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Nikolaos Matsoukas' Efforts to overcome Scholastic in Dogmatic Theology

Abstract

Among the leading representatives of the Greek Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Nikolaos Matsoukas occupies a definite place, being a theologian and a former professor at the Faculty of Theology in Thessalonica. In this study, we will focus on some issues developed by Professor Nikos Matsoukas in the Orthodox Dogmatic assuming a hermeneutic effort to overcome the tradition of the influences of the medieval scholasticism in the Church.

The renewing notes of Orthodox Dogmatic are evident in Nikos Matsoukas' thinking, although we cannot say that the renewal of the Orthodox theology in general or of the Greek one ended. It is still affirmed through the contributions of new generations of scholars - although some theologians point to the damaging divorce between theology and church life. The renewal of Orthodox theology has a creative, alive and patristic answer to the diverse challenges of the contemporary world and a unified and comprehensive vision.



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Keywords

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The Greek Orthodox dogmatic theology has had a number of important representatives of which some have been the exponents of the "academic" theology of the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century and some have been exponents of the neo-patristic renewal by the recourse to the sources of the Revelation, the biblical and patristic theology. Some of them worked in Greece at the two Faculties of Theology, or in the Diaspora, exposing the dogmatic tradition of the Christian East to a foreign and often westernized environment, but also responsive to some interesting issues that these theologians have managed to skilfully highlight. The great struggle was for the disposal of the Western influences in Orthodox theology on the one hand. On the other hand, in the positive direction, to provide to the secular world, a coherent theology, a theology that is not separated from the life of the Church, a theology with a clear and redeeming message for the secular man of the twentieth century. The errors of the historic Christianity wanted to be surpassed by another manner of making theology. The primary and fundamental source of this new manner of doing theology was the Revelation, the returning to the richness of life and ideas of it¹. Among the leading representatives of the Greek Orthodox Dogmatic, Nikolaos Matsoukas occupies a definite place, being a theologian and a former professor at the Faculty of Theology in

¹ See also Cristinel Ioja, *Dogmatică și Dogmatişti. Prolegomena privind aprofundarea Teologiei Dogmatice Ortodoxe în România în a doua jumătate a secolului al XX-lea și începutul secolului al XXI-lea*, Marineasa Press, Timișoara, 2008, pp. 13-17.

Thessalonica. In this study, we will focus on some issues developed by Professor Nikos Matsoukas in the Orthodox Dogmatic assuming a hermeneutic effort to overcome the tradition of the influences of the medieval scholasticism in the Church.

1. The Revelation as unity between natural-supernatural, apophatic – cataphatic

Detaching from the western Protestant and Catholic conceptions about the divine Revelation, Matsoukas affirms the Orthodox view on this theme which is the basis of the gnoseological manner of regarding the reality. Nikos Matsoukas says that in the biblical and the ecclesiastical tradition “there is no question of two revelations, whose borders will be drawn and delimited, because the Revelation, everywhere and always is one and unique, fulfilled in the world and in history. In this view, there are not two revelations - natural and supernatural, the former being subordinate to the second, but only one Revelation with two ways of manifestation - natural and supernatural. Based on the vision of revelation unity, Professor Matsoukas reaches the vision of knowledge process unity of apophatic and cataphatic.

Developing the relationship between cataphatic and apophatic, with major implications for the relationship between reason and mysticism, even between science and theology, Matsoukas shows that: "there is always a functional unit between apophatic and cataphatic; therefore, according to the Fathers' theological methodology, the two modes harmoniously coexist (...), while the cataphatic is functionally related to apophatic in a necessarily manner, it prevails in every experience and life occurrence².

² *Ibidem*, pp. 172-173.

Starting from this point, both the reason and the mystery, the faith and the reason coexist and are complementary³. The Greek theologian uses the same gnoseological equilibrium as Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae⁴ does, through which he distances himself from the total apophatic approach professed by Lossky and Yannaras⁵. However, unlike Father Stăniloae, Matsoukas particularly emphasises on the importance of this balance between natural-supernatural and apophatic-cataphatic for the relation of the theology with the philosophy and the science. In this perspective, we can say that Nikos Matsoukas develops this cataphatic-apophatic relationship that the western theologians have lost due to a poor methodology and a unilateral vision. For him there are not a supernatural revelation in the Church and a natural revelation outside the Church, but "any form of revelation and every stage of it, outside or inside the boundaries of the Church, is both natural and supernatural"⁶.

Matsoukas succeeds in making both a genuine introduction in the Orthodox gnoseology, based on the theology of the Church Fathers, in which the vision is comprehensive, and the

³ *Ibidem*, p. 181.

⁴ Pr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. I, Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române Press, București, 1978, p. 122-125

⁵ See in this respect: *Ibidem*, p. 122. Silviu Eugen Rogobete, *O ontologie a iubirii. Subiect și Realitate Personală supremă în gândirea părintelui Dumitru Stăniloae*, trad. Anca Dumitrașcu, Adrian Guiu, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2001, pp. 36-116; Emil Bartoș, *Conceptul de îndumnezeire în teologia lui Dumitru Stăniloae*, Editura Institutului Biblic „Emanuel” Oradea, pp. 52-84; Pr. Conf. Dr. Ștefan Buchiu, *Cunoașterea apofatică în gândirea Părintelui Stăniloae*, Editura Libra, București, 2002; Nicolae Moșoiu, *Taina prezenței lui Dumnezeu în viața umană. Viziunea creatoare a Părintelui Profesor Dumitru Stăniloae*, pp. 65-100; Jürgen Henkel, *Îndumnezeire și etică a iubirii în opera părintelui Dumitru Stăniloae*, trad. Diac. Ioan I Ică jr. Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 2003, pp. 155-160.

⁶ Nikos Matsoukas, *Teologia Dogmatică și Simbolică, vol. II. Expunerea credinței ortodoxe*, traduction by Nicușor Deciu, Bizantina Press, București, 2006, p. 35. In this statement I think Matsoukas distances himself from Father Stăniloae's vision on the aspects of divine revelation.

relationship between the tradition and modernity is clear and balanced. By a unitary vision on theology, he avoids the Western "breaks" between Scripture and Tradition, revelation and reality, natural and supernatural, apophatic and cataphatic, theory and action, presenting all these in one existential unit which resides in anthropology. Nikos Matsoukas' thinking is based on St. Gregory Palamas and St. John Damascene's theology, thus his work has a neopatristic orientation. It is anchored on the foundations of the Revelation of the Church – the Holy Scripture and the Holy Tradition - and it represents a creative answer to the problems raised by the contemporary world. That is why for him "the theological gnoseology is not just a simple concern for the dogmatists, but the very way of life of the members of the Church, and its marks may be seen on the monuments of the communities of the Church and even in its culture"⁷. He describes the attitude which the Orthodox dogmatist must have towards science and philosophy, an attitude and a vision that does not exclude at all these forms of knowledge.

We can notice that Matsoukas is not bothered by other forms of knowledge of the reality, but he integrates them together with the theology in a balanced manner, in a comprehensive and synthetic vision, without confusion over the reality. He pleads for the opening of theology towards the other forms of knowledge, and for a straight relationship with science and philosophy. The theologian uses the later ones to highlight the position of theology that he divides in *scientific and charismatic*. The professor also exposes the complex relationship between theology and philosophy, and the relation theology-philosophy-science during the history in ancient Greece and the East. Other aspects refer to the conflict and the relationship between theology-philosophy-science in the West, highlighting the dual methodology of the Fathers of the Church in contrast with the

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

unidirectional methodology of the scholastic theology and also the methodological implications for the knowledge, in both approaches. "It should be noted that the Eastern theology does not confuse the areas of the science that concentrates on the data of the creation with the function of the theology as charisma."⁸

Matsoukas appreciates that the Orthodox theology distinguishes between truth and knowledge, knowledge being the participation to truth⁹. He also says that contemporary science helps us to understand that reality is one thing and our image of it, is a different thing. Matsoukas believes that its object should characterize every science and not the method it uses, the method being the "key" that helps us understand the object. Starting from here, according to Matsoukas, the object of the knowledge object should be divided in natural and spiritual and subsequently sciences should not be divided into theoretical and practical, but in natural and spiritual¹⁰.

The Greek theologian is aware that the scission of the object of the knowledge into natural and spiritual raises a painful problem, i.e. the unity of the object. In reality, it is unitary, because "in spite of this scission and diversification of the methods, sciences (natural and spiritual) cannot be considered as isolated and bounded in hermetic and inviolable borders. They relate, surround, overlap and support each other"¹¹. In his apologetic-dogmatic investigations, the Greek theologian uses the discoveries of modern physics, thus overcoming the dualistic philosophy and the positivism. Although these discoveries are real, however they have their limitations. Professor Matsoukas shows that the quantum science raises major questions to scientism and positivism.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 120

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 37.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 40-41.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 43.

In this relationship between God and creation, Matsoukas raises the issue about the arguments of the existence of God. The different opinions on the viability and necessity of such arguments are due to a blockage in the debate over natural and supernatural revelation. The wrong vision on Orthodox apophatic Theology makes some theologians to reject those arguments, which is contrary to the practice of the Church Fathers. Both the biblical tradition and Church Fathers speak about the existence of God through these arguments, using especially the cosmological and teleological argument. For Matsoukas, these arguments cannot be isolated and considered separately because "they are a form of knowledge that inherently and functionally links to the content and stages of the theological knowledge"¹². Therefore, the Greek theologian

¹² Idem, *Teologia Dogmatică și Simbolică, vol. II. Expunerea credinței ortodoxe* p. 37. For teleological and cosmological supporting of his arguments, Matsoukas appeals to biblical and patristic texts, while the psychological, historical and moral arguments can hardly be located in biblical and patristic texts, being logical construction of newer dogmatists. Matsoukas considers the ontological argument is unthinkable in the Orthodox tradition texts, being the consequence of the scholastic theology premises. He criticizes Andrusos who places these arguments at the periphery of his concerns and Karmiris who in his summary Dogmatics makes no reference to these arguments, or to the divine attributes (pp. 36-37). Here is Matsoukas's reaction to the removal of God's attributes from the dogmatic teaching, attitude concerning I. Karmiris first: "Because of the known separation of the apophatic and cataphatic theology that we recorded together with all its consequences in the first volume of Dogmatics and wanting to purify the recent Orthodox theology from scholastic elements, many authors suppress the attributes from the dogmatic teaching, just as they do with the arguments for God's existence. This however is a very painful race. It is well known that Orthodox theology in general and not just St. Dionysius the Areopagite, is concerned within the revelation with the name, attributes and triad God's divine appointments. And this job is one of the most serious and essential theological issues "(p. 87). While criticizing him on some points, Matsoukas recognizes the contribution of Karmiris on the renewal of Orthodox theology and his attempt to overcome the Western models of dogmatics even using them extensively in arguing some aspects of his

addresses the issue of the arguments to prove the existence of God from the perspective of an unbreakable unity between the natural and supernatural revelation, and of the basic principle regarding the relationship between divinity and creation, relationship that was altered.

2. A historical view on the trajectory of the dogma and the philosophy in Byzantium

Matsoukas gives us a real history of Byzantine philosophy due to the approach style and the concision of ideas¹³. This history is the same that it was expressed in ecclesiastical monuments. The foundation of the Byzantine culture and life is based on

Dogmatics. Also referring to Andrutsos, our theologian emphasizes the presence of God's attributes in his Dogmatics, but "it is enough for someone to read the paragraph on attributes of God in Christos Androutsos Dogmatics and since he knows scholasticism well, he will be able to distinguish the radical difference between the patristic and scholastic theology related to the subject "(p. 91). Andrutsos is in a different orbit than the patristic theology. In understanding God's attributes topic he follows the medieval realists. Regarding this subject, Christos Andrutsos used scholastic method and content. Thus, it appears - says Matsoukas - the complete lack of the premises of the Orthodox Theology. In addition, the scriptural and patristic foundation of the eight divine attributes into three groups indicates the atrophy in developing the subject. So involuntarily and unconsciously, Andrutsos gets to challenge the basic positions of the Orthodox Theology regarding them groundless. Regarding the presence of God in creation, Andrutsos of ignorance, challenges word by word an excerpt from the work of St. Athanasius the Great, *On the Incarnation of the Word* 17 PG 25, 125. (pp. 93-94). See on rational arguments also Nikolaos Matsoukas, *Protestantismul*, Tesalonic, 1978 pp. 10-14. In the same context of the school dogmatics, Matsoukas refers to the discussion of three Greek theologians: Andrutsos, Balanou and Diouvuniotis, which was full of contradictions and almost unpardonable inconsistencies. The problem is that none of them is aware that he is influenced by the scholastic method and ideas. (p. 226).

¹³ Idem, *Istoria filosofiei bizantine*, traduction by Pr. Prof. Dr. Constantin Coman, Nicușor Deciu, Bizantina Press, București, 2003.

certain demanding historical-philological criteria and approaches them in a new way.

Matsoukas uses a different research method from the one of his predecessors B. N. Tatakis, K. I. Logothetis and he give us an image and a holistic interpretation of the history of the Byzantine philosophy. Their works "do not promote or clarify the autonomy of Byzantine thinking in the space of theology and philosophy", they rather seem "history books of dogma, with some emphasis on the tenets of the philosophical concerns of Byzantine scholars having the Plato, Aristotle, Neo-Platonist, Stoic and other models". Matsoukas examines Gnosticism, Judaism and Hellenism in relation to Christianity and the gnoseological, cosmological, anthropological and Christological implications. Gnosticism, Judaism and Hellenism are the three cultural factors among which Christianity developed and emerged as a new perspective of seeing the world and a new way of life and culture. The Greek theologian divides the Byzantine culture and the historical realities in closed periods - that is centuries - having methodological reasons to ease the research, but he recognizes that life and culture are not sealed in closed sections or strictly defined periods, that stop suddenly letting another to begin¹⁴.

The first century is characterized by the revolutionary advancements of Christian preaching in the Roman world and the second century - by the major necessity of the Church community to dialogue with political and intellectual elite, while in the third century, the School of Alexandria provides a "unified view of theology and Greek Paideia". In the fourth century, Christianity is already recognized, but in addition to the "filters" emerging from the imperial power, the Church must deal with heresies that will lead to crystallization of the doctrine. In the 5th and 6th centuries, the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite who "comments and expresses the spiritual

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 78.

climate of theology, of liturgical life, of the ascetic universe and of the whole cultural atmosphere"¹⁵, will have a marked influence in Byzantium. In the seventh century, St. Maximus the Confessor offers a well-connected and structured theological system. He processes St. Gregory of Nyssa theology and gives a light on Areopagitica writing, "providing them with the most courageous hermeneutic perspective that could never exist". St. John Damascene dominates the Eighth century that Matsoukas calls "the light that illuminates the darkness of the climate of the Greek culture"¹⁶.

Nikos Matsoukas examines St. Photios' role in the encounter between theology and Greek culture¹⁷, and the role of St. Simeon the New Theologian, who by the theology of uncreated light "left strong marks in the culture of his age"¹⁸, and the events which preceded the Hesychastic dispute. Listing numerous representatives of art and literature, with their varied forms of thinking, Matsoukas shows that they developed in a creative and prolific way throughout the Byzantine civilization, but not in the detriment of theology and philosophy¹⁹.

Addressing the historical issues of Byzantine philosophy in a thematic and personal analysis, in order to renew the contemporary theology Matsoukas emphasizes the distinction between uncreated and created in cosmology, distinction that is based on the patristic distinction between being and energies in God. In terms of anthropology, he speaks of unity as the picture of a unified universe in this relationship between uncreated and created. "Opposite to monistic and dualistic conceptions, in Byzantine philosophy the existential unity is dominant by

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 98

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 110-111.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 116-117.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 125.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 152

relationship with the enlightenment of the divine energy"²⁰. Matsoukas highlights the integrative holistic dimension of the history of Byzantine philosophy stating that the Church „moves in the dimensions of the universality and catholicity"²¹. In Byzantium, ascetic and mystic are the ethos and way of life, and a new worldview. Using a holistic way, in an analytical, synthetic and comprehensive style, away from dichotomy, one-sidedness and excesses, the Greek theologian gives us the image of the Byzantine history of philosophy as hermeneutics of the world and life, based on the principles formulated by the theology.

3. Doctrinal and spiritual implications of demonology

Contrary to the orthodox dogmatic practice Matsoukas addresses the issue of demonology according to the Gospel, the Patristic theology, and the liturgical texts from the dogmatic point of view. According to the author "It is impossible that someone speaks theologically correct about Satan and the devils and, in the same time, to ignore the dogmatic teaching of the Church. In other words, there can be no independent demonology²². The causes of the absence of demonology from the dogmatic theology books are as following: a) demythization b) the modern morality views prevailing in biblical texts interpretation, c) the belief in an idyllic and largely sappy Christianity²³. Matsoukas tries to free the researcher and the reader from the influence of mythical stories, both from Christian texts and from the religious and philosophical ones,

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 191.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 215

²² Idem, *Teologia Dogmatică și Simbolică, vol IV. Demonologia*, traduction by Pr. Prof. Dr. Constantin Coman, Pr. Drd. Cristian-Emil Chivu, Bizantina Press, București, 2002, p. 13

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

his tool being the clarity of the theological premises²⁴. His book of *Theology* that includes the demonology, gathers summary information and ideas from other previous treaties that are well-defined parts developed by Nikos Matsoukas in his *Dogmatic Theology*. Matsoukas includes the demonology in the fourth chapter of his work, analysing it from a cosmological, dogmatic, biblical and even liturgical perspective, without disregarding the general atmosphere of the Church in the contemporary world. He emphasizes the presence of evil in the contemporary world, the passion, the wonders fever, the problems posed by the genetic science, the philosophy, the secular culture. All these are evaluated from a Biblical-patristic perspective, and one of his sources is Dostoevsky's thinking. He quotes other philosophers and thinkers too, in order to highlight the nihilism, alienation and world autonomy as work of the devil: JP Sartre, F. Kafka, A. Huxley, G Orwell, James Joyce, Ingmar Bergman, W Reich, etc. Matsoukas shows that those who wish to adapt and modernize the Church, in accordance to the changes and historical events are influenced by "satanic logic." In his opinion, "the Church did not modernize itself, but it modernized the world by producing civilization"²⁵.

4. Dogma - Scripture and Tradition

The professor pleads for a strong link between the Dogmatic, the Tradition and the Bible. In his *Dogmatics*, volume II, Matsoukas "investigates the continuity of a living history that reaches in any circumstance the contemporary of the experience of the Church. Biblical events, Theophany, apparitions of God's glory as transfiguring light, constitutes the living history, the accomplished and complete reality (...) Thus, the Fathers, who were enlightened by the Holy Spirit, did not

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 169.

separate at all the experience of the Church from the biblical events. The tradition is biblical and the Bible is traditional"²⁶. He makes a difference between dogma and dogmatism, emphasizing the relationship between dogma and the mystery of freedom, and thus rejecting the obsessive domination of dogmatism.

We subscribe to some considerations of theology, such as: "A great success of professor Matsoukas' *Dogmatics* is the biblical foundation of the dogmatic theological discourse. We do not exaggerate when we say that this is the first Orthodox dogmatic theology that succeeds to recover patristic theology on biblical foundation. Matsoukas' recovery of the biblical discourse in the dogmatic theology resembles to the dogmatic theology of Fr Dumitru Staniloae that recovers the Philokalic discourse"²⁷.

5. The overcoming of the scholastic theology and the key aspects of the Orthodox Dogmatics

The approach and the content of Professor Matsoukas' *Dogmatics* is different from the school one, his models being Georges Florovsky and Dumitru Staniloae. In presenting some fundamental doctrinal issues of dogmatics he follows the patristic line, but mentions the historical and dogmatic vision of Western Christianity too. Thus, unlike the Scholastic textbook division, he adopts the bipartite division of Patristic theology that is theology and oiconomia, which ends up being tripartite, the three sides being organically related to each other²⁸. This vision is inspired by the *Dogmatics* of St. John Damascene and includes: a) theology, b) Christology c) ecclesiology. The last

²⁶ Idem, *Teologia Dogmatică și Simbolică*, vol. II. *Expunerea credinței ortodoxe*, p. 9.

²⁷ Idem, *Teologia Dogmatică și Simbolică* vol. IV. *Demonologia*, p. 7.

²⁸ Idem, *Teologia Dogmatică și Simbolică* vol. II. *Expunerea credinței ortodoxe*, p. 29

two parts particularly refer to *oiconomia*, but they are not independent from any of these three parts. This overview of dogmatic theology in the Orthodox tradition relates to cosmology, anthropology and eschatology, the latter being nothing but "the continuous progress of the body of the Church to perfection"²⁹.

Matsoukas considers that „*dogma*” and „*heresy*” should be discussed not only in the *Introduction* of Dogmatics, but should be considered as features for all the chapters of symbolic and Dogmatic theology. Starting from the historical research, Matsoukas believes that both dogma and heresy are not axioms or theoretical principles, with some practical applications, but they are forms of life, that meet and collide³⁰. From this point of view, W Bauer's considerations about the Orthodoxy against heresy are outside reality because both Orthodoxy and heresy "pre-exist in the course of the divine *oiconomia*"³¹. Speaking about the definition of dogma in the dogmatic manuals, Matsoukas believes that the trend is an incomplete appreciation by focusing especially on the Ecumenical Church teaching. These definitions tend to impose a certain type of dangerous scholasticism. „The impression is that the dogmatic truths are theoretical conclusions with a determined and powerful functionality in the area of the Church itself. This statement is wrong and might foster an absurd and inexorable dogmatism"³². Matsoukas believes that the cosmology and the anthropology cannot be understood

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 30.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 30. See a developed analysis of this problem at Nikolaos Matsoukas, *Ortodoxie și erezie*, „Anuarul Universitar al facultății de Teologie din Universitatea din Tesalonic”, annex no. 29, vol. 26, (1981), pp. 41-103.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 12. He criticizes those who, ignoring the premises of Orthodox theology, believes that the positions of the Orthodox patristic Theology come into opposition with the results of modern historical-critical biblical research (pp. 46-47).

³² *Ibidem*, p. 14-15.

outside the theology, Christology and ecclesiology, but as their axis, so that the man, the history and the cosmic dimensions will be located in a linear emerging of the completion from Alpha to Omega³³.

We can see a renewal of the theology that criticizes the structure and the content of the Orthodox dogmatic theology from the textbooks influenced by Scholastic Theology. Matsoukas pleads for a full and vivid vision of making the Dogmatic Theology. In his work, Matsoukas is critical to the various aspects of Dogmatic Theology from textbook and he completes and goes beyond them through his vision. In his opinion the theologians from the 3rd to the 8th century, did not fall in the trap of theoretical schemes and did not put the basic concept of dogma in the centre as theoretical form. Therefore, they did not write any system of dogmatic teaching of the Church. The basic contents were alive, combative and embodied the content of faith in all forms of the life of the Church i.e. worship, art, canons, conciliar decisions and Tradition meet unseparatedly in the life of the Christians. Theorization of faith intended the complete and united use of dogmatic teaching, clarifying the concept of spiritual environment in which Christians live and breathe³⁴.

In terms of relationship between dogma and mind, the Greek professor appreciates the positive developments of the dogmatists from a patristic and neopatristic theology perspective; however, he exposes the erroneous scholastic view on knowledge and faith of the members of the Church, who experience faith in an irrational belief. Therefore the Western theologians think that reason is the body of science (of the dogmatists who systematize the dogmatic truths), and the sense is the body of religion³⁵. The concept that human rational

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 30.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 22. After exposing the vision of patristic tradition on the subject, Matsoukas outlines some of the consequences of this teaching of scholastic

powers are limited and could not understand the divine life is wrong and of a Scholastic influence. It states that reason submits to a certain point and then comes the irrational faith that fills the imperfection. This is still promoted in the apologetic studies of the last decades³⁶. In his opinion, the orthodox dogmatist must consider three basic premises: 1) the patristic line on presenting the Orthodox faith. Besides his own experience of life in the Church, the dogmatist needs to research the patristic texts, the texts of the Councils, that of the Church historians and ascetic literature correctly and from a historical-philological perspective. 2) the historical-dogmatic study of all forms of the life of the Church and the history of the Western Christianity dogmas which is necessary for a West-East comparison. 3) the knowledge of the contemporary, philosophical and scientific language³⁷.

In the first chapter, *Theology*, Matsoukas says that there are only two realities: *divinity* and *creation*. This is the first and essential ontological distinction. Fundamentally, there is only divinity because God is Being, and the creation is the non-being. Creatures exist because they participate to the divinity³⁸. I should mention that by referring to Patristic theology, Nikolaos Matsoukas passively uses the method and writings of St. John Damascene and the Cappadocian Fathers and the writings of St. Maximus the Confessor, Dionysius the Areopagite, St. Simeon the New Theologian, St. Gregory Palamas, St. Cyril of

influence. These include the danger of reaching agnosticism or a purely intellectual faith. He highlights how Orthodox theology saves the role of reason within knowledge through rationality of the body. It is called to deification in total existential unity of man. Through scientific and philosophical language, reason can formulate and express the contents of faith. Paradoxically, those who "mutilated" reason were scholastics and scholasticism generally, while Orthodox theology recognizes its well-defined role in science, philosophy and theology (p. 25).

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 24. See also *Nașterea și ființa dogmei ortodoxe*, Tesalonic, 1969, pp. 159-157.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 25-26.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 32.

Alexandria, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. Irenaeus of Lyon, Origen, etc. The Greek theologian offers a new perspective on the creation out of nothing, underlining „theology does not talk about creating the world out of nothing (μηδέν), but out of nothingness (ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος). Although from a certain point of view this is the same thing, he surely goes beyond the narrow limits of the Scholastic thinking about the act of creation out of nothing. Theology resolutely wishes to express the relationship between Being and non-being, between uncreated and created, Being and energies. In other words when he speaks about the creation "of nothingness" he wants to tell us that the world does not come from the Divine Being, and therefore is non-being"³⁹. Matsoukas concludes that Origen did not deny the uncreated-created and therefore he made a distinction between the birth of the Logos and the creation of the world. At this point, he disagrees with Florovsky who "wrongs Origen, and uses the criteria used by post-Origen theology as it happened in Origenist disputes, that makes his hermeneutics uncertain"⁴⁰.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 108-109. On creation see also Idem, *Elemente științifice, filosofice și teologice în Exaimeronul Sfântului Vasile cel Mare*, Tesalonic, 1981, pp. 75-92; *Trăirea religioasă și teologia în Confesiunile lui Augustin*, Anuarul Universitar al Facultății de Teologie din Universitatea din Tesalonic, vol. 25 (1980); *Cosmos, om, comuniune după Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul*, Atena, 1980. On the issue of the evil see also Idem, *Problema răului. Eșeu de teologie patristică*, Anuarul Universitar al Facultății de Teologie din Universitatea din Tesalonic, anexa nr. 22, vol. 20 (1976). Between the patristic cosmology and philosophical cosmology there much difference in terms of the problem of evil. Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy talk about evil as nothingness, as the absence of good. "Non-being of patristic theology is not a self-existing amorphous material reality, but in principle any created reality: matter, bodies, souls, angels, reason, word, and mind. All creation is nothingness from the most imperfect sensing element and to the most perfect angelic order (...) The absence does not mean the absence of form, but the danger of adulteration or tampering existence, life, reason, deification ". (*Teologia Dogmatică și Simbolică vol. II. Expunerea credinței ortodoxe*, pp. 160-162.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 115. See George Florovsky, *The Concept of Creation in Saint Athanasius*, „*Studia Patristica*”, nr. 6, (1962), p. 50 ff.

Assuming the Bible perspective which does not separate the great events from the common ones, Matsoukas goes beyond the scholastic dogmatics on miracles and beyond that of Andrutsos⁴¹.

In Chapter *Christology*, Matsoukas emphasizes the organic connection between Christology and Theology on one side and between Christology and Theotokology on the other side⁴². Christological heresies are also treated, the dogma of Chalcedon, hypostatic union and its consequences, the three ministries of Christ in the Church. In these last points we notice a certain similarity between Father Staniloae's structure and Dogmatic and Nikolaos Matsoukas'. In Chapter *Ecclesiology*, Matsoukas criticizes and distances himself from the Catholic and Protestant ways of conciliation of the two concepts - communion and institution - in Trembelas' *Dogmatics* and that of Andrutsos and Karmiris. This view on ecclesiology is due to the fact that dogmatics "do not see the particular sectors of the dogmatic teaching in an organic unity", but they regard them independently as the scholastic method does⁴³. He deplores the fact that some theologians argue that Orthodox theology did not develop an ecclesiology and thus it needs to borrow it from the West, especially from Scholastic, and often it is not assimilated. There is ecclesiology in Patristic theology but it does not follow the scholastic systems. We will not find a definition of the Church anywhere in the patristic texts, because life is not defined, only described. "The descriptions of the Church through images and auxiliary terms constitute the ecclesiology and it is common in Biblical and patristic texts"⁴⁴. Nikos

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 119-123. See also Idem, *Locul minunii în lumea fizică și sensul acesteia în Noul Testament*, „Grigorie Palama”, Tesalonic, 1963, pp. 3-13.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 163 și 221. Matsoukas emphasizes that Catholic theology has independently developed the doctrine of Christology Theotokos reaching two deviations: a) the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, b) the dogma taking up Theotokos' body into heaven (p. 222).

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 264.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

Matsoukas uses an abundance of references to the works of the former Orthodox theologians and dogmatists who are influenced by the scholastic theology. His source of inspiration is the biblical and patristic theology that overcomes various scholarly-influenced ideas in an alive, creative and integral vision. The overall impression is that sometimes his goal is to overcome these mentioned patterns and influences. The professor realizes that a statement of the Orthodox faith in its authenticity must necessarily sanction the deviation of Western influence in the orthodox thinking. This idea can be found in the chapters of volume II of his *Dogmatics*, and Matsoukas does not stop stressing the incompatibility of system and content between Scholastic Theology and biblical and patristic theology that Orthodox Theology must connect. He exposes the canons meaning, the relationship between canons and dogma, canons and laws⁴⁵, in an interesting and exciting way, showing that "the basis of a correct account of infallibility is Pneumatology"⁴⁶.

The issue of the Sacraments in Orthodoxy is regarded as a unity of sensitive and understandable. Sacraments are the acts of this

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 302-306. Matsoukas is very firm on this issue: "... canons do not regulate charismatic inner life of the Church, but its outer and worldly side. We cannot say that today there is an adversity to the canons. While canons are immutable, but continually renew in their content, it is more likely that today they are more needed because the external structures of the Church should be organized and articulated in order to properly address an articulated, organized and very complicated world. Therefore, not only we do not win remaining in unchanged canons, but we are in danger of cluttering the Church, betraying the legacy of tradition which needs the canons for the proper preparation and a worldly organization of Church. In this way the situation can become even abnormal while we want canons in order to fight the most profound theological and practical content. If someone will be careful, he manages to see how unrealistic are some canons of the past and how necessary are new ones for the contemporary life" (pp. 303-304).

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 324.

unity and not abstract and magical things. Matsoukas does not agree with Andrusos, who is influenced by the Scholastic Theology, and who defines sacraments as rites transmitting the invisible divine grace. For Matsoukas sacraments have two fundamental premises: a) the reality of the unitary body of the community and b) they are historical, natural, and non-magical facts that involve the free and synergetic agreement of man. Therefore, there is no independent and mechanical ritual that produces some results⁴⁷. He also shows that the Orthodox tradition and ecclesiology cannot divide the sacraments in mandatory and optional or reduce them to seven sacraments⁴⁸ – this criticism being directed especially against Andrusos. "Sacraments are not isolated rituals, but the very manifestation of the historical body (...) According to the hermeneutics of the Church the Mysteries are the body of Christ Himself"⁴⁹. After approaching the „ecclesiological anthropology”, Matsoukas highlights the harmonization of the first aspects to eschatology that is not the last chapter of the Dogmatic Theology as the Scholastic Theology alleged⁵⁰.

The renewing notes of Orthodox Dogmatic are evident in Nikos Matsoukas' thinking, although we cannot say that the renewal of the Orthodox Theology in general or of Greek one ended. It is still affirmed through the contributions of new generations of scholars - although some theologians point to the damaging divorce between the Theology and the life of the Church. The renewal of the Orthodox Theology has a creative, alive and patristic answer to the diverse challenges of the contemporary world and a unified and comprehensive vision.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 348-349.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 350-351.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 351.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 401-402.