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Eschatology in Neo-Patristic Synthesis^{1,2}

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Abstract

Through the elements highlighted in this study, we can say that the method and content of the 19th century Orthodox Dogmatics - influenced by the structure and content of the Western, Roman Catholic and Protestant dogmatics - were overcome in the neo-Patristic synthesis of the 20th century. First of all, the Orthodox theologians have understood that eschatology is not an autonomous chapter of Dogmatics, separated from the other chapters and placed at the end of Orthodox Dogmatic structure, but it must represent the “ferment” that guides the theological discourse towards the experience of the Kingdom of God within the Church and Mysteries as a pledge of future ones. Secondly, eschatology was viewed and expressed as an essential dimension of the Church life and spirituality, being experienced in the Mysteries of the Church, as well as in the presence of the Holy Trinity in the Church. Thirdly, the eschatology was viewed in correlation with the culture of the past, the Orthodox theologians attempting to show that culture, history and cosmos are not abandoned by the Church, on one hand, and on the other hand to express the correct relationship between eschatology and culture, based on the worship-culture relation from the perspective of Revelation.

Keywords

Orthodox Dogmatics, eschatology, neo-Patristic synthesis, eschatology present, culture, history and cosmos, Revelation.

¹ This paper was presented at the sixth symposium of the International Association of the Orthodox Dogmatists, held in Balamand, Lebanon, between the 7th and 10th of June 2018, under the title *The Orthodox Church's View on Eschatology*.

² We assumed the phrase “neo-Patristic synthesis” meaning by this to overcome the barrier between Patristic and Byzantinism and, on the other hand, updating Patristic thinking in the context of the world and of the Church theology. This does not mean to pass beyond the thinking of the Church Fathers, but it is an ecclesial-experimental, and a rational-spiritual assumption of their thinking in the present. In other words, by “neo-Patristic” I understood not a delimitation or ignorance of the Fathers’ thinking, but precisely the specificity of the 20th century theology, grounded on the thought, method, life and spirit of the Fathers

I. Eschatology is not a chapter, but a presence in the structure and content of Dogmatics

In Orthodox Dogmatics from the 19th and 20th centuries, eschatology is placed as a final chapter dealing with “the last things”. That is the structure of Dogmatics written by Makarii Bulgakov, Sylvester of Kanev, Alexiu Comoroșan, Iosif Iuliu Olariu, Christos Andrusos et al. If we carefully look at them, they are structured according to the Western Dogmatics, where, in the section about “last things”, the following are presented: death, private judgment, purgatory, universal judgment, resurrection of the dead, end of the world, heaven and hell, and resurrected bodies. In some Dogmatics, the teaching about venerating the icons, relics and saints are inserted in this chapter - but extremely restricted and questionable as a place. A specific note is found in Father Staniloae’s *Dogmatics* (1978) where eschatology, although it is a separate and final chapter, represents a constant in the content of his Dogmatics, its elements being present even from the theme of Revelation. From the first pages of his *Dogmatics*, Father Staniloae emphasizes the perspective of human eternity, and the fact that man is created for eternity. For men the communion with the Person or the communion with the infinite Persons becomes the means of an endless growth in love and knowledge. In these first pages, Father Staniloae speaks of the ultimate meaning of man: his preservation and perfection in eternity, being open to senses which are superior to the world, and tending to an order beyond him³.

“Only the eternity of a personal communion with a personal source of absolute life offers the fulfilment of their meaning to all human beings, while granting them the possibility of eternal and perfect communion among themselves (...). The whole universe is marked by a personal rationality designed to eternalize the human beings. Our being thinks that it will see its meaning fulfilled only in the eternal participation to the infinity of this supreme Person. This is the meaning of the Orthodox Christian doctrine about the deification of our being through participation to God or by grace. To achieve this goal ... not only do we ascend

³ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILAOE, *Teologia dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. I, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1996, pp. 14-16.

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to communion with the Supreme Person, but that Person also descends to us”⁴.

As a Dogmatic subject eschatology “was developed as an integral part of the doctrine referring to God’s *oikonomia*, which encompasses the creation, incarnation, redemption, consecration and recapitulation in Christ at His second coming in glory”⁵.

A success of the 20th century theology is the unitary perspective on dogmas and Dogmatics by a method which is paradoxically specific to the Patristic thinking. The Orthodox theologians of the 20th century are still talking about the fundamental unity between dogma-spirituality-worship, which helped to escape the influence of the medieval scholastics, on one hand. On the other hand it managed to renew the theology and to connect it to the revelation sources and to the thinking and experience of the Church Fathers. Alexander Schmemmann noticed: “Indeed the medieval Christian syntheses were based on a progressive elimination of the Christian primary notion of God’s Kingdom. It eliminated not the term but its initial Christian understanding, as an antinomic presence of the «world to come» «in this world»”⁶. The Orthodox spirituality which is basically founded on the paradox of the Christian life leaves a very generous place to the eschatological experience in the historic life⁷. Boris Bobrinsky was right to note:

“The scholar theologies: Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant have suffered a very important distortion, and they present eschatology as it refers only to the final goals of man and world, from a strictly straight and isolated perspective in the future, either individualistic or cosmic and universal, but always distant and non-real. The gap between this eschatology of our textbooks and, on many times, as well of our preaching, and the

⁴ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. I, pp. 18-19.

⁵ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. I, p. 10.

⁶ Pr. Alexander SCHMEMMANN, *Biserică, lume, misiune*, transl. Maria Vințeler, Editura Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2009, pp. 85-87.

⁷ Ion BRIA, “Învățătura ortodoxă despre viața viitoare”, in: *Ortodoxia*, XXXVI (1984) 1, pp. 9-28, here p. 9.

eschatology inaugurated or accomplished by the New Testament and the ecclesial and liturgical life, is huge and dramatic”.⁸

An eschatology isolated in the future does not correspond to the Orthodox classical experience which confesses the presence of the Kingdom here and now, as pledge and ascent to the complete and face to face communion in the Kingdom. In this respect “eschatology is less a special part of Dogmatic theology and more a constancy that passes the whole Orthodox theology”⁹. At this point it opens the perspective of a unitary and distinct regard on the dogmas and on the chapters of Dogmatics. Thus, the Revelation already finds the final goal of things and their dynamics in Christ through the Holy Spirit in the Church. For example, the Orthodox theology has an eschatological dimension because the dogmas of the Church have an eschatological dimension. We cannot talk about man and cosmos, about Church and Mysteries without seeing their eschatological goal and functionality from a triadological and Christological perspective. Therefore, eschatology in the Church, doctrine and theology is not something static, a reality of the future, but something dynamic in the sense of an actual experience. Eschatology must not be mistaken for the “end of the world” and should not be confined to the events that will accompany the second coming. It is the “ferment” of the history, society and culture in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Schmemmann points out that eschatology is not an escape from the world; on the contrary, it is the source and foundation of the Christian doctrine about the world and the work of the Church in the world¹⁰. The renewal of the Church and Dogmatics consists in “the removal and destruction of that «divorce» between the thinking of the Church and the experimentation of the Kingdom of God”¹¹.

⁸ Boris BOBRINSKOY, *Împărtășirea Sfântului Duh*, transl. Măriuca și Adrian Alexandrescu, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1999, p. 488.

⁹ Karl Christian FELMY, *Dogmatica experienței eclesiale*, transl. Pr. Prof. Ioan Ică, Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 1999, p. 311.

¹⁰ Alexander SCHMEMMANN, *Biserică, lume, misiune*, p. 219.

¹¹ Alexander SCHMEMMANN, *Biserică, lume, misiune*, p. 223. “The more we will think in Eucharistic and eschatological terms, the more we are aware the fashion of this world is passing, and things acquire meaning, purpose, consistency and reality only in relation to the coming of Christ and His glory” (p. 326).

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Orthodox Dogmatics needs an eschatology present in its content and overall structure. In John Meyendorff's view, eschatology cannot be considered as a separate chapter of Christian theology because it defines the character of theology as a whole¹².

This can be achieved through an interdependent view of the dogmas and by the organic-synthetic-selective insertion of the Liturgy and spirituality into Dogmatics. It can also be achieved by understanding that eschatology penetrates and forms the entire Christian faith as dynamic inspiration and motivation, and it is not a denial of world and history, but a ferment and a renewing presence in its structures. This exercise, which also have an apologetic dimension, and not just an ecclesial-enriching one, will overcome the legal rigidity of an academic theology about eschatology and will express a correct ecclesiological relationship between eschatology and history, eschatology and world, eschatology and culture.

II. Eschatology, Church, Liturgy

A dimension of expressing eschatology in neo-Patristic thinking is the ecclesiological-sacramental one. Felmy notes that: "the futuristic eschatology of the dogmatists is not the one that best suits the Orthodox ecclesial experience. On the contrary, the latter corresponds to a presentist eschatology"¹³. The Orthodox theologians' contributions from the second half of the 20th century assert precisely this eschatology already present in the Church, experienced in the Liturgy and throughout the worship. Georges Florovsky speaks of the sacramental dimension of the Church and of the fact that "sacramental" is neither above nor below the "eschatological". He emphasizes that eschatological does not mean "only *final*". That is why in Florovsky's thinking the Church is situated between "not yet and already", an expression Alexander Schmemmann will theologially develop later¹⁴. Florovsky affirms the essence of the Church mission, namely the proclamation of the world to come, bearing "the testimony of the New

¹² John MEYENDORFF, *Teologia bizantină. Tendințe istorice și teme doctrinare*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1996, p. 291.

¹³ Karl Christian FELMY, *Dogmatica experienței eclesiale*, p. 310

¹⁴ Georges FLOROVSKY, *Biblie, Biserică, Tradiție. O viziune ortodoxă*, transl. Radu Teodorescu, Editura Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2016, p. 97.

Life”. Starting from the eschatological nature of the Church, Florovsky speaks of the antinomic existence of the Church in history¹⁵.

Vladimir Lossky closely links eschatology to Pentecost as fulfilment of the “Father’s promise”. From this perspective, eschatology can “begin” only through an ending. In Lossky’s opinion this “ending” is not “a static term or a limit: it is the ever-renewed beginning of an endless journey of deification”, identified with “the inner mystery of the Church”¹⁶. Eschatology is already working in the mystery of the Church where the Holy Spirit and the free will of man together accomplish the deification and transfiguration of creation - man and cosmos. The mystery of the eschatological is working “in the body of the old Adam” under the conditions of the old world, because “Christ’s victory and the change of the cosmic order are not a restoration of the primordial condition before Adam’s sin” and “the end does not mean the heavenly earth but the new heaven and the new earth”¹⁷. Following Lossky on interpreting the Pentecost, Evdokimov points out that “the history of the Church from Pentecost is already the last epoch, and the inaugurated eschatology”. He speaks of the Holy Spirit’s own work, the invocation of the Holy Spirit being an “eschatological epiclesis in the history”¹⁸. Let us point out the special connection these theologians make between the work of the Holy Spirit, Pentecost and eschatology as a reality already present in the Church and history.

The Orthodox theologians of the second half of the 20th century have also emphasized the eschatological dimension of worship, Mysteries and Liturgy. Paul Evdokimov had stated that “in the Mysteries, all the elements of the eschaton are already present and active”¹⁹. He developed a theology of the eschatology presence in the Church, worship, Liturgy, and icons. By elaborating this vision, Evdokimov affirmed the reality of a living Church, full of the Most Holy Trinity presence and internally connected to the Kingdom, through the Holy Spirit.

¹⁵ Georges FLOROVSKY, *Biblie, Biserică, Tradiție*, pp. 98-99.

¹⁶ Vladimir LOSSKY, *După chipul și asemănarea lui Dumnezeu*, transl. Anca Manolache, Editura Humanitas, București, 1998, p. 217

¹⁷ Vladimir LOSSKY, *După chipul și asemănarea lui Dumnezeu*, p. 218.

¹⁸ Paul EVDOKIMOV, *Ortodoxia*, transl. Irineu Ioan Popa, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1996, p. 333.

¹⁹ Paul EVDOKIMOV, *Ortodoxia*, p. 345

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In particular, Alexander Schmemmann succeeded in highlighting the eschatological dimension of worship and Liturgy, centred on the Eucharist²⁰. And Ioannis Zizioulas emphasizes the eschatological aspect of the Eucharistic gathering around Christ Who is present in the Church²¹. In the context of a secularized world Schmemmann states:

“Since the whole Christian worship is always a reminder of Christ «in the flesh», it can also be a *reminder* of the expectation and anticipation of his Kingdom. The Liturgy of the Church is always cosmic, that is assuming all creation in Christ, and always historical, that is assuming all the time in Christ, but it can also be eschatological, that is, to make us partakers of the future Kingdom. So, this is the idea of man’s relationship with the world suggested by the notion of worship itself. By definition and as an act, worship is also a reality with cosmic, historical and eschatological dimensions, not only the expression of «godliness» but of an all-encompassing «world opinion»”²².

Therefore, the cosmos is also integrated in the eschatological perspective that is restored in the incarnation, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. And the cosmos is sanctified and transfigured in the Holy Mysteries within the Church, which ontologically proceeds from Christ. Eschatology is also developed from Christological perspective as the experience of Him Who comes. It already represents the teandrical and pneumatological dimension of the Church as the Spirit’s activity through the Saints, their relics being the pledge of the Kingdom²³.

In order to emphasize Christ’s presence in the Church through the Holy Spirit, and implicitly the permanent ecclesial way of eschatology, Boris Bobrinskoy outlines the eschatological perspective of the Eucharist and of the worship. They interfere with the “one and multiple” presence of Christ,

²⁰ Alexander SCHMEMMANN, *Euharistia – Taina Împărăției*, transl. Boris Răduleanu, Editura Anastasia, București.

²¹ Ioannis ZIZIOULAS, *Ființa eclesială*, transl. Aurel Nae, Editura Bizantină, București, 1996.

²² Alexander SCHMEMMANN, *Pentru viața lumii. Sacramentele și Ortodoxia*, transl. Pr. Prof. Aurel Jivi, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2001, p. 151.

²³ Karl Christian FELMY, *Dogmatica experienței eclesiale*, p. 312.

“a presence that transcends time and space, but unites in the present of the Church the people from always and from everywhere, from past, present and future”²⁴. The Eucharistic Liturgy accomplishes the eschatological presence of Christ, being a prophetic icon of the eschatological assembly of mankind in the Kingdom of God. That is why Liturgy begins with the invocation of the Most Holy Trinity’s Kingdom. Bobrinsky develops the liturgical realism of Evdokimov who writes:

“During the Liturgy, and through its holy power, we are abducted and elevated to a point where eternity intersects with time, and at this point we become real contemporaries of the biblical events from Genesis to Parusia; we live them as their eyewitnesses (...). When the royal door of the altar opens, the Kingdom of God is right in our midst. Heaven descends and the believer unites with the choir of angels to gladly welcome Him Who comes”²⁵.

In his synthesis, Zizioulas asserts that “pneumatology must be a *part* of Christology and ecclesiology, in other words to represent the very condition of the existence of Christ and of the Church. This can be achieved only if two elements of pneumatology are introduced into the being of Christ and of the Church. The two elements are *eschatology* and *communion*”²⁶. Zizioulas is influenced by Lossky who develops the theory of the two oikonomies in his *Mystic Theology of the Eastern Church*²⁷. Just as Father Stăniloae, Zizioulas does not accept Lossky’s distinction between Son’s oikonomia and the Holy Spirit’s oikonomia. Nevertheless, he uses it to show that the role of pneumatology is to provide the Church with the personal element, while the role of Christology is to provide the

²⁴ Boris BOBRINSKY, *Împărtașirea Sfântului Duh*, p. 493.

²⁵ Paul EVDOKIMOV, *Ortodoxia*, p. 262.

²⁶ Ioannis ZIZIOULAS, *Ființa eclesială*, pp. 154-155. See also “The Eucharist and the Kingdom of God” 1, in: *Sourozh*, 58 (February 1995), pp. 1-12. “The Eucharist and the Kingdom of God” 2, in: *Sourozh*, 59 (February 1995), pp. 1-12. “The Eucharist and the Kingdom of God” 3, in: *Sourozh*, 59 (February 1995), pp. 22-38.

²⁷ Vladimir LOSSKY, *Teologia mistică a Bisericii de Răsărit*, trad. Pr. Dr. Vasile Răducă, Editura Anastasia, București, 1992, pp. 195-197. See also *După chipul și asemănarea lui Dumnezeu*, p. 104. For an analysis of Eucharistic ecclesiology see Pr. Dr. Cornel TOMA, “Lex orandi, lex est credendi sau unitatea dintre dogmă, spiritualitate și cultul Bisericii”, in: Alexander SCHMEMANN, *Introducere în teologia liturgică*, transl. Ierom. Vasile Bârză, Editura Sophia, București, 2002.

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Church with the institutional element - the nature. Compared to Lossky, Zizioulas added an emphasis on *eschaton* and *koinonia*. This aspect makes a real contribution to the Catholic nature of the Church. The dichotomies between local and universal, even between Christology and Pneumatology, are overcome in this synthesis of Zizioulas, that is in the Mystery of the Eucharist and not in the relationship between the Son and the Holy Spirit. Metropolitan Ioannis Zizioulas did not know Father Staniloae's vision who asserted the synthesis of Christology and Pneumatology within triadology before Zizioulas expressed the need for such a synthesis. Zizioulas understands the inseparability of the Son and the Spirit related to the works of God *ad extra*, without establishing this inseparability in triadology, which produces certain inadequacies in his ecclesiology²⁸. Thus, Zizioulas affirms the priority of the Eucharist by using pneumology. In this regard he was influenced by Nikolai Afanasiev²⁹. Following these theologians, with some corrections, instead of the Trinitarian relationship between the Son and the Holy Spirit, he makes from the structure of the Eucharist / Bishop, the fundamental principle of synthesis and unity in the Church. From this perspective, there might be the risk of seeing the other Mysteries only as "partial" sacraments, and of creating a "gap" in the ecclesiological status of the parish. There is also the risk that spirituality outside the Eucharist may not be fully incorporated into the life of the Church, the Church being "Mystery" only during the event of the Eucharist. Unlike Zizioulas, Father Stăniloae's approach avoids polarizations and dichotomies, balancing the Eucharist with Baptism and Unction, thus establishing the dwelling of the Son and the Spirit in believers, and incorporating them into the life of the Trinity and in the communion and eschatological life of the Church³⁰. All

²⁸ Lucian TURCESCU, "Eucharistic Ecclesiology or Open Sobornicity?", in: Lucian TURCESCU (ed.), *Dumitru Stăniloae. Tradition and Modernity in Theology*, Centrul de Studii Românești, Iași, 2002, p. 96. On Father Staniloae's criticism regarding the Eucharist ecclesiology of Afanasiev, Schmemmann and Zizioulas, see "Biserica universală și sobornicească", in: *Ortodoxia*, XVIII (1966) 2, pp. 167-198.

²⁹ Nikolai AFANASIEV, *Biserica Duhului Sfânt*, transl. Elena Derevici, Editura Patmos, Cluj Napoca, 2008.

³⁰ Calinic (Kevin M) BERGER, "Does the Eucharist Make the Church? An Ecclesiological Comparison of Stăniloae and Zizioulas", in: *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, vol 51, 1(2007), pp. 23-70; Paul MCPARTLAN, *The Eucharist Makes the Church. Henri de Lubac and John Zizioulas in Dialogue*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1993, one of the most valuable studies; "The Eucharist, the Church and Evangelization: The Influence of Henri de Lubac", in: *Communio* 23 (1996), pp. 776-785; Richard R. GAILLARDETZ,

these aspects of the ecclesial experience of the Kingdom were expressed in the neo-Patristic synthesis, being integrated into the dogmatic approaches on eschatology, and from a methodological point of view, they gave a unitary and comprehensive view of the Church theology and experience.

III. Eschatology and History

The neo-Patristic synthesis of the second half of the 20th century affirmed not only the presence of the eschatological in the Church and Liturgy as a living experience of the Most Holy Trinity's Kingdom, but also the importance of eschatology in the context of the secularized world, and the secularization of history. Lossky speaks of eschatology in the context of the world secularization, and of limiting man's preoccupations in a "false eschatology" without dynamics, which confuses eschatology with an epistemological category that gives us peace to deal with things here without worrying about what belongs to another level³¹. Paul Evdokimov expresses the theological view on eschatology even with greater acuity, in the context of the secularized world and the proliferation of the various "utopias" of earthly Paradise, and of various eschatological philosophical, scientific and social conceptions. Evdokimov's perspective is to assert the eschatological maximalism of monasticism in the life of the Christians from the cities, understood as "interiorized monasticism"³². By underlining the uniqueness of Christ and by using typologies, Evdokimov develops a true theology of history in which the Church is revealed as a "new dimension of life and a new qualification of history". He notes:

"This is the great discovery of today's eschatology, so forgotten in history, yet inherent to Patristic thinking. The Fathers' typological conception about the Old Testament shows it as foreshadowing of the eon that will come into Christ, and this allows the reading of history in its light. The eon that is Christ is at the same time the eschaton: history is fulfilled in Christ.

"The Eucharistic Ecclesiology of Nocolas Afanassieff: Prospects and Challenges for the Contemporary Ecumenical Dialogue", in: *Diakonia* 27 (1994), pp. 18-44.

³¹ Valdimir LOSSKY, *După chipul și asemănarea lui Dumnezeu*, p. 216.

³² Paul EVDOKIMOV, *Ortodoxia*, p. 331.

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Nothing new can happen in history because Christ cannot be overcome. The Revelation is over because the Resurrection already inaugurates Parusia³³.

From this perspective, “history is not autonomous; it has its edenic pre-history and will have a post-history in the Kingdom. Passing through history, the first is fulfilled in the second”³⁴. By emphasizing Christ’s centrality in history, Evdokimov shows that - in contrast to the various secularized conceptions of history - the meaning of history is given in Christ as the fulfilment of the “pliroma” of history³⁵.

Schememann draws attention to the danger of secular eschatology within Christianity through the mutation of the world eschatological vision from the Church into the secular culture. The theme of the Kingdom in modernity and post-modernity subsists in various secular concepts, but in an autonomous way, without reference to God, and even without reference to transcendence³⁶. We note a constant concern of the Orthodox theologians of the second half of the 20th century to offer a theological and ecclesial perspective on eschatology which accumulated strictly immanent and autonomous forms in the context of the secularization of the world.

IV. Eschatology and culture

Another dimension of eschatology developed by the Orthodox theologians of the 20th century was the relationship between eschatology and culture. By expressing this relation, they wanted to draw attention to the historical-eschatological sense of culture, the danger of an autonomous culture, and the way in which a theonomic culture can be edified and expressed. Paul Evdokimov starts from the premise that “culture is an icon of the Kingdom of heaven” in the sense that it is directed to those to come³⁷. In arguing this, he developed a true vision of the relationship between culture and the eschatology of the Church.

³³ Paul EVDOKIMOV, *Ortodoxia*, p. 344

³⁴ Paul EVDOKIMOV, *Ortodoxia*, p. 345.

³⁵ Paul EVDOKIMOV, *Ortodoxia*, p. 345

³⁶ Alexander SCHEMANN, *Biserică, lume, misiune*, pp. 89-91.

³⁷ Paul EVDOKIMOV, *Ortodoxia*, p. 342.

From an eschatological perspective, Paul Evdokimov points out the possibility of transfiguring the theonomic culture and of becoming eternal. Thus culture will complete its meaning in eschaton, but only after abandoning the “infinity of its immanence” by getting drunk with its vanity.

“In the perennial Liturgy of the age to come, man will give glory to God through all the elements of a culture that will be cleansed by fire. But even from here, the community man, the scholar, the artist - all the ministers of the universal priesthood - already celebrate their own Liturgy, in which the presence of Christ is felt according to the measure of their worth. Like skilled painters using the matter of this world in the light of Transfiguration, they trace a renewed reality in which the enigmatic face of the Kingdom discreetly leaps³⁸. That is why art and autonomous culture must acquire a spiritual dimension that belongs to the Holy Spirit choosing thus between living to die (autonomy), and dying to live (theonomy). Our historical task is not to recover the forms of the primary Christianity, but to find the *Maran atha* - «Come Lord!» - of the beginning and hence the communion with the Church of the Last Hour”³⁹.

We see that art and the whole culture must be related to the eschatological vision by integrating them into the culture-worship binome, which goes beyond the natural powers and appeals to the power of the saints and to the pneumatophoric power of the Church⁴⁰. In other words, culture is called to become eternal not autonomously, but by participation-transfiguration in Christ and in the Church. Evdokimov exemplary highlights the relationship between culture and holiness, between faith and culture, which he sees as a vocation of the royal service:

³⁸ Paul EVDOKIMOV, *Iubirea nebună a lui Dumnezeu*, transl. Teodor Baconsky, Editura Anastasia, București, 1993, p. 142. See also in this regard Peter C. PHAN, *Culture and Eschatology: The Iconographical Vision of Paul Evdokimov*, P. Lang, New York, 1985.

³⁹ Paul EVDOKIMOV, *Iubirea nebună a lui Dumnezeu*, p. 135, 165-181.

⁴⁰ Paul EVDOKIMOV, *Arta icoanei, o teologie a frumuseții*, transl. Grigorie Moga, Petru Moga, Editura Meridiane, București, 1993, p. 41.

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“All forms of culture must strive for this limit, to participate in the mutual intercession of the two worlds, ensuring the transition from the earthly «wealth» to the heavenly «being». (...) The scholar, the thinker, the artist, or the social reformer will be able to find the charismas of the royal service: as a priest, everyone will be able to shift his research into a sacerdotal work, in a sacrament that changes any form of culture into a theophanic place: to praise the Name of God with the help of science, thinking, social action («the Sacrament of Brotherhood») or art. In its own way, culture meets Liturgy; it makes the «Cosmic Liturgy» sound and becomes a hymn of glory. (...) In this way the prophetic charisma of creativity suppresses the false dilemma: culture or holiness, associating cultural creation and holiness; moreover, this charisma establishes culture itself as a form of holiness”⁴¹.

Under these circumstances, the culture will not only have a new garment but will participate in the transfiguration of its potentialities and creativities, and it will prepare its externalization even from here and now, and also its entrance to the glory that transfigures everything. This will only be possible when the «people of culture» will actually become people who are part of the holiness proposed and made possible by Jesus Christ in the Church, their creations being but a genuine reflection of this participation. An authentic culture that goes beyond the crumbling threshold of creation is a culture of holiness that integrates all the potencies and inspirations of the creation in a comprehensive way, being developed and deepened by it in the perspective of God’s will and love for the world, except for the sin and the «ugly» in the world.

V. Conclusions

Eschatology was approached in the neo-Patristic thinking of the 20th century from various perspectives, being a theme of major interest in theology, spirituality and Church life. Through the elements highlighted

⁴¹ Paul EVDOKIMOV, *Arta icoanei, o teologie a frumuseții*, pp. 138-140.

in this study, we can say that the method and content of the 19th century Orthodox Dogmatics - influenced by the structure and content of the Western, Roman Catholic and Protestant dogmatics - were overcome in the neo-Patristic synthesis of the 20th century.

First of all, the Orthodox theologians have understood that eschatology is not an autonomous chapter of Dogmatics, separated from the other chapters and placed at the end of Orthodox Dogmatic structure, but it must represent the «ferment» that guides the theological discourse towards the experience of the Kingdom of God within the Church and Mysteries as a pledge of future ones.

Secondly, eschatology was viewed and expressed as an essential dimension of the Church life and spirituality, being experienced in the Mysteries of the Church, as well as in the presence of the Holy Trinity in the Church. Thirdly, the eschatology was viewed in correlation with the culture of the past, the Orthodox theologians attempting to show that culture, history and cosmos are not abandoned by the Church, on one hand, and on the other hand to express the correct relationship between eschatology and culture, based on the worship-culture relation from the perspective of Revelation. They wanted to draw attention to the consequences of an autonomous culture and, above all, to set up a functional perspective of the modern man of culture in relation to Christ, the Church and eschatology. It was also expressed the correct relationship between eschatology and history centred in Christ whom the beginning, middle and end of history are discovered and included in. Therefore eschatology must be a constant in the structure and content of Orthodox Dogmatics. Eschatology refers not only to the future things, but also to the present ones which are experienced in the Church, Mysteries, and Liturgy. As a reality of communion of the Most Holy Trinity, eschatology is present in the worship, the Mysteries and the Church Liturgy as a pledge of the Kingdom.