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Orthodoxy and Orthology in the Context of Religionism*

Abstract

This essay attempts to present the dogmatic framework, in which orthodox theology could include human religiosity. In this regard, doctrinal teachings are considered in general to reduce human beings to soteriological exclusivity. But, is there a theological manner of emphasis on the whole humanity? If so, how and why? What is the attitude of the orthodox good will of understanding towards religions and to its other? This way of thinking rests on the modern questions of exclusivity and pluralism. It implies acceptance of



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pluralism as a reality, whether or not seen as an agent of relativism. We also have to consider whether religion upholds a confused soteriology? Or, might we support the need for exclusivity of different kinds of faiths and closed soteriologies? Is there a more honest way in Orthodoxy? What's the meaning of the Christological event for the Christian relationship to the diversity of religious faiths? What does it mean for the resistance against exclusivity and relativism in this field of faith? These theological and anthropological challenges are read from a systematic-dogmatic point of view, and discussed in a creative dialogue with contemporary issues.

Keywords

Religiosity, interreligious dialogue, exclusivity, pluralism, soteriology, anthropology

1 Introduction

The elaboration of a question concerning essentially pluralism of the religious phenomenon ought to be seen in the context of the principle that there is no human nature that is religiously non-existent. Therefore, if the religious tendency of man is a catholic phenomenon, the hypostatic articulation of religious phenomenon is the expression of universal nature in a particular way. In his divided nature, man certainly asks for an ideologically universal prevalence of the particular (i.e. the prevalence of individual power and collective individualisms). During its course, this tendency, as a hypostatic expression of man, violates, indeed, as a deviation, the hypostatic principle itself, as soon as it becomes an individual matter and a combination of individual collectivities willing to dominate over other similar collectivities or individuals.

More specifically: if people believe that the main principle and condition of salvation is its concentration on the level of human hypostasis (personal existence) or on the united whole of the various human hypostases under the biological-material interest, then it is obviously a motion towards a non-existent salvation and a centralization to partiality, to the division of human nature. It is religion that “must” survive despite the fact that man “needs” primarily to be saved. This motion has nothing to do with the real and sincere experience of the universality of salvation as a spiritual event in a catholic (global) perspective.

I consider that the incarnation of God, believed (and betrayed) by Christianity, is the same either as a cold shower for theology or a hot bath for philosophy. It is time for Christianity to see that over the centuries it often made theology without the incarnated God and philosophized without the realistic theology of man inspired by God. If the modern need for a *comparative theology* in a multi-religious environment has to be in harmony or in logical terms with faith¹, then I believe that the incarnation of God can be an example of a unifying connection between reason and faith. This connection is opposed both to the extremity of rationality (and relativism) and to the extremity of mysticism (and exclusiveness) too. I’ll point out that the harmonious connection of intellect with faith

¹ See i.e. F. X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders*, (Sussex: Willey-Blackwell, 2010), p. 4: “But, in fact, the cultivation of a more interconnected sense of traditions, read together with sensitivity to both faith and reason, grounds a deeper validation and intensification of each tradition”. Certainly Clooney puts in the centre of his book the relation between faith and logic by saying: “Faith and reason, faith seeking understanding in a world of diversity, will still be at stake”. Furthermore: “Perplexed by diversity, we may seek excuses not to take it seriously, on the grounds of the sanctity and sufficiency of our own religion. Or we may find relativism the easier path to tread. But we are better off if we keep paying attention to the dynamics of diversity intelligently and with the eyes of faith”.

is the same theological expression of the paradox which does not want to hurt either the rationality or the faith.

Let's develop the subject using theological terms keeping in mind the various polymorphic frames (relationships) that have to be considered accordingly in a multi-religious environment.

2 Religious Enhypostaton (inner-existence) and Religionization (religion-making)

We have said that when the religious feeling as a natural disposition of man is expressed distinctively (at an individual level or at a level of collective individualisms), that is against to its genuine ecumenical reference with the catholic man². If we accept that religionisation (idolization of religion) is the enemy of religion, then we will not disagree that dominion is the great tool to religion-making as static religiosity. Today theology on inter-religious level and philosophy would agree that the use of religion as a tool of human power is a serious rival against any honest religious dialogue. Within this context of the instrumentalization the construction of idols triumphs. Idols of course stand out for clothes and ornaments, though these are heartless.

I have the impression that nowadays in Europe we aren't in the age of inter-religious meeting, as it appears to be on the surface, but we face the intense rivalry between religionisation and de-

² I do not consider accidental that the modern literature shows an interest in the religious phenomenon as an "open" phenomenon and not simply as a personal diathesis of man. See, for instance, K. Gabriel, *Von Religion zum Religiösen. Zur Bedeutung der Erfahrung in der gegenwärtigen (religiösen) Szene des Westens. Genese und Diagnose*, in: G. Haeffner (ed.), *Religiöse Erfahrung II. Interkulturelle Perspektiven* (Münchener philosophische Studien 26, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2007), p. 39 etc. The title of the module in the above pages is: *Vom religiösen in der Privatsphäre zurück zur Religion der Öffentlichkeit? (From the religious in private life to public religion)*.

religionization. At the same time we experience the multidimensional ecumenical dialogues of Christianity in relation to the importance of other religious approaches of peoples and nations which do not restrict religious expression in the field of privacy. Due to economic reasons non-Christians move to Europe and meet the main teachings about God and His relation to the catholic man. Europeans no longer need to move out in order to teach nations, but nations come to Europe where they have the opportunity of an apprenticeship in a religious culture. However, the divided Christianity has not shown a common view on the relationship of the catholic man with the Catholic God³.

There is no room here for historic and dogmatic analyses that show the perception inside Christianity that the relationship between God and man in Christ is divided. We are interested however to see why the vision of this relationship is important for a healthy perception of the multi-religious fact and the dialogue with humanity. If we agree that authoritative religionization shrinks religion, then enypostasia (existence of humanity in God) of humanity as the dynamic incarnation of God, as in Orthodox Theology, leaves the universal humanity of God (of Christ) free for every individual to experience as an ecumenical event.

In the context of the Christian event, a theology that overrides the importance of the incarnation of God essentially maximizes religionization and comes in dialogue with other religions as a religious opponent or as their servant. In the opposite case, however, focusing on the fact of the universal concept of the incarnation, the theology is against to centralization (or syncretism) and absolute religiousness, introducing a real

³ Particular interesting bibliography for the subject of God-expression in Europe see N. Hintersteiner (ed.), *Naming and Thinking God in Europe Today: Theology in Global Dialogue*, (Amsterdam-N.Y.: Rodope, 2007), p. 465 and the interesting work of the editor in the above edition: *Intercultural and Interreligious (Un)Traslatibility*.

liberation from religion (liberation from the religionization and the idolic expression of religions). In this case in the practical Christian life nobody *makes war* for peace, nor hates in order to have love⁴. In any case nobody is fanatic for religious need⁵ and is against the religionization of Christianity.

At first I would talk about the *religious enypostaton* (inner-existence) as an issue of a Christian proposition, if I had to talk about the meeting of religions in the pursuit of anti-authorization and theological honesty⁶. Let me explain: If the belief in a concept of God that doesn't liberate man from the empathy of man to man, then a *religionized religion* is dominant where the exercise of power of man over a man, (or a religion over another religion) prevails. The religious *enypostaton* is, therefore, the recognition of religiousness, when it practically refuses the absolute character of human power in the relation of man to God under the presupposition of the vision of the unapproachable (incarnated for Christians) God of the whole humanity.

⁴ For this subject see more I. G. Kourempeles, "Christian Monotheism: Exclusivity or Openness to the Otherness?" in: N. Hintersteiner (ed.), *Naming and Thinking God in Europe Today, Theology in Global Dialogue*, (Amsterdam-N.Y.: Rodope, 2007), pp. 295-318.

⁵ Very aptly N. Matsoukas has mentioned with ecumenical thinking the following: "One solution is offered; to become all one Ecumene (...). Maybe these contradictions will not be recovered. Nowhere in the nature and in the history exists static tranquility. Harmony is the operating relation between the opposites. I consider that European dialectics, that asks composition and overcoming of contradictions, is utopian. One thing that we can do is to balance the contradictions, like in nature balance water the fire" (N. Matsoukas, *Εύρώπη ώδίνουσα*, (Thessaloniki: P. Pournaras, 1998, p. 262).

⁶ My thinking derives from the terminological expression that sets in the theological level the great theologian of the 6th century Leontios of Byzantium. See D. Leontii Hierosolymitani, *Adversus eos qui duas affirmant Christi personas, nullamque in ipso conjunctionem confitentur, Liber Secundus*, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus LXXXVI, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1863), p. 1560B.

The *religious anypostaton* (non-existence) would thus be a caricature of religion, where the view to God is closed for man because of the manipulation of man by man, which occurs within the same religious systems and in the interactive relationships that are formed between them during their dialogues. This is religionization, i.e. when I speak here about religious non-existence, and not about the religiousness in which the man lives and that is necessary for man to live. Among religiously unsubstantiated organizations, I have to say, that real dialogue cannot work.

3 Religion as Anti- Authoritative Power and as Love of Beauty

Certainly religionization lies heavily on the religious event. Modern criticism shows that it closes the view of religion in its motion towards the beauty and against religious domination of man to man (people to people). Thus religion is losing its aesthetics and its real relationship with the innermost human need to be saved by religion. Every religion, I believe, wants to save naturalness and order, but at the same time ought not to lose the spirit of mystery of the ontological distinction of God from man. Religiousness is moving on this intermediary state as in rope-walking in order to get released and release.

But if one considers the beauty of religion as a natural fact in the limits of religion then one will seek beauty to the suspension of freedom and the suppression of human creativity. Respecting the natural and granted religiousness in every tradition one has to define the exercise of freedom as an ontological need for redemption from the oppression of religious tutelage. Training to the pursuit of truth is the goal of true religious education and religious agony.

I would like to mention that in the Orthodox Church frequent participation in the Eucharist operates as a “soteriological necessity” and serves as an antidote to the magical view of the

communion of man with God. It has been stressed that communion with God is not taken for granted or given, but it is always actively sought in the catholic humanity of God's Logos and not in the human reason.

This prospect is removed when the faithful man is entrenched in the dogmatic context of a faith that leans alternatively either to the intellect or to the faith⁷. The harmonious opposition (and its paradoxical effect) between these two factors does not give any advantage to the religious systems which certainly want to dominate over individuals and collective individualisms either rationally or mystically. In these systems (and of course much more in religious ones) God should not be describable and indescribable simultaneously. Alternatively a choice is suggested on which the soteriological tutelage of people over people is systematically built with the strongest material used. Two kinds of arts have been invented for this aim: The charm and the magic which are developed respectively over the errors of reason and the deceptions of faith.

Religious beauty, however, is discovered in the *paradoxical union* of God and humanity, which does not allow absolutes (either of faith or of reason) to destroy the connection between *pulchrum* and *decorum* (connection of things that are nice because of their form and connection of things that are beautiful because of their purpose) for the souls of people.

⁷ We should not forget that this problem is also related to the orthodox ecclesiastical communities where they encounter the matter of exclusiveness as a problem of national appropriation with the religious phenomenon not unrelated with historical significant socio-cultural factors. In this context we have an example of contradictory relationship of faith and logic, between in other examples of such conflict in orthodox communities, as it happens with the matter of divorcement between conservative and progressive, that it is presented from time to time as a divorcement between orthodoxy and heresy. See indicatively for this issue the paradigm of the Serbian church B. Aleksov, "The Serbian Orthodox Church: haunting past and challenging future", *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 10, Nos. 2-3, May-August (2010) pp. 176-191.

The lack of this union, as a logical faith, (as a reasonable belief) does not qualify the sense of proportion, the symmetry as a rule of beauty, but the immodesty and the fanaticism of exclusivists and relativists. While the first ones easily show the fanatical characteristics of dogmatism, the second ones hide them under the dogmatism of the relativity of the theological truth. That truth ought to be regarded as always being sought for and always being experienced and participated in.

Religions as cultural phenomena and loads of life can contribute to the polychromy of human life positively only if they don't catch or kill God in order to keep Him in this world so that he will not be free to rise for the whole humanity. Nevertheless, the Risen God, has no need of human systems and their dreadful lack of freedom.

Religions, to put it in a different way, can converse with each other as references to (the Original) - the Prototype and they can be useful for the meeting of people who need religion in all traditions. *Every theological product is successful not because of its own form but due to the reference that it makes to the Prototype as a successful imitation of the Original.*

In other words, when it is expressing that it does not own the Prototype but is striving to participate in it and to receive goodness by it. In any case the way of Orthodoxy's reference to the divine Prototype of the catholic society is not unrealistic but paradoxical because it believes in *the incarnate Creator of the world* who is separated (μελίζεται) but not divided (μερίζεται), is participated but not possessed, crucified and resurrected for the mankind.

4 The Trinitarian-Christology fact. Real Unity in God-Humanity

The Trinity is by nature precisely that in which any of those (hypostasis) which are seen in the Trinity might be. This is to understand that in the inner-trinitarian life nature has to be

regarded as not being in division with existence or hypostasis⁸. However, although this approach is typical for the presentation of the whole (as catholic beings) into the one, it doesn't cope with the way that is understood and experienced by man in his human life. The catholic nature of man as a hypostatic phenomenon shows that man is fragmented and his hypostasis does not integrate the catholic human nature and life⁹. The complexity of this fragmented human being seeks for a unifying factor that has to be inside the field of the human nature, so that it can contain the human hypostasis in *a different way* (*ἀλλιῶς*) that is in the context of a true unity of the whole of human nature in God.

If the marginal and limited human nature sets bounds to man and to his freedom, man is required to find the liberation and recognition of his freedom in this marginal human nature. The soteriological question is to find the salvation of our human nature in ourselves as a catholic event.

How, though, can human freedom be really practiced within the limited world of humanity?

God, who is regarded as a whole, without hypostatic division, provides the framework for a sincere theological approach and a suggestion of life for people: *The integration of human nature in the hypostasis of the divine person*. The incarnation of God in the whole humanity (enypostatōn) is the unification of the human nature with the divine hypostasis that is united in its triune nature. Therefore the fact of the incarnation of God is a gateway to the catholic human natural unity since the humanity of Christ exists in the unfolded divine subject for the catholic man. There is no individual subject of a (fragmented) man. Christ is not an individual being struggling for his own salvation

⁸ See D. Leontii Monachii, *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos, Liber Primus*, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus LXXXVI, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1863), p. 1288, 10f.

⁹ See B. Kotter (ed.), *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. 2, (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1973), p. 28.

and the salvation of a group of people, but for the universal cure of the whole humanity.

If we see, however, the latest Greek bibliography¹⁰ of personalistic theological approach, we will understand that distinction and essentially the division of nature and person has been particularly stressed out and nature has been identified with the need (necessary) and the hypostasis with freedom (the particular energy).

However, the importance of the incarnation of God as a paradox and the true recognition of the unity of God and man in the grounds of freedom and not post-freedom hasn't been examined at all. In this personalistic approach of theology one can easily distinguish the philosophical targeting that drives man far from his natural borderline. Here the human nature is seen as a suffocating factor that man is obliged to overcome through his personal outcome from his natural boundaries.

The recognition of the person in this frame of thought seems as a logical philosophy, and this kind of soteriology honors a human society in terms of a relationship. Which relationship? The relationship that people develop at the transcendental level of the ecstatic person. Here we face the danger of seeking de-religionization that is against the hypostatic God of the catholic human nature.

Such a philosophical theology of the human person cannot give real meaning to the theological paradoxology that is experienced by the catholic man in God. This divine-human paradox saves in itself the logic and the mystery of faith, the faith and the mystery of the intellect. Or, rather, this theology of the paradox is the same composition and salvation of the reason, as an experienced mystery of the participation of logic in the God-Logos. De-religionization is not sufficient, and no one can throw away religion as a consequence of this approach,

¹⁰ Precisely for these personal opinions for such matters see my work: *Λόγος Θεολογίας Α΄*, (Thessaloniki: P. Pournaras, 2009), p. 97 f. and p. 275 f.

since religion is a universal phenomenon for the whole humanity that inspires and frames human civilizations.

Man has no power to unite the human nature even if one is associated with the other. The obstacle of death fragments man and his weak nature on his birth. In this weak situation man unfortunately seeks to survive in oneself without regard to a catholic co-existence with God and with the catholic man.

The unity of all things in the Christian event is the Gospel of the unity of the incarnated God, the unique Creator, who can restore the nature as his own creation, the fragmented nature that exists forever in the dissolving process of death from person to person. Religious or de-religious dialogue can, according to my opinion, take place under the assumption of the Incarnation of God Logos and not the incarnation of human mind-logos that is always shattered and supports the maximalism of the human intellect.

5 Instead of Epilogue

The Pythagorean philosophers believed that the universe has a harmonious structure and named it *cosmos* that means order, class. Thus, they introduced an aesthetic element in cosmology and in its definition. They made remarkable considerations on the issue of cosmic harmony. Assuming that any normal movement produces a harmonious sound¹¹, they considered that the whole universe would create a music of the spheres, a symphony that we cannot hear because it sounds continuously. Thus, they conceived a spherical world.

As we see our certainly spherical world through the technological progress and as we constantly hear the electronic sounds today, we strongly feel the dissonance of our time. We can't hear the constant divine sound because we hear the

¹¹ See Aristoteles, *De Caelo*, P. J. Allan (ed.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936, repr. 2005), B9, 289b-291a.

electronic echo that we have built. A universally accepted cosmological aesthetic doesn't automatically fulfil the desire for an ecumenically religious theology. The ecumenical thinking in recent decades has shown to all Christian denominations and religions that there has been a motion to the quantitative composition of the various traditions rather than to the qualitative quest for the communication between man and God. If that happened among Christians, then we wouldn't need to wonder about the future perspective of inter-religious dialogues. To the extent that religions are sounds and rhythms that prohibit man from hearing and moving towards the true freedom of a God who resembles man without dominating him, the religious diversity (polymorphy) becomes an improper, non-cosmic, indecorous religiosity, ready sooner or later to serve under religious cover the hostility of man to man.

A decent religiousness needs the discussion of the comprehensive condescension (συγκατάβαση) of God to man and co-rising inclusiveness of man for God. This condescension recognizes in a divine way the spiritual-material polymorphy as an exercise to the loving and voluntary union of God with the universal body of the catholic man. The co-rising is the human journey to God, a God who is not closed to humanity. In this respect religionization and the individualized understanding of religion can be faced as it becomes an instrument of oppression of man by man, instead of functioning as an anti-authoritarian lever and a way out to the exercise of freedom as a partnership in the (catholic) global body.

It would be unrealistic to squeeze God according to human belief systems. The Pythagoreans will continue my metaphorical thought about life resembling a feast: As some people go fighting, others go for trade and others as spectators, thus in life, others are born servile, others as hunters of glory and of greed and others, the philosophers, are born hunters of truth.

Religiousness, I'd say proportionally, is like a festivity, whether we like it or not: some go to it to fight, others for trade and

others as hunters of beauty. So, in religious life others are servile, others are hunters of glory and greed and others are hunters of the beautiful dramatic truth which frees man from anthropocentrism and religion from religionization. *Religions are referred to the senses, the sensible God is referred to everything that is related to the senses*: for example, we enjoy the scents of the fragrant flowers ad hoc, while we enjoy those of food and drink because we are predisposed for the joy of eating and drinking.

It is, thus, delightful to smell God and to be prepared for eating and drinking him... It is, though, also pleasant, to savour, in the world, the unspent God himself of a humanity which gives birth to him... without making him man's creature!