

THE HOLY SCRIPTURE AND THE HOLY LITURGY OR ABOUT THE ORGANIC RELATION OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURE TO THE HOLY TRADITION

Abstract

The main purpose of the paper is to offer a perspective on the Liturgy conceived as being concerned not only with physis/matter/history, but also with a spiritual growth and enrichment of the entire human being, of the man rooted in eternity, and one of these roots in eternity of the modern/postmodern man is (or should become again) the Revelation. Throughout this research, the concept is understood as involving both the Holy Scripture and the Holy Tradition. Secondly, the paper will emphasize the fact that there is an unbreakable relation between the Holy Scripture and the Holy Liturgy through the work of the Holy Spirit, while trying to resume the biblical sources for the text of the Eastern Christian Liturgy.



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Father Stăniloae stated very clearly the fact that “every Holy Liturgy brings us closer to the Kingdom of the Holy Trinity, which is going to last forever”, and if we speak about getting closer, we imply that it has already been installed, or at least introduced as teleological announcement of the whole creation. But I would not appeal too much to the logical-discursive structures, because the Liturgy is not only concerned with physis/matter/history, but with a spiritual growth and enrichment of the entire human being, of the man rooted in heaven (Popescu 2001), in eternity. One of these roots in eternity of the modern/postmodern man is (or should become again) the Revelation, and I am using this generous concept because it involves both the Holy Scripture and the Holy Tradition, so the man rooted in heaven is the man with the “living memory” (not with a depositum-like memory), not as a historical accumulation, but as an accumulation of hermeneutical, historical and meta-historical meanings (Ricoeur 1995) which, for us,

mean more than exegesis, they mean mistagogy (St. Maximus the Confessor 2000), and the Eastern mistagogy is always a liturgical mistagogy (Nellas 2002), a practical event, not a theory.

So we can observe that the Holy Scripture is a means (Yannaras 2007, 9-12; 48) of re-grafting us in eternity. According to this deductive logic we would be tempted to say that the second means of rooting us into eternity is the Holy Liturgy. In this respect, I would confine myself to introduce a single argument of hymnographical/ prayer type: “make us worthy to partake of your heavenly and awesome Mysteries in the eternal day of your Kingdom” (Vintilescu 1972), text which determined liturgists to speak about a pre-tasting of eternity even during this historical existence, and “standing in the Church of your greatness, it seems to me as if I was in heaven, Holy Mother of God” (Ceaslov 1993, 73). But there is no need to get into the captivating and depersonalized game of contemporary logical-philosophical demonstration, which imposes itself as an imperative without being given/offered like in the case of the liturgical experience of God. It is enough to state again a clear evidence, that is the fact that “there is an unbreakable relation between the Holy Scripture and the Holy Liturgy through the work of the Holy Spirit: by means of the Holy Liturgy, the Scripture becomes “a Holy Scripture for continuous study” (Anania 2007, 8) in view of incarnating the Word. I shall speak about this act of realizing the “entheosic” aspect of the Liturgy while trying to resume the biblical sources for the text of the Eastern Christian Liturgy. In this way we can conclude, not as a theoretic act, but as the object of our faith, the fact that the Holy Liturgy is a place of our personal conceiving into the Word, a theme too large and too beautiful to be exhausted in a synthetic expression; this is why I shall only confine myself by saying that it has a very important place in/for the logotic articulation of the world.

The Holy Scripture – the living, continuous, eternal word of God

Saint Maximus the Confessor was convinced that “just as man is mortal according to what is seen and immortal according to what is unseen, it is just as such with the Holy Scripture, the letter passes, but the spirit hidden within never ceases to be.” (St. Maximus the Confessor 2000, 15) But today, in our immediate contemporaneity, we encounter the following aspect: more and more the Scriptures are approached exclusively from the perspective of scientific epistems specific to the humanities area and thus we are ever increasingly ignoring their revealed content, their relevance for Christian life

and implicitly their anastasic testimony. That is why we come to phenomena like the one generated by the Da Vinci Code, by Juda's Gospel, the Jerusalemite sarcophagus etc.; faced with these phenomena, we theologians must formulate the confession of our Christian faith. But the greatest confessor in this case is the treasury of the Holy Tradition, the patristic thesaurus meant to be an argument to the possibility of incarnating the Word and also to be a model of living and testimony.

For this reason I would like to reiterate briefly the patristic way of approaching the Scripture and I consider necessary to focus our attention towards their holy enthusiasm, in which the Holy Fathers compare the Scripture to a spring of living waters, to a source of wisdom (St. Gregory of Nazianz PG 37, 692), treasure (St. John Chrysostom PG 59, 97), precious stones (St. John Chrysostom PG 59, 32), protection against sin (St. John Chrysostom PG 55, 453) and, finally, the entrance to the Kingdom of Heaven (St. John Chrysostom PG 56, 69). How beautiful that is, what a wonderful way has God revealed to us!

I shall insert here those elements from the patristic discourse which testify the constant preoccupation of the Holy Fathers for the identification and assuming/incarnating the spiritual meaning of the Holy Scripture. And I am taking a first example from Saint Basil the Great, to whom the importance of the Scripture lies in the fact that its entire content is “written for the strengthening and salvation of our souls” (St. Basil the Great 1968, 483). Similarly, for Saint John Chrysostom, the illustrious representative of the Antioch exegetical school, everything that is written in the holy books: “narratives, phrases, words, small particles or even letters are important only then when they serve the author in expressing the truths revealed to him by God for our salvation” (St. John Chrysostom PG 53, 198). Or if salvation is one of the Holy Scripture's purposes, as the Fathers state, then everything contained in it will not have to suffer under the burden of time. The Scripture really is a letter of divine love addressed to man, but a living, continuous and eternal one. It addresses not a human hypostasis or a generation placed at a certain point on the history axis, but it addresses the entire humanity, from all times and places, because those contained in the Holy Scripture are not simple words, they are “words of the Holy Spirit” (St. John Chrysostom PG 54, 514), words of the divine grace who determined the author to write (St. John Chrysostom PG 39, 17-18), words of God spoken through the prophets, “the prophets are the mouth of God” (St. John Chrysostom PG 56, 110). Saint Maximus had a similar opinion, showing that the Scripture, through its spiritual

meaning, transcends the restrictive limits of the Cartesian: “As far as the letter retires, the spirit progresses. And as far as the shadows of the temporal service disappear, the truth of faith comes to light whole and bright, through which and for which it is and was written and it is called Scripture”. From this conviction results the Fathers' insistence on the idea that “every religious teaching found in the holy books, no matter of the person that actually wrote them down, belongs to God, who is the main author of the Holy Scripture” (St. John Chrysostom PG 53, 65), idea which contemporary approaches seem to forget when analyzing and interpreting the text of the Scripture from a predominantly historical perspective. And here I would insert another idea from Saint Maximus the Confessor: the meaning of the Scripture, this living word of God, reveals to man only at the same time with the knowledge of God, through the Spirit (St. Maximus the Confessor 1983, 158), at the moment when the soul is liberated from all “material mist”, or this cleansing that opens the soul for encountering the Spirit is more evidently accomplished in the Holy Liturgy (Louth 1999).

The realization of a continuum of the word in the liturgy – about the sources / biblical foundations of the liturgy's text

This year is dedicated to St. Basil the Great, overwhelming personality with an oeuvre that could be rightfully considered an extended commentary of the Holy Scripture (Neaga 1979: 133-45). These two elements seem sufficient to justify my option; I have chosen the text of the Holy Liturgy which bears his name in order to argue the possibility/ necessity of realizing the continuum, the perennial aspect of the Word in the Liturgy.

Before entering effectively in the analysis and concise presentation of biblical foundations that constitute the basis of this liturgical text, I would like to introduce here only a few landmarks regarding St Basil's way of placing himself in regard to the text of the Holy Scripture. As we have already seen, for him, the entire Scripture is “written for the strengthening and salvation of our souls” (St. Basil the Great 1968, 483); for this reason, he recommends incessantly to his faithful to meditate and study thoroughly the words of the Holy Scripture, through which we can reach the knowledge of God, His resemblance and obtain salvation. His interpretative discourse evidently shows that St. Basil regards the Scripture as a unitary reality, the essential element which determines this unity is, for him, the Christocentric character of the Holy Scripture, evident from the first pages to the last revelation.

Another aspect regards the inspired character of the Scripture. St. Basil considers that, by cooperating with the Holy Spirit, both the hagiographer and the one who approaches wholeheartedly the Scripture become “a dwelling place of the Spirit's thoughts” (St. Basil the Great 1968, 253). I have introduced this type of language because it clearly shows that St. Basil perceived the text of the Scripture in its dynamic dimension, he read it without interruption not only for identifying historical information, but for incarnating it, and towards this ideal he tirelessly encouraged his faithful. I would add a last coordinate of St. Basil's exegesis, that of its ecclesial character: the interpretation is always made in a liturgical environment (Basarab 1979, 299), because the Church is the place of authentic incarnation / living of the Scripture. Only interpreted in this environment, the Holy Scripture truly is “spiritual light” and “mysterious wisdom” (St. Basil the Great PG 29,9A). And this is the explanation of the abundance of biblical texture in his liturgical creations.

I have opted for an analysis of the liturgical anaphora; I shall very briefly insert the biblical expressions introduced by St. Basil in the two prayer-texts. The first one introduces addressing formulas whose scriptural origin can be easily identified: Lord, thou [art] God (Acts 4:24), Father (Lk 23:34) the Almighty (Rev 1:8), thou [art] the God, [even] thou alone (Is 37:16) Lord, thou [art] God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is (Acts 4:24), who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens (Heb 8:1), behold the depths (3 Children 1:31), God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth (2Tm 2:25); God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom 15:6) or simply Father (1Pt 1:17), the only true God (Jn 17:3) through Him the Holy Spirit was manifested (Jn 14:26) who is the Spirit of truth (Jn 14:17) and source of holiness (Jn 7:37-39). Christ is our hope (1 Tm 1:1), the great God (Tb 3:16), the image of Your lovingkindness (Ws 7:26) and the One who reveals in Himself the Father (Jn 14:9).

The doxological content of prayer invokes new scriptural passages when it calls God unseen (Col 1:15) unchangeable (Jas 1:17), living Word (Heb 4:12), life (Jn 14:6) true Light (Jn 1:9), sanctification (1 Cor 1:30) and also when it states the impossibility of man to show forth all thy praise (Ps 9:14), tell of all Your wonderful deeds (Ps 70:18) at all times (Ps 33:1).

In what way relates man and the entire creation, both seen and unseen, with God? All things are subject to You (Sir 35:17), giving You eternal glorification (Jdg 15:14), serving You all together (Rev 7:15), You are praised by the angels (Pr. of Man. 1:15),

Round about You stand the Seraphim, one with six wings and the other with six wings; with two they cover their faces; with two they cover their feet; with two they fly, crying out to one another with unceasing voices and ever resounding praises... Holy, Holy, Holy (Is 6:2-3). An appropriate attitude of the human being standing before God is synthesized in expressions taken from the book of Psalms: praise You, hymn You (Ps 91:1), bless You, worship You (Ps: 62:5), to stand before Him with broken and a contrite heart (Ps 50:18).

The prayer before the anamnetical moment could be considered a synthesis of the salvation history, beginning with the creation of man according to the image and resemblance of God and to the salvation from death through the work of Christ. The prayer's text begins with a series of doxological formulas: there are no bounds to the majesty of Your holiness (Ps 144:3,5), You are holy in all Your works (Tb 3:2). Then follow the fundamental landmarks of salvation history, the first one is the moment when God has made man by taking dust from the earth (Gn 2:7), honoring him with His own image (Gn 1:27) placing him in a garden of delight (Gn 2:8, 15), promising him eternal life and the enjoyment of everlasting blessings in the observance of His commandments (Gn 2:16-17). But when he disobeyed You (Gn 3:11), he was led astray by the deception of the serpent (Gn 3:13), becoming subject to death through his own transgressions (Rom 6:23), he was expelled from paradise into this world (Gn 3:24) in Your righteous judgment (Ps 118:75) returning him to the earth from which he was taken (Gn 3:19).

The punishment of man's sin is followed by the annunciation of salvation through a second birth (Tb 3:5), because the sins of man do not overwhelm the infinite compassion of God: You did not forever reject Your creature whom You made (Ps 102:14), nor did You forget the work of Your hands (Is 64:7), because of Your tender compassion, You visited him in various ways (Is 4:31). Preparations for the incarnation of the Son were made through the prophets (Heb 1:1), You gave us the law to help us (Ps 18:8), You appointed angels as guardians (Heb 1:14). At the fullness of time (Gal 4:4), You spoke to us through Your Son Himself, through whom You created the ages (Heb 1:2), He, being the splendor of Your glory and the image of Your being, upholding all things by the word of His power (Heb 1:3) thought it not robbery to be equal with You... He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, conforming to the body of our lowliness (Phil 2:6-7), But, being God before all ages (Jn 1:1-2) He appeared on earth and lived with humankind (1 Tim 3:16) Becoming incarnate from a holy Virgin (Mt 1:25).

The work of the Son of God is presented in a detailed manner: that He might change

us in the likeness of the image of His glory (Phil 3:21), Your only begotten Son, who is in Your bosom, God and Father (Jn 1:18) born of a woman, the holy Theotokos and ever virgin Mary; born under the law (Gal 4:4) to condemn sin in His flesh (Eph 2:15) so that those who died in Adam may be brought to life in Him (1 Cor 15:22), He lived in this world, and gave us precepts of salvation (Jn 3:17), Releasing us from the delusions of idolatry (1 Tim 1:9), He acquired us for Himself, as His chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation (1 Pt 2:9), Having cleansed us by water (Eph 5:25). The work of the Saviour culminates in the death, Resurrection and Ascension to heavens: He gave Himself as ransom to death (Eph 5:2), descending into Hades through the cross, that He might fill all things with Himself (1 Pt 3:18- 19), He loosed the bonds of death (1 Cor 15:25-26), He rose on the third day (1 Cor 15:4), having opened a path for all flesh to the resurrection from the dead (1 Cor 15:20) since it was not possible that the Author of life would be dominated by corruption (Acts 2:27), Ascending into heaven, He sat at the right hand of Your majesty on high (Heb 1:3) He will come to render to each according to His works (Rom 2:6). The final of the prayer evokes the voluntarily death of Christ (Jn 18:4) Who left us remembers of His Passion (Lk 22:19), thus introducing the anamnetical moment (1 Cor 11:23-24).

I have chosen this kind of presentation in order to easily observe the natural way in which St. Basil introduces in the formulation of the anaphora this succession of expressions alternatively selected from the Old and New Testament. For me, this is nothing else than the forte argument for an understanding of the Holy Scripture as a unitary reality, due to the conviction of the Fathers that “both in the Old and New Testament spoke the One and the same Spirit” (St. John Chrysostom PG 51, 282). However, in the case of the two prayers, we have the possibility to observe the fact that the liturgical act makes us contemporary, subjects of this wonderful salvation history, offering us the possibility of distinguishing in the profane history the eschatological orientation of the created world / existence.

On the importance and role of the biblical readings in the Holy Liturgy speaks Saint Nicolas Cabasilas. His interpretations regarding the presence and signification of scriptural readings in the Liturgy are explicit; they testify the organic liaison existent between the revealed Word and the Holy Liturgy. Saint Nicolas Cabasilas clearly states what is the place and signification of the biblical elements introduced in the liturgical ritual: they purify the heart from that “material mist” mentioned by Saint Maximus: “The readings from the Holy Scripture, which teach us both the loving kindness of

God to man and His justice and judgment, give birth not only to our love but also to our fear of Him, thus making us more zealous in fulfilling His commandments” (Cabasilas 2004, 2). But Saint Nicolas Cabasilas considers that these chants and readings from the Holy Scripture which were introduced in the ritual of the Holy Liturgy fulfill a double role, being “divine Scriptures and divinely inspired words, they sanctify those who read and chant them; but as they were chosen and arranged in a certain manner, they figure the coming and earthly living of Christ” (Cabasilas 2004, 24). The Gospel announces Christ, but also impersonates Him (Cabasilas 2004, 29). Thus, “there is nothing stopping them (readings and chants from the Holy Scriptures) from doing both, on the one hand sanctifying the faithful, on the other symbolizing Christ's iconomy” (Cabasilas 2004, 24).

The importance of the Gospel reading is overwhelming: the doxology that both precedes and succeeds it is lifted up by the faithful as ones aware of the fact that “the Holy Gospel impersonates Christ and if we have found Christ, we have it all.” (Cabasilas 2004, 32)

For Saint Nicholas Cabasilas, all the scriptural readings have a preparative role in view of the culminant moment, they “prepare and purify us before the great sanctification of the Holy Mysteries” (Cabasilas 2004, 32). And the final of the liturgical ritual is enriched with „words selected from the Holy Scripture”: “Be the name of the Lord blessed...” and the others (Ps 112:2; Dan 2:20), followed by “a doxological and thanksgiving psalm”: “I will extol the Lord at all times” (Ps 33:1) (Cabasilas 2004, 78).

Through the reading from the epistles, Saint Maximus considers that “we acknowledge our duties to fulfill”, “we learn the laws of divine combats following which we will enter victorious in the Kingdom of Christ” (St. Maximus the Confessor 2000, 18). Moreover, the reading of the Holy Gospel “shows, in particular to those who are striving, the sufferance to be endured for the word. After this, the Word of contemplation and knowledge descending from the Heavens, like a Bishop puts aside all bodily thoughts and orients their sight towards spiritual issues.”

The three times chant of divine holiness by the faithful figures the union and equal dignity we will have in the life to come with spiritual powers. In that state, in a thought with celestial powers, the nature of man will be taught to praise and sanctify through three sanctifications the One tri-hypostatical divinity (St. Maximus the Confessor 2000, 19). The all holy calling of the Heavenly Father is the symbol of genuine adoption which will be given to us through the gift and grace of the

Holy Spirit.” (St. Maximus the Confessor 2000, 21)

On canonicity and organicity of the Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition

The first criteria of the Church – In her quality of infallible authority – for selecting canonical writings was that of writings that speak/ reveal God in His Word, so not in the creations or speculations of human logic, but the epiphanic/ theophanic works of the Word before incarnation (in the prophetic discourse), in the incarnation and in His mystical Body, perceived as theandric medium of continuous elevation towards the Kingdom of God. Actually, when trying to determine a chronological landmark for the beginning of collecting canonical writings, we meet the words that God spoke to Moses: to be an eternal sign of the Alliance (Ex 17:14), of the eternal relation between God and His people, between God and His creation. From this perspective, we can say that a canonical book / writing has an obvious dialogical aspect, it is not a “*demonstratio fidei*”, but a “*revelatio fidei*”. And I believe that in this manner I have given a minimal answer to the question of excluding the Gnostic literature (St. Athanasius of Alexandria 1988, 67) and its determinations from the canonical area. In fact, faith is not a demonstration, but a transfiguration, and this formula can introduce an explanation regarding the long way of accepting the Revelation (Apocalypse) between canonical writings, and not only.

Gradually and diversely revealing Himself, God marked the history with His interventions, sealing it eternally and orienting it towards its natural thelos. But the periods of this revealing are in fact the periods of the spiritual ethnogenesis of Israel. The meaning of history is the communion of men and of creation with God, this meaning is dynamically and exemplarily revealing from the old Israel to the new. The speech of God to Israel has not remained without testimonies. Accomplishing through encounters, promises, discoveries and alliances, this word / dialogue constituted itself in a dynamic frame of truth and life. This frame of meeting and the first testimony of relations between God and Israel is the Holy Tradition. Inside the Holy Tradition different reports have appeared, strictly catalogued by the Church, according to the fidelity to the truth / Christ, in three categories: canonical, explanative and apocryphal books. Born inside Tradition, as an incarnation of the Word, the Holy Scripture cannot and must not be taken out of its context.

The Scripture and the Tradition, signs of God's love for Israel, are not two distinct realities, but are reciprocally involved one in another, having functions/ roles not one

towards the other, but both towards the truth/ Christ. In this way, they do not have autonomy outside the Church, because the truth is the word permanently addressed to the Church by God, on / about God in Christ, on Himself. The Holy Scripture constitutes the essence of Tradition, and the latter is its development, and we can see the effective means of incarnation of the word. And if we speak of Tradition, we must consider the following three periods of development: until 34 AD – Jewish Tradition; between 34 and 90 AD – Jewish and Judeo-Christian Tradition, and after 90 AD, a clear distinction will be made between the two traditions, Jewish and Christian.

Concerning the extension of the canon, it is given by Christ's Scripture. But, in the announcing of Christ, the transparency of the truth itself, as unique transcendental reality, makes His exposition not nominal, but categorical, a fact that leaves place for discussions.

I would remark nonetheless the fundamental criteria which can determine the canonicity: Christ / the eternal truth of Deus revelatus. The common thesis according to which the Tradition completes the Scripture at an informational level forgets precisely this common reference to the truth, to the transcendence itself of the incarnated Truth. The Church chose, from the multitude of writings, those who had as direct object the knowledge of God from the acts of Revelation, and not those that led to His knowledge from the acts of demonstration or different esoteric Gnostic formulas or derived from the above. The following question will rise: then why the Orient chooses as secondary the anaginoscomena writings and introduces them in the Scripture? Because these ones show the axiological consistencies of mundane history and the fact that the divine Providence manifests concretely in it in order to reveal it as medium of salvation.

The unity of the Scripture, breaking the captivity in the field of clichés, as conclusion of reaffirming its revealed dimension, but also of the quoting style in the patristic theological discourse and unification in the liturgical prayer

Right from the start, I have considered appropriate to introduce a quotation from St. Maximus the Confessor which I consider a good expression of the Scripture's unity: "The Holy Scripture, regarded as a whole, is like a man who has the Old Testament as body and the New one as soul, spirit and mind; or the literary history of the entire Holy Scripture, the old and the new, and the meaning of those written and the purpose towards which tends this meaning, soul." (St. Maximus the Confessor 2000, 15) In consequence, there is an organic relation between the two Testaments, and the

patristic discourse proves it thoroughly. I have seen this in St Basil's legerity to use alternatively Old and New Testament texts in the text of his Liturgy, like from a unique source of spiritual richness.

The two Testaments are in perfect accord, considers St. John Chrysostom, and, in support of this statement, he invokes texts selected both from the Old and New Testaments, like Jeremiah 31:31-33 or Matthew 5:21, actually the entire corpus known as the Sermon on the Mount offers us the key of understanding of the veritable meaning of the Law, and Jeremiah speaks of a new Alliance, its original aspect being, from a formal point of view, "the carnal flags of their hearts". We have to put an accent on the fact that "the old Law regards towards the fruits of sin. The New Testament follows the destruction of the roots of sin. Regarding the same sin, the old Law convicts its effects, while the new Law strives against its naissance (Moisescu 2003, 46). Thus, we can say that the New Testament fulfills the lacks of the Old one, perfecting it and better formulating its teachings revealed in the past (St. John Chrysostom PG 57, 241). For revealing the unitary and concordant aspect of the two components of the Scripture, I consider extremely important the chrysostomic observation that "God, in His great wisdom, reveals dogmatic truths, promulgates moral laws, according to His addressee's capability of understanding them. And if He would have given the two Alliances in the same time, for the same people, living a similar life, there would have not been any formal difference between them (St. John Chrysostom PG 51, 283). But in all cases, the divine teaching, gradually revealed to man, must not be judged in comparison with the eternally identical perfection of God, but with the gradual development of the human race and its intellect" (St. John Chrysostom PG 54, 582).

This is the reason why I cannot confine myself to the historical-critical method. For me, this method offers the possibility of identifying the subjective/ objective element which made that an act of revelation (incomprehensible by his object) be limited by the capacity of understanding of the readers. This interpretation offers me the level of historical stasis and does not make sufficiently evident the dynamic aspect of it, its capacity of transcending a historical period and addressing another. I repeat, I do not despise this method, but I rather hear in mind the words of Saint Symeon the New Theologian on those who seek to shock. I use it, but I do not idolatryze it.

Comparing the two laws in what concerns the contents, Saint John Chrysostom finds the Old Testament inferior to the New Testament; of course, this is not due to God, but due to the people to which these laws where addressed. But from the possibility of

comparing them one another, we can deduce their common origin and their partaking in the same family, because the notion of superior or inferior refers to objects belonging to the same genre. Therefore, he concludes by saying that the Law of the Old Testament was a type, a figure of the New Testament, shadow which disappeared simultaneously with the apparition of the Sun of Justice, because the shadow hides when the sun rises. And now, in the shining of the Sun, the work of the Holy Spirit on human beings is more powerful, the gifts offered by God are greater and the reward of the faithful is greater, too. Thus, interpretations given to some old testamentary passages allow the intuition of a conviction that the Fathers of the Church had, namely that these ones were not only addressed to Jews, and that they rather have a prophetic character, addressing the entire humanity.

Another element which determines the unity of the Scripture is its christocentric character, that is why I have chosen to introduce here several patristic hermeneutical landmarks which state the necessity of applying a Christological lecture to the Old Testament.

Patristic landmarks for the re-cognition of the necessity of a Christological lecture of the Old Testament

For the Holy Fathers, the Christocentric character of the Holy Scripture is a means for unity which, evident from the first pages to the final revelation, makes that the Holy Scripture in its entire, both Old and New Testaments, is regarded as a unitary reality. Two levels are identifiable in the Old Testament: one relates events from the history of the chosen people in a literal sense, and a higher level, typological, which announces Christ and essential events from the history of salvation. Thus, the Old and New Testament represent a unitary testimony of the salvation history. Their relation is one from promise to fulfillment, there is an interior, organic unity between them, and the orthodox exegete, just like the Fathers of the Church, interprets the Old Testament in the light of Christ (Breck 2003, 64).

Thus, Christ Himself is the “hermeneutical principle” or the principle of interpretation, because He reveals the true meaning of all inspired Scriptures (Breck 2003, 24). But the principles and hermeneutical presuppositions used by the patristic authors in their essay to interpret the Scripture and to explain the “Christological” signification of the Old Testament suppose a spiritual perspective, called *theoria*, an inspired vision or contemplation of the revealed Truth through the divine power,

given by the Holy Spirit both to the patristic authors and to the exegetes that followed (Breck 2003, 57-8).

A distinction is required here between the different meanings of the Scripture. The Antiochian understood the literal meaning, through an allusion to the “intention of the biblical author”, in other words, “the message which the writer himself understands by the inspiring work of the Holy Spirit and tries to transmit it to the readers”. The spiritual sense, on the other side, refers to the spoken Word of God to the written testimony, in each moment, in every generation in the life of the Church. Nonetheless, for the Antiochian Fathers, the spiritual sense is anchored in the historical events. Transcending the literal sense, the *sensus plenior* updates in every historical event the salvation value of the work of God: in the middle of Israel, and in the highest degree, in the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ (Breck 2003, 58).

Father John Breck identifies eight principles or presuppositions which would define the patristic interpretation of the Holy Scripture, and I introduce in this conclusive part a few landmarks which I consider essential in any exegetical demarche which we can and must assume nowadays: 1) the last referent of the expression “Word of God” is the Person of the Logos; 2) the Holy Scripture must be understood in a Trinitarian perspective; 3) the testimony of the Scripture must be reinterpreted in each new generation in the life of the Church, under the inspirational guidance of the Holy Spirit; 4) The Word of God serves the plan of God for the salvation of the world, and its interpretation is ecclesial; 5) In the relation of the Bible to the Tradition, as empowered by the Holy Spirit, the Scripture is the canon which determines the veritable Tradition. 6) The Relation between the Old and the New Testament is one from promise to accomplishment / fulfillment. Therefore, the Old Testament must be interpreted from a typological point of view. 7) The Scripture is integrally and uniformly inspired by the Holy Spirit, therefore it can be interpreted in virtue of the exegetical reciprocity, and finally, 8) in order to correctly interpret the Scriptures and to understand the depths of its truth, the exegete must interpret it from the inside, conforming his existence to the teachings of the Holy Scripture (Breck 2003, 69-70).

And this is, maybe, the fundamental principle without which any scientific demarche, no matter how documented, risks to remain outside the sphere of the salvation word transmitted by God to His creature: “Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered...” (Ex 17:14).

Appendix 1

Theological prayer in the Holy Anaphora of Saint Basil the Great Liturgy

Master, Lord, God (Acts 4:24), worshipful Father (Lk 23:34) almighty (Rev 1:8), it is truly just and right to the majesty of Your holiness to praise You, to hymn You (Ps 92:1), to bless You (Ps 63:4), to worship You, to give thanks to You, to glorify You, the only true God (Isa 37:16), and to offer to You this our spiritual worship with a contrite heart and a humble spirit (Ps 51:17). For You have given us to know Your truth (2 Tm 2:25). Who is worthy to praise Your mighty acts (Isa 44:7)? Or to make known all Your praises (Ps 9:14)? Or tell of all Your wonderful deeds (Ps 71:17) at all times (Ps 34:1)? Master of all things, Lord of heaven and earth, and of every creature visible and invisible (Acts 4:24), You are seated upon the throne of glory (Heb 8:1) and behold the depths (3 Children 1:31). You are without beginning (1 Jn 1:1), invisible (Col 1:15), incomprehensible, beyond words (Wis 13:6), unchangeable (Jas 1:17). You are the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 15:6), who is the great God (Tob 3:16) and Savior (Jdg 1:25) of our hope (1 Tm 1:1), the image of Your goodness (Wis 7:26), the true seal of revealing in Himself You (Jn 14:9), the Father (1 Pt 1:17). He is the living Word (Heb 4:12), the true God (Jn 17:3), eternal wisdom (Eph 3:10), life (Col 3:3), sanctification (1 Cor 1:30), power (Rm 1:4), and the true light (Jn 1:9). Through Him the Holy Spirit was manifested (Jn 14:26), the spirit of truth (Jn 14:17) the gift of Sonship (Rom 8:23), the pledge of our future inheritance (Eph 1:14), the first fruits of eternal blessings, the life giving power, the source of sanctification (Jn 7:37-39) through whom every rational and spiritual creature is made capable of worshiping You (Sir 35:17) and giving You eternal glorification, for all things are subject to You. For You are praised by the angels (Manasseh 1:15), archangels, thrones, dominions, principalities, authorities, powers (Col 1:16), and the many eyed Cherubim (Ez 10:12). Round about You stand the Seraphim, one with six wings and the other with six wings; with two they cover their faces; with two they cover their feet; with two they fly, crying out to one another with unceasing voices and ever resounding praises... (Isa 6:2-3).

Appendix 2

Christological prayer in the Holy Anaphora of Saint Basil the Great Liturgy

Together with these blessed powers, loving Master we sinners also cry out and say: Truly You are holy and most holy, and there are no bounds to the majesty of Your holiness (Ps 145:2-4). You are holy in all Your works (Rom 3:4), for with righteousness and true judgment You have ordered all things for us (3 Children 1:3). For having made man by taking dust from the earth (Gn 2:7), and having honored him with Your own image, O God (Gn 1:27), You placed him in a garden of delight (Gn 2, 8, 15), promising him eternal life and the enjoyment of everlasting blessings in the observance of Your commandments (Gn 2:16-17). But when he disobeyed You (Gn 3:11), the true God who had created him, and was led astray by the deception of the serpent (Gn 3:13) becoming subject to death through his own transgressions (Rm 6:23), You, O God, in Your righteous judgment (Ps 119:75), expelled him from paradise into this world (Gn 3:24), returning him to the earth from which he was taken (Gn 3:19), yet providing for him the salvation of regeneration in Your Christ (Titus 3:5). For You did not forever reject Your creature whom You made (Ps 103:14), O Good One, nor did You forget the work of Your hands (Is 64:7), but because of Your tender compassion, You visited him in various ways (Isa 4:31); You sent forth prophets (Heb 1:1); You performed mighty works by Your saints who in every generation have pleased You. You spoke to us by the mouth of Your servants the prophets, announcing to us the salvation which was to come (Is 49:6); You gave us the law to help us (Ps 19:7); You appointed angels as guardians (Heb 1:14). And when the fullness of time had come (Gal 4:4), You spoke to us through Your Son Himself, through whom You created the ages (Heb 1:2). He, being the splendor of Your glory and the image of Your being, upholding all things by the word of His power (Heb 1:3), thought it not robbery to be equal with You, God and Father (Phil 2:6-7). But, being God before all ages (Jn 1:1-2), He appeared on earth and lived with humankind (1 Tm 3:16). Becoming incarnate from a holy Virgin (Mt 1:25), He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, conforming to the body of our lowliness, that He might change us in the likeness of the image of His glory (Phil 3:21). For, since through man sin came into the world and through sin death (Rm 5:12), it pleased Your only begotten Son, who is in Your bosom (Jn 1:18), God and Father (Rom 5:6), born of a woman, the holy Theotokos and ever virgin Mary; born under the law (Gal 4:4), to condemn sin in His flesh (Eph 2:15), so that those who died in Adam

may be brought to life in Him (1 Cor 15:22), Your Christ. He lived in this world, and gave us precepts of salvation (Jn 3:17). Releasing us from the delusions of idolatry (1 Tm 1:9), He guided us to the sure knowledge of You (In 1:18), the true God and Father. He acquired us for Himself, as His chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation (1 Pt 2:9). Having cleansed us by water (Eph 5:25) and sanctified us with the Holy Spirit, He gave Himself as ransom to death (Eph 5:2) in which we were held captive (Eph 2:15), sold under sin. Descending into Hades through the cross, that He might fill all things with Himself (1 Pt 3:18-19), He loosed the bonds of death (1 Cor 15:25-26). He rose on the third day (1 Cor 15:4), having opened a path for all flesh to the resurrection from the dead (Phil 3:10-11), since it was not possible that the Author of life would be dominated by corruption (Acts 2:27). So He became the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep (1 Cor 15:20), the first born of the dead (Rev 1:5), that He might be Himself the first in all things (Heb 2:12). Ascending into heaven, He sat at the right hand of Your majesty on high (Heb 1:3) and He will come to render to each according to His works (Rom 2:6). As memorials of His saving passion, He has left us these gifts (Lk 22:19) which we have set forth before You according to His commands. For when He was about to go forth to His voluntary, ever memorable, and life-giving death (Jn 18:4), on the night on which He was delivered up for the life of the world, He took bread in His holy and pure hands, and presenting it to You, God and Father, and offering thanks, blessing, sanctifying, and breaking it... (1 Cor 11:23-24).

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