God, he does so symbolically to denote the omniscience of the all-seeing God: «ἐν οὐρανῷ ὁ θρόνος αὐτοῦ. Οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν πένητα ἀποβλέπουσιν. Τὸ ἀλάθητον σημαίνει τοῦ Θεοῦ ὀφθαλμοὺς δὲ τὴν εὐεργετικὴν ἐπισκοπὴν»⁴⁰. At the same time, the spurious *Σύνταγμα διδασκαλίας* urges Christians not to deceive others, because the infallible eye of God sees them: «Μὴ δολιεύση ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀλαθήτων ὀφθαλμῶν τοῦ θεοῦ»⁴¹.

Possibly the same period the *Εὐχὴ τοῦ ἁγίου Μακαρίου* refers to the infallibility of the omniscient God: «Κύριε, ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀλαθήτων σου

38. Ἀστραμφύχου Αἰγυπτίου, *Πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα Πτολεμαῖον περὶ προρρήσεως διαφόρων ζητημάτων*, 13.

39. Didymus of Alexandria, *Περὶ Τριάδος*, PG 39, 697.

40. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὸν Ψαλμὸν Γ' (11)*, PG 27, 93.

41. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Σύνταγμα διδασκαλίας πρὸς μονάζοντας καὶ πάντας χριστιανούς κληρικούς τε καὶ λαϊκούς*, p. 124 (spurious). It is worth mentioning that while the above passage exists in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* 8.0 it does not appear in Migne's *Patrology* which simply mentions: «Μὴ δολιεύου ἐνώπιον Κυρίου» (PG 28, 840).

ὀφθαλμῶν οὐκ ἐπαυσάμην πάντα ἐργάζεσθαι τὰ πονηρὰ καὶ αἰσχροῦ»⁴², the Λόγος ΛΖ' to the infallibility of the Word God: «θεὸς ἐκ θεοῦ, ἄχραντος, ἀναλλοίωτος, ἀκατάληπτος, ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ ἀπαράλλακτος, ἐν γνώσει ἀλάθητος, ἐν δυνάμει ἀνίκητος»⁴³, and the Λόγος ΛΘ' to the infallible divine grace: «Ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀγνοεῖ, ἀλλὰ πιστεύειν ὀφείλει, ὅτι ἡ χάρις ἀλάθητός ἐστι· καὶ ὅταν εὖρη κεκαλυμμένα τῆς ψυχῆς τραύματα, τότε τοῖς ἔξωθεν θλιβεροῖς ἀρμοδίως παραχωρεῖ σε»⁴⁴.

The same interpretative approach of Athanasius the Great, according to which the biblical references to the eyes of God declare His infallibility and omniscience, is followed by Saint Cyril of Alexandria (early of 5th century) both in his interpretation in *Psalms* 10: «Ἡ ὀφθαλμὸς τὸ ἀλάθητον τοῦ Θεοῦ σημαίνει»⁴⁵ and in the *Περὶ τῆς παναγίας Τριάδος*: «Ὁφθαλμοὺς μὲν οὖν Θεοῦ καὶ βλέφαρα καὶ ὄρασιν, τὴν τῶν ἀπάντων ἐποπτικὴν αὐτοῦ δύναμιν, καὶ τὸ ἀλάθητον τῆς αὐτοῦ γνώσεως ἐννοήσωμεν, ἀπὸ τοῦ παρ' ἡμῖν διὰ ταύτης τῆς αἰσθήσεως ἐντελεστέραν γνῶσιν καὶ πληροφορίαν ἐγγίνεσθαι»⁴⁶.

A few decades later (late 5th century) in Constantinople, Procopius of Gaza, professor of rhetoric and hermeneutics of the Holy Scriptures, explains that man has been created with mind and speech in order to look, love and desire God as an infallible knowledge and final destination: «οὕτω καὶ ὁ ἄνω πρὸς Θεὸν ὡς ἀρχέτυπον ὄραν τε καὶ τούτου ἐρᾶν ὡς ἀλαθῆτου γνωστοῦ καὶ ἐσχάτου ὀρεκτοῦ, πλασθεὶς ἄνθρωπος ὁπότεν τῶν οἰκείων κατὰ νοῦν καὶ λόγον ἔξεων τῆς γνώσεως καὶ τῆς ἀρετῆς ἐκὼν ἀπαλλοτριωθῆ, τοῖς ἀτμοποιοῖς δεδούλωται πάθει»⁴⁷.

In the same area, but a little more than a century later, Maximus the Confessor (7th century) one of the greatest Fathers and mystical theologians of our Church, writes in his *Μυσταγωγία* about truth and infallibility: «Τὴν ἀλήθειαν δὲ καὶ τὸ ἀγαθόν, τὸν Θεὸν ἔλεγε δηλοῦν, ἀλλὰ τὴν μὲν ἀλήθειαν, ὅταν ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τὸ θεῖον σημαίνεσθαι δοκῆ· ἀπλοῦν γάρ, καὶ μόνον, καὶ ἓν, καὶ ταῦτόν, καὶ ἀμερές, καὶ ἄτρεπτον, καὶ ἀπαθὲς

42. Pseudo-Macarius, *Εὐχὴ τοῦ ἁγίου Μακαρίου*, PG 34, 448.

43. Pseudo-Macarius, *Sermones* 64 (collectio B), Λόγος ΛΖ' (37) 1, 3.

44. Pseudo-Macarius, *Sermones* 64 (collectio B), Λόγος ΛΘ' (39) 3, 1.

45. Cyril of Alexandria, *Εἰς τοὺς Ψαλμούς*, PG 69, 793.

46. Cyril of Alexandria, *Περὶ τῆς παναγίας Τριάδος*, PG 77, 1148.

47. Procopius of Gaza, *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς Παροιμίας*, PG 87, 1493.

πραγμα ἡ ἀλήθεια καὶ ἀλάθητον, καὶ παντελῶς ἀδιάστατον»⁴⁸, as well as «τὴν δὲ ἄληστον γνῶσιν, σοφίας τε καὶ θεωρίας καὶ γνώσεως, ἧγουν δυνάμεως καὶ ἔξεως καὶ ἐνεργείας, τὴν περὶ τὸ γνωστὸν τὸ ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν τὴν γνῶσιν ἀκατάληκτον καὶ ἐκτικὴν ἀεικινήσιαν, ἧς πέρας ἐστίν, ὡς ἀλάθητον γνωστὸν, ἡ ἀλήθεια ὃ καὶ θαυμάζειν ἄξιον, πῶς τὸ ἄληστον λήγει περιγραφόμενον, ἢ δηλονότι ὡς Θεῶ τῇ ἀληθείᾳ περατούμενον· Θεὸς γὰρ ἡ ἀλήθεια περὶ ὃν ἀκαταλήκτως τε καὶ ἀλήτως κινούμενος ὁ νοῦς, λήγειν οὐκ ἔχει ποτὲ τῆς κινήσεως, μὴ εὐρίσκων πέρας ἔνθα μὴ ἔστι διάστημα»⁴⁹.

During the 8th century, the exclusive connection between infallibility and God by the Fathers of our Church, continues to prevail in order to declare the omniscience of the all-seeing God, this time through the Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως of the great dogmatist Saint John Damascene: «Δεύτερον δὲ τὸ θεὸς ὄνομα, ὃ λέγεται ἢ ἐκ τοῦ θέειν καὶ περιέπειν τὰ σύμπαντα ἢ ἐκ τοῦ αἶθειν ὃ ἐστὶ καίειν (ὁ γὰρ θεὸς πῦρ καταναλίσκων πᾶσαν κακίαν ἐστίν) ἢ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεᾶσθαι τὰ πάντα ἀλάθητος γὰρ ἐστὶ καὶ πάντων ἐπόπτης. Ἐθεάσατο γὰρ τὰ πάντα πρὶν γενέσεως αὐτῶν ἀχρόνως ἐννοήσας καὶ ἕκαστον κατὰ τὴν θελητικὴν αὐτοῦ ἄχρονον ἔννοιαν, ἧτις ἐστὶ προορισμὸς καὶ εἰκὼν καὶ παράδειγμα, ἐν τῷ προορισθέντι, καιρῷ γίνεται»⁵⁰. In the same work he repeats the position of Athanasius the Great and of Saint Cyril of Alexandria, that the biblical references to the eyes of God are made in order to declare the infallibility and His omniscience: «Ὅσα τοίνυν περὶ θεοῦ σωματικώτερον εἴρηται, συμβολικῶς ἐστὶ λελεγμένα, ἔχει δὲ τινα ὑψηλοτέραν διάνοιαν· ἀπλοῦν γὰρ τὸ θεῖον καὶ ἀσχημάτιστον. Ὀφθαλμοὺς μὲν οὖν θεοῦ καὶ βλέφαρα καὶ ὄρασιν τὴν τῶν ἀπάντων ἐποπτικὴν αὐτοῦ δύναμιν καὶ τὸ ἀλάθητον τῆς αὐτοῦ γνώσεως ἐννοήσωμεν ἀπὸ τοῦ παρ' ἡμῖν διὰ ταύτης τῆς αἰσθήσεως ἐντελεστέραν γνῶσιν τε καὶ πληροφορίαν ἐγγίνεσθαι»⁵¹.

At the beginning of the 9th century, we probably encounter for the first time in ancient Greek and Patristic literature, the term as descriptive of a

48. Maximus the Confessor, *Μυσταγωγία* Ε' (5), PG 91, 673.

49. Maximus the Confessor, *Μυσταγωγία* Ε' (5), PG 91, 677.

50. John Damascene, *Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως* Θ' (9), PG 94, 836-837.

51. John Damascene, *Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως* ΙΑ' (11), PG 94, 841.

man, even as rhetoric. Saint Theodore the Studite, abbot of the Stoudios Monastery in Constantinople, sends a responsive letter to the emperor Nicephorus I regarding the selection criteria that the new Patriarch must meet, given the death of the Patriarch Tarasius in 806: «*Ἡνίκα τοίνυν οὐχ ὀρῶμεν τοιοῦτον, οὐδὲ ἀποτολμῶμεν ψηφίσασθαι. τοῦτο δὲ ὡς ἐν ὑπομνήσει μετὰ συστολῆς καὶ αἰδοῦς ὑποτιθέμεθα, ὅπερ ἀλάθητόν ἐστι πάντως τῇ πολυπειρῶ καὶ θείᾳ μεγαλονοίᾳ σου, ἵνα ἀπό τε τῶν ἐπισκόπων ἀπό τε τῶν ἡγουμένων ἀπό τε τῶν στυλιτῶν ἀπό τε τῶν ἐγκλειστῶν, εἶτα τοῦ κλήρου ὑποδεχόμενος ἐκλογὴν ἐξ αὐτῶν τε τῶν ἐπιδεδωκότων λαβὼν τοὺς ἐν συνέσει καὶ φρονήσει καὶ βίῳ τῶν ἄλλων προέχοντας (καταβάτωσαν γὰρ καὶ στυλῖται ἐκβαινέτωσάν τε καὶ ἐγκλειστοί, ἐπεὶ περ κοινῇ καὶ συμφέρον τὸ ζητούμενον) ἐπικρίνη καὶ συγκρίνη καὶ σὺν αὐτοῖς ἀποδείξῃ τὸν ἀξιώτερον*»⁵². The use of the term *infallibility* here to characterize the “experienced and divine magnanimity” of the emperor is probably made in a rhetoric way, given the prevailing situation in the empire, where the iconoclastic dispute is gradually rekindled, two decades after the Seventh Ecumenical Council (787), and Nicephorus I having ascended the throne after the overthrow of the iconophile empress Irene of Athens by iconoclastic army officers. Saint Theodore rhetorically exalts the emperor, in order to raise expectations in the eyes of the readers of the letter. By setting the bar high and combining it with the criteria cited by the Saint, the equation of the criteria for the election of the new Patriarch, with the desirable way of acting of the emperor and his moral quality is artfully created. In simple words, if the emperor wants to appear “infallible” and as having “experience and divine magnanimity” he must appoint Patriarch as the one who will meet the criteria of Saint Theodore. Of course, history was destined to refute this characterization of the emperor, since he himself imprisoned the Saint in order to elect unprohibited as Patriarch the lay and his namesake Nicephorus I, a fact that cause the strong reactions of the clergy and monks, including Saint Theodore, whom he exiled three years later, in 809. The iconophile chroniclers of the time, such as Theophanes the Confessor, recorded in history the rule of Nicephorus I in black colors.

52. Theodore the Studite, *Ἐπιστολὴ 16, Νικηφόρω βασιλεῖ*, PG 99, 960.

About a half century later, Photios the Great (9th century), one of the most emblematic Patriarchs of Constantinople, uses again the term “infallibility” as a characteristic feature of God, this time in the light of the coming Judgment: «τί δὲ δύναται ὁ μέλλων αἰών; καὶ τί ἐστὶν αὐτοῦ ἡ χρεία καὶ τὸ ἔργον; ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἕκαστος ὧν ἔπραξε τὴν ἀμοιβὴν εὐρίσκει, ὅτι οὐκ ἔχει τέλος οὔτε ἡ τιμωρία ἢ ἐν αὐτῷ, οὔτε ἡ εὐδαιμονία, ὅτι τότε μᾶλλον τό τε ἀλάθητον τοῦ κριτοῦ καὶ τὸ δίκαιον φανερωθήσεται, καὶ πολλὰ ἕτερα. τοὺς οὖν μετὰ τῶν ἄλλων καὶ ταῦτα μαθόντας, φησὶν, εἶτα παραπεσόντας ἀδύνατον καὶ ἐξῆς»⁵³.

From the end of the 9th century onwards, the term *infallibility* begins to appear in Greek literature a somewhat more flexible use, attributed to other persons and situations, always in parallel with its traditional use as a characteristic feature of the all-seeing and omniscient God.

Arethas (9th century), Archbishop of Caesarea and prominent theologian of the middle Byzantine period, characterizes *infallible* the vision of the eagle of Revelation: «Ἀετὸς δέ, τῶν τετραμόρφων, καὶ οὐκ ἄλλο τῶν περὶ τὸν θρόνον δηλωθέντων, ἅτε τούτων οὐδενὸς τὸ ἵπτασθαι. Ἐξ οὗ καὶ τὸ μεσουράνημα καταλαβεῖν ἦν εὐπετῶς, καὶ ἅμα ὡς ἔχον τῇ ὄξυωπία (ὁ σύμφυτον ἀετοῖ;) τὸ ἀλάθητον, περισταίῃ τοῖς κατηκόοις τὰ ἐφ’ οἷς ἐκβοᾷ»⁵⁴.

Ignatius the Deacon (9th century), one of the most important hagiologist authors of the period, uses the term *infallibility* as synonym of “clearly”. He records an incident between the iconoclast emperor Leon V (r. 813-820) Leon argues that it is “clear” that God chose him as emperor in order to maintain the balance and his interlocutor replies (again using rhetoric) that it is indeed “clearly” the will of God, but accuses the emperor of not keeping the balances for which he was chosen by God (that is, again the emperor seems inconsistent with the mission assigned to him by God): «Πρὸς οὖς ὑπόδρα ἰδὼν ὁ θυμολέων φησὶν: [ΛΕΩΝ Ε΄:] καὶ ὑμῖν, ὡς ὁρᾶτε, καὶ πᾶσιν ἀλάθητόν ἐστιν, ὡς ὑπὸ θεοῦ μεσιτεύειν ἐπὶ ταυτηνὶ τὴν μεγαλώνυμον καὶ λογικὴν ποίμνην ἐτάχθημεν [...]. [ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΟΣ:] Ὅτι μὲν, ὦ βασιλεῦ, κρίμασιν οἷς ἀγνοοῦμεν, ἐπὶ τὴν μεγίστην Χριστοῦ

53. Photios I of Constantinople, *Τεμάχια εἰς τὴν ἐπιστολὴν πρὸς Ἑβραίους*, p. 645.

54. Arethas of Caesarea, *Συλλογὴ ἐξηγήσεων*, PG 87, 1493.

ποιμνην μεσιτεύειν ἐτάχθητε, καὶ ἡμῖν καὶ πᾶσιν, ὡς ἔφησ, ἀλάθητόν ἐστιν. ὅτι δὲ τὰ ζυγὰ τῆς μεσιτείας ἐξ αὐτῆς ἀρχῆς ὑμῖν ἑτεροόρεπῃ διεσκέυασται ἤκιστα τοῖς κρίνειν ὀρθῶς ἐπισταμένοις ἡγγόηται»⁵⁵.

On the other hand, Joseph Genesius (10th century), a Byzantine chronicler, describe as infallible the fall of one of the two wrestlers: «συνῆλθον οὖν, συνῆλθον κατὰ παλαιστραν ἀμφότεροι ὧν ὁ μὲν μετεωρίζειν πειράται Βασίλειον, ὁ δὲ μὴ ἐνεγκῶν τὴν Βασιλείου ἀντίβασιν μετεωρίζεται παραυτὰ γενναιότατα καὶ περιστρέφεται ταχίστω κινήματι, καὶ τῇ κατὰ πόδρεζαν προσπλοκῇ, ὡς ὁ ἐγχώριος λόγος, πρὸς γῆν καταφέρεται, ὑποστὰς πτώσιν ἀλάθητον, ὡς καὶ παραψυχὴν τοῖς πᾶσιν εἶναι λογίζεσθαι, εἰ καὶ μετὰ πολὺν χρόνον ὕδασι πολλοῖς κατάρραντισθεῖς μόλις ἀνέσφηλεν»⁵⁶.

Leon the Deacon (10th century), another Byzantine chronicler records the term again as infallible eye to denote the omniscience of God: «ὅς γε τὸν ἀλάθητον καὶ μέγαν ὀφθαλμὸν λήσειν οἰόμενος»⁵⁷, as well as: «Μίαν ἀρχὴν ἐξεπίσταμαι, τὴν ἀνωτάτην καὶ πρώτην, ἣτις ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος εἰς τὸ εἶναι τὸ τοῦ ὄρατοῦ καὶ ἀοράτου κόσμου παρήγαγε σύστημα. δύο δὲ τὰς ἐν τῷδε τῷ βίῳ γινώσκω καὶ τῇ κάτω περιφορᾷ, ἱερωσύνην καὶ βασιλείαν, ὧν τῇ μὲν τὴν τῶν ψυχῶν ἐπιμέλειαν, τῇ δὲ τὴν τῶν σωμάτων κυβέρνησιν ἐνεχείρισεν ὁ δημιουργός, ὡς ἂν μὴ τούτων χωλεύσοιτο μέρος, ἄρτιόν τε καὶ ὀλόκληρον διασώζοιτο. τοίνυν, ἐπεὶ τὸ χρεῶν ὁ τὴν ἐκκλησίαν ἰθύνων ἐξέτισεν, ἔργον μὲν τούτου τοῦ ἀλαθήτου πέφυκεν ὀφθαλμοῦ, τὸν κατευμεγεθοῦντα πάντων εἰς τὴν λειτουργίαν τῶν θείων παραγαγεῖν, ᾧ καὶ πρὸ τοῦ πλασθῆναι τὰ ἐπιτηδεύματα τῶν ἀνθρώπων διέγνωσται»⁵⁸.

In a similar context move Saint Symeon Metaphrastes, (10th century), the most known hagiologist of the time and writer of the *Μηνολόγιον*, as also Michael Psellos (11th century), the prolific and meddlesome monk. Both make use of the *infallibility* in its traditional Patristic use in the interpretation of the Old Testament, as an attribute of the all-seeing

55. Ignatius the Deacon, *Βίος ἀγίου Νικηφόρου ἀρχιεπισκόπου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως*, p. 186.

56. Joseph Genesius, *Βασιλεία* 4,26.

57. Leo the Deacon, *Ἱστορία*, PG 117, 709.

58. Leo the Deacon, *Ἱστορία*, PG 117, 805.

and omniscience God. Symeon refers about the fall of the first-created humans: «μετὰ τὸ τόλμημα εἰς συναίσθησιν ἐλθόντες τοῦ πταιίσματος, τῷ κριτικῷ κρατοῦνται φόβῳ καὶ κρύπτεσθαι τὸν ἀλάθητον ὀφθαλμὸν καὶ παραιτοῦνται τὴν πρόοδον καὶ ἀναδύονται τὴν παράστασιν»⁵⁹. And Michael Psellos, interpreting *Psalm* 50 of David comments: «σοὶ γοῦν μόνῳ ἤμαρτον, ᾧ δὴ καὶ τὸ πονηρὸν ἐναντίον πεποίηκα. τὸν μὲν γὰρ διέλαθον καὶ τῷ γάμῳ ἐπιβουλεύσας καὶ τὴν τοῦ θανάτου ψῆφον ἐπενεγκῶν οὔτε γὰρ τὴν μοιχείαν διέγνωκε, καὶ τὸ τοῦ θανάτου κόνδου ἀθρόως καὶ ἀπροσδοκῆτως ἐκπέπωκε· σὲ δὲ τὸν ἀλάθητον ὀφθαλμὸν οὐκ ἠδυνήθη λαθεῖν. ἀλλ' εἰ καὶ ἐν νυκτὶ εἴργαστό μοι τὸ παρανόμημα, εἰ καὶ σκότον εἶχον τῆς ἀμαρτίας φύλακα καὶ συμπράκτορα, ἀλλ' ὥσπερ ὑπὸ τοῖς σοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς δρῶν τὸ ἀμάρτημα, ἐνώπιόν σου ἐδόκουν τοῦτο ποιεῖν»⁶⁰.

Of the above, the exception is the Byzantine orator John Sikeliotes (11th century), who is the only one (not counting Theodore the Studite) who uses the adjective *infallible* to characterize a man, Belisarius: «μεθ' ὧν καὶ Βελισσάριος, ὁ πολὺς, οὕτω καὶ ῥήτωρ ἂν εἶη δεινός, ὃ ἔστι σοφός, φρόνιμος, ἔμπειρος, ἀκριβής, ἀλάθητος, ἐπιστήμων, τεχνίτης»⁶¹.

Similarly, the *Πάτρια Κωνσταντινουπόλεως* (11th century), deviate, this time for objects, characterizing as infallible the quality of the statues of Constantinople: «ὁμοίως καὶ ἐπὶ πάσης τῆς πόλεως τὰ ἀγάλματα ἐστοιχειώσατο. Οἱ δὲ ἔχοντες δοκιμὴν τῶν στηλωτικῶν τῶν ἀποτελεσμάτων εὐρήσουσιν πάντα ἀλαθῆτως. Ὅμοίως καὶ οἱ τρίποδες τῶν Δελφικῶν κακκάβων καὶ αἱ ἔφιπποι στῆλαι γράφουσιν, δι' ἣν αἰτίαν ἔστησαν καὶ τί σημαίνουσιν»⁶². An alternative use of the term is also made by the Byzantine historian Nicephorus Bryennius the Younger, who recounts: «Καταλιπὼν δὲ τὴν εὐθεϊαν ὁδόν, ἴν' οὕτως λάθη τὸν μικροῦ δεῖν ἀλάθητον, διὰ τῆς λεγομένης Λιτῆς διελθὼν»⁶³.

Returning to the use of infallibility in relation to God, we observe the Byzantine historian Nicetas Choniates (12th century) who was an eye-

59. Symeon Metaphrastes, *Σύντομον Χρονικόν / Εἰς κοσμοποιίαν*, p. 1273.

60. Michael Psellos, *Θεολογικά* 14.

61. John Sikeliotes, *Ἐξήγησις εἰς τὰς ιδέας τοῦ Ἑρμογένους*, p. 449.

62. Pseudo-Codinus, *Πάτρια Κωνσταντινουπόλεως* 2, 79.

63. Nicephorus Bryennius the Younger, *Ἱστοριῶν Βιβλία Δ'*, PG 127, 197.

witness to the fall of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204, addressing to the all-seeing and infallible Judge with the following words: «Ὡ πάντ' ἐφορῶν ὀφθαλμὲ τῆς δίκης ἀλάθητε, πῶς ἐπιμύεις πολλάκις ἐπὶ τηλίκους παρανομήμασιν ἢ καὶ μεῖζοσιν ἑτέροις ἀνθρώπων κακοπραγήμασιν, οὐδ' ἐπάγεις εὐθὺς τοὺς πρηστῆρας καὶ τὸ κεραύνιον ἀναμμα, ἀλλ' ὑπερτιθέμενος ἐπέχεις τὴν κόλασιν»⁶⁴.

In the same pattern of the infallible and sleepless eye of the all-seeing Judge, the *Μέγα Χρονικόν*, describes the examination (13th century) of Michael Palaiologus by Archbishop Arsenius Autoreianos under the accusation that Michael wanted to usurp the throne of Theodore II Lascaris Vatatzes. In his apology Michael refers: «Καὶ ἐλπίζω εἰς τὸν Θεὸν τὸν λυτρώσαντα τοὺς τρεῖς παῖδας ἐκ τῆς καμίνου τῆς φλογός, καὶ ὁ ἀλάθητος [ἀλάθαστος] καὶ ἀκοίμητος ἐκεῖνος ὀφθαλμὸς ὁ ἐρευνῶν καρδίας καὶ νεφρούς, εἰδὼς ὅτι οὔτε ἐνεθυμήθην, οὔτε ἐλογισάμην, περὶ ὧν με ἐπερωτᾶς, εἰ τύχη, φυλάξει με ἀβλαβῆ ἐκ τοῦ πυρὸς τοῦ καιομένου»⁶⁵.

Respectively, Saint Mark the Hermit (13th century), also aligned with the Patristic tradition, uses the term to denote divine justice: «Τῷ ἐκτὸς ἀνάγκης ἀμαρτάνοντι δυσμετανόητα γίνεται διότι ἀλάθητος ἢ τοῦ Θεοῦ δικαιοσύνη»⁶⁶, and the omniscience of God: «Μὴ καταφρονήσης ποτὲ ἐν λογισμῶν ἀμελεία: ἀλάθητος γάρ ἐστιν ὁ Θεὸς ἐπὶ πάσης ἐννοίας»⁶⁷ and God Himself: «Ἐνα ἔχομεν σύμμαχον τὸν μυστικῶς ἡμῖν διὰ τοῦ βαπτίσματος ἐγκεκρυμμένον Χριστόν, ἀνίκητον καὶ ἀλάθητον»⁶⁸.

Finally, the Byzantine historian Michael Doukas (15th century), who lived through and recorded the fall of Constantinople by the Ottomans in 1453, moves in the same context and describes God as omniscient and righteous Judge: «Εἰ γὰρ καὶ παρασπονδὰς τῶν χριστιανῶν τινες καὶ παραβάσεις τῶν ὄρκων μεταχειρισθέντες τὸν ἀλάθητον τοῦ Θεοῦ ὀφθαλμὸν οὐκ ἔλαθον καὶ τὴν δίκην δικαίως τιμωρηθέντες παρ' αὐτοῦ

64. Nicetas Choniates, *Χρονικὴ Διήγησις*, PG 139, 452.

65. Pseudo-Sphrantzes, *Ἱστορία*, PG 156, 643.

66. Mark the Hermit, *Περὶ Νόμου Πνευματικοῦ*, PG 65, 912.

67. Mark the Hermit, *Περὶ Νόμου Πνευματικοῦ*, PG 65, 916.

68. Mark the Hermit, *Διάσχεψις τοῦ νοῦ μετὰ τὴν ψυχὴν του*, PG 65, 1109.

τοῦ ἐκδικητοῦ, οὐκ εἰς μακρὰν τὰ τῆς μήνης ἐξετείνοντο πλέθρα, ἀλλ' εὐθὺς μετὰ τὴν νίκην οὐ κατεδίωκεν ὁ βάρβαρος, οὐκ εἰς τέλος τὸν ἀφανισμόν ἐδίψα τοῦ τυχόντος ἔθνους»⁶⁹.

Epilogue – Conclusions

Having now carried out a historical and spectacular retrospective of the use of the term in modern, Patristic and ancient Greek literature, we can draw some useful conclusions.

The term *infallibility*, in this form together with its derivatives, is almost always used as a characteristic of the all-seeing and omniscient God. Despite so many centuries of Patristic literature and the multitude of patristic writings, the term is never used as a descriptive of the authority of any person (Father, emperor, bishop, monk or laity), nor of any organ of the Church such as the Ecumenical Councils, and their decisions⁷⁰, neither of the body of the Church, nor even of the Church itself.

The term is also always interwoven with the omniscience of God and therefore has the character of a timeless quality, and not revealing. God has always known, always knows and always will know, and that is why He is always infallible. The revealed and ever-revealing truth is a continuous gift of the most merciful God to the finite man, and not an acquisition by right, of the latter. Man, constantly needs divine grace, in the same way that he himself needs to constantly move towards divine grace. Consequently, the term *infallibility*, although it is appropriate as a characteristic of the omniscient God, may not be the most appropriate term to describe man's reality.

69. Michael Doukas, *Βυζαντινὴ Ἱστορία*, PG 157, 1029.

70. The absence of the term *infallibility* from the “decisions” of the Ecumenical Councils is also pointed out by Kolovopoulou in her study on the tradition of the Church in the Ecumenical Councils, who, however, adds that “the concept of *infallibility* is contained in the characterizations: «ἀπλανής» (Mansi 11, 632a ... Mansi 7, 109a and Mansi 7, 136a), ἀσάλευτος (Mansi 7, 113a. Can. A', Quinisext Council, Mansi 13, 400e); «ἀκράδαντος» (Mansi 13, 400e); «ἀπαρεγγεῖρητος» (Mansi 7, 113a); «τέλειον κήρυγμα» (Mansi 11, 636c); «ἀκαινοτόμητος» and «ἀμείωτος» (Mansi 13, 412e)”. See Marina Kolovopoulou, *op.cit.*, p. 144, note 238.

On the contrary, there is a term which is widely used by the Fathers, the Ecumenical Councils and the Church itself, and we personally believe that it is the most appropriate to describe reality. This term is the *inspiration of God*. Inspired by God is the Holy Scripture and its authors, the tradition, the Fathers of the Church, the Ecumenical Councils, the Church, inspired by God are its illuminated saints, bishops, clerics, monks and laity, when they are highlighted as such by God and the Church itself.

Whether *infallibility* and the *inspiration* by God are identical in the Patristic tradition and in modern Orthodox theology, whether they are related or if they differ and to what extent, is something that it is impossible to analyze in the context of this article⁷¹. Therefore, what is the aim of this article? To demonstrate precisely this: that today we can talk a lot about infallibility and its bearers, however this term was almost never used by the Fathers of the Church to denote anything other than the omniscience of God Himself. The no use of course of the term is not a problem⁷², nor does it mean the absence of action. Or in simple words: the fact that neither the Fathers, nor the Ecumenical Councils used the term “infallibility” to describe human matters does not mean that they did not believe that the decisions of the Church and of the Ecumenical Councils were infallible. Probably they believed it.

However, they certainly believed that they were inspired by God, and this is evidenced by the writings of Athanasius the Great on the First

71. However, it is something that may be attempted in the future, although there is already excellent bibliography on the subject.

72. The Patristic approach to most other subjects was similar, since the Fathers did not hesitate to resort to the ancient Greek literature and philosophy, or to create their own terms, when they considered that the biblical terms were not sufficient to describe the revealed truth and created confusion. Very characteristic are the cases of the non-biblical terms: «ὁμοούσιον» (“consubstantial”), «ὑπόστασις» (“hypostasis”), «διάκριση προσώπου-φύσεως» (“distinction person-nature”), «οὐσίας καὶ ἐνεργείας» (“essence and energy”), «Θεοτόκος» (“Mother of God”), «μία φύσις τοῦ Θεοῦ Λόγου σαρκαρωμένη» (“one nature of the Word God incarnated”), «ἀντίδοσις ἰδιωμάτων» (“reciprocal exchange of attributes”), «ἐνυπόστατον» (“subsistent”) etc. See the relevant remark of Marina Kolovopoulou on the unwritten terms of the First Ecumenical Council and their support by Athanasius the Great, Marina Kolovopoulou, *op.cit.*, p. 81, note 135; St. Papadopoulos, *op.cit.*, pp. 111-118, 136-165.

Ecumenical Council, and those of Saint Cyril of Alexandria on the Third Ecumenical Council⁷³. Accordingly, however, their opponents may have believed it: Arius, Eusebius, Nestorius, Dioscurus, Barsumas, Eutyches and others. This is evidenced by their efforts to convene or to participate in Ecumenical Councils and control them. They would not have done so, if these Councils did not have the authority and if they did not believe and invoke that they have God on their side and that they are doing work pleasing to God and that they must guide the Church on their own paths. However, in the end they found themselves outside the Church and turned against the Councils to which they themselves attributed authority before their condemnation.

In conclusion, and briefly, the Fathers never use the term *infallibility* to describe human things but only God. This is not a problem, nor does it mean that they do not believe to the infallibility of the Church and the Ecumenical Councils. Nor, of course, does it cancel out the excellent contribution and question of modern theologians on the issue. On the contrary the intension of the writer is to demonstrate this no-use of the term by the Fathers of the Church, so that we ask ourselves whether it is worth insisting on the discussion of infallibility instead of focusing on the use of the term *divine inspiration*, which is the term par excellence used by the Fathers. We believe that beyond the spirit it is useful to follow the letter of the Fathers, when the divinely inspired terminology they use describes better reality, as they experienced it and as we are called to experience it too, having them as enlightened guides and Christ as head. «Οὐ γὰρ εἰσιν δύο ἢ τρεῖς συνηγμένοι εἰς τὸ ἕμὸν ὄνομα, ἐκεῖ εἶμι ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν»⁷⁴.

73. More on the subject can be found in our article on the authority of the First Ecumenical Council according to Athanasius, as also in our study on the Third and Fourth Ecumenical Councils, to which the contribution of Saint Cyril of Alexandria was greater than we know until today.

74. *Matthew* 18, 20.