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Deconstructing Theology or Prophetic Theology? A Comparative Protestant and Eastern Orthodox Christian Perspective

Nathanael Neacșu

Faculty of Orthodox Theology “Dumitru Stăniloae”, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași,
700062 Iași, Romania; pr.nathanael@gmail.com

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is twofold: first, to depict, in its main elements, the conception of a Protestant “deconstructive theology”, and, secondly, to present the prophetic aspect of Eastern Christian Orthodox theology in comparison with it. According to the method of “deconstructive theology” as a method, the Scripture must be dismantled in order to be fresh and new. In the Orthodox understanding, the work of theology is understood to be, in the first place, a personal relationship with and experience of God, both from a mystical and sacramental perspective, and, through this, an actualisation of the work and message of God’s Revelation, making it present in the context of each historical and cultural circumstance. As will be presented below, this achievement could be completed only within the Church. Thus, Orthodox theology must deliver the eternal word and life of Jesus Christ, addressed to the contemporary context, in order to guide the Church and the Faithful toward the Kingdom of God. It is hoped that this comparative endeavour may be beneficial for general understanding between Christians, through placing in conversation two different perspectives regarding theology, which seldom encounter one another.

Keywords: theology; deconstruction; Christ; eschatology; prophetic; church; life; eternal; relationship



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1. Introduction

The present study aims to present and compare two conceptions of the nature and purpose of Christian theology: the first is to be found in the Protestant Christian world and the other in Eastern Orthodox Christianity. The former has advanced and implemented a deconstructivist method for theological developments and hermeneutics in the last half-century, while the latter uses a unitary, mystical, participatory, and personhood-centred method. In the first part of this study, we address the principles promoted by the most prominent Protestant theologians who advocate for “theological deconstructivism”, as well as the philosophical framework in which this conception has been developed during the last half of the century. In the second part, we consider the foundations on which Orthodox theology understands the task of developing theological frameworks and constructs, emphasising its most significant aspects: its specifically eschatological and prophetic dimensions. It should be pointed out that such an analysis has a somewhat innovative/pioneering character, and so we offer this as an exploratory study.

The purpose of this study is not to highlight the differences between the two perspectives, Protestant versus Orthodox, even if they become apparent during the exploratory analysis of texts and in the concluding part. The chief goal of this study is to present reflections on how the task and role of theology are understood throughout the wider

Christian world with an emphasis on the specific case of the Protestant and Orthodox traditions. The method of study is, therefore, neither polemical nor apologetic, but comparative and analytical. This study might contribute to a better inter-Christian understanding of theological approaches, and thereby offer insight into how the Christian faith interacts with the common experience of human life.

2. The Philosophical Roots of “Theological Deconstructivism”—When, Where and Why D ‘Deconstruction’ Develops?

Theological deconstructivism is conceptually underpinned by the deconstructivist philosophical movement, which emerged in the late 1960s under the influence of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930–2004). Derrida is given primacy in terms of both coining the concept of “deconstruction” and its philosophical development and articulation. He is regarded as the promoter, within a postmodern philosophy of language, notions and meanings, of a theory of ‘deconstruction’ (Derrida 1997, pp. 14, 19, 21, 24, 60; Derrida and Caputo 1997, pp. 74–77), through which he sought to distance himself from the philosophical currents adopted by the French society of his time. Derrida attempted to develop his own worldview through the method of deconstruction, which would later become a philosophical current in its own right (Lawlor 2023).

Over time, Derrida’s deconstructivism became a phenomenon proposing the renunciation of stereotypical ways of thinking regarding ontology and morality. Derrida argues that deconstructivism is not a method, or a critique in the Kantian sense, nor is it an analysis in the traditional sense of philosophical inquiry. The meaning and mission of deconstructivism are rather “to show that things-texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices of whatever size and sort you need—do not have definable meanings and determinable missions, that they are always more than any mission would impose, that they exceed the boundaries they currently occupy” (Derrida and Caputo 1997, p. 31). As can be understood, it is a philosophy going beyond limits, it is a philosophy beyond philosophy. Derrida argues for his deconstructivist theories, starting from the biblical case of Abraham who was urged to sacrifice his son to God. He sees in this sacrifice, which in the end did not take place (Genesis 22:1–14), a difference between the accepted moral norms and the norms applied in relation to a loved person, be it man or God. Hence, he proposes the argument of a deconstruction of all that is institutionally imposed in order to identify new meanings at the ontological, religious, moral, and socio-political levels. His work *Donner La Mort* is one of the most representative in presenting these ideas, starting from the model of the patriarch Abraham (Derrida 1992, 1995). His work, arguments and theo-ethico-political ideas are analysed and contextually addressed in a noteworthy manner by Mary-Jane Rubenstein (Rubenstein 2018).

Within philosophical criticism, Derrida is considered to have been influenced by Martin Heidegger and Friederich Nietzsche, who are recognised in their turn as precursors of deconstructivism. As a term, the origin of “deconstruction” lies in Martin Heidegger’s concept of *destruktion* (Heidegger 2006, pp. 43–44). In his view, to deconstruct does not mean to destroy; deconstruction is always a double movement of simultaneous affirmation and undoing. Philosophical deconstruction was soon applied to the interpretation of literary, religious and legal texts, as well as philosophical ones (Holland 1996, pp. 361–67; Balkin 1996, pp. 361–67).

An important hypothesis of J. Derrida’s philosophy is that man, through his historical-biological becoming, develops the capacity to appropriate the present as a teleological and eschatological reality, but also to elaborate and propose constructs that give meaning to his own personhood: “«Let man appropriate everything to himself; but what is important for him to appropriate is man himself (Manuscript of Emille)». But as usual, this anthro-

pologism essentially comes to terms with a theology” (Derrida 1997, p. 352). In other words, the fundamental reality of things is more than a human psychological creation, it is a self-discovery or a divine revelation of truth. Hence, the deconstructionist perspective holds that human language communicates, at best, not ultimate truth, but how a particular individual conceives of the truth at a particular moment in time, in the specific contexts of his/her cultural, political, religious, environmental and experiential influences (Margolis 1985, pp. 138–50).

Deconstruction, therefore, revisits and revises the work of philosophers who study past written works in order to discover absolute truth or meaning, highlighting that, in fact, they encounter only previous authors’ constructions of truth and meaning. Moreover, it is stated that, the more different and distant—culturally, linguistically and historically—the reader is from the authors, the less likely he/she is to be able to understand what the authors had in mind when they used terms like *truth, justice, right, wrong*, etc.

Thus, the philosophy of deconstruction states that it is necessary to implement an effort to properly interpret a text and gain a proper understanding of the author’s context, language and cultural setting in which the writing was conceived (Culler 1986, pp. 85–180, 227–80). Therefore, philosophical hermeneutics must use sophisticated methods of textual criticism to deconstruct the author’s words and to decipher the conceptual constructs through which one author or another expresses a truth or a meaning (Silverman 1994, pp. 9–21). This is accomplished through the *method of double reading* (Wolfreys 1998, p. 2).

In Derrida, deconstruction—before being a *philosophical* method—was a method of *literary* criticism. It deconstructs and analyses an author’s use of language in an effort to discern its construction of meaning. In this perspective, there is no meaning outside the text of a philosopher’s written work and no absolute truth upon which the writer sheds light for the reader. There is only the writer’s construct of meaning, of truth, represented in the text he has written (Wolfreys 1998, p. 2).

This would mean that there is no absolute truth in the texts of philosophers, but only a reflection of the author’s interpretation of what the world means. What appears to others to be the meaning of a reality is in fact a human psychological construct shaped by multiple factors and influences.

3. Quid of Deconstruction of Theology in Protestantism?

The concept of a “deconstruction of theology” is considered to be more than just a philosophical current in the Protestant world of the last two decades, as it is increasingly gaining ground beyond its identification with the beliefs of “progressive evangelicalism”, a branch of Protestant Christianity. Despite accusations of “apostasy” by some Protestant Christians and theologians, the method and ideas of this Protestant movement are increasingly seen as a new and beneficial approach to what could be termed, “The Bible For Normal People” (Hübner 2020, p. 19).

The concept was proposed in the theological writings of the 1980s by Mark C. Taylor in his work *Deconstructing Theology* (Taylor 1982). As C. Stephen Evans notes, the deconstruction of theology proposed by M. Taylor is not a theological endeavour in the traditional or common sense of the word; it is rather, a philosophical approach to theology drawing from the conceptions of Derrida (Evans 1987, pp. 101–2). There has been considerable interest in this method which attempts to replace traditional theology with philosophical hermeneutics of a postmodern type. In this sense, M. Taylor considered that traditional theology had become “irrelevant”, for which reason “postmodernism”, with all the insights that are related to Derrida’s “deconstruction”, ought to be taken very seriously. For M. Taylor “the death of God, the disappearance of the Father, is the birth of the Son, the

appearance of the Word—the appearance of language as sovereign” (Taylor 1982, p. 91). This perspective, however, was not accepted by later theologians. Seeds of a revival and a fresh theology are hoped for all Protestant theologians but, for most, the consciousness and the preaching of the actual death of God cannot be welcomed. This is why not all of them join in supporting the strictly philosophical, post-modern approach of M. Taylor’s “theological deconstruction”. What is obvious, at least for Marisa Strizzi, is the debate on the philosophical, religious and theological features of deconstructivism. For Strizzi, it is not clear that deconstructivism truly belongs to Protestant theology at all:

“I discovered different works approaching deconstruction from the fields of philosophy of religion and theology. Deconstruction was beginning to be received and critiqued by various authors, among them Mark C. Taylor, Jean-Luc Marion, Richard Kearny, John D. Caputo, Graham Ward, John Milbank, and Catherine Pickstock. However, in most of their works, the issue of deconstruction and religion is considered from a philosophical point of view, and Luther’s theology is not a main subject”. (Strizzi 2023, p. 4)

In spite of this, W. Thompson believes that Mark C Taylor’s theological work can be considered deconstructivist from two perspectives: it deals with Friedrich Hegel and Søren Kierkegaard, two philosophers discussed intensively by deconstructionists, and it attempts to deal with the kinds of problems they raise from a theological perspective: the death of God, the disappearance of the self, the perishing of the constructor/author and the correspondence between presence and absence (Thompson 1985, p. 186).

It is true that theological deconstruction took shape as an intellectual movement when deconstruction came to prominence in philosophical and literary criticism, starting with the controversy of the death of God in the 1960s. For some theologians, theological deconstruction is based on F. Nietzsche’s thought and approach. In this sense, Carl A. Raschke states that “Deconstruction is the death of God put into writing” (Raschke 1982, p. 3). This approach is considered problematic or even infamous by current critics (Rubenstein 2018, p. 228). Of course, one cannot speak of the actual death of God, which would be nonsense, but one can speak of the death of an institutional, formal conception of God, and through deconstructing this conception, an attempt to find, *re-encounter and re-think God on new foundations*.

Although there have been and, perhaps, still are philosophical tendencies related to theological deconstruction, it is mostly gaining ground in the Protestant theological world as a methodological step seen as necessary to understand revealed truth. “Deconstruction” is a *critical method* of analysing and evaluating the “presupposition” on which theological systems have been built (Canale 2006, p. 95). The need to create a fresh and new theology has led Protestant theologians, in particular, to speak of a renewal of theology in a “post-theological” era. This is also because they speak of a crisis and transition within evangelical theological scholarship (Grenz 2000, pp. 11–15).

For example, the evangelical theologian F. Canale proposes in one of his studies:

“a deconstruction of Christian teachings that were constructed through the centuries by way of dogmatic or systematic theological thinking [. . .]. Thus the aim of methodological deconstruction is not to destroy evangelical theology, but to open the way for new theological understandings and fresh discovery of truth”. (Canale 2006, p. 95)

Deconstructionism is the constructive attempt to talk about God from within the context of our secular relativistic postmodern culture, and in a non/a/theological form: “[. . .]deconstruction is the *hermeneutic* of the death of God. [. . .] it provides a possible point of departure for a postmodern a/theology” (Taylor 1987, p. 6). However, deconstruc-

tion is not a new phenomenon. F. Canale considers that Jesus Christ (Matthew 15: 2–6; Mark 7:1–13) and Luther used deconstruction effectively and properly (Canale 2006, p. 105). Thus, for Canale, the principle of theological deconstructionism is as follows: “Theologia reformata semper reformanda est” (Canale 2006, p. 129). It is important to also highlight the limits, the principles and the foundations according to which theology can be deconstructed and reconstructed as a reality that communicates new mysteries and meanings of God’s word.

As an unquestionable basis for theological deconstructivism, F. Canale invokes the need to go beyond formalism and external expressions of faith, and to continually rediscover, with renewed determination, the authentic life that comes out of the Scriptures: “Search the Scriptures, that in them you may know that you have eternal life” (John 5:39). This is seen as building the Christian life on the rock of the words of Jesus Christ, as received in the Scriptures. In this way, theology could, in his view, overcome any challenge from the world by being connected to the divine Revelation which is communicated in/through Scriptures:

“Yet, obedience to Christ, the great theological deconstructionist, and the deconstructionist examples of Luther and Calvin should encourage us to press on to complete the unfinished task with renewed determination. In so doing, we will be following Christ’s command to build our life on the rock of his words we receive in Scripture (OT and NT) (Matthew 7: 24). Simultaneously, we will be overcoming the challenge of postmodernity not only in postmodern terms, but also in faithfulness to the evangelical commitment to Scripture’s revelation”. (Canale 2006, p. 130)

Although the argument of such a movement seems to have support—not for the destruction of foundations, but for a liberation from a formal determinism, whatever its construction—there is no unanimous reception of this method within the Christian world of the Protestant tradition. For example, John Cooper has stated: “it is time that we declare war against this deconstruction Christian movement [. . .]. There is nothing Christian about it. It is a false religion” (Huckabee 2022).

On the other hand, Jamin Hübner writes that “Deconstruction simply refers to the process of questioning one’s own beliefs (that were once considered unquestionable) due to new experiences, reading widely, engaging in conversations with «the other», and interacting in a world that is now more connected and exposed to religious diversity than ever before” (Hübner 2020, p. 20).

4. Deconstruction and Hermeneutics in Protestant Theology

According to the Protestant circles that advocate deconstructivism, it would not be a question of the loss of faith, but of Scriptural hermeneutics, of transcending all forms, language stereotypes, cultural, social and theological complexes and preconceptions, etc.:

“With all this talk of deconstruction these days, one problem is that very few people mean precisely the same thing when they use that word. For some people, deconstructing means losing their faith altogether—becoming atheists, agnostics, or spiritual but not religious ones. For others, deconstructing means still believing in Jesus but struggling with how religious institutions have failed”. (Moore 2022)

It is argued that deconstructivism is a hermeneutical method by which one abandons the formulas and conceptual differences that inherently arise due to the contextualisation and teaching of the divine message revealed in the historical setting (Dean 1984, p. 2). K. Elliott considers that reading must be separated from writing and from the author of the

writing. This would lead to the fundamental meanings and authentic interpretation of the Bible:

“The deconstruction of fundamental Christianity resembles Derridean deconstruction in other ways. In order to maintain the equivalence of the Protestant bible with God, fundamental Christian theology must and does deconstruct hierarchies and differences between speech and writing, between author and text. And, in order to establish the equivalence of fundamental interpretations of the bible with the bible itself, it must further deconstruct hierarchies and differences between writing and reading”. (Elliott 2006, p. 723)

Deconstruction in Protestant theology is, therefore, linked exclusively to the text of the Holy Scripture and how it is read and understood. All that is hidden, contradictory, difficult to accept, or even impermissible according to the reader’s prejudices, even Christian prejudices, is, therefore, acknowledged and taken into account. As K. Elliott notes, deconstruction helps to decode the ambiguous, contradictory and not-understood passages, with the effect of elucidating and identifying solutions to social, economic and political justice problems. Moreover, Kevin Hart considers deconstruction necessary in the theological act as it helps to formulate a reflective faith that leads to an honest dogmatic faith devoid of excessive and redundant rationality (Hart 1989, p. 213).

Deconstruction is a way of overcoming the functional contradictions between different theological views, while avoiding the stumbling blocks of a Christian fundamentalism based on infallibility readings of Scripture. Although “Scripture Alone” (Sola Scriptura) captures and can faithfully render the facts received through Revelation, it can be read by the “deconstructivist” method in order to avoid absolutisations of any kind. Theological deconstruction is a deconstruction of religious contextual contradictions and oppositions by uncovering the ultimate foundations of Christianity (Gall 1990, pp. 413–15). It not only deconstructs the forms that “parasitise” theological discourse in the Protestant consciousness, but advocates strategies for overcoming and deconstructing humanism, modernism, empiricism and rationalism. This theological work helps to delineate differing political and philosophical viewpoints (Elliott 2006, p. 714).

Although, attempting to overcome all that might corrupt the fundamental evangelical message, paradoxically, Protestant hermeneutics aim to teach the fundamental tenets of Christianity by following deconstructivist strategies in the most socially powerful way. The focus of Protestant hermeneutics is to find the potency of the word to break through into the world beyond the relativism that every human approach brings with it:

“It is precisely the combination of deconstructive strategies with claims that the bible is infallible, fixed, and literally true that gives fundamental Christianity so much discursive and social power. Christian fundamentalists understand as well as poststructuralists that the power of word over world depends on the contradictions and gaps of language, on its detachment from referents and epistemologies that might expose its deceptions, and on the absence of author and originals”. (Elliott 2006, p. 714)

As Kamila Elliott herself notes, Protestant theological deconstructivism is not the same as Derridean deconstructivism. In some respects, it is even diametrically opposed. Some important differences between the two deconstructivist approaches are apparent:

“First, fundamental Christianity maintains a transcendental signified that locates meaning outside and pre-existing of the Word, while Derridean deconstruction makes the debunking of the transcendental signified its cardinal tenet and denies that meaning can exist outside the logic of the trace or difference. Second, fundamental Christianity claims that God’s presence gives the Word its significance,

while Derridean deconstruction maintains that it is the trace, which is neither present nor absent, that creates signification. Third, fundamental Christianity bases its claim of biblical authority and inerrancy on the affirmation that God authored the bible, while Derridean deconstruction denies that a text is simply defined by author intent or can express the full presence of the author. Fourth, fundamental Christianity affirms that the meaning of the Word is eternal and fixed, while Derridean deconstruction avers that the meaning of words is indefinitely deferred and indeterminate. Fifth, fundamental Christianity holds the Word as authoritative, infallible, and literally true, while Derridean deconstruction unfolds the subversive, unreliable, and metaphorical properties of language". (Elliott 2006, p. 717)

It follows from the above analysis that Protestant theological deconstructivism is not deconstruction *per se*, but rather a deconstruction of obsolete forms and the establishment of new forms through which theological meanings full of God's presence and authority can be more appropriately expressed. In Protestant theology, the Word is eternal and immutable, unchallengeable in its divine meanings. However, the written Word is marked and limited by its scientific, contextual and historical character.

In this sense, in the conception of some contemporary Protestant theologians, deconstructivism and theological post-structuralism (Rubenstein 2003) and their implicit biblical hermeneutics constitute one of the concrete and practical endeavours that make use of the revealed content and inner dynamics of the sacred biblical text.

5. General Features of Eastern Orthodox Theology: Introduction

In comparison with the above aspects of Protestant theological "deconstructivism", Orthodoxy upholds the simultaneous historical and eschatological, human and divine, immanent and revealed and present and prophetic constitution of theology. Its quality of being a reality that assumes and transcends time and history, being defined, above all, by its prophetic and eschatological dimensions, is biblically grounded in the Source of eternal truths, that is, in Jesus Christ. The Saviour Jesus Christ reveals to us that he is the source of the divine words recorded in Scripture and that they are living and eternal: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matthew 24:35). Jesus Christ is considered to be the divine source of the unchangeable, living, prophetic words of the ages to come. Theology is outwardly an analysis of the eternal words of Jesus Christ. In substance, however, the approach to the words of Christ is concerned with more than the transmission of the religious message to believers; it is concerned with the sharing of the divine power and life that flow from the Person of Jesus Christ. To this end, theology is the expression and means of realising a relationship of love and personal union with the same Jesus Christ in this age and in the perspective of eternity.

In the Orthodox confession and phronema, theology is the unveiling and definition of personal experience regarding the Person of Jesus Christ and, through him, of God—the Holy Trinity. This experience is the "content" of theology. Personal experience of God and the living of the divine words in their fullest depths not only develop our knowledge, but also ground us in the Christian mindset and lead us to the final goal of the human being: the sanctification and the eternal establishment of man in the Kingdom of God. The doctrine of the Apostles regarded Jesus Christ not only as the Person of the Son of God, the Word, but also as the One who by his incarnation and his *oikonomic* (οἰκονομία) work or earthly ministry gave eternal life to the whole world (Romans 5:10, 21; I Timothy 1:10; I John 1:2). For the Apostles, Jesus Christ is not only the One who has revealed to us the ultimate meanings and truths of this world, but He is, above all, the Source of eternal life on which man can base, develop and fulfill his existence. In this sense, we may understand

one of the deepest responses of the Apostles to the work and person of Christ: *“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life”* (John 6:68). Thus, for the Apostles, Jesus Christ was the Teacher, but also the One who shared with them His Life (Colossians 3:4) and the words of eternal life.

Orthodoxy does not discuss the words of Scripture in isolation, but always in relation to the Person of Jesus Christ and to the eternal life in the Kingdom of God. Theology is not simply a theory about a god of abstract meanings and ideas, or a religious–moral god of precepts and norms. Rather, theology in the Orthodox tradition is about a living God who incarnates and lives for and in us (John 1:14) and reveals to us the mysteries of eternal life (McGuckin 1998, pp. 268–69). This makes theology more than a human reflection, aspiration and concern. It is a divine–human work accomplished by Jesus Christ himself, Who is the active Subject in the work of theology. Jesus Christ is both the primary and the ultimate Theologian, but also the Foundation Stone of theology. St. Gregory Palamas affirms that He is both Theos and Theos-Logos, that is, He is also the One who, in the fullest sense, can present Himself as God, but also God the Word (Theos-Logos/“Θεός προαιώνιος δὲ ἡμᾶς καὶ θεολόγος ἐγγεγόνει”). As such, He is both Signifier and Signified. He is the Source of theology, but also the Person par excellence who can speak about God, that is, about Himself (Γρηγορίου Παλαμά 1981, p. 74). This perspective is also the one that Christ Himself presents to us when He says that *“For he whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit sparingly”* (John 3:34).

Theology is not only about God—through God the Word—being a revealed reality as ministry, content and method, but it is also about the encompassing reality of history. Theology is about the constitution, meaning and final purpose of history which, in the Orthodox understanding, is identified with the fulfillment and consummation of history in the eschatological realm of the Kingdom of God. Theology is not simply a hermeneutical approach to the word revealed and enshrined in the Scriptures or sacred writings and, consequently, it is not exclusively a strict objective and scientific analysis and research of the “monuments” of faith. For Orthodoxy, theology is the mystery and work through which eternal words, spirit and life are communicated to man. Jesus Christ reaches people with words which are not purely human, but which “have spirit and life” (John 6:63). These words and experiences that Christ taught to the Church can be studied and treated hermeneutically and scientifically, but this pertains only to the cognitive acquisition and appropriation of theology, not to the experience of theology per se. This is a necessary process implicit in the holistic dimension of theology.

Orthodox theology, by its nature, presupposes a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, so that the one who engages in theology can be one with Him, but also with His words: *“If you abide in Me, My words abide in you”* (John 15:7). From the scripturally referenced preaching of Jesus Christ, theology is presented as an organic reality, a process of receiving and uniting ourselves with the Son through the divine words and thus participating in the mystery of the Holy Trinity: *“For the words which Thou gavest Me I gave them, and they received them, and truly knew that I came forth from Thee, and believed that Thou didst send Me”* (John 17:8). The words which the Son reveals in the perspective of a true theology are not only the words of the Son, but also the words of the Father who, through these words, accomplishes the mysteries of divinity: *“The words that I speak to you I do not speak from Me, but the Father who abides in Me does His works”* (John 14:10).

Theology is the consequence of a mysterious process of God’s abiding and indwelling in us (II Corinthians 6:16), an act that involves the working of God’s words in us. They are not the words of this age, but the Father’s words delivered to us through the Son. Theology can only be prophetic in the ultimate sense, because Jesus Christ speaks to us in this world, but of realities from another world. The emphasis in Orthodox theology is not simply on

the words and text of Scripture, but on the relationship with the Father through the Son. This makes theology not a framework platform or statement of faith. Orthodox theology is not and cannot be a theology of repetition. Orthodox theology is about the eschatological future, including the whole history of humanity in its temporal dimension. A theology that is simultaneously non-prophetic and non-historical, or without a creative finality in the immanence of history, is not an Orthodox theology.

Theology is not a mere abstraction of a metaphysical order, but is the way in which the divine mystery or the personal relationship between man and Jesus Christ is lived and expressed. The experience of Jesus Christ as a theological experience is liturgical and mystical. Therefore, the Apostles required the first Christians to ordain deacons to serve the needs of the community, while the Apostles themselves would “devote [them]selves to prayer and to serving the word” (Acts 6:4). The basis of Christian life and teaching is prayer and service of the Word. It is only through personal and liturgical prayer that the inculcation of eternal life and of the prophetic preaching of the Word of God are realised in us. And this is because the Word is both the living principle, and the ultimate goal of Creation (Florovsky 1976, p. 246).

Thus, theology is more than a scientific analysis of the revealed words, it is the dynamic consequence of the assumption and growth of the words of Jesus Christ within us. It is an increase of Jesus Christ in us, an inner incorporation and cultivation of “the life of the age to come” (The 12th Article of Creed). Orthodox theology is the Revelation activated throughout the ages, and the map for meeting, living, and developing in Christ towards the end of history.

6. The Eschatological Dimension of Eastern Orthodox Theology—Premise for a Hermeneutic Prophetic Theology

Theology can be hermeneutics and teaching about God with the teaching and preaching of Jesus Christ as its starting point. These hermeneutics may be likened to the partaking of the rays of the sun as they are reflected on the water (Gregorii Theologi 1858, coll. 29B). This is the formal dimension which is an integral part of the reality that defines theology as inseparable from the relationship between Christ and humanity. Therefore, Orthodox theology is essentially a divine–human work that is shared by man in a relationship with God, with his fellow men and with the world.

For Orthodox Christianity, theology, in its profundity, is the union, the vision (Procopii Gazaei 1863, coll. 677C) and the implicit knowledge of the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity (Johannes Damascenus 1864, coll. 1372). Following the real contemplation of God, according to the witness of St. Paul the Apostle (II Corinthians 12:2), the task of theology is to present prophetically what has been seen in order to journey towards the final end of every human person and of history. Theology is eschatological because it leads human beings to God, whom the Saints have seen and to whom they bear witness (I Corinthians 13:12; I John 3:19). In this direction, St. John the Evangelist assures us that we—as sons of God—when his Son appears, will be like Him, because “we shall see Him as He is” (I John 3:2). As a result, theology is about the vision of God that can be realised proleptically in this life and fully realised at the end of history, and theology is the discourse on the present and immanent experience of the eternal life as experienced in history.

Christians are raised up by Jesus Christ through Revelation to the highest level that can be experienced in life, an anticipation of what is to come. Consequently, theology has a transformational role. It transfigures man and history towards the realisation of the final act of the divine economy: the second Parousia (Thiselton 2012, p. 112). Theology, Eschaton, history and Revelation are identical and distinct realities at the same time. Theology is the experience of Revelation in history from the perspective of believers’ encounter with

Jesus Christ, who is present in us and revealed in us (Galatians 1:16) and across the ages. Theology is about Jesus Christ, about His Revelation, about His work in history that reaches and relates to all people, to each one of us. Therefore, the four realities mentioned above are one, without confusion. They all concern Jesus Christ in His encounter with humans and through the perspective of His union with them. Theology is the personal experience of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, in His presence and action, especially in the perspective of union with His transfigured and divinised Body which will be revealed at the end of the ages.

Therefore, the living newness of theology comes from Jesus Christ being present and working His mysteries in the world and in man until the end of the world. From the Orthodox perspective, theology is not simply a form of an individual understanding of reality, but it is the description and unveiling of Jesus Christ in His ministry until the end of history. This can be experienced by Christians through participation in the Holy Sacraments of the Church. Thus, theology is not an end in itself, nor is it a mere intellectual method of gaining knowledge, nor is it a mere morality or a doctrinal system, a collection of teachings, but it is a process of assuming, living and representing our ascetic, mystical and sacramental union with God. Theology is a growth and sharing in the divine and human life of Jesus Christ.

Through the Holy Mysteries of the Church, the acts and words of Jesus Christ continue in us, allowing believers within the Church not only to engage in a constant dialogue with God, but also to experience a personal and existential communion with Him. Communion and dialogue with God in Jesus Christ involve the exchange of words and meanings of eternal life, which underscores the eschatological nature of theology and Christian life. Theology is eschatological not because it is preoccupied with the future, but because it focuses on the divine plan to deify humanity.

Theology should illuminate humanity's steps toward the horizons of eternity in the Kingdom of God, mediating the path to union with God in any circumstance of earthly life. This work is not merely intellectual, but also organic and existential and it is realised within the Church, imbued with the presence of Jesus Christ and the mystical work of the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Mysteries, all the activities of the Church are marked by its theological attributes. If the Church is one, holy, Catholic and apostolic, then theology is also defined by these same qualities. Orthodox theology remains one and the same throughout the ages. It must convey and interpret the experience of the grace of the Holy Spirit shared with the saints, making it both holy and sanctifying.

Theology encompasses and refers to all created and uncreated existence, embracing the whole, and is, therefore, Catholic. It is also apostolic, as it is founded on the creed and doctrine of the Holy Apostles which they lived and taught through encounters with the risen Jesus Christ and it carries a missionary role in extending the evangelical work and message to all creation (Mark 16:15). All these attributes and realities, inherited from the Church, make theology a constantly relevant, living, comprehensive and eschatological endeavour (Stăniloae 1996, p. 75).

Theology is sacramental, ecclesial and eschatological because it is centred on Jesus Christ, who assures us: "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). His presence among us is made real sacramentally, especially through the Holy Eucharist. Theology is eschatological because it is Eucharistic. The Eucharist is the mystery that unites us with Christ, present in His gifts and seated at the right hand of the Father. Through the Holy Eucharist, we are united with Christ both in His Body and in His glorified state at the right hand of the Father.

The Holy Gifts, then, represent "the inaugural event of freedom and the moment in which eschatological reality becomes the actual presence of the Church" (Zizioulas 2010, p. 161). We partake of Jesus Christ now, but with a view towards full communion in the

Kingdom of God: “I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s Kingdom” (Matthew 26:29).

Theology, therefore, is about Eucharistic communion with Jesus Christ as the mystery of union with Him now, but even more fully in the life to come. There is no theology without the Eucharist. The Eucharist offers the ultimate perspective of communion with Jesus Christ, not theology as a theoretical, cognitive and intellectual discourse.

Therefore, Orthodox theology, through its eschatological nature, and through its sacramental and implicit eucharistic life, brings us into an immediate relationship with Christ within the realm of the everlasting Kingdom of God.

7. Hermeneutical Theology as the Prophetic Mystery of the Church—The Fulfillment of Prophetic Theology at the Eschaton

The prophetic hermeneutics of theology in Orthodoxy are rooted in the presence of Jesus Christ in His Church beyond time by drawing humanity toward an encounter with Him at the end of history. Orthodox theology is prophetic because it is eschatological. Theology is nothing more and nothing less than the interpretation of living and divine mysteries given to humanity for deification. It is the transmission of this work, which aims to experience eternal life already herein this world. Prophetic theology is the prophetic guidance of humanity in this world toward the Kingdom of God.

For Saint Dumitru Stăniloae, theology is prophetic because it is tasked with revealing, in every historical context, God’s plan for humanity and for each individual, with a view toward their deification (Stăniloae 1996, p. 70). Theology is prophetic because it operates not with mere concepts, but with the lived experiences of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Son of Man in His salvific divine economy for humanity. It is prophetic because it describes Christ’s ongoing sanctifying work through the ages; it is His words, life and prophetic deeds extended into us within the Church out of His exalted place at the right hand of God the Father (Mark 16:19).

Being prophetic does not mean focusing exclusively on apocalyptic calculations or mystical interpretations of history. Instead, it means describing Christ’s ascension to heaven and the invitation for each person to join Him at the right hand of The Father. Prophetic theology ensures humanity’s diachronic journey toward the Eschaton. Prophecy is manifested in word, deed and being. It involves identifying with Jesus, who lived in this world, transcended time and comes to us from the eternal realm to unite Himself with us and to draw us to Himself (John 12:32). Prophetic theology, as both act and work, entails striving to conform oneself and world to Christ, or, as Saint Paul puts it, acquiring the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5) and living His life as one’s own (Galatians 2:20).

From an Orthodox perspective, prophetic theology is sacramentally founded in the mystery of Baptism. Orthodox theology is not the product of a scientific approach, but the methodical expression of a profoundly sacramental experience, realised in Baptism. Through Baptism, a person is mystagogically united with Jesus Christ and sealed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In this way, the life of the Christian becomes a dynamic, prophetic realisation of Christ present within them. Beyond the sacrament of Baptism, the highest theological and prophetic act is the Holy Eucharist. Theology may take the form of a continuous communion with Christ through His Body and Blood. This communion leads to the “fulfillment (πλήρωμα) of the kingdom of heaven” (The Orthodox Liturgy 1982, p. 73). In other words, through the Holy Eucharist, Christians experience Jesus Christ existentially in the Kingdom of God now and here: “Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (The Orthodox Liturgy 1982, p. 35).

We journey towards Him, but we also sacramentally live the same Christ who is to come in glory. For this reason, we not only move prophetically towards, Him but

also prophetically remember the experience of Baptism and re-actualise it at every Divine Liturgy:

“remembering therefore this commandment of salvation, and all those things which came to pass for our sakes—the cross, the tomb, the resurrection on the third day, the ascension into heaven, the sitting at the right hand, the coming again a second time in glory”. (*The Orthodox Liturgy* 1982, p. 74)

In the Divine Liturgy, as the highest theological act, prophecy encompasses not only the eschatological future, but also the sacramental past. Prophecy recalls the sacramental events accomplished, yet not fully realised. In Baptism, the individual is united with—and simultaneously filled by—Christ and the Holy Spirit. Christ and the Holy Spirit become active in every moment of a Christian’s life through the Holy Eucharist. This activation is not a mere historical reality, but a fully divine, meta-historical and eternal reality. Therefore, the prophetic nature of Orthodox theology is far from being only informative; it is, above all, recapitulatory, trans-historical and organically participatory. To be prophetic, the Christian must continually actualise the mystery of Baptism through the sacraments of Repentance and the Holy Eucharist (Stăniloae 1997, pp. 15–16).

In this sense, the transformative character of theology is to be emphasised. Theology is prophetic not in the sense of a humanistic enlightenment; it is not sacred information or a cognitive approach to divine mysteries. Prophetic theology is about communion with Christ in His roles as Teacher and Prophet, High Priest and King. Theology is prophetic because it follows Christ’s Sacrifice, calling each person to die and rise with Him. It is also prophetic because, in Christ, theology expresses the experience of overcoming death and inheriting the Kingdom of God. On the other hand, prophetic theology is only possible in Christ, the conqueror of death and the author of new, eternal life (Acts 3:15).

The pursuit, communion and union with Jesus Christ as Prophet, High Priest and King transforms Christians into prophets, priests and heirs of the work of sanctification, elevating humanity to the level of Christ in the Kingdom of God. Consequently, theology is prophetic as it stems from the Christian experience of Jesus Christ as the Prophet and Revealer of God’s mysteries, the High Priest and sanctifier of life and the King of the new eternal Kingdom. As a result, theology is a continuous process and work of dying and being mystically buried with Christ and walking in the renewal of life (Romans 6:4), all of which are real, typological and prophetic acts.

Theology is prophetic only if it remains in Jesus Christ and in His Church. The Church provides the sacramental context necessary for a living and prophetic theology. It embodies the Kingdom of God that is to come (Matthew 6:10), yet is has already experienced prophetically during the Divine Liturgy: “Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (*The Orthodox Liturgy* 1982, p. 35). Theology is prophetic insofar as it is connected to the Body of Christ—the Church—as an “eschatological community” living out its ultimate reality and phase of history (Florovsky 1975, p. 63). As the life of the Church is lived as the communal life of the Kingdom of God on earth, humanity—and the world—reaches the final stage of history and transcends it, with theology becoming a “metahistorical reality”.

In His Church, Christ shares Himself through a creative kenosis, which will reach its fullness only in “the Last Events” (Florovsky 1975, p. 246). Therefore, theology remains prophetic and dynamic until Christ reveals His glory and light in these “Last Events”. At that moment, prophecy and all forms of limitation will cease. When history ends, and Christ’s kenosis reaches its fullness, the purpose of history and of humanity will be fulfilled. All mediated realities will converge and be revealed as the sole eternal reality. This world and “the fashion of this world” (1 Corinthians 7:31) will pass away, and creation will be perfected in the age to come, within the Kingdom of God.

The end of the world will not mean the abolition of the created order, but the great event of humanity's likeness to God: "Little children, we do not yet know what we shall be; but if a revelation be made to us from the Saviour, ye will say, without any doubt, we shall be like Him" (1 John 3:2). This does not signify the cessation of history and all things, but their perfection and the conclusion of theology as the Church's prophetic activity (Callinicos 1969, p. 161). In the Book of Revelation, Christ is described as the Alpha and the Omega (Revelation 22:13), signifying, according to St. Andrew of Caesarea, His divinity and humanity as the beginning and end (Andreas Caesareae 1863, coll. 449A). Christ will thus be the fulfillment of humanity, her journey and her aspirations. Humanity will enter a new dimension of life, which, though unending, will perpetually renew herself in eternity: "[Whoever ascends in the next life] does not stop, but, going from beginnings to beginnings, goes through beginnings which have no end" (Maximus 1865, coll. 613CD).

This reality will manifest as "a Sunday without end, or a rediscovered paradise and an inaugurated eschatology, and the light without sunset of the eighth day in which God may «be all in all»" (1 Corinthians 15:28; Stăniloae 1997, p. 299). At this point, theology and its prophetic nature will reach their culmination in eternal life. Humanity will no longer have a merely human purpose, but will unite with God through grace, participating in His goodness and living eternally new divine mysteries.

The Church will also conclude her historical journey, no longer needing eschatology or prophecy. Theology and the Church will merge into unity with Christ at the end of time, and humanity will share in His glory. The Church will be fully identified as the Bride of the Lamb—Christ—and the eternal Church. All will be called to the joy and the glory of the wedding feast of the Lamb and His Bride, and blessed are those invited to this banquet (Revelation 21:9). The prophecy of Revelation will be fulfilled: "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come'. And let the one who hears say, 'Come'. And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price" (Revelation 22:17).

Until humanity reaches its eschatological fulfillment, the role of theology is continually to renew, within each historical context, the message, the content and the gifts of Christ's revelation and salvific economy. Theology must balance the tension between the Eschaton and the history, offering divine knowledge, meaning and life to people of every era. In this sense, the Church must discern which spiritual realities and human actions have an eternal purpose and salvific character. By using its prophetic power in the Holy Spirit, the Church validates these realities and aligns them with eternity. Thus, theology within the Church has a prophetic vocation: to mediate divine life and to interpret and contextualise the "words of eternal life" (John 6:69) that Christ speaks to every person in every age, guiding humanity toward the Kingdom of God.

8. Conclusions

The Protestant theology of deconstructionism can thus be summarised through the following principles, methods and structural forms:

1. Theology is not, nor does it aim to be, a theory or a set of rules for faith.
2. It seeks to generate a new, creative and original theology, which has led Protestant theologians to speak of a renewal of theology in a "post-theological" era.
3. Deconstructionism is viewed as a constructive method for discussing God within the context of our secular, relativistic, postmodern culture.
4. Deconstructionism aims to move beyond formalism and the external expressions of faith, focusing instead on deeper, more meaningful engagement.
5. Deconstructionism is essential for Protestant hermeneutics, as it offers new frameworks for the expression and deeper exploration of the Scriptures.
6. The focus is exclusively on theology as an act of interpretation and scriptural reading.

On the other hand, Orthodox theology presents the following characteristics:

7. It is personal and organic, emphasising a real union with God, the Holy Trinity.
8. It integrates history, cultural contexts and social–political realities, assuming and transcending them in the direction of the Kingdom of God.
9. Orthodox theology expresses the mystery of a personal relationship between humanity and God, an expression that takes shape in the Holy Scripture and in the writings of Holy Tradition.
10. Forms and modes of describing the mystical experience of faith are also subject to “deconstruction” when they become rigid and devoid of lucidity/transparency.
11. Orthodox theology is prophetic and alive, enriched by the experience of God through the Holy Spirit.
12. It unfolds and develops in the perspective of the Eschaton, reaching its fulfillment and conclusion at the end of history.

Despite their differences, some points of convergence can be identified between the two approaches:

13. The need for a living, renewed theology.
14. The search for deeper and ultimate meanings in the Scriptures.
15. The emphasis on the essence of Revelation rather than on her external forms.

Notable differences between the two theological perspectives include the following:

16. Protestant theology is focused on hermeneutics and the Scripture’s interpretation.
17. Orthodox theology is defined by an ontological–unitary and personal–participative dimension. Orthodox hermeneutics have a fundamentally organic, personal and existential character and their interpretive, textual and contextual dimensions have their roots in the former.
18. It meets the need to critically reformulate and approach the various expressions and descriptions of realities presented in Scripture while safeguarding the universality of the Christian experience across time and space, being intrinsically universal.

The findings of this study can be practically applied in the following contexts:

19. Fostering mutual understanding between these two Christian traditions and lived realities.
20. Promoting inter-Christian relations of love and fruitful ecumenical dialogue.
21. In Christian interactions within multicultural and multi-faith societies.

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