

Δεικνύναι, but also *λέγειν*:
Reflections on the Necessity
of a Contemplative Witness to the God-Manhood,
Inspired by the *Iconophilia* of Saint Photios*

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It is widely held that the Christian faith, along with the other two versions of classical monotheism, is essentially opposed to humanism. In which way? In the sense that it advocates a theocentrism that sucks man –the tangible, real man with his uniqueness and imperfections– to the point of strangulation, or even annihilation; according to this double accusation, that it is usually hurled against the monotheistic worldview, the obsession with the celestial sphere delegitimizes the self-worth and legitimate claims of earthly life, imposing a dark devaluation of joy and a closed-mindedness of spirit regarding the human condition. In view of this well-established advocacy of an independent aporetic approach to reality, confessional Orthodoxy in particular, which defends the right opinions regarding God, is deemed by the critical thinking minds as impossible to be endured due to its intolerable “dogmatism”. If we are to be honest with ourselves, we should admit that this reproach

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that has been ascribed to it is not totally unjustifiable: More often than not, it can be founded on the hardened one-sidedness and reckless oversimplifications of institutional Christianity that mutilate the human person. From the moment, though, that those who judge are also been judged, according to the Ancient Greek tradition –inexorable in its demands– of «λόγον διδόναι», the rising popularity of the overflowing anthropocentrism that, for centuries now (at least since the age of the Renaissance), has displaced reflection on the God-man as a useless and deluding prating, is in dire need of re-examination – a sufficiently honest one, but also capable of exposing its plausible shallowness. In fact, due to anthropocentrism’s ideological hegemony as a “self-evident” commonplace, the unbiased deepening of the premises and meanings of the timely Protagorean dictum “man is the measure of everything” («πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἄνθρωπον εἶναι»)¹, appears as an urgent need for those of us who invest in truth, not based on our emotions, but exactly as Christ’s critically thinking disciples. A good starting point would be Adolf Harnack, the Lutheran theologian and historian, who summed up the Protestant theology’s verdict in the 18th and 19th centuries with his snappish statement that “all that is historically interesting in Christianity is its heresies”. It was he who enthusiastically exalted the Protestant principle of doctrinal liquidity, which was firstly praised by Friedrich Schleiermacher as the greatest virtue of the Protestant Reformation (in spite of Luther’s own intentions). The dedication of this year’s celebration of the feast of St. Photios the Great to the Christological truth proclaimed by the First Ecumenical Council of 325 AD at Nicaea offers us an excellent opportunity to critically filter out the complacently prevalent apathy to dogmatics – not for the sake of a reflexive confessional self-righteousness, truly petty in its simplicity, but in order to dispel, among other things, easily-sold fallacies on the part of fundamentalists, who insist on sharing and cashing in on the caricature of Christian anti-humanism as profit and virtue.

The truth about the person of Christ, as well as the being of the Triune God, is nowadays undesirable on many fronts; we must pay attention to

1. Plato *Θεαίτητος* 152a.

the reasons for this rejection. The truth about Christ's true identity was and remains unbearable – not only for those who reject it because of their atheistic orientation, but also for many believers. Let us not forget that the great heresiarchs were not atheists at all; they were overwhelmingly pious religious people, yet they were unable and unwilling to accept the dizzying signified of the Incarnation of the Word – so they struggled to moderate it, bringing the person of Christ to the standards and strengths of human perceptivity. The real Christ surprises and frightens humans, paradoxically, perhaps, even more so the most devout among them. And here arises a fascinating paradox: The atheists, the religiously discolored minds, from the moment they have accepted the cracks in their naturalistic armor, not infrequently acquire a clearer, fresher view of life and truth, so that they are sometimes more receptive to the inconceivable novelty that the Incarnate Christ offers. The same does not apply to many believers, who are already eroded by the prevalent conventional, costless and self-justifying religiosity, which is unable to contain the overflowing surplus of divine magnificence and love, especially as it is substantiated in the masterpiece of divine charity, the Incarnation of the Word. The biblical God takes bold initiatives and pushes man into paths incomprehensible by our standards, disregarding our strengths and tolerances, our readiness to accept the subversive invasion of the Uncreated into history: an invasion that activates defensive reflexes, nourished by our natural, post-Fall perceptions. It is a common secret that we, as believers, are often living effortlessly our lives without God, but never without idols, i.e. *religious* substitutes for the spirit and truth of the Gospels; substitutes which dumb us down sweetly, by eradicating our thinking, personal responsibility and detached, deeply critical view of life, with the combined result of supposedly pious concealment of the Almighty's vision in its true range.

The temptation of indifference to the Incarnation of the Word is a great one: Many great thinkers, although philosophically ignorant, see God and religiosity in general as an obstacle to progress and self-realization, both their own and that of society. According to them, faith binds citizens and societies to stagnation, heteronomy and uncritical love for the past, systematically deadening the intellectual reflexes of the

flock. This stereotypical reproach, while highlighting some key truths – which have unfortunately been neglected by foundational Christianity – recklessly obscures the dizzying implications of God’s incarnate descent into space-time. Others, even from the perspective of our faith with an affirmative view of theism, are focusing on the social message of the Gospel and on the ethics deriving from it, reducing it to a “first theology” at the expense of the dogmatic one. They argue that dogmas are obscure, cause confusion to the ordinary believer, and divide nations and people; on the other hand, practical reason is universal and offers direct practical redemption, bringing tangible results in interpersonal relations and within the social realm. The question of the Christians’ moral improvement, though clearly desirable and feasible as a project, has long been the sole and exclusive concern and absolute priority of preminent scholars who have been impressively engaged with the philosophical contemplation of Christianity. Immanuel Kant wrote a lengthy treatise that has exerted considerable influence (with the eloquent title: *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*) to establish ethics as the sole *locus* of Man’s encounter with God, stripping him away from dogmas, temples, priesthoods, services and mysteries. Having already rendered metaphysics philosophically unlawful and disreputable in his earlier treatises, Kant puts forward in his treatise an anti-theoretical – essentially anti-theological–, moral theism, in the context of which God is introduced *ex post facto* into our lives as an attendant and supporter of human self-institution. The Kantian *corpus* instituted a totalitarian apophaticism, the specifications of which make it impossible for man to know the Absolute, thus excluding any analogous reference to the God’s being. The Kantian invocation of God as the badge of the so-called “Kingdom of the Purposes” is obviously an instrumental one, and, in any case, it functions as a pretext: The identity and the historical interaction of God with creation and man are of no interest to the philosopher from Königsberg; according to his philosophical system, God is secondarily instrumentalized as a principle which validates and guarantees the truth of our moral decrees. Among Modern Greeks, Andreas Laskaratos has similarly attempted to strip the Christian faith off its dogmatic and mystical attire, advocating a secularized Kantianism: the simplicity, that

is, of a moral teaching capable of improving human character, saving him from what he believed to be a futile metaphysical garrulity. Much later, Nikos Kazantzakis would go so far as to moralize the God-Man himself according to the expectations of the common mind; the Cretan writer was incapable of grasping the sheer magnitude and existential range of the Christological truth he was going to sacrifice, in order to shrink Christ to the range of our physically limited perceptions – to the stature comprehensible by the intellect².

2. If there were a possibility of Christ to be morally excellent, the God-man would not only be qualitatively different from the first Adam, but He would be shown to be incomplete, even substantially different from the good, as having been harmonized with it afterwards by choice. In this case, the good would be eternally hovering in a quasi-Platonic way as a sort of a second principle, independent of the triune God, which God would subsequently subscribe to, as a complement and added value to His being. As St. John Damascene expressly points out, “it is not permitted to say of God that He first exists and then He is good” (*«Ὡς δὲ ὁ ἅγιος Διονύσιος φησίν, ὁ ἀγαθός. Οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἐπὶ Θεοῦ εἶπειν, πρῶτον τὸ εἶναι, καὶ τότε τὸ ἀγαθόν»*). *Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου πίστεως*, translated into Modern Greek by Archim. Dorotheos Papparis, § 9). The biblical God is revealing himself to us as good by nature and as being himself love, thus upgrading love (and goodness) from an emotion and ideal to an ontological quantity, with which He is essentially and not preferentially identified (cf. *1 John 4, 16*: *«Ὁ Θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστὶ, καὶ ὁ μένων ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ ἐν τῷ Θεῷ μένει καὶ ὁ Θεὸς ἐν αὐτῷ»*). [Regarding *προαίρεση* in God see *Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου πίστεως*, § 36.104-108: “We should also know that we attribute to God will and not volition; because God does not think. Thinking is a characteristic of ignorance; but no one thinks about something he knows. If, then, thought is a characteristic of ignorance, the same unquestionably goes for proairesis. Yet God, who has perfect knowledge of everything, does not think. But neither do we attribute thought or volition to the soul of the Lord, for He was not ignorant. Though His (human) nature was ignorant of things to come, He was hypostatically united to God the Word; He had knowledge of all things, not by gift, but, as it is said, because of his hypostatical union; for he was both God and man. Therefore, he had no volition”]. Besides, the moral choice in the face of occasional dilemmas would indicate alteration and corruption in God, something which, according to Damascene (*Λόγος κατὰ Νεστοριανῶν*, § 1, 37) and the whole of patristic thought is absurd (*«ἄτοπον»*). Christ possesses two natural wills, divine and human; however, those wills, being natural and not hypostatic, are not judgements / opinions, as in the case of humans, and therefore are not divisively differentiated from each other, either factually or potentially. In this respect, Damascene follows the distinction between natural will and judgement / opinion that had been masterfully developed by St. Maximos the Confessor, who attributed the will to nature and not to substance; see St. Maximos the Confessor, *Θεολογικὸν Ἔργον 7* and *Συζήτησις μετὰ Πύρρου*, PG 91, 308cd and 329d.

Denying the fact that God-Man, as well as the other two Persons of the Holy Trinity, express judgements / opinions –something that also implies that Christ could not have

sinned–, raises plausible objections; the main and greatest one of them is that God is thus deprived of freedom, since He is apparently driven by His nature and, therefore, He is good by necessity. By extension of this reasoning, Christ must have pretended to be tested by the devil in the wilderness, thus mocking the ever-afflicted by temptations and hard moral dilemmas man, who is constantly fighting battles of conscience. Indeed, many would have preferred a “more human” Christ, closer to the human moral struggle. In reality, though (and to put things in perspective, with admittedly brutal brevity, since the issue at stake is huge), in God’s case there is no question of unfreedom and “forceful” goodness, since the divine nature is uncreated; and as St. Maximos points out «οὐκ ἠναγκασμένα τὰ τῶν λογικῶν φυσικά» (Συζήτησις μετὰ Πύρρου, 293bcd). Hence, God as «ὑπερούσιος» is not subject to limitations akin to creatureliness – He is not subject to (even unlimited) freedom of choice, not because of lack of freedom but because He is above choices and contingencies; He is not confronted with existential and ontological facts. This is why self-will is God’s natural attribute (i.e. «ἄλλως δὲ ἐπὶ ἀγγέλων, καὶ ἄλλως ἐπὶ ἀνθρώπων»), according to St. Damascene (Περὶ τῶν ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ δύο θελημάτων καὶ ἐνεργειῶν, PG 95, 141B: «τὸ αὐτεξούσιον καὶ παντεξούσιον [...] καὶ ἀπλῶς εἰπεῖν πάντα, ὅσα ἔχει ὁ πατήρ, τοῦ υἱοῦ εἰσιν πλὴν τῆς ἀγεννησίας», and, PG 95, 161B: «καὶ ἡ θεία φύσις ἀναμάρτητος καὶ αὐτεξούσιος θέλησις, ἀλλ’ οὐ τρεπτὴ ἀλλ’ ἄτρεπτος. Ἡ μὲν οὖν θεία φύσις θελητικὴ καὶ αὐτεξούσιος καὶ ἀναμάρτητος καὶ ἄτρεπτος»; see also Ἱερὰ Παράλληλα, PG 96, 532c: «Τὸ Κύριος ὄνομα, καθὸ ἄρχει καὶ ἡγεμονεύει, δυναστεία κράτους αὐτεξουσίου χρώμενος· τὸ δὲ Θεός, καθὸ ἀγαθότητι καὶ χρηστότητι». Self-will is, *mutatis mutandis*, common to God and man; the difference is that the divine autonomy is not created but supersubstantial. A difficult question one might ask is why God did not from the beginning make man naturally, i.e. irreducibly, good. A first answer to this could be that, by creating man, as well as the angels, as created beings endowed with will related to judgement rather than supersubstantial will, God did not clone Himself; He did not transfuse them with His uncreated essence (something which, apart from its pantheistic implications, would also have disastrous consequences, since evil as a choice would assume physical immortality and substance – hence man’s deification by grace); He gave to them a will related with judgement / opinion that is alterable, in order for them to train it and freely submit it to His will. See Ἑκδοσις Ἀκριβῆς τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Πίστεως §3: «Πάντα τὰ ὄντα ἢ κτιστά ἐστιν ἢ ἄκτιστα. Εἰ μὲν οὖν κτιστά, πάντως καὶ τρεπτά». Self-will is a blessing and a gift of God to man as the foundation of his freedom’s preservation, provided always that it is properly used. If not, self-will turns into a cause of death: original sin was nothing but the will’s *digressive activation* of the will for making judgements and decisions, a “metaphysical solipsism” opposed to divine goodness: The tree of *knowledge* (of good and evil, as a necessary way out of innocence that nevertheless opens up the possibility of choosing evil through temptation) is not the tree of life; as such, it is contrasted with the Life-Giving Cross, the “tree” that the God-Man undertook to lift in the drama that took place in another garden, submitting His will to the will of the Father. Christ, as the last Adam, accomplished, *by nature and will*, what the first Adam was unwilling to accomplish *by volition*. The Lord, as the real priest and leader of the Eucharist (according to the «Σὺ γὰρ εἶ ὁ προσφέρων καὶ προσφερόμενος» of the

On a different wavelength, but essentially similarly iconoclastic in relation to the dogma, the very important post-war prose writer and poet Marios Chakkas would emblematically sum up in a heartbreaking short story towards the end of his life (in which he speaks tenderly of a priest with whom he is sharing their hospital ward as cancer patients) the popular aversion of educated and non-educated alike to theology as an idle talking that traps man in futile mentalist labyrinths alien and hostile to life, its truth and its joy: “He is a good thirty year old lad – calm face, rubbed robes, from those village priests who cultivate a few fields, make a stable of children and remain untainted by theologies and fanaticisms”³. In a nutshell, the antirrhetic stance of the iconoclastic opponents of the Christianity’s metaphysical, ecclesiological and mystical apparatus could be summarized in the following verdict: The dogmas, as ideocratic joints of an irreversibly defunct Byzantinism with theocratic aspirations, apart from promoting clericalism and the authoritarian mechanisms of the ecclesiastical bureaucracy, pulverize the spiritual zest, keeping reasoning stagnant and stacked to past, doomed to self-justification and underdevelopment. Furthermore, dogmatism and theology distract from the major aspects of life, blunting sensitivity and openness to the diversity of the world, to the, often, invisible injustice that escapes the radar of the religious bigots; even worse, they devalue the desperate voices of our defenseless and marginalized fellow human beings, who unquestionably find euphoria and refuge outside the faith. In short, according to the universal current consensus of well-read freethinkers, with sufficient representation even of theists among them, the long ago rusty doctrinal-institutional “crust” of the Gospel not only does not improve human character but alienates it, in diametrical contrast to the social preaching of the Gospels’ Christ.

Cherubic hymn), extends His salvific work intra-historically in every liturgical assembly, as Nicholas of Methoni has succinctly pointed out, uttering the stirring phrase: «τὰ σὰ ἐκ τῶν σῶν» to His Father, a phrase that negates the original sin, thus doing for us and with our consent (with the «ἀμὴν» of the laity) what the first Adam refused/failed to do.

3. Marios Chakkas, «Οἱ Θεσεεις», a short story from the collection *Ὁ Μπιντές και ἄλλες ἱστορίες*, afterword P. Boukalas, Agra Publications, Athens 2023, p. 88. Similar are the views of the main character in Angelos Terzakis’s notable novel *Δίχως Θεό* (Vivliopoleion tis Hestias, Athens 1951, p. 320).

It would be meaningless for us to deny all the above by being evasive: The scholastic intense study of metaphysics –Christian one included–, in the sense of a systematic preoccupation with the transcendental and the ultimate questions, has been going through a crisis for centuries, beginning perhaps with the nominalist controversy of the late Middle Ages and the victory of the existing “particulars” over the Platonic “universals”. Its place has long since been taken by Naturalism (atheistic materialism), with all that this implies: renunciation of the grand narratives with soteriological content, emphasis on the visible, the tangible and the sensorially verified. Obviously, religious faith, as inherently irrefutable within history, finds it difficult to becoming integrated into such a naturalistic milieu, much less to convince of its plausibility and credibility. But even if a place for the transcendental is granted by concession, always with extreme acquiescence, barbed wire is erected around it from the very start. We are not allowed to speak of the sacred. The logical positivists of the Vienna Circle maintained that the discourse on the transcendent is meaningless, because simply God and the like do not exist. Immanuel Kant and Ludwig Wittgenstein, on the other hand, accepted the existence of God or, in any case, a peculiar idea of God; nevertheless, they denied that we are in position to articulate a word with a legitimate meaningful impact on the divine element, simply because language is unable to refer to what transcends intra-historical contingency and our sensory, physical-experiential perceptions. It is all too well known that Kant has placed a categorical “embargo” on someone’s desires or attempts to escape from the world of “phenomena”, the world of the human gaze in the direction of the “conceivable”, the territory of God and Metaphysics in general – except, and always up to a certain degree, through Morality. On the other hand, Wittgenstein while he insists that “There is indeed the inexpressible. This shows itself; it is the mystical” (6, 552; see and 4, 1212), he nevertheless had already observed that “Everything that can be thought at all can be thought clearly. Everything that can be said can be said clearly”, and ends his famous treatise, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, with the following emblematic phrase: “Where of one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent” (7)⁴. This dictum partly reminds us of

4. L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, transl. (Greek) Th. Kitsopoulos, pre-

Basil the Great's apothegmatic phrase from his treatise *Περὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος* (IH' 44, 8), that «σιωπῇ τιμάσθω τὰ ἄρρήτα». However, St. Basil did not advocate an absolute apophaticism, nor did he trap us in the dilemma between «δεικνύναι» and «λέγειν»; that is why he left to us a rich theological work, like all the other Church Fathers, including St. Gregory Palamas, who was not content with mental silence, but he extensively theologized. He did not rest on living experience; he deemed thoughtful investigation and testimony as necessary. Besides, all the major heresies that have plagued the Church for centuries were not repelled by piety and silence, much less by the suspension of reason, but by elaborate logical arguments, formulated with an astonishing depth of reasoning. The profound patristic writings that attempted to aporetically investigate our major existential problems, and shed fresh light on the human condition, were written based on the assumption that the truth about God can be communicated: that it is communicable not only visually, or otherwise indirectly and implicitly, or through moral action, as Kant and Wittgenstein insist, but also *verbally*. This fundamental patristic premise, which perceives the propositional theological witness as being utterly legitimate, is not easily accepted; it seems at first sight to subordinate truth about God to human perception, apparently driven by a regression to pre-modern epistemology. Assuming, then, that there does not exist any isomorphism between thought and (ultimate) reality, that the (divine) being does not fit into *the process of thinking and reflecting*, would the modern insistence on total apophaticism and scepticism concerning God's things not be more valid, more reliable and more appropriate?

Photios the Great, as well as Saint Maximos the Confessor (to dwell on just two figures of the patristic pantheon), rejected this fraudulent, disjunctive syllogism: the choice between a) the reductionist shrinkage of reality, divine and even natural, to our mental capacities, or b) the absolute, pseudo-pietist silence. Rather than having trapped us in the prison of the human gaze, and, consequently, in the ignorance about God, they proposed with their attitude an alternative path, risky but

sentation by Z. Lorentzatos, introduction B. Russell, Papazisis Publications, Athens 1978, pp. 72 & 131.

equally necessary for our spiritual life as the oxygen for our biological one: the functional combination of apophaticism and affirmative theology, which is investigating and recording the traces and existential imprints of the divine Economy for man and creation. Indeed, theology has proven to be a risky activity: The two confessors of faith, as well as St John Chrysostom, who died in exile, were persecuted by state and ecclesiastical authorities for their unyielding insistence on the propagation of the right dogmatic opinions regarding God as well as the unfolding of its existential-ontological impact on man and creation. Photios (the most important Byzantine scholar with an astonishing education, as can be seen by his *Bibliotheca* [Μυριόβιβλος]) defended the truth about sacred icons, a truth which, in the context of worship, leads us directly to Christology, to the actual fact of the Incarnation of the Word and, consequently, to the correctness of the God-man's visual representation. As it is well known, Christian iconography is not a kind of religious or decorative art. It testifies that «ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν»⁵ while equally demonstrating the possibility that matter as wood and paintings has of receiving the Holy Spirit in common with human corporeality. For his insistence on Orthodoxy, Photios was persecuted. As it has been transmitted from our sources, St. Maximos suffered as punishment the brutal severing of his tongue and one of his hands for standing firm in his witness to the truth about Christ (a truth that had to be sacrificed for reasons of political expediency), facing the Emperor Herakleios and successively the Archbishops of Constantinople, Sergios (the instigator of the monotheistic and mono-energetic cacodoxy) and Pyrros. The truth seeker and finder can be tortured and is often unwanted; truth breaks conventions, challenges conventional lies and shatters popular prejudices and superstitions, the pretexts with which we knowingly or unknowingly circumvent the difficult and intolerable things of life. The unabatedly popular Nietzschean reading of history regards with suspicion the concept of truth, perceiving it as nothing more than an authoritatively imposed view. Egon Friedel, the eminent Austrian scholar, said that the truth is nothing more than the popular lie of the majority, while André Gide urged his readers to believe those

5. *John* 1, 14.

who seek the truth but to question those who claim to have found it. Sometimes, of course, a deprecatory caution about popular notions among the masses –especially generalized ones– is necessary, if not imperative; Papadiamantis used to say: “where there are generalities, there lies frivolity”. As a rule, though, nothing is more pernicious than the voluntary renunciation of the distinction between falsehood and truth. The trials of Photios the Great, Maximos the Confessor, and John Chrysostom, among many others, amply demonstrate that truth is seldom in favor of power and that its defense comes at a cost. More particularly, the case of St. Maximos amply illustrates that, if nothing else, theological Orthodoxy is not a by-product of political or other expediencies and that the Nietzschean view of any Orthodoxy (other than Christian) as a “smoke screen”, imposed by force to serve various opportunistic pursuits, is not only misleading in its abusive invocation, but also blatantly untrue in its unilateralism and absoluteness.

The truth about the person of Christ matters a lot. It has a real impact on our lives, on our own being; it has nothing to do with a garrulous scholasticism and a high-minded theoretical detachment from reality. It does not overshadow morality and social sensibilities, as it is often thought; it rather enhances them. Christ Himself gave us the trigger and the obligation to seriously and responsibly dealing with the truth about His true identity when He asked His disciples, and diachronically, humanity, «τίνα με λέγουσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι εἶναι»⁶? Since then, the answer to this question has never stopped from dividing the world: «Ὁὐ πᾶς ὁ λέγων μοι Κύριε Κύριε, εἰσελεύσεται εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν, ἀλλ’ ὁ ποιῶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πατρὸς μου τοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς»⁷. Nevertheless, it is equally important to know who exactly we accept or reject as Lord, given that at times there are those false pretenders who claim our attention and devotion, sellable Messianic caricatures, which in untrained minds appear as bars of gold while in the light of the God-Man they are stripped bare and stand as what they really are: rusty scrap metal, utterly useless but stubbornly assertive in the capture of eager gullible people.

6. *Matth.* 16, 13; *Mark* 8, 27.

7. *Matth.* 7, 21.

The right judgement/opinion (always with the dual meaning of true doctrine and right worship) for the person of Christ always works affirmatively for humankind: it elevates us as a biological species, making us inherently worthy to physically and mentally receive the uncreated God, thus securing the self-worth of the human person. The integrity of the God-man's two natures constitutes a metaphysical model that *simultaneously affirms* divine transcendence and intra-worldliness, while at the same time, according to the words of Christ Himself⁸, it explicitly separates the powers of God from those of Caesar, i.e. the political power from the spiritual one – the most relevant recommendation for those who rightly raise the fear of theocracy. In this respect, humanity is not absorbed and annihilated by the deity, nor is it opposed to it as its disputant. As a reminder, allow me here to point out that Christ, apart from real human flesh, also possesses a human will; without it, the Incarnation of the Word would be incomplete and Christ would be mutilated, since reflection is one of the most precious and inalienable privileges of humankind. If someone will decide to renounce thinking, whether as a partisan, an unquestioning traditionalist, or in the name of “mysticism” and sanctified “spirituality”, he or she will simply cease to be human. This Christological architecture, owing much of its completion to the condemnation of Apollinaris of Laodicea's teachings (according to whom, for “pietist” reasons, Christ's humanity should have been assumed to be without *rational human soul* [«νοῦς»]), testifies that Christ's humanity retains its autonomy, despite its justified hypostatic asymmetry, which ensures that no new person has emerged with the Incarnation of the Son and Word of God. In conclusion (and this is worth noting), Christological Orthodoxy, precisely because it does not limit itself to an explicit delineation of the person of Christ in terms of a mere moral model but insists on doctrinal precision, ensures that Christ also received a human mind, which include human (though in this case natural, i.e., unaltered) will. By extension, as far as we are concerned, the Lord's full humanity ensures that, in the name of pity, neither human reflection, nor human action and self-determination are

8. *Matth.* 22, 21; *Mark* 12, 17.

abolished in relation to the settlement of socio-political issues, which fall under Caesar's purview.

The Christological and triune architecture is fascinatingly structured; it has a supra-rational, but not irrational, morphology. Structurally, both possess the elegance of a fine mathematical formula with the unexpected side effect of transcending traditional monotheism. As a conception, the trinitarian deity –Father, Son, Holy Spirit– is highly antinomian; thus, it is not justified by the tools of a man-made, essentially and therefore finite reason, inherently intolerant of antinomy and paradox, such as that presupposed by Kant. This is why Christianity is a “difficult”, intellectually demanding religion, unlike Islam, which owes much of its rapid spread to its simplicity (as it is actually a basically practical reason with rudimentary metaphysics), according to the deep expert on that religion, the late Archbishop of Tirana, Anastasios. It was almost unheard of one God to correspond to three distinct Substances, which are not different, alternative “masks” of the one and the same Person, but three integral Persons – homogeneous, but in a state of otherness between them [according to the formula “Not other and other and other (essentially), but Other and Other and Other” as Substances]? Again, what kind of logic justifies the (Chalcedonian) doctrine about Christ's Two-Natures – that is, the latter's coexistence under the coordinate aegis of the *one* Hypostasis of Christ (a reversal of the previously mentioned triune formula: now, the Person of Christ is not divided into “Other and Other”, because of His two natures, but into “other and other”, i.e. into a hypostatic possessor of divine and human natures)? Incidentally, the essentially dualistic Christological architecture recalls (*mutatis mutandis*, the strict created-uncreated proportions) the dualistic ontology of light as simultaneously body and wave. The common sense tends to identify monotheism with a single divine Substance, just as it tends to identify the Substance of Christ with a single, unique nature – primarily, and understandably so, the human one. But the image of Christ, as it has been synthesized by the Chalcedonian formula, is seductively supra-rational: In its maximalism, it challenges not only the proponents of immanentism but also the simplistic (mono)theists, insofar as it asserts that Christ, as the God-Man, was born out of space-

time from a Father without a mother, and (conversely) in creation from a mother without a father, as Kallistos Ware, the blessed Bishop of Diokleia, has beautifully pointed out. We see, then, that if we are going to follow the antinomian syllogistic process of the Kantian reason, as it is expected by human standards, then in both Physics and Theology, we will not even be able to suspect their ultimate dizzying oddities that are testing, fascinatingly but also educationally, our physical and mental perceptions. Approaching the divine, and, in general, Christian faith under the terms of the “natural” man can only end up in a sad intellectual poverty –in the deprivation of a broader vision–, since only a God unconstrained by the limitations of the human subject’s physical specifications is able to opening up unexpected avenues for man. The inconceivable self-emptying and diminution of the Son and Word of God into the dimensions of human physiology, within the universe which He had created as the still pre-incarnate Word, was additionally intended to expand the human spirit *beyond the obvious*, thus establishing as a major property of the Christian faith the possibility of transcending the rudimentary empirical condition of knowing – in itself, human reason is neither able nor willing to discern the divinity behind the frail human flesh of Christ, much less to arrive at the supra-rational and provocatively antinomian conception of God as a Trinity of Persons. If we can judge by the long history of anthropomorphism that underlies the theology of the human imaginary, the same goes for the radical hetero-hypostatization and general otherness of the biblical God from the creation.

Although reason is extremely valuable to man as a tool of socio-political progress and maturity, acting as a supreme deterrent to insanity and nihilism, it encounters insurmountable perceptual and cognitive limits that only revelation is able to break through them. Even so, reason remains theology’s undeniable ally: Christianity, as an ongoing worldview, cannot exist without reflection and reasoning; even revealed truth, if we regard the Bible and the dogmas as such, is a matter of thought and human elaboration, as well as of historicity and evolution. Rightly understood dogmas are apophatic in terms of epistemology, i.e. starting points of quests instead of end points. At the same time, they are life-affirming, in the sense that they highlight the beneficial consequences

of Christology and Trinitarianism for man and material creation: Their purpose is *to reveal*, rather than *obscure and conceal*, the complexity and depth of existence; that is why they must be understood not as closed doors that block thought –as a spiritual prison-house–, but as open windows that maximize and sharpen vision beyond the partiality and conventionality of the obvious, thus allowing a view of wider horizons that are opened up by the eschatological alertness, in which the future remains undefined and open to radical surprise. The «Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ Λόγος»⁹ demonstrates that the world, as a creation, is inherently governed by meaning and *ratio*, since it bears the stamp of a “semantics” that makes the universe largely (though never fully) intelligible – a “semantics” that is indelibly engraved in the existing things and the human mind, and therefore non-absorbable from the contingency and entropy of creation. Thus, a rationality becomes perceptible; it is neither defeated nor nullified by the murderous human instincts, impulses expediencies, malice and absurdity that govern the egocentric and nihilist aspects of the human condition. Such a maximalist faith in reason is justified only if the meaning of the world has a transcendent origin and is reduced to a Person – a Hypostasis free from universal causality and necessity, which became incarnate by uniting earth and heaven in the flesh, inviting us to contemplate existence, the miracle of life, beyond our physical perceptions, conventional way of thinking, and usual expectations – to embrace, on the basis of the things about God, not of course uncritically, but with criteria and due attention, the antinomy and the paradox, even if the latter contradict at first sight the natural expectations of human cognition and perception.

Dogmatics and theology are inseparable; they constitute a single testimony. Dogmatics is the theology’s indispensable backbone; in its turn, theology, as the way par excellence of contemplating and interpreting the various doctrines, exploits the dogmatic premises of faith existentially and for the man’s sake. Who is nowadays threatening them, more than ever before? Doctrine is deviously being undermined by its phobic transformation into a museum exhibit, in a manner reminiscent of the Parable of the Talents, according to which the

9. *John* 1, 1.

slothful worker handed over intact and clearly unchanged the talent entrusted to him by his owner, but completely unused – as we Orthodox often do, when we obsessively and fearfully refuse to make use of the doctrine, giving up any attempt to honestly confront novel problems and challenges that require creative theological thinking, in constant dialogue with the sciences. In its turn, theology is undermined by easy and stereotypical answers, by the mechanistic and reflexive regurgitation of biblical and patristic quotations with an attachment to their letter rather than to their spirit, as well as by the complacent renunciation of questioning and reflection in favor of a convenient line taking by those who allegedly see God, as the exclusive holders of all truth about the matters of faith. The Protestant thieves of doctrinal fluidity are not the only ones who show contempt about the value of truth; the same goes for our endemic bigotry, religious populism and pietism, both old and new, the forensic approach to life that reproduces the Pharisaic misanthropic spirit. The religious fundamentalism is the greatest and most pernicious opponent of Christian humanism; more precisely, it is the *anti-humanism* par excellence, to which we give a particular meaning, defining it as the renunciation of reflection, both theological and general one, and therefore as something that *ex premium* disavows and annuls constant reflection. This danger has been threatening the Orthodox Christian faith for several years now. Our basic thesis is that during the patristic era, anti-humanism was avoided thanks to the eclectic interaction of Christian thought with the ancient Greek philosophy, in the latter's various manifestations – an interaction from which the Christian faith benefited the most, although (as we should make it clear in advance) the osmosis did not concern the content of faith *per se*, but the process of collecting conceptual categories and appropriating the rational argumentation that underlies the ancient Greek tradition of «λόγον διδόναι». As the available Christian literature unquestionably shows, the Church Fathers chose, at a crossroads crucial for the formation of Christian faith and witness, to make full use, without phobic syndromes and irresponsible (i.e. convenient) recourse to mysticism, of the precious gift of God in His earthy image, the human mind with the incalculable possibilities that the Creator had endowed it.

With the passage of time, the effort for the Christianity's harmonization with the current scientific knowledge, and the fight against the heresies that had begun to appear, beginning with the field of Christology, provided the valuable trigger for the ecclesiastical writers, the great thinkers we call the Fathers of the Church, to *theologize*, so as to defend extensively and with sound arguments the truth and universality of the Christian Orthodoxy from its falsifications. Without falling into metaphysical posturing and intellectual acrobatics devoid of content and substance, i.e. rhetorical bubbles, the Fathers defended Christological (and consequently Trinitarian) integrity in order to demonstrate, with robust reasoning, that the True Opinion/Judgement in relation to God does not result from a morbid obsession with the fidelity of a dogmatism independent from life, that is, in the name of a religious obsession, but – as we've already mentioned– it literally constitutes a profoundly human existential need. This is because an imaginary Christ is neither able to save humans, i.e. to make them guileless and incorruptible, nor to reveal the masterly beauty of the Divine Economy, in the unparalleled way that the latter culminates in the Incarnation of the Word.

But in order to build the faultless Christological model that epistemologically purifies the Orthodox Trinitarianism (let us be allowed to briefly recall at this point that, while epistemologically we are moving from Christology to Trinitarianism, the reverse is true in the context of the everlasting Trinity), the Fathers were not content to mechanistically invoke biblical passages, nor to some pietistic but empty of weight and content idiom, in the name of a piety that eliminates judgment and reflection. In opposition to such a sterile dogmatism, a mentality which has never failed to this day to temptingly afflict Orthodoxy, the Church Fathers consumed an enormous amount of grey matter to construct reasons sufficient enough to counteract the Christological truth from its heretical copy. Many lessons, ranging from interesting to fascinating, can be drawn from the confrontation of patristic thought with heretical cacodoxy.

One of these is that doctrines are not divine decrees, which the Church received as complete formulas engraved, as it were, on tablets, like those delivered by the Word of God to Moses. Doctrines are considered, as

indeed they are, the fruit of divine inspiration, but they also involve contemplation; they are imbued with *thought*, i.e. with intellectual human mediation. At the same time, they are historical products. The Bible itself, though divinely inspired, is full of human mediation and vision; as such, it is not Divine Revelation except secondarily – unfortunately we easily forget that in Christianity the revealed truth is not a text, however sacred that it may be, but a Person, Jesus Christ, the only Son and Word of God, the only authentic image of the Father. In fact, the Bible is an *ex post facto* record of the historical events relating to the interaction of the originally fleshless Word with the human race and subsequently to the earthly, intra-historical activity of Christ; it is not Revelation itself in its primary meaning, something which corresponds only to Christ. In this sense, Christianity is not exactly a “religion of the sacred text”, in the sense that Judaism and Islam (whose sacred text, the Qur’an, is taken to be so independent and untouchable in terms of interpretation, that only by misapplication and concession is it even allowed to be translated into languages other than Arabic). But even when it is secondarily viewed, the recorded revealed truth is never direct and “naked”, i.e. unaffected by human processing, as it is evident from a careful reading of the Bible. Consequently, man is not a passive automaton on which the divine truth is mechanically imprinted.

If this is the case for the Bible, it is even more true of theology; apart from spiritual alertness and discernment of spirits, it requires critical thinking as a fundamental prerequisite for its formation. Especially nowadays, in a time of an alarming erosion of reason and the rise of fundamentalism, the necessity of theological reflection for the health of faith must be most categorically brought out. We should further point out that, despite the predominant belief, *theology is not exhausted in spirituality*. Theology is indeed a carrier of spirituality, since there is no Christian theology that is cerebral and de-spiritualized; at the same time, though, it must be understood that not all forms of spirituality have theology. Some of them are non-theological; as such, they are useless: they aim at auto-suggestion and only at creating awe, at constructing a shell of evocative religious atmosphere. Yet, the latter one neither add anything to our self-knowledge, nor illuminate unseen aspects of

the mystery of human existence, or help man in his effort to meet God. A non-theological spirituality creates feelings of devotion which may improve our psychology, but it does nothing to deepen our faith. The result is the atrophy of the intellect and, in general, of Christian reflection.

However, the Orthodox doctrine, as well as the theology that is inspired by it, are not aimed at evocative devotion, much less at pietistic stupor; they are boldly *maximalist*, by firmly proclaiming the Christ's divine humanity and the common, uncreated substratum of essence and will of the Trinitarian substances, thus offering a supra-rational (but not irrational) truth about God, which exceeds the possibilities, if not the limits, of human perception, in whose prison the heretics' minds were living. In this respect, the Fathers did not obey the dictates of Greek reason, but baptized the Word in the holy waters of Faith – not, of course, to abolish it, but to extend it beyond the limits and boundaries of finite human perception. In this respect, the balances are very delicate. The Greek categories of thought have indeed given the Christian witness to God an unprecedented, exciting dynamic that was absent from the Semitic cultural context in which the Bible was written. The difference between “before” and “after” is clearly demonstrated by the fact that historical narratives take the lead in the pages of the Scriptures, while metaphysics lurks there in the background, waiting for its gradual theological emergence; the catalyst of this evolution was the influence of the Greek «λόγος». On the other hand, of course, the living biblical God is far from the way that the ancient Greek imaginary conceived him, a prisoner of Heimarmene and ontologically tethered to the world. The Greek philosophy was not exploited in the Christian context as *a doctrine* but *conceptually*. As we've mentioned before, this explains why the patristic defense of the *maximalist truth* about the God-Man, and, by extension, about the Holy Trinity, was accomplished with an admirable *rational argumentation*, i.e. with a reasoning that is not subject to the endogamous finite logic, but deserves the attention of believers and non-believers alike, precisely because *it justifies* its beliefs. That is, the Church Fathers, wishing to assert the true identity of Christ, reflected deeply and extensively, presenting syllogisms and arguments.

They certainly did not proceed to making arbitrary reflections, i.e., contenting themselves with the possibilities of the human imaginary; in this way, they would neither have exceeded the faint-hearted partiality of heretical Christology, nor would have reached the daring proposition of the (characteristically monotheistic) difference in substance between God and the world, the distinction between the created and the uncreated. Nevertheless, the Church Fathers did not refrain from reasoning. In this sense, to the extent that patristic theology is not ostrich-like and does not rest on regurgitating simplistic platitudes, it rightly belongs to the Greek tradition of «λόγον διδόναι» –to the Greek way of thinking–, which requires that every speaker and writer *are accountable* to the principles of sound reasoning. Furthermore, we should mention at this point that bold theologizing also involves the inevitable precariousness corresponding to it, as it has been demonstrated by the occasional oversights and inaccuracies of the Fathers themselves, which St. Photios himself acknowledges with disarming honesty. As the Holy Father whom we are honoring today wisely observes:

[...] Moreover, how many difficult situations were forcing many Fathers to misrepresent certain things, to adopt some positions with a condescending spirit, to say different things when the unruly rose up, or out of ignorance, since erring is, of course, a human quality. If they misrepresented something or, for some reason that we are now unaware of, deviated from the right course, even at the time when they were not asked to give an opinion, nor was anyone asked them to teach him the truth, we nevertheless recognize them as Fathers, just as we would recognize them if they did not express this opinion ... we will not follow those teachings of them that reveal that they have been deceived [...] ¹⁰.

10. Photios, «Ἐπιστολή Ε΄, Πρὸς τὸν Ἀκυληΐας Μητροπολίτην», in: Φωτίου τοῦ Σοφωτάτου καὶ Ἀγιωτάτου Πατριάρχου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως Ἐπιστολαί, Preface by Io. N. Valettas, London 1864, pp. 195-196 [transl. (modern Greek) P. Chatzipapas]. Here is the original text: «... Πόσαι γὰρ περιστάσεις πραγμάτων πολλοὺς [= πατέρες] ἐξεβιάζοντο, τὰ μὲν παραφθέγγασθαι, τὰ δὲ πρὸς οἰκονομίαν εἰπεῖν, τὰ δὲ καὶ τῶν ἀπειθοῦντων ἐπαναστάντων, τὰ δὲ καὶ ἀγνοίᾳ, οἷα δὴ περιολισθῆσαι ἀνθρώπινον;... Εἰ δὲ παρεφθέξαντο μὲν, ἢ διὰ τινὰ αἰτίαν νῦν ἀγνοουμένην ἡμῖν τῆς εὐθύτητος ἐξετράπησαν, οὐδεμία δὲ ζήτησις αὐτοῖς προσεήνεκται, οὐδ' εἰς μάθησιν τῆς ἀληθείας οὐδεὶς αὐτοὺς παρακάλεσε, Πατέρας μὲν οὐδὲν ἔλαττον αὐτούς, εἰ καὶ μὴ τοῦτο εἶπον, ἐπιγραφόμεθα... τοῖς δὲ λόγοις τούτων, ἐν οἷς παρηνέχθησαν, οὐχ ἐψόμεθα...». For this quote, I am deeply grateful to my colleague and theologian, Dr. Alexia Chatzi.

The annotation of the above quote by the theologian Alexia Chatzi covers us perfectly:

A holy Father tells us clearly that it is indeed possible to find errors in the writings of the Holy Fathers. That is why they are unjustified those who insist on quotations from the Holy Fathers, in order to fanatically argue issues that “were not at issue” at the time they were written, but which, in a later time, were corrected and duly formulated either by other holy Fathers, or by scientific data, if they were scientific issues, or when the time was ripe for them to be more satisfactorily conceived and explained by the Lord’s Church.

The Church is the Church of truth; it is always united with the Living Christ. It does not depend on texts. It does not cling to texts and personal positions when the evidence shows otherwise, nor does it have a problem saying that all its members can (as human beings) make mistakes. And this is made clear in the above text by a holy Father, St. Photios. That the holy Fathers made mistakes is a Patristic teaching!

Therefore, if someone insists on looking for “infallibility” among the saints of the Church, then he must necessarily accept that a saint of the Church, Saint Photios, is wrong!¹¹

What has happened since then and where are we today? For some time now we have been reaping the bitter fruits of the fear of theology, a fear which has been unhappily entrenched in the wake of the “*experience’s*” *over-exaltation* and, consequently, the sluggishness that redeems itself as “spirituality”, the confessional *ideologization* of Orthodoxy, the watchful *pietistic grimness* and *nationalistic navel-gazing*. Theological awakening, as a true imitation of the patristic spirit, is necessary for the re-catechism of the world, a world that –make no mistake– is a post-Christian one.

11. <https://www.facebook.com/alexia.chatzi>.