



WHAT DOES THEOLOGY, ACTUALLY, DO? ** THE INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE IN THE EAST IN THE LIFE OF THE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH: AN OVERVIEW OF CURRENT STATUS - TOMORROW'S PROSPECTS***

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Abstract:

The contemporary synchronic approach to the interpretation has created **a Koine (= common) Language which interconnects** the interpreters of the East and the West. In the East itself, the reception of the explanatory tradition, as it is practiced in academic field, does not influence satisfactorily the life of the Church. This may be due to the fact that audiences in the East put great emphasis on the dramatic representation and revival of a narrative, rather than on the audition of "sacred" texts itself. The biblical passages are considered as *wedding invitations* or as *byzantine chants*, where the notes don't have an *independent value* but are related to their context / relevance, creating a monophonic but also antiphonic melody that is "re+cyceled" or finished with the reference to the Eternity, concentrated in the phrase NYN KAI AEI KAI EIS TOYΣ AIΩNΑΣ. Paul, as a messenger par excellence, as well as an explainer of the message / Gospel in the east Mediterranean World, through his erotic - "psychomatical" relationship with *the Truth* of his "message" (Evangelium), was a *living image* of the Crucified (not yet the Risen Christus comp. Rom. 6), calling others *father and mother / nurturer* to his *imitation*. The letters were written not to be read but to *be listened* to as a part of a Gathering that took place in the frame of κυριακόν δείπνο, which revived the last events of Jesus' life and awaited him as a Judge and bridegroom.

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INTRODUCTION

The paradox of the New Testament Interpretation is the following: in relation to other disciplines of Theology, it has as its source only one book with 890 pages (Nestle-Aland²⁸). And yet countless Commentaries have been written and many interpretive techniques have been applied to extract its message. There is also a paradox with us, the Greek Interpreters: we speak to a large extent the language of the New Testament. And yet our presence in the international literature is not as expected. In the Greek Orthodox area up to the 60s the interpretation of the New Testament was identified with the accumulation of the citations – comments of the Church Fathers (Catenae). This was probably the reaction of the Eastern Church to the propagandistic use of the Bible by certain evangelical missionaries in the 19th century.

Particularly the introduction **of the synchronic approach** alongside the historical-critical method offered to the Eastern interpreters the opportunity for a more meaningful dialogue in the frame of SBL and SNTS¹ with the Western colleagues, who additionally appreciate the fact that the *first audiences* of the Gospel were located in the East Mediterranean world. The possibility to approach each book of New Testament as an integrated composition – a “universe” (*text < textile*), but also as part of the Canon (comp. *canonical approach*), in terms of the rhetorical and narrative Criticism, instead of the sterile anatomy of the texts (Form – and Redaction Criticism), was enthusiastically accepted in the East as a *Koine Language* of listening to the texts together with their Western colleagues. The ongoing studies of the mechanisms of (i) the oral Tradition (comp. the meaning of the verb *παραδίδωμι* I Cor. 15:3), (ii) the cultural Memory and (iii) the textualisation contributed even more positively in this direction, while in the postmodern ages the introduction of the *Space Turn* and the *new Materialism*, allow larger areas of cooperation. Indeed, the main Problem in the biblical *Hermeneia* remains the same from the time of the First Church and the establishment of the two *schools* of Interpretation in Antioch and Alexandria: it's about the danger to turn *Exegesis* (explanation) into *Eisegesis* (projection on the text of a variety of *subjective views of the reader* or rather the *listeners*)².

And yet we must admit that the *Bible Hermeneutics* in the East has not influenced to the same extent the Orthodoxy itself (i.e., the pastoral service, the Sermon and in general the religiosity of the Modern Greeks). Of course, is still missing in Greece a series of modern Commentaries on the books of N.T. or a special Journal of biblical Exegesis, where those who are interested (pastors, scholars of other fields etc.) can acquire an overview of the *diachrony* and the *synchrony* in the biblical Hermeneia up to date. But I think the problem is deeper and lies in the following points:

(a) The average orthodox believer focuses on the second part of the Eucharist, not the *Liturgy / Sacrament of Logos* but the Liturgy of the Gifts, although Father Alexander Smemann³ underlines that the second part without the first, evolves into

neutestamentlicher Ethik / Contexts and Norms of New Testament Ethics Band VII Herausgegeben von Ulrich Volp, Friedrich W. Horn und Ruben Zimmermann Tübingen 2016; 355-374 Die himmlische Liturgie (Apk. 4-5) in ihrem Kontext und die Interaktion mit der irdischen Liturgie "Poetik und Intertextualität in der Apokalypse / Poetics and Intertextuality in the Book of Revelation" (WUNT I; Mohr Siebeck; ed. by Tobias Nicklas, Stefan Alkier & Thomas Hieke). 437-457.

- 1 Especially in Greece, women colleagues were emerged in the field of Interpretation with an alternative look at the texts.
- 2 We must underline the biblical Texts were written to be the object of *listening* in the frame of a *Synaxis / commune*
- 3 *Η Λατρευτική Αναγέννηση και η Ορθόδοξη Εκκλησία*, Larnaka: Simatoros 1989, 110.



"magic". The main emphasis, as it is proven also during this period of Covid19, is located exclusively on Holy Communion of the common cup, not on the coexistence / *koinonia* around the same table. We, as Greek Orthodox Church, to a large extent, face also the same Problem with that of I Cor. 11, as already in the first century the Lord's Supper (κυριακόν δεῖπνο) was regarded as a sacred meal and as individual *φάρμακον αθανασίας* (medicament of immortality; Ignatius to the Ephesians 20:2).

(b) The deficit in the knowledge of the Old Testament is also enormous in the Greek Orthodox Church, as its texts are neither heard nor preached in the Eucharistic Synaxis, although their message (the *one living God of the Fathers and of Exodus*, the deconstruction of idols and the solidarity to the *holy trinity* of socially insignificant and weak [widows, orphans and converts]) is nowadays as relevant as that of the New Testament. Here we must also note two things: (i) Greek Old Testament was the Scripture(s) par excellence of the Early Church, although the Interpretation of its Texts was Christological. (ii) Especially in the modern research the Studies on the Theology of the *Greek Old Testament* (Septuaginta) are in full swing.

(c) The sermon in the Orthodox Church usually until today is not the announcement of the Coming Basileia but *the daydreaming* of the glorious (Byzantine) past and / or the interconnection of the Religion with the national identity. This is the exact opposite of Paul's priority of the *faith Christi* against / versus τα έργα του Νόμου (as "identity markers" of an elected nation)

(d) The medium of the communication of the Evangelion in the frame of Synaxis as well in the public Forum is not the "*Koine Greek*" (the usage of *daily moments* as parables / metaphors of the Basileia / Reign of God) but usually a *wooden* (largely standardized) language.

I. EXEGETING AS EASTERN INTERPRETER THE FIRST EXEGESIS/ RECEPTION OF PAULINE GOSPEL

In this article I will reflex about how Paul's sermon *from the beginning* was transmitted in Greek cities and what should be added *today* to the explanatory methods for those of us who deal with Interpretation to have a more active reception (impact) in the religious communities but in the society also⁴. I rely, among other things, (a) on the archaeological discoveries in Athens⁵ after the excavations for the Metro in combination and (b) on those in the Asclepieion of Epidaurus which in the near future will be opened to the Public.⁶

4 We now live in a World where Christianity (a) is viewed by the political Government as one of the many religious Communities. (b) It is again a conscious choice in a multicultural environment, in which everyone becomes the "director" of their identity. Thus, the attitude of the protagonists of N.T. towards (i) the globalized environment of the Universe, (ii) the "public space" - the market (the forum) of the City and (iii) the prefecture / management of the House, I think it can be used as a model for which can be the functionality of the course of the Orthodox Religious in the public space and especially the School. Ultimately, the discovery of the New Testament and the Bible in general can actively help the theological world to articulate a "political" discourse of real hope.

5 See my book *Ο Απόστολος Παύλος κηρύττει στην Αθήνα: Η πρώτη συνάντηση Χριστιανισμού και Ελληνισμού*, Athens: Ennoia 2019, passim.

6 Vasilios Lambrinouidakis, *Το Ασκληπιείο της Επιδαύρου: Τόπος φροντίδας σώματος και ψυχής*. <https://www.blod.gr/lectures/to-asklipleio-tis-epidayrou-topos-frontidas-somatos-kai-psyhis/>



In Greece but also in the Imperium Romanum generally, especially in the 1st AD, very popular⁷ were the deities who offered *healing* which was conceived as a *holistic matter* (as *sotiria / sotirion* = becoming *whole*) and as means to achieve *eudaimonia* (physically and mentally, avoiding among other things the influence of evil spirits). Already after the pandemic of Athens (429 - 427 BC), and in fact on a *private* initiative, the cult of Thessalian *Asclepius* was introduced from Epidaurus in Athens through Piraeus. This particular cult was interrelated both topographically and essentially with the theater of Dionysus, the cradle of ancient tragedy and comedy, but also the seat of the meeting / *synaxis* of the Ecclesia of the Demos in the Greco-Roman years. Additionally, in honor of Asclepius was dedicated the fourth day (the 17th) of the Eleusinian Mysteries (Epidaureia), where the drama of the abduction of Persephone and her search by Demeter *was revived* not only through the *ritual* (= imitation), but also the *direction of the space* (the architecture of her Temenos).

The abovementioned most popular in the Graeco - Roman World deities (Asclepius,⁸ Dionysus, Demeter and the imported from East Isis [a sanctuary in her honor exists in Epidaurus]) share the following common characteristics:

(a) They experience passion (*pathos*) and resurrection, which act therapeutically not only for the person(s) who *imitate(s)* the deity (for example through sleep / *εγκοίμησις* in the abaton), but also for the community (το κοινόν) and the Universe (fertility) and its eternal future. According to Pliny the Elder, in the Greco-Roman years *the "path" to the eternal glory of becoming a god was to help the man* (Nat. Hist. 2.18).

(b) The *descent* to Hades and *the ascent* to Earth were revived (εν+θυμούμαι / ἀναμμνήσκω) not only through the rhythmic *recitation* of sacred texts, but (as it is already noticed) principally through the *μέθεξις*. I mentioned also above the stark interconnection in southern slope of Acropolis between the *Sanctuary* of Asclepius and the *Theater* (drama) of Dionysus (the god – sponsor of the abundance of wine and joy), whose luxurious *parousia* (arrival) in the *beautiful town* (κλεινόν άστυ) was accomplished through the sea on a ship.⁹

(c) Another experience par excellence in Epidaurus, after the sacrifice on the θυμέλη (< θύω) in the center of the orchestra, was *theoxenia*: the *common sacred meal*, while god was invisibly present. It should be noted that in antiquity deities were not ubiquitous. Indeed Aelius Aristides (2 cent. AD *Ιεροί Λόγοι*, which (title) in fact is translated not only as "Sacred Tales" but also as "Sacred Ceremonies")¹⁰ proclaims

7 Pnyx, the seat of the church of the municipality, in the Greco-Roman years, had been transformed into a place of worship of the God of the Most High.

8 The cult of Asclepius is introduced in Rom on an island of Tiber following the example of Dionysus in Athens.

9 It was revived either by a boat moving on wheels or by a cruiser. When Marcus Antonius visited Athens, he was transformed into the specific deity and sealed his visit through a "marriage".

10 277.26: ἡ κωμωδία γε τὸ λοιπὸν ἐστίν, ἔλεγον δὲ ἀναφέρων εἰς τοὺς Τελμισσέας τοῦ Ἀριστοφάνους ὡς ἐκεῖ λόγῳ τις ἠγωνίζετο, ἔργῳ δὲ οὐ. ἐνάτη δὲ ἐδόκειν ὡς ἐν Σμύρνῃ περὶ ἐσπέραν προσιέναι τῷ ἱερῷ τοῦ Ἀσκληπιοῦ τοῦ ἐν τῷ Γυμνασίῳ, προσιέναι δὲ μετὰ Ζήνωνος, καὶ εἶναι τὸν Νεῶν μείζω τε καὶ ἐπειληφότα τῆς Στοᾶς ὅσον ἐστὶ τὸ ἐστρωμένον. ἅμα δὲ καὶ ὡς περὶ Προνάου τούτου διενεσοῦμην. προσευχομένου δὲ μου καὶ ἀνακαλοῦντος τὸν θεόν, ὁ Ζήνων οὐδὲν ἔφη προσηνέστερον, λέγων δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς τὸν θεόν, καταφυγὴν τε καὶ τοιαῦτα ὠνόμαζε. περιεσκόπου δὲ ὡς ἐν τῷ προνάῳ δὴ τούτῳ, ἀνδριάντα ἐμαυτοῦ· καὶ τότε μὲν γε ὡς ἐμαυτοῦ ὄντα ἐώρων, πάλιν δὲ ἐδόκει μοι εἶναι αὐτοῦ τοῦ Ἀσκληπιοῦ μέγας τις καὶ καλός. ταῦτα καὶ ὡς ὄναρ μοι φανθέντα αὐθις διηγείσθαι πρὸς αὐτὸν τὸν Ζήωνα· καὶ ἐδόκει σφόδρα ἐντιμον τὸ τοῦ ἀνδριάντος εἶναι. αὐθις δὲ αὐτὸν ἀνδριάντα ἐώρων, ὡς ἐν τῇ Στοᾷ τῇ προμήκει τοῦ Γυμνασίου. περὶ δὲ Βαλανείου τοιαύδε ἔδοξα.



the identification of the healing deity with its beloved – «suffering servant». This proves the deep interaction between the worship of the rising from the dead deity on the one hand with the healing / catharsis and *revitalisation* – happiness (eudaimonia: ΥΓΕΙΑ, ΕΥΝΟΜΙΑ, ΕΙΡΗΝΗ, ΕΝΤΙΜΟΣ ΠΛΟΥΤΟΣ¹¹) on the other hand. In this healing, according again to Aristides, important role play the anointment (χρίσμα > Χριστός¹²).

(d) Crucial role in the abovementioned *koinonia* with the risen deity and the process of identity *making / building of community* (θίασος) of devotees play the thanksgiving / eucharistic hymns (paeans) – composed and sung by inspired by *the Muses* persons (“theologians”). These singers as a reward taste a special part of the sacrifices. In these hymns, the object of narration and *living remembrance* are the benefits (αρετές, ευεργεσίες, δυνάμεις) of the deity, its course and especially the healings performed for the sake of man¹³. This narration - aretology by (or before) the cured and the community was escorted by the *suggestive* language of the body (gestures and movements). The main event of the remembering (re+collection) / revival of the course of the Rising Deity takes usually place in the so-called all-night feast (*pannykhis*). During the imperial years, as A. Hanriotis¹⁴ has proved, take place the so-called “domestication” of the Night and its utilization through various opportunities.

The main issue of these above-mentioned ceremonies was Health and Happiness, which as well as the hope of posthumous survival (ηδεία ελπίζ) were considered the highest Goods. It should be noted that these events were not connected only with Epidaurus or its subsidiary center in Pergamon, but also with other areas in Greece, such as Doric Megara according to the testimony of Pausanias from the 2nd c. A.D (1.43.6).

11 These are the components of the Happiness according to the popular orphic hymn to Demeter and many Inscriptions. See <https://www.theoi.com/Text/OrphicHymns1.html> [hymn 39 TO CERES [DEMETER ELEUSINIA] [https://el.wikipedia.org/wiki/%CE%94%CE%AE%CE%BC%CE%B7%CF%84%CF%81%CE%B1_\(%CE%BC%CF%85%CE%B8%CE%BF%CE%BB%CE%BF%CE%B3%CE%AF%CE%B1\)](https://el.wikipedia.org/wiki/%CE%94%CE%AE%CE%BC%CE%B7%CF%84%CF%81%CE%B1_(%CE%BC%CF%85%CE%B8%CE%BF%CE%BB%CE%BF%CE%B3%CE%AF%CE%B1))

12 315.7: τὰ δ' ὑπὲρ τὸν τράχηλον καὶ τὰς ἀπὸ τῶν νῶτων κατατάσεις καὶ τὸν ἀκριβούμενον ὀπισθότονον ἤδη τόνδε τρόπον ἰάσατο εὐθύς, ἐπειδὴ τὴν δύσπνοιαν ἐξίασατο. χρήμα ἔφη βασιλικὸν εἶναι· χρήναι δ' αὐτὸ λαβεῖν παρὰ τῆς γυναικός. καὶ πῶς ἐκ τούτων ἐφάνη διάκονος τῶν βασιλείων πρὸς τῷ τοῦ Τελεσφόρου νεῶ τε καὶ ἔδει, λευχείμων τε καὶ ἐζωσμένος, καὶ κατὰ τὰς θύρας, οὐ ἡ Ἄρτεμις, ἦει ἔξω ὑπὸ κήρυκος, φέρων τῷ βασιλεῖ τὸ λοιπὸν τοῦ χρήματος. τὸ μὲν δὴ ὄναρ ὡς ἀμυδρῶς ἀπομνημονεῦσαι τοιοῦτον μάλιστα ἐγένετο. ἐπεὶ δ' ἐλθὼν εἰς τὸ ἱερὸν γίγνομαι περιμῶν κατὰ τὸν Τελεσφόρον, ἐπέρχεται ὁ νεωκόρος ὁ Ἀσκληπιακός, καὶ ὡς ἔτυχεν ἐστῶς πρὸς τῷ ἔδει, φράζω πρὸς αὐτὸν τὴν ὄψιν τὴν γενομένην μοι, καὶ ἠρώτων τί ἂν εἴη τὸ χρέμα, ἢ τίς ἂν χρήσαιτο. καὶ ὡς ἀκούσας καὶ θαυμάσας, ὡσπερ εἰώθει, Οὐ μακρὰ ἔφη, ἢ ζήτησις οὐδ' ὁδοῦ πολλῆς, ἀλλ' ἔνθενδε σοι φέρω· κείται γὰρ παρὰ τοῖς ποσὶ τῆς Ὑγείας, ἀρτίως γε θείσης Τύχης ταύτης, ἐπειδὴ τάχιστα ἀνεώχθη τὸ ἱερὸν. ἦν δὲ καὶ ἡ Τύχη γυνὴ τῶν ἐπιφανῶν. καὶ παρελθὼν εἰς Ὑγείας κομίζει τὸ χρέμα· καὶ χρίσμαι ὡς ἔτυχον προσεστῶς. ἦν δὲ καὶ τὸ χρέμα τῆς εὐωδίας θαυμαστὸν οἶον καὶ ἡ δύναμις εὐθύς ἐπίδηλος. θάπτον γὰρ ἢ εἴρηκα ἀνείθη ἢ τάσις. ἐρωτήσας δ' ὕστερον τὸν 315 νεωκόρον ἔγνω ὅτι εἴη κάθαρσις τριῶν, ὅπου τε ᾧ χριὸ μεθα καὶ μύρου ναρδίνου καὶ ἐτέρου μύρου τῶν πολυτελέων, ἔστι δ', οἶμαι, τοῦ φύλλου ἐπώνυμον. σκευάσας δὲ ἐχρῶμην οὕτως τὸ λοιπὸν καὶ πάντα ἐκεῖνα ἐκεχάλαστο. ἐφάνη δὲ καὶ ὁ Τελεσφόρος νύκτωρ, χορεύων περὶ τὸν τράχηλόν μου, καὶ ἀπέλαμπεν ἐν τῷ κατασκευαστῷ τοῦ τοῦ σέλας ὡσπερ ἐξ ἡλίου. See also III.21-22 Anointment at Temple of Hygieia <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/508180520d724b57bc6f03a0651636ea> 315.7

13 Well known is the παιαν of Sophocles who received Asclepius in his home.

14 Hear the Lecture: Aggelos Chaniotis, Dionisia Daskalou. Το ημέρωμα της νύχτας: Η αρχαία Ελλάδα μετά το ηλιοβασίλεμα <https://www.blod.gr/lectures/to-imeroma-tis-nyhtas-i-arhaia-ellada-meta-to-iliobasilema/>



* Based on what I mentioned, I will try to argue that Jesus Christ, as he was proclaimed by Paul in Greece and especially in Athens, he was initially perceived as a healing deity, sharing with them the following main features:

(a) The dual nature (the divine and human),

(b) Philanthropia,

(c) The resurrection from the dead after his pathos (passion) for the sake of the humans. These are at as well the common *identity markers* of Asclepius, Dionysus, Dimitra – Isis. Already John Chrysostom claims that peregrinus Paul was led to the Areopagus, to give clarifications about the new *pair* of therapeutical deities (Jesus and the Resurrection) so as to be imported from the East in the Athenian Pantheon (PG 60.267).¹⁵

(d) Likewise, we already know from Paul's letters that the main identity marker of the *Way* (οἱ τῆς Ὁδοῦ - the first name of the new community. Acts 9:2) was the common Supper, in which the Lord was considered invisibly present.

(e) In this context, those *who belong to Christ* (οἱ τοῦ Χριστοῦ]) reMembered not only once per year, but very often and especially *every Sunday* (Κυριακή: Dominus-day) the night of his last Pesach (the foundation "myth" of their cult) and indirectly his extremely painful and dishonorable *Crucifixion* (the offering of his blood) in favor of the world, as well as his Resurrection – Ὑψωσις (Ascent).

(f) From the same texts (the epistles) we know already as well how important for the argumentation of Paul were the hymns, which proclaim his *kenosis* and *his ascension - enthronement* (Phil. 2, 6-11). The Meeting – κυριακόν δεῖπνον itself was called at the end of the 1 cent. *Eucharist* (Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans 7:1) because *the doxology of God the Abba – Father* was its most prevalent element. Its main feature was the eschatological joy – rejoicing, which is "produced" / generated by the *catharsis* of the fear of the Death and the theosis / christosis through the divine *adoption*.

(g) Of course, as it is concluded from the Acts (20, 7-17) but also from Pliny's letter, this *anamnesis* took place on the night of the first day of the week (X.96.7: soliti statonate lucem convenire). The letter also mentions an oath not to violate specific orders. Of course, the remembering / revival of the Last Supper took place not in a specially designed space, but in the *houses* (domi) of noble Christians (perhaps in the atrium around the *impluvium* [baptismal? "pool"]).

From the above-mentioned arguments, it follows how important in East Mediterranean World for the Hermeneia (which is etymologically connected with the Annunciation of Hermes Trismegistus) is not just the *recitation* / *υπόμνησις* of a narrative, but the imitation of its main theme in the frame of a «choir» / κοινόν. This dramaturgie leads to joy and purification as well as to the mental - psychosomatic health (psychagogia). This means that by the Exegesis of the biblical message nowadays must be taken in account seriously the factor of *figuration* (*παραστατικότητα*) and *performativity* / *επιτελεστικότητα* (in the sense of realization - effecting one's purpose).

¹⁵ 60.267.61: Καὶ γὰρ τὴν ἀνάστασιν Θεὸν τινα εἶναι ἐνόμιζον, ἅτε εἰωθότες καὶ θηλείας σέβειν.



In my opinion this is confirmed par excellence in the *Epistle to Galatians* (one of the oldest texts of Christianity) by the *first* argument Paul in his response (refutatio) to the polemic, being waged against him by the so called (by him) “pseudo-apostles”. Even before his *logical* argumentation on the Scriptures, he primarily argues as follows on the base of the *personal-communal experience* of his audience:

3. 1-4 Ἰῶ ἀνόητοι Γαλάται, τίς ὑμᾶς ἐβάσκανεν, οἷς κατ’ ὀφθαλμοὺς Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς προεγράφη ἐσταυρωμένος; 2 τοῦτο μόνον θέλω μαθεῖν ἀφ’ ὑμῶν· ἐξ ἔργων Νόμου τὸ Πνεῦμα ἐλάβετε ἢ ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως; 3 οὕτως ἀνόητοί ἐστε, ἐναρξάμενοι πνεύματι νῦν σαρκὶ ἐπιτελεῖσθε; 4 τοσαῦτα ἐπάθετε εἰκῆ; εἶ γε καὶ εἰκῆ. 5 ὁ οὖν ἐπιχορηγῶν ὑμῖν τὸ Πνεῦμα καὶ ἐνεργῶν δυνάμεις ἐν ὑμῖν, ἐξ ἔργων Νόμου ἢ ἐξ ἀκοῆς Πίστεως;

Translation: You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified! The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? Did you experience so much for nothing? -- if it really was for nothing. (NRS New Revised Standard Version Bible)

I argue that *Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified* not only by the *preaching of the Cross* (μωρία του κηρύγματος) but also by the language / *mise en scene* (direction) of the body / physiognomy of the apostle of the nations. Already with *erotic language*, Paul has expressed his communion / identification with Christ: *and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* Gal 2:20 [“theology of the Gift”]. In the East we don’t have not examined in depth the place that the issue of the gift (χάρις) occupies in Paul's thought, which is inextricably linked to the institution of *adoption* (υιοθεσία). These are two issues of great importance in the context of the Mediterranean¹⁶, as is of course the praise – thanksgiving of the gift-giver.

Likewise, his *last word* in the Epilogue of this Letter in order to motivate the pathos of his audience (= Ἰσραήλ τοῦ Θεοῦ) is the following: *From now on, let no one make trouble for me; for I carry (βαστάζω = bear, uphold) the marks of Jesus branded on my body* (Galatians 6:17¹⁷). *Through his “Christological Physiognomy”* the Galatians received the Spirit of adoption and *also – in fact they suffered themselves*. I have argued in another article¹⁸ that the πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἶς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ in the same Epistle (Gal 3:28) doesn’t mean that all Christians constitute one “body”, but each Christian personally after his baptism is the icon-bearer of the Crucified Jesus. Paul self has labor pains in order to re-form the image of Christ on his recipients (Gal. 4:19).

16 See J.M. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*. Cambridge 2015.

17 See also 6:11: ἴδετε πηλικοὺς ὑμῖν γράμμασιν ἔγραψα τῇ ἐμῇ χειρὶ. (See what large letters I make when I am writing in my own hand!).

18 Gal 3:6-9.23-29: Orthodox Readings of the Relevant Pauline Texts with Regard to the Debate between the Old and the New Perspectives. Participation, Justification and Conversion Eastern *Orthodox Interpretation of Paul and the Debate between Old and New Perspectives on Paul* (Hgg. A. Despotis), Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck 2017, 181-205.



In the same way but not with the same polemic style, in II Corinthians, the *messenger of God* (Paul) appeals to the same co-experience with the cross Christi (four catalogues of sufferings) to argue for his apostolic authority¹⁹: πάντοτε τὴν νέκρωσιν τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐν τῷ σώματι **περιφέροντες (= bear, carry about)**, ἵνα καὶ ἡ ζωὴ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐν τῷ σώματι ἡμῶν φανερωθῆ. (2Co 4:10: always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body). Let us note that in the 1st and 2nd c. AD, the tradition circulates that the martyrdoms of the body in favor of the faith are combined with extraordinary celestial revelations (see for example the work *The Ascension of Isaiah*).

Of course, the question, that it is not answered in the above analysis, is why Paul, while emphasizing the resurrection of Jesus, recalling the Last Supper and reciting the hymns in his honor, does not refer in his texts (but also on the Areopagus hill) to the healings and miracles of Jesus, as it will happen in the Gospels. On the contrast Paul, whose (according to his opponents) *αἱ ἐπιστολαὶ μὲν βαρεῖαι καὶ ἰσχυραί, ἡ δὲ παρουσία τοῦ σώματος ἀσθενῆς καὶ ὁ λόγος ἐξουθενημένος* (2Co 10:10: *His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible*), applies the following:

- ♦ Ὡστε ἡμεῖς ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν οὐδένα οἶδαμεν κατὰ σάρκα· εἰ καὶ ἐγνώκαμεν κατὰ σάρκα Χριστόν, ἀλλὰ νῦν οὐκέτι γινώσκομεν. ὥστε εἴ τις ἐν Χριστῷ, καινὴ κτίσις· τὰ ἀρχαῖα παρῆλθεν, ἰδοὺ γέγονεν καινὰ. (2Co 5:16-17)

Translation: From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view;¹ even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view,² we know him no longer in that way. (2Co 5:16 NRS)

- ♦ καὶ εἰρηκέν μοι· ἀρκεῖ σοι ἡ χάρις μου, ἡ γὰρ δύναμις ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ τελεῖται. ἡδιστα οὖν μᾶλλον καυχῆσομαι ἐν ταῖς ἀσθενείαις μου, ἵνα ἐπισκηνώσῃ ἐπ' ἐμὲ ἡ δύναμις τοῦ Χριστοῦ. (2Co 12:9)

Translation: But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power¹ is made perfect in weakness." So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. (2Co 12:9 NRS)

¹⁹ We must take in account that one of the main methods to receive and to memorize a text / narrative was to transform the words in pictures / imagery.



CONCLUSIONS²⁰

- ◆ It has already been pointed out that the contemporary synchronic approach of the interpretation has created **a Koine (= common) Language which interconnected** the interpreters of East and West. In the East itself the reception of the explanatory tradition, as it is practiced in academic field, does not influence satisfactorily the life of the Church. This may be due to the fact that audiences in the East over time put place great emphasis on the dramatic representation and revival of a narrative, rather than on the audition of "sacred" texts itself. The biblical passages are considered by modern eastern Theologians as *wedding invitations* or as *byzantine chants*, where the notes don't have independent value but are related to their context / relevance creating a monophonic but also antiphonic melody that is "re-cycled" or it is finished with the reference to the Eternity, concentrated in the phrase ΝΥΝ ΚΑΙ ΑΕΙ ΚΑΙ ΕΙΣ ΤΟΥΣ ΑΙΩΝΑΣ.
- ◆ Paul as par excellence messenger and explainer of the message / Gospel in the east Mediterranean World, through his erotic - "psychomatical" relationship with *the Truth* of his "message" (Evangelium), was a *living image* of the Crucified (not yet the Risen Christus comp. Rom. 6), calling others as *father* and *mother / nurturer* to his *imitation*. The letters were written not to be read but to be listened to as part of a Gathering that took place in the frame of κυριακόν δείπνο, which revived the last events of Jesus' life and awaited him as Judge and bridegroom.
- ◆ Nowadays in the context of the new materialism, we experience the turn of Hermeneutics to the senses and emotions, as well as to everyday (private) life. If we (the Interpreters) want to use a *Koine language* (Common Language) to interact not only with each other but also with the authors of the N.T. and at the same time to influence and interact with the personal and *political* experience of our audience, we must activate the factor of *figuration* and *performativity*. **This is achieved not by playing as actors (υποκριτές) a role in the frame of a Bible drama, but by rediscovering the faith to Jesus Christ and the dynamic of the Synaxis around the same table.** (The abovementioned) Smemann, who argues that the second part of Eucharist without the first, evolves into magic, proclaims also that the Liturgy of Logos, without the second (the Lord's supper) remains *something dry, dead and bony*.

²⁰ June F. Dickie, *The power of performing biblical text today: For trauma-healing, evangelism, discipleship and for supporting careful biblical study/translation* verbum et ecclesia 2021; 202 <https://verbumetecclisia.org.za/index.php/ve/article/view/2233/4770>. Larry W. Hurtado, "Orality, 'Performance' and Reading Texts in Early Christianity," *New Testament Studies* 60 (2014): 321-40. About the discussion, which was provoked by this article see <https://larryhurtado.wordpress.com/2016/03/01/performance-and-reading-in-early-christianity/> Anna Krauß, Jonas Leipziger and Friederike Schücking-Jungblut, *Material Aspects of Reading in Ancient and Medieval Cultures Materiality, Presence and Performance*. *Materiale Textulturen* 26. De Gruyter 2020 <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9783110639247/html>



- ◆ I think that for the “sacred science” Hermeneia, after the discovery of the worthiness the *memory* (remembered Jesus instead of historical Jesus), it is *kairos* (time - chance) to taste as well empirically the psychosomatic *imitation* of the core of the Evangelion (= απόθετον κάλλος) in interaction/κοινωνία with μωρά του κόσμου και εξουθενημένα²¹. Maybe it leads to so the longed today mental - psychosomatic metamorphosis (catharsis and *joy*) of Polis and Kosmos.

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²¹ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong (1Co 1:27 NRS).



"ΠΟΙΑ Η ΕΠΕΝΕΡΓΕΙΑ ΤΗΣ ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑΣ ΣΗΜΕΡΑ"; Η ΕΡΜΗΝΕΙΑ ΤΗΣ ΒΙΒΛΟΥ ΣΤΗΝ ΑΝΑΤΟΛΗ ΚΑΙ ΕΙΔΙΚΟΤΕΡΑ ΣΤΗΝ ΟΡΘΟΔΟΞΗ ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ ΤΗΣ ΕΛΛΑΔΟΣ: ΑΠΟΤΙΜΗΣΗ ΚΑΙ ΠΡΟΟΠΤΙΚΕΣ

Summary:

Περιγράφεται ο Διάλογος που διεξάγεται σήμερα μεταξύ Ανατολής και Δύσης στο πεδίο της Ερμηνευτικής της Βίβλου, στην οποία στηρίζεται σήμερα το οικοδόμημα του δυτικού Πολιτισμού. Σημειώνονται προοπτικές από κοινού ανακάλυψης του «Ευαγγελίου» (=μηνύματος της ελπίδας) μέσω της αξιοποίησης της επιτελεστικότητας, της γλώσσας τους σταυροαναστάσιμου Σώματος αλλά και της μελωδικότητας της ακρόασης.

Keywords:

Συγχρονική προσέγγιση,
Ερμηνεία,
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Επιτελεστικότητα,
Κάθαρση.