

The Christian-Islamic Vision of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror

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*Engenderings of Ecumenical
Romanity*

By

Christos Retoulas

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And they heard *the voice of the LORD GOD walking* in the garden in the breeze of the day: and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD GOD amongst the trees of the garden. And the LORD GOD called to the man, and said to him; Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat ? And the man said, The woman whom thou didst give to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the LORD GOD said to the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat. And the LORD GOD said to the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field ; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life : and I will put enmity-between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed ; *it[/he] shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel*. Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply the pain of thy child-bearing; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and yet thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee¹.

Thus, when the rule and reign of the Romans that today impedes [it] cease to exist and comes to an end – it says -, then the lawless, i.e., the antichrist will be revealed. And when the *archē* of the Romans is broken up, then the antichrist will impose anarchy and attempt to take control not only over that of the humans but also, over the *archē* that belongs to God. As for the *archē* of the Romans, the antichrist will destroy it utterly. Just as the Babylonians crushed the *archē* of the Medes, and as the Persians eliminated that of the Babylonians, and as the Macedonians destroyed that of the Persians and as the Romans ruined that of the Macedonians, in such manner the antichrist will destroy that of the Romans, and the *archē* of the antichrist will be eradicated by our Master, [the Lord Jesus Christ]. Prophet Daniel writes all these².

¹ Bereshit/Genesis 3:8-16. The majority of the Old Testament quotes are primarily from *The Koren Jerusalem Bible*. Jerusalem: Koren Publishers 1989 (KJB) (Hebrew/English). Otherwise, unless stated are from, *The Orthodox Study Bible*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008 – as they are the New Testament ones (based on the New King James Version (TOSB) “Scripture taken from the New King James Version ®. Copyright© 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.”).

² Saint Oikoumenios the Wonderworker (10th century AD) [Saint Oecumenii, Triccae (in Thessalia Episcopi, PG 119121-2AB)].

Alif Lam Mim

The Byzantines[, i.e. the Romans] have been defeated
in a nearby land. They will reverse their defeat with a victory
in a few years' time — God is in command, first and last.

On that day, the believers will rejoice at God's help.
He helps whoever He pleases: He is the Mighty, the Merciful.

This is God's promise:

God never breaks His promise, but most people do not know;
they only know the outer surface of
this present life and are heedless of the life to come³.

“I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches.
I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star.”

And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say,
“Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the
water of life freely. For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the
prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him
the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the
words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the
Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in
this book. He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming
quickly.”

Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!⁴

Βγήκαν λάμειες στὸ ποτάμι
σύννεφο ἔβαλαν γιορντάνι
κι ἄντρας ζῶνει τ' ἄρματά του
πάει ταμένος τοῦ θανάτου.
Vagellis Goufas, Εἰς μνημόσυνον.

³ Koran 30:1-7 (in Haleem 2005, 257). The fulfilment of prophesy in the Roman victories against the Persians at that time guarantees that the future dimension of the prophesy will also be fulfilled.

⁴ Apostle John's the Apocalypse/Unveiling 22:16-20.

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READING GUIDE

“Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,”
says the Lord.⁵

Blessed is the monk[/the Christian] who counts all human beings as gods
after God.⁶

A monk[/a Christian⁷] is the one who has separated himself/herself from
everyone, and he/she is united with everyone[, at the same time]⁸.

Gaze into what is not ashamed or afraid of any truth.
Contain all human faces in your own without any judgements of them.
Be pure emptiness.
What is inside that? You ask.
Silence is all I can say⁹.

A monk[/a Christian] is the one who regards himself/herself as one with
everyone else, for he considers that he/she sees himself/herself in everyone
without exception¹⁰.

When something goes wrong, accuse yourself first.
Even the wisdom of Plato or Solomon can wobble and go blind.
Listen when your crown reminds you of what makes you cold toward
others, as you pamper the greedy energy inside¹¹.

⁵ Deuteronomy 32:35

⁶ Saint Nilus of Ancyra (d. 430 AD), PG 79:1193C.

⁷ Paraphrasing by Elder Father Archimandrite Athanasios Mytilinaios (Lesson 98, Acts 9:22-26, Dec 11, 1988). Accessed March 28, 2024. http://www.arnion.gr/mp3/omilies/p_athanasios/prajeis/prajeis_098.mp3.

⁸ Saint Nilus of Ancyra, PG 79:1193C.

⁹ Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi (1207-1273 AD) [in Barks 2007, 9].

¹⁰ Saint Nilus of Ancyra, PG 79:1193C.

¹¹ Rumi 2003, 191.

Let no one take and extract a bare part from our words,
 and, dividing it from the rest of what is written,
 he/she holds it in his/her hands foolishly¹².

Know the words of the Koran are simple,
 But within the outward sense is an inner secret one.
 Beneath that secret meaning is a third,
 Whereat the highest wit is dumbfounded.
 The fourth meaning has been seen by none
 Save God, the Incomparable and All-sufficient.
 Thus they go on, even to seven meanings, one by one,
 According to the saying of the Prophet, without doubt¹³.

¹² Saint Isaac the Syrian (6th century AD) [in Saint Isaac the Syrian 1991, 304-305].

¹³ Rumi [in Gruner, Cameron O. *A treatise on the Canon of Medicine of Avicenna: incorporating a translation of the first book*. New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1970, 13].

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book could be seen as an appanage to my epopic work, *The Glory of the 'Byzantine'-Ottoman Continuum: Romanity, God's Neighbourhood on Earth*. In the uplifting lightness of a gust of the wind, it was as if it had to be cut away from the mountain while still remaining there. For some *logos*, that cut had to be magnified as itself; in the end, it was understood as being a milestone towards the *telos* that had been declared from the *archē*. From the *Logos* to the *Logos*, via a number of Roman milestones such as Alexander the Great, Gaius Julius Ceasar, Saint and Emperor Caesar Flavius Valerius Constantinus Augustus the Great, Emperor Caesar Flavius Petrus Sabbatius Iustinianus Augustus, Fatih Sultan Imparator Basileus Mehmed Manuel, Revolutionaries of the 1821 Hellenic Revolution such as Yannis Makrygiannis (Ioannis Triantaphyllou), and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

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I would also like to express my deep thanks to Dr. Julian Raby, who permitted me to use and quote from his DPhil thesis, *El Gran Turco: Mehmed the Conqueror as a Patron of the Arts of Christendom*. (University of Oxford, The Faculty of Oriental Studies, Michaelmas Term 1980) – exactly the same Faculty in which I commenced my own DPhil nineteen years later. Indeed, no works have done more to liberate the enormous personality of Fatih Sultan Mehmed from the claws of the Frankish and Frank-servient late Byzantine aulic sources of the terminal decadence than those superb ones of Julian Raby. That being said, I cannot fail to accentuate that although from the point of 'evidence' that is most true, at the same time, these works seriously suffer in theological-spiritual exegesis

– and for this, my severe criticisms at times in this book. Yet this is up to the point explainable, for at the time of its writings, no serious work on Ottoman religiosity had been attempted – apart from the usual Arab-Persian approaches to Islam in general. Ottoman religiosity was basically buried in and confined to the 19th-century Western perceptions of Islam, or better, Islamism. *Vahdet-i vücud tasavvufi* Islam was not even properly examined in itself – let alone in its organic and historical relation to Ottoman Islam, Sunni and *Alevi/Bektaşî*. Of course, the reality of the hierarchical inter-encapsulation between Roman Orthodox Christianity and *vahdet-i vücud tasavvufi* Islam was not even on the horizon.

In this respect, the life-long outstandingly pioneering, in-depth and comprehensive works of William Chittick constitute a uniquely unshakable foundation of Sufi studies globally. Although I came to personally communicate with him only relatively recently – yet having consulted his writings extensively and for decades - I take the opportunity once again to express my gratitude for his academic generosity and, generally, for all his efforts in the field all these years.

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Apart from her globally unique academic contributions to Sufism (especially to its poetry dimensions), I need also to mention here Professor Victoria Holbrook as someone I hold dear.

Georgios Soupionis has remained a constant companion in a long journey of return – his material contribution to the publication of this book too aside.

Osman Gazi honoured the unbelievers of Bilecik very much. They asked him: ‘Why do you honour the unbelievers of Bilecik?’ He said: ‘They are our neighbours. We came as strangers into this land. They treated us well.

Now it is our duty to honour them’¹⁴.

The Chronicles of Yahsi-Fakih (? – 1414 AD):

Despite all the complaints against “the pagans,” in the second half of the sixteenth century it could be said by one who knew *the Greeks* very well that

“*they did not want another to be their sovereign but the Turk, not even a Christian.*”¹⁵

They felt that the empire was becoming theirs again.

For a while, even in Constantinople, the relations with *the Westerners* were reduced to a few embassy officials, like Stephen Gerlach or Solomon Schweiger, who went to Egypt with David Chytreus, an erudite traveler; not before 1580 *did* the ambassadors themselves *begin to take an interest in this world which they sometimes used, but actually despised.*

*A feeling of pride was beginning to animate the Greeks who had remained under the rule of this sultan, who, through an imperial order, had forbidden any offence brought to the Christians*¹⁶.

“*The sultan*” - one could write in the second half of the sixteenth century - “*was very pleased to be the ruler and the emperor of such a nation.*”¹⁷

One of his successors in the sixteenth century, Murad III, the son of a Christian woman from Paros, very appreciated, was said to have secretly bought an icon of the Virgin Mary^{18,19}

Nicolae Iorga (1871-1940 AD), *Byzantium after Byzantium*

One day, while walking with his disciples, Mevlana Celaleddin [Rumi] came across some [Roman Orthodox] priests dressed in their black clothes.

¹⁴ Zachariadou 1999, 141.

¹⁵ ““*Nollent allium sibi dominari quam Turcam; ne christianum quidem,*” Crusius, *Turcograecia*, p. 250”.

¹⁶ “This feeling lasted throughout the centuries. For Skarlatos Byzantios, loc. cit., p. 393, Mehmed II was *ὁ μεγαλόψυχος τῷ ὄντι καὶ πολιτικώτατος* [truly benignant and politically astute]”.

¹⁷ “Crusius, *Turcograecia*, p. 120”.

¹⁸ “Gerlach, op. cit., p. 361.”

¹⁹ Iorga 2022.

Some of them said about the priests, ‘How dark are these people?’ to which Rumi replied: ‘There is no one more generous than they. In this world, they gave us Islam (*Müslümanlık*), purity (*temizlik*) and worship (*ibadet*), while in the next world too, they bestowed on us the houris and the pavilions [of paradise]. What more do you want?’.

Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi (1207-1273 AD)²⁰

The Ottoman Empire,
which was once “the most beautiful Kingdom in the World,
praised by the wise men/women all over the world”²¹,
in his days, had ended up a tyranny from which:
“both Christians and Turks, without any discrimination vis-à-vis religion
(as they are all created by God and are the children of Adam)”²²,
must save themselves.

The Roman Christian and probably *Bektaşî*²³ Greek revolutionary,
Rigas Velestinlis (1757-1798 AD)

[Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was] the apostle of a kind of a wide Hellenic-Turkish Empire in the East, a dual Empire with two administrative capitals and with one spiritual capital, the Augusta city, that was successively Byzantium, Constantinople, Istanbul and that will always be the Crown City of a whole eastern world ...

I did not have in front of me Peter the Great of Russia but, more, another Victor Hugo who sang new eastern poems, the new *Orientales*.

Greek MP Leon Maccas (1892-1972 AD)²⁴

²⁰ Eflaaki in Atasagun 2001, 136 (trans. by author). Eflaaki was a 14th-century Sufi historian who collected literature by and about Rumi and his disciples.

²¹ Rigas (in Metallinos 1998, 265).

²² Rigas (in Metallinos 1998, 264).

²³ Hasluck 1929, 595.

²⁴ Kitsikis 1995, 27, quoting from Maccas, Léon, “Atatürk et İnönü: à travers quelques souvenirs personnels”, *Les Balkans*, vol. 10, 4th quarter, 1938, 362-363, emphasis added.

BONDING

So, Being has two outer frontiers that can neither be partaken in themselves nor be delved into *at all*: the True Non-Being Who is Life *Supra*, i.e., God, and the non-being that is not even an essence/an existent (and thus devoid of energy/operations). What lies after/*meta* the ever unpartakable Divine Essence, i.e., God as He is in Himself, but before what we call ‘normal’ Creation (the unseen metaphysical (human spirit, *nous*, souls, intellects, minds, angels, spirits, *nous*-es, intelligibles, etc.) and the seen physical (corporeals, bodies, matter, etc.)) constitutes the uncreatedly existential Realm round about God where His Will of His omnipotently satisfactory approval/pleasure (*εὐδοκία*) utterly reigns – but without the whole of Creation being within that Realm as yet: this existential vacuum has various names, Heaven, Paradise, etc. where – for the time before the End - bodiless existents live in *theosis*. Now what lies beyond that Realm of God is where we as humans live, i.e., selves of ever inter-encapsulating composites of souls and material bodies – the noeric demons also occupy this realm whose higher segments are termed, ‘waters’ or ‘air’.

Note that essences (a being in itself) are experienced by created beings as follows: in what they are in themselves, we see only that they exist (by some form of operation/energy-based detection, we know that something exists, although not what it is as such) or not; and, that they are naturally subject to alterability towards themselves and the non-being. Nothing else. These are the two poles of the limits of existence for a creature²⁵.

As for God, He lies *supra* both opposition and similarity.

The anatomy of Ancestral Sin, or, the Fall as the root of idolatry – which is why, in reality, no one is truly an atheist:

As *supra*-essential, the Divine Essence has no natural connection to Creation. It can never be experienced whatsoever. Only Its energy[/operations]. For, as the divine Essence is simple/unitary, or better said, *supra* simple and unitary, the possibility of even partial participation is not in the cards, even as a tangible theoretical exercise – except in deadly daydreaming. So, in reality, a created essence (being) can idolatrize itself by way of the non-

²⁵ Retoulas 2022, 202.

being out of which it had initially come. An essence that moves to grasp the Divine Essence and fantasizes that it did projects its own created energy upon the non-existent smoky mirror of the non-being, which in turn deceitfully identifies it with the Non-Being, God. And then it comes to think the divine energy is a creature. So it fantasizes the non-being as the living Non-Being having made it 'alive' by shining upon its own created human or angelic natural energy – or allowing itself to be deceived by the created light of a being of a corresponding existential level. Having an aeonian hatred of the flesh, a fallen angel is not fooled by the intelligible natural light that the human composite can project upon itself. But the reverse is not valid²⁶.

In this respect, Prophet Samuel advises fallen Israel:

Fear not : you have done all this wickedness : yet turn not aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart ; and turn not aside : for then you should go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver ; for they are vain²⁷.

The word that the Prophet Samuel uses to dissuade Yisra'el from continuing to practice idolatry is *תֹּהוּ* (*tó-hoo*) – a word that is translated above as 'vain'. In the Septuagint (LLX), relevant characterisations are, “μηθὲν ὄντων” and “οὐθέν εἰσιν”, i.e., “that which are non-beings”, and “that which are nothing/which are not even an essence-form”, respectably. It is this alterability of an existential orientation towards non-being that creates phantoms, idols, confusion, and chaos. In fact, the conclusive definition of the word *תֹּהוּ* (*tó-hoo*) from its usage in the Holy Scriptures is: “formlessness, confusion, unreality, emptiness, chaos... desolation, empty space, futile, futile things, meaningless, meaningless arguments, nothing, waste, waste place”²⁸.

As a *logos*-based, soul-body composite essence, a fallen human being can idolatry with every noetic and/or material element and being in Creation; the fallen angels only with noetic/intelligible/spiritual things. Have you seen an angel worship matter? So, you understand that today's New Age Gnosticism is a kind of a humanized Gnosticism (by way of Frankishized, Augustinian theology and Western religiosity in general), and not exactly the original Gnosticism that was the mere product of the fallen angels. It is the apex of apostasy against which the Lord Jesus Christ warned us: “So

²⁶ Retoulas 2022, 202.

²⁷ Shemu'el/The First book of Samuel 12:21.

²⁸ Strong's Hebrew: 8414. *תֹּהוּ* (*tohu*) -- formlessness, confusion, unreality, emptiness (plus New American Standard Bible (NASB) translations) (biblehub.com) (<https://biblehub.com/hebrew/8414.htm>).

then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.”²⁹ For, surely, in Reality, all this is self-worshipping. And as the crucial element of this anatomy is the actualized knowledge of oneself, i.e., godless self-love, idolatry is equivalent to adultery and fornication (noeric and bodily)³⁰.

As for the human constitution:

the generic essence of the human being is a differentiated united composite, one constituted of two essences, the noeric (spirit, intelligible) and the bodily (material). At each human birth, these are engendered as human essence in one *logos* and one hypostasis, i.e., a single unrepeated particular person who in their personhood harmoniously share homogeneity and individuality: universal Humanness and unique Individuality in a single mode of being³¹.

In other words, each human being has a unique hypostatic *logos* that defines him as unique – while he/she is also common via the *logos* of the human essence –, and although the intelligible-material linkage is seemingly severed at death, in Reality, that bond remains alive via the Holy Spirit, to be engendered·ly activated in soul *and* matter at the time when the whole of the Creation will be restored into the omnipotently satisfactory approval/pleasure of God and remade anew, i.e. at the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ: when everything will be spiritually, intelligibly and fleshly Spiritual. This is the 8th Aeon, ‘the Kingdom of God’. To put it differently, Paradise, Heaven, etc., are not ‘the Kingdom of God’.

Two things are to be noted here: First, the unique personal hypostatic *logos* of each and every human being proscribes any notion of reincarnation whatsoever (a teaching that has its origins in the fallen spirits who castrate the human soul from its body and the human body from its soul to dominate humanity which they envy and want eternally dead – and all this under the guise of blind and undiscerning lovism). Secondly, the institution of the 8th aeon institutes in itself the realm of Hell as well. Before then, what the dead experience as ‘hell’ is a pre-tasting – just as *theosis* in this life and dwelling in Heaven after death are pre-tastings of the 8th Aeon, the aeon of the aeons. This establishment goes as follows: The institution of the 8th Aeon removes the Tree of knowledge of good and badness/evil³² from existence and institutes only the Tree of Life in the new re-Creation. That means that *logos*-based entities can no longer freely dwell in the Fallen existence of

²⁹ The Apocalypse/Unveiling 1:16.

³⁰ Retoulas 2022, 202.

³¹ Retoulas 2022, 187.

³² Bereshit/Genesis 2:17.

existential oscillation/alterability between humanly perceived good and humanly perceived badness/evil. They can only freely dwell in an environment according to the uncreated Goodness of God – which is the ultimate good of human beings and humanity. That means that, for love, freedom, and justice to reign in absolute terms, the existential engendered orientation of each human being in our short life has to be eternally transliterated accordingly to the new environment of ever Being: towards either the True Non-Being or the non-being. Which is why it is said:

But as Hazret Muhammed said: “In whatever state a bondsman dies, whatever quality is dominant in him while he dies, when he is raised up again he will be raised up in that quality”³³.

And also:

As to what will happen in the next life, take care not to follow deceitful teachings [like reincarnation]. Whatever you sow here, you will reap in the hereafter. One can't progress after they leave this world. After death, God no longer struggles and cooperates with a human being towards the rebirth of their soul³⁴ [(in the sense of repentance)].

This everlasting transliteration is known as the Last Judgement. In the case of transliteration as the True Non-Being, i.e., God, the 8th Aeon is lived out as the Paradise of Completion/Perfection/*Teleiotes*. For if transliteration is toward non-being, that same divine 8th Aeon, the ever Day of the Lord, is experienced as a never-ending Hell³⁵.

And we must know this: in the state that the soul finds herself when leaving the body [at death], in that state, she will remain immutable for the rest of time wanting either good or evil³⁶.

³³ Rifai 2011, 424.

³⁴ Saint Barsanouphious the Great (6th century AD) (in Saint Barsanouphious the Great and Saint John the Prophet 1997, 142-143).

³⁵ I have explored the issue of *theosis/glorification/deification*, after-life, the constitution of the human being, etc. in my exegesis of Dr. Eben Alexander's unique Near-Death Experience (unique as it took place without the presence of a functioning brain) in my book, *God's Gift, World's Deception: Dr Eben Alexander's Proof of Heaven in the Light of the Real*. Lit Verlag, Zürich, 2022.

³⁶ Saint John Damascene 2007, 98-99 (*Dialogue against the Manicheans*, 37)

The Door, the Way, and the *Telos* of the Uncreated Land of God's omnipotently satisfactory approval/pleasure (*εὐδοκία*) are all the Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit by the Father's Will.

Before the coming of Christ in the flesh among human beings, the *theoria* in the *nous* – within which the angelic order/class operates - and the sighting were not present in them authoritatively/abundantly so that they pass into the mysteries themselves. But when the *Logos* was incarnated, there a door was to them in Jesus – as the Apostle says³⁷.

In this uncreated Light:

The common axis which holds together [Roman] Orthodoxy and preserves its unity, the one and only axis relating to all matters and that places everything on the right foundations, when it is followed, is the axis: *Catharsis – Enlightenment/Illumination – Theosis (Glorification/Deification)*³⁸.

That is why:

What will happen to man after death was not an overriding concern for the Fathers. Their primary concern was what will man become in this life. After death, his *nous* cannot be treated. The treatment must begin in this life, because “in hades there is no repentance.”³⁹ This is why Orthodox theology is not outside of this world, futuristic, or eschatological, but is clearly grounded in this world, because Orthodoxy's focus is man in this world and in this life, not after death⁴⁰.

As we have seen, Roman Christianity promulgates a differentiatedly unified physics-metaphysics continuum into and with Uncreatedness, placing the theocosmic human being at the centre of existence:

The basic key is the fact that, according to Orthodox theology, everyone throughout the world will finish their earthly course in the same way, regardless of whether they are Orthodox, Buddhist, Hindu, agnostic, atheist, or anything else [*our comment*: the more so with regard to Islam in which Jesus is centre stage at the End of Days]. Everyone on earth is destined to see the glory of God. At the Second Coming of Christ, with which all human

³⁷ Saint Isaac the Syrian 1991b., 222-223; Homily 84 (Greek text) corresponding to Homily 27 (Syriac text).

³⁸ Romanides 2004, 46.

³⁹ Saint John Damascene, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Book II, Chapter IV.

⁴⁰ Fr. John Romanides 2008 (Kindle Locations 445-44).

history ends, everyone will see the glory of God. And since all people will see God's glory, they will all meet the same end. Truly, all will see the glory of God, but not in the same way – for some, the glory of God will be an exceedingly sweet Light that never sets; for others, the same glory of God will be like “a devouring fire” that will consume them. We expect this vision of God's glory to occur as a real event. This vision of God – of His Glory and His Light – is something that will take place whether we want it to happen or not. But the experience of that Light will be different for both groups. Therefore, it is not the Church's task to help us see this glory, since that is going to happen anyway. The work of the Church and of her priests focuses on how we will experience the vision of God, and not whether we will experience the vision of God. The Church's task is to proclaim to mankind that the true God exists, that He reveals Himself as Light or as a devouring fire, and that all of humanity will see God⁴¹ at the Second Coming of Christ. Having proclaimed these truths, the Church then tries to prepare Her members so that on that day they will see God as Light, and not as fire⁴². When the Church prepares her members and everyone who desires to see God as Light, She is essentially offering them a curative course of treatment that must begin and end in this life. The treatment must take place during this life and be brought to completion, because there is no repentance after death. This curative course of treatment is the very fiber of Orthodox tradition and the primary concern of the Orthodox Church. It consists of three stages of spiritual ascent: purification from the passions, illumination by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and *theosis*, again by the grace of the Holy Spirit. We should also take note. If a believer does not reach a state of at least partial illumination in this life, he will not be able to see God as Light either in this life or in the next. It is obvious that the Church Fathers were interested in people as they are today at this moment. Every human being needs to be healed. Every human being is also responsible before God to begin this process today in this life, because now is when it is possible, not after death. Everyone must decide for himself whether or not he will pursue this path of healing. Christ said, “I am the Way.” But where does this Way lead? Christ is not referring to the next life. Christ is primarily the Way in this life. Christ is the Way to His Father and our Father. First, Christ reveals Himself to man in this life and shows him the path to the Father. This path

⁴¹ “Of course, all people have a partial experience of this vision of God immediately after the departure of the soul from the body at their biological death”. [Fr. John Romanides 2008 (Kindle Locations 3332-3333).]

⁴² “In the fire of revelation on the final day, the deeds of each will be tested by fire as Paul says. If what one has built up for himself is a work of incorruptibility, it will remain incorruptible in the midst of the fire and not only will it not be burned up, but it will be made radiant, totally purified of the perhaps small amount of filth...” St. Nikitas Stithatos, “On Spiritual Knowledge,” ~ 79, *The Philokalia*, vol. III, page 348 [in Greek] [in English, p. 165]. [Fr. John Romanides 2008 (Kindle Locations 3334-3337).]

is Christ Himself. If a man does not see Christ in this life, at least by sensing Him in his heart, he also will not see the Father, the Light of God in the life to come⁴³.

Saint Isaac the Syrian elaborates on that last point:

He will furnish him/her with what is asked for and He will open to him/her the gate, indeed due to his/her humility. For the mysteries are unveiled to the ones who are humble in [self-]opinion. And if he/her dies in this hope – even if he/her had not seen that land anywhere – I think that he/she will have his/her inheritance together with the righteous ones of the old [Testament] who had the hope of reaching perfection/completeness, yet they did not see it (according to the Apostolic saying) for they worked all the days of their lives in hope and died in it too⁴⁴.

One minor trimming here. ‘Between’ the seeing of the glory of God at the Second Coming of Christ, and each and everyone meeting their ends, there exists an instant ‘intermediate’ state where all will see the glory of God in the same way, i.e., to experience themselves as themselves according to what God had willed them and were able to have been in every single moment of their lives on earth: Saint Gregory of Nyssa’s ἀποκατάστασις (restoration) will take place for human beings “to arrive at the knowledge of [that state they yet had failed to conformingly concur to], [and] not by partaking in the goods [of the everlasting life] (τῇ ἐπιγνώσει οὐ τῇ μεθέξει τῶν ἀγαθῶν)... so the Creator is shown that He is not the cause/source of sin”⁴⁵ and also that His judgment is irrefutably just for, in reality, our true self will be our judge.

This Gift is conditional: it presupposes active humility in Christ:

So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what [we ought] to do.’⁴⁶.

To be more precise, the worshipable humanity of Jesus, the Perfect Human Being by nature, as it is hypostatically (differentiatedly) ever united with the Divine Essence. This is our ontological *archē*, middle and *telos*. Becoming in the human *eidos* of Christ, we become in the *eidos* of God by uncreated energy in the human constitution of Jesus, not any essential

⁴³ Fr. John Romanides. *Patristic Theology* (Kindle Locations 451-475).

⁴⁴ Saint Isaac the Syrian 2009, 224-225; Homily 11 (Greek text) corresponding to Homily 12 (Syriac text).

⁴⁵ Saint Maximus the Confessor, PG 90:796ABC.

⁴⁶ Luke 17:10.

identification with God. We become gods as engendered·ly God-like, not as God Himself. This takes place neither by Divine Fiat nor by human effort, but with both. God offers His energetic Uncreatedness – not His essential Uncreatedness-, and the human being offers his/her createdness to Him. That is why the ultimate Gift is *supra*/beyond humanness, presupposing sacrificial humanness.

THE DIVINE GIFT THAT IS ROMANITY AND ITS FRANKISH CONCOCTION: DEFINITIONAL ENGENDERMENTS, EPISTEMOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES AND METHODOLOGIES

What is then Romanity, or the Roman *Ecumene*? At the highest and deepest sense of that reality, Romanity constitutes the existential historical space that adjacently neighbours the uncreated Realm of God, the place of the Skull and the burial Chamber for the Resurrection and Ascension *Supra* from this life, the doorstep/παραστάς-κατώφλιον/*eṣik* of Eternal Life. Never step on the *eṣik*, never step on Him!!! As God has vested the human being *autexousiotis* (self-authority to will and enact) concerning his/her human existence (spiritual, intelligible, corporeal), His uncreated Realm, the Way there, and Its presence in this life remaining utterly His prerogative and these constituting a differentiated unity, Romanity includes both what is today termed religious as well as worldly arrangements. In truth, what you are reading now is but a path of an embodied dialogue with and within stillness, silence and ever-moving rest, a voyage into and out of *hesychia*, from within and without Romanity. Born downwardly yet also prophetically in the bodiliness of Hebraity,

Gracious is the LORD , and just; and our GOD is merciful. The LORD preserves the simple: I was brought low, and He saved me. Return to thy rest [(*menuchah*)], O my soul; for the LORD has dealt bountifully with thee⁴⁷.

Moving upwardly in the intellectuality of Hellenity,

... *sōphron*, *dikaïos* [(just)], and *sophos* [(wise)]. ‘*Sōphosunē*’ ... [as]the name of an aristocratic virtue[, i.e. a virtue of excellence and perfection], it had been used to characterize a man who could have aggrandized himself beyond due limit but preferred deliberately to curb himself, so that he might

⁴⁷ Tehillim/Psalms 116: 5-8.

enjoy hēsuchia[/hesychia], that peacefulness of spirit in which the victor deservedly rests after the agōn [(struggle)]⁴⁸,

concluding in their most perfected stage and yet being none of and unbounded by them, Roman Christianity as ἡ τῶν πάντων ἐνότης (*the unity of all being/existents*)⁴⁹. A point of reference is due here. Roman Christianity, or Christianity is used herewith to refer to the ecumenical Christianity of the *One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Ecclesia* of the *Symbolum Nicaenum*, the Nine Ecumenical Councils sponsored by the New Rome and the Five Patriarchates of (Elder) Rome, New Rome (Constantinople), Jerusalem, Antioch and Alexandria, which after the fall of the Roman West to the Carolingian Franks survived only in the eastern part of the Roman Empire. Within our discussion, it can also be termed, Roman Orthodox Catholic Christianity, Roman Orthodox Christianity, Orthodox Christianity, or ancient Christianity. For this understanding of ‘Roman,’ I am indebted primarily to Father John Romanides (1927–2001 AD)⁵⁰, regarded by many as the most important dogmatic Orthodox theologian of our times, or as Sopko calls him, the “Prophet of Roman Orthodoxy”⁵¹. Romanides’ unique approach is an attempt to provide a differentiatedly unified religio-historical perspective on Roman history – much in the same ‘methodological’ typology with the holy Elder Athanasios Mytilinaios. Or else:

History is both in the detail and in the general. A good historian must be both a kind of Sherlock Holmes [with regard to detail] and at the same time speak from a global perspective; that is what a historian means⁵².

Or, as the farsighted ‘Eurasian Perspective’ of the British medievalist Robert Moore sets the balance to be followed,

⁴⁸ MacIntyre 1988, 48.

⁴⁹ See Christodoulos (Archimadrite) *et al.* 1997.

⁵⁰ Father John Romanides’ family origins are to be found in Cappadocia in Central Anatolia. Before coming to Greece in the 1920s, his parents had lived in the village of Αραβησσός (Gülşehir), about 20 km from the village of Hacı Bektaş Veli where the tomb of the founder of the *Bektaşîyye* is situated.

⁵¹ Sopko 2003; see also Metropolitan of Nafpaktos Hierotheos (Vlahos) 2010.

⁵² Dimitris Kitsikis’ Interview with Giannis Kontos on June 10, 2020. Accessed January 23, 2023. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6_23F2ATbo.

intelligent historical discourse sometimes requires generalisation, and intelligent readers understand that generalisation is always qualified, implicitly if not explicitly⁵³.

And de Jong gives certain indications of the possible pitfalls and points of warning:

Grand Narratives cannot be made to disappear. At best one can identify and analyse these persistent paradigms, locate them in the ideology in which [they] originated, and subsequently use them as tools to uncover significant discrepancies. But when present-day Grand Narratives correspond with those from the past, or have even emerged directly from them, it is more difficult to construct this '*inventaire des difference*'⁵⁴.

There are two things to note here. First, the point of view of the inquirer has to be situated in such a location: neither too close - for extreme bonding-destroying proximity dissolves the object into unconnected individualistically constitutive elements that colour the whole perception with one particular at a time (depending on our focus each time) -, nor too distant, for great intra-limit-destroying distance forms the object as an undifferentiated essence dominated by the colour that is most widespread (magnitude). Secondly, the object itself has not only an external dimension but also a dimension within the self of the researcher, i.e., the existence of the object itself and its mode is constitutively dependent on the self of the researcher. The object is not totally outside the self but *also* inside it.

During our engagement with the so-called Western European 'Dark Ages' (the period following the collapse of the Western Roman Empire), the unification of the Merovingian Franks of Clovis (481–511 AD) and the fall of the Roman West to Charlemagne and his Carolingian comrades, we were astonished by certain predominant characteristics found in relevant mainstream Western literature (mainly Anglophone literature), and, in part we rather dismayed.

First, the degree of explicit and implicit control the Carolingian worldview and thought categories have been generally exerting upon the pre-dominant forms of modern Western academia is almost absolute. It is as if Carolingian religio-intellectual construct constitutes not only a point of departure for Frankish history itself but, in some form, it still operates as an innate nucleus or womb for Western thought and praxis.

⁵³ Moore 2007, 145.

⁵⁴ de Jong 2000, 185.

In her book, *Those of My Blood: Creating Noble Families in Medieval Francia*, Constance Brittain Bouchard provides a racial-institutional link with the modern West, i.e., modern Frankism.

Yet medievalists know better than anyone how much these people were our ancestors: not just of course our biological ancestors, although the same blood of which they were so acutely aware flows unrecognized today in the veins of anyone of western European descent, but also our institutional ancestors, the first creators of the structures we now consider modern⁵⁵.

Secondly, ‘distancing’ from all other forms of religiosity and intellectual traditions is generally called for and effected in epistemology; and yet the empathy displayed for the Carolingian cause becomes so fundamental and over-powering that it reaches self-definitional dimensions under which the self (both medieval and modern) becomes inaccessible, undiscernible, thickly veiled, lost from sight, crucially insulated and protected from any substantial and organic interaction with its subjects. Yet, at the same time, this self remains the source of an over-powering moralism and/or moralised commandments; or, it overpowers normativism and/or normative power – depending on the historical period. It is as if it follows the innately reclusive Carolingian distancing and insecurity, a spirit based on fear and precariousness, in that, as Flierman says:

One is hard-pressed, indeed, to find a group on the periphery of the Frankish realm, whom Frankish historiography did not, at one point or another, come to brand unfaithful. As already underlined by Richard Broome, accusations of rebellion and infidelity belonged to the standard narrative tool-set of the Frankish historian, applied wherever Carolingian claims of hegemony were challenged or Frankish aggression stood in need of legitimation⁵⁶.

The modern bipolar reflection of this essentialism in the mirror of the undiscerning and indiscriminate dualistic absolute is its pair: ‘all are faithful or moral’, ‘all religio-moral philosophies are equally and undifferentiatedly true’, i.e., mere, undiscerning and unconditional multiplicity. Western religiosity, philosophy and epistemology usually forget that both myopia (lit. to shut one’s eyes) and hyperopia (lit. to open one’s eyes in excess) are both illnesses of seeing.

In that setting, the self and its inner reclusive court are nurtured and protected against contamination from ‘the individual or the social other’ – how Augustinian indeed!!! This mere ‘distancing objectivity’ meant total

⁵⁵ Bouchard 2001, 175.

⁵⁶ Flierman 2015, 189-90.

subjectivity to one's own operating ontological categories: in the medieval the Religious Reclusive Universal, and, in modern times, the Multiplicity of Secular Reclusive Singulars. Ultimately, even critical evaluations and antitheses presented in various analyses stem from within and not without the Carolingian worldview – the work of Fichtenau (particularly that in German) and also, that of Nelson leave small openings to a more comprehensive approach; as Nelson informs us, relating to a theme Reuter touched upon in his inaugural lecture at University of Southampton: “All medievalists work, inevitably, within a national culture”⁵⁷ – here, ‘the national’ conforms to a definition or definitions peculiar to the West.

For along with the pair of Universal-Singulars, we also find another absolutely related dualistic one: Reason-Power. As a whole: Homogenising Reason vs. Individualistic Power. As far as Medievalism is concerned, the ‘classical’ work of Rosamond McKitterick occupies a place closer to the former axis:

Yet underlying the processes of communication was a strong purpose, not simply to ensure royal control, peace, stability and order, but also to create a harmonious and Christian whole of a disparate realm. The Christian faith offered an essential common culture to bind this huge empire together...⁵⁸.

While the latest innovative approach, that of Jennifer Davis, which is based more on “patterns of power”⁵⁹ is nearer to the latter view – note that both books were published by Cambridge University Press.

The Western historical trajectory, i.e., from Augustinian Catholicism to the secular Enlightenment Encyclopaedia (via the Protestant Reformation) and finally to the Nietzschean Genealogy of today is also intrinsically connected to the study of Islam. Its first pillar, Orientalism, constitutes a version of instrumental secular reason-based Essentialism, while the second, anti-Orientalism, is a version of a mere power-based Individualism. It is not accidental, as Victus argues, that modern Orientalism as described by Edward Said appears in an embryonic form in the West, not with Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798, but during the 16th and 17th centuries⁶⁰.

As we have argued elsewhere, the seemingly antithetical Western Augustinian·ly crypto-Manichaean ‘Orientalist vs. anti-Orientalist’-imposed “approaches are in tandem with the West, moving from a pre-modern theocratic order of a predominant ‘unity without diversity’ to the modern

⁵⁷ Nelson in Reuter 2010, xiv.

⁵⁸ McKitterick 2008, 379.

⁵⁹ Davis 2015, 3.

⁶⁰ See Vitkus 1999, 209.

secular order of a predominant 'diversity without unity'. Anti-Orientalism manages to deconstruct Orientalist Islam in the way it does, precisely because the latter is built upon rationalist essentialism. Yet, in the end, nihilistic anti-Orientalistic deconstruction leads to particularistic decomposition, leaving us to wonder whether a thing that we can call Islam as such exists at all – apart from figments that obey or propagate the power of the West. And it is interesting that the 'Orientalist – anti-Orientalist' bipolarity finds its twin relative, a kind of Occidentalism vs. Anti-Occidentalism, in the formulation of what Ward-Perkins call "the New Late Antiquity"⁶¹⁶². As does Christian Orthodoxy, Roman Turkish Islam inclusively overcomes this falsely imposed epistemological worldview.

Most importantly, in his superb study, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization*, Ward-Perkins highlights how Western epistemology and politics are mixed to propagate this Frankish paradigm in modernity:

...the European Union ... needs to forge a spirit of cooperation between the once warring nations of the Continent, and it is no coincidence that the European Science Foundation's research project into this period was entitled 'The Transformation of the Roman World' – implying a seamless and peaceful transition from Roman times to the 'Middle Ages' and beyond. In this new vision of the end of the ancient world, the Roman empire is not 'assassinated' by Germanic invaders; rather, Romans and Germans together carry forward much that was Roman, into a new Romano-Germanic World. 'Latin' and 'Germanic' Europe is at peace⁶³.

On the EU-propagated 'Latin'-'Germanic' 'love' affair of unconnected Roman 'Christian microcosms' and Roman-Germanic 'organic evolutions' – we might ask the 40.000 Saxons Charlemagne 'organically' exterminated in the name of what he took to be Christianity. And after having uprooted the vineyard of Ecumenical Roman Christianity, poisoning its olive-tree orchard with both worldisation and other-worldisation, the Magnus King and 'Father' of Western Europe addressed the following question to an assembly of lay nobles and clerics on the matter of baptism in 811AD in a rather farcical-tragic manner: Are the Franks are truly Christian?!

⁶¹ Ward-Perkins 2006, 180.

⁶² Retoulas 2018, 157-158.

⁶³ Ward-Perkins 2005, 174.

9. Quod nobis despicendum est, utrum vere christiani sumus. Quod in consideration vitae vel morum nostrorum facillime cognosci potest, si diligenter conversationem coram discutere voluerimus⁶⁴.

Apparently neither his lay nobles nor his clerics had any idea for the question was skilfully evaded⁶⁵. The other extraordinary thing here is that, as Davis notes: “even in the context of the long-standing concern with baptism at the Carolingian court, this is a remarkable issue to address in a legislative format”⁶⁶ How far we are from the Roman Ecumenical Councils that were centred on human *catharsis*, *photismos* and *theosis*!

For the EU, it seems the Western part of the Empire, which was permanently subdued to the Carolingian Franks militarily after the 9th century and, doctrinally and ecclesiastically after the 11th century, remains an insignificant matter of historical contingency, expressed in such murderously soothing and mesmerising terms, such as the Carolingian religious policies of *Correctio* or *Innovatio*! Of course, all these German-led EU initiatives fly in the face of anything ‘Roman’. Hear the wise words of the great German-Jewish Ernst Hartwig Kantorowicz (1895 – 1963 AD) on a truer and franker path to any unity:

The historian, today, cannot dismiss Byzantium as an intellectual parenthesis. He will not exclude from his account that Europe beyond the Adriatic Sea, draw a frontier or establish an intellectual customs port at Venice, and ignore the existence of South-Eastern Europe even to preserve belief in a “Medieval World Unity.” We cannot simply forget that Constantine’s creation of an Empire- Church, his fusion of the Roman Empire and Christian Church served — with due alterations and due forgeries — as a basis for political thinking and acting during the Middle Ages until roughly 1300 A.D., until in the West the “Byzantine style” was abolished in every respect. In essence, the medieval western world produced no one new political solution to surpass, to improve or to replace that of Constantine; the Carolingian or Ottonian Empire-Churches as well as the Gregorian Church-Empire are only paraphrases of the Constantinian tune⁶⁷.

And he continues into vital nuances:

⁶⁴ Capitula Tractanda Cum Comitibus Episcopis et Abbatibus, no 71, Boretius 1883, 161.

⁶⁵ *Capitula de Causis Cum Episcopis et Abbatibus Tractandis*, no 72, Boretius 1883, 162-164.

⁶⁶ Davis 2015, 8-9.

⁶⁷ Kantorowicz 1942/1944, 32.

Byzantium belongs to “our world,” although the disparity of Romano-Germanic West and Greco-Slav East may defy every effort to construct a world unit. There is no unity of Eastern and Western customs or standards; there is no unity of language and letters or of the fundamentals of education. *Where, if at all, has St. Augustine his shrine in Byzantine education? To the Western mind the idea of the “City of God” is basic and cannot be thought away. But did it exercise any appreciable influence on the East, and are we allowed to transfer the Civitas Dei ideology to Byzantine conditions?* Not to mention a unity of political matters, even the unity of the Church is a most problematic and delicate matter. Shaky ever since the Iconoclast Struggle, at the breaking point in the ninth century, and definitely broken in the eleventh when the Reform Papacy launched anew the ship of St. Peter, the ecclesiastical union remained a dream and only the schism between East and West survived⁶⁸.

It goes without saying that Father Romanides’ work constitutes the predominant approach that remains true to a centuries-long Roman perspective. And in the solidified ocean of Frankish academia, the works of Yitzhak Hen and Bryan Ward-Perkins represent – up to a point - Roman sheltering lone islands. Alternatively, if one would like to see how the ‘halo’ is put over the heads of Charlemagne and the post-Carolingian Franks in general, within this essentially anti-Roman ‘newly propagated paradigm’, he only has to handily indulge the conceptual drumbeat played by academics such as Peter Heather.

In this respect, Lorentz Gyömörey, a former Catholic priest and scholar, states:

During its life-span, the Byzantine state did not make imperialist and conquering wars in the real sense of the term. Even its cultural and religious policy lacks an imperialist element, as the Christianisation of the Slavs, to whom Byzantium gave the Liturgy and the Bible in their own language, shows. In the West, it was different: here, Rome's imperialist spirit survived in the Roman-Latin Church [, i.e., Frankish Church]. The German peoples were Christianised in ‘Latin’, and where existed the minimum of sperms pointing to a different evolution (based on the Irish-Scottish monks’ tradition), they were exterminated. ... the Christianisation of the Saxons by Charlemagne resulted in the loss of life of thousands of people. A Christianity distorted in such a way was the proper ideology for that revealing act of the West's self-presentation, which could be called ‘primordial fascism’: the Crusades. ... in the handling of the American natives already hovers the shadow of Auschwitz⁶⁹.

⁶⁸ Kantorowicz 1942/1944, 32.

⁶⁹ Gyömörey 1977, 18-9.