

# Politics, Society and Culture in Orthodox Theology in a Global Age

# Eastern Church Identities

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# Politics, Society and Culture in Orthodox Theology in a Global Age



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Published with the support of the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster.



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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30965/9783657793792>

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data available online: <http://dnb.d-nb.de>

© 2023 by Brill Schöningh, Wollmarktstraße 115, 33098 Paderborn, Germany, an imprint of the Brill-Group (Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands; Brill USA Inc., Boston MA, USA; Brill Asia Pte Ltd, Singapore; Brill Deutschland GmbH, Paderborn, Germany; Brill Österreich GmbH, Vienna, Austria) Koninklijke Brill NV incorporates the imprints Brill, Brill Nijhoff, Brill Hotei, Brill Schöningh, Brill Fink, Brill mentis, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Böhlau, V&R unipress and Wageningen Academic.

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Cover illustration: Vicky Vlachogianni, "The Sound of the Feast", oil on canvas, 85 × 70 cm, 2010. Collection of the 2nd International Art Conference, Poland

Cover design: Evelyn Ziegler, Munich

Production: Brill Deutschland GmbH, Paderborn

ISSN 2628-9741

ISBN 978-3-506-79379-9 (hardback)

ISBN 978-3-657-79379-2 (e-book)

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# Politics, Society and Culture in Orthodox Theology in an Age of Globalization

## *Introduction*

The collection of essays in this volume grew out of a lengthy collaboration between the two editors, Hans-Peter Grosshans, a Protestant theologian, and Pantelis Kalaitzidis, an Orthodox theologian. At some point, the Protestant theologian raised the question of how Orthodox theology and Orthodox churches respond to very significant changes in society, culture, and politics and whether these changes would also leave their mark on Orthodox doctrine and practice, leading to changes in Orthodox doctrine and practice. With regard to Greek Orthodoxy, for example, the Protestant theologian was thinking of Greece's independence from the Ottoman Empire, which took place between 1821 and 1830, or the transition from a monarchy to a democracy in Greece in 1974, and of Greece's accession to the European Community in 1981 – to name just three examples from the political sphere.

The question of the Protestant theologian fell on fertile ground with Kalaitzidis, who had recently posed something similar: the question why Orthodoxy had not developed an explicit “political theology” or theology of the political needed to be researched. Kalaitzidis raised this question in his 2012 book, *Orthodoxy and Political Theology*, in which he presented the current state of the discussion concerning an Orthodox theology of the political.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the discussion on the relationship between Orthodox theology and liberal democracy took a new turn<sup>2</sup>, while wider interest in the emergence of an Orthodox political theology inspired by pneumatology and eschatology became more visible.<sup>3</sup> Other Orthodox theologians have also taken up the

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- 1 Cf. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy and Political Theology* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012).
  - 2 Cf. Aristotle Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012).
  - 3 Nikolaos Asproulis, “Pneumatology and Politics: The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Articulation of an Orthodox Political Theology,” *Review of Ecumenical Studies* 7 (2015), 58–71; Georgios Vlantis, “Pneumatologie und Eschatologie in der zeitgenössischen orthodoxen Theologie: Richtlinien und Perspektiven”, in Petra Bosse-Huber, Konstantinos Vliagkoffis, and Wolfram Langpape (eds.), *Wir glauben an den Heiligen Geist: XII. Begegnung im bilateralen theologischen Dialog zwischen der EKD und dem Ökumenischen Patriarchat* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt: 2021), 119–37. For an overview of the current trends in political theology in today's Orthodoxy, cf. Kristina Stoeckl, Ingeborg Gabriel, and Aristotle Papanikolaou (eds.), *Political Theologies in Orthodox Christianity – Common Challenges and Divergent Positions* (London: Bloomsbury/T&T Clark, 2017); Pantelis Kalaitzidis, “[Political Theology in] Eastern

topic. Metropolitan of Bursa, Elpidoforos Lambriniadis (now Greek Orthodox Archbishop of America) summarized in a precise way the state of research on the traditional relationship between state and church in the Orthodox tradition and the questioning of this relationship by a modern European understanding of the state.<sup>4</sup> A number of current practical conflicts of norms between church and state and their theoretical consequences are discussed in a new study by Grigorios Larentzakis.<sup>5</sup> In this respect, the already slightly older volume by Vasilios N. Makrides on *Religion, State and Conflict Constellations in Orthodox Eastern and Southeastern Europe: Comparative Perspectives* remains highly informative,<sup>6</sup> but it is now complemented by the more recent volume (that emerged from an international conference): *Christianity, Democracy, and the Shadow of Constantine*,<sup>7</sup> while for the crucial issue of pluralism the edited volume by Father Emmanuel Clapsis always retains its value.<sup>8</sup>

To explore the question raised in greater depth, we invited a number of Orthodox theologians and other experts on Orthodox Christianity and its theology to a conference at the Volos Academy for Theological Studies in Volos, Greece, in February 2020. The question was expanded beyond the political sphere to include changes in society and culture – with a special focus on the challenges posed by today’s globalised world.

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Orthodox Thought,” in William T. Cavanaugh and Peter Manley Scott (eds.), *Wiley Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, 2nd ed. (Oxford/New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2019), 97–110; Nathaniel Wood and Aristotle Papanikolaou, “Orthodox Christianity and Political Theology,” in Rubén Rosario Rodríguez (ed.), *T&T Clark Handbook of Political Theology* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2020), 337–51.

- 4 Metropolitan Elpidoforos (Lambriniadis), “Das Verhältnis zwischen Kirche und Staat in der orthodoxen Tradition,” in Petra Bosse-Huber and Martin Illert (eds.), *Theologischer Dialog mit dem Ökumenischen Patriarchat: Die Beziehungen zwischen Kirche und Staat unter historischen und ekklesiologischen Aspekten* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2015), 228–35. Cf. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, “Church and State in the Orthodox World: From the Byzantine ‘Symphonia’ and Nationalized Orthodoxy to the Need of Witnessing the Word of God in a Pluralistic Society,” in Emanuela Fogliadini (ed.), *Religioni, Libertà, Potere: Atti del Convegno Internazionale Filosofico-Teologico sulla Libertà Religiosa, Milano, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore e Università degli Studi, 16–18 Ottobre 2013* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2014) 39–74.
- 5 Grigorios Larentzakis, “Die Beziehungen zwischen Kirche und Staat unter dem Blickwinkel der pastoralen, erzieherischen, sozialen und kulturellen Angelegenheiten der Kirchen,” in Bosse-Huber and Illert *Theologischer Dialog mit dem Ökumenischen Patriarchat*, 197–217.
- 6 Vasilios N. Makrides (ed.), *Religion, Staat und Konfliktkonstellationen im orthodoxen Ost- und Südosteuropa: Vergleichende Perspektiven* (Frankfurt, etc.: Peter Lang, 2005).
- 7 George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou (eds.), *Christianity, Democracy, and the Shadow of Constantine* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017).
- 8 Emmanuel Clapsis, *The Orthodox Churches in a Pluralistic World: An Ecumenical Conversation* (Brookline MA/Geneva: Holy Cross Orthodox Press/WCC Publications, 2004).

The relationship between Orthodoxy and democracy has often been a central theme in theological discourse – but not only there of course. As we write this brief introduction, the government of the Russian Federation is waging a brutal war against Ukraine and its people to rid them of the Western mindset and reincorporate them into the authoritarian “Russian world.”<sup>9</sup> The ideological differences manifested here with regard to the free democratic, self-determination of societies and their people can also be found in Orthodox Christianity. The Orthodox churches are generally regarded as very “traditional” churches whose identity was formed in the premodern era and continue to exhibit a premodern mentality. This image of Orthodoxy is readily cultivated by conservative circles even within Orthodox Christianity but is almost more pronounced in Protestant Christianity, for example, where Orthodoxy is quickly and easily viewed in this way. This overlooks the fact that the challenges posed to Christianity today as a whole by postmodernity, secularisation, and globalisation, need to be dealt with urgently in Orthodox Christianity as well and are indeed being actively discussed. Drawing attention to this is also one of the intentions of this volume of essays.

These challenges include questions such as the compatibility of the Orthodox Church and its theology with modern moral concepts and democratic values or the acceptance of human rights in Orthodoxy. While such questions used to be quite often met with great scepticism in Orthodox churches and were deliberately left ambiguous, things began to change in recent times when it became clear with, among other things, the publication in March 2020 of the document *For the Life of the World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church*. The document was composed by a special commission of Orthodox scholars appointed by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and blessed for publication by the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. This highly significant document, already translated into fifteen languages, addresses – along with its social sensitivity and its concern for inclusion – contemporary social and moral issues, challenges, and other issues in an unusual way for the Orthodox Church. These issues include poverty, racism, human rights, democratic values, reproductive technology, new forms of marital and family life, and the environment.<sup>10</sup> They are issues that are ever-present on a

9 Cf. the recent “Declaration” by eminent Orthodox theologians who oppose the “Russian World”: <https://www.polymerwsvolos.org/2022/03/13/a-declaration-on-the-russian-world-russkii-mir-teaching/> and <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2022/03/13/a-declaration-on-the-russian-world-russkii-mir-teaching/#more-10842/> (accessed 27 March 2022).

10 David Bentley Hart and John Chryssavgis (eds.), *For the Life of the World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church* (Brookline MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2020); also accessible at: [https://www.goarch.org/el/social-ethos?p\\_p\\_id=56\\_INSTANCE\\_](https://www.goarch.org/el/social-ethos?p_p_id=56_INSTANCE_)

practical level since many Orthodox churches exist in liberal democratic societies. In this volume of essays, this debate occurs precisely by critically examining various earlier concepts (such as the Tsarist model and its “symphonic” background, Orthodoxy under persecution, etc.) in theological, historical and political perspectives and linking them to current issues (such as Orthodoxy and human rights, Orthodoxy and pluralistic societies, etc.).

With regard to the Russian Orthodox Church, the current war conducted by the Russian Federation opens up the discussion once more of the role played by a certain version of Orthodox theology and by the nationalist conservative social ideas of some Orthodox churches in their understanding of state and society, politics, and culture of the countries of Europe shaped by Orthodox Christianity. Already in Ukraine, however, the Orthodox churches seem to have constructively embraced liberal democratic conditions – not to mention Orthodox churches in many other European countries. In view of the various political tensions in Europe, which are currently exemplified by the war in Ukraine, there is a considerable need to better understand the religious character of various countries of Orthodox tradition in Eastern and Southeastern Europe.

On a fundamental intellectual level, this discourse is about transparency in the interconnections between religious identity and the political or social context, as well as the relationship between tradition and innovation with regard to the understanding of politics, society, and culture in Orthodox theology. How flexible is Orthodox theology in its response to social changes or to social and practical conflicts between norms? To what extent has the Orthodox theological understanding of politics, society, and culture impacted the multiple changes in the societies of Eastern and Southeastern Europe, so influenced by Orthodox culture, in the last two centuries?

As editors of this volume, we would like to thank all the contributors for their erudite and fascinating contributions to the elucidation of these and many other questions for a better understanding of politics, society, and culture in the Orthodox theology of the present era of globalisation and for making their texts available for this purpose. The whole publication and the conference in Volos would not have been possible without the very substantial financial

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support of the whole project by the German Cluster of Excellence *Religion and Politics: Dynamics of Tradition and Innovation* at the University of Münster (Germany) and the Institute of Ecumenical Theology at the Faculty for Protestant Theology at the same university. We like to thank both institutions for their very generous support, as well as the Huffington Ecumenical Institute in California, and its Director at that time, the Rev. Prof. Cyril Hovorun, for its contribution to the conference. In respect to the conference in Volos we are very thankful to all the staff of the Volos Academy for Theological Studies for their wonderful hospitality. We also like to thank very much his Eminence, Metropolitan Ignatios of Demetrias in Volos for his patronage and his generous support of the conference. And we are grateful to Prof. Dr. Herman Selderhuis for his personal greetings as president of the European Academy of Religion and his active participation in the conference.

Concerning the publication, we would like to thank Dr. Henry Jansen and his *Wordfair English Language Service* for copy-editing and proofreading the entire manuscript and for standardizing the footnotes and layout. We would also like to thank Dr. Ioannis Kaminis (Volos) and Lorenz Opitz (Münster) for their support in preparing the manuscripts. We extend our warm thanks to Vicky Vlachogianni for the permission to use her painting in the cover of the present volume, and to Costis Drygianakis, MA (Volos), for his assistance all over the preparation of the book and especially for creating an Index. And, last but not least, we would also like to thank the editors of the book series *Eastern Church Identities*, Prof. Dr. Ioan G. Tulcan, Dr. Andriy Mykhaleyko, Prof. Dr. Reinhard Thöle, and Prof. Dr. Martin Illert, for including this book in this series, and Dr. Martina Kayser of the publishing firm Brill Germany for her very constructive support in the publishing process.



# The Tsarist System

*Alfons Brüning*

For approximately 450 years, Orthodox Russia was governed by the tsars. If we can indicate a starting point for the “tsarist system,” it would have to be the last third of the 15th century when the grand princes of Russia first claimed the title of “tsar” for themselves. The “tsarist system” ended in February 1917 with the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II and the assumption of power by the Provisionary Government. It had obviously become outdated in the eyes of many by then. At least, the Orthodox Church in Russia had surprisingly few problems with accepting new developments: “God’s will has been fulfilled: Russia has entered the path towards a new governmental state life.” This is the initial, rather laconic sentence in an official statement by the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church, published in early April on the front pages of the leading church journals.<sup>1</sup>

The fact that the Russian Orthodox Church, with a delay of almost two months, felt urged to give its own theologically founded interpretation of the events in the spring of 1917 highlights a particular element, namely, the religious aspect of this system that needed to be definitively addressed.<sup>2</sup> The “tsarist system” has always been more than the practical manifestation of one political theory that demands reflection along with alternative and competing theories. As a rule, this system it does not even theoretically offer any space for alternatives.

It is the religious foundation and claim that make the “tsarist system” interesting for a conference on politics, democracy and human rights in Orthodox thinking. Both the theme of the conference and the many implications of the tsarist system provide the interdisciplinary nature of any attempt to design an appropriate picture of this system. Such an attempt, if carried out carefully, would need to engage at the least cultural and political history and political theory, in addition to theology and religious studies.

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1 See, e.g., the first page of the Holy Synod’s official journal, published after a two months’ hiatus, *Tserkovnye Vedomosti*, nos. 9–15 (April 1917): 57 (translation mine).

2 For further insight into discussions among Russian clerics about the tsarist system and alternatives prior to 1917 see M. Babkin, ed., *Rossiiskoe duhovenstvo i sverzhenie monarkhii v 1917 godu; Materialy i arkhivnye dokumenty po istorii Russkoi pravoslavnoi Tserkvi* (Moscow: Indrik, 2008); John D. Basil, *Church and the State in Late Imperial Russia: Critics of the Synodal System of Church Government (1861–1914)* (Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

The long life of this system is one thing, and the limited space for a contribution like this is another – the picture under such circumstances can necessarily only be impressionistic, consisting of some main lines and colors that I hope to have appropriately identified as constitutive. There are mainly two such constitutive elements: first, we have the position and function – the office – of the tsar himself; second, there is the notion of *pravda* as a constitutive moral element. One can add others that I can touch upon only in passing, like the noble entourage of the “tsar” with its development from a circle of advisors and holders of beneficiaries into a bureaucratic system, or the dualism and inter-relation of church and state derived from the famous *symphonia* principle in Byzantium.

Each of these elements has a prehistory that illustrates its relevance within Orthodox discourse on political theory, given its particular predecessors in what Father Georges Florovsky would have called the Byzantine culture of “sacred Hellenism.” For Florovsky (Georgii Florovskii) and even more so for some of his followers, Russia, including its political system, would have formed an integral part of a “Hellenic Orthodox” civilization that emerged in late antiquity on paths that eventually became distinct from those followed in the West.<sup>3</sup> Wherever necessary, this origin, and what has become of it on the way to its adoption in Muscovite and Russian Imperial context, also needs to be briefly addressed.

### The Tsar

By calling themselves “tsar,” since the late 15th century, the grand princes of Muscovy applied a title that in its current, Slavonic form had first occurred in and eventually been taken over from medieval Serbia and Bulgaria. There the Latin *caesar* or Greek *kaisar* had been transformed in the early Slavic idioms into the title of “tsar.” By that time, Serbian and Bulgarian kingdoms were vassals of the Byzantine Empire. While this large political entity still existed, there could – at least in theory – be only one *kaisar*, which meant that any attempt

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3 Florovsky’s ideas are found in various essays, such as his “Christianity and Civilization,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1952): 13–20; later reprinted in his *Christianity and Culture*, Collected Works, vol. 2 (Belmont MA: Nordland Publishers, 1974), 121–30; see also Alfons Brüning, “The Empire and the Desert: Eastern Orthodox Theologians about Church and Civilization,” in *The Law of God: Exploring God and Civilization*, ed. Pieter Vos and Onno Zijlstra (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2014), 84–104; Paul L. Gavriluk, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), especially 201–20, 232–58.

to adopt the title on the part of Slavic vassal states came down to sporadic attempts to rebellion or at least to achieve greater independence.

The claim made by the Muscovite princes since the late 15th century was very much of this kind. When first expressed, it lacked the approval of the Patriarch of Constantinople that it still theoretically needed. There was an important reason for this delay because, in comparison with the medieval Balkan states, the situation had basically changed on one pivotal point: since the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turks in 1453 the “original” *kaisar* had ceased to exist. Against this background, the adoption of the title in any linguistic adaptation whatever came down to a claim to, not independence, but a *translatio imperii* in full, i.e., a claim to continuing the legacy of the Byzantine Empire in its entirety. That included all the pillars of its political structure as well as its eschatologically charged self-understanding since the time of Emperor Constantine. An illustrative example of the prevalent mood among Christians at the time are the writings of the historian and church father Eusebius of Caesarea. He depicted the tolerance of Christianity by and eventually the conversion of the first Byzantine Emperor to Christianity as the beginning of a new era in world history, i.e., that of the emergence of the actual kingdom of God in a political form after the many persecutions Christians had suffered.<sup>4</sup>

The Byzantine emperor was much more than just a political ruler. According to interpretations still current among experts in Byzantine studies, the image of the emperor had been formed by using a vacuum that had come into being when the early Christological debates of the council of Nicea and Constantinople saw the defeat of the Arian party. Whereas Christ was now to be described – as in the Nicene Creed – as equal to God (*homoousios*), the emperor had subsequently adopted the Arian alternative of a man similar to God (*homoiousios*).<sup>5</sup> It is probably this perspective in which the central theme in Deacon Agapet’s famous “mirror of princes” from the 6th century has to be understood: Agapet addresses the emperor as a twofold being – as a simple human, equal to all others, and at the same time exceptional, raised by

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4 Eusebius Pamphilus of Caesarea, “The Life of the Blessed Emperor Constantine,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, 2nd Series, ed. P. Schaff, H. Wace (Edinburgh: repr. Grand Rapids MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1955); also online, the Medieval Sourcebook, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/vita-constantine.asp> (accessed 22 December 2020).

5 See, e.g., Marie T. Fögen, “Das politische Denken der Byzantiner,” in *Pipers Handbuch der politischen Ideen*, vol. 2, ed. Iring Fetscher and Herfried Münkler (Munich/Zurich: Piper, 1983), 41–85.

God's grace above all others to be the representative of the heavenly kingdom on earth.<sup>6</sup>

The emperor, therefore, was seen as a figure both political and spiritual. He was the source of justice and law as well as a defender of the faith and guardian of the Church. Although there was a certain insistence in Byzantine political theory on the separation between political and spiritual matters, the two were supposed to closely combine in the end and cooperate – the famous concept of *symphonia* prominently fixed in Emperor Justinianus' 6th novel issued in 535. In practice and theory the system offered a certain superiority to the office of the emperor. It was he who convened ecclesiastical synods, and he even attended Divine Liturgy from a prominent place opposite the altar and high above the mass of ordinary believers. Byzantium has aptly been described as a theocracy.<sup>7</sup>

A matter of particular importance within this framework was the inherent distinction between the office itself, with all its theological and eschatological ornamentation on the one hand, and the real person of its actual holder on the other hand. The consequences of this distinction were twofold. First, the office itself was highly morally charged: to become emperor automatically meant being subject to almost superhuman requirements for character, moral behavior, and lifestyle. This is where a specific category of Byzantine political literature, the "mirrors of princes" with their explanatory and admonishing style (the above-mentioned Agapet among them) had their purpose and context. On the other hand, this meant that even in individual cases of obvious violations of the highly moral norms connected with the Emperor's office by a concrete holder, the ideal remained intact. Byzantine history had already contained numerous usurpers, cruel dictators, and even murderers on the Emperor's throne, but all such deficits could be attributed to the particular person in charge. An emperor might have failed to achieve or even have ostentatiously ignored the requirements of his office, but the purity of the ideal did not suffer. Nor did obviously bad developments really generate a real debate about possible mistakes of the system itself. Byzantine political concepts already had little if any space for system debates – mistakes had to be corrected morally and were not perceived as conceptual deficits of the political system.

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6 For a modern English translation, cf. Peter N. Bell (trans., introd.), *Three Political Voices from the Age of Justinian: Agapetus, Advice to the Emperor, Dialogue on Political Science; Paul the Silentiary, Description of Hagia Sophia* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 2009), 99–121.

7 Cyril Hovorun, "Is the Byzantine 'Symphony' Possible in our Days?" *Journal of Church and State* 59, no. 2 (2016): 280–96.

All this – the eschatological perspective and legitimization, the moral ideal, and the resilience of the system against any theoretical questioning – became Byzantium’s heritage to the Russian tsars. The idea of the “Third Rome,” so often quoted and referred to as illustrative of Moscow’s political ambitions, in fact at the time of its conception had almost nothing to do with political power claims but rather expressed this eschatological perspective of the emperor’s office. The admonishing tone of Filofei of Pskov’s famous passage needs to be compared with similar overtones in the above-mentioned mirrors of princes:

So be aware, lover of God and Christ, that all Christian Empires have come to an end and are gathered together in the singular empire of our sovereign [...] and this is the Russian empire; because two Romes have fallen, and a third stands, and a fourth there shall not be.<sup>8</sup>

In the given context as well as being quite in line with Byzantine examples, Filofei first and foremost reminds the tsar of the exceptional dignity of his office and the specific duties and moral requirements linked to it. If there were any differences from the Byzantine examples, these would have been found in an even greater emphasis on the particular, in a way superhuman, character of the office of the tsar, and a greater neglect of the ordinary human aspects of their holders. The “charisma of power” of the tsar (and also of the patriarch of Moscow in the period between 1589 and 1721), expressed by numerous elements in the inauguration ceremonies, raised him to a level highly different from that of ordinary humans and their usual concerns.<sup>9</sup>

The office of the tsar was virtually untouchable in Muscovite and later Russian history. Critique could be directed only at its actual holder, with a specific set of possible consequences. First, there was in theory the possibility of resistance by the governed people or the nobility in relation to a tsar who obviously failed to fulfill his God-given duties. A passage in Iosif Volotskii’s famous *Prosvetitel’* (Enlightener) apparently provides a possibility of refusing the otherwise obligatory obedience to a tsar who had turned into a negation or caricature of the ideal:

8 Cf. Marshall Poe, “Moscow, the Third Rome: Origins and Transformations of a ‘Pivotal Moment,’” in *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 49, no. 3 (2011): 412–29 (quotation on p. 416); still important is Hildegard Schaefer, *Moskau – Das Dritte Rom: Studien zur Geschichte der politischen Ideen in der slawischen Welt*, 1st ed. (Hamburg: Friederichsen, de Gruyter, 1929).

9 See the classical study by Boris A. Uspenskii, “Tsar’ i Patriarkh: Kharisma vlasti v Rossii (Vizantiiskaia model’ i ee russkoe pereosmyslenie),” in: *Izbrannye Trudy* 1, ed. Boris A. Uspenskii (Moscow: Gnozis, 1996), 184–204.

However, if there is a Tsar who reigns over the people, but himself is overwhelmed by evil passions and sin, by greed, violence, lie and defiance and, worst of all, disbelief and blasphemy, then such a Tsar is not a servant of God but a devil, not a Tsar but a tyrant. Our Lord Jesus Christ named such a person not a Tsar, but a fox (Luke 13,33); you do not owe obedience to such a Tsar, or Prince, who would lead you only into dishonor and cunning – even if he molests you and threatens you with death.<sup>10</sup>

The very existence of such a possibility, even in the writings of Iosif Volotskii, the abbot of the Volokolamsk monastery and a political author otherwise often quoted as the main theoretician of Russian tsarist absolutism is remarkable. On the other hand, its significance should obviously not be exaggerated. Beyond the refusal of obedience, the passage does not give any further indications about other possible kinds of active resistance. Furthermore, the authority of decision, i.e., the answer to the question who would be authorized to decide whether a given tsar did not only display a bit too much human weaknesses but had truly turned into a bad governor or tyrant, remains within the church. Till its end, the Muscovite and tsarist Russian system did not develop any formal, let alone constitutional, mechanisms to control or restrict the tsar's power even in case of obvious violations of the high requirements linked to the ruler's office.

Probably the best example is the reign of Ivan IV, who became known as “the Terrible” (an English translation of the Russian *groznyi*, which in fact means “the strict, severe” and is just one of the possible titles along a scale of stereotypical properties of tsars, ranging from “humbleness” to “authority and severity”). Even the disastrous consequences of his reign – like the extinction of a 600-year-old dynasty through Ivan's murder of his son and heir, the devastation of entire regions, the numerous victims of the tsar's personal cruelty and of his notorious private militia (the *oprichnina*), eventually the “time of Troubles” as well that would result from Ivan's government – did not lead any political writer to question the institution of the tsar's office itself. Such writers in the late 16th and early 17th centuries might well have felt urged to specify the ideal and redefine the moral requirements of the tsar's office a bit, but there was still no attempt whatsoever to reconceptualize the political system itself. Reflections made against the background of the crisis had a predominantly

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10 Josif Volotskii, *Prosvetitel'*, ed. A. Volkov (Kazan': Tipografiia Kazan'skoi Dukhovnoi Akademii, 1869), 287; English translation according to Daniel Rowland, “Did Muscovite Literary Ideology Place Limits on the Power of the Tsar (1540s-1660s)?” *The Russian Review* 49, no. 2 (April 1990): 125–55, here 127. The “fox” in this passage relates to the biblical image of King Herod, the persecutor of Christ and murderer of children.

moral and only exceptionally also a systematic character.<sup>11</sup> Cautious reassessments of the system concerned the significance of the tsar's noble entourage and its right to be adequately honored through appropriate consultation before important decisions. This did not mean, at any rate, a step towards any division of power. Recent investigations of this corrective element, however, still had to state that such corporative patterns in the Old Russian system were at best of a "pre-magna charta type" and still constituted a "state-conditioned society."<sup>12</sup>

Consequences that we can observe all relate to a slightly altered profile of the tsar as an ideal. Therefore, the oath of newly elected tsars now gave greater attention to the circle of his advisors, the boiar elite and the nobility; furthermore, successors of Ivan IV were often eager to maintain their reputation as not "terrible" (*groznyi*, as in Ivan's case) but "most humble" (*tishaishii*), even if as actual persons they could appear rather irascible and intemperate (like Tsar Alexi I, the father of Peter the Great).<sup>13</sup>

This distinction between the sacred office and the human person actually occupying it also resulted in numerous stories of "tsar pretenders" (like the several "false Dmitriis" in the early 17th century) who continued to be promoted by rebellious groups, at least until the end of the 18th century and the famous Pugachev rebellion. Again, the ideal and the institution remained intact, as did the system it represented. It was only that the "right" human occupant, according to allegedly true divine providence, needed to be someone else.

Opposition to this system was therefore only possible as fundamental opposition with all the radical attendant consequences. To call the system into question was to raise doubts about its metaphysical foundations itself. That might still – at least partly – explain the radicalism of late 19th-century revolutionary movements inspired by whatever ideology. Perhaps even the various (in one case, i.e., Alexander II, successful) assaults on the reigning tsar's life carried out by revolutionaries in the late 19th century followed the same logic in a

11 Cf. *Russkaia Istoricheskaia Biblioteka* (RIB), vol. 13 [Pamiatniki drevnei russkoi pis'mennosti otnosjashchiesia k smutnomu vremeni] (St. Petersburg, 1892). See also Rowland, *Ideology*, especially pp. 131–42; M. A. Korotchenko, "Pisateli o Smutnom Vremeni," in *Istoriia drevnerusskoi literatury. Analiticheskoe posobie*, ed. A. S. Demin (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskikh kultur, 2008), 150–203, especially 159f.; Alfons Brüning, "Symphonia, kosmische Harmonie, Moral: Moskauer Diskurse über gerechte Herrschaft im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert," in *Gerechtigkeit und gerechte Herrschaft vom 15. bis zum 17. Jahrhundert: Beiträge zur historischen Gerechtigkeitsforschung* [= Schriften des Historischen Kollegs. Kolloquien, 101], ed. Stefan Plaggenborg (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2019), 23–52.

12 Rowland, *Ideology*, 151. Cf. Hans-Joachim Torke, *Die staatsbedingte Gesellschaft im Moskauer Reich: Zar und "zemlja" in der altrussischen Herrschaftsverfassung* (Leiden: Brill, 1974).

13 Rowland, *Ideology*, 132.

certain sense, at least if they were directed not against an individual tsar (only Alexander II enjoyed the reputation of a reformer) but the institution. The revolutionaries of the *narodnaia volia* (“people’s will”) movement after 1860, within the ranks of which the murderers of the “Tsar liberator” were recruited, had in fact an ambiguous relationship with the institution of the tsar. Some felt that only its annihilation could make the Russian peasants abandon their veneration of the tsar and develop instead a clear view of their miserable conditions that would have resulted in revolt; others shared the veneration of the tsar like the people widely did and openly bemoaned the assassination of Alexander II.<sup>14</sup> A reform of the system, certainly if it included a downgrade of the tsar’s sacred office to a mere constitutional context for quite a few of them was not an option. Change could only be attained by annihilating the tsar himself.

On the positive side, the tsar’s obligations subsequently changed in the course of modern history. This began as just a mere moral profile as the “righteous” (*pravednyi*, derived from *pravda*, a term we are about to explain more thoroughly) and the “caring” one – a protector of the right faith on the one hand and a defender of the poor, the oppressed and the weak on the other. This basic, predominantly moral, profile did not change, but it did take on a more “bureaucratic” character through the centuries, in line with the development of Muscovite and Russian state structures. The responsibility of the tsar, according to changing definitions, was less related to the welfare of an amorphous people or particular groups (nobility, church) and more to the state system and its functioning. Moral requirements were partly “translated” into technical measures and institutionalized: redistributing wealth as a matter of practicing justice became an issue of the tax system; listening to advisors and commissioning embassies to foreign powers resulted in the installation of offices (the Muscovite *prikazy* since the 16th century) and the appointment of office holders and secretaries.

Responsibility for the accurate functioning of the system, in the sense of fostering the “common good” became a concretization of the tsar’s duties for the state together with the development of a bureaucratic system with officers, defined tasks, and a legal and financial system. Not earlier than the end of the 17th century was a term like “the common good” (obviously a borrowing from Western political theory transferred to Russia via 17th-century Ukrainian

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14 Cf. Vitalij Fastovskij, *Terrorismus und das moderne Selbst: Religiöse Semantiken revolutionärer Gewalt im späten Zarenreich (1860–1917)* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), 153f., 170f.

intellectuals) made it into the tsars' speeches.<sup>15</sup> By then, slowly but surely the "reforming tsar" appeared as a more professional and less as a merely moral manifestation of the tsarist ideal.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, even a partial reception of Western political theory in the Russian context led ultimately to just a more sophisticated theoretical foundation of tsarist sovereignty. One prominent example from the early 18th century is Bishop Feofan Prokopovich's *Pravda voli monarshoi* ("Justice of the Monarch's Will"), which he published in 1721. Despite all its borrowings from contemporary Western political theory, the learned monk and bishop Prokopovich became one of the main theoreticians in transforming old Byzantine and Muscovite rule into modern forms of Russian-style absolutism.<sup>17</sup> In that same year, which saw the publication of Prokopovich's treatise, the Petrine church reform, carried out according to guidelines fixed in the famous *Dukhovnyi Reglament* ("Spiritual Reglement") came into force. Once again, Prokopovich was the main author of these guidelines. What started here was the so-called "synodal period," in which the church was completely formally subordinated to the state, governed by a "holy synod," presided over by the *oberprokur*, a delegate appointed by the tsar. This period ended only in 1917, after the February revolution and the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II.

Some corporative elements as part of the system before and still after the Petrine reforms did not basically change the picture. Indeed, there was a peculiar role in the Russian empire for the nobility as well, but this could be compared to Western estates in a feudal system in only a rather limited sense.<sup>18</sup> Rather, once again, everything depended on the tsar's favor. Already according to the Byzantine model, the tsar was supposed to listen to his advisors and consult his entourage in case of difficult political decisions. The Russian system distinguished between different ranks among the nobility and had a

15 Cf. Hans-Joachim Torke, "Moskau und sein Westen. Zur 'Ruthenisierung' der russischen Kultur," in *Berliner Jahrbuch für osteuropäische Geschichte* 1 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1996), 101–20; idem, *Die staatsbedingte Gesellschaft* (n. 12), 13; Brüning, "Symphonia, kosmische Harmonie, Moral," 46–9.

16 Cynthia H. Whittaker, "The Reforming Tsar: The Redefinition of Autocratic Duty in Eighteenth Century Russia," *Slavic Review* 51, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 77–98.

17 Cf. Jaroslava Stratii, "Idei pryrodnoho prava i suspil'noho dohovoru na sluzhbi petrovs'koho absolutism ('Pravda voli monarshoi' Feofana Prokopovycha)," in *Ukraina XVII stolittja: Suspil'stvo, Filosofiia, Kul'tura*, ed. Larisa Dovha, Natalia Jakovenko (Kiev: Krytyka, 2005), 128–51. Earlier studies emphasize the still important Byzantine features in Prokopovich's system. Cf. Hans-Joachim Härtel, *Byzantinisches Erbe und Orthodoxie bei Feofan Prokopovič* (Wuerzburg: Echter, 1970).

18 See already Günther Stökl, "Gab es im Moskauer Staat 'Stände'?" *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 11 (1963): 321–42.

system that was even enhanced by Peter the Great's introduction of a "table of ranks." Nonetheless, an ethos of service to the tsar and therefore to the country was always the conditioning pattern of the mentality of the Russian nobility, whereas, in turn, everything concerning rank and welfare ultimately depended on the tsar's favor. The situation changed dramatically once more, when Tsarina Catherine abolished the obligatory state service for members of the boiar elite in the late 18th century. What resulted was a class with no defined task within the state, even though they retained a feeling of commitment as "sons of the fatherland." Noblemen, like the writer and philosopher Alexander Radishchev (1749–1802) in his famous *Journey from Petersburg to Moscow*, took pride in presenting to the tsar a mirror, an authentic picture of the miserable conditions in his country.<sup>19</sup> Nobles regarded this for some time as a patriotic duty connected with their status to admonish the tsar about necessary improvements of the system. The ethos culminated in use of the term of a "son of the fatherland" (*syn otechestva*) by patriotic noblemen to express their code of behavior and allegiance to the Russian state. Radishchev still remained unheard, as happened to this and another generation of reform-oriented noble politicians. The institution of tsarist autocracy (*samoderzhavie*) in the further course of the 19th century was in addition charged with a patriotic spirit and provided with ideological justification. Conservative ideologists came to see in it the main representative of the uniqueness of the Russian political system that would also distinguish Russia from suspicious Western models. Attempts at reform to transform autocracy into forms of constitutional monarchy ended in failure and another return to restrictive authoritarianism. The most prominent example, representing the following generation of noble reformers and "sons of the fatherland" was the revolt of the Decembrists. This was a group of officers and young noblemen who tried in December 1825 to use the occasion of the enthronement of the new Tsar Nicholas I for the establishment of constitutional reforms. Inspired by Western ideas they had picked up during the Napoleonic wars, they led their regiments to St Petersburg's Senate Square and demanded the assumption of Nicholas' elder brother Constantine and the introduction of a constitution. The revolt was quickly put down, after Constantine had already relinquished the throne. The ideas of the relatively small circle of noblemen had never found a wide echo among the majority of the Russian people. The actual prospective of the rebels' program is best illustrated by the fact that the slogan "for Constantine and a constitution" (Russian: *za Konstantin i konstitutsiia*) shouted during the rebellion had apparently been

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19 Aleksandr Radishchev, *A Journey from St Petersburg to Moscow*, transl. Leo Wiener, ed. and introd. Roderick P. Thaler (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1958).

gravely misunderstood by the majority of the rank and file soldiers in the regiments. As has been reported, most of them understood the slogan as indicating that the campaign wanted the assumption of Constantine and his wife called “konstitutsiia” to the throne.<sup>20</sup> The new tsar, Nicholas I, soon became known throughout Europe as a reactionary, suppressing all kind of dissent. The Decembrists, many of whom were deported to remote Siberia, added stories of the heroic fate of exile to Russian history books. This, however, also marked a preliminary end to influence of the nobility on state affairs. Just a few years after the revolt, the new Deputy Minister of national education, count Sergei Uvarov (1786–1855), created the threefold formula of “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality” (*Pravoslavia, Samoderzhavie, Narodnost*) denoting what he and the regime would come to see as the pillars of both the Russian state order and public education.<sup>21</sup> Public debate about Russia’s place in post-revolutionary Europe, usually roughly summarized as the Slavophiles vs. Westerners debate, took place in – often clandestinely published – newspapers, letters and memorandums and was cut off from the tsarist court. Since the time of Radishchev at least several generations of a patriotic (in whatever sense) noble elite remained largely unheard. The stereotype of the “unnecessary man” (*lishnyi chelovek*) emerged in the further course of the 19th century: an individual deprived of both a defining task according to his talents and of contact with real life due to his isolation. It has been argued that the origins of the Russian *intelligentsia*, including the inherent radicalism of ideas prevailing in those circles, have to be found in 18th-century nobility.<sup>22</sup>

So, the tsarist system might have been “modernized” and further developed in terms of law, institutionalization, bureaucracy, but in fact the tsar relied exclusively on himself and an entourage of loyal officials. At the same time, the tsar remained in theory the ultimate source of any existing right. In praxis, the complete absence of any constitutional background allowed several peculiarities of the tsarist system and for some time Russian legal culture in general. Because whatever the legal system granted, be it privileges for the nobility, the appointment of a particular officer (state secretary, local governor) or the

20 Cf. Valentin Giterman, *Geschichte Russlands 2* (Zurich: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1945), 396.

21 Sergei S. Uvarov, *Gosudarstvennye osnovy* (Moscow: Institut russkoi tsivilisatsii, 2014). The edition also testifies to a continuing attractiveness of such conservative ideas in some circles in modern, post-Communist Russia.

22 Marc Raeff, *Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia: The Eighteenth-Century Nobility* (New York: Harcourt, 1966). Recently, more sketches have been added to the image and self-understanding of the nobility; cf. Martin Aust, *Adlige Landstreitigkeiten in Russland: Eine Studie zum Wandel der Nachbarschaftsverhältnisse 1676–1796* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003).

correction of a particular judicial error (like an unjustified court sentence) was ultimately a matter not of right but of the tsar's favor. Until its end, the Russian tsarist system contained only rather elementary elements of what the Western model came to know as a *Rechtsstaat* (rule of law), i.e., a system of objective legal assessments, rights and duties to which ultimately the tsar himself could also be held accountable. Consequently, people approaching the otherwise "righteous" (*pravednyi*) tsar were supposed not to claim any rights (which they did not possess in the true sense), but to "beat their forehead" (*bit' chelom*<sup>23</sup>) devotionally and ceremonially and ask the tsar for his favor. As a matter of fact, there are those (like contemporary human rights activists) who pretend that this fundamental difference, the lack of any notion of objective rights and the concomitant motivation to claim them in the face of erring or misusing authorities is a certain pattern in Russian civil culture to this day.<sup>24</sup> To what extent such long-term explanations seem appropriate and how much of the Soviet experience after 1917 they would ignore are also questions worth being asked. Any possible answer, however, will probably have to reckon with this aspect of the tsarist system.

### Pravda

At any rate, if the tsar acted as the just and righteous tsar he was supposed to be, he acted in accordance with *pravda*. In most dictionaries, this Russian term is usually rendered (in English) as either "justice" or "truth." In fact, the term belongs among those which are impossible to translate adequately into other, at least Western, languages.<sup>25</sup> To start with, current Russian uses the term *spravedlivost* for "justice," but this denotes a semantic shift. "Justice" – certainly in the sense of "equivalence, balance," with the usual connotations of equal distribution or adequate treatment probably first entering the mind of a Western observer – entered the Russian language not earlier than the early

23 The Russian term for a petition to the tsar, the so-called *chelobitiie*, is derived from this phrase.

24 Cf. Tatiana Artemyeva, "From 'Natural Law' to the Idea of Human Rights in 18th-Century Russia: Nobility and Clergy," in *Orthodox Christianity and Human Rights*, ed. Alfons Brüning and Evert van der Zweerde (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 111–24.

25 See Constantin Sigov, s.v. "Pravda," in *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, ed. Barbara Cassin, Emily Apter, Jacques Lezra, Michael Wood (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 813–9; Wilhelm Goerdts, "Pravda: Wahrheit (Istina) und Gerechtigkeit (Spravedlivost)," *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 12 (1968): 58–85; Stefan Plaggenborg, *Pravda: Gerechtigkeit, Herrschaft und sakrale Ordnung in Altrossland* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2018).

18th century, most probably as an adaptation of the Polish *sprawiedliwość*. To put it briefly, in a transitory phase covering the decades before and after 1700, *pravda* was a moral, semi-religious principle, whereas *spravedlivost* pertained at best to the legal system. It was only much later that the latter term, by the way, made it into the high literary style of Russian language. Reports of foreign visitors issued at this time still sometimes point to the fact that the Russian language did not have any equivalent to, for example, the French word *justice*.<sup>26</sup> If, then, the tsar was – or was expected to be – “just,” than he was not *spravedlivyi* (“just”), but *pravednyi* (“righteous”). This is what indicated his connection with, and the rootedness of his government, in the principle of *pravda*.

The term probably already had a history of its own in ancient Kievan Rus', as can be presumed with a view to early legal codices, like the famous *Russkaia Pravda*, a legal corpus conceived by Prince Iaroslav the Wise in the early 12th century. On the other hand, here we also have to take into account a certain Byzantine influence that became even stronger the more the Muscovite Principality and later Russian Empire grew into the self-assigned role of the successor to the “Second Rome.” Common knowledge renders *pravda* as simply the ancient Russian (Slavonic) translation of the Greek term *aletheia* (“truth”). There is still reason to presume that *pravda* does indeed cover a semantic field and an array of Byzantine political vocabulary and can equally be rendered as “order.” From this angle, the Byzantine predecessor of the term is not – or not only – *aletheia* but also *taxis*, the term for “order, ceremony, liturgy.”<sup>27</sup>

The quasi-liturgical sense of *pravda* also hints at the most important implication of the term, which had pivotal significance for the Russian political or “tsarist system.” The basic idea of this principle is – simply speaking – that there is a preformed order and universal harmony in God's creation and that this harmony needs to be adequately reflected not only in the Divine Liturgy but also in inter-human relations and in the political order of a community. In this view, the tsar becomes something like an intermediate personality, a translator of God's will for the benefit of the political system he presides over.

Realizing the principle of *pravda* is regarded essential for the durability and welfare of every political entity by early Russian authors. Ivan Peresvetov, an early 16th-century writer, explained the decline and fall of Byzantium by the

26 See Natalja Pečerskaya, “Spravedlivost' [Justice]: The Origins and Transformations of the Concept in Russian Culture,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 53, no. 4 (2005): 545–64; Christoph Schmidt, “Von Gottes und Rechts wegen oder zu einigen Charakteristika von Gerechtigkeit in Russland: Ein Kommentar,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 53, no. 4 (2005): 565–8.

27 Sigov, “Pravda,” col. 813; Goerdts, *Pravda*, 59–63. See also Brüning, “Symphonia, kosmische Harmonie, Moral.”

latter's loss of the sense for *pravda*.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, *pravda* has a strong mystical component; as the secret harmony in divine creation that lies behind all things, it is not always obvious and can only partly be translated into written law. Viewing *pravda* as the order of creation implies a kind of religiosity that religious science has qualified as primary religiosity. It includes notions of "cosmological-theopolitical order" that are repeatedly found in the Old Testament.

That does not mean that there is no exceptional role for the individual human being. On the contrary, *pravda* can be translated into hymns about the glory and exceptional dignity of the human being – early modern Russian Orthodox anthropology is in fact much more positive about human nature than Protestant or Catholic anthropology in the West.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, this is hardly to be understood in an abstract and individualistic sense. Every human is part of a prefigured natural order in his relation to creation, to other human beings, and within a quasi-natural hierarchy. Quite similar to Byzantine ideas, this also includes patterns of social hierarchy, with the emperor or tsar at the top. To move outside this prefigured divine order would threaten both the stability of the system and human individuals themselves.

Just as was the case with the office and position of the tsar, *pravda* denotes more an ideal than an actual state of affairs. Political hierarchy, legal systems and social interaction can all be fixed, to some extent, in accordance with *pravda* but can hardly ever be considered a complete expression of all the mysteries of the divine harmony prevalent in the whole of creation. So, there is constant effort required not only by the tsar (as pointed out above) but by all political dignitaries, right down to the common people, to realize the divine order and live according to this principle.

This might introduce a certain dynamic element into every given political and social order, which can and always needs to be improved. On the other hand, this approach once again excludes systematic critique and the possibility of alternatives and radical system changes. Even if a current state of affairs by alert contemporaries would be regarded as being extremely deficient or even "unjust" for the majority of the state's inhabitants, the advisable consequence is not a system change but rather a return to the true path, the righteous order already long established. Debates about the correct interpretations

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28 Andrei L. Iurganov, "Vera christianskaia i 'pravda,'" in *Kategorii russkoi srednevekovoi kul'tury*, ed. Andrei L. Iurganov (Moscow: Institut "Otkrytoe Obschestvo," 1998), 33–116, especially 34, 42–9.

29 Cf. Mikhail V. Dmitriev, "Humanism and the Traditional Orthodox Culture of Eastern Europe – How Compatible Were They in the 16th and 17th Centuries?" in Brüning and van der Zweerde, *Human Rights*, 85–110.

and actual requirements of the *pravda* principle might occur, but they will never go beyond the surface of a certain consensus and reach the foundations. In other words, there is little if any space for aspects otherwise regarded as essential for modern democracy: if a culture of discussion is regarded as the basic element of democracy, in the *pravda* perspective this is connoted rather negatively as endless struggle and discord. In contrast to this, in ancient Russia, there was a quite dominant preference for unity and social harmony among social theorists as well. It has been argued that this predilection for patterns of unity and social harmony forms the root of a certain distance that modern Russian Orthodoxy takes towards central elements of political modernity, like the secular state, civil society and pluralist democracy.<sup>30</sup>

This view of political issues on the eve of the tsarist system in the late 19th century generated a variety of philosophical derivations, most of them falling within the main theories of Russian conservatism. But the spectrum was actually wide. Perhaps the most adept philosopher of *pravda*, at the same time critical of contemporary tsarist autocracy, was the “Narodnik” Nikolai S. Mikhailovskii, who saw *pravda* as the exclusively Russian term for reconciling the ideal and reality, theory and practice, divine will and human existence.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, a conservative theorist like Konstantin Pobedonostsev, the legal theorist and tsarist *oberprokuror* (the tsar’s representative at the Orthodox Holy Synod), developed a vision of an organically structured society that displayed more than superficial borrowing from, or at least a striking concurrence with, the *pravda* principle.<sup>32</sup> At any rate, there was little latitude for deviating opinions in this system – to question implicitly this kind of order, sanctioned by divine principles, could only be done by questioning the divine order itself and necessarily required a radicalism that the guardians of this order could only see as demonic. As noted before with regard to the office of the tsar, perhaps this explains the radicalism of late 19th-century political opponents, as well as the image of them encountered in some of Dostoevsky’s novels.

These are examples, and there is also a possibly more positive aspect to it. What needs to be explored is in what sense this ancient understanding of the human being as part of a larger whole leads to Russian and Orthodox views of

30 See Regina Elsner, *Die Russische Orthodoxe Kirche vor der Herausforderung Moderne: Historische Wegmarken und theologische Optionen im Spannungsfeld von Einheit und Vielfalt* (Wuerzburg: Echter, 2018).

31 On Mikhailovskii and other philosophers referring to *pravda* for modern concepts, see Goerdts, *Pravda*, 65–85; cf. also Sigov, *Pravda*, col. 814–9.

32 John Basil, “K. P. Pobedonostsev and the Harmonius Society,” *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 37, no. 4 (January 2003): 415–26.

the human as not an atomized individual but a *person*, with all the mystical and theological implications this concept might have. Orthodox personalism in fact puts a strong accent on the relatedness of the human being to his social environment on the one hand and to the divine Creator on the other. Since late 19th century, Orthodox thinkers have taken pride in juxtaposing notions of “personhood” to an allegedly isolated individualism they saw dominant in Western ideologies of their time.<sup>33</sup>

It would need yet another shift of the focus, the oft-mentioned “anthropological turn” of Russian religious philosophy of the Silver Age, to make such concepts actually fruitful. This entails, in other words, not speaking about a pre-figured ideal of harmony that was supposed to prevail in the totality of human interactions but reflecting, again as a way to realize God’s will, on appropriate virtues in order to realize this harmony in inter-human relations by mutual respect and love. It is important to note that this “anthropological turn” had its final breakthrough only after the tsar had gone. Thinkers advocating this kind of approach, however, like the Parisian diaspora around such profiled and peculiar thinkers as Nikolai Berdiaev, Sergii Bulgakov or Georges Florovskii, already preferred a vision of society that could do, if necessary, without a tsar. In the decades after the 1917 events, this was their way of understanding the message of God’s providence – but this is another story.

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33 Cf. Ruth Coates, “Theosis in Early Twentieth Century Russian Religious Thought,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Russian Religious Thought*, ed. Caryl Emerson, George Pattison and Randall A. Poole (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 240–56.

# Orthodox Christianity under Pressure: Ottoman, Communist and Post-Communist Contexts

*Ina Merdjanova*

## Introduction

In this paper, I discuss major political contexts and legacies in the history of Orthodox Christianity that defined, in important and often challenging ways, the trajectories of Orthodoxy's institutional development, social presence and theological responses to important issues such as modernity, secularization, globalization, religious pluralism, human rights and gender equality, among others. I introduce the notion of self-colonization and argue that Orthodoxy's responses to adverse historical circumstances, particularly in Eastern Europe, have typically been dominated by a "besieged fortress" mentality. This mentality has entailed a self-imposed institutional and theological stagnation that can be described as self-colonization.

The notion of self-colonization proposed here differs from the "self-colonizing metaphor" explicated by Alexander Kiossev<sup>1</sup> as well as from the narrative of "internal colonization" introduced by Alexander Etkind.<sup>2</sup> Kiossev showed that the countries in Eastern Europe and other places not subject to an actual military, economic, financial, and administrative rule by a colonial power nevertheless succumbed to the rule of colonial Eurocentric imagination. Etkind interpreted Russia's imperial experience as simultaneously external (the colonization of other people) and internal (the colonization of its own people). In my usage, self-colonization refers to Orthodoxy's self-induced encapsulation and stagnation as a result of the traumatic experiences of significant social and economic restrictions under Ottoman rule and of oppression and persecution under totalitarian communism. This psychological

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- 1 According to Alexander Kiossev, "The concept of self-colonizing can be used for cultures having succumbed to the cultural power of Europe and the west without having been invaded and turned into colonies in actual fact. Historical circumstances transformed them into an extracolonial 'periphery,' lateral viewers who have not been directly affected either by important colonial conflicts or by the techniques of colonial rule." See Alexander Kiossev, "The Self-Colonizing Cultures," in *Cultural Aspects of the Modernization Process*, ed. Dimitri Ginev, Francis Sejersted and Kostadinka Simeonova (Oslo: TMV-senteret 1995), 73–81.
  - 2 Alexander Etkind, *Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2011).

mindset has real practical consequences reflected in what Prodromou has called Orthodoxy's "discernible ambivalence" about contemporary pluralism<sup>3</sup> – and, one can also add, about human rights, modernity, gender equality, etc. Orthodoxy's ambivalent engagement with sensitive contemporary issues is further aggravated by theologies emphasizing the Church's "otherworldliness" on the one hand and its symphonic alliances with state powers on the other, at the expense of its social service in the world and its preferential option for the poor and the powerless.

Nevertheless, Orthodox Christianity can draw on a significant body of theological doctrine to elaborate new positive theological and institutional responses to challenging contemporary issues and thus overcome its self-colonization.

## Historical Legacies

### *The Byzantine Theocratic Legacy*

From the 4th to the mid-15th century, all Orthodox countries in Europe, and not merely the Byzantine Empire proper, formed a supranational commonwealth that in principle acknowledged the emperor as its head.<sup>4</sup> In the 6th century, Emperor Justinian elaborated the doctrine of *symphonia*,<sup>5</sup> according to which the Christian empire was the earthly icon of the kingdom of God with the Christian emperor at its center. The Byzantine emperors' official policy aimed to eradicate heathenism and had little respect for religious tolerance. Therefore, as Aristotle Papanikolaou points out, the theologies of state and culture of the Orthodox Church "were shaped within the context of an empire in which it was the state-sponsored religion and, hence, the primary principle of cultural unity." The present-day Orthodox Churches are inheritors

3 Elizabeth Prodromou, "Orthodox Christianity and Pluralism: Moving Beyond Ambivalence?" in *The Orthodox Churches in a Pluralistic World: An Ecumenical Conversation*, ed. Emmanuel Clapsis (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2004), 22–46.

4 See Dimitri Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe 500–1453* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971).

5 The frequent subordination of the Orthodox Church to the state has often been described by Western writers as "caesaro-papism" in contradistinction to the Catholic Church's model of "papo-caesarism," yet this notion has been contested by Orthodox authors. According to Father Sergius Bulgakov, "Caesaro-papism was always an abuse; never was it recognized, dogmatically or canonically." See Sergius Bulgakov, "Orthodoxy and the State," in *The Orthodox Church*, [http://www.holytrinitymission.org/books/english/orthodox\\_church\\_s\\_bulgakov.htm#\\_Toc45589064](http://www.holytrinitymission.org/books/english/orthodox_church_s_bulgakov.htm#_Toc45589064).

of the Byzantine theocratic legacy, which often impedes their support for the democratic principles of church-state separation and multiculturalism.<sup>6</sup>

An in-depth critical assessment of this legacy and its continuous influence on contemporary Orthodox self-definitions, symbolic appropriations and political practices still remains to be done. It bears mentioning that the largest church body in the Orthodox world today, the Moscow Patriarchate, has frequently insisted, through some of its spokesmen – particularly Father Vsevolod Chaplin – that Byzantium did not vanish without a trace but “has been reincarnated in Russia.”<sup>7</sup>

### *The Ottoman Legacy*

In the late 14th to mid-15th century, the historical Orthodox dominions of the Byzantine Empire were conquered by the Ottomans and lived under non-Christian rule until the 19th century. Ottoman rule is often interpreted in binary terms: either as a completely negative historical experience that stymied Orthodoxy’s ecclesiastical and theological development for centuries or in an overly positive perspective that emphasizes the peaceful and even harmonious coexistence of multiple religions and cultures. More balanced interpretations concentrate on the relative administrative and social autonomy of the different faith communities under the leadership of their respective religious hierarchies within the framework of the so-called *millet* system. This system of social organization was based on the confessional affiliation of the diverse populations (called *millets*) in the empire. The Orthodox *millet* was headed by the patriarch of Constantinople and included all the Orthodox Christians regardless of their linguistic or ethnic identities.

In the Ottoman Muslim-dominated system of rule, Christians and Jews remained second-class citizens who were subordinated politically, socially and economically, yet, as “people of the Book,” they enjoyed a protected status. During this period, Orthodox Christianity lived “in the shadow of the mosque,” to use Sidney Griffith’s metaphor,<sup>8</sup> and Eastern Orthodoxy thus became a surviving rather than a thriving faith.

6 Aristotle Papanikolaou, “Byzantium, Orthodoxy and Democracy,” *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 71, no. 1 (2003): 78.

7 Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin wants Russia to become “Byzantium without its faults,” *Interfax Religion*, <http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=4345> (accessed 29 January 2020).

8 Sydney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

### *The Legacy of Communism*

After WWII, all Orthodox countries, except Greece, became part of the Soviet sphere of influence. The communist regimes' policies towards religion varied from country to country and changed over time. The initial persecution of religion during the first two decades gave way to its consequent limited toleration, co-optation and utilization for various political goals. Oppression was strongest in the Soviet Union and Albania and only slightly milder in Bulgaria. The Orthodox Churches in Romania and Yugoslavia experienced the state's significant liberalization of religion from the mid-1960s onwards and became important vehicles for the mobilization and expression of growing national sentiments. The different experiences among the Orthodox Churches under communism were related to the diverse state policies towards religion, to cultural variations as well as to the different relations between Orthodoxy and ethnonational identities in individual societies.

Admittedly, the traditionally close ties between state and church, and specifically the cooperation and submission of the church to the state, made the Orthodox Churches particularly vulnerable to the encroachment of the totalitarian regimes. Furthermore, as Irena Borowik has observed, Orthodox Churches have loose links, structurally, among themselves and lack both the centralized authority and leverage to influence the positions of a particular church in a given country. In this respect, they resemble to some extent the nationalized Protestant Churches and differ significantly from the Catholic Church with the latter's centralization, powerful international structures, and a strong tradition of opposition to the state which allowed for better defense strategies against communist oppression.<sup>9</sup>

Participation in the ecumenical movement was not an option for the Orthodox Churches under communist regimes in the first two decades after WWII. In the 1960s, those churches became members of the WCC with the blessing of the ruling communist regimes, yet the rationale behind their membership was politically calculated. Church representatives at the ecumenical gatherings were supposed to praise the alleged advantages of life under communism but to remain silent about the persecution of religion.

The churches' subordination to the state bred their institutional and spiritual stagnation and reinforced conservative and exclusivist tenets. The historical legacies of living initially under Christian theocracy (Byzantium), later under non-Christian rule (the Ottoman Empire) and more recently under authoritarian regimes (the Communist Bloc and the far-right junta in Greece)

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9 Irena Borowik, "Orthodoxy Confronting the Collapse of Communism in Post-Soviet Countries," *Social Compass* 53, no. 2 (2006): 269.

bestowed on Orthodox Christianity a weak institutional culture unsupportive of liberal democratic values.

### Post-Communism

The Orthodox Churches' experience with democratic regimes started with the democratization of Greece after 1974 and the rest of the Orthodox countries after the fall of communism in 1989. Democratization established a free, competitive public sphere and fostered ethnic, religious and cultural heterogeneity. The dynamics of multiple transitions, particularly in the post-communist societies, from a command economy to a liberal market one, from authoritarian to democratic polities, from non-freedom to freedom of religion presented the Orthodox Churches with enormous challenges.

The Orthodox Churches were ill-equipped to come to terms with those challenges – and particularly with the increasing religious pluralism. The competition implied by religious heterogeneity and requiring adequate “theological ideas, financial resources, institutional networks, and human capital”<sup>10</sup> was difficult to handle. All these assets were immensely weakened by the historical contexts in which Orthodox Churches evolved.

What are the major traits in the organizational behavior of the Orthodox Churches today that exhibit persistent ecclesiastical self-colonization and impede constructive responses to the contemporary challenges?

(a) The persistence of a “besieged fortress” mentality, which was related to the struggle for survival under Ottoman rule and later under oppressive authoritarian and atheistic regimes, has reinforced the encapsulation of the Orthodox Churches. It has hampered enormously their capacities to address constructively their internal pluralization as well as the external religious and social heterogeneity. Both internal and external diversity are often seen by these churches as a threat to their survival. Consequently, the former is heavily restricted while the latter is either tacitly ignored or forthrightly dismissed. This stagnating mentality also obstructs a constructive reevaluation of the Orthodox Churches' patriarchal and anti-modernist positions in line with contemporary core liberal democratic values of human rights and gender equality.

Self-colonization in the case of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, for example, is evident in its growing isolationism. The Church withdrew from the ecumenical movement, leaving the World Council of Churches in 1998. Furthermore,

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10 Elizabeth Prodromou, “Christianity and Democracy: The Ambivalent Orthodox,” *Journal of Democracy* 15, no. 2 (2004): 63.

it gradually alienated itself from other Orthodox Churches, with the notable exception of the Russian Orthodox Church. Conspicuously, it refused to take part in the historical Pan-Orthodox Council in Crete in 2016, an important event organized by the Ecumenical Patriarch to consolidate an Orthodox position on pressing contemporary issues such as the mission of the Orthodox Church in today's world and its relations with the rest of the Christian world, among others. More broadly, the Church regularly expresses "traditionalist"<sup>11</sup> negative attitudes towards modernity, the West, liberalism, the rights of women, sexual minorities, and the "sects,"<sup>12</sup> among other things. However, it has never expressed a critique of the neo-liberal economic restructuring and its disastrous social costs, of the rise of poverty, endemic corruption, inequality and discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities. In the rare cases when it takes a public stance on sensitive issues, it raises eyebrows among many of its followers. In 2018, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church vehemently opposed government plans to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, known as the Istanbul Convention. In its official statement, the Synod insisted that the Convention tried to introduce "a third gender," whereas "sex can be only biologically defined because man and woman are a creation of God." It expressed concerns regarding the Convention's Article 12, which calls for the eradication of "prejudices, customs, traditions and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority of women or on stereotyped roles for women and men"<sup>13</sup> – thus inadvertently displaying its attitude towards women's equality. The ecclesiastical hierarchy's take on the document left the impression that they did not see violence against women as a serious social issue, even though they condemned it in general terms. Furthermore, in a baffling effort to denounce the Convention, the Synod ordered parish priests to distribute a special prayer called "The Canon of the Holy Mother of God" so that it would not be ratified.<sup>14</sup>

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11 For an illuminating discussion of "traditional Orthodoxy," see George Demacopoulos, "Traditional Orthodoxy' as a Postcolonial Movement," *The Journal of Religion* 97, no. 4 (2017): 475–99.

12 On the conflictual attitudes of the traditional Churches in Eastern Europe towards the so-called "new religious movements," disparagingly referred to as "sects," which arrived in the region after the fall of the Berlin Wall, see my *Religion, Nationalism, and Civil Society: The Post-Communist Palimpsest* (Lewiston NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), 33–67.

13 Stanovište na Svetija Sinod po povod Istanbulskata Konvencija [Statement of the Holy Synod regarding the Istanbul Convention on January 22, 2018], <http://www.bg-patriarshia.bg/news.php?id=254101> (accessed 16 September 2018).

14 For the Bulgarian Orthodox Church's backlash against gender equality see my article "Women, Orthodox Christianity, and Neosecularization in Bulgaria," in *Women and*

(b) In post-communist Eastern Europe, the historical (often also called “national”) Orthodox Church has turned into a central preoccupation in the discourses on the “nation.” Orthodoxy has often been regarded by many people, including non-believers, as a “national religion,” even as a kind of new state ideology. The re-emphasized link between religious and national identities, which is historically embedded in the institutional organization of Orthodox Christianity in autonomous (autocephalous) churches territorially linked to individual nation states, fostered exclusivist attitudes. If being Bulgarian, Serbian, or Romanian means being Orthodox, then religious others – Muslims, Jews, Evangelicals, etc. – are not members of the nation. At the same time, religious heterogeneity is perceived as a threat to political and social stability. For example, the Protestant and Catholic Churches in Russia have often been accused of proselytism by the Orthodox Church, which has insisted that the state should limit the activities of foreign missionaries as well as of new religious movements.<sup>15</sup>

Recently, those exclusivist attitudes became evident in some of the national churches’ attitude to the migration wave from the Middle East. During the refugee crises in 2015–16, the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church called on the government to stop admitting more refugees, even though it expressed compassion for those already in the country. It pointed out that accepting more refugees from the Middle East could threaten Christianity and raise “questions about the stability and existence of the Bulgarian state in general.”<sup>16</sup>

(c) Orthodox theological education in post-communist countries generally pays little attention to disciplines such as comparative religions, interreligious dialogue and ecumenics.<sup>17</sup> When it does consider other religions, this is almost invariably done in the tradition of negative apologetics, which prevents

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*Religiosity in Orthodox Christianity*, ed. Ina Merdjanova (New York: Fordham University Press, 2021), 50–75, here 66–9.

15 This official document lists as one of the areas of church-state cooperation “opposition to the work of pseudo-religious structures presenting a threat to the individual and society.” “Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church,” Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, <http://orthodoxeurope.org/page/3/14.aspx> (accessed 25 January 2020).

16 Izvānpedno sāobštenie na Sv. Sinod na BPC po povod krizata s bežancite [Special announcement of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church with reference to the refugee crisis on 26 November 2016], <http://www.bg-patriarshia.bg/news.php?id=184530> (accessed 3 October 2018).

17 The situation is different in Greece, where, already in the 1930s, the study of world religions was introduced into the curricula of the theological schools. The theological faculties in Athens and Thessaloniki run well-established chairs in the history of world religions and comparative religion.

objective presentation and discussion of other faiths. The introduction of the comparative study of religions emphasizing a dialogical approach would be an important step towards a more adequate appraisal of cultural and religious plurality and would encourage the understanding of diversity as a positive challenge rather than as an ominous threat.

To be sure, Orthodox Christians in Eastern Europe have coexisted for centuries with Catholics, Jews, Muslims and, more recently, with various Protestant denominations as well. They have developed certain modes of living together peacefully and of negotiating differences and tensions on a daily basis and, in certain cases, have supported and helped people from other faiths. For example, in 1943, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church was at the forefront of political initiatives and social protests against plans of the pro-German interwar government to send Bulgarian Jews to extermination camps. This saved the lives of some 48,000 persons. Reflections on and the interpretation of similar historical experiences in a theological key can form the basis of a new theology of interreligious coexistence and pluralism.

(d) The post-1989 reassertion of male domination in the Church imposed over the assertiveness of women both in the wider society and the Church, and over a renewed promotion of gender equality in all aspects of life. Orthodox Churches today are largely feminized in terms of church attendance, confession and receiving communion. This feature closely mirrors the *de facto* feminization of Orthodox Christianity during the communist period as a result of the privatization and domestication of religion. The confinement of religious practice and beliefs to the domestic sphere under communism turned women into the unofficial custodians of religiosity. Women, particularly elderly women, continued to attend church at the major Christian feasts and to prepare the ritual meals at home, to pray and to perform domestic religious customs related to birth, death, and marriage. They conveyed the basics of Orthodox beliefs and practices to their children and grandchildren in the absence of other sources of religious knowledge in society, and they would often secretly have their grandchildren baptized.<sup>18</sup>

With the break-up of the communist regimes and the newly acquired religious freedom, the Orthodox Churches reemerged in the public sphere. Women's roles in the survival of Orthodoxy under the communist atheistic policies remained unrecognized, whereas men's institutional power and ritual expertise in Orthodox settings was re-emphasized through a process that can be described as re-clericalization. The inherent contradiction between

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18 On the domestication of religion under communism see Merdjanova, "Women, Orthodox Christianity," 59.

the official masculine domination and the unofficially feminized spaces in Orthodox Christianity has caused anxiety among conservative ecclesiastics and theologians. Orthodox female subjectivities have been restricted by a continuous emphasis on women's roles as wives, mothers and caregivers at the expense of women's professional realization and clout in public life. The extensive ecclesiastical promotion of the so-called "traditional gender values and norms" in society has typically implied male leadership and female domesticity. The Russian Orthodox Church in particular has made the defense of the "traditional values" a major staple in its ideological struggles at home and abroad, liaising with conservative Catholic and Evangelical groups in the West and opposing gender equality and LGBT rights at international forums and in organizations such as the UN and the Council of Europe.<sup>19</sup>

The post-1989 masculinization and clericalization of the Orthodox Churches coalesced with the advent of post-communist "hegemonic masculinity"<sup>20</sup> that revolved around the avowed ethnonationalism with Orthodox identity as its symbolic element, aggressive machoism and, frequently, anti-intellectualism. In Bulgaria, for instance, self-professed Orthodox "experts" do not hesitate to denounce Bulgarian liberal intellectuals as a "catastrophe" and praise "simple, ordinary people" for their "natural instincts" about the subversive conspiracies of a globally imposed "gender ideology."<sup>21</sup>

### Toward a Constructive Engagement with Contemporary Challenges

The transition to a neoliberal economy and financial deregulation resulted in huge imbalances in income and wealth, the commodification of life, demographical collapse, and the rise of a culture of ultra-individualism that corrodes the social fabric. The Orthodox Churches in Eastern Europe, in the grip of self-colonization, have failed to address the crucial challenges of economic injustice, rampant corruption, and rising political authoritarianism as they have

19 For an in-depth discussion of the transnational conservative alliances and activism of the Russian Orthodox Church, see Kristina Stoeckl and Dmitry Uzlaner, *The Moralists International: Russia in the Global Culture Wars* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2022).

20 Hegemonic masculinity is a dominant form of masculinity in society constructed in relation to women and to subordinate/marginalized masculinities. See Raewyn W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2005).

21 These are quotes from a discussion at the book launch of the Bulgarian translation of Gabriele Kuby's *The Global Sexual Revolution: Destruction of Freedom in the Name of Freedom* in Sofia, 1 June 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XQbwNgumSes> (accessed 12 November 2019).

failed to come to terms with ecumenism, human rights, gender equality and the cultural and religious diversity in contemporary society. Disturbingly for many Orthodox believers around the world, the Moscow Patriarchate praised and celebrated the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine in 2014, and openly condoned President Vladimir Putin's war against Ukraine in 2022.

Admittedly, the general absence of critical reflections and cogent politico-theological analyses by ecclesiastics and theologians on the state of affairs in the Orthodox Churches and societies in Eastern Europe has been aggravated by the lack of a transnational institutional structure and authority in Orthodox Christianity. This, according to Aristotle Papanikolaou, has prevented "any meaningful deliberation on the contemporary challenges and questions confronting the Orthodox churches."<sup>22</sup>

Yet Orthodox Christianity is not a cultural monolith, and the post-communist churches often differ from the vibrant Orthodox communities in Western Europe, North America and Australia, both in their social and political outlook and in their role in the public sphere.<sup>23</sup> Orthodoxy in the West has a long experience with democratic systems, where human rights policies figure prominently, and with living in a heterogeneous social environment. Different political contexts and sociocultural dynamics, especially the historical and sociocultural realities of being a majority versus being a minority religion, have shaped varied approaches to pressing contemporary issues. Father Dragos Herescu, for example, points to the existence of "multiple Orthodoxies" and counterposes Orthodoxy mediated by ethnicity, place and custom versus Orthodoxy as a universal, mobile, voluntary religion. He also usefully reminds us of a generational gap as younger generations in Eastern Europe who have firsthand experiences of Western modernity, secularization and pluralism relate in a different way than their parents and grandparents to contemporary sensitive issues.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the emergence of new generations of clergy,

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22 Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Orthodoxy, Postmodernity, and Ecumenism: The Difference That Divine-Human Communication Makes," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 42, no. 4 (2007), 527–46, here 542.

23 It is beyond the scope of this paper to elaborate on how the influx of converts, particularly from evangelical Christianity, to the Orthodox parishes in North America in recent decades has complicated the picture by exacerbating significantly the rift between the "modernists" and "fundamentalists" within Orthodoxy in this part of the world. As Father John Jillions aptly reminded us during his Georges Florovsky lecture at the Orthodox Theological Society in America in January 2022, this rift undermines the catholicity of the Church: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a2SVk\\_Zhk2c&t=103s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a2SVk_Zhk2c&t=103s) (accessed 7 March 2022).

24 Father Dragos Herescu, "Secularization, Multiple Modernities, and the Contemporary Challenges of 'Multiple Orthodoxies,'" *Public Orthodoxy*, 29 October 2019, <https://>

theologians and lay people, who have enjoyed better educational opportunities, international travel, study abroad programs, access to internet resources and social media, is inevitably transforming Orthodox identities.

More importantly, Orthodox Christianity can draw on a significant body of theological doctrines that can serve as cornerstones for laying out a theological framework to explore and justify its engagement with contemporary challenges. These doctrines include its teaching about the human being as the image and likeness of God and the associated ideas about personal freedom and responsibility, its soteriology that proclaims that Christ died for all and especially its Trinitarian doctrine which emphasizes diversity in unity. Theologies of asceticism certainly have a lot to teach us regarding consumerism and the commodification of life, and the pioneering work by Father Gregory Jensen on asceticism as a cure for consumerism is an inspiring example to follow.<sup>25</sup> Tenets about the “traditional values,” instead of being employed as a strategy to reconfirm patriarchal orders of male leadership and female subordination, can serve as a program for resistance against the dominance of the “neoliberal values” in society and the attendant marketization of education, healthcare, culture and even human bodies. Teachings about the divine economy of all creation have underlined the humanity’s intrinsic relationship with nature and ecological responsibility. God gave human beings “dominion” over creation, according to Genesis 1:28, which involves responsible stewardship and duty of care for the planet Earth rather than the ruthless exploitation of natural resources in the name of unlimited economic growth and consumption. Orthodox authors, among whom Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew figures prominently, have already laid the groundwork for a sound theology of the environment.<sup>26</sup> Last but not least, Christianity has a preferential option for the poor and vulnerable (“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” Matthew 5:5). This option emphasizes social justice and the duty of the faithful to help the oppressed and to recognize the marginalized, which in

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publicorthodoxy.org/2019/10/29/secularization-multiple-orthodoxies/ (accessed 31 January 2021).

25 Gregory Jensen, *The Cure for Consumerism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Acton Institute for the Study of Religion & Liberty, 2015).

26 The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has been promoting a theology of the environment for decades. For an overview of eco-theological writing by Bartholomew and other Orthodox authors, see Theokritoff who also states that “the Orthodox tradition goes beyond the dichotomy of man and nature to offer a ‘deeper ecology’ in which the physical interrelations between creatures are set within the divine economy for all creation.” Elizabeth Theokritoff, “Green Patriarch, Green Patristics: Reclaiming the Deep Ecology of Christian Tradition,” *Religions* 8, no. 7 (2017): 116; <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8070116>.

the contemporary world means to responsibly address issues related to immigration, racism and social and gender inequality.

*Acknowledgements*

This paper was inspired by my participation as Senior Fellow in the “Orthodoxy and Human Rights” project, sponsored by Fordham University’s Orthodox Christian Studies Center and generously funded by the Henry Luce Foundation and Leadership 100.

# Democracy in Russian Religious Philosophy: A Political Theology of Participation

*Nathaniel Wood*

## Introduction

This essay will offer a broad overview of three major “democratizing” themes within Russian religious philosophy, themes that gesture toward an Orthodox theology of democracy. The first is the ecclesiological theme, centered on the doctrine of *sobornost’* as the ideal shape of community life, both within the church and within broader society. Second is the anthropological theme, or perhaps more correctly the theo-anthropological theme, which considers the deification of the human person as the basis of human dignity. Third, there is the incarnational theme, wherein the Chalcedonian formula of Christ’s two natures becomes a model for divine-human relations generally and, by extension, for church-state relations. These three themes are united by a broader motif that runs throughout much of Russian religious philosophy: the participatory theme. As will be demonstrated, the ecclesiological, anthropological and incarnational themes all center on the free participation of human beings in the coming of the Kingdom of God, whether in humanity’s collective participation in God’s work of redeeming fallen creation or in the unique participation of all persons in the transformation of social life. The present essay will focus on the theme of participation as it was developed in four major sources of Russian religious philosophy: early Slavophile thought (active 1830s–60s), the religious philosophy of Vladimir Soloviev (1853–1900), and the political theologies of two of Soloviev’s intellectual heirs, Father Sergei Bulgakov (1871–1944) and Semyon Frank (1877–1950).

The thesis presented here is that these themes “gesture toward” democracy. There is no fully formed democratic political theology in Russian religious philosophy, and not all of the thinkers who contributed to the development of these themes endorsed democratic politics at all. Soloviev, for example, never abandoned the basic framework of Christian monarchy even after losing faith in the most ambitious articulations of his “free theocracy,” while others like Bulgakov who at times voiced high praise for democratic politics were also at times ambivalent toward it, recognizing democracy’s potential to devolve into a kind of pseudo-theocracy. The most explicit theological endorsements for a particular mode of governance within these thinkers’ works tend to be

pro-monarchy and even pro-autocracy; support for democracy tends to be much vaguer, more conditional, less explicit, and often mentioned only in passing. Regula Zwahlen rightly observes that the main focus of much of the political thinking in Russian religious philosophy was the negotiation of new kinds of relationships “between the Church and any kind of state, not necessarily” to offer a “Christian justification of democracy.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it would be an overstatement to suggest that a democratic political theology follows unambiguously from the major voices of this tradition. Nevertheless, all historical observations about their immediate intentions aside, the three themes examined in this essay, together with their unifying motif of free participation, have a democratizing thrust. As such, they can serve as a point of departure for further development toward an Orthodox democratic political theology, especially as contemporary theologians reflect on these themes in new democratic contexts. This essay will thus present an outline of these themes with an emphasis on their democratic resonances.

### The Ecclesiological Theme

The first “democratizing” theme of Russian religious philosophy is linked to what Vasily Zenkovsky referred to as the rebirth of “ecclesiastical consciousness” in 19th-century Russia, a spiritual reawakening that sought both to liberate the church’s self-understanding from the secular prerogatives of the tsarist state and to make the shared experience of ecclesial life the point of departure for a comprehensive Christian theological understanding of society and culture.<sup>2</sup> Instrumental in this reawakening were the early Slavophiles, including Alexei Khomiakov, Ivan Kireevsky, and Konstantin Aksakov. To locate the Slavophiles within the development of an Orthodox theology of democracy might initially seem strange. When addressing the question of governance directly, Slavophile political thought – which rested, initially, on an idealized account of the traditional way of life of the Russian *obshchina* or peasant commune – was typically explicitly *anti*-democratic. The anti-democratic rhetoric is perhaps strongest in Aksakov, who insisted that the Russian people have “no aspiration toward self-government, no desire for political rights” – this disregard for democratic

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1 Regula M. Zwahlen, “Sergii Bulgakov’s Reinvention of Theocracy for a Democratic Age,” *Journal of Orthodox Christian Studies* 3, no. 2 (2020): 176.

2 Vasilii Vasilevich Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, vol. 1, trans. George L. Kline (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), 187, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315829852>.

governance being, in his view, one of the great strengths of Russian culture.<sup>3</sup> It was devotion to the *obshchina* that led Slavophile thought to reject the rights of the people to participate democratically in government and instead to defend the legitimacy, even the necessity, of autocracy. In this understanding, it was an advantage of autocracy that it excluded the common people from such participation. But an advantage in what sense?

The answer to this question helps to illuminate, ironically, the positive role of participation in the Slavophiles and thus the democratizing thrust of their theology. The problem with democracy is that, as a form of politics, it belongs to the domain of *the state*, which for the Slavophiles is always associated with the dualism of coercive external authority and superficial, artificial social relations. State politics, as the Slavophiles understood it, is inseparable from conflict, and as such it stands in tension with the sort of harmonious communion that they idealized in the *obshchina*. Democracy is dangerous precisely because it draws the common people into the politics of the state and thus entangles them in conflicts that risk eroding the communal bonds between them. Democracy risks debasing communal relations into merely *contractual* relations; or, as Andrzej Walicki describes it, borrowing Ferdinand Tönnies' terminology, democracy risks transforming the *Gemeinschaft* into the *Gesellschaft*.<sup>4</sup> The Slavophiles' support for autocracy was not a celebration of state power for its own, nor was it an uncritical defence of the actually existing Russian autocracy of their time, but instead reflected their desire to shield the Russian people from the potentially corrosive effects of democratic politics on social life. Ultimately, its purpose was to "depoliticize" social relations. This desire is reflected in Slavophile advocacy for a principle of "mutual non-interference" between the state and the common people, according to which the people freely renounce democratic political rights and entrust the necessary work of state governance entirely to the autocrat, while at the same time narrowly restricting the proper scope of autocratic power essentially to that which is necessary to preserve the conditions for community life, without interfering in that life. This principle, which barred the people from democratic participation, was thus intended to *free* the people from absorption into the state, carving out a space for community to flourish outside the conflictual realm of the political.

3 Konstantin Aksakov, "Memorandum to Alexander II on the Internal State of Russia," in *Russian Intellectual History: An Anthology*, ed. Marc Raeff (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1978), 231.

4 Andrzej Walicki, *Legal Philosophies of Russian Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 34.

A specific bugbear lurked behind this rejection of democracy: namely, the contract-based society founded on competition between self-interested individuals, typically associated in Slavophile writings with “the West.” Their critiques of Westernization and their valorization of the *obshchina* were in part a resistance to the infiltration of this type of society into Russia. In substance, their polemics against “the West” share much in common with critiques of liberal democracy by later Western Christian theologians such as John Milbank, William Cavanaugh, and Stanley Hauerwas,<sup>5</sup> along with others who draw sharp contrasts between liberal democracy, with a supposed foundation in the Hobbesian *bellum omnium contra omnes*, and the peace of ecclesial communion. The similarities are especially apparent, for instance, in Kireevsky’s diagnoses of the West’s (alleged) excessive individualism and rationalism. Kireevsky traces the emergence in the West, through its feudal history, of what would later become known as “possessive individualism,” the conception of the human being as sole “owner” of him- or herself.<sup>6</sup> Kireevsky argues that “the whole of West’s social and personal life is based on the concept of the individual and private independence” – most fundamentally, the individual’s right of private ownership, to the extent that even “personhood itself [...] is no more than an expression of this right.”<sup>7</sup> This is why, for Kireevsky, the feudal lord ruling absolutely over his own estate is the representative symbol of Western society. In this feudal context, however, relations among individuals are fundamentally antagonistic, since rival lords always present themselves as potential threats to one’s property. Modernity did not eliminate this feudal personhood but democratized it, transforming social relations along the lines of self-ownership, conflict, and rights claims. Modern society thus maintains the basic character of feudal relations: “The first step taken by each individual entity upon entering into communal life is to surround itself with fortress walls, from behind which it conducts its relations with other equally independent powers,” Kireevsky writes.<sup>8</sup> Social relations become strictly formal and contractual, rooted in self-interest, without reference to a higher common

5 For more on the comparison between the Slavophiles and these critics, especially Cavanaugh, see Nathaniel Wood, “*Sobornost*, State Authority, and Christian Society in Slavophile Political Theology,” in *Religion, Authority, and the State*, ed. Leo Lefebure (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

6 The concept of “possessive individualism” was developed by C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

7 Ivan Kireevsky, “On the Nature of European Culture and Its Relation to the Culture of Russia: A Letter to Count E. E. Komorovskii,” in *Russian Intellectual History: An Anthology*, ed. Marc Raeff (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1978), 199.

8 Ivan Kireevsky, “A Reply to Khomiakov,” in *Documentary History of Russian Thought*, trans. and ed. W. J. Leatherbarrow and D. C. Offord (Ann Arbor: Ardis Publishers, 1987), 82.

good, and rest on the threat of coercive power; thus, they do not reach the level of authentic community.

The rejection of political democracy therefore stems in part from its association with this flawed individualist anthropology and its erosive effects on communion – placing their critique in the company of later theological critics of liberal democracy, who in similar fashion understand the contractual liberal order as resting on an atomistic individualism and primordial conflict. Yet, just as for these later critics, the critique of the democratic *state* can be seen as an effort to make space for a *different kind* of “democracy” realized outside the state, one not based on the external coercive power of the state or on conflicting individual rights claims but instead based on kenotic communion and consensus. Initially for the Slavophiles, this alternative democracy was to be realized within the *obshchina*, which exchanged the “feudal” right of self-possession for a Christian ethic of self-renunciation – including, importantly, the renunciation of individual property, severing the feudal link between personhood and private ownership.<sup>9</sup> Along these lines, Aksakov imagines the citizens of the *obshchina* not as feudal lords but as singers in a choir: ones who freely renounce their self-sufficient individuality to sing, with a greater collective voice, a common song in harmony with others.<sup>10</sup> Thus, even while rejecting democratic participation in state politics, Aksakov envisions a community shaped by its own sort of participation, one in which persons freely donate their diverse gifts as unique and essential contributions to the realization of the common good and in so doing become something more than what they were on their own.

Eventually, the marks of this “democratic” vision of the *obshchina* would be transferred to the Church, primarily through Khomiakov’s contributions, in the ecclesiological doctrine of *sobornost’*.<sup>11</sup> It is in the Church that true democracy is realized. The *sobornost’* doctrine offered an account of ecclesial life as a perfect communion based on the kenotic renunciation of individual egoism and the harmony of consensus. In place of democratic politics, it promised a deeper sort of participation in ecclesial communion and in enacting Christian truth. For Khomiakov, Christian truth is an event of communion, because it is dispersed throughout the whole ecclesial body, such that this truth must be

9 See Kireevsky, “European Culture,” 199; “Reply to Khomiakov,” 83; also see Paul Patrick O’Leary, O.P., *The Triune Church: A Study in the Ecclesiology of A. S. Xomjakov* (Dublin: Rollebon Press, 1982), 48.

10 See Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, 236.

11 For Khomiakov’s main statement of the doctrine, see his “The Church is One,” in *On Spiritual Unity: A Slavophile Reader*, trans. and ed. Boris Jakim and Robert Bird (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Books, 1998).

realized “democratically” through the free participation of the Church’s members in the Church’s life of mutual love and prayer: “The knowledge of divine truths was given to the mutual love of all Christians, and it has no other guardian but this love.”<sup>12</sup> Truth is realized in a kind of democratic “gift exchange” wherein each person offers up his or her unique insights and, liberated from the limits of individual egoism, receives back a fuller participation in the truth that is impossible on one’s own. The result is a stark contrast from the autocratic nature of the state. The life of the ecclesial community is radically democratic, requiring the free participation of all its members, with no room for coercive power or monarchical authority – even *God* is not an authority over the Church, Khomiakov contends, because God is known by the Church from within the Church’s own experience of communion.<sup>13</sup> The necessity of democratic exchange and the inadmissibility of monarchy in the Church found expression in, among other places, Khomiakov’s anti-Catholic polemical works, which attacked papal supremacy as a sin against the mutuality of *sobornost’* – an attempt by one part of the Church to claim a monopoly on truth and thereby establish itself as a monarchical authority over the others.<sup>14</sup>

There is significant resemblance here to many later political-theological critiques of liberal democracy. For many contemporary theologians, the critique of liberal democracy is not a critique of democratic modes of life *as such*, but, first and foremost, an attempt to recover an independent social identity for the ecclesial community outside the terms set by liberalism, empowering the Church to *be the Church* more faithfully. Their aim is to realize a more authentic ecclesial communion, freed from the prerogatives of the secular state, so that the Church might serve as a “counter-*polis*” or alternative order to the conflict and violence of the liberal state. The goal is not the rejection but the *perfection* of democracy, based on the assumption that the most authentic democracy is achieved not in the liberal state but in the Church. Milbank, for example, is clear that he sees the Church as the higher realization of democracy: the Church is, in his words, a “deified democracy.”<sup>15</sup> His Church is a non-liberal

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12 Alexis Khomiakov, “Some Remarks by an Orthodox Christian Concerning the Western Communions, on the Occasion of a Letter Published by the Archbishop of Paris,” in *On Spiritual Unity: A Slavophile Reader*, trans. and ed. Boris Jakim and Robert Bird (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Books, 1998), 112.

13 Alexis Khomiakov, “On the Western Confessions of Faith,” in *Ultimate Questions: An Ontology of Modern Russian Thought*, ed. Alexander Schmemmann (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1965), 50.

14 Khomiakov, “Western Communions.”

15 John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 133.

democracy community that offers more than the “uneasy peace of contract”<sup>16</sup> but – expressed in various ways – “the perfection of *concordantia*,”<sup>17</sup> the “harmonious blending of diverse gifts,”<sup>18</sup> “peaceful consensus”<sup>19</sup> or “perfect social harmony.”<sup>20</sup> The resonances with the Slavophiles’ emphasis on consensus, communion, and gift exchange are no accident; Milbank explicitly invokes *sobornost’* as inspiration for his democratic vision of the Church.<sup>21</sup>

Milbank’s concept of “deified democracy” is helpful for making sense of Khomiakov’s ecclesial community. But if this higher democratic life belongs to ecclesiology, what does that mean for democratic *politics*? On the one hand, because of their strong separation between the state and the people, the Slavophiles do not offer a real democratic political theology; their ecclesial “democracy,” as we have seen, is entirely compatible with political autocracy, even supportive of it. On the other hand, the Church’s democratic principles were not meant to remain locked within the Church’s walls but were meant to shape the wider society. Khomiakov expresses hope that the sobornal spirit should “penetrate man’s whole being and all his relations with his neighbor,” thereby becoming Russia’s “highest social principle.”<sup>22</sup> Likewise, Kireevsky writes that his “only wish” is that the Church’s sobornal life “should become part and parcel of the beliefs of all estates and strata of our society; that these lofty principles, in dominating European culture, should [...] engulf it in their fullness, thus giving it a higher meaning and bringing it to its ultimate development.”<sup>23</sup> Christians are called to transform the social order in the direction of ecclesial democracy; but, given the constraints of their larger “depoliticizing” project, there is in the end no clear role for democratic *politics* to play in carrying out this transformation. The Slavophile path is one of ecclesial *withdrawal* from the political; *sobornost’* as “deified democracy” simply takes the place of democracy as it is normally understood.

Nevertheless, the basic shape of *sobornost’* would serve as a foundation for subsequent, more developed Russian political theologies – such as those

16 John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd edition (Malden MA: Blackwell, 2006), 367.

17 Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 128.

18 Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, ix.

19 Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 128.

20 John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Malden MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997), 154.

21 Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 132.

22 Aleksei Khomiakov, “To the Serbs: An Epistle from Moscow,” in *A Documentary History of Russian Thought from Enlightenment to Marxism*, trans. and eds. William J. Leatherbarrow and Derek C. Offord (Ann Arbor: Ardis Publishers, 1987), 93–94.

23 Kireevsky, “European Culture,” 207.

presented by Soloviev, Bulgakov, and Frank – infusing them with a spirit of “democratic” participation even when they retained some commitment to institutional monarchy. The doctrine would continue to provide the general social ideal toward which Christian social action is to be directed. For these later thinkers too, the essential task of Christian action was to “church” the social order, moving it in the direction of *sobornost’*. Soloviev, for instance, described the mission of politics as “bringing the principle of love present in the church into civic life and state affairs.”<sup>24</sup> Frank likewise argued that central purpose of Christian politics is to “*creatively christianize* the general conditions of life” by “introduc[ing] into all orders of life and relations between people the spirit of love” found in the Church.<sup>25</sup> The same is true for Bulgakov: “Social life is to be organized according to the postulates of Christian love, so also the whole of political life [...]. We must seek for a state of things in which the Church may penetrate as with inward power the whole of human life.”<sup>26</sup>

### The Anthropological Theme

This notion of *sobornost’* as the social ideal is closely linked to the second “democratizing” theme in Russian political theology: the revitalization of the doctrine of deification as part of a defense of the dignity of the human person. Soloviev’s famous doctrine of *bogochelovechestvo*, “Godmanhood” or “Divine-Humanity,” is central to this second theme. Soloviev’s interest in creatively retrieving the patristic doctrine of theosis was driven largely by the urgency defending the “absolute significance and worth” of the human person, which was under threat, in different ways, from both the tsarist regime and its radical secular alternatives. Soloviev believed that modernity had brought about a greater recognition of what he referred to as the “negative absoluteness” of the human person or the intuition of the human person’s moral freedom and perfectibility. However, “positive absoluteness,” the actual attainment

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24 Vladimir Soloviev, “On Spiritual Authority in Russia,” in *Freedom, Faith, and Dogma: Essays by V. S. Soloviev on Christianity and Judaism*, trans. and ed. Vladimir Wozniuk (Albany NY: SUNY Press, 2008), 18.

25 S. L. Frank, *The Light Shineth in Darkness: An Essay in Christian Ethics and Social Philosophy*, trans. Boris Jakim (Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 1989), 220.

26 Sergei Bulgakov, “Social Teaching in Modern Russian Orthodox Theology,” in *Sergii Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology*, ed. Rowan Williams (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 282.

of perfection, requires union with God – deification.<sup>27</sup> In this way, Soloviev tied Orthodox soteriology directly to a political program centered on the liberation and the dignity of human persons, offering an Orthodox theological rationale for several political values commonly associated with modern liberal democracies: freedom of conscience and freedom of the press, a degree of church-state separation, welfare rights, freedom from cruel punishments and so forth.

More directly pertinent to the question of democracy, however, is the importance of participation in Soloviev's project. On the basis of theosis, Soloviev pointed to the necessity of broad participation in the transformation of the social order – and this despite his formal support for monarchy. The key move here is Soloviev's recognition of the *vocational* character of deification, the linking of deification to humanity's "common task" of preparing the way for the eschatological arrival of God's Kingdom.<sup>28</sup> Soloviev, like so many others of his time, had a progressive view of history; in his case, the end toward which history is progressing is the perfect communion of the divine and the human, the universal incarnation of Christ – the "materialization of spirit" and "spiritualization of matter."<sup>29</sup> This is to say that the end of history is a *relationship*, and as such, it must be brought about through personal freedom rather than by some immutable law of historical necessity. Therefore, even though God has been luring creation toward this end from the outset, the end is attained only as the movement toward it becomes "more and more conscious and free, i.e., really *personal* – that each should more and more understand and fulfill the work [of universal incarnation] as if it were his own."<sup>30</sup> In other words, deification – which here includes the transformation of the social order in line with *sobornost'* – depends utterly on the full and free participation of humanity, not only collectively but also as individuals. There is thus a "democratic" undercurrent to Soloviev's theology that tempers the monarchism of his politics, since it is precisely the capacity of the human person to participate in the

27 Vladimir Soloviev, *Lectures on Divine-Humanity*, trans. Peter Zouboff, revised trans. Boris Jakim (Hudson NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1995), 17–23.

28 Soloviev's focus on the task character of Christianity was influenced by the thought of Nikolai Fedorov. See Fedorov, *What Was Man Created For? The Philosophy of the Common Task*, trans. and ed. Elisabeth Koutaissoff and Marilyn Minto (Lausanne: Honeyglen Publishing/L'Age d'Homme, 1990).

29 Soloviev uses this language in *God, Man, and The Church: The Spiritual Foundations of Life*, trans. Donald Attwater (Cambridge, UK: James Clarke, 1937), 23. For more on this theme, see Oliver Smith, *Vladimir Soloviev and the Spiritualization of Matter* (Boston MA: Academic Studies Press, 2011).

30 Vladimir Soloviev, *The Justification of the Good: An Essay on Moral Philosophy*, trans. Nathalie A. Duddington, ed. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 176–7.

common task of working toward the Kingdom that grounds his or her positive absoluteness. It is only in this capacity that “the absolute significance, dignity, and worth of the human personality consist, and this is the basis of its inalienable rights.”<sup>31</sup>

This vocational dimension of deification remained in the next generation of Russian political theology. Bulgakov made it central to his critique of positivism and theories of progress that instrumentalize and cannibalize actual human persons. As for Soloviev, the defense of the human person was central to Bulgakov’s religious philosophy and one of the sources of his disillusionment with Marxism;<sup>32</sup> this defense rested on divine-human communion and humanity’s call to participate in God’s redemptive work. Frank, too, in his response to the horrors of the Russian Revolution, likewise appealed to deification as human vocation to defend the dignity and freedom of the person. For Frank, it is precisely the obligatoriness of this vocation, the imperative for human persons to become co-workers with God, that transforms mere individual demands into genuine human *rights* – the right to participate in constructing the divine-human future, to freely contribute one’s gifts to the common task.<sup>33</sup> Frank sees a clear link between human vocation and democratic principles: He writes that “democracy has as its genuine foundation the commonality of the aristocratic nature of all people as the children and free collaborators of God.” The equal dignity of all people is based in this common task; in the sphere of politics, therefore, equality entails “above all [...] the universal right to participate in the construction of the society.”<sup>34</sup>

This democratic impulse arises from one of the core principles Frank shares with Soloviev and Bulgakov: namely, that a fundamental aim of Christian politics is (in Bulgakov’s words) “the creation of the conditions for the free development of personhood.”<sup>35</sup> To paraphrase Soloviev’s approach, the Christian state aims to interfere as little as possible with the inner moral and spiritual lives of the people (preserving here a degree of the church-state separation upon which the Slavophiles had insisted) while working to order the external

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31 Soloviev, *Justification*, 176–7.

32 See Sergei Bulgakov, *Karl Marx as a Religious Type: His Relation to the Religion of Anthropotheism of L. Feuerbach*, trans. Luba Barna, ed. Virgil R. Lang (Belmont MA: Nordland Publishing, 1979).

33 See Semyon Ludvigovich Frank, *The Spiritual Foundations of Society: An Introduction to Social Philosophy*, trans. Boris Jakim (Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 1987), 136.

34 Frank, *Light Shineth*, 176.

35 Sergei Bulgakov, “Basic Problems of the Theory of Progress,” in *Problems of Idealism*, ed. Pavel Novgorodtsev, trans. Randall A. Poole (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 104.

conditions of life – the economy, political systems, etc. – in ways that maximize opportunities for personal development.<sup>36</sup> But if personal development is rooted in human beings' vocation to participate in the deification of the world, then it follows that the conditions for personal development must include the opportunity for participation in the redemption of the social order. The implications of this view of deification are sobornal and thus democratic: I develop my own personality, and struggle toward my own deification, by participating in God's redemptive work, and this means assisting others in their deification by empowering them also to become co-participants in God's work. The social dimension of deification entails a continual expansion of the scope of democratic participation in society, drawing all in as free collaborators in the common task.

None of this, however, suggests that just any sort of democracy is adequate from a theological perspective. The Slavophiles' reservations about individualistic, contract-based democracies remain, and the democracy that emerges here is instead one based on the common pursuit of deification. Genuine democracy continues to be the "deified democracy" of ecclesial *sobornost'*, and it is therefore little wonder that Soloviev and those who followed him continued to locate the culmination of human personality not in the state (democratic or otherwise) but in the *sobornost'* of the Church. Human personality reaches the height of its development only when it "takes its place in the Church," Soloviev argues.<sup>37</sup> He maintains that it is "through the universal Church alone that the individual person can obtain positive freedom," and it is only through integration into *sobornost'* that "the unconditional significance of each human being" is realized.<sup>38</sup> Christian democracy in this view cannot ground itself in the subjective self-assertion of self-sufficient individuals, but instead holds as its objective aim the infusion of the social order with the deifying spirit of self-emptying ecclesial love. Yet this outcome is precisely one that *democratic politics*, in its standard secular forms, can never guarantee. For this reason, it might seem that the "democracy" in question here is really something else altogether, and in the end just another word for the Church. If that is the case, then result might be an ecclesiastical triumphalism, one that might justify the ecclesial "democracy" being non-democratically imposed on the society – for instance, by a Christian monarch. In this case, support for monarchy – whether by Russian religious philosophers or by contemporary political theologians, such as Milbank, who invoke them – might be considered

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36 Soloviev, *Justification*, 394.

37 Soloviev, *Spiritual Foundations of Society*, 171.

38 Soloviev, *Justification*, 374.

the natural conclusion of the “democratic” themes so far described. But does it need to be?

### The Incarnational Theme

The third major “democratizing” theme of Russian religious philosophy has the potential to challenge the monarchical temptation: namely, the *incarnational* theme, the new understanding of the relationship between Christ’s divine and human natures, based on a deepening of the Chalcedonian formula. This new approach, first given a somewhat detailed articulation in Soloviev’s *Lectures on Divine-Humanity*, offers a framework for a modern Orthodox understanding of the Church’s relationship to the political order: neither a *withdrawal* from the political nor a *domination* of it.

In keeping with the themes covered above, this approach to Chalcedonian theology places central emphasis on participation, specifically the free, active participation of Christ’s humanity in his incarnation. In this understanding, divine action does not bypass human freedom but operates in and through it as “divine-human” action. In the incarnation, Christ acts divinely only insofar as he acts humanly, that is, in accordance with the properly human capacities of the nature he assumes. Soloviev laid the groundwork for this approach in his discussion of a “double *kenosis*” in the *Lectures*: in the incarnation, Christ, as God, renounces his divine power so that, *as a human*, he can freely renounce the self-sufficiency of his human will and harmonize himself with the will of God, thereby deifying his humanity.<sup>39</sup> Bulgakov’s *Lamb of God* expands on the meaning and significance of this double *kenosis* in much great detail. There Bulgakov argues that the incarnation, as the union of the two natures, should not be understood as a single event accomplished at one moment in time (such as the conception of the Christ child in Mary’s womb), but – in keeping with the larger notion of *bogochelovechestvo* – as a dynamic *relationship* that is progressively realized in the development of Christ’s consciousness across the whole course of his earthly life. There is no point in this process at which Christ’s divinity outstrips or outpaces his humanity, since Christ “actualizes His divinity for Himself in inseparable union with the human nature, as a function of [that nature’s] receptivity,” or, in other words, “only to the extent of

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39 See Vladimir Soloviev, *Lectures on Divine-Humanity*, trans. Peter Zouboff, revised trans. Boris Jakim (Hudson NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1995), 159–61.

the deification of His humanity.”<sup>40</sup> Christ’s divinity is kenotically “submerged,” so to speak, within the limitations of his humanity, exerting no coercive control over that humanity, and comes progressively to the foreground only as his humanity learns to freely renounce its separate independence from God and conforms itself to the divine will – that is, only to the extent that his humanity makes itself transparent to divinity by participating in it.

What does this have to do with democracy? To begin with, it shapes the way Bulgakov conceptualizes God’s reign. Because of the incarnation, he argues, “God is enthroned in a new way over the world: in man and through man in the God-Man.”<sup>41</sup> Christ’s humanity is drawn up into his sovereign governance of the world, such that the divine and human natures “co-participate in the sitting at the right hand of the Father, for God and man are seated there in the one God-Man.”<sup>42</sup> God does not reign *over* humanity but *within* humanity, as human – a humanity that makes the divine reign present in the world only to the extent that it freely consents to and participates in that reign. The incarnation explodes the concept of monarchy as “the rule of the one”; the theological prototype of monarchy, its divine-human foundation, is already inescapably democratic: “the rule of the many” human persons who are knitted together as Christ’s collective divinely-human Body.

In practical terms, this general picture of the incarnation offers a model for the Church’s relationship to the state and society that rules out any kind of triumphalist theocracy that would place the Church, or its secular proxy, in a position of domination over secular society. As Soloviev explains, the Church can no longer impose itself on society through external political compulsion; rather, “The Church embodies herself in the state only in as much as the state becomes spiritualized by Christian principles. The Church comes down to temporal realities by the same steps up which the state climbs toward the Church’s ideal.”<sup>43</sup> In an incarnational politics, the Church, like the divinity of Christ, would have to be in some sense “submerged” within the limitations of human freedom, working within those limitations to move the social order progressively, little by little, toward ever greater transparency to the *sobornost’* that lies at its ontological foundations.<sup>44</sup>

40 Sergius Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008), 256.

41 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, 418.

42 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, 399.

43 Soloviev, *Spiritual Foundations of Life*, 180.

44 Frank speaks of *sobornost’* as the often-hidden foundation of all social relations in Semyon Frank, *The Spiritual Foundations of Society: An Introduction to Social Philosophy*, trans. Boris Jakim (Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 1987). At a deeper level, society

This Christological approach has democratic implications in a couple of different ways. First, it ties into a notion Bulgakov used in relationship to atheistic socialism, namely that of “inward overcoming,” according to which Christian politics does not simply resist rival political systems but sublates them, drawing them up into ecclesial life and “deifying” them as Christ did with his human nature, fulfilling their righteous but one-sided humanistic impulses in a higher divine-human synthesis.<sup>45</sup> This means that for Christians who find themselves already living in secular democratic contexts, the shortcomings of liberal democracy – its failure to embody the genuine democracy of *sobornost’* – need not be a call for the complete withdrawal or denunciation of democratic politics. Instead, it can be an invitation to lift up what is right and true in liberal democracy and use it to establish, in piecemeal ways, better conditions for personal development and new opportunities to cultivate and express sobornal love. Second, however, an incarnational political theology lends support for democracy in a more robust way, as the very ideal toward which Christian social action aims. The Church, if it seeks to make God’s reign present to the world, should do so in a manner befitting the character of that reign, which no longer confronts humanity from the outside. Unsurprisingly, then, for Bulgakov, “The work [of Christian politics] is no longer done outside, from above, but from within, below, from the people and by the people. The Church influences society in a democratic way.”<sup>46</sup>

Finally, it is helpful to take note of Frank’s emphasis on so-called “Christian realism.” There is no doubt that an immense gap exists between all presently existing democratic politics and the sobornal ideal. On this point, Frank offers an especially valuable use of incarnational imagery for political theology: the Johannine metaphor of the incarnate Word as a light shining in the darkness.<sup>47</sup> Democratic politics are darkened by sin in many ways, and Frank stresses the importance of recognizing that, on this side of the *eschaton*, this darkness will not be fully overcome. But as Frank understands, it is precisely within the darkness that the light of Christ shines. He therefore distinguishes between the tasks of *perfecting* and *protecting* in Christian politics. Although the perfect

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has its ontological basis in the Divine Sophia, in what Bulgakov refers to as the “universal cosmic *sobornost’*” (*Lamb*, 104) and Frank the “universal *sobornost* of being” (*Spiritual Foundations*, 61).

45 Sergei Bulgakov, “The Soul of Socialism,” in *Sergii Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology*, ed. Rowan Williams (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999). Bulgakov uses the language of “inward overcoming” in relation to the two natures throughout *The Lamb of God*.

46 Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, trans. Lydia Kesich (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1988), 163.

47 This is the theme of Frank’s *The Light Shinet in Darkness*.

realization of sobornal love is the goal of Christian politics, this perfection is for the age to come; in the present age, this love must usually find much more humble political expression in the more modest work of protecting the dignity and freedom of persons, which are necessary if insufficient conditions for their participation in constructing the order of love. Christian politics should recognize the ways in which democratic principles offer such protection and seek to strengthen those principles; but above all, Christian politics cannot seek to impose perfection by force. “Deified democracy” is the guide for Christian political action in the world yet remains, for now, an eschatological hope.

### Conclusion

This essay has sought to illustrate how three key features of Russian religious philosophy – ecclesial *sobornost'*, the call to deification and the incarnation of Christ – are united by a common thread: the theme of free participation. Although this focus on participation does not lead Russian religious philosophers to an unambiguous endorsement of democratic politics or a clean break from the Orthodox heritage of Christian monarchy, the present essay has attempted to amplify the inchoate democratic gestures in their thought that might inform further Orthodox theological reflection on democracy. From what has been shown in the preceding pages, a theology of democratic participation that draws on Russian religious philosophy would not simply provide a theological rubber stamp for liberal democracy, but neither should it simply reject democracy as antithetical to Orthodox faith. Rather, such a political theology should recognize the essentially democratic shape of God's coming Kingdom, which stands in judgment of the democracies of this world. The present task is to understand how Christians are to participate in the democratic communities in which they find themselves in light of this tension.

# Is Scholasticism a Pseudomorphosis? A Polemical Note on Georges Florovsky's Political Theology

*Cyril Hovorun*

## Introduction

Father Georges Florovsky (1893–1979) was one of the most influential Orthodox intellectuals in the 20th century.<sup>1</sup> Born in the Russian Empire not long before its collapse in 1917, he spent most of his life in the West as an immigrant. He was associated with the St. Sergius Institute of Orthodox Theology in Paris, St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary near New York, and later with Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology near Boston, as well as with Harvard and Princeton. Florovsky was known as a historian and theologian, but he also implicitly propagated a political program, that shaped the ideological profile of modern Eastern Christianity to a significant extent. This paper argues that Florovsky's famous "Neopatristic synthesis"<sup>2</sup> was also his political theology.

## Two Syntheses

The Neopatristic synthesis was based on two concepts, which in Florovsky's interpretation were opposed to each other: "Churchified Hellenism" and "the Western captivity" of Orthodox theology. This "captivity" led to what he called "pseudomorphosis." On the one hand, for Florovsky, "Churchified Hellenism"<sup>3</sup> was a phenomenon ultimately beneficial to the church. He spoke rather romantically about the "conversion of Hellenism" to Christianity and counterposed this conversion to the "Hellenization of Christianity." Florovsky thus refuted a thesis that had been articulated and promoted by the German critical school represented by scholars like Adolf von Harnack. Harnack's point was that, after being Hellenized, Christianity became alienated from its original form.

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1 On Florovsky, see Andrew Blane, *Georges Florovsky: Russian Intellectual and Orthodox Churchman* (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1994).

2 Paul Ladouceur, *Modern Orthodox Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 95–122.

3 Georges Florovsky, "Christianity and Civilization," *St Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly* 1 (1952): 13–20, 14.

Florovsky responded to this critique by arguing that it was not Christianity that had changed. Rather, he proposed, Hellenism had changed from its classical version in its “churchified” form. Hellenism had been “dissected with the sword of Christian Revelation, and was utterly polarized thereby.” As a result of its synthesis with Christianity, it turned into a “New Hellenism.”<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, and on different occasions, Florovsky spoke about the “pseudomorphosis” of Orthodox theology. Paul Gavrilyuk has presented Florovsky’s concept of “pseudomorphosis” as a drama in three acts, with each act corresponding approximately to the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries.<sup>5</sup> In the 17th century, the pseudomorphosis was caused by Roman Catholic influence. It was imposed upon Russia via Ukraine, which was struggling at that time with uniatism. In the 18th century, the pseudomorphosis was Protestant, based in Protestant scholastic theology, mostly from Germany. Finally, in the 19th century, German philosophical idealism produced a new form of the pseudomorphosis of Orthodox theology. The common denominator of all these forms of pseudomorphosis, according to Florovsky, was their scholastic character. In his main work, *Ways of Russian Theology*, where he tried to identify Eastern theology’s pseudomorphoses, he used the word “scholastic” and its derivatives around seventy times, always with negative connotations. For example, he described Catholic “scholasticism,” which had been introduced to the Russian Orthodox milieu through the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, as follows:

In practically every respect the Kiev collegium represents a radical break with the traditions of earlier schools in West Russia [...].<sup>6</sup> Its students were hardly initiated into the heritage of the Orthodox East. Scholasticism was the focus of teaching. And it was not simply the ideas of individual scholastics that were expounded and assimilated, but the very spirit of scholasticism.<sup>7</sup>

In the 18th century, according to Florovsky, scholasticism was reintroduced to Russia after the reforms of Tsar Peter Romanov, again by the Ukrainians but now in a Protestant form. Its proponent was a close confederate of Peter in the church hierarchy, the Archbishop of Novgorod Feofan Prokopovych (1725–1736). For Florovsky, “Feofan did not simply borrow from 17th-century Protestant scholasticism, he belonged to it.”<sup>8</sup> Speaking about Platon Levshin,

4 Florovsky, “Christianity and Civilization,” 14.

5 Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 179.

6 Florovsky saw Ukraine as a part of the “Russian world.”

7 Georges Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology*, Part One, trans. Robert L. Nichols (Belmont MA: Nordland, 1979), 78.

8 Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology*, Part One, 124.

who was Metropolitan of Moscow at the turn of the 19th century (1775–1812), Florovsky lamented his theological method: “How greatly his outlook had been restricted by scholastic tradition and how little he sensed the church’s needs.”<sup>9</sup> Probably the only positive hero in Florovsky’s narrative about the ways of Russian theology, Filaret Drozdov (1821–1867), the Metropolitan of Moscow was – in Florovsky’s eyes – an ardent opponent of scholasticism. He fought against “the captivity or slavery of scholasticism”<sup>10</sup> but could not win this fight. The time for such a victory had not yet come. Florovsky believed that *his* time was the *kairos* put an end to “the slavery of scholasticism.” He personally led an assault against the scholastic windmills. Florovsky fought valiantly against scholasticism in his project of Neopatristic synthesis, which he described as a “return from scholasticism to patristics.”<sup>11</sup> There seems to be a contradiction, however, between two syntheses that Florovsky endorsed: “Churchified Hellenism” on the one hand and the anti-scholastic Neopatristics on the other.

### Scholasticism

To demonstrate this inconsistency, we have to inquire about the origins of scholasticism. Its roots go back to Aristotle, who suggested identifying commonalities of different individual beings. This became the primary epistemological method during antiquity, including Christian antiquity and the Middle Ages. This method can be called scholastic. In other words, the bottom line of the scholastic method is the differentiation between particularities and generalities, as well as taxonomies that classify generalities.

Aristotle introduced degrees of generalities as species and genera and also established relations between them. He called them “things that are said” (τὰ λεγόμενα) and “predicates” (προσηγορίαι). In the later commentaries on Aristotle’s works, they became known as “voices” (φωναί, *voices*). In modern scholarship, they are usually called “categories” – after the treatise in which Aristotle discussed them most, “Κατηγορίαι.”<sup>12</sup> This treatise constitutes the core of the Aristotelian texts called “the Instrument” (Ὀργανον). Other texts in this

9 Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology*, Part One, 146.

10 Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology*, Part One, 211.

11 Discovered by Paul Gavrilyuk in Florovsky’s notes on the congress of Orthodox theologians in Athens in 1936; see Gavrilyuk, *Georges Florovsky*, 177.

12 L. Minio-Paluello, ed., *Aristotelis categoriae et liber de interpretatione* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), 3–45; Aristotle, *Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, vol. 1, ed. Jonathan Barnes, trans. J. L. Ackrill (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 3–24.

group, also known as dialectical and logical, are *On Interpretation*,<sup>13</sup> *Prior and Posterior Analytics*,<sup>14</sup> and *Topics*.<sup>15</sup> These texts were grouped in the first century BCE by the publisher of the Aristotelian corpus, Andronicus of Rhodes. Andronicus also commented on the *Categories*, but this commentary has not survived. He boosted interest in the Aristotelian studies in the Hellenistic period and opened doors for numerous commentaries on Aristotle that mushroomed into different philosophical schools.<sup>16</sup>

The Neoplatonic philosopher Porphyry of Tyre (ca. 234–ca. 305 CE) penned the most famous commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*. The title of Porphyry's work is *Introduction* (Εἰσαγωγή).<sup>17</sup> Porphyry believed that Aristotelian logic could be the best introduction to philosophy, and this applied not only to the Peripatetic but also to the Platonic school. Porphyry also believed that the Aristotelian categories could help reconcile Platonic and Aristotelian branches of philosophy. Such reconciliation became one of the goals of Neoplatonism. Other Neoplatonists after Porphyry followed his line and produced extensive commentaries on the *Categories*, including Dexippus<sup>18</sup> and Simplicius of Cilicia.<sup>19</sup> Simplicius was one of the latest representatives of the pagan school of Neoplatonism. He also wrote commentaries on the *Categories*, and these commentaries have survived.<sup>20</sup>

The Neoplatonic school had two most important centers of teaching and research: Athens and Alexandria. Athenian Neoplatonism focused on

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- 13 Minio-Paluello, ed., *Aristotelis categoriae et liber de interpretatione*, 49–72; Aristotle, *Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 1, 25–38.
- 14 W. D. Ross, ed., *Aristotelis analytica priora et posteriora* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 3–183; Aristotle, *Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 1, trans. A. J. Jenkinson and Jonathan Barnes, 39–166.
- 15 Ross, *Aristotelis topica et sophisticorum elenchi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 1–189; Aristotle, *Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 1, trans. W. A. Pickard-Cambridge, 167–277.
- 16 See Richard Sorabji, ed., *Aristotle Transformed: The Ancient Commentators and Their Influence* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).
- 17 A. Busse, ed., *Porphyrii isagoge et in Aristotelis categorias commentarium* (Berlin: Reimer, 1887), 1–22; Porphyry, *Porphyry: Introduction*, trans. Jonathan Barnes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003).
- 18 Flourished in the middle of the 4th century CE, the disciple of Iamblichus (ca. 250–ca. 330 CE).
- 19 Flourished in the middle of the 6th century CE, the disciple of Ammonius (ca. 435/445–517/526) and Damascius (ca. 480–ca. 550).
- 20 A. Busse, ed., *Dexippii in Aristotelis categorias commentarium* (Berlin: Reimer, 1888), 1–71; Dexippus, *Dexippus: On Aristotle Categories*, trans. John Dillon (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); K. Kalbfleisch, ed., *Simplicii in Aristotelis categorias commentarium* (Berlin: Reimer, 1907), 1–438; Simplicius, *Simplicius on Aristotle's "Categories,"* trans. Michael Chase (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).

metaphysics and emphasized polytheism, while Alexandrian Neoplatonism concentrated on the logical categories. In Alexandria, Christians became interested in the *Categories* as well. We know of two Alexandrian Neoplatonic philosophers who lived in the 6th century and were disciples of Olympiodorus the Younger; they also wrote commentaries on the *Categories*.<sup>21</sup> These two students had Christian names, Elias and David<sup>22</sup> and were probably baptized Christians. One can hardly observe any Christian beliefs in their writings, apart from several brief references that the world is not eternal, as Neoplatonism taught, but was created by God.<sup>23</sup> Despite their work's purely scholastic character, it has been appropriated by the Christian theology with appreciation.

David's work was received in the Armenian Christian tradition with particular enthusiasm. He became an intellectual hero in Armenia and received an honorary title, "Invincible." Armenian scholars consider him an Armenian author who made a unique contribution to Armenian culture.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the Armenian translations of David's commentaries on Aristotle's logical treatises and Porphyry's *Introduction*<sup>25</sup> became foundational for medieval Armenian philosophy and theology.<sup>26</sup>

Another Christian Neoplatonic philosopher who studied in Alexandria, John Philoponus (ca. 490–ca. 570), was more consistent than David or Elias in applying Aristotelian categories to Christian theology. In particular, he fervently engaged in polemics against the Neoplatonic idea of the world's eternity

21 A. Busse, ed., *Olympiodori prolegomena et in categorias commentarium* (Berlin: Reimer, 1902); Sebastian Gertz trans., *Elias and David: Introductions to Philosophy Olympiodorus: Introduction to Logic* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

22 See Christian Wildberg, "Three Neoplatonic Introductions to Philosophy: Ammonius, David and Elias," *Hermathena* 149 (1990): 33–51.

23 See, for example, Gohar Muradyan, *David the Invincible: Commentary on Porphyry's Isagoge. Old Armenian Text with the Greek Original, an English Translation, Introduction and Notes* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 117.

24 See V. K. Čalojan, *Filosofija Davida Nepobedimogo* [Philosophy of David the Invincible] (Academy of Sciences of ASSR: Yerevan, 1946), 83. It is noteworthy to mention that the Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts in Yerevan (Matenadaran) holds over 300 manuscripts with Armenian translation of David's commentaries on Porphyry's Introduction. See David Anaht (Nepobedimyi) [David the Invincible], *Analiz "Vvedenija" Porfirija* [Analysis of Porphyry's Introduction], trans. S. S. Arevshatjan (Yerevan: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk Armyanskoi SSR, 1976), v.

25 See David Anaht, *Analiz "Vvedenija" Porfirija*; Muradyan, *David the Invincible*.

26 See *Anonimnoje tolkovanie "Kategorii" Aristotela*. Ed. S. P. Lalafarjan and V. K. Čalojan (Yerevan: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk Armyanskoi SSR, 1961); Khosrovik Tagmanich, *Dogmatic Writings*, trans. Khachik Grigoryan (Yerevan: Ankyunacar, 2019).

and insisted on the Christian teaching that the world was created by God.<sup>27</sup> He also applied Aristotelian categories to explain the Trinity and Incarnation. He arrived at conclusions, however, that were rejected by other theological schools of his time. In particular, he claimed that the Christian God should be regarded as three separate beings and that Christ, as a single being, had only one nature.<sup>28</sup> As a result, the ecumenical council held in Constantinople in 680–681 condemned Philoponus posthumously. His interpretation of Christ's singularity was too radical even for the Miaphysites who, like Philoponus, advocated one nature in Christ. In contrast to Philoponus, they admitted the double consubstantiality of Christ, which was a way of saying that he is consubstantial with the Father according to his divinity and with us according to his humanity.

The church condemned Philoponus not because of his scholasticism, i.e., the use of the Aristotelian categories, but because he used them in the wrong way. All prominent theologians in late antiquity relied on these categories. According to Theodore of Raithu (flourished at the end of the 6th century and the beginning of the 7th), Severus of Antioch (ca. 465–538), one of the key participants in the controversies around the Council of Chalcedon (451), used to say that a good theologian has to be “trained in Aristotle's *Categories* and similar texts of outside philosophers.”<sup>29</sup>

Theodore himself, who belonged to the Chalcedonian camp, which was opposed to the theological school of Severus, produced a handbook on logic called *Preparation* (Προπαρασκευή).<sup>30</sup> In this handbook, he systematically elaborated on various categories from the logical nomenclature of Aristotle and Porphyry. It became a popular handbook that has survived in many editions,<sup>31</sup>

27 Philoponus polemicized against the Neoplatonic philosopher Proclus (ca. 410–485); see H. Rabe, ed., Ioannes Philoponus, *De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1899); Ioannis Philoponus, *Philoponus: Against Proclus on the Eternity of the World*, trans. Michael Share (London: Bloomsbury, 2014). He also elaborated on arguments in favor of creationism; see W. Reichardt, ed., *Joannis Philoponi de officio mundi libri vii* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1897); See also Richard Sorabji, ed., *Philoponus and the Rejection of Aristotelian Science* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987).

28 Michael Lang, *John Philoponus and the Controversies Over Chalcedon in the Sixth Century: A Study and Translation of the Arbitrator* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001).

29 Quoted by Theodore of Raithu, *Praeparatio* 10, Franz Diekamp, ed., *Analecta Patristica* (Rome: Pontificum Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1938), 200, 14–6.

30 Franz Diekamp, ed., *Analecta Patristica*. See also a study on this logical treatise by Ἀθανάσιος Νίκας [Athanasios Nikas], *Θεόδωρος τῆς Ραιθίου* [Theodoros of Raithou] (Athens: Holy Monastery of Sina Publications, 1981).

31 At least 24 manuscripts from the 10th through the 17th centuries contain this work; see Nikas, *Θεόδωρος τῆς Ραιθίου*, 17–19.

even though its author was condemned by the councils of Lateran (649) and Constantinople (680–681) for monoenergism. This was a doctrine<sup>32</sup> that had emerged within Neochalcedonianism. The latter, in turn, tried to rearticulate the theological points of the Chalcedon in the theological language of Cyril of Alexandria (376–444).<sup>33</sup> Several other handbooks and reflections on the categories emerged to facilitate Christological debates within the same Neochalcedonian framework. A Neochalcedonian theologian who flourished at the end of the seventh century, Anastasius of Sinai, composed a *Guidebook* (Ὁδηγός) to the categories.<sup>34</sup> He instrumentalized the Aristotelian-Porphyrian dialectics to defend the teaching of two energies or operations (ἐνέργειαι) and two wills in Christ.

Anastasius' dyothelite approach to Neochalcedonianism was followed by John of Damascus (ca. 675–749) who compiled a summa of theology called *The Fountainhead of Knowledge* (Πηγὴ γνώσεως). This summa was scholastic not only because it sorted out the entire corpus of theology known in John's time in a systematic and almost dull way but also and primarily because it was garnished with a selection of categories: *Dialectica*.<sup>35</sup> In his logical introduction to Orthodox theology, John relied on Aristotle's *Categories*.<sup>36</sup> A prominent Syrian theologian, Theodore Abū Qurrah (ca. 750–ca. 825), followed in John of Damascus' steps. He summarized the Neochalcedonian dyothelite theology in Arabic, including a detailed exposition of the categories.<sup>37</sup> Through Theodore, the Aristotelian categories, having been elaborated by Christian theologians,

32 See Cyril Hovorun, *Will, Action and Freedom: Christological Controversies in the Seventh Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

33 See Charles Moeller, "Le chalcédonisme et le néo-chalcédonisme en Orient de 451 à la fin du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle," ed. A. Grillmeier and H. Bacht, *Das Konzil von Chalkedon: Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Würzburg: Echter-Verlag, 1951) 637–720; Patrick Gray, "Neo-Chalcedonianism and the Tradition: From Patristic to Byzantine Theology," *Byzantinische Forschungen* 8 (1982): 61–70; Karl-Heinz Uthemann, "Der Neuchalkedonismus als Vorbereitung des Monotheletismus: Ein Beitrag zum eigentlichen Anliegen des Neuchalkedonismus," *Studia Patristica* 29 (1997): 373–413.

34 Karl-Heinz Uthemann, ed., *Anastasiū Sinaitae Viae Dux* (Turnhout: Leuven University Press, 1981).

35 There are shorter (earlier) and longer (later) editions of the *Dialectica*; see Bonifatius Kotter, ed., *Die Schriften des Iohannes von Damaskos, Band 1: Institutio elementaris: Capita philosophica (Dialectica)* (Patristische Texte und Studien, 7, Berlin, 1969), 51–146; John of Damascus, *John of Damascus: Writings*, trans. Frederic H. Chase (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1958).

36 Andrew Louth, *St. John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 40.

37 Najib George Awad, *Orthodoxy in Arabic Terms: A Study of Theodore Abu Qurrah's Theology in Its Islamic Context* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015).

were transmitted to the Arabic language and world. Muslim scholars continued reflecting on them from their perspective. In particular, Abū Qurrah influenced such thinkers as Al-Kindī (d. 870), Jābir Ibn Hayyān (d. 925/35), Ishāq Al-Isrā'īli (d. c. 932), Ibn Suwār (d. 1017), and Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037). They also used Syriac compendiums of the categories, which had been composed by Christian authors like Sergius of Resh'aina (d. 536), Ahoudemmah (d. 575), 'Enanishū (flourished around 650), Severus Sebokht (d. 667), Jacob of Edessa (d. 708), Severus bar Shakko (d. 1241), and Yūhannā bar Zo'bi (flourished in the 13th century) and others.<sup>38</sup> Arab logicians, in their turn, influenced Western scholastics.

Even more, the posterior Western dialectics was influenced by the systematic expositions of the categories in the Eastern Christian theology, which we have just examined. There were even more Eastern *non-systematic* scholastic reflections in the East, which influenced Western scholasticism. For example, Maximus the Confessor (ca. 580–662) remarked that he preferred to address the categories not in the “book-writing” but the “letter-writing” format.<sup>39</sup> Despite his brevity on the categories, Maximus appeared to be among the most insightful logicians in the Eastern Christian tradition.<sup>40</sup> His take on the categories was particularly innovative. It is also noteworthy that Maximus approached logic within the frame of the Christological controversies, from the perspective of Neochalcedonianism.<sup>41</sup> In his dialectical reflections, Maximus relied on the analytical work of the Neonicæans, who had applied categories to solve the main theological problem of the 4th century: how God can be simultaneously singular and plural. They used the Aristotelian distinction between generality and particularity to address this issue. The first who adopted this distinction was the Neonicæan theologian Apollinaris of Laodicea (ca. 310–ca. 390).<sup>42</sup> His view was upgraded by the Cappadocians, who suggested calling the former

38 Mossman Rouechè, “A Middle Byzantine Handbook of Logic Terminology,” *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik* 29 (1980): 71–98, 74–5.

39 *Opera* 21; PG 91, 248.

40 Melchisedec Törönen, *Union and Distinction in the Thought of St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

41 Cyril Hovorun, “Maximus, a Cautious Neo-Chalcedonian,” eds. Pauline Allen and Neil Bronwen, *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 106–24.

42 Johannes Zachhuber, “Universals in the Greek Church Fathers,” in *Universals in Ancient Philosophy*, eds. Riccardo Chiaradonna and Gabriele Galluzzo (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2014), 428. See also, Kelley McCarthy Spoerl, *A Study of the Κατὰ Μέρος Πίστεις by Apollinaris of Laodicea*, PhD diss. (University of Toronto, 1991).

“essence” (οὐσία) and the latter “hypostasis” (ὑπόστασις).<sup>43</sup> The Cappadocian suggestion became a standard in later Christian theology. This standard was scholastic.

Scholasticism is often accused of being dry and suffocating for spirituality. But its metaphysical dryness was precisely why Christians extracted it from pagan philosophy to express their theology. The reason why Christian theologians appropriated the dialectical method of Aristotle and his later Neoplatonic commentators was their concentration on logic and not metaphysics. Christian theologians rejected much of classical metaphysics but embraced much of classical dialectics. That was the main reason why Porphyry became so popular in Christian theology. Religiously, he was a practicing polytheist. Porphyry believed in the Greek gods and participated enthusiastically in pagan rites. He was also a convinced anti-Christian. He even took the trouble to compose a long polemical treatise against Christianity.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, when it came to logics, he preferred to adhere to a metaphysical neutrality. He also encouraged his fellow Neoplatonists to keep logics separate from their religion. That is why his *Introduction* became the most popular handbook of logics for generations of the Christian theologians and students, right up until modernity. In the words of Jonathan Barnes, “Other philosophical introductions may have sold more copies: none has had – or is likely to have – a longer career.”<sup>45</sup>

Aristotelian-Porphyrion dialectics, which lies at the foundation of scholasticism, became the treasure of Hellenism, which was valued the most by the Christian theologians. Among all the treasures of classical Greek culture, Christian theologians chose scholastics as the most appropriate for Christianity. Classical scholastics thus constituted the core of what Florovsky called “Churchified Hellenism.” If we apply Florovsky’s claim that Hellenism had been “dissected with the sword of Christian Revelation,” then this dissection

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43 See especially letter 38 ascribed to Basil of Caesarea but probably authored by Gregory of Nyssa: Y. Courtonne, ed., *Saint Basile Lettres* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1957–66); Basil of Caesarea, *Basil of Caesarea. The Letters*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1986); see also Johannes Zachhuber, *The Rise of Christian Theology and the End of Ancient Metaphysics: Patristic Philosophy from the Cappadocian Fathers to John of Damascus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

44 Only fragments of Porphyry’s *Contra Christianos* have survived and were first published by Adolf von Hamack, ed., *Porphyrius Gegen die Christen* (Abhandlungen der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosoph.-hist. Kl. 1., Berlin: Reimer, 1916). The most recent publication in a German translation is by Matthias Becker: *Porphyrios, Contra Christianos: Neue Sammlung der Fragmente, Testimonien und Dubia mit Einleitung, Übersetzung und Anmerk* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015). See also Robert M. Berchman, *Porphyry Against the Christians* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

45 Porphyry, *Introduction*, ix.

separated pagan metaphysics from metaphysically neutral dialectics. Fathers of the Church rejected the former and adopted the latter.

In contrast to the patristic appropriation of Neoplatonic dialectics, Florovsky introduced his Neopatristic synthesis as the opposite of scholasticism. He urged the Orthodox Church to leave the scholastics and return to the church fathers. The irony, however, is that when we go back to the fathers, we will inevitably arrive at scholasticism. The most influential fathers were scholastics, including Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Leontius of Byzantium, Maximus the Confessor, Anastasius of Sinai, John of Damascus, and others. They represent the highest points of patristic scholasticism. These points coincided with the theological debates about God and the Incarnation. One cannot imagine how Eastern Christian doctrine, which was articulated as an outcome of these debates, could be possible without scholastics. High Byzantine scholasticism predated Western scholasticism by seven centuries. Eastern scholasticism reached its peak in the Neochalcedonian Christology during the 6th to 8th centuries. In the West, high scholasticism emerged only in the 13th and 14th centuries.

Even if we take the most famous debate in the Western medieval scholasticism, that between nominalists and universalists, we can find its prototype in the East. For example, John Philoponus was a convinced nominalist. For him, only particularities can exist, whereas generalities exist only in one's mind:

Each common thing is constructed by our intellect from particulars. For this reason, the Ancients called such things posterior and intellectual beings. For, correctly speaking, Peter, John and every individual man are animal and substance, and the same goes for this horse and that ox. However, these names passed from these (particulars) to what is called genera and species, that is, from things which subsist in substance to those which are inferred by our intellect.<sup>46</sup>

In contrast to Philoponus, Maximus the Confessor believed that generalities have some objective existence outside of human imagination. He called them *logoi* and traced them back to the creation of the world. God created the world using these *logoi* as blueprints for particular things, which would come to existence through the act of creation:

From all eternity, He (the Logos) contained within Himself the pre-existing *logoi* of created beings. When, in His goodwill, He formed out of nothing the

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46 Fragment 1 in A. van Roey, "Les fragments trithéites de Jean Philopon," *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 11 (1980): 148; see also the English translation in Christophe Erismann, "John Philoponus on Individuality and Particularity," in *Individuality in Late Antiquity*, ed. Johannes Zachhuber and Alexis Torrance (London: Routledge, 2014), 148.

substance of the visible and invisible worlds, He did so on the basis of these logoi. By his *word (logos) and His wisdom He created* and continues to create *all things* (see Wis 9:1–2) – universals as well as particulars – at the appropriate time. We believe, for example, that a logos of angels preceded and guided their creation; and the same holds true for each of the *beings and powers* (see 1 Pet 3:22) that fill the world above us. A logos of human beings likewise preceded their creation, and – in order not to speak of particulars – a logos preceded the creation of everything that has received its being from God.<sup>47</sup>

Now we can see the contradiction within the project of Neopatristic synthesis suggested by Georges Florovsky better. On the one hand, he praises “Christian Hellenism,” whose best fruit, as we have demonstrated, was Byzantine scholasticism. On the other hand, he considers scholasticism the most dangerous threat to Orthodox theology, the reason for its pseudomorphosis. The same thing is a blessing and a curse for him – depending on where it comes from: East or West.

### Eurasian Temptation

It becomes clear that the idea of pseudomorphosis in Florovsky is not just a theological or historical concept. It is also a political program, a key term in his political theology. Florovsky’s political theology was shaped by Eurasian doctrine that advocated and still advocates a distinct Eurasian civilization. The spiritual ancestors of the Eurasian movement were Slavophiles. Both groups believed that Russia constitutes the core of a self-sufficient civilization with Orthodox Christianity shaping its distinctiveness from the West above all. Both the Slavophile and Eurasian movements were anti-Western; they regarded the West as another civilization that claims to be universal. In this role, so Eurasians believed, the West has imposed on Russia civilizational patterns that are alien to its unique standing in history. The Eurasian view of the West is dystopian. To the Eurasians, Russia appears as a utopia. In the words of the co-founder of Eurasianism, Nikolai Trubeckoi (1890–1938), “While Russia was budding a culture which was crowned with the Byzantine cupola, the structure endured; when the roof was replaced with the Romano-Germanic culture, the whole edifice crumbled.”<sup>48</sup>

47 Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguum ad Johannem* 7, 15–6; idem, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, vol. 1, trans. Nicholas Constas (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 95–7.

48 Nikolai Trubeckoi, “Verhi i nizy russkoi kultury,” [Highs and Lows of Russian Culture] *Iskhod k Vostoku: Predčuvstvija I sveršenija* [Exodus to the East: Anticipations and Accomplishments] (Sofia, 1921), 101; see also the English translation: Gavriilyuk, *Georges Florovsky*, 65.

The Eurasian movement's political program consisted of building a powerful state that would protect and enhance the unique Eurasian civilization. But the attitude to the role of the state differentiated the Slavophile movement from the Eurasian movement. For the Eurasians – unlike the Slavophile – the state plays a crucial role in maintaining the civilization, which is supposed to include not only Slavs but also various peoples of Asia. The Eurasians acknowledged a constructive role played by the Mongolian invasion of Rus' in shaping Russian civilization.

In his early years, from his mid-twenties through his mid-thirties, Georges Florovsky was under the spell of Eurasianism. He contributed to the three collections of Eurasianist essays: *Exodus to the East* (1921), *On the Ways* (1922) and *Russia and Latinity* (1923). When he claimed a greater role for himself in the movement, he was denied.<sup>49</sup> This upset him. Some ideological developments within the movement also alarmed Florovsky. In particular, he disagreed with the state's outsized role, which other Eurasians supported. Florovsky distanced himself from the Eurasians' readiness to endorse dictatorships if the latter would help them achieve their political ideals. Florovsky eventually broke up with the Eurasian movement and marked this by publishing an article "Temptation by Eurasianism."<sup>50</sup> Later on, Florovsky tried to downplay his involvement in the Eurasian movement.

Although he publicly denounced Eurasianism, it seems Florovsky could not get rid of it completely. I agree on this account with the conclusions of Paul Gavrilyuk. On the one hand, "Florovsky eventually left the movement," and "his association with the Eurasians is commonly viewed as having had little impact on his subsequent historical and theological work." On the other hand, "he remained attracted to some aspects of the Eurasian teaching, as he understood it, to the end of his life."<sup>51</sup> An example of such a lasting impact of Eurasianism on Florovsky's mind is the concept of the exodus from captivity. It was a Eurasian concept by which the Eurasians expressed their desire to exit the civilizational captivity of the West. Florovsky effectively extrapolated this concept to theology. As Gavrilyuk remarked, "in essence, in *The Ways of Russian Theology*, Florovsky offered his own religious-historiographic version of the Eurasian 'exodus to the East.'<sup>52</sup>

In my judgment, Florovsky's concept of the Western pseudomorphosis of Eastern theology became a sublimation of his earlier Eurasian views. The

49 Trubeckoi, "Verhi i nizy russkoi kultury," 76–7.

50 G. V. Florovsky, "Iskušenie evraziistvom" [The Eurasian Temptation] *Sovremennye zapiski* 34 (1928): 312–46.

51 Gavrilyuk, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance*, 60.

52 Florovsky, "Iskušenie evraziistvom," 66.

link between them is Occidentalism – the fear and mistrust of the West.<sup>53</sup> Occidentalism is the first article in the Eurasian creed. It remained deeply rooted in Florovsky’s thought even after he rejected Eurasianism. It is difficult otherwise to explain how the same scholasticism is acceptable for Florovsky when it is a part of the Eastern Hellenism, and a pseudomorphosis when it is a result of Western influences.

It is noteworthy that Florovsky’s concept of pseudomorphosis comes from the work of Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*.<sup>54</sup> This work was also one of the main inspirations for the Eurasian movement. Spengler’s definition of pseudomorphosis covers that of Florovsky:

By the term “historical pseudomorphosis” I propose to designate those cases in which an older alien Culture lies so massively over the land that a young Culture cannot get its breath and fails not only to achieve pure and specific expression-forms, but even to develop fully its own self-consciousness.<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, Spengler applied the concept of pseudomorphosis to early modern Russia in a way similar to what we find in the *Ways of Russian Theology*:

This Muscovite period of the great Boyar families and Patriarchs, in which a constant element is the resistance of an Old Russia party to the friends of Western culture, is followed, from the founding of Petersburg in 1703 by the pseudomorphosis which forced the primitive Russian soul into the alien mould, first of full Baroque, then of the Enlightenment and then of the nineteenth century. The fate-figure in Russian history is Peter the Great.<sup>56</sup>

In conclusion, I believe, Florovsky’s idea of the pseudomorphosis of Orthodox theology became a pseudomorphosis in his own theology. It is a euphemism that indirectly promotes the hidden Eurasian agenda. This agenda, which remained somewhere deep in his mind even though he had publicly rejected it, led him to a logical inconsistency in evaluating scholasticism. Florovsky’s attitude to scholasticism was quite dualistic. He rejected its every form as evil and counterposed an idealized Patristic thought. But he overlooked the fact that this thought was imbued with scholasticism in its original sense. Moreover, the most prominent theologians of the early church, whom Florovsky brought as

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53 Cyril Hovorun, *Political Orthodoxies: The Unorthodoxies of the Church Coerced* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress, 2018) 96–7.

54 Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2017).

55 Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, trans. George Allen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 268.

56 Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, 271.

theological standards, had deliberately chosen classical scholasticism to serve them as a logical apparatus to express Christian doctrine. Among the variety of philosophical ideas that ancient philosophy could offer, Christian theologians opted for scholastic/logical categories. The dryness and metaphysical neutrality of these categories was not a disadvantage but an advantage – from the perspective of the Christian metaphysics. Classical scholasticism became that part of Hellenism that was appropriated by the church after it had been dissected from classical metaphysics. Scholasticism is the core of the “Churchified Hellenism” that Florovsky appreciated so much.

# History of the Idea of Democracy in Modern Greek Orthodox Theology

*Dimitrios Moschos*

## Introduction

Orthodox theology has always been acquainted with democratic practices such as representation, voting, and the principle of majority rule. This familiarity is a product of the long history of the Orthodox Church institutions formed during the Roman period and is marked by the role of church councils' at a local and universal level. Bishops became a part of the Byzantine state apparatus during the late Byzantine period, however, and they were invested with political authority at the local and municipal levels. During the post-Byzantine period, the Greek Orthodox clergy (along with the Armenian or Syrian Church) acted as the representative of all Christian subjects of the Ottoman Sublime Porte, where the notions of accountability or rotation in office, as well as the role of assemblies, appeared for the first time. This participation explains why Orthodox theology is compatible with the institutions of a modern republic. Nevertheless, contextualizing Orthodox Christianity within the general framework of contemporary democracy, such as the equality of all people, human rights, freedom of conscience, freedom of speech, and, above all, respecting minorities, is quite a different thing. It is crucial that we investigate this position, especially after 1990 and the events of the Yugoslav crisis as well as Samuel Huntington's thesis about "civilization" – a notion instrumentalized to mark the line between "the West and the rest." According to Huntington, an essential feature of the "West" is Christianity in its Western forms: "The Reformation and Counter-Reformation and the division of Western Christendom into a Protestant North and a Catholic South are also distinctive features of Western history, totally absent from Eastern Orthodoxy."<sup>1</sup> This notion of "West" is further characterized by the separation of spiritual and temporal authority, the rule of law, social pluralism, representative bodies, and individualism. Non-Western

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster 1996), 70.

civilizations, including the “Orthodox” or “Byzantine,” do not fit into this notion even if they have developed some of the aforementioned ideas.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, we are going to modify this simplistic picture. The encounter of the Orthodox Church in the Greek-speaking areas with the ideas of modern democracy has already appeared before the Greek Revolution during the so-called movement of the Modern Greek (or Neohellenic) Enlightenment, which sought to restore the thought of the European Enlightenment to its birthplace in Greece.<sup>3</sup> This affected in a positive way specific views of the Orthodox theological discourse. We can trace some hints of this influence in different genres of ecclesiastical literature, such as the “Ecclesiastical History” by the archbishop of Athens Meletios Mitros (1661–1714), written between 1710 and 1714 but edited posthumously in 1784. In his introductory remarks, Mitros defines the term *basileia* as lawful kingship in contrast to tyranny. Seeking to present the history of the Orthodox Church in its Byzantine political past, he argues that, although Romans did not adopt the title *rex* for their emperor, they aspired to maintain the monarchy, which was considered very useful in military terms. Hence, they devised other names such as *augustus* and *imperator*, which mean practically the same and were translated [by the Byzantines] as *basileus* in Greek.<sup>4</sup> He adds that Greek chronographers never used this title to designate rulers outside Constantinople, as they used the term *reges* for other European kings. He further explains that *rex* refers to the lawful ruler. All of this clearly shows that, for Meletios, the old “Christian” (that is, Orthodox) empire was a) a kingdom subject to law, and b) a member of a larger community of other European lawful kingdoms, heirs to the Roman democratic legacy.<sup>5</sup> Another example is the *Handbook of Canon Law* by the Metropolitan of Campania (today Verroia in Northern Greece), Theophilos Papaphilou, written

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2 In the case of the separation of the spiritual and secular realm, Huntington notes: “God and Caesar, Church and state, spiritual authority and temporal authority, have been a prevailing dualism in Western culture. Only in Hindu civilization were religion and politics also so distinctly separated. In Islam, God is Caesar; in China and Japan, Caesar is God; in Orthodoxy, God is Caesar’s junior partner.” As far as the rule of law is concerned: “The tradition of the rule of law laid the basis for constitutionalism and the protection of human rights, including property rights, against the exercise of arbitrary power. In most other civilizations, the law was a much less important factor in shaping thought and behavior” Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations*, 70–2.

3 For an excellent introduction to this phenomenon, see Paschalis M. Kitromilides, *Enlightenment and Revolution: The Making of Modern Greece* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

4 Meletios of Athens, *Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Ἱστορία* [Ecclesiastical History], v. 1 (Vienna, 1783), Introduction 13, 5, p. 55–6.

5 Meletios of Athens, *Ecclesiastike Istoría*, 56–7.

around 1780. This work's Introduction provides a lengthy argument about the rule of law as a feature of an organized society like classical Greece and Rome.<sup>6</sup> These are examples that are positively related to the Enlightenment's intellectual trends and the emergence of the modern Hobbesian state.

It is well known that the newly created Greek state following the revolution of 1821 was established essentially at the height of the restoration of the monarchy. The legacy of the French Revolution and the ideal of self-determination remained, however, in the circle of the most eminent advocate of the Neohellenic Enlightenment, Adamantios Korais (1748–1833), and the circle around the journal *Hermês Logios* (Hermes the Scholar) published in Vienna from 1811 to 1821. The director of the journal, the archimandrite Theoklitos Farmakidis (1784–1860), claimed autocephaly for the Church for the Greek territory that had rebelled, without the consent of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. We tend to consider the reasons for this proclamation to be ecclesiastico-political in nature, namely, as an effort to launch a process that would turn the Greek ecclesiastical hierarchy away from its canonical subjugation to its traditional source, the Patriarchate, and facilitate their independence from the Western colonial powers. Theoklitos justifies this unilateral proclamation, however, by using the notion of natural law and the law of self-determination as leading to the creation of a new state. In a similar way, a local church could proclaim its independence without needing any approval of a higher authority:

The Greek nation having declared its political autonomy and independency before God and men through its glorious revolution it manifested simultaneously that, according to its right, its Church should also be autocephalous and independent, as it will be proved elsewhere.<sup>7</sup>

The cause of this holy struggle was not only the political but also the ecclesiastical autonomy and independence. In everything that the Greek nation accomplished it did not need any permission or consent by anybody as it did not need any permission for its political autonomy and independence.

As we all know, the Autocephaly was granted officially by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1850 (with the so-called “Tomos of Autocephaly”). Farmakidis criticized this Tomos vehemently as surrendering the natural rights of the

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6 For an attempt to demonstrate this, see Dimitrios Moschos, “The Churches of the East and the Enlightenment,” in *Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theology 1600–1800*, ed. Ulrich L. Lehner, Richard Muller and A. G. Roeber (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 499–516.

7 Theoklitos Farmakidis, *Ἀπολογία* [Apology] (Athens: Aggelidès, 1840), 14.

Greek Church. He was criticized in turn on the ground that his negative attitude against the Tomos “crushes and takes apart the cornerstone of the Great Idea,” opposing the new constitution and the nation’s sacred mission and goal. Farmakidis did not deny the Church’s unity (here the Church of Greece and the Patriarchate), but he understood it in a democratic way. He defines the nation in a purely political way: “When we refer to the Greek Nation we use this term according to national decisions, meaning the Greeks who waged the Revolution, not the whole Greek race, nor all Orthodox who believe in Christ and live and inhabit within the limits of the *Ottoman State*.”<sup>8</sup> This definition shows an in-depth understanding of the nation by a clergyman in a purely political way, far removed from any mystical, metaphysical, or emotional/romantic interpretation. In that case, it provides an excellent example of contextualizing ecclesiastical institutions in a political democracy, an idea that was developed during the French Revolution.

### National Romanticism and Democracy as Elements of Greek Identity

It is worth noting a crucial evolution in the realm of ideas throughout the continental European area, leading to a more idealistic or mystical interpretation of the idea of the nation. In Greece, national identity was concretized in the unifying historiographical program of the Professor of History at the University of Athens, Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos (1815–1891), in his *Historia tou hellênikou ethnous* [“History of the Greek Nation”] that was completed in 1874. This became the historical manifesto of Greek national identity. In the eyes of National Romanticism, the modern Greek nation is marked by the uninterrupted continuity of all Greek-speaking people in a time-space continuum that originates in antiquity and continues through the Middle Ages/Byzantium up to the present day. This basic thesis redefines the until then dominant classicist idea that conceived the Greek nation basically as people that originated in the classical and Hellenistic cities being conquered by the Romans, living for centuries under Roman, “Byzantine,” and Ottoman yokes and being liberated only after the Revolution and rebirth (“*paligenesia*”) of 1821. Following the 1860s, the national romantic “extension” of the nation through the Middle Ages forced

8 See the references and the relevant discussion in Georgios D. Metallinos, “Επακριβώσεις στην ιδεολογική ταυτότητα του Θεόκλητου Φαρμακίδη” [Clarifications in the ideological identity of Theoklitos Farmakidis], in *Ελληνισμός Μετέωρος* [Pending Hellenism] (Athens: Apostoliki Diakonia, 1999), 168–83.

Orthodox theology to re-forge Orthodox Christianity's identity through some sort of synthesis rather than through the contrast between Christianity and Hellenism (interpreted in this way as a perennial entity). A synthesis between Christianity and the respective indigenous national identity was not uncommon in most European nations of the 19th century and was not restricted only to those who belong in their majority to the Orthodox Church.

In this context, the democratic Greek tradition of equality and freedom is located in the synthesis with Christianity and is being interpreted as a particular characteristic of Orthodox Christianity in contrast to an alleged monarchical papal tradition and Asian despotism. On the Turkish-occupied island of Chios, Metropolitan Gregory "Byzantios" (Pavlidis, 1860–1877) delivered a speech in 1866 on the occasion of the well-established (also in the context of the synthesis of Christianity and Hellenism) feast of the Three Hierarchs who were proclaimed in the free Greek state as patron saints of education.<sup>9</sup> Gregory points out that the basic principles of ancient Greek democracy, as opposed to either the autocracy and tyranny of the Asian states or the anarchy and individualism of Western peoples (i.e., the Protestant nations), are the sovereignty of the people, which allows every citizen to hold a public office<sup>10</sup>, equality before the law<sup>11</sup>, freedom and equal rights of speech<sup>12</sup>, equality in voting (*isop-sêphia*), accountability of the office holders<sup>13</sup> and the attribution of the highest and irrevocable power to the public assembly (*Ecclêsia tou Dêμου*). These same elements, he argues, characterize the Orthodox Church: the offices are open to all, all Christians are equal regardless of their origin or social class, and free citizens of the spiritual Kingdom of God. Every Christian is free to speak and express his opinion on matters of faith like every official in the Church, regardless of his position.<sup>14</sup>

The national romantic "restoration" of Hellenism (and its democratic spirit) resulted in Orthodox theology viewing the attempts at the modernization of

9 See Effi Gazi, *Ο Δεύτερος Βίος τῶν Τριῶν Ἱεραρχῶν: Μιὰ γενεαλογία τοῦ "Ἑλληνοχριστιανικοῦ Πολιτισμοῦ"* [The Second Life of the Three Hierarchs: A Genealogy of the "Helleno-Christian Civilisation"] (Athens: Nefele, 2004).

10 Gregorios Chiou, *Τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν Πνεῦμα: Ἦτοι Σχέσις τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ πρὸς τὴν Ὁρθοδοξίαν* [The Hellenic Spirit or The Relation of Hellenism to Orthodoxy in Greece] (Chios: Prokidis 1869), 5; cf. Aristotle, *Polit.* IV, 2 and VI, a, 10: "Χαρακτήρες τῆς ἐλληνικῆς πολιτείας εἰσὶν οἱ ἐξῆς α, κυριαρχία τοῦ λαοῦ, τουτέστι τὸ δύνασθαι, κατ' Ἀριστοτέλη, πάντα πολίτην ἔχοντα τὰ ἀρμόδια προσόντα ἄρχειν πᾶσαν ἀρχήν."

11 Chiou, "β, ἰσονομία, τουτέστιν ἴση ἀπονομή τοῦ δικαίου καθοριζόμενη ὑπὸ τοῦ νόμου."

12 Chiou, "γ, ἰσηγορία, ἣτοι ἔκφρασις τῆς ἀτομικῆς γνώμης καὶ ἐλευθέρᾳ συζήτησις (ἐπὶ τῇ βάσει τῶν πατρῶων νόμων καὶ παραδόσεων)."

13 Chiou, "ὕπευθυνον τῶν ἐν τέλει."

14 Chiou, *Τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν Πνεῦμα: Ἦτοι Σχέσις τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ πρὸς τὴν Ὁρθοδοξίαν* 11–12, 20–21.

the Greek state mostly favorably, but it was not very actively involved. There were occasional voices from theologians from time to time against the dominance of the state over the Church (which was a legacy of Josephinism), but not equally insistent on the formation of a democratic political ethos on a practical level, e.g., against corruption in the Church hierarchy. A turn can be detected after the dissolution of the 19th-century religious uprisings founded on a romantic/mystical basis among instigators in the Peloponnese such as the monks and preachers Christophoros Papoulakos (1770–1861) and Cosmas Flamiatos (1786–1852) and his “Philorthodoxos Etaireia” (Society of Friends of Orthodoxy) in the 1840s. Apostolos Makrakis (1831–1905), a younger associate of Flamiatos, constitutes a pivotal case in that turn: he gradually distanced himself from the old enthusiastic communal opposition to the modernization of society based on Western models and shifted toward preaching ethics and the regeneration of the Greek Orthodox Church. His sermons were eschatological calls in favor of Christian Socialism.<sup>15</sup> He participated in the modern democratic state, running for Parliament but without success (1875). He was eventually condemned by the Synod and marginalized. Consequently, his younger followers abandoned any political attempt within the framework of parliamentary democracy. They committed themselves to the regeneration of the rapidly urbanized Greek population founding the religious organization, the Zoe [“Life”] Brotherhood in 1907, which aspired to encourage a more conscious moral Christian life and was involved in catechetical work. Others of his followers founded the society and the review *Anaplasis* with a similar purpose (1886).

An important exception to politically radicalized Christians who fought for a redistributive land policy was the Eptanisioides Rizospastai (Ionian Radicals) movement, which emerged as a political party in the autonomous Ionian “state” (i.e., the British Protectorate of the Ionian Islands) struggling for justice and peace based on Orthodox tradition. Marinos Antipas was a member of this party, and he also played a prominent role in the rural uprisings in Thessaly at the beginning of the 20th century during the so-called “agricultural issue” (the distribution of the land of the great estates of Central Greece to the landless serfs). This phenomenon is not, however, related to academic theology or official ecclesiastical discourse.

Modernization movements proliferated after 1909. The Cretan politician Eleftherios Venizelos played a prominent role in leading the modernization wave and became the architect of the alliance with other Balkan states against

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15 See Effi Gazi, “Revisiting Religion and Nationalism in 19th-Century Greece,” *The Making of Modern Greece*, ed. David Ricks and Roderick Beaton (London: Routledge, 2019), 95–106.

the Ottoman empire that was in decline. This alliance allowed the territorial expansion of the Greek state in the Balkan wars of 1912–1913. Venizelos had also adopted a high-risk policy (and territorial gains) endorsing the participation of Greece in the First World War on the side of Entente despite the opposition of King Constantine (who had no constitutional authority to interfere in politics but still had kinship relations with the German Kaiser). This political shift led the Greek nation to a long and bitter division. This great division did not leave the Church unaffected. Several bishops supported Venizelos, but they were not enough to establish a critical series of reforms in the Church and theology that would positively and critically address the demands for a democratic society. The majority in the Church hierarchy continued to believe that the entire Greek nation adhered to their own ideas. This belief was directly related to the national romanticism and the tradition of the nation leadership (*Ethnarchia*). Many bishops were responsible for leading and representing the Greek population in the Christian dioceses that were located in the Ottoman Empire. Many of them were also committed to the Greek national cause; they managed to confront the Ottoman administration and developed brilliant political tactics. Nevertheless, it was a typical reaction for laypeople and clerics to side with the King.<sup>16</sup> They regarded kingship as a perennial institution vital to the solidarity of the nation.

### **From the Culmination of National Romanticism until the End of the Great Pseudo-messianic Political Visions**

The end of the First World War turned the tables. The dissolution of the empires, the prevalence of secular regimes in the newly established USSR and the successor-state of the Ottoman Empire, the Kemalist Turkish Republic, as well as the expulsion or extermination of Greeks (and other Christians) from Turkey, which marked the end of the Great Idea, were accompanied in the interwar period by the rise of the pseudo-messianisms of the fascist and Nazi regimes in Western Europe. In Greece, under the repeated coups d'état and the consolidation of the fascist regime by Ioannis Metaxas (4 August 1936), some hierarchs and theologians began to sympathize with the civil democracy notions that could be a solution to the political issue.

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<sup>16</sup> For more on this period, see Andreas Nanakis, “Venizelos and Church-State Relations,” in *Eleftherios Venizelos: The Trials of Statesmanship*, ed. Paschalis M. Kitromilides (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 346–73.

At a time when most Christians were attacking the atheistic communist system of the USSR, the theologian and later Professor of Ecclesiastical History at the Theological Faculty of the Athens University, Gerasimos Konidaris (1905–1987), became acquainted with National Socialism during his studies in Germany and refuted it, demonstrating that the Gospel transcends racial differences. Konidaris' critical remarks are clear and insightful. They are also based in his vivid personal experience of dramatic events, such as the attack by the Nazi Youth against the Jewish Professor of Law, Martin Wolff (1872–1953), during his lecture at Humboldt University (June 1933). Moreover, he witnessed the celebration of liturgy in the churches of German Christians (*Deutsche Christen*) after they had won the elections of 1933 for the ecclesiastical councils – this group was a device constructed by Adolf Hitler to control the newly established structural unification of the Evangelical Church in Germany. He managed it by having his puppet, Ludwig Müller, elected as *Reichsbischof*.<sup>17</sup> What is most impressive, however, is that Konidaris goes beyond the usual moralistic Christian criticism of Nazism that targeted mainly its pagan elements or its radical nationalism. Konidaris proceeds from a significant theoretical reflection on the relationship between Christianity and modern politics in which his Eastern Orthodox identity also plays a distinct role. He agrees that the Church should not be identified with a specific state form like monarchy or democracy, but, on the other hand, he points out that parliamentary democracy and the legal admissibility of political opposition (and at the same time the existence of minority rights) is much closer to the standards of the Christian Church concerning how a society should operate because it grants more freedom to the individual as well to the state.<sup>18</sup> He published his reflections during 1933 and 1934 in a series of articles in the *Anaplasis* review and later (1937) reprinted them in a separate book.

The aforementioned review, *Anaplasis* (literally “Regeneration”), inspired a profound intervention in the political situation of the church in Greece towards a moral reform of the Church. The former editor-in-chief of *Anaplasis*, Michael Galanos (1868–1948)<sup>19</sup>, envisioned a more active role for Christians in the Greek political scene in a more progressive direction and had also been elected

17 The events broadly called “Kirchenkampf”; see Thomas Martin Schneider, *Reichsbischof Ludwig Müller: Eine Untersuchung zu Leben, Werk and Persönlichkeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993).

18 Gerasimos Konidaris, *Ἡ ἐθνικιστικὴ Γερμανία ἐκκλησιαστικῶς. Προτεσταντισμός, Παπικὴ Ἐκκλησία. Κείμενα Νόμων* [Nationalist Germany from an Ecclesiastical Point of View: Protestantism – Papal Church – Texts of Laws] (Athens: 1934–1937), 54.

19 P. Marketos, I. “Anaplasis,” in *Egkyklopaideia tou Ellenikou Typou* 1784–1974 [Encyclopedia of the Greek Press 1784–1974], vol. 1, ed. Loukia Droulia and Gioula Koutsopanagou

to the Greek parliament in 1910. Konidaris dedicated his book to Metropolitan Ezekiel of Thessaliotis (Stroumbos 1874–1953) and Metropolitan Damaskinos of Corinth (Papandreou 1891–1949), who was a renowned adherent of Venizelos. Damaskinos became Archbishop of Athens and All Greece in 1941 during the time of the Nazi occupation following the deposition of his rival Chrysanthos, who favored the dictator Ioannis Metaxas.<sup>20</sup> The Nazis believed that they could avoid the intransigent nationalistic attitude of Chrysanthos by reinstating Damaskinos, thinking that he would be friendlier towards them. Nevertheless, during the Nazi Occupation (1941–1944), Archbishop Damaskinos skillfully used the classical patriotic/national romantic church policy (a legacy of many generations of bishops acting as representatives of the Christian Orthodox subjects in the Ottoman Empire) and espoused balancing tactics necessary for the joint action of mutually hostile resistance groups against the Nazis, specifically the communist and the pro-English nationalist guerillas, as well as pre-war conservative politicians. He saved many Jews in Athens and served in the interim period after the liberation from Nazi occupation as Regent until the King of Greece returned from England.

But all these political progressive circles could not remove the theological and ecclesiastical discourse from the national patriotic context that prevailed during the Resistance and the subsequent Civil War, when significant contesting messianic visions of national grandeur or social emancipation were active. The idea of social justice and colonial emancipation, which motivated the resistance of the left, was eventually effectively compromised by the pro-West conservative politicians backed initially by the British and, after 1949, the USA. Under these circumstances, a reasonable conceptual framework for the idea of a typical liberal democracy was not only ineffective (because of the lack of a major, stable middle class in mainly agrarian Greek society) but also morally condemned, since the new victorious Western allies used Nazi collaborators in the post-Civil War Greek state to ensure its adherence to the West and NATO. This so-called post-Civil War state, which used the possibility of a communist insurrection as a pretext, empowered the court-martial to determine the guilt

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(Athens: National Hellenic Research Foundation, 2008), 197–99. Galanos presented himself as a “Christian of liberal principles.”

20 As Damaskinos was considered a “democrat,” Metaxas manipulated the election of Chrysanthos in 1938. Konidaris later stated that “the democratic sentiment of Damaskinos was well known”; see Polykarpos Karamouzis, *Κράτος, εκκλησία και εθνική ιδεολογία στη νεώτερη Ελλάδα: κλήρος, θεολόγοι και θρησκευτικές οργανώσεις στο μεσοπόλεμο* [State, Church and national ideology in modern Greece: clerics, theologians, and religious organizations in the Interwar], PhD diss. (Athens: Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, 2004), 382.

of political crimes, conducted censorship, and even sent into exile those who were suspected of adhering to the radical left or having leftist ideas. Many bishops of the Greek Church (apart from two of them who supported the National Liberation Front during the Occupation) sided with the official Greek state.

### After the Civil War: Anticommunism and the Attempts at a Christian Democracy

In view of this background, one can better understand the awkward effort to form a Greek type of middle-class “Christian democracy” movement under the guidance of a Christian Professor of Commercial Law in Athens, i.e., Alexandros Tsirintanis (1903–1971). His name was associated with the catechetical movement Zoe, which was an old organization founded around 1907 at the end of the above-mentioned circle of messianic ideas and was aspiring to the renaissance of theology and ecclesiastical discourse.<sup>21</sup> Zoe was used as a primary ideological weapon against communism.<sup>22</sup> Yet that movement did not manage to create a robust theological argument supporting the idea of liberal democracy in its own right and not as a defense against communism. Tsirintanis understood this failure and distanced himself from it, issuing manifestos such as the *Declaration of Christian Scientists* (1946)<sup>23</sup> signed by scientists and scholars and showing the need for a social revival through law, morality and social justice. Later (1950), Tsirintanis published the declaration *Toward a Christian Civilization* signed by him and articles in his review *Sizêtêsis* (“Discussion” or “Common Quest”) until the establishment of the dictatorship in 1967. His works are characterized by an appeal to moral restoration, the rule of law and solidarity as the main political goals that go along with an utterly reactionary catechism and a condemnation of the loose lifestyle of the young generation of his time. In that way, a sincere and comprehensive encounter of Orthodox Christianity with the values of democracy on the political field was not able to be developed.

Nevertheless, there were theologians, members of those “organizations,” that considered the Orthodox Church compatible with liberal democracy. One

21 See also Stanley Harakas, “Alexander Tsirintanis on the Present Age,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 2 (1956) 75–82.

22 See more on this in Vasilios N. Makrides, “Orthodoxy in the Service of Anticommunism: The Religious Organization Zoë during the Greek Civil War,” in Philip Carabott and Thanasis D. Sfikas (eds) *The Greek Civil War: Essays on a Conflict of Exceptionalism and Silences* (Aldershot: Routledge, 2004), 159–73.

23 Declaration of the Christian Union of Scientists, Athens 1946.

of them was Hamilcas Alivisatos (1887–1969), who reasserted in 1964 the old thesis that the Orthodox Church is inherently democratic, something that also appears in the equality of its members.<sup>24</sup>

Strangely enough, the far-right Regime of the Colonels (1967–1974) has led many people to be disappointed and disillusioned by the right-wing nationalist messianism. This messianism culminated in senseless propaganda about the national grandeur of a “regenerated” Greece consisting of “Greek Christians,” using slogans such as “Hellas of Greek Christians.” This pattern served as a pretext for the ecclesiastical anticommunism and conservative puritan discourse that justified the lack of civil rights and democratic freedom. This changed quickly after the Turkish invasion of Cyprus (1974), however. The pretext for this invasion was given by the Greek military regime, proving that the anticommunist nationalist rhetoric and the suppression of democracy were treacherous and devastating for the national interest. It also revealed the failure of the Church hierarchy (despite significant exceptions) to address the quest for democracy, freedom of speech, social justice and similar demands that had been formed in the meantime by progressive liberal (and not only communist) political forces in the country since the 1960s.

At the same time, the most creative, free and fertile current of critical thinking in theology emerged paradoxically from the Zoe Organization and its members who started to write in the review *Synoro* [“Frontier”]. This review formed the famous current of the so-called “Theology of the 1960s,” which endeavored to address comprehensively significant issues such as Christianity and politics, the social question, etc. This group was influenced by an older cultural movement that had emerged in Greek literature during the 1930s (the so-called “generation of the 1930s”) that focused on a creative rediscovery of the Greek folk tradition, Greek language, etc. The contributors to *Synoro* understood the relation between Greek culture, Orthodox theology and social and political theory in a non-triumphalist and certainly more progressive and self-critical way. While *Synoro* deliberately suspended its publication on the day of the coup d’état on 21 April 1967, one cannot describe the theology of the 1960s as “political.” Nevertheless, it is important to remember that the key parameters of *Synoro* stem from Christian anthropology and the Christian belief in the fall of human nature. This fall explains social evil and the need for salvation by the

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24 Hamilcas Alivisatos, “Ο Δημοκρατικός χαρακτήρ τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας” [The Democratic Character of the Orthodox Church], *Πρακτικά τῆς Ἀκαδημίας Ἀθηνῶν* [Proceedings of the Academy of Athens] 14.5.1964 (Athens: 1964), 213–8. I am indebted to my associate of the Volos Academy for Theological Studies, Dr. Nikos Kouremenos, for drawing my attention to this work.

entire society through Jesus Christ. These basic teachings are considered in the light of contemporary issues and theories such as Marxist philosophy and economy, the state's role in the life of the Christians, etc.<sup>25</sup> This theological current also included Christos Yannaras, doctor in philosophy and theology and Professor of Philosophy at Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences 1982–2002). In his book *Kephalaiia politikês theologias* (“Chapters of Political Theology”), one can note the central axes of his thought, which are related to the notion of democracy. These are: a) democracy in Greece is imposed from without and results in the alienation of Greek people from their collective self-identity, which is integrated with Orthodox Christianity; and b) the essence of politics resides in the revelation of the existential truthfulness of the human being as a person (i.e., in an ontological relation to the Other) and not to a rational accommodation of individual interests.<sup>26</sup> Later, during the period of *Metapolitefsi*<sup>27</sup>, he claimed in his work *Ὁρθός Λόγος και κοινωνική πρακτική* (Rationalism and Social Practice), that Being should be connected existentially both with the critical function of reason as well as freedom. This connection forms a “critical ontology.” According to Yannaras, this relation was affirmed by the young Karl Marx and Jacques Lacan. Then he tried to give a rough sketch of his idea of this connection in which rationality functions apophatically (i.e., without posing limits to existing truth and confining it to reason) and real existence means “shared existence” (*koinonein*). Therefore, politics is redefined through forms of immediate democracy, autogestion and other possibilities that show that Otherness can constitute and not dismantle an ontologically truthful *polis*.<sup>28</sup>

25 For further remarks on the whole theological generation of the 1960s, see Dimitrios Moschos, “Theology and Politics in Contemporary Greece: A Missed Opportunity for the Greek Theology of the 1960s,” *The Ecumenical Review* 70, no. 2 (July 2018): 309–21.

26 Christos Yannaras, *Κεφάλαια Πολιτικής Θεολογίας* [Chapters on Political Theology] (Athens: Papazisis, 1976).

27 In modern Greek, the technical term “*Μεταπολίτευση*” (*Metapolitefsi* means the transition from one political situation to another) denotes a unique moment in the modern political history of the Greek state. It is the fundamental transition from the “quasi-democracy” of the post-Civil War state, which was under the political control of the West and paralyzed because of the suspension of civil rights, to a modern, Western democratic state. It occurred in July 1974 with the fall of the dictatorship and the ratification of a new constitution in 1975.

28 There is ample literature on the political implications of Yannaras’ thought. See Jonathan Cole, “The Commune-centric Political Theology of Christos Yannaras in Conversation with Oliver O’Donovan,” *Mustard Seeds in the Public Square: Between and Beyond Theology, Philosophy, and Society*, ed. Sotiris Mitralaxis (Wilmington DE: Vernon Press, 2017), 61–92; Dionysios Skliris, “Aristotelian Marxism, Critical Metaphysics: The Political Theology of Christos Yannaras,” *Political Theology* 20, no. 4 (2019): 331–48.

Before the 1970s, a minor political movement that emerged in the 1950s is worth noting: “Christian Democracy” (*Christianikê Dêmokratia*), which recalls Christian democratic parties in Italy, Germany, and Belgium. Like many others, its goal was to draw a middle line between capitalism and communism by proclaiming a social Gospel. The most crucial difference with the project of a bourgeois Christian Democrat like Tsirintanis’ was the utterly radical attack on the post-Civil War political establishment, accompanied by the view that capitalism and communism are two sides of the same coin, projections of the inhuman, unchristian condition defined as materialism. Consequently, the founder and leader of *Christianikê Dimokratia*, Nikos Psaroudakis (1917–2006), a schoolteacher and lawyer (but not an academically trained theologian), and his rather few associates, spoke out openly against the dictatorship after 1967. Psaroudakês defended human rights and democratic freedom from a Christian social perspective. He and the party’s newspaper were persecuted and censored while Psaroudakis was imprisoned and sent to exile. Despite the bold and sometimes naive messianic elements (proclaiming to build a pure Christian society of equality and justice for all) of the movement, Nikos Psaroudakis, with books such as *Tò χριστιανικό πολιτικό маниφέστο* (The Christian Political Manifesto) (Athens, 1947), *Ἡ ἐπανάστασις τῆς ἀγάπης: Λύσις τοῦ κοινωνικοῦ προβλήματος ὑπὸ τὸ φῶς τῆς χριστιανικῆς κοινωνιολογίας* (The Revolution of Love: The Solution of the Social Problem under the Light of Christian Sociology) (Athens, 1959) or the collection of articles against the dictatorship *Νὰ πέσει ἡ τυραννία* (Down with Tyranny) (edited by him, published later in Athens, 1978) and many others, formed the first comprehensive effort of Christians to reform not only individual ethics (as was the case with organizations like Zoe) but also the political situation. Although many theoretical issues such as the role of the capitalist economy or the place of minorities are treated with relative oversimplification, one should give credit to *Christianikê Dimokratia* because of its combatant attitude demanding political freedom, equality, solidarity, and similar democratic values. But the movement often declared that civil democracy is insufficient for establishing a just and moral society. Although it had won a small percentage in all free elections after 1974, the movement influenced many theologians after the 1970s who were committed to politically progressive actions in trade unions and youth work. There was a student movement of the party called the “Christian Socialist Student Movement,” and it later (after 1980) hosted a fertile encounter with representatives of the theology of the 1960s. Among other things, the party’s publishing activity presented translations of important works in liberation theology, introducing them to the Greek public.

### *After the Metapolitefsi of 1974*

In 1974 there was a cataclysmic political change, which led to the reform of the Greek Republic. The new constitution marked the transition to a modern democratic state with the separation of powers and the establishment of the rule of law, guaranteeing democratic rights to all and the subsequent admittance of Greece to the European Union (1981). These developments rendered obsolete not only the remnants of national romanticism (the central platform of the old conservative nationalism) but also the Orthodox Church's role. The Orthodox Church had to face new challenges, nevertheless every change brings positive and negative effects. The legal framework of the relations between the Church and state has changed substantially according to the constitutional revision of 1975. Consequently, the Orthodox Church regained its freedom at last and was liberated from the nationalistic fetters of the 19th century, i.e., the dominance of the state. It was indeed a positive experience.

On the other hand, the Church considered a series of state laws encouraging secular modernization as an attack on the Church: the new family law that corrected aspects of discrimination against women, the decriminalization of adultery, the legal recognition of civil marriage, the development of religious education at schools that was escaping from the institutional control of the Church Synod. Following the 1990s, it is worth noting the elimination of the mandatory indication of religious affiliation on public documents, including identity cards, because it was contrary to the law on the protection of data and was also imposed as a measure against discrimination. All these acts were signs that the vital core of the *raison d'être* of modern Greece and the Greek Republic was something different from the romantically fabricated alias of "Christian-Hellenic" identity (which tacitly excluded other religions and national minorities from the possibility of belonging to the national identity). Greece was being transformed into a "political nation" consisting of citizens who follow the rule of law in accordance with the legal right of self-determination that was put forward by the Greek Revolution and the building of a modern democratic state. It can be said that Orthodox Greece had fulfilled its role at last in constructing the ideology of modern Greece and now the main challenge for it is to assume and develop a new role in this secular environment.

During the same period, on the grassroots level, ecclesiastical rhetoric and theology interact with the anti-colonial, anti-Western political rhetoric of the *Metapolitefsi*, where a belated reception took place of ideological debates that occurred during the 1960s in the rest of the world. In these debates, Marxism

in a free, unofficial (non-Soviet) form had a key role, i.e., the quest for the “young Marx,” and economic theories that analyzed the relations between the metropolis and the periphery, the Frankfurt school, etc., along with the socialist experiments of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Arab world, the emergence of the political understanding of psychoanalysis and ecology and many more currents that redefined the concept of progressive thinking and activism especially after the protests of 1968. Greek society encountered this widespread anti-colonial sentiment through heated political debates about socialism and the course of the newly established democracy in the country. Marxism (as Neomarxism) and socialism were the focus of many Orthodox theologians in this context.

As a product of this situation, the so-called Christian-Marxist dialogue (1983–1987) encouraged many Orthodox theologians to take seriously the social problem (which many of them approached in a mere humanistic and moral way) on the one hand and the East as a cultural periphery that had to articulate its emancipated discourse against the western metropolis on the other. The theology of the 1960s contributed significantly to this since it reinterpreted the history and the achievements of Eastern Orthodox theology in order to respond to the dead end of Western rationalism. Nevertheless, this encounter with the theories of 1968 made the restoration of civil democracy and its principles irrelevant and outdated for theology. A typical example of a historian influenced by theologians of the 1960s generation with a strongly anti-Western/anti-colonial approach to modern Greek history was a priest committed to the Church’s democratization, Georgios Metallinos (1940–2019), Professor of Intellectual Trends in the East after the 15th Century at the Theological Faculty of the University of Athens. In his work, he showed a great affinity with Marxist ideas and a Gospel-based approach to social problems as a shared basis.<sup>29</sup>

Standing more in the theological margins of the 1960s, the professor of New Testament at the Theological Faculty of Athens, Ioannis Panagopoulos (1938–1997), published a small book in 1982, *Δημοκρατία και Έλληνική Όρθοδοξία* (Democracy and Greek Orthodoxy), that can be considered as an attempt at dialogue with the Orthodox spirit. It was a time of the alleged war between the Panhellenic Socialist Movement, which had governed Greece since 1981,

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29 Unlike Christos Yannaras, he stated that “the fact that Marxist philosophy recognizes the omnipotence of science cannot be considered contrary to Orthodox spirituality in advance because this spirituality is also scientific and practical. Like positive science, Orthodox spirituality relies on a specific method, practice, and experimentation.” Georgios Metallinos, *Εισαγωγική πρόσβαση στην όρθόδοξη πνευματικότητα* [Introduction to Orthodox Spirituality], *Semadía* 9 (February 1984): 20.

and the Church hierarchy because of the aforementioned modernization of family laws and measures. The war escalated later because the government attempted to gain control over ecclesiastical property. Basing himself on the eschatological dimension of Christian discourse, Panagopoulos demonstrated the compatibility between democracy and Orthodoxy as well as the gap that separates them:

The ultimate purpose of civil democracy is to transform the people (*demos*) into a society of free and responsible community, characterized by justice, equality, freedom, peace, happiness, as Aristotle wanted. According to the teaching of the Church, the ultimate destiny of the world and all creation is to be developed and be a ripe fruit of God's kingdom. There is no radical contrast between these two objectives, as many want to believe, but only qualitative differences.<sup>30</sup>

Parallel to this central thesis, however, Panagopoulos reduces Orthodoxy culturally to Hellenism, as was the general trend that time.<sup>31</sup>

Apart from theoretical reflections, there were also practical initiatives such as the formation of collective bodies that, although they had no specific task in promoting the relationship between democracy and Orthodox theology, they introduced demands into the public sphere that connected various aspects of the theoretical democratic framework with theology, such as dialogue, human rights, respect for the environment and the life of the Orthodox Church. In that sense, the example of the Orthodox Academy of Crete, which was founded during the time of the dictatorship (1968), and the establishment of the Theological Association of Northern Greece (1979) are very interesting, as well as of "Theological League" (1984), which later began to publish (1992) the theological journal *Kath' odon* ("In statu viae"). The Academy aimed to cultivate "the spirit of dialogue between Orthodoxy and other denominations and religions and more generally between faith, science, and culture." It has also tried to support dialogue through conferences and other activities. Apart from this attempt, other initiatives focused on introducing current political and social issues such as human rights, ecology, discrimination, etc., following the theological quest of the 1960s, thus bringing a new dynamic into the encounter between Orthodox theology and democracy.

During the 1990s, following the sudden collapse of the communist regimes and the rise of the global market power, the spectacular defeat of the Marxist

30 Ioannis Panagopoulos, *Δημοκρατία και Έλληνική Όρθοδοξία* [Democracy and Greek Orthodoxy] (Athens: Stefanos Vasilopoulos), 198.

31 Panagopoulos, *Δημοκρατία*, 61–85, where Panagopoulos speaks about the "dynamic relationship between Hellenism and Orthodoxy," "the debt of Hellenism to Orthodoxy" and vice versa, etc.

ideological hegemony left a vacuum in the anti-colonial camp. This vacuum was once again filled by culturally ethnocentric collectivism fueled by populist traditionalist rhetoric combined with isolationist elements – what we now call “ethnopolitism.”

This development greatly affected the Greek intellectual landscape. Key ideas and motifs of the theology of the 1960s (the essence of the Church as the people of God, the rediscovered meaning of tradition, the philosophical importance of the *via negativa* for the knowledge of God, the criticism of Western rationalism, etc.) that had inspired a whole generation of lay theologians, clerics, and monks, evolved into a catalyst of shallow anti-Western fundamentalism, isolationism and delusions of national and cultural grandeur. As the old ghosts of ethnic conflicts reappeared in the Balkans, the Church of Greece addressed the uneasy Greek public using these ideas that recalled the perennial cultural war of the “West” against the Orthodox “East.” In that war (with nationalistic connotations), the model of Western civil democracy was held responsible for the political destabilization in the Balkans and the dismantling of the former Yugoslavia, the demonization of the new Russia, the alleged support of Muslims against Christians and the Uniate (Greek Catholic) ecclesiastical communities against the territorial rights of the Eastern Orthodox Churches in Eastern Europe. This tendency culminated with the Archbishop of Athens, Christodoulos Paraskevaïdis (1939–2008, archbishop 2001–2008). Despite moments of creative openness to modernity (the delegation of the Church of Greece to the EU, ecumenical initiatives, the visit by Pope John Paul II in 2001, the translation of parts of the liturgy into contemporary Greek, etc.), he often clashed with the Greek government on legal and administrative measures that would mark a further separation of the Church from the state. By continually stressing the Church’s position as the “soul” of the nation in a purely neo-romantic sense, Christodoulos marked a whole era of Church rhetoric.<sup>32</sup> In 1998, Savas Agourides (1921–2009), Professor Emeritus of New Testament at the University of Athens, wrote a book on human rights that pictures the different ways that civil democracy was received in the divergent paths of the theological landscape after the 1960s.<sup>33</sup> Agourides was also known for his progressive political activity as a member of the Greek Peace

32 Some interesting remarks about the period of Archbishop Christodoulos see in Evangelos Karagiannis, *Die Kirche von Griechenland und die Herausforderung der offenen Zukunft*, in *Grenzüberschreitungen. Traditionen und Identitäten in Südosteuropa. Festschrift für Gabriella Schubert*, ed. W. Dahmen, P. Himstedt-Vaid and G. Ressel (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008), 262–84.

33 Savas Agourides, *Τὰ ἀνθρώπινα δικαιώματα στὸ Δυτικὸ Κόσμο* [Human Rights in the Western World] (Athens: Filistor, 1998).

Movement and among other things as a member of the Greek section of the Minority Rights Group International. According to him, human rights are an essential achievement of humanity that is based on the notion of tolerance that emerged due to the religious wars in early modernity. In the same year, 1998, Christos Yannaras published his book with the significant title *Ἡ ἀπανθρώπια τοῦ δικαιώματος* (The Inhumanity of Rights).<sup>34</sup> Yannaras attacked the ideology of “human rights-ism,” which regards the accommodation of individual interests in an individualistic segmentation of the classical *polis* as a logical consequence of the understanding of politics. This segmentation is the legacy of the rise of individualism in the anthropological model of modernity.

Some other collective efforts initiated a substantial practical intervention related to the openness of modern society in an attempt to understand its modern framework: the theological journal *Synaxi* (founded in 1982 by another prominent representative of the theology of the 1960s, Panayiotis Nellas 1936–1986) has up to now published many articles on different aspects of the Orthodox tradition and its relation to modernity, politics being one of them. Another one is our host here, the Volos Academy for Theological Studies (founded in 2000), which organizes panels, seminars, and conferences on Orthodox Christianity and democracy in countries belonging to the Orthodox East.

The work of such initiatives sets a pivotal example in a time when democracy is being eroded because of the usurpation of the popular will through economic power with examples such as the outsourcing of state authority to private enterprises (like banks), an action assisted by the political status quo in many countries, the uncontrolled power of the EU Commission that seems to set capital above the unity and the prosperity of its members and the European peoples, the capability of the international financing mechanisms to impose their conditions for lending money, the corruption of governing elites, and the like. All this undermines the real meaning of society with the result that democracy as a set of political principles and liberties becomes less and less convincing. Given that neo-isolationism in the form of anti-globalization movements is on the rise, what it is developing is a kind of populism/ethno-populism and irrationalism in the form of mistrust of scientists and scholars (who became dependent on private donors and patrons). This kind of neodespotism in opposition to the corrupt parliamentary institutions prevails in

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34 Christos Yannaras, *The Inhumanity of Right*, trans. Norman Russell (Cambridge: James Clark, 2021). One can also consult Christos Yannaras, “Human Rights and the Orthodox Church” in *The Orthodox Churches in a Pluralistic World: An Ecumenical Conversation*, ed. Emmanuel Clapsis (Geneva: WCC Publications), 83–9.

many countries, while democratic rights and the achievements of the two previous centuries are seriously at stake. These phenomena became more dangerous after the third phase (i.e., after 1974 and 1990) of large migration flows (immigrants and refugees). These migration flows are caused by the destabilization of the Middle East and the overthrow of authoritarian (yet secular and non-religious) regimes in many Middle Eastern countries, as well as the subsequent chaos, the widening of the economic gap in the periphery and climate change.

The fragility of democracy as a system of values was evident in Greece after 2012 when the disapproval of the mainstream ruling parties and the state's factual bankruptcy was unleashed under the guise of a neo-Nazi party ("Chrysi Avgi"). The fact that many ecclesiastical persons (clerics and monks, some of them in Mount Athos) initially encouraged the "Chrysi Avgi" (Golden Dawn) party in word and in deed was enough to understand that there were hidden paths connecting the isolationist, hysterical and sectarian defense of Orthodoxy on the one hand and secular populism and irrationalism on the other.<sup>35</sup>

### Conclusion

If we sum up the historical trajectory of the idea of democracy in Orthodox theology in Greece, we recognize the known stereotype that Orthodox theology is completely pre-modern, hierarchical, Neoplatonist, etc. Therefore, by definition, it should be contrary to the concept of democracy, the rule of law, and so forth, as Samuel Huntington claimed. But the history of ideas has evolved differently. The concept of democracy was infiltrated by the metaphysical interpretation of Hellenism applied from the point of view of the national romanticism in the 19th century. It became a means of national consolidation precisely because it was regarded as an inherent characteristic of the "Hellenic spirit" that also fertilized and characterized Eastern Orthodoxy over against Catholicism and Protestantism. On the other hand, the absence of a social basis and a robust middle class in the newborn Greek state or the other Balkan and Eastern European nations adhering to Eastern Orthodoxy can be noted that could launch a process of democratization in order to unify the nation

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35 More about the criticism against ultra-right tendencies in the Church see in Stavros Zoumboulakis, *Χρυσή Αυγή και Έκκλησία* [Golden Dawn and the Church] (Athens: Polis, 2013).

by controlling the means of production – something that has happened in the West.

It is now time for Orthodox theology to reflect more intensively on the concept of democracy. That should not be done on national romantic grounds, as if we still live in the 19th century, but through commitment to the indispensable values that promote a global shared and peaceful way of life as well as protect minorities, human life and the natural environment against any injustice and discrimination.

There have been significant contributions in that direction, inspired by a broader relevant discussion in the global Orthodoxy and expressed in texts originated by the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Examples of such texts are the inspired speech of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in Germany, on 24 April 2017, pleading for the importance of human rights, which he referred to as a “gift from God,”<sup>36</sup> or one of the official documents of the Panorthodox Council of Crete in 2016, in which the Orthodox Church proclaims its commitment to peace and the paving of “the way to justice, fraternity, true freedom, and mutual love among all children of the one heavenly Father as well as between all peoples who make up the one human family.”<sup>37</sup> Such a turn can provide a refocus on democracy and breathe new life into the dry bones of European declarations, ascribing spiritual value to a shared vision of a less brutal and more just society, beyond the usual poor normative and moralistic rhetoric. Moreover, if Eastern Orthodoxy desires to be heard and taken seriously in the modern world, this theological reflection must consider seriously and in a critical way the significance of democracy in the Orthodox Church itself.

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36 See “Rede Seiner Allheiligkeit, des Ökumenischen Patriarchs Bartholomäus,” Ökumenischer Rat der Kirchen, <https://www.oikoumene.org/de/resources/documents/address-of-his-all-holiness-ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew> (accessed 5 February 2021).

37 Official Documents of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church: The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today’s World, <https://www.holycouncil.org/official-documents> (accessed 5 February 2021).

# Orthodoxy and Democracy in Romanian Theology

*Lucian Turcescu*

## Introduction

Democracy came rather abruptly to Eastern Europe during the course of about six months in 1989, with the collapse of the communist regimes in a quick succession one after the other, like in a game of dominoes. It all started with Poland in June 1989 and ended with Romania in December 1989. The dismantling of the Soviet Union followed in 1991. People in the region opted for a Western-style capitalist democracy that defended private property and individual (as opposed to economic and communal) rights. The 1990s were a rather painful decade in much of the region due to the transition from a state-owned to a private economy, the loss of guaranteed markets for selling one's economic output in the former Soviet bloc countries, a worsening of living standards due to the loss of guaranteed employment, and the absence of legislation that would properly regulate the economic, political and social situation. Things were further complicated depending on whether a country adopted a "piecemeal" slow transition or "shock therapy" fast transition. Romania chose a "piecemeal" approach, while Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia went for "shock therapy." In 2004, a majority of the Eastern European countries were admitted into the European Union, and the predominantly Orthodox Romania and Bulgaria were also admitted in 2007, thus contradicting Samuel Huntington's controversial theory of the clash of civilizations that predicted in 1996 that Eastern Orthodox "civilizations" would never make it into a Western-style civilizational bloc.

In reaction to the arrival of democracy in Eastern Europe, churches in the region had to "hit the ground running," that is, adapt rather quickly to the new market mentality of competition. Most chose to avoid a passive attitude that would just allow democracy to happen and decided to be involved in shaping it. Demands for increased religious freedom, legalization of churches banned under communism (e.g. the Greek Catholic Church), restoration of religious rights and freedoms, as well as calls for reparations for the persecution and damages they sustained during communism began to be heard from many religious groups, small and large. One such demand included the introduction of religious instruction in public schools, due to the fact that such instruction was forbidden under communism. Churches justified it by attempting to fill the

void left in the children's education by the atheistic, corrupt morality that was allegedly spread under communism. Communism had used lies to promote an imaginary happy society existing in an undetermined future, while the population suffered crisis after crisis and privation after privation in an unhappy, never-ending present.

In this contribution, I would like to focus on the Romanian Orthodox Church (hereafter: RomOC) and its interaction with democracy. I will focus specifically on the participation of priests and bishops in politics; the support given by the church to various political candidates during electoral campaigns, as well as pronouncements by the Holy Synod on such participation; the protocols of collaboration between RomOC and government; and evolving models of church-state relations that RomOC experienced during the past three decades since the collapse of communism.

### **Participation of Priests and Bishops in Politics**

One way in which the RomOC manifested its attitude towards the new democracy taking root in the country was in regard to elections and clerical participation in politics. Many Romanian politicians sought electoral support from the RomOC during electoral campaigns. During local and national elections, politicians of all ideological persuasions and religious leaders from Orthodox, Catholic, Greek Catholic, and Protestant denominations closely cooperate, continuously forging new ties and renegotiating old ones to fit their respective goals. First, when it comes to populist Romanian politicians seeking support from the RomOC during the electoral campaigns, several examples can be mentioned. Ion Iliescu is a former communist apparatchik and one-time collaborator with Nicolae Ceausescu, and his National Salvation Front is a large umbrella organization that brings together second-echelon officials of the Communist Party. The party is known today as the Social Democratic Party (PSD, to use the Romanian acronym). A convinced communist who seemed to share Marx's belief that religion is the opium of the masses and who blamed Ceausescu more than the communist ideology for the country's bankruptcy, Iliescu initially refused to employ religion as an electoral instrument, convinced of its lack of importance for the Romanian electorate in the post-communist context. The highlight of the 1996 presidential race was the televised debate in which the Christian Democrat Constantinescu surprised the incumbent Iliescu, a self-declared atheist, by asking him whether he believed in God. Iliescu tried to affirm his Freethought convictions while

emphasizing his membership in the Orthodox Church through his baptism as an infant.<sup>1</sup> As a well-known Communist official who had served a regime that had engaged in religious persecution, Iliescu was unable to pose as a pious candidate who embraced the religiosity of most of the Romanian electorate. In the end, Constantinescu won and, in a token of gratitude, became the first post-communist Romanian president to take his solemn oath, hand on the Bible, in the presence of the Orthodox patriarch. Since then, the patriarch has opened every legislative session by encouraging senators and deputies to fulfill the mandate entrusted to them by the electorate.

Ever since 1996, religion has unexpectedly become important in electoral campaigns. Other candidates for the presidency, parliament and local government also discovered that an electoral win was difficult, if not impossible, if they did not appeal for the support of the country's powerful Orthodox Church. As a result, many of them have tried, at least during electoral campaigns, to include visits to Orthodox churches in their itineraries; to show up for religious services on major Orthodox feast days; to be photographed and filmed surrounded by Orthodox icons, calendars and other religious symbols; to make donations for church buildings; and to become godfathers for orphans and witnesses for weddings in public ceremonies.<sup>2</sup>

Not even Traian Basescu, whose religiosity has proven lukewarm at best, dared to ignore religion during his bid for the Romanian presidency in 2004. Among Romanian politicians, Basescu was an exception both because of his lack of a well-planned strategy regarding the Orthodox vote and his generally lukewarm support for the majority church and its most cherished projects. Indeed, while he was the mayor of Bucharest (2000–2004) and leader of the opposition Democratic Party, Basescu constantly resisted Patriarch Teoctist's plans to erect a monumental National Salvation Cathedral in downtown Bucharest. Even after the Social Democratic government transferred a plot of land located in Carol Park for the use of the Orthodox Church in 2003, Basescu flatly refused to give approval for construction. Basescu also criticized the allocation of public funds for the project, reminding the church of its pledge to finance the cathedral exclusively from donations. To block the project, Basescu launched public debates via the mayor's official website and asked residents to vote against locating the cathedral in the park, one of Bucharest's few

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1 See "Constantinescu: Credeți în Dumnezeu, domnule Iliescu?" [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ik8irXN7pCQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ik8irXN7pCQ) (accessed 12 June 2017).

2 Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu, *Religion and Politics in Post-Communist Romania* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 135; Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu, *Church, State, and Democratization in Expanding Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 203–4.

remaining green oases.<sup>3</sup> As a nominal Orthodox believer, Basescu's opposition stemmed from concern with the many technical deficiencies of the project more than any rejection of Orthodox principles as such. He insisted that he opposed the cathedral, not the church, but the statement was interpreted by the Orthodox leaders as a declaration of war, and they were further enraged when Basescu voiced support for homosexual marriages and the legalization of prostitution in mid-2004. Basescu's determination weakened as the 2004 presidential elections approached, and he understood that he would be unable to win the presidency without the Orthodox vote. Hours before the vote, Basescu did what all other presidential candidates did before him: attended mass, mumbled the Our Father, made the sign of the cross, and pledged to return property to the Orthodox Archbishopric of Suceava. This display of religiosity may have helped Basescu win the presidency. After assuming the office of president, Basescu paid lip service to the Orthodox Church and Orthodox religious rituals, admitting that the Orthodox Church is "our national church" and accepting the church's highest medal, the Patriarchal Cross, but he did not openly support pro-Orthodox legislation or make frequent use of religious symbols.<sup>4</sup>

In the country's presidential elections of 2014, populist politicians like Victor Ponta tried to rally the support of the RomOC for his presidential bid. Several bishops and priests responded to the call and openly supported his bid and encouraged their parishioners to do so as well.<sup>5</sup> Romanians living in the diaspora became the new frontier that a number of candidates attempted to conquer. Ponta sent two of his representatives to make electoral promises in the main Romanian Orthodox church in Paris. But in the end, it was a non-Orthodox, non-ethnic Romanian, the German-speaking Lutheran mayor of Sibiu, Klaus Iohannis, who won the presidency. In a rather obscure message around 12 noon on the Sunday of the elections, Patriarch Daniel himself, urged voters to vote for Iohannis. Iohannis was re-elected president in November 2019. In return for politicians courting the powerful Orthodox church, the RomOC has used the support given to politicians to pursue its own interests: covering

3 Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu, "Politics, National Symbols and the Romanian Orthodox Cathedral," *Europe-Asia Studies* 58, no. 7 (November 2006): 1119–39.

4 Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu, "The Romanian Orthodox Church and the Government," in *Romania under Basescu: Aspirations, Achievements, and Frustrations during his First Presidential Term*, ed. Ronald King and Paul Sum (Lanham MD: Lexington, 2011) 203–19.

5 Claudiu Pădurean, "Dovezile vânzării Bisericii Ortodoxe către Ponta. Reprezentanții Bisericii promit cercetări. Vor fi și sancțiuni?" *România curată* (12 November 2014), <http://www.romaniacurata.ro/dovezile-vanzarii-bisericii-ortodoxe-catre-ponta-video-reprezentantii-bisericii-promit-cercetari-vor-fi-si-sanctiuni> (accessed 12 January 2020).

up its own past of collaboration with the communist regime, property restitution, obtaining state funds for the construction of numerous churches, salaries for the clergy, support for its policies against abortion and homosexuality, and limiting other religious groups' abilities to pursue their religious missions in the country.

The other aspect of elections and religion is the direct participation of clergy in the country's political life, and this is where the views of the Orthodox Church are officially represented. As citizens, clergy themselves would have the right not only to vote but to participate in the country's political life, which is what some of them have done right since the early 1990s. The political involvement of religious leaders is not a novelty to Romania. In pre-communist times, the clergy were actively involved in elections, advising parishioners to vote for certain candidates, blessing electoral banners, and praising their favorite parties from the pulpit. For a brief period, the RomOC's first Patriarch, Miron Cristea (1925–1939), was a member of the regency that ruled the country on behalf of the child King Michael, and became the country's Prime Minister in 1938–1939. In the interwar period, many Orthodox priests joined the fascist Iron Guard and the Legion of Archangel Michael, a paramilitary fascist organizations opposing Soviet communism and extolling Orthodoxy as central to Romanian identity. After 1989, the Orthodox Church leaders advised clergymen to refrain from participating in politics, joining parties, running for public office, and influencing their parishioners' political options. At a January 1990 meeting, the Synod banned priests from engaging "in any form of political partisanship," including party membership, allowed bishops to sanction politically active priests and monks, and obliged priests holding public office to cease their priestly activity for the duration of the political mandate. This latter provision forbade priests from collecting a salary from the church while receiving wages for performing the duties of public office. But at a time when the Orthodox leadership was vehemently opposed by various intellectuals because of its collaboration with the previous communist regime and the Synod was divided between reformers and conservatives, most priests and monks disregarded the recommendation. The Synod Decision no. 1066 of 1996 reiterated that "according to canon law [canon 6 Apostolic, canon 7 of the 4th Ecumenical Synod, canon 10 of the 7th Ecumenical Synod, canon 11 of the local synod of Cartagena], bishops, priests, deacons, and the spiritual fathers of all faithful will abstain from running in elections to become deputies or senators. Priests and monks are called to fulfill their spiritual mission, which is incompatible with a systematic party engagement." The decision banned clergy from becoming active party members, but left the door open to political involvement by permitting priests to run in elections as independent candidates. Several times during electoral years,

the Synod reminded priests that they could run in local but not general elections and only as independent candidates if they secured the approval of their superiors. The Orthodox leadership further specified that, in light of canon law on political neutrality, clergy should abstain from openly supporting parties and candidates. Because of its vague formulation and lack of sanctions, the decision was treated as a mere recommendation. Bishops failed to sanction politically active priests and allowed priests holding public office to perform the liturgy, religious services like marriage and baptism, preaching, and hearing confession. By design or accident, the decision offered priests the possibility of contributing to politics in the hope of obtaining tangible advantages for the Orthodox Church or their parish, while showing society, the political class and other religious denominations that the Orthodox Church as an institution opted for political neutrality. Many priests and even bishops joined political parties and some even gained seats in parliament or even as government ministers. Some bishops, such as the powerful Metropolitan Bartolomeu Anania of Cluj – a counter-candidate of the current Patriarch Daniel Ciobotea for the patriarchal see in 2007 – expressed official opposition to the Synod decisions and insisted that political participation is important for the RomOC.

In 2008, less than a year after he became patriarch, Daniel Ciobotea decided to call everybody to order and enforce uniformity in his church. Thus, on 7 March 2008, the Holy Synod issued its Decision no. 1676 concerning the Issue of Priestly Participation in Politics. This Decision re-examined and maintained the previous recommendations of 1996 and 2000, as well as Decision no. 410 (12–13 February 2004), on the non-participation of clergy in party politics, while allowing priests (with the approval of their bishops) to participate in the political life of their community as an independent city, county or village councilors. However, the Decision refers to participation as a councilor in the life of the community as a necessary dispensation (economy) until “Orthodox lay members will be found who will properly represent the interests of their local community in which there are also Orthodox believers.”<sup>6</sup> This last comment about laypeople is quite insulting of their intelligence, as many of them throughout Romania are already well prepared to properly represent their community politically. But perhaps some justification needed to be provided about the exceptionalist character of priestly participation as a low-level politician.

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6 “Decizia Sf. Sinod privind problema implicării preoților în politică” (7 March 2008), <https://basilica.ro/decizia-sf-sinod-privind-problema-implicarii-preotilor-in-politica> (accessed 12 January 2020).

## Models of Church-State Relations

My book, *Religion and Politics in Romania* (Oxford University Press, 2007) identified several models of church-state relations that various groups were promoting in the country as a new approach to understanding the relationship between religion and politics in the country. While the political elite traditionally embraced a managed quasi-pluralist model of church-state relations, after 1989 prominent political actors were tempted to codify into law the privileged position they were ready to grant to the powerful Orthodox Church. Those attempts were rapidly quashed under pressure from other religious groups, the local civil society, and the EU in which Romania sought acceptance as a full member. Until 2007, the RomOC advocated an established church model that recognized its role as defender of Romanian identity, qualified it for record levels of state financial support, and guaranteed its formal representation in the national legislative assembly. This model was proposed with an eye to the (semi)established church model upheld in the United Kingdom, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Greece. My book provided numerous examples to support the argument about this model, and I will not repeat them here.

The established church model advocated by the RomOC and some politicians came under attack from religious minorities favoring a pluralist model firmly grounding all denominations outside the state and in civil society and recognizing religious minority and majority groups as equal before the law. Some intellectuals who represent the best organized and most vocal segment of the local civil society have countered the unprecedented levels of religiosity and the growing reliance of the political elite on religious symbols by way of articulating a model calling for the strict separation of church and state. Eventually, the long-awaited Law on Religious Freedom and the General Regime of Religious Denominations 489 of 28 December 2006, agreed upon days before the country was officially admitted into the EU on 1 January 2007, confirmed the pluralist model as the one the country embraced.<sup>7</sup> So, neither the separation model nor the established church-state model was adopted by Romania. After the death of Patriarch Teoctist, the new Patriarch Daniel has seemingly abandoned the search for an established church model in which the Orthodox Church would be the state church. Instead, with an eye to Germany, Patriarch Daniel has pushed for a model of partnership between church and state.<sup>8</sup> According to Monsma, den Dulk and Soper:

7 "Decizia Sf. Sinod privind problema implicării preoților în politică."

8 For the German model of partnership between church and state, see J. Christopher Soper, Kevin R. den Dulk, and Stephen V. Monsma, *The Challenge of Pluralism: Church and State in Six Democracies*, 3rd ed. (Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), 193–228.

Under this model the state and the church form a partnership in advancing the cause of religion and the state. Church and state are seen as two pillars on which a stable, prosperous society rests. The state provides the church with recognition, accommodation, and often financial support; the church provides the state with an aura of legitimacy and tradition, recognition, and a sense of national unity and purpose.<sup>9</sup>

In Germany, “There indeed is a nonprofit-government partnership in providing important social and health services, a partnership that includes the major religiously based organizations as full partners.”<sup>10</sup> Autonomy is also a valued principle in Germany:

The concept of church autonomy is important for understanding the degree of freedom religious nonprofit service organizations have in pursuing their religious missions, even when working as partners with the government in providing services. The concept of church autonomy includes religious service organizations.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, Patriarch Daniel has promoted partnership with the state and autonomy from it. This is perhaps due to his familiarity with the German model. Although born and educated in Romania, in 1979, Daniel obtained a doctorate in theology from the University of Strasbourg (France), after having done graduate-level work in both France and Germany for four years. Starting in 1980, he served as a lecturer at the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey (Switzerland) and as its associate director (1986–1988), while being an adjunct professor at the Universities of Geneva and Fribourg (Switzerland). In an interview granted to me in 2004, when he was still Metropolitan of Moldova and Archbishop of Iași, Ciobotea approached the topic of partnership between church and state and indicated his admiration for the German model. When asked to comment on the Byzantine model of church-state symphonia, he indicated that this outdated model should be replaced by collaboration between church and state and active participation by the RomOC in the social life of the country. He added that

democracy as we experience it today is a Western invention that relies a lot on respect for freedom, respect for human rights, institutions, as well as on a contractual understanding of human relations. One has to abide by contracts, respecting their deadlines and obligations. Unfortunately, that is not how Romanian society and Orthodox societies in general have functioned so far. Therefore, democratization presents a challenge for the Romanian society and

9 Soper, den Dulk, and Monsma, *The Challenge of Pluralism*, 10.

10 Soper, den Dulk, and Monsma, *The Challenge of Pluralism*, 219.

11 Soper, den Dulk, and Monsma, *The Challenge of Pluralism*, 219.

the Orthodox Church in the sense that they have to adapt to the new contractual nature of democracy.<sup>12</sup>

The current patriarch is also better fit to lead the church into the 21st century. In contrast with the previous patriarch, Daniel no longer seeks to obtain privileges for his church from the state, by forcing undemocratic legislation that would guarantee the RomOC a leading position. Instead, he is aware that he must build an image of his church as an important social player and make it known inside and outside the country. Whereas the previous patriarch did little to promote his church, while he was still Metropolitan of Moldova, Daniel founded the radio station Trinitas, which broadcasts live 24/7. Since 2007 he has expanded the station to cover the entire country and to also broadcast on the internet, began the television station Trinitas TV, a news agency Basilica (also with a strong online presence), and the newspaper *Lumina*.

Two important protocols signed by the RomOC and the Romanian government testify to the desire of the RomOC to serve as an important social partner in the country and therefore they support the new model of church-state relations of partnership that we propose here. These documents are the Protocol of Cooperation in the Area of Social Inclusion, and the Collaboration Protocol regarding the Social Assistance Partnership.

On 2 October 2007, just days after his ascension to the patriarchal throne, on behalf of the RomOC, together with Prime Minister Calin Popescu-Tăriceanu Patriarch Daniel signed the Protocol of Cooperation in the Area of Social Inclusion.<sup>13</sup> This protocol is meant to simplify the procedures of collaboration between church and state when dealing with social projects, especially those dealing with disadvantaged persons and minorities such as the Roma. In 2007, over 300,000 persons received some form of assistance from the RomOC.<sup>14</sup> The purpose of the ten-year protocol is cooperation between the two parties in strengthening the social inclusion mechanism in Romania, the promotion of social dialogue for the improvement of the national legislative and institutional framework with regard to social inclusion and participation in common projects meant to meet the needs of people in difficulty. One substantial role in this regard is to be played by graduates in Orthodox theology who major in

12 Daniel Ciobotea, Metropolitan of Moldova and Archbishop of Iași, personal interview conducted by Lucian Turcescu, Iasi/Romania, 11 June 2004.

13 Protocol de Cooperare in Domeniul Incluziunii Sociale intre Guvernul Romaniei si Patriarhia Romaniei, 2 October 2007, <https://basilica.ro/protocol-de-colaborare-in-domeniul-incluziunii-sociale-intre-patriarhia-romana-si-guvernul-romaniei> (accessed 21 December 2020).

14 Protocol de Cooperare in Domeniul.

Social Theology, church-endorsed non-governmental organizations, as well as priests who are to identify individuals in their parishes needing assistance so they can be directed to the resources available from the government.

An important practical application of the Protocol on Social Inclusion was a symposium organized by the Ministry of Labor, Family and Equal Opportunities in partnership with the RomOC in Bucharest on 9–10 December 2008. Entitled “Family Violence and its Social Consequences,” the symposium was meant to address family violence toward women and children, a discussion that is usually avoided in Romania and for which there are really very few resources. In Romania, only a handful of centers, usually maintained and run by various churches, offer women protection from family violence. In his own presentation to the symposium, Patriarch Daniel reminded participants that the RomOC remains an active partner of the government in social affairs. The symposium was preceded by a national campaign for combating family violence against women called “Stop Domestic Violence against Women” that took place from 28 November to 10 December 2007 period. The organizers of the campaign were the Information Bureau of the Council of Europe in Bucharest and the National Agency for the Protection of Family, which represented the Ministry of Labor. The RomOC and the Roman Catholic Church in Romania were both actively involved in conveying the message of the campaign in their parishes and media outlets.<sup>15</sup>

The second partnership, signed by the Patriarchate and the Ministry of Public Health on 7 October 2007, was a “Collaboration Protocol regarding the Medical and Spiritual Assistance Partnership.”<sup>16</sup> By virtue of this document, the two parties agreed to coordinate their actions regarding medical assistance and to integrate medical, social and spiritual assistance. The purpose of the collaboration protocol is to achieve “a community that is healthy from physical, mental, social, and spiritual points of view by increasing one’s awareness and involvement in actions of prevention and treatment of the practices that are damaging to one’s health.”<sup>17</sup> This is to be done through collaboration in the implementation of programs that would increase the quality of life through the development of a healthy lifestyle and by facilitating access to medical, social, and spiritual assistance in Romania. Besides regular medical education

15 “Lansarea Campaniei Naționale de Combatere a Violenței in Familie față de Femeie: ‘Opriti violența domestică împotriva femeilor,’” <http://www.coe.ro/stire.php?id=662> (accessed 19 November 2009).

16 Protocol de Cooperare privind Parteneriatul Asistența Medicală și Spirituală, 25 July 2008, [http://www.basilica.ro/\\_upload/doc/1216886201076490400.pdf](http://www.basilica.ro/_upload/doc/1216886201076490400.pdf) (accessed 17 October 2009).

17 Protocol de Cooperare privind Parteneriatul, 1.

and prevention, the promotion of health is to be achieved through “religious education conducive to the adoption of a healthy lifestyle,” the reduction in the consumption of health-threatening products such as tobacco, alcohol, and drugs, the general improvement of social and environmental conditions, the promotion of increased awareness about the “important role played by children in the health of the family and society,” as well as “integrated services that would assist medically, socially, and spiritually” in the case of natural and unnatural disasters.<sup>18</sup>

In 2000, while still Metropolitan of Iași, Daniel began the Proviđența Medical Center. Based in Iași, the largest town of Moldova, the ambitious project was designed as a complex combining ultramodern medical expertise with spiritual care. Specifically, the Proviđența Complex comprises the Centre for Diagnostic and Treatment Proviđența, the Centre for Medical Education and Information Proviđența, and the Peter and Paul Medical Clinic, as well as a 43-bed hospital. The Centre can host conferences, colloquia, launches of medical literature, as well as training sessions. More importantly, diagnostic and treatment is provided by the clinic and the hospital that operate on a day-treatment basis. These services are offered for free to patients who are poor or come from large families, to handicapped children, and to monks and nuns from poor monasteries, all of them financed from funds coming from the RomOC. A substantial financial donation to kickstart the project was made to the Metropolitanate by a Swiss citizen in 1998.<sup>19</sup> According to Father Dan Sandu, the current Metropolitan of Iași, Teofan, has also been enthusiastically involved in the completion of the project after Daniel became patriarch.<sup>20</sup>

Article 29 of the Romanian Constitution deals with freedom of conscience, stating that “religious denominations are autonomous in relation to the state and enjoy its support, including the facilitation of religious assistance in the army, hospitals, prisons, elderly care homes, and orphanages.”<sup>21</sup> According to Article 7 of the Law on Religion

the Romanian State recognizes the denominations’ spiritual, educational, social-charitable, cultural and social partnership role, as well as their status as factors of social peace. The Romanian State recognizes the important role of the

18 Protocol de Cooperare privind Parteneriatul, 1.

19 Proviđența Medical Centre, <http://providenta.mmb.ro> (accessed 21 December 2020).

20 Father Dan Sandu of Iași, e-mail to author, 11 November 2009.

21 *The Constitution of Romania*, 1991. It was amended in 2003, but Article 29 did not undergo any revision. See *The Constitution of Romania*, 1991, <http://www.cdep.ro/pls/dic/site.page?id=339> (accessed 20 March 2009).

Romanian Orthodox Church and that of other churches and denominations as recognized by the national history of Romania and in the life of the Romanian society.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, there is no state religion in Romania, according to Article 9 of the Law on Religion; rather, the state strives to maintain its neutrality toward religion. Article 10.7 of the same Law on Religion stipulates that “the State shall also support the activity of recognized denominations in their capacity as providers of social services.”<sup>23</sup> These important pieces of legislation have opened the way for further collaboration between the dominant Orthodox Church and the state.

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22 “Law on Religious Freedom and the General Regime of Religious Denominations,” no. 489 (28 December 2006), <http://www.cdep.ro> (accessed December 21, 2020).

23 “Law on Religious Freedom.”

# Eyes Wide Shut: Discussion about Orthodoxy and Democracy in Serbian Theology and Thought

*Branko Sekulić*

## Preconditions of the Discussion

The tradition of democracy, which implies the question of tolerance, individualism and freedom, John Binns writes, is the product of a European post-Enlightenment period and is as such not too close to the Eastern European socio-political context.<sup>1</sup> Viewed from the perspective of the two-thousand-year history of Christianity, Binns continues, the democratic traditions are experienced as relatively new civilizational achievements, and although Western Christianity has over time made them compatible with the Christian faith, Eastern Christianity, generally speaking, still retains a certain distance from them. This poses the question: Can Orthodoxy and democracy coexist at all?<sup>2</sup> The answers to this question are of course twofold: negative and affirmative.

On the one hand, following Huntington's *clash of civilizations* thesis, according to Christopher Marsh, some authors see Orthodoxy and democracy as mutually exclusive, arguing that the churches of the European East are solely dedicated to preserving national identity, making it impossible for them to participate meaningfully in building a constructive civil society and democratic worldview.<sup>3</sup> An additional argument for a negative attitude towards this issue is found in the Byzantine imperial experience – the concept of the *symphony* – which is considered constitutive for the Orthodox understanding of the relationship between church and state.<sup>4</sup> According to this understanding, Pantelis Kalaitzidis says, a monarchist worldview is considered to be in

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1 John Binns, *An Introduction to the Christian Orthodox Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 188.

2 Binns, *An Introduction*, 188.

3 Christopher Marsh, "The Ambivalent Role of Orthodoxy in the Construction of Civil Society and Democracy in Russia," in *Burden or Blessing? Russian Orthodoxy and the Construction of Civil Society and Democracy*, ed. Christopher Marsh (Boston: Institute on Culture, Religion and World Affairs, 2004), 1–2.

4 Binns, *An Introduction*, 166, 188; Aristotle Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 57–63; Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Byzantium, Orthodoxy, and Democracy," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71, no. 1 (2003): 75–98.

harmony with monotheism, while a democratic one is considered to be consistent with polytheism.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, we have a number of authors who answer the question of whether Orthodoxy and democracy can coexist in the affirmative. In this regard, Aristotle Papanikolaou rejects *the clash of civilizations* thesis and that of Byzantine imperial experience as crucial and argues that the theological foundations of Orthodoxy themselves support and develop communitarian forms of democratic social organization.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, certain authors note that, in many contemporary societies where Orthodoxy is the dominant form of the Christian faith, the stability of democracy depends precisely on the role the church plays in them.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, according to Papanikolaou, striving to achieve a communion with God directs Christians toward the establishment of a political community that, in a broader sense, affirms precisely the basic axioms of liberal democracy.<sup>8</sup>

When considering the nature of Orthodoxy and democratic potential within the framework of Serbian theology and thought, however, there are two things to discuss, the broad and the narrow contexts.

### *The Broad Context*

In the broad context, one should take into consideration the fact that Orthodox believers from Eastern European, post-communist countries become, as Papanikolaou notes, confused when faced with the possibility of their traditionalist countries becoming liberal democracies.<sup>9</sup> Namely, after the fall of communism in the early 1990s, Papanikolaou continues, the Orthodox world of the European East was completely unprepared for the turbulent political changes that followed, when the Orthodox churches, like most of society, overwhelmingly embraced democracy because they saw in it the antithesis of communism.<sup>10</sup> But churches very quickly became reserved towards what liberal

5 See Pantelis Kalaitzidis, "Church and State in the Orthodox World: From the Byzantine 'Symphonia' and Nationalized Orthodoxy, to the Need of Witnessing the Word of God in a Pluralistic Society," in *Religioni, Libertà, Potere: Atti del Convegno Internazionale Filosofico-Teologico Sulla Libertà Religiosa*, ed. Emanuela Fogliadini (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2014), 68.

6 See Papanikolaou, *Mystical*, 55–87; Papanikolaou, "Byzantium, Orthodoxy, and Democracy."

7 James H. Billington, "Orthodoxy and Democracy," *Journal of Church and State* 49, no. 1 (2007): 19–26; Papanikolaou, *Mystical*, 163–200; C. Marsh, ed., *Burden or Blessing?* (Boston: Institute on Culture, Religion and World Affairs, 2004).

8 Papanikolaou, *Mystical*, 80.

9 Papanikolaou, *Mystical*, 6–7.

10 Papanikolaou, *Mystical*, 47.

democracy brought with it: religious pluralism that allows other confessions and religions to have an equal impact on society; human rights including the right to abortion, LGBT rights and gender equality; secularization as a threat to the deep connection between a particular Orthodox church; and a particular national and cultural identity and the like.<sup>11</sup> The position of the church in Eastern Europe is of particular socio-political importance, which is particularly evident in the territory of the former Yugoslavia where, according to Ivo Žanić, politics has often been guided by priests throughout history. This was so because, apart from their intensive participation in public life, the church was sometimes the strongest substitute for the state.<sup>12</sup> This aspiration to control the public space became visible particularly after the dissolution of the SFR Yugoslavia, when, after almost half a century, the church institution became a constitutive social factor, and an inevitable element in the construction of the identity of the post-Yugoslav communities.

But this is not a kind of post-Yugoslav specificity; rather, it is part of a broader, global phenomenon that is taking place within the so-called *post-secular period*, whose main characteristic is the emergence of religious identities from the sphere of privacy and their assumption of significant roles in social and political decision making.<sup>13</sup> According to Jürgen Habermas, religion appears to be a great temptation for 21st-century society because this process of secularization brings with it a strong growth of fundamentalist communities and the political instrumentalization of violent religious potential.<sup>14</sup> Many of today's world conflicts are presented as religious ones in the media, which shifts religion from its former socio-political margins to the very centre of contemporary socio-political events.<sup>15</sup> But the importance of religion, Habermas says, is evident not only on a global scale but also on many national levels

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11 Papanikolaou, *Mystical*, 46–50.

12 Ivo Žanić, "Simbolični identitet Hrvatske u trokutu: raskrižje-predziđe-most" [Symbolic Identity of Croatia in the Triangle: Crossroad-Bulwark-Bridge], in *Historijski mitovi na Balkanu* [Historical Myths in the Balkans], ed. Husnija Kamberović (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 2003), 196.

13 For more on this, see Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007); Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2006): 1–25; cf. Branko Sekulić and Zoran Grozdanov, "Geknebelte Universalität: Die Herausforderung der Ethnoreligiosität für das Christentum im ehemaligen Jugoslawien," *Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift* 68, no. 2 (2017): 146–54.

14 See Jürgen Habermas, "Die Dialektik der Säkularisierung," *Eurozine – Gesellschaft zur Vernetzung von Kulturmedien*, 2008, <http://www.eurozine.com/die-dialektik-der-sakularisierung/> (accessed 21 September 2020).

15 Habermas, "Die Dialektik."

where it has taken on the role of interpreter in some very delicate social issues (abortion, euthanasia, assisted reproductive technology, emigrants and refugees, etc.), becoming a powerful actor in shaping public opinion and culture.<sup>16</sup> In this sense, the key question of the post-secular age is not whether religion is public or private, but rather what a particular religious institution represents within a particular socio-political context – for instance, whether it is more left-wing or more right-wing, pro-democratic or anti-democratic, whether it is more conservative or more liberal, and the like – i.e., what is its ideological agenda?

### *The Narrow Context*

Here we come to the narrow context and what is specific to the post-Yugoslav spaces, within which religious institutions – at least as far as the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina are concerned – are ideologically profiled as some of the most important bearers of ethnonational ideological agendas. Namely, by participating in the overthrow of the communist system and SFR Yugoslavia and striving for democratic changes that were primarily understood as the establishment of sovereign nation states, Željko Mardešić (aka Jakov Jukić) says, churches implemented what he calls the theology of national liberation.<sup>17</sup> What was supposed to be the democratic right of peoples to self-determination, however, turned very quickly into ethnonationalistic policies of ethnic cleansing of the former Yugoslavia. According to official statistics, about 130,000 people died and about 4 million fled or were displaced.<sup>18</sup> Due to such circumstances, the reputation of the aforementioned religious institutions was compromised because their structures, leaning towards the ethnonational policies of the people they held as their own, contributed to the increase in interethnic intolerance and the brutality of the conflict between Croats, Serbs, Bosniaks and Albanians.<sup>19</sup> These institutions understood democratic changes as strengthening their own position within the newly formed ethnonationally

16 Habermas, “Die Dialektik.”

17 See Željko Mardešić, *Rascjep u svetom* [The Rift in the Sacredness] (Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 2007), 758–9; Jakov Jukić, *Lica i maske svetoga* [Faces and Masks of the Holy] (Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 1997), 425.

18 For example, see “Map of War Victims in the Former SFRJ 1991 – 2001,” Humanitarian Law Centre, Documenta – Centre for dealing with the past Humanitarian Law Centre Prishtina, accessed 21 September 2020, <http://zrtveratovasfrj.info/site/home/en-US>; Kirsten Young, “UNHCR and ICRC in the former Yugoslavia: Bosnia-Herzegovina,” *International Review of the Red Cross* 83, no. 843 (September, 2001): 783–4.

19 See Jukić, *Lica i Maske*, 290–1; Željko Mardešić, *Svjedočanstva o mirotvorstvu* [Peacekeeping Testimonies] (Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 2002), 93.

homogeneous states, demanding a central role in them, which they largely achieved in the end,<sup>20</sup> with the result that they are now more often perceived as a political rather than a religious factor.

Therefore, what is today seen as the democratic transition of the successor states of the former Yugoslavia is primarily burdened by anti-communist rhetoric that has given a strong impetus to ethnonationalist policies in which the aforementioned religious institutions are also stuck. Thus, the institution of the Serbian Orthodox Church will primarily perceive democracy as an opportunity to *collect debts* for decades of social marginalization during the rule of the Yugoslav communists, while its Orthodox discourse will become burdened by Serbian ethnonationalist ideology that unquestionably carries the burden of crime against its neighbours – Croats, Bosniaks and Albanians. In accordance with that, the Serbian Orthodox community, due to the insufficient desire or inability of the institution of the Serbian Orthodox Church to face this type of aberration within its own ranks, became trapped between ethnototalitarian ideology and ethnoclerical aspirations. At the intersection of these two currents, the so-called phenomenon of *ethnoreligiosity* arose, which is the greatest challenge to Christianity in post-Yugoslav societies today; it is no longer possible outside of this to adequately consider and process the ideological concept on which the Catholic Church in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina is based and the institution of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

### Conditions of the Discussion

First of all, it should be noted that this is not a generalization of Serbian Orthodoxy as such, nor the Serbian Orthodox Church as such, but only a critical assessment of the institution of the Serbian Orthodox Church. By succumbing to ethnototalitarian ideology and ethnoclerical aspirations, it caused

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20 See Radovan Bigović, *The Orthodox Church in the 21st Century* (Belgrade: Foundation Konrad Adenauer-Christian Cultural Center, 2013), 41–2.; Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 216–7; Treaties between the Republic of Croatia and the Holy See include four international agreements between the Holy See and the Republic of Croatia, 1. Cooperation in areas of upbringing and culture, 24 January 1997; 2. Care of the spiritual needs of Catholic believers and members of the armed and police forces, 24 January 1997; 3. Legal matters 9 February 1997; 4. Economic matters, 4 December 1998; Cf. Branko Sekulić, *Ethnoreligiosity in the Contemporary Societies of the Former Yugoslavia: The Veils of Christian Delusion* (Lanham MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2022), 193–4.

a number of problems, both within the Serbian Orthodox community itself and in the wider socio-political context of the entire former Yugoslavia.

By succumbing to an ethnototalitarian ideology, the religious institution of the Serbian Orthodox Church turned to the doctrine that strives to create an ethnically pure, completely ideologically homogeneous and absolutely sovereign state in the entire area where one ethnic corpus is present, regardless of whether part of that corpus is spatially located within the borders of some other state.<sup>21</sup> It strives therefore for the complete homogenization of a certain community in order to create ethnic uniformity and unanimity – a social state in which individuals declare themselves members of one ethnic group and who think in exactly the same, organic, totalitarian way.<sup>22</sup> As part of this doctrine, the institution of the Serbian Orthodox Church developed certain ruling aspirations within its ranks that fall within the domain of ethnoclericalism – the concept of an ethnic (ethnonational) church whose clergy strive to be leaders of that ethnic (ethnonational) community but who refuse to take responsibility for their own political actions in the ways to which secular leaders are obliged.<sup>23</sup> This concept is viewed as a specific Balkan contribution to contemporary religious fundamentalism, which is a kind of attempt at re-establishing the pre-modern role of the religious organization that was an important factor in preserving ethnic identity in times when the church institution was the only fulcrum, along with the dynasty, of a particular social community.<sup>24</sup> The combination of these two things, as previously mentioned, gave rise to the phenomenon that we recognize as *ethnoreligiosity*. Although we will not go into detail about this phenomenon – because there is no space or need for it here, it is necessary to define it in order to at least gain general insight into the contours of ethnoreligiosity as such and thus more constructively understand the seriousness of the situation in which the Serbian Orthodox Church found itself.<sup>25</sup>

Ethnoreligiosity can be understood as a phenomenon resulting from the usurpation of the religious aspect of human life by the ethnic one and that emerges as a consequence of the secular ideological overtaking of the structures of the religious organization in order to give sacral connotation to a

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21 See Dejan Jović, *Rat i mit* [War and Myth] (Zagreb: Fraktura, 2017), 309.

22 Jović, *Rat i mit*, 298–9.

23 Perica, *Balkan*, 214–5.

24 Perica, *Balkan*, 215.

25 For more about this see Sekulić, *Ethnoreligiosity in the Contemporary Societies of the Former Yugoslavia*.

particular ethnonational myth or myths.<sup>26</sup> This is characterized by the spirit of conflict, which entails a whole spectrum of problems related to the religious organization, religious community, politics, theology, identity and social context whereby the whole dimension of interrelations between the secular and sacral aspects of human life leads to a state of intense crisis and a potential breakdown. The final manifestation of ethnoreligiosity occurs through the idea of the existence of a mortal enemy to establish the ideology of the *memory of evil* (a phenomenon generated by the manipulation of historical memory and its religious justification, a combination that is a very fortuitous tool for the achievement of certain political aims), and its associated *woundological* worldview (the psychological state of a person who builds communication with the environment based on the trauma they have experienced, with the intention to earn compassion, and thereby to have a certain situation within their own control as much as possible). This results in the formation of a sacralized political concept characterized by the distortion of basic religious attitudes towards the world and anti-rationalism as well as the state of permanent conflict.

Today, the institution of the Serbian Orthodox Church and its community are facing a serious challenge in this phenomenon that, *nolens volens*, affects the Church quite a bit, and thus the consideration of the issue of Orthodoxy and democracy in contemporary Serbian theology and thought outside of ethnoreligiosity is not possible. Therefore, in terms of gaining as concrete an understanding of the scale of this issue as possible, we will consider it on two existing levels: on the level of what the Serbian Orthodox Church says about itself in this context and on the level of what its works say about it.

### *What Does the Serbian Orthodox Church Say about Itself?*

At the level of what the Serbian Orthodox Church says about itself on the issue concerned, we will take as paradigmatic the stance of the late Serbian Orthodox theologian Radovan Bigović. According to Bigović, the attitude of the institution of the Serbian Orthodox Church can be characterized as one that balances between the two options of complete rejection of the democratic traditions and their unreserved acceptance and manifests itself through the acceptance of the democratic process under certain circumstances.<sup>27</sup> In this respect, Bigović first approaches the problems of the relationship between Orthodoxy and democracy through the lens of Serbian Orthodoxy generally,

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26 For what is discussed in this paragraph, see Sekulić, *Ethnoreligiosity in the Contemporary Societies of the Former Yugoslavia*, 1–2.

27 See Bigović, *Orthodox Church*, 47–56.

noting that Orthodoxy cannot be identified with any social system, with any form of state, be it monarchy, republic, democracy, autocracy or something similar, because Orthodoxy is exclusively a church, universal, ecumenical, all-embracing, the essence of which is not *of this world*.<sup>28</sup> But, Bigović continues, if one considers the principles on which democracy rests as an idea, it can be argued that, to the Orthodox Church, the democratic state system is far closer than any other.<sup>29</sup> “If a state should exercise the rule of law, if it is truly free and democratic, then the Church functioning in such a society would have the necessary freedom of action, i.e. the freedom to put her mission into practice.” Here, however, Bigović delves deeper into the issue of the connection between democratic principles and the Orthodox religion, arguing that despite its closeness to a democratic order, the church cannot accept the democratic utilitarian ethics and axiology prevalent in liberal democratic societies, given they encourage egoism, the will for power and many other anomalies that are incompatible with the Orthodox worldview. Accordingly, he insists on the distinction between a liberal democratic ideology, which, according to him, is based on the inviolability of the ideology of human rights and a liberal democratic state as neutral and as such allows the existence of different beliefs and worldviews, without interfering with the individual’s freedom of choice.

On this point, Bigović is moving from a general account of the problems of the relationship between Orthodoxy and democracy to their relationship in the Serbian Orthodox context, which is characterized by both openness and disappointment.

### *The Openness of the Serbian Orthodox Church to Democratic Change*

In favour of openness, Bigović notes that immediately at the beginning of the fall of the Communist Party and the establishment of the multiparty system in Serbia, the Holy Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church welcomed the overall democratization of society with its decisions and messages and blessed the opportunity to make political and social choices.<sup>30</sup> After the one-party Yugoslav system had forbidden this, the Serbian Orthodox Church considered the time of freedom to have returned to Serbia, with the right of each individual to express their opinion without fear, and in the parliamentary elections, in their own opinion, to choose the political option they considered

28 Bigović, *Orthodox Church*, 60, 108–9.

29 For what is discussed in this paragraph and the quote, see Bigović, *Orthodox Church*, 60.

30 Bigović, *Orthodox Church*, 49–50.

to primarily contribute to Serbia's socio-political prosperity.<sup>31</sup> Political and party pluralism has been characterized as a welcome and necessary change, one that must persist and be empowered. But two remarks have been added to clarify their message: the first remark was directed to Orthodox believers to remain united in spirit without paying attention to the differences in political views, while another remark emphasized that the church institution should remain neutral in the democratic processes in Serbia. Because the Serbian Orthodox Church is a patriotic rather than a partisan institution, its clergy is thereby forbidden from being actively involved in any kind of political engagement.<sup>32</sup> "These public statements of the Holy Synod of Bishops," Bigović notes, "may lead to an unequivocal conclusion that the Serbian Church supports democratization of the society, political and political party pluralism, that it remains neutral in relation to political parties, and that her clergy cannot be 'professional politicians.'" The Serbian Orthodox Church, Bigović emphasizes, pointed out that as a patriotic institution it cannot be limited by socio-political criteria and that its role is above the daily political events embodied in overall concern for the Serbian people as such. Accordingly, the church press of the late 1980s and early 1990s reported on supporting the activities of the Serbian leadership and the crucial role of the church in the life and development of Serbian society, noting that there could be no strong state without a strong church.<sup>33</sup>

Upon Milošević coming into power, the Serbian Orthodox Church expected that, after a decade of marginalization, the democratic transition would return it to the role that it claims belongs to it historically, namely, a central place in the public life of the Serbian society, an official presence in schools, hospitals, military, media, and the like.<sup>34</sup> During the mandate of Slobodan Milošević, however, this did not happen, and, moreover, it enflamed the relationship between the church and state powers. According to Bigović, this was a consequence of disguised communist figures at the top of Serbian politics who turned democratic processes solely to their own advantage.<sup>35</sup>

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31 Bigović, *Orthodox Church*, 49–50.

32 For what is discussed in this paragraph and the quote, see Bigović, *Orthodox Church*, 49–50.

33 See Srđan Barišić, "Serbian Orthodox Church and Yugoslavia," *YU Historija*, 2017, [http://www.yuhistorija.com/culture\\_religion\\_txt01c2.html](http://www.yuhistorija.com/culture_religion_txt01c2.html), accessed 24 December 2019.

34 See Bigović, *Orthodox Church*, 49.

35 Bigović, *Orthodox Church*, 47.

### *Disappointment of the Serbian Orthodox Church with Democratic Changes*

Thus, after the openness of the Serbian Orthodox Church to democratic changes, we come to its disappointment with them, which, apart from events on the national plane, manifested itself through events on the international plane. More specifically, according to Bigović, this disappointment was demonstrated through the undemocratic and inhumane policies of a democratic Western, Euro-American world against the Serbian people and the Serbian state. This disappointment was fed by two things: the portrayal of the Serb people by the Western media in a bad light during the Serbian aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Kosovo during the 1990s, and NATO's 10-week bombing of the Serbian state territory (24 March to 1 June 1999) as the closing act of the Kosovo War (1998–1999).<sup>36</sup> Due to such circumstances, Bigović said, this led on the one hand to the resistance by some church structures to the democratically elected government of Slobodan Milošević and on the other to reservations about democratic changes of the Western, liberal type in general. According to Bigović, this can best be seen from an analysis of the church press, the opinions of certain Serbian Orthodox intellectuals, and texts published by certain theologians and members of the Holy Synod in those years, all of which clearly indicate a radical difference between their own views and the official position of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Some went so far as to openly adhere to ethnonationalist ideology, participating in the implementation of what Tonči Kuzmanić called a radical evil – a policy of ethnic cleansing and genocide aimed not at the establishment of a state but of the people (*Volk*) as an attempt to define the masses in strictly ethnic terms.<sup>37</sup>

### *What Do the Works of the Serbian Orthodox Church Say about It?*

After looking at what the Serbian Orthodox Church says about itself on the issue of Orthodoxy and democracy, we will now look at what its works say about it. On this occasion, Ivan Čolović's thesis about the spiritual space of the nation will be taken into account.<sup>38</sup> This thesis shows how the Serbian Orthodox Church, as an institution, regardless of what it said about itself, realized its democratic potential and manifested its Orthodox nature, both during the last war in Yugoslavia and in the post-Yugoslav period.

36 For what is stated in this paragraph, see Bigović, *Orthodox Church*, 47–50.

37 See Tonči Kuzmanić, "Raspad SFR Jugoslavije i nasljedstvo: Narodnjaštvo, a ne nacionalizam" [Disintegration of the SFR Yugoslavia and Its Legacy: Populism, Not Nationalism], in *Nasilno rasturanje Jugoslavije* [The Violent Disintegration of Yugoslavia], ed. Miroslav Hadžić (Beograd: Centar za civilno-vojne odnose, 2004), 85.

38 See Ivan Čolović, *The Balkans: The Terror of Culture* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2011), 59–66.

In this regard, by explaining the idea of *the spiritual space of the nation*, Čolović stated that it is a space that remained outside the ethnic boundaries of a particular ethnonational corpus after the war in the former Yugoslavia (1991–1995) – a war aimed at dividing territories according to ethnicity.<sup>39</sup> In the case of Serbian Orthodoxy, these would be all those parts of the former Yugoslavia where the Serbian population lives or has lived and which do not formally belong to the Serbian state. Consequently, the spatial unity of an ethnonational collective occurs on *the plane of symbolic topography*, that is, as an integral part of the ethnonationalistic imaginaria. In this regard, Čolović divides *the spiritual space of the nation* from the Serbian perspective into four aspects. Two of these aspects can be taken as having consequences primarily for the democratic potential of the Serbian Orthodox Church and Serbian Orthodoxy, and two for the very nature of Orthodoxy.

### *The Nature of the Democratic Potential of the Serbian Orthodox Church*

The first two aspects that we will address are those related to the manifestation of democratic potential. One aspect that designates *the spiritual space of the nation* as one that encompasses all members of a certain people (*Volk*), regardless of where they live in the former Yugoslavia, and an aspect that includes as *the spiritual space of the nation* all territories that contain remnants of national history and culture of that people (*Volk*), such as the remains of medieval cities, monasteries, battlefields, places of mass graves, tombs, ossuaries, and the like.<sup>40</sup> Thanks to this, Čolović says, a certain territory and a certain population is considered part of *the spiritual space of the nation*, regardless of the fact that they are not part of it in an actual sense.<sup>41</sup> In the case of the Serbian Orthodox Church, a good example is the period from June 1988 to August 1989, when the relics of Prince Lazar were carried through parts of SFR Yugoslavia with the intention of integrating the Serbian Orthodox population into the Yugoslav Federation.<sup>42</sup> The event of May 1991 has the same significance: the relics of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović were transported from the Monastery of Saint Sava in Libertyville (USA), where he was buried, to Lelić Monastery near Valjevo (Serbia), which was his endowment. It was the final act of the termination of the great schism within the Serbian Orthodox Church, which had begun in

39 For what is stated in this paragraph, see Čolović, *The Balkans*, 59.

40 Čolović, *The Balkans*, 60–1.

41 See Čolović, *The Balkans*, 60.

42 Čolović, *Smrt na Kosovu polju* [Death on Kosovo Plain] (Beograd: Biblioteka XX. vek, 2016), 384; Perica, *Balkan*, 128; cf. Sekulić, *Ethnoreligiosity in the Contemporary Societies of the Former Yugoslavia*, 151.

1963 when the community in the American diaspora separated from its Serbian mother church. But it was also the act of integrating the Serbian Orthodox diaspora with its mother country.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, these two events can be taken as examples par excellence of determining the boundaries of the Serbian *spiritual national space*, as to whether a potential (desired) integration of the population or of the territory into the Serbian state was needed. Whether it was the intention of the institution of the Serbian Orthodox Church or not, the ensuing war in Yugoslavia led to the conclusion that the events with the carrying of the relics of Lazar and the return of Velimirović heralded the policy of ethnic cleansing and of the violent attempt to seize territories that the Serbian ethnonationalistic agenda considered their own. The peak of the event of the transfer of Prince Lazar's relics through the territory of the Yugoslav Federation was the 600th celebration of Vidovdan at Gazimestan on 28 June 1989, during which Milošević was presented by the Serbian Orthodox Church leaders as a long-awaited statesman, a new Lazar who would return dignity to Serbs and Serbia.<sup>44</sup> By dignity, the Serbian Orthodox Church meant their dissatisfaction with the treatment that, according to them, Serbia had endured within SFR Yugoslavia, arguing that it was doubly disadvantaged: with respect to status because of its enormous victimhood in WWI was not valued and appreciated enough, and with respect to space because the delineation of state borders by the communists in the Yugoslav Federation left many Serbs outside the Serbian state.<sup>45</sup>

With Milošević, however, they did not experience the return of dignity to Serbia, in the way they thought that it should be returned. According to Čolović, this love lasted for a short time because Milošević very quickly removed the church and other creators of ethnonational discourse – the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Association of Writers of Serbia, intellectuals at the University of Belgrade and the like – from its governing system, and he did that in such a manner that he kept the ideology and got rid of the

43 See Vjekoslav Perica, "Nacije i dijaspore: mit o sakralnom centru i vječnom povratku" [Nation and Diaspora: The Myth of the Sacred Centre and the Eternal Return], in *Mitovi nacionalizma i demokratija* [Myths of Nationalism and Democracy], ed. Darko Gavrilović, Ljubiša Despotović, Vjekoslav Perica and Srđan Šljukić (Novi Sad: Centar za istoriju, demokratiju i pomirenje, 2009), 95–6.

44 See Čolović, *Smrt na Kosovu*, 384–5.; Perica, *Balkan*, 143–4; cf. Sekulić, *Ethnoreligiosity in the Contemporary Societies of the Former Yugoslavia*, 151–52.

45 See Jozo Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 741–3; Radmila Radić, "Srpska pravoslavna crkva tokom 90-ih [Serbian Orthodox Church in the 1990s]," *Poznańskie Studia Slawistyczne*, no. 10 (2016): 260; cf. Sekulić, *Ethnoreligiosity in the Contemporary Societies of the Former Yugoslavia*, 129.

ideologists.<sup>46</sup> This led to an increasingly expressive and clear dissociation of the Serbian Orthodox Church as an institution from the official Serbian state policy, condemning its holders, claiming that they were imprisoned in the ideology of a failed communist system, disrupting the equal democratic dialogue in society, and thus not allowing the church to take a place that, according to church leaders, belongs to it historically.<sup>47</sup> This resulted in part of the Serbian Orthodox Church turning to Bosnian Serbs and the creators of the Republika Srpska (convicted war criminal Radovan Karadžić and convicted war criminal Ratko Mladić), where the church institution was given a much more important place in the creation of socio-political life.<sup>48</sup> In addition, there was a certain bitterness about Milošević's policies, which, according to some bishops, did not sufficiently support the political efforts of the Bosnian Serbs.<sup>49</sup> Their intention to govern the socio-political reality is best seen in the conclusion of the Holy Synod of Bishops that there is no valid political agreement that can be made on behalf of the Serbian people without the prior consent and blessing of the Orthodox Serbian Church (1991). It can also be seen in the statement that the Serbian people have the right to reject illegal borders that the Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia made in 1943 (1992), and in the rejection of the Vance-Owen Peace Plan as a proposal to end the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1993).<sup>50</sup> If we translate this into the language of democracy, we could say that the welcoming of the democratization of Serbian society and the blessing of freedom of choice in political and social commitments expressed by the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the early 1990s was addressed exclusively to Serbian Orthodox. It was directed especially at those who do not live in the territory of Serbia but

46 Čolović, *Smrt na Kosovu*, 385, 389; cf. Sekulić, *Ethnoreligiosity in the Contemporary Societies of the Former Yugoslavia*, 152–3.

47 See Barišić, "Serbian Orthodox Church"; Radić, "Srpska pravoslavna crkva," 262.

48 See what Dragan Bursać has said on this according to Čolović, *Smrt na Kosovu*, 386; Radić, "Srpska pravoslavna crkva," 261–2; Perica, *Balkan*, 142; Srđan Vrcan, *Nacija, nacionalizam, moderna država* [Nation, Nationalism and Modern State] (Zagreb: Golden Marketing-Tehnička knjiga, 2006), 204; Medina Šehić and Suzana Šaćić, *Balkan bluz* [Balkan Blues] (Sarajevo: Vlastita naklada, 2007), 99–103.

49 See Barišić, "Serbian Orthodox Church"; Radmila Radić, *Država i verske zajednice: 1945–1970*. [The State and Religious Communities 1945–1970] (Belgrade: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2002), 331.

50 Barišić, "Serbian Orthodox Church"; Radić, "Srpska pravoslavna crkva," 261; Šehić and Šaćić, *Balkan bluz*, 99–103.; Ilija T. Radaković, "Vjerska buđenja ili vjerski ratovi," [Religious awakenings or religious wars] chap. V in *Besmisljena YU-ratovanja 1991–1995* [Meaningless YU warfare 1991–1995] (Belgrade: Društvo za istinu o antifašističkoj narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi u Jugoslaviji 1941–1945, 2003), <http://www.znaci.net/00001/23.htm> (accessed 27 December 2019).

in other successor states of SFR Yugoslavia, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, to stimulate them to secede from their home countries in order to join Serbia. In support of this thesis, we can use the fact that, during the 1980s and the 1990s, some Serbian Orthodox bishops openly called for the division of Yugoslavia between Serbs and Croats.<sup>51</sup>

### *The Nature of the Orthodoxy of the Serbian Orthodox Church*

This brings us to the remaining two aspects of Čolović's thesis on *the spiritual space of nation*, which we can relate to the description of the nature of the orthodoxy of the Serbian Orthodox Church: an aspect that signifies *the spiritual space of the nation* as one made up of the earthly and heavenly realms, and the aspect which, under *the spiritual space of the nation*, considers its already held part – that which is within the physical boundaries of a particular *spiritual space of the nation* – and its latent part – what will be obtained when nationally unconscious members of the community become aware and *receive communion*.<sup>52</sup>

When Serbia lost the war in 1995 and began withdrawing to borders drawn by the Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia in 1943, the Serbian Orthodox Church saw this as a consequence of both Milošević's betrayal of the Serbian Orthodox and pressure from the international community and the West, which was never favourable toward the Serbs. The Holy Synod of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church considered the defeat of Serbia in the war a violent act against the Serbian Orthodox people's freedom of choice. According to them, these Orthodox Serbs pleaded to live in united Serbian countries, which, aside from Serbia and Montenegro, include eastern Herzegovina, part of Bosnia, part of Croatia and Kosovo.<sup>53</sup> In doing so, through its own interpretation of democracy the Serbian Orthodox Church also expressed the nature of its own Orthodoxy, which is unquestionably bounded by the agenda of ethnonationalistic content. Its rhetoric, which belongs to the two aforementioned aspects of the nature of Orthodoxy of the Serbian Orthodox Church only further confirms this. The story of the Serbian kingdom of heaven is primarily intended to highlight the difference between Serbian heroes who, like Prince Lazar and his soldiers in the battle of Kosovo in 1389, laid down their lives for the eternal glory of the Serbian people on the one hand and traitors who turned away from the Serbian people when they were

51 Perica, *Balkan*, 158–61.

52 Čolović, *The Balkans*, 60–2.

53 See Barišić, "Serbian Orthodox Church"; Radić, "Srpska pravoslavna crkva," 261–3; Radaković, "Vjerska buđenja ili vjerski ratovi."

most needed on the other.<sup>54</sup> Accordingly, the heavens will reward those who – between the earthly and the heavenly realms – have chosen the latter, opening thereby the doors of *Heavenly Serbia* to themselves.<sup>55</sup> *Heavenly Serbia* presents a kind of idealized image of the Serbs as the most spiritual and humane people on the planet. After going through the passage of historical events, they finally find peace in reconciliation with God in that *Heavenly Serbia*.<sup>56</sup> It is also worth noting that the story of *Heavenly Serbia* serves as a narrative of comfort for the Serbian people for their political and military failures. The story of the latent *spiritual space of the nation*, however, is primarily aimed at pointing out unbelievers, apostates from the Serbian ethnic corpus who refuse to accept that the essence of their existence is found in Serbianism and Orthodoxy as a homogeneous and indivisible unity.<sup>57</sup> These *anational* people, in that part of the Serbian Orthodox Church, are perceived as a field of mission, as objects of evangelization, though here the evangelization is not done in accordance with the New Testament but according to ethnonationalistic principles.

### Consequences

According to Radmila Radić, the Serbian Orthodox Church considers itself to be a major element of authentic national identity, and its role is patriotic.<sup>58</sup> On the one hand, this means that the impulse for a defense of the Serbian ethnonational identity lies in its very nature because the church believes that this identity cannot survive nor can it develop if it is internally divided or separated from its Orthodox roots. On the other hand, nationalism for the Serbian Orthodox Church represents the possibility of preserving its dominant position as a religious institution in Serbian society, which the process of democratization and religious pluralism that democratization bears with itself puts into question. These two things, Radić says, were the reason for the convergence between the Serbian national elites and the church leadership at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. The Church supported the national project, considering it an integral part of its existence and necessary to preserve its position as a key religious factor while ruling structures needed

54 Čolović, *The Balkans*, 60.

55 Čolović, *The Balkans*, 60; Čolović, *Smrt na Kosovu*, 42, 49–50.

56 See Nikolaj Velimirović, *Sabrana dela V* [Collected works, vol. V] (Šabac: Manastir Sv. Nikolaja, 2016), 678–9; cf. Sekulić, *Ethnoreligiosity in the Contemporary Societies of the Former Yugoslavia*, 107.

57 Čolović, *The Balkans*, 61.

58 For the comments in this paragraph, see Radić, “Srpska pravoslavna crkva,” 260.

the church as a powerful source of their own legitimacy. "Religion was seen as a fresh spiritual and emotional compensation for the breakdown of the social and value systems," Radić claims, "as well as a repository of cultural arguments, collective memory and symbolic power needed to build new national, group and individual identities." The rapprochement between church and state was seen as a return to the tradition of the symphony and an overture to the universal clericalization of society. What happened in Serbian Orthodoxy during the 1990s, however, was the emergence of extremely close ties between Serbian ethnonationalist representatives and the top of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

This led to the rapprochement of ethnototalitarian ideology and ethnoclerical aspirations, the hybridization of which gives birth to the phenomenon of ethnoreligiosity.<sup>59</sup> Ethnototalitarianism is an ideology and doctrine, says Dejan Jović, which aims to create an ethnically pure and absolutely sovereign state, treating the ethnic community as a homogeneous community, implying it as a single political entity regardless of any state borders that may divide it.<sup>60</sup> According to Vjekoslav Perica, ethnoclericalism is a Balkan contribution to contemporary religious fundamentalism, based on the idea of a nation constructed on an ethnic aspect, and of the concept of a church whose clergy constitute one group of leaders of that ethnonational community.<sup>61</sup>

Also, ethnoreligiosity should not be confused with ethnophyletism because although they share some similarities, they are two different phenomena. Ethnophyletism puts the idea of people (*Volk*) or nation above the idea of faith, thereby harnessing the church in the service of that people (*Volk*) or nation, while the ethnoreligiosity does this in a far more political way, not only by putting the idea of people (*Volk*) or nation over the idea of faith but by emphasizing the specific ethnonationalistic thought as the basis of a religious concept that the church needs to follow.<sup>62</sup> More specifically, in this case it is not about putting the idea of Serbianism ahead of the idea of Orthodoxy but about viewing the Chetnik ethnototalitarian pattern as a prefix to Orthodox religious discourse. Namely, for ethnoreligiosity, it is not enough to be a member of a certain people but one must be that people in an ideologically right, ethnototalitarian way.<sup>63</sup> Ultimately, religion is shaped in this way through a sacralized

59 Cf. Sekulić, *Ethnoreligiosity in the Contemporary Societies of the Former Yugoslavia*, 189–190.

60 See Kuzmanić, "Raspad SFR Jugoslavije i nasljedstvo," 283–323.

61 See Perica, *Balkan*, 215.

62 Sekulić, *Ethnoreligiosity in the Contemporary Societies of the Former Yugoslavia*, 1–2, 229–230.

63 Sekulić, *Ethnoreligiosity in the Contemporary Societies of the Former Yugoslavia*, 277–278.

ethnototalitarian concept that separates people in two ways: through the ethnonationalistic key of *traitors* and *Orthodox* and through the religious key of the *faithful* and *apostates*.<sup>64</sup> Combining these two criteria yields *the spiritual space of the nation par excellence*, whose logic, according to Čolović, requires the *erasure* of others within the national space, whether this *erasure* is done through absolute homogenization within their own ethnic ranks or through the complete destruction of the historical and cultural heritage of other ethnic groups.<sup>65</sup> Through the policies of ethnic cleansing, this led to the creation of what Viktor Ivančić calls a culture of killing within which the destruction of others became a central creative act because liquidation shows itself as the only creation.<sup>66</sup> Consequently, this led to the glorification of one's own crimes and the contempt for the victims of others, the logical consequence of which is the emergence of historical revisionism and self-victimology. Because it enables the forgery of facts, revisionism eliminates the desire, courage and humanity to deal with their own crimes and all responsibility for them. Self-victimology serves to justify crimes by one's own ethnic group with the crimes of another ethnic group against the members of one's own people, the side effect of which is the development of the ideology of the *memory of evil*.

In all this, the Church plays a major role in the territory of the former Yugoslavia because, according to Mardešić, the political elites in Yugoslavia could never cause conflicts of such a bloody nature and on such a scale without the religious aspect.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, taking this into account, I would twist Bigović's aforementioned thesis about certain members of church structures and theologians who have strayed from the official stance of the institution of the Serbian Orthodox Church on the topic of Orthodoxy and democracy and say that the aberration from the nature of Orthodoxy and the denial of democratic achievements was more a rule and not an exception in the attitude of the Serbian Orthodox Church. That has been demonstrated for decades by the behaviour of part of its clergy who politicize the Gospel on ethnonationalist grounds without considering larger or even any sanctions at all by Church authorities. Accordingly, we can see how this church understands democracy in an ethnototalitarian sense, while Orthodoxy within that ethnototalitarian agenda is experienced almost exclusively through the pattern of the ethnoclerical concept. This is followed by the idea that the Serbian state coincides

64 Sekulić, *Ethnoreligiosity in the Contemporary Societies of the Former Yugoslavia*, 288.

65 See Čolović, *The Balkans*, 61–5.

66 See Viktor Ivančić, Hrvoje Polan and Nemanja Stjepanović, *Killing Culture* (Belgrade: Forum Ziviler Friedensdienst, 2019), 19.

67 See Jukić, *Lica i maske*, 291; Mardešić, *Svjedočanstva*, 93.

ideally with the borders of Serbian Orthodoxy, notwithstanding all the perniciousness caused by such ideological aspirations. As a consequence, we can conclude that Orthodoxy and democracy in contemporary Serbian theology and thought are, in essence, unquestionably burdened with ethno-religiosity, which is an issue to which the Serbian Orthodox Church must urgently find an answer, if it is to be prevented from collapsing entirely under it in the future.

# Orthodox Theology Challenged by Balkan and East European Ethnotheologies

*Pantelis Kalaitzidis*

## Introduction

Ethnotheology or “national Orthodoxy,” i.e., the understanding and definition of the church in ethnic and national terms, is a centuries-old problem of the Orthodox Church, the main and most serious challenge the latter has faced since the fall of Byzantium in 1453. It is a challenge that annihilates its eucharistic and ecclesiological self-awareness, as well as its unity and mission in the world, as became evident just before the convening of the Holy and Great Council of Crete in 2016 and more recently on the occasion of the Ukrainian autocephaly granted by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople with the “Tomos” of 5 January 2019.

Previous to these recent developments, the Pan-Orthodox Council of Constantinople (with the exception of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Patriarchate of Moscow), clearly condemned ethnophyletism in 1872 by characterizing it as “heresy” and a distortion of the authentic Christian faith and the Orthodox tradition. The reason for this conciliar condemnation was the establishment, based on ethnicity, of a separate Bulgarian

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\* Sincere thanks are due to Prof. Dr. Hans-Peter Grosshans, Director of the Institute for Ecumenical Theology and Professor at the Faculty of Protestant Theology, Münster University, Germany, for the hospitality he provided at the Institute and its library, which enabled me to finalize this paper. I would also like to warmly thank my colleagues at the Volos Academy Dr. Nikolaos Kouremenos, Dr. Ioannis Kaminis, and Mrs. Anna-Theodora Valsamou, MTh, for their insightful comments, remarks and suggestions in a previous version of this paper. I am also grateful to Dr. Nikolaos Asproulis, Deputy Director of the Volos Academy for Theological Studies, and Lecturer at the Hellenic Open University, for his gracious editing of the English of my text. I am happy to extend my thanks to Rev. Philoktimon Stamopoulos-Samaras, BA, and Mrs. Valila Giannoutaki, MTh, MA, Staff members of the Volos Academy, for facilitating my access to library material.

The present paper benefits from my previous publications, “Church and Nation in Eschatological Perspective,” *The Wheel*, issue 17–18 (2019), 52–61; “La relation de l’Église à la culture et la dialectique de l’eschatologie et de l’histoire,” *Istina* 55 (2010), 7–25; “Orthodoxy and Hellenism in Contemporary Greece,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 54, nos 3–4 (2010), 365–420; and *Ἑλληνικότητα καὶ Ἀντιδυτικισμὸς στὴ “Θεολογία τοῦ ’60”* [Greekness and Anti-Westernism in the “Theology of 1960s”], PhD Dissertation (Thessaloniki: Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, School of Theology, 2008).

Exarchate within the canonical territory of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and therefore the theological justification of a tendency inherent in Eastern Orthodoxy. But while the conciliar condemnation was supposed to stop or at least delay the expansion of ethnophyletism among the Orthodox, it was exactly the opposite that happened: i.e., the emergence and multiplication of national autocephalous churches, with the initiative and the support of the respective newly created nation states and this time with the forced approval and official recognition of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. After the proclamation of the autocephaly of the Church of Greece in 1833, recognized by Constantinople in 1850, the Orthodox Church of Serbia obtained its autocephaly in 1879, the Orthodox Church of Romania in 1885, the Orthodox Church of Albania in 1937, while the Orthodox Church of Bulgaria asked for forgiveness and obtained its recognition by Constantinople as an autocephalous church in 1946. The last to obtain autocephalous status from the Ecumenical Patriarchate was the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (January 2019). The emergence of the Orthodox diaspora in the Western Europe and the Americas, as a result of the dramatic events and political changes at the beginning of the 20th century, and the creation of the multiple nationally based jurisdictions, confirmed the national fragmentation and balkanization of Orthodoxy, creating a situation that annuls the principles of Orthodox ecclesiology, and the unity of the church.

In this paper, I will not enter into the historical details of this complex historical and ecclesiological problem. Rather, I will attempt to explore what lies under the surface and to offer a reflection on and theological critique of the strong ties between ethnicity and religion, nation state and Orthodoxy, or even Orthodoxy and ethnocultural identity. I will examine “ties and shackles”<sup>1</sup> that characterize the Orthodox world as a whole, with the possible exception of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople<sup>2</sup>, and the Greek Orthodox

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1 Cf. the special issue of the leading Greek theological journal *Synaxi* with the same title: “Church and Nation: Ties and Shackles” issue 79 (2001), and with papers by Father Antonios Pinakoulas, Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Vasilis Filias, Father Vasileios Thermos, Athanasios N. Papatthanasiou, Dimitris Arkadas, and a round table discussion that includes Christos Yannaras, Stavros Zoumboulakis, Paschalis Kitromilides, Nikos Kokosalakis, Antonis Manitakis, and Panos Nikolopoulos.

2 Cf. Paschalis M. Kitromilides, “The End of Empire: Greece’s Asia Minor Catastrophe and the Ecumenical Patriarchate,” *Δελτίο Κέντρου Μικρασιατικών Σπουδών* [Bulletin of the Centre for Asia Minor Studies] 17 (2011), 29–42: “From the point of view of the substantive history of the Christian Church, the most significant development in the life of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the period following the Asia Minor Catastrophe and the expulsion of the largest number of its Orthodox flock from Turkey was the development of a model of a non-national Church in its jurisdiction: the communities dependent on it in Turkey and the diaspora were held

Patriarchate of Antioch in Syria and Lebanon<sup>3</sup>, with all this confirming the existence of ethnotheology and an ethnocentric understanding of the ecclesial event.

### From Eschatology to Ethnotheology

Any discussion on eschatology points directly to the question of the identity and the nature of the Church – what is the church first and foremost. Moreover, it introduces the element of expectation, along with a future-oriented perspective<sup>4</sup> and the rejuvenating breeze of the Spirit that are of decisive importance for the life and theology of the church, even though they are missing today. “Without eschatology,” the late Father John Meyendorff argues, “traditionalism

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together by a common faith and by the shared consciousness of belonging to the Orthodox tradition, not by national loyalties, as it has been as a rule the case in the national Orthodox Churches, whose attitudes and behaviour have contributed to the unfortunate and spiritually indefensible identification of Orthodoxy with nationalism.” Cf. also Metropolitan Ioannis of Pergamon (John D. Zizioulas), “The Ecumenical Patriarchate and its Relations with the other Orthodox Churches,” in P. Kitromilides and T. Veremis (eds.), *The Orthodox Church in a Changing World* (Athens: Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy and Centre for Asia Minor Studies, 1998), 155–64, here 157, 160: “In the nationalistic fever of that time all the Balkan states started doing the same, and in this way autocephaly and autonomy became matters of national identity. Nationalism became an almost integral part of Orthodoxy and the consequences of that are still with us and are felt particularly in our time. [...] The way the Ecumenical Patriarchate tried to avoid being absorbed by the spirit of nationalism was by dissociating itself from the aims of the Greek nationalism of that time.” Under the present circumstances, the role of the Ecumenical Patriarchate is really unique and, indeed, vital for Orthodox unity, the connection between the local and the universal church, and with regard to the perspective of a postnational Orthodoxy, provided, of course, that the actions and words of its representatives – particularly in the “diaspora” – give priority to the universal rather than the Greek, and that secular national or racial Hellenism will recede in favor of Christian Hellenism, the Hellenism of the Gospel, the Councils, the Fathers, and worship.

3 Cf. Assaad Elias Kattan, “Beyond Nationalism? The Case of the Orthodox Church of Antioch,” *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 57, nos 3–4 (2013), 353–60. If religious nationalism did not find fertile ground to develop in the Church of Antioch, communitarianism remains one of the major problems of the Christian communities in that region.

4 A major reference for the discussion on the normativity of the future and the eschatological hermeneutics remains the work by Reimund Bieringer and Mary Elsbernd (eds.), *Normativity of the Future: Reading Biblical and Other Authoritative Texts in an Eschatological Perspective* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010). Especially for the Orthodox, cf. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, “Eschatology and Future-oriented Hermeneutics in Contemporary Orthodox Theology: The Case of Metropolitan John D. Zizioulas,” in Reimund Bieringer, Peter De Mey, Ma. Marilou S. Ibita, and Didier Polleffeyt (eds.), *The Spirit, Hermeneutics, and Dialogues* (Leuven: Peeters, 2019), 155–180.

is turned only to the past: it is nothing but archaeology, antiquarianism, conservatism, reaction, refusal of history, escapism. Authentic Christian traditionalism remembers and maintains the past not because it is past, but because it is the only way to meet the future, to become ready for it.<sup>5</sup> The movement to “return to Orthodox tradition,” however – in the way it has prevailed and been understood – has warped Tradition into traditionalism and has turned the quest to “return to the Fathers” into an objectification and fossilization of the Fathers.<sup>6</sup> It was a certain theology, however, that turned Tradition into traditionalism and taught us to associate the identity of the church with the past and the struggles of the nation. It passed onto us an Orthodoxy that is permanently out of step with its time and with history. Lacking a productive, creative relationship with the past and the present of history, tradition has become identified with conservatism. Thus steeped in a yearning for Byzantium (for the Greeks, or – for other Orthodox peoples – for any other empire, monarchy, or “Christian” nation state), we are trapped inside a view of the church as a guardian and guarantor of national continuity and cultural identity, being often unable to articulate any serious theological reflection with regard to the issue of church and nation as well as a theological critique or deconstruction of the “sacred” national narrative or story.

As the late African-American Orthodox intellectual Albert J. Raboteau, Professor of American Religious History at Princeton University, has rightly observed in commenting on the dialectical tension of the biblical “in the world but not of the world”:

In the world, but not of the world. These words capture the antinomical relationship of the Church to human society and culture. On the one hand, the incarnational character of the Church establishes her in history, in this particular time and place and culture [in every nation I would add from my side, with regard to the topic of the present paper]. On the other, the sacramental character of the Church transcends time and space [and nation, I would add], making present another world, the kingdom of God, which is both here and now and yet still to come. Throughout the history of Christianity, the temptation to relax this antinomy has led Christians to represent the Church as an ethereal transcendent mystery unrelated and antithetical to human society and culture. Or, alternatively, it has prompted Christians to so identify the Church with a particular society, culture, or ethnicity as to turn Christianity into a religious ideology.<sup>7</sup>

5 John Meyendorff, “Does Christian Tradition Have a Future?” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 26 (1982), 141.

6 See on this issue Pantelis Kalaitzidis, “From the ‘Return to the Fathers’ to the Need for a Modern Orthodox Theology,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 54, nos 3–4 (2010), 5–36.

7 Albert J. Raboteau, “American Salvation: The Place of Christianity in Public Life,” *Boston Review* (April/May 2005). See also idem, “In the World, Not of the World, For the Sake of the

According to the above quotation (which is reminiscent of the *Epistle to Diognetus*<sup>8</sup> and of what I have elsewhere characterized as a “unique eschatological anarchism”<sup>9</sup>), and also the most authoritative voices of modern Orthodox theology,<sup>10</sup> the church is not an atemporal and ahistorical reality but the icon – in time – of the community of the eschaton, the revelation of the truth of the Triune God inside history, the continual experience of the mystery of the Incarnation and the Divine Economy, the call to participation in the divine life. Theology is not coextensive with history and cannot be identified with history, but neither can it function in a vacuum, outside of history, nor, more importantly, can it keep ignoring the teachings of history. Without this process of an unconfused osmosis and assumption of the world and of history, without this gesture of dialogue, of moving toward the world and “witnessing” to it, neither the church nor theology can exist, nor can God’s revelation, since the church does not exist for itself but for the world and for the sake of the world: “for the life of the world” (cf. Jn 6:51).

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World: Orthodoxy and American Culture,” *Orthodoxy in America Lecture Series* (4 April 2006), Fordham University, available online at: <https://www.fordham.edu/download/downloads/id/15011/Raboteau2006.pdf> (accessed 25 March 2022).

- 8 Cf. *The Epistle to Diognetus*, especially ch. 5:1–10, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. J. B. Lightfoot, J. R. Harmer, and M. W. Holmes (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1992), 541.
- 9 Pantelis Kalaitzidis, “Church and Nation in Eschatological Perspective,” 53–5. By “a unique eschatological anarchism,” I meant an eschatologically inspired estrangement from every kind of natural bond (such as language, customs, culture, marriage, family, homeland, ethnicity, and law), and which in my opinion explains why Christian writers did not deal with questions of ethnicity and race until relatively recently.
- 10 Cf. the works of Father Georges Florovsky, Father Alexander Schmemmann, Father John Meyendorff, Olivier Clément, Savas Agourides, Nikos Nissiotis, Metropolitan John D. Zizioulas. Cf. also the review papers by Marios Begzos, “L’eschatologie dans l’orthodoxie du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle,” in Jean-Louis Leuba (ed.), *Temps et Eschatologie: Données bibliques et problématiques contemporaines*, Académie Internationale des Sciences Religieuses (Paris: Cerf, 1994), 311–28; Georgios Vlantis, “In Erwartung des künftigen Äons: Aspekte orthodoxer Eschatologie,” *Ökumenische Rundschau* 56 (2007), 170–82. The debt of Orthodox theology to German Protestantism, and more precisely Johannes Weiss, on the issue of the rediscovery of eschatology is clearly acknowledged by the most prominent Orthodox theologian in our time, Metropolitan John D. Zizioulas (Ecumenical Patriarchate), in his study “Déplacement de la perspective eschatologique,” in Giuseppe Alberigo, Jean-Pierre Jossua, Daniele Menozzi, Nikos A. Nissiotis, Giuseppe Ruggieri, Gustave Thils et Jean D. Zizioulas (eds.), *La chrétienté en débat: Histoire, formes et problèmes actuels. Colloque de Bologne, 11–15 mai 1983* (Paris: Cerf, 1984), 89–99; reprinted in Métropolitain Jean (Zizioulas) de Pergame, *L’Eglise et ses institutions: Textes réunis par l’Archimandrite Grigorios Papathomas et Hyacinthe Destivelle, O.P.* (Paris: Cerf, 2011), 459–73.

The main argument of this contribution is that at the root of all the problems and difficulties Orthodoxy faces today, including that of ecclesiastical nationalism and the pending encounter with modernity, lies the inversion of the paradoxical and antinomic relationship between eschatology and history or the oblivion of the biblical “in the world, but not of the world, for the sake of the world.” Orthodoxy is usually (and especially in the theological analyses of the second half of the 20th century) described as defined by the eschatological vision of the church. Nevertheless, a more attentive approach to the topic will reveal that, without completely losing its eschatological identity and orientation, Orthodoxy is to a large extent shaped by history and more precisely by the historical experiences and wounds of its peoples, especially by the fall of Byzantium in 1453 and the four or even five centuries of Ottoman occupation. This is evidenced particularly in its social conservatism and even anachronism as well as in the phenomena of ecclesiastical culturalism and nationalism that have marked the Orthodox world for centuries.<sup>11</sup>

In fact, and based on serious theological and historical arguments, it seems that ecclesiastical nationalism is probably the most serious problem facing the Orthodox Church since the fall of Byzantium (1453). The latter represents a decisive historical event that led to a period of introversion for Orthodoxy as well as to the understanding of the Gospel and the ecclesial event in national terms. Following the Turkish conquest, the Orthodox peoples of the Balkans and Eastern Europe – who, according to Dimitri Obolensky’s excellent analysis, participated in the “Byzantine Commonwealth”<sup>12</sup> – maintained throughout the Ottoman occupation a community of people with common roots, common values, and a common orientation, a phenomenon that has been described by the Romanian historian Nikolai Iorga as “Byzance après Byzance” in his seminal book of the same name (1935).<sup>13</sup> Thus, the end of Byzantium and the period of Ottoman domination formed the basis for a common history among all the Orthodox peoples (Russia being the only exception). This common history of the Orthodox people of the Balkans and Eastern Europe was marked by a) the

11 Cf. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, “The Eschatological Understanding of Tradition in Contemporary Orthodox Theology and its Relevance for Today’s Issues,” in Colby Dickinson (ed.), *The Shaping of Tradition: Context and Normativity* (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 297–312, especially 309–12.

12 Cf. the book of the same name by Dimitri Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe 500–1453* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000).

13 Nikolai Iorga, *Byzantium after Byzantium*, trans. Laura Treptow (Oxford: Centre for Romanian Studies, 2000). The attempt to provide a consistent explanation about the way Iorga combined his ideas about Byzantine continuity and ecumenicity with populist and anti-Semitic ideas and with his political involvement with the Romanian nationalistic far-right parties and governments is beyond the scope and purpose of this paper.

*millet* (nations) system, which was constituted on a religious (not national) basis and fostered coexistence and cultural and religious variety within the Ottoman world, leading to the creation of an Ottoman *oikoumene*; and b) the leading role of the Church in secular, civil or ethnic affairs (*ethnarchia*). In other words, it was characterized by the assumption – mainly taken by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople – of political responsibility for and representation of all Orthodox people, of all *Romioi* or Romans (and not only of the Greeks) before the Sultan. Steven Runciman described the brightest moments of this difficult venture in his classic work, *The Great Church in Captivity*.<sup>14</sup> But the great Russian theologian of the diaspora Father Alexander Schmemmann recorded, among other things, the pitfalls of this venture in his book *The Historical Road of Eastern Orthodoxy*<sup>15</sup>, pitfalls that were connected mainly with decisions by the Ecumenical Patriarchate that were biased in favor of the Greeks and against the Slavs.<sup>16</sup>

In this phase, the Church, as the only Christian institution to survive the Ottoman conquest and to later become a *sui generis* institution of the Ottoman Empire, took on the responsibility of filling the political void, assuming the duty of preserving the language, the tradition, and the Christian collective identity of the Orthodox people, and rescuing them from Islamization and from becoming Turkish. It is perhaps the first time that the Church was forced in such a clear and obvious manner to be involved in issues foreign to its nature and purpose, such as the preservation of a race (*genos*), a language, and a religious-cultural identity. It did so because its people, its flock, and its very existence were in danger of becoming extinct.

This common Byzantine past and the then common Ottoman present nurtured the feeling of a common culture among the Orthodox people, a sense of religious *belonging* within a shared identity. Its particular local ethnic variations did not yet constitute national identities but comprised a religious and cultural unity, with their common Orthodox faith as the main point of reference. The Orthodox peoples' shared history, however, was gradually

14 Steven Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

15 Alexander Schmemmann, *The Historical Road of Eastern Orthodoxy*, trans. by L. W. Kesich (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1977), 271–91.

16 For a more up-to-date and balanced discussion of this complex picture, cf. Tom Papademetriou, *Render unto the Sultan: Power, Authority, and the Greek Orthodox Church in the Early Ottoman Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Paschalis M. Kitromilides, *Religion and Politics in the Orthodox World: The Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Challenges of Modernity* (London/New York: Routledge, 2019); Christian Gastgeber, Ekaterini Mitsiou, Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, and Vratislav Zervan (eds.), *A Companion to the Patriarchate of Constantinople* (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

altered in the 18th century and especially the 19th through the influence of the European Enlightenment and the rise of nationalism that this engendered. The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople was strongly opposed to this nationalism, but in the end, at the turn of the 20th century and because of the national struggles and antagonisms in Macedonia, it was also converted to Greek nationalism/irredentism and to the Greek Great Idea. This national splintering and definitive divorce of the Orthodox people of the Balkans was made final with the dominance of the principle of nationalities, the growth of competitive national narratives/mythologies, the creation of nation states, the separation of the respective national churches from the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and the state-supported declarations of their autocephaly. This turned them into departments of the state and organs for the formation and building of national identity and the spread of the respective ideology. The epitaph for the idea of the Christian *oikoumene* was written when armed combat broke out between Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bulgaria in the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913 over rival claims concerning Macedonia and especially with the Asia Minor Catastrophe (1922) and the compulsory population exchange (1923–24) between Greece and Turkey, which meant the end of the unique Eastern version of multiculturalism and multi-ethnicism and its replacement by the principle of ethnically “pure” states.

Typical examples of ecclesiastical nationalism are the instrumentalization of Orthodoxy for the sake of the nation states in the identity formation process, the gradual articulation of the theory of the “new chosen people of God” in its various versions (Greek, Russian, Romanian, Serbian, Bulgarian, etc.) as well as both the idea and the reality of the national churches. In the end, the latter suggests the inability to think of the Orthodox Church, its mission and witness to the world apart from the national perspective and the individual national history or narrative. As a result of this substitution of the ecclesial criterion by the national, and the “replacement of the history of salvation with the history of national revival,”<sup>17</sup> the Orthodox Church has for decades experienced a profound division between the different national churches, as typically depicted

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17 Cf. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, “The Temptation of Judas: Church and National Identities,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 47 (2002), 357–79. The original Greek publication (“Ο πειρασμός του Ιούδα. Από την ιστορία της θείας οικονομίας στην ιστορία της έθνικής παλιγγενεσίας,” *Synaxi*, issue 79 (2001), 51–65) and the title of its French translation (“La tentation de Judas. Église, nation et identités: De l’histoire de l’économie divine à l’histoire de la renaissance nationale,” *Contacts*, issue 197 (2002), 24–48) make clear reference to this replacement.

on the occasion of the Holy and Great Council of Crete in 2016<sup>18</sup>, while it is called to confront an extremely problematic ecclesiological conception that understands the Orthodox Church as a mere “confederation of autocephalous national churches.”<sup>19</sup> All these phenomena legitimized those who wonder to what extent religious nationalism and the nationalization of the church are inherent to the Orthodox tradition.<sup>20</sup>

As has been rightly pointed out, however, this identification between church and nation and the ensuing “national” role of the church constitutes a “novelty,” a modern phenomenon for the Orthodox Church, which has for many centuries been the Church of the multinational Byzantine and then Ottoman Empire. But the national role of the Church and the dialectics of tradition and innovation are much more complex issues, given that change and innovation have not always led to a genuine renewal of ecclesial life.<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that, in general, until the time of the Turkish conquest (the 15th to the 19th or in

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- 18 See Pantelis Kalaitzidis, “The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church between Synodal Inertia and Great Expectations: Achievements and Pending Issues,” in Herman Teule and Joseph Verheyden (eds.), *Eastern and Oriental Christianity in the Diaspora* (Leuven: Peeters, 2020), 77–153, especially 104–10. Father Cyril Hovorun (“Ethnophyletism, Phyletism, and the Pan-Orthodox Council,” *The Wheel*, issue 12 (2018), 62–7), adopted a more positive and optimistic approach as regards the issue of nationalism and the Holy and Great Council.
- 19 For a theological discussion of this crucial issue, see Jean Meyendorff, “Régionalisme ecclésiastique, structures de communion ou couverture de séparatisme?” in Giuseppe Alberigo (ed.), *Les Églises après Vatican II: Dynamisme et prospective. Actes du Colloque international de Bologne – 1980* (Paris: Beauschesne, 1981), 329–45; Grigorios Papatomas, “Face au concept d’Église nationale: La réponse canonique orthodoxe: l’Église autocéphale,” *L’année canonique* 45 (2003), 149–70, and reprinted in Grigorios D. Papatomas, *Essais de Droit canonique orthodoxe* (Firenze: Università degli Studi di Firenze/Facoltà di Scienze Politiche “Cesare Alfieri,” 2005), 51–76. On the connection of autocephaly with nationalism from a religious studies perspective, see the paper by Pedro Ramet, “Autocephaly and National Identity,” in idem (ed), *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Durham/ London: Duke University Press, 1988), 1–19, and the recent volume by Marie-Hélène Blanchet, Frédéric Gabriel, and Laurent Tatarenko (eds.), *Autocéphalies: L’exercice de l’indépendance dans les Églises slaves orientales (IX<sup>e</sup>–XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle)* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 2021).
- 20 See, e.g., Vasilios N. Makrides, “Why Are Orthodox Churches Particularly Prone to Nationalization and Even to Nationalism?” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 57, nos. 3–4 (2013), 325–52.
- 21 For the complex issues of change and innovation with regard to the Orthodox theology and tradition, cf. Trine Stauning Willert and Lina Molokotos-Liederman (eds.), *Innovation in the Orthodox Christian Tradition? The Question of Change in Greek Orthodox Thought and Practice* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012); Sebastian Rimestad and Vasilios Makrides (eds.), *Coping with Change: Orthodox Christian Dynamics between Tradition, Innovation, and Realpolitik* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2020).

some cases the 20th century), at the end of which the first signs of this national role can be observed, the Orthodox Church – despite or perhaps, because of, its ties to imperial power – ignored the so-called “national logic,” both in its ecclesiological structure and in its theological self-consciousness. Taking on this new role, however, and being involved in shaping particular ethno-cultural identities, the Orthodox Church not only seems to be facing serious problems in affirming its catholicity, ecumenicity and ecclesial unity, slipping from a baptismal/Eucharistic into an ethnocultural community.<sup>22</sup> It also seems to have abandoned in practice the foundation and geographical criterion of its ecclesiology, that is, the principle of the local and not the national church.<sup>23</sup>

Through a long and complex historical process, especially after the creation of the modern “Orthodox” states, mainly during the 19th century, the Orthodox Church in the Balkans and in the East finally espoused the respective national ideologies and the particular national narratives. At the same time, because of an intense historical anachronism, traditional Balkan historiography attributed to Orthodoxy a significant role in the emergence and building of Balkan nations.<sup>24</sup> The final nationalization and national fragmentation and Balkanization of Orthodoxy was made possible through the replacement of a religious “imagined community,”<sup>25</sup> i.e., the Orthodox Church, by a series of competing or even mutually exclusive “imagined communities,” i.e., national states and their national narratives and identities.<sup>26</sup> Following a relevant

22 Cf. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, “Baptismal and Ethnocultural Community: A Case Study of Greek Orthodoxy,” in Michael L. Budde (ed.), *Beyond the Borders of Baptism: Catholicity, Allegiances, and Lived Identities* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Publishing Company, 2016), 141–67.

23 Cf. the papers by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware of Diokleia, “Neither Jew nor Greek: Catholicity and Ethnicity” and Metropolitan John Zizioulas of Pergamon, “Primacy and Nationalism,” both published in *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 57:3–4 (2013), respectively 235–46 and 451–59.

24 See, e.g., Paschalis Kitromilides, “Enlightenment, nationalism, the Nation State and their Impact on the Orthodox World,” *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 57, nos. 3–4 (2013), 271–80; idem, *Religion and Politics in the Orthodox World: The Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Challenges of Modernity* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2019).

25 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London/New York: Verso, 2006; the original version of this seminal book was published in 1983). The adjective “imagined” used in the title of the book refers not to an imaginary and non-existent community, but to a cultural and political construction and the natural symbolic vocation of individuals to imagine themselves as members of a community that transcends them.

26 Paschalis M. Kitromilides, “‘Imagined Communities’ and the Origins of the National Question in the Balkans,” *European History Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (1989), 149–92, especially 177–85; reprinted in Paschalis M. Kitromilides, *Enlightenment, Nationalism, Orthodoxy: Studies in the Culture and Political Thoughts of South-Eastern Europe* (Aldershot: Variorum/Ashgate, 1994); idem, “The Ecumenical Patriarchate,” in Lucian N. Leustean (ed.), *Orthodox*

remark, these henceforth nation state-oriented imagined communities tried to reinterpret their common Byzantine heritage through the national Balkan historiographies (Greek, Bulgarian, Serbian, Albanian, Romanian, Turkish, and Russian) and to appropriate that heritage for themselves and for the sake of the respective national constructed ideologies.<sup>27</sup>

### The Dilemma Between the Ethno-cultural and the Theological Criterion

We, the Orthodox (mainly of the traditionally “Orthodox” countries) have been identified so much with the individual national churches and local traditions, we have combined Orthodoxy so much with the individual national narratives, and linked faith so closely with traditions and habits that we have largely lost the awareness of catholicity, ecumenicity, and universality and thus reduced Orthodoxy to the realm of custom, ancestral heritage, and ethnocultural identity. We have so emphasized the dimension of faith that is passed down from generation to generation and embraces entire collectivities such as peoples and nations, we have become so addicted to spiritual self-sufficiency and self-justification, to the stereotypes of race and nation, in praising our forebears and what we have inherited from them that we have forgotten the element of innovation and personal choice that Christianity initially brought. Meanwhile, we remain unaware of how scornfully the great theologians and Church Fathers, such as St. Gregory of Nyssa, spoke in their writings about praising the achievements and virtues of one’s ancestors.<sup>28</sup> They did so to such

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*Christianity and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Southeastern Europe* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 14–33. Cf. Lucian N. Leustean, “Orthodox Christianity and Nationalism: An Introduction,” in idem (ed.), *Orthodox Christianity and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Southeastern Europe*, 1–13; Dimitris Stamatopoulos, *Τὸ Βυζάντιο μετὰ τὸ ἔθνος. Τὸ πρόβλημα τῆς συνέχειας στὶς βαλκανικὲς ιστοριογραφίαις* (Athens: Alexandria Publications, 2009). Especially for the history of the adoption of the national ideology by the Church of Greece, cf. Charles A. Frazee, *The Orthodox Church and Independent Greece (1821–1852)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); Ioannis Petrou, *Ἐκκλησία καὶ πολιτικὴ στὴν Ἑλλάδα, 1750–1909* [Church and Politics in Greece 1750–1909] (Thessaloniki: Kyriakidis, 1992), especially 141ff.; Antonis Manitakis, *Οἱ σχέσεις τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μὲ τὸ κράτος. Ἐθνος στὴ σκιά τῶν ταυτοτήτων* [The Relationship Between the Church and the Nation State in the Wake of the Identity Card Conflict] (Athens: Nefeli, 2000), 21–56.

27 Stamatopoulos, *Τὸ Βυζάντιο μετὰ τὸ ἔθνος. Τὸ πρόβλημα τῆς συνέχειας στὶς βαλκανικὲς ιστοριογραφίαις*; forthcoming in English translation as *Byzantium after the Nation: The Problem of Continuity in Balkan Historiographies* (Central European University Press, 2022).

28 Cf., e.g., Gregory of Nyssa, *De Vita Gregorii Thaumaturgi*, PG 46, 896 C.

an extent that a fundamental criticism of the opponents of Christianity in the first centuries (e.g., Celsus, Porphyry) was that Christianity abolished ancestral customs and traditions.<sup>29</sup> We are still so fascinated and trapped in the pre-modern medieval or romantic communitarian model that we seem to have forgotten that acceptance of the Gospel message and inclusion in the ecclesial body cannot be understood on the basis of collectivities of any sort, such as those of a people, a nation, a language, a culture, etc., but only on the basis of an absolute personal act, free of every kind of biological, cultural, and ethnic predestination.

That is why the radically new thing the ecclesial way of life brings about is the personal call made by God through Jesus Christ for an encounter and relationship with him, as well as the answer to this call, which is also personal. There is a plethora of New Testament narratives that are not only purely personal events and choices<sup>30</sup> – not mediated by any kind of group or community or any religious, national, linguistic, cultural, or class collectivities – but quite frequently are also directed *against* particular communities or violate borders and limits set by them, but without these choices also leading to a private religiosity or an individual version of faith and salvation.<sup>31</sup>

We, the Orthodox have been so much identified with Byzantium, its culture and civilization that the fall of the empire in 1453 seems to have caused an incurable trauma. From this date onward we have behaved like orphans. We find it very difficult to move beyond this historical trauma. It has been incredibly difficult to find our way outside the framework of the empire and the monarchy by divine right. We yearn nostalgically and unceasingly for this now lost premodern form of political organization, in the place of which the

29 Cf. the remarks by Athanasios N. Papathanasiou, “Μεταμοντέρνα αναβίωση τῆς πολυθεΐας ἐν ὀνόματι τῆς χριστιανικῆς ἐμμονῆς στὴν πίστη τῶν πατέρων. Μία ἀντίφραση τῆς σύγχρονης ἐκκλησιαστικῆς μας πραγματικότητος” [The Postmodern Revival of Polytheism in the Name of Christian Adherence to the Faith of the Fathers and Ancestors: A Paradox in Our Modern Ecclesiastical Situation], *Πάντα τα Ἐθνη/Panta ta Ethni (All Nations)*, issue 108 (2008), 3–7, especially 6.

30 Examples are the calling of the twelve (Mt 4:18–22, 10:1–4; Mk 1:16–20, 3:13–19; Lk 5:1–11; 6:12–16), followed by a similar invitation addressed by Jesus to others (Mk 10:21; Lk 9:59–62); Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1–19. cf. Acts 22:6–16, 26:12–18); the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25–37); Jesus’ encounters with Zacchaeus (Lk 19: 1–10); the pagan Canaanite woman (Mt 15:21–28; Mk 7:24–30); the Roman centurion (Mt 8:5–13; Lk 7:1–10; Jn 4:43–54) or even the Samaritan Woman at Jacob’s well (Jn 4:4–42).

31 For a more extensive analysis, see Pantelis Kalaitzidis, *Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ Νεωτερικότητα. Προλεγόμενα* (Athens: Indiktos Publications, 2007), 64–7; English edition (forthcoming): *Orthodoxy and Modernity: Introducing a Constructive Encounter* (Paderbon: Brill/Schöningh, 2022).

Great Powers granted us the Balkan monarchies in the 19th century, to which we hastened to ascribe a metaphysical dimension and messianic expectations. But we had previously exchanged the kingdom of God and its journey toward the eschaton with the earthly kingdom and its establishment within history; the spirit of the desert with the ideal of the empire;<sup>32</sup> the contest of faith and its witness to the new life in Christ for all kinds of “Christian” civilizations, all kinds of “Christian” kingdoms, all kinds of “Christian” societies that were nothing but Christian versions of the agrarian or traditional society. And while we have almost identified the Orthodox faith with our customs and habits and with our cultural heritage, we stubbornly deny the peoples we evangelize the opportunity to incarnate the truth of the Gospel in the language and the symbols of their own culture. We thus oppose the needed inculturation of Orthodoxy in the Global South and the imperative and urgent deculturation in the case of the traditional “Orthodox” peoples. In other words, we refuse the unavoidable re-ordering of priorities vis-à-vis theological and cultural criteria and the required new balance between the local and the universal, the particular and the catholic.<sup>33</sup>

The Enlightenment and modernity marked the end of religiously organized societies but not necessarily the end of the quest for the true God or the thirst for genuine spiritual life. The presence of God, however, is no longer imposed on the whole of society nor is it an element of the social order and social organization. Belief in God is no longer considered a given but something to be sought and found. Therefore, it is no longer possible to continue talking about sacred societies or empires, about Christian societies, about Christianitas, Chrétienté, Christendom, Christentum. There is a general sense that we have not yet recovered from this trauma, from this loss of the homogenous “Christian” society. Suffice it to think here how fascinating all forms of premodern social and civilizational organization still are to many Orthodox Christians throughout the Balkans, Central and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, but also to the so-called “diaspora” communities (monarchism/pro-royalism, denial of human rights and political liberalism, yearning for communitarian, holistic

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32 Cf. Georges Florovsky, “Antinomies of Christian History: Empire and Desert,” in *Christianity and Culture*, vol. 2 in the *Collected Works of Georges Florovsky* (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1974), 67–100.

33 Cf. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, “La relation de l’Église à la culture et la dialectique de l’eschatologie et de l’histoire,” *Istina* 55 (2010), 7–25; idem, “New Wine into Old Wineskins? Orthodox Theology of Mission Facing the Challenges of a Global World,” in Atola Longumer, Po Ho Huang, and Uta Andrée (eds.), *Theological Education and Theology of Life: Transformative Christian Leadership in the 21st Century. A Festschrift for Dietrich Werner* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2016), 119–47.

political and cultural models, etc.). That is why the yearning for the empire has replaced the yearning for the eschaton and the journey to the kingdom of God. In this vein, we, the Orthodox, are referring complacently – if we do not boast about it – to Byzantinism, Hellenicity and Greek uniqueness, Holy Russia, and the “Third Rome” or the Slavophile movement, the Serbian people “as a servant of God,” the Antiochian uniqueness and Arabhood, the Latinness of Romanian Orthodoxy, and many other ethnotheological narratives, inventions and “constructions.”<sup>34</sup> It is obvious that the vast majority of the Orthodox have exchanged the ecclesial sense of “belonging” for an ethnocultural or communitarian one while identifying the structures and authoritarian patterns of a patriarchal society with the golden age of the church and “Christian” civilization. That is why we among other things, continue to oppose modernity or human rights as well as any attempt to improve the position of women in the Church.<sup>35</sup>

### Contemporary Examples of Ethnotheology

In the attempt to free Orthodox faith from its identification with nation, culture, and ethnocultural identity, in this urgent call for deculturation, our generation may feel rather alone and orphaned. This is so because wherever we look around the Orthodox world, we see a constant slide from the theological and ecclesial to the cultural and ethnotheological, a problematic mixture of theology and ethnocentric discourse, theology and “Great Idea” (either territorial/national or cultural), theology and the defense of the nation, cultural or national identity, the spiritual tradition and ethnoreligious/ethnocultural pride. Let me give just a few typical examples of this.

#### *Father Dumitru Staniloae*

The great Romanian patristic scholar and dogmatic theologian, Father Dumitru Staniloae, who contributed so much to the neo-patristic and philocalic revival

34 Cf. Kalaitzidis, “La relation de l’Église à la culture et la dialectique de l’eschatologie et de l’histoire”; idem, “Holy Lands and Sacred Nations,” *Concilium: International Review of Theology*, issue 2015/1, 115–123.

35 See Pantelis Kalaitzidis, “La sfida della parità di genere: Il ruolo della donna nell’Ortodossia,” *Nel mondo ma non del mondo: sfide e tentazioni della chiesa nel mondo contemporaneo*, traduzione, cura, prefazione di Luigi d’Ayala (Comunità di Bose, Magnano, Italy: Edizioni Qiqajon, 2016), 179–97. Cf. Pantelis Kalaitzidis and Nikos Ntontos (eds.), *Φύλο και Θρησκεία. Ἡ θέση τῆς γυναίκας στὴν Ἐκκλησία* [Gender and Religion: The Place of Women in the Church] (Athens: Indiktos Publications, 2004).

of Orthodox theology in the 20th century, could not avoid – mainly in the early phase of his work but not only in this – the theological idealization and exaltation of the Romanian patriotism and greatness, of agrarian and patriarchal society, while his anti-Semitic references in his early writings as well as his laudatory comments on the persecution of Jews in pro-Nazi Romania and even on the “important work” done by Hitler himself are indeed shocking. In the words of this Romanian theologian: “All countries should understand that it is in their own interest and in the interest of world peace not to transform themselves into instruments of International Jewry but to begin by mutual agreements to clear the air of a germ that fosters continuous strife between peoples.”<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore Father Staniloae believes not only that the human person cannot exist outside of the nation in which he/she was born and raised but also that he/she cannot be saved without it: “The individual is saved at the same time as the nation. Nations are undiminished entities. They are the last specific units of humanity. From them the individual emerges and lives through them.” For this Romanian theologian, the church is the basic component of the nation and vice versa. Romanianism is synonymous with Orthodoxy and vice versa.<sup>37</sup>

The struggle for the increase of the nation along the lines of Christian virtues is nothing but the struggle for the glorification of God in the creation. And when we emphasize the Orthodox element in the Romanian character, we show one more reason for the necessity for our nation to continue to follow the Orthodox line, if it does not want to fall from Romanianism and, in general, from a superior situation to an inferior one. This would not only be a fall in the natural order but also a sin against God that would not remain unpunished.<sup>38</sup>

All these elements created a nationalist rhetoric of self-admiration, especially since the Romanian people occupied a unique position between the West and

36 Cf. “Necesitatea soluționării problemei evreiești” [The Need to Solve the Jewish Problem], *Telegraful Român* issue 3 (10 January 1938), 1–2. The quote comes from the unsigned editorial of this particular issue of which Staniloae was the editor-in-chief. It is known that no issue of this magazine was printed without the prior approval of its editor-in-chief, i.e., Father Staniloae. This policy of the periodical under question was confirmed by Staniloae’s daughter, Lidia, in her father’s biography. Cf. Roland Clark, “Nationalism, Ethnotheology, and Mysticism in Interwar Romania,” *The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies*, No. 2002, (University of Pittsburgh, 2009), 6.

37 Staniloae, “Orthodoxie și Națiune,” 20.

38 Dumitru Staniloae, “Iarăși Ortodoxie și Româanism” [Again Orthodoxy and Romanianism], in Dumitru Stăniloae, *Ortodoxie și Româanism* (Bucharest: Basilica, 2014), 85. Cf. Anna Theodora Valsamou, *Πολιτική Θεολογία και Ἐθνο-θεολογία στὸν π. Δημήτριο Στανιλοάε* [Political Theology and Ethnotheology in Father Dumitru Staniloae] (Patras: Hellenic Open University, 2019), 45.

the East and witnessed to a distinctive ability to creatively combine characteristics from both cultures.

In our spirituality, we unite Latin lucidity or confidence in the rational understanding of reality typical of the West with the sense of the inscrutable mystery of existence typical of the peoples of Eastern Europe. But, as Latins, we bring to the mystery of things and people a light that is stronger than that of the Slavic peoples, a light that does not limit but defines and is proper to the peoples of the West.

And Stalinoae concludes that, because of the above features, the Romanian people have the most refined spirituality in the world: "In this respect we are closer to primal Christian spirituality that is still present in the spirituality of the Greek people, although with a lesser sentimental experience of this light than in Romanian spirituality."<sup>39</sup>

Furthermore, what is considered to be a deadly sin for the person, such as pride, automatically turns into virtue if it refers to the national community, as Berdiaev had observed.<sup>40</sup> Driven by his personal beliefs but also to explain and justify the extreme nationalism of his time<sup>41</sup> (most of the Romanian intellectuals in the 1930s belonged to or were sympathetic to the ultra-nationalistic, fascist, anti-Semitic, and pro-Nazi movement of the Iron Guard or the Legion of the Archangel Michael),<sup>42</sup> Staniloae understood the nation as a spiritual

39 Dumitru Staniloae, "De ce suntem Ortodocși" [Why are we Orthodox?], in Dumitru Staniloae, *Reflecții despre Spiritualitatea poporului român* (Bucharest: Basilica, 2018), 477.

40 Cătălin Bogdan, "Omorul serafic (III) Cazul Stăniloae," *Revista 22*; <https://revista22.ro/cultura/omorul-serafic-iii-cine-este-aproapele-meu> (accessed 18 March 2022).

41 Leon Volovici, *Nationalist Ideology and Antisemitism: The Case of Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930s*, trans. by Charles Kormos (Oxford/New York: Pergamon Press, 1991), 14–5.

42 See Cosmin Florian Porcar, "Philosophy in Totalitarianism: Constantin Noica and the 'Păltinis School,'" *Journal for Communication and Culture* 1, no. 1 (2011), 90–96; Mircea Platon, "The Iron Guard and the 'Modern State': Iron Guard Leaders Vasile Marin and Ion I. Moța, and the 'New European Order,'" *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies* 1 (2012), 65–90; Keith Hitchens, "Interwar Southeastern Europe Confronts the West. The New Generation: Cioran, Yanev, Popovic," in Costică Brădățan (ed.), *Philosophy, Society and the Cunning of History in Eastern Europe* (Oxford/New York: Routledge, 2012), 8–25; Radu Ioanid, "The Sacralised Politics of the Romanian Iron Guard," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 5, no. 3 (2004), 419–53. For further research on the relationship between the Iron Guard and Romanian Orthodoxy, cf. Radu Ioanid, *The Sword and the Archangel: Fascist Ideology in Romania*, trans. by Peter Heinegg (New York: East European Monographs, 1990); Valentin Săndulescu, "Sacralised Politics in Action: The February 1937 Burial of the Romanian Legionary Leaders Ion Mața and Vasile Marin," in *Clerical Fascism in Interwar Europe*, ed. Matthew Feldman, Marius Turda, and Tudor Georgescu (Oxford/New York: Routledge, 2008), 47–58; Ionut Biliuță, *The Archangel's Consecrated Servants: An Inquiry in the Relationship between the Romanian Orthodox*

entity, through which humans can be saved. He believed in fact that humans are saved only through their national community and not individually: “Man exists only in a national form, with a national coloration. [...] It is not possible to extract the defining individual or national characteristics from an individual or a nation and leave the pure human element behind. To do so would mean the very destruction of the human element.”<sup>43</sup>

Staniloae’s political theology seeks to defend the absolute identification between the national and the ecclesial:

And the thread that runs through the essence of a nation’s history, that keeps it true to its very being, is its tradition, whatever is essential, good and characteristic. And the first institution that represents the continuity of tradition in the life of a nation is the Church. In the present practices and beliefs of the Church, we find again the very content of the soul life of our nation from each of the previous centuries.<sup>44</sup>

By no means does he relativize or question the ethnocultural bond. On the contrary, by taking this bond as a given, he ascribes an eschatological dimension and ontological substance to it. Nation and ethnicity are not viewed as stages of the fallen human condition but as manifestations of the divine will, possibly even a prelapsarian human condition. Staniloae argues that to the extent that Adam belonged to a nation, humanity in its eschatological state will retain its national particularities.

In Revelation it has been said: not as individuals, but “nations will walk in the light of the city of Lamb,” while it is not individual persons who will enter through the doors of the city but “the glory and honour of the nations” (Rev 21:24–25), that is, each nation will bring its own spirituality through the Christian faith, thanks to the special gifts it has received from God.<sup>45</sup>

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*Church and the Iron Guard (1930–1941)* (PhD Diss., Budapest: Central European University, 2013); Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth: Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2015).

43 Dumitru Staniloae, “Scurtă interpretare teologică a națiunii” [Short Theological Interpretation of the Nation], in Staniloae, *Ortodoxie și Româanism*, 42.

44 Dumitru Staniloae, “Partidele politice și Biserica” [The Political Parties and the Church], in Dumitru Staniloae, *Cultură și Duhovnicie*, vol. 3 (Bucharest: Basilica, 2012), 635.

45 Dumitru Staniloae, “Unitatea spirituală a neamului nostru și libertatea” [The Spiritual Unity of our Nation and Liberty], *Națiune și Creștinism*, preface by Constantin Schifirneț (Bucharest: Editura Elion, 2004), 281.

The nation is a mandatory and constituent element for the formation of the ecclesial body, while the relationship between church and history definitely passes through the national collectivity.

Staniłoae's collectivistic and ethnocentric understanding of the church did not remain without effect but pervades almost the whole of Romanian theology, with few exceptions. For example, the Romanian Metropolitan of Transylvania Antonie Plamadeala (1926–2005), expressed similar views at the Second International Conference of Orthodox Theology, in Athens (1976) and radicalized the former's ethnotheology, leading thus to the substitution of the local character of the church by a national character and to the interpretation of the relevant canons of the church, such as the well-known 34th "Apostolic" Canon.<sup>46</sup> Following Metropolitan Antonie Plamadeala and the way he interprets this canon:

At the heart of the Byzantine Empire, the Church in its hierarchical-sacerdotal and canonical administrative organization took the national element and context into consideration. The 34th Apostolic Canon is the expression of this reality, affirming in this way the ecclesiastical organization's relationship to the national element. [...] The analysis of this canon reveals that it expresses and establishes through the organization of the Church the following principles: a) the national principle, b) the principle of autocephaly. [...] The view that the word "nation" at the end of the canon does not express the idea of a people or nation but rather the idea of a piece of land or a population is completely ridiculous. This is nothing other than an attempt to obfuscate the issue so that the national principle is not recognized as a criterion for the organization of autocephalous Churches.<sup>47</sup>

Among other things, these positions also represent an anachronistic reading of history. The Byzantine Empire, even if it was marked by the (eschatological) temptation of creating the ideal of the kingdom of God on earth, was a multi-ethnic empire and knew nothing of the principle of nationalities or the phenomenon of ecclesiastical nationalism. And while, of course, the church may have been guilty of other historical sins during that period, it did not

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46 "The bishops of every nation must acknowledge him who is first among them and account him as their head, and do nothing of consequence without his consent; but each may do those things only which concern his own parish, and the country places which belong to it. But neither let him (who is the first) do anything without the consent of all; for so there will be unanimity, and God will be glorified through the Lord in the Holy Spirit." English translation from the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series II, vol. 14, ed. by P. Schaff and H. Wace (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1885), 596.

47 Évêque Antonie Plamadeala, "Catholicité et Ethnicité," in Savas Chr. Agouridès, *Deuxième Congrès de Théologie Orthodoxe à Athènes, 19–29 Août 1976* (Athens, 1978), 490–500, here 495–97.

adopt the national principle in its canonical organization but rather the local, thus remaining faithful to the Ignatian view of the local church as the catholic church.

In 1939, however, Staniloae argued that “An a-national sentiment does not exist.”<sup>48</sup> For him, nations are not only ontologically given but also have the potential to shape individuals in the image of God. According to his ethno-theological account, Father Staniloae was absolutely convinced that if the Romanian state would be structured on the principles of Orthodoxy and Romanianism, then it would not only fulfil its eschatological mission but would also be the only nation that could offer the world a model of salvation (the nationalist-Christian).<sup>49</sup>

### *Father John S. Romanides*

After his important theological publications of the late 1950s and 1960s (the most important of which was his doctoral dissertation defended at the University of Athens, *The Ancestral Sin* (1957),<sup>50</sup> and a series of papers on doctrinal and ecclesiological/ecumenical issues), the great Greek-American theologian Rev. John S. Romanides came up with the theory of Romanity. This offered a very typical example of Greek Orthodox triumphalism (and anti-Westernism) and a peculiar case of “Greek Orthodoxy” and “Hellenic Christianity” (without even using the terms Greek or Hellenic). With the appearance of Romanides’ book

48 Staniloae, “Ortodoxie și Națiune,” 20.

49 For further discussion on Staniloae’s ethnotheology see also Mihail Neamtu, “Between the Gospel and the Nation: Dumitru Stăniloae’s Ethno-Theology,” *Archæus* 10 (2006), 9–46; Biliuță, *The Archangel’s Consecrated Servants*; Valsamou, *Πολιτική Θεολογία και Έθνο-θεολογία στὸν π. Δημήτριο Στανιλόε*; Roland Clark, “Nationalist and Trinitarian Visions of the Church in the Theology of Dumitru Staniloae,” *Studii Teologice: Revista Facultăților de Teologie din Patriarhia Română*, series A III-A, 9.2 (2013), 207–27; Olivier Gillet, *Religion et nationalisme. L’idéologie de l’Église orthodoxe roumaine sous le régime communiste* (Brussels: Université libre de Bruxelles, 1997); Volovici, *Nationalist Ideology and Antisemitism*. A defence of Staniloae’s position has been undertaken by Metropolitan Irineu Popa and Marian G. Simion, “Nationalism and Orthodoxy in Father Dumitru Staniloae’s Thinking,” in Semegnish Asfaw, Alexios Chehadeh, and Marian G. Simion (eds.), *Just Peace: Orthodox Perspectives* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012), 13–23; Mircea Cristian Pricop, “The Contribution of Rev. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Staniloae and Rev. Prof. Dr. Ilie Moldovan to the Identification of the First European Christians,” in Iulian Boldea, Cornel Sigmirean, Dumitru-Mircea Buda (eds.), *Literature as Mediator: Intersecting Discourses and Dialogues in a Multicultural World* (Târgu Mureș: Arhipelag XXI Press, 2018), 206–12.

50 John S. Romanides, *Τὸ προπατορικὸν ἁμάρτημα* (Athens, 1957). English translation: *The Ancestral Sin*, trans. by George Gabriel (Ridgewood NJ: Zephyr Publications, 1998, and reprinted with additions in 2002 and 2008).

*Romanity* in 1975,<sup>51</sup> his work marked a dramatic shift from theology to cultural criticism, historiography and ethnology, and to forms of neo-Romantic and neo-nationalist ideology. Romanides' theory now moved in an undifferentiated national-religious, historical-theological, theological-cultural and theological-political milieu. It is thus grounded not in the well-known distinction between Greek (Orthodox) East versus Latin (Roman Catholic) West but in the abysmal rivalry between the Greek-speaking and the Latin-speaking Romanity on the one hand and heretical "Frankism" on the other.<sup>52</sup> This radical distinction and divide was thenceforth played against the backdrop of a seamlessly fabricated theological-cultural and theological-political ideology. In this understanding, the West is wholly demonized and held responsible for all the misfortunes of the Orthodox, both theological and historical/national. Here, Frankism is portrayed as the scene of endless conspiracies aimed at the extermination of Romanity. In fact, Romanides' hermeneutics formed the necessary alibi for a conspiratorial, non-self-critical, historical interpretation of the sufferings and adventures of Romanity, attributing them all to Western machinations.

In this spirit, Romanides adds a new prologue to his 1989 second Greek edition of his *Ancestral Sin*,<sup>53</sup> where, in a frenzied tone strongly reminiscent of conspiracy theories, he accuses the "Franks" of conniving against Romiosyne and Orthodoxy. The opening lines of this prologue are highly enlightening as to his ulterior motive of incorporating a historical-political manifesto in the body of an otherwise theological work.

The present study dates from a time when efforts were made to isolate heterodox influences on Orthodox theology, and digressions from patristic tradition were all too evident. Nowadays, we are in a position to account for the political and theological circles that launched heterodox initiatives for the annihilation of Romiosyne and the Westernization of Orthodoxy.

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51 John S. Romanides, *Ρωμηροσύνη, Ρωμανία, Ρούμελη* [*Romiosyne, Romanity, Roumele*] (Thessaloniki: Pourmaras, 1975); third edition updated, with the addition of an extra chapter (Thessaloniki: Pourmaras, 2002). Romanides' project was later supplemented by a historical/theological essay published as *Francs, Romans, Feudalism, and Doctrine: An Interplay Between Theology and Society* (Brookline MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1981) that offers a panoramic overview of his theological-political ideas.

52 It should be noted here that Romanides' "Romanity" does not include the Orthodox Slavs who, in his writings are almost always conspiring together with the Franks against the "Romans."

53 John S. Romanides, *Τὸ προπατορικὸν ἀμάρτημα*, 2nd ed. with a new Preface (Athens: Domos, 1989).

Elaborating somewhat on his reference to these “political circles,” Romanides further stipulates: “Back when this work was written, no one yet realized that foreign think tanks had designed not only the annihilation of Romiosyne but the distortion of Orthodoxy as well, according to Western principles. Today, research leads curiously to Napoleon and his associates as the chief architect of this policy.”<sup>54</sup> Napoleon is further accused of aiming at more than merely seizing authority by playing the revolutionary. In Romanides’ view, Napoleon sought as a Frank to undercut the force of the French Revolution of 1789, which, according to Romanides, was nothing but an uprising of “the enslaved Gallo-Romans against the Franks, France’s nobility.” Or, as he indicates a few lines later, “the majority of Frank officers abandoned the revolution, which developed into a war of Romans versus the Franks.” For their part, “the French revolutionaries of 1789 were proud of their lineage from Rome and the Peloponnese.”<sup>55</sup>

Even purely theological texts, such as Gregory Palamas’ *In Defense of the Holy Hesychasts*, published by Romanides in a series of patristic works characteristically called “Roman or Romioi Church Fathers,” would be read through this self-same and indivisible ethno-religious, historico-theological, and theological-political perspective, as is evident in its introduction.<sup>56</sup> In its earliest pages, Korais (a Greek scholar of the Enlightenment) is already chided as responsible for the transformation of Romiosyne into “Hellenism,” effected through trading hesychasm (the very heart of the nation) for metaphysical and social philosophy.<sup>57</sup> In the same vein, his introduction ends with a fierce assault on Europeans, Russians and so-called “Latin Greeks” or “neo-Franco Greeks” (sic),

54 Romanides, *Τὸ προπατορικὸν ἀμάρτημα*, 2nd ed., xv. The English translation of this important theological work by Romanides, although published and republished many years after the publication of the second edition of the Greek original, did not include this new preface. In his “Introduction,” the translator notes the following: “In 1989 a second Greek edition was published, and he wrote [sc. Romanides] a second preface for it. I have not included the 1989 Author’s Preface here because it discussed issues largely as they related to Western European political and intellectual efforts to reshape the national and ecclesiastical ethos of Greece in the turbulent 19th century.” See George Gabriel “Introduction,” in Romanides, *The Ancestral Sin* (Ridgewood, NJ: Zephyr Publications, 2008), 11–12.

55 Romanides, *Τὸ προπατορικὸν ἀμάρτημα*, 2nd ed., xx.

56 See John S. Romanides, “Εἰσαγωγή εἰς τὴν Θεολογίαν καὶ τὴν πνευματικότητα τῆς Ρωμαιοσύνης ἔναντι τῆς Φραγκοσύνης” [Introduction to the Theology and Spirituality of Romiosyne over and against Frankism], in John S. Romanides and Despoina Kontostergiou, *Ρωμαῖοι ἢ Ρωμηοὶ Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας: Γρηγορίου Παλαμά Ἔργα I. Ὑπὲρ τῶν Ἰερῶς ἠσυχάζοντων. Τριάς Α΄* [Romans or Romioi Fathers of the Church: The Works of Gregory Palamas I: In Defense of the Holy Hesychasts. Triads I] (Thessaloniki: Pournaras, 1984), 11–33, 49–194.

57 Romanides, “Εἰσαγωγή εἰς τὴν Θεολογίαν καὶ τὴν πνευματικότητα τῆς Ρωμαιοσύνης ἔναντι τῆς Φραγκοσύνης,” 13.

who are held responsible for the destruction of Romiosyne and the undoing of its spiritual context. The introduction then closes with a call addressed to all genuine Romans to reclaim their leadership and unfetter Romiosyne from its alien spiritual bonds.<sup>58</sup>

The above historical-theological hermeneutic (Greek-speaking and Latin-speaking Romans versus heretical Frankish invaders, Romanity versus the Franks), combined with the “three stages” theory (purification, enlightenment, glorification/theosis), hailed by Romanides as the distinctive hallmark of Orthodoxy – i.e., what sets it apart from all other religions and traditions<sup>59</sup> – will henceforth assume dominance in Romanides’ scholarship. It will color and undergird all of his remaining texts, regardless of topic (ecclesiological, dogmatic, or ecumenical, the relationship between faith and culture, national issues and territorial and national disputes with Greece’s neighbors, or even the relationship between religion and Orthodoxy and science and Orthodoxy). The unbridgeable rivalry between Romanity and the Franks, the rancorous common struggle of Greek and Latin speaking Romanity against the Frankish usurpers of Rome’s throne and the Teutonic distorters of the true spiritual experience (purification, enlightenment, glorification/theosis), was bound to be Romanides’ permanent theme after the 1970s, his hermeneutical key for understanding and explaining all kinds of problems, concerns, and challenges (theological, ecclesiological, etc.).

During the 1980s, 1990s, and partly even during the 2000s, Romanides’ theology strongly influenced the Greek theological and wider ecclesiastical landscape. It has had a decisive impact on the thought not only of bishops, priests, and especially monks but also lay theologians and numerous religious groups as well, inasmuch as it furnished a convenient and comforting conspiratorial explanation for the historical woes of Orthodoxy and the Romiosyne. As an explanation, of course, it is devoid of the slightest traces of repentance and self-criticism, for blame is always placed upon others: the heretics, the Franco-Latins, the Pope, Westerners, Napoleon Bonaparte, the Slavs, etc.

58 Romanides, “Εἰσαγωγή εἰς τὴν Θεολογίαν καὶ τὴν πνευματικότητα τῆς Ρωμαιοσύνης ἔναντι τῆς Φραγκοσύνης,” 189.

59 John S. Romanides, *Πατερική Θεολογία* [Patristic Theology], Foreword by Fr. George Metallinos, edited with notes by Monk Damascene of the Holy Mountain (Thessaloniki: Parakatathiki Publications, 2004), 30: “But Orthodoxy is not a *religion*. Orthodoxy is not a religion like all the other religions. Orthodoxy is distinguished by one unique characteristic, which is not found in the other religions. This is its anthropological and therapeutic aspect. It is on this point that it differs. Orthodoxy is a therapeutic course that treats the human person.”

Small wonder, then, that Romanides' theology has won such a large and widespread following among conservative circles in the church as well as on the far-right: he flattered the repressed frustrations, prejudices, and psychological complexes of the historically defeated modern Greeks, with the effect of cultivating theological self-sufficiency, cultural introversion, aggressiveness, and an intemperate sense of superiority. His theories on the Romiosyne have never been resisted or challenged by a robust counter-theology, nor has his book (and other related publications) been subjected to serious critical commentary in the forty-seven years after its first appearance.<sup>60</sup> What interests us here, with regard to Romanides' texts and teaching, is the total demonizing of the West, the chiliastic conflation of Orthodoxy and spirituality with Romanity/Romiosyne, and last but not least, the reductive geographical identification of all those graced with the vision of God and the uncreated light with the so-called citizens of Romanity/Romiosyne! In the characteristic words of Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos and St. Vlassios, one of Father John Romanides' most faithful followers, "Father Romanides had devoted himself entirely to the cause of Romiosyne, which to him was the quintessence of all genuine spirituality, the kind that frees us from self-love, material lust, and every other expression of fallen humankind."<sup>61</sup>

Outside the territory of Romanity, Greek-speaking or Latin-speaking, there does not seem to be – for Father Romanides – either repentance and spiritual struggle, holiness, *theosis/theoptia*, nor salvation, as all the above seem to be limited or connected to a specific cultural and geographical domain. Bearing in mind the definition of Romanity and Roman given by Romanides himself (the citizen of the Roman Empire, incorrectly called Byzantium), we can conclude that holiness, *theosis*, and genuine Orthodoxy is ultimately identified for the Greek-American theologian with a particular empire (the Roman), and its culture, its territory, and its citizens. Orthodox peoples who formed no part of this empire, by chance or choice, such as the Slavs, are either ignored by Romanides or openly denounced as collaborators with the Franks and traitors

60 For pertinent criticisms, see André de Halleux, "Une vision orthodoxe grecque de la romanité," *Revue Théologique de Louvain* 15 (1984), 54–66; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI/Edinburgh: Eerdmans and T&T Clark, 1998), 511–5. For a sympathetic appraisal of Romanides' work in English language cf. Andrew Sopko, *Prophet of Roman Orthodoxy: The Theology of John Romanides* (Dewdney BC: Synaxis Press: The Canadian Orthodox Publishing House, 1998).

61 Father George Metallinos, *Πρωτοπρεσβύτερος Ἰωάννης Σ. Ρωμανίδης. Ὁ "προφήτης τῆς Ρωμηοσύνης" προσωπογραφούμενος μέσα ἀπὸ ἀγνωστα ἢ λίγο γνωστά κείμενα* [Protopresbyter John S. Romanides: The "Prophet of Romanity": A Profile through Unknown or Little Known Texts] (Athens: Armos, 2003), 67.

of Romiosyne. It is certainly no accident that, as far as I know, Romanides nowhere makes references to Slavic and especially Russian saints or ascetics. Thus, in its dual version, as a state and as a culture, as a citizenship and as a spiritual path to holiness and *theosis*, Romanity is described in Romanides' work in terms of spiritual and cultural authenticity and supremacy.

### *Christos Yannaras*

Another very influential Greek theologian, philosopher, and columnist, Christos Yannaras was the most characteristic representative of the Greek generation of the 1960s. He contributed so much through his work to the renewal of Orthodox theology in Greece and the wider Orthodox world. Yannaras came to support and systematize – as a sort of a metaphysical axiom – the theory of an unbroken continuity of Hellenism, not in the field of history but in that of thought and culture. Yannaras' unbroken continuity, which illustrates in the most characteristic way, the cultural hermeneutics of Florovsky's "Christian Hellenism," clearly differs from the racial one and focuses specifically on the dialogical/communal and apophatic version of truth from Heraclitus through St. Gregory Palamas and in his theory of the survival of an enduring cultural Greekness. In his view, this Greekness transcends historical, political, and religious divisions and maintains certain unique characteristics unchanged over time. Yannaras' hermeneutic first debuted, in its original form, in his early works at the beginning of the 1970s whereas, after 1979–80,<sup>62</sup> there's hardly a single work by Yannaras that does not derive from or add further support to his theory of an unbroken continuity of Hellenic culture from classical antiquity to the present. According to Yannaras, the truth is never exhausted in its formulation, just as the cognizance of prepositional truth cannot be completely identified with its non-verbal, original version. Thus, Yannaras developed his thesis of "the Greek identification of the truth with the *common logos*, in other words with a social version of the truth," a Heraclitian identification of being in truth with being in communion. Without this identification, Yannaras claims, "it is simply impossible to make any sense of the Greek way of life from the

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62 In 1980–1981, Yannaras published his two-volume work in Greek: *Σχεδιάσμα Είσαγωγής στη Φιλοσοφία* [An Outline of an Introduction to Philosophy] (Athens: Domos Publications), in which he developed his view of this issue. It was then translated into French under the characteristic title: *Philosophie sans rupture*, trans. André Borrély (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1986). The title of the English translation focuses not on the issue of continuity between ancient Greek and Christian thought but on the discontinuity between Hellenic (ancient pre-Christian and Christian alike), and Western thought: *The Schism in Philosophy: The Hellenic Perspective and its Western Reversal*, trans. Norman Russell (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2015).

5th century BC to the 15th century AD.”<sup>63</sup> It thus follows that the suggested epistemological continuity, premised on the concept of truth, common to both pre-Christian and Christian Hellenism, as an event of interpersonal participation and communion, would now serve as a point of contact and a platform for the encounter of Hellenism and Christianity, chiefly through the grand theological synthesis of the Greek Fathers.<sup>64</sup>

For Yannaras, this version of the truth constitutes the very crux of the cultural identity of Hellenism, inasmuch as “yet ... the moderately formed Greek, with at least some philosophical and theological education, suspects or knows that it is a peculiarity of his culture to be defined in particular by the apophatic interpretation of truth – from the time of Heraclitus to that of Gregory Palamas.”<sup>65</sup> It is actually this definition of truth, above all else, that “determines every other difference between the two traditions or cultures,”<sup>66</sup> i.e., the Greek and Western respectively.

Elsewhere, Yannaras reiterates his standard position that what sets the Greek tradition apart from the West is the former’s consistent preservation, again from Heraclitus to Gregory Palamas, of apophatic epistemology. He sees this divergence as instrumental in the ecclesiastical schism between East and West and no less responsible for the “religious” distortion of the church:

Had the Greek intelligentsia been more resistant to [sweeping slogans], they would have discovered more kinship with the heretical founders of modernity. For what radically sets Greece (ancient and medieval alike) apart from the West is its consistent commitment to apophaticism, as evidenced in the tradition from Heraclitus to Gregory Palamas. The search for “meaning” in the Greek tradition, i.e., the ontological concern, was never trapped in dogmas or in different authoritarian forms *a priori*. The Greek intelligentsia learned at long last that Christianity was once split into two because the Greek Church consciousness and experience refused to walk with the then-barbaric West on the way to a “religious” distortion of the ecclesial event and its submission to doctrines and infallible authorities.<sup>67</sup>

63 Christos Yannaras, “Μυστήρας: Ἀπὸ τὸν βυζαντινὸ στὸν Νέο Ἑλληνισμό” [Mystras: From Byzantine to Modern Hellenism], *Κριτικές Παρεμβάσεις* [Critical Approaches], 2nd expanded ed. (Athens: Domos, 1987), 45. Cf. idem, *Elements of Faith: An Introduction to Orthodox Theology*, trans. K. Schram (London/New York: T & T Clark, 1991), 153–4.

64 Cf. Cyril Hovorun, *Political Orthodoxies: The Unorthodoxies of the Church Coerced* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 2018), 168–70.

65 Christos Yannaras, *On the Absence and Unknowability of God: Heidegger and the Areopagite*, edited and with an Introduction by Andrew Louth, trans. by Haralambos Ventis (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 17.

66 Yannaras, *On the Absence and Unknowability of God: Heidegger and the Areopagite*, 15.

67 Christos Yannaras, *Ἡ κατάρρευση τοῦ πολιτικοῦ συστήματος στὴν Ἑλλάδα σήμερα* [The Collapse of the Political System in Greece Today] (Thessaloniki: Ianos, 2008), 240.

Yannaras' theory of the unbroken continuity of Greek thought and culture from Heraclitus to Gregory Palamas would soon be complemented by a more historical and "political" – and at the same time more fixed – dimension: one that not only likes to constantly discover the Greeks' enduring apophatic attitude vis-à-vis the issue of truth but also sees an enduring civility and a sense of nobility in the Greeks, as well as their destiny as an aristocratic people, to live in leisure, i.e., to be free from the savage need to earn a living and to focus instead on producing culture: to philosophize, to exercise virtue, and to cultivate the art of politics. They thus leave manual labor (which is identical to the subjection to need) to other people, who are like sheep in their need for production. For the latter, the highest goal of salvation has become intertwined with the idea of work and faithfulness, *Labor et Fides* – as Yannaras himself characteristically writes in his book *Undefined Greece*,<sup>68</sup> in which he records experiences, events, and discussions from his encounters with Greeks in the Diaspora in Australia, Canada, and the U.S.

This constant preoccupation with the theme of the inherent gentleness and nobility of the aristocratic Greeks, this theological and cultural fomentation and justification of the quest for excellence and superiority that inevitably takes place at the expense of others, and this continual reference to faith almost exclusively in terms of culture and, indeed, in a way that often seems to exclude some from this faith because they are not culturally mature appear to be consistent features of the thought and work of Yannaras. Thus, his later works are distinguished by, among other things, a disengagement from theology as such in favor of or because of philosophy and especially culture/identity. Yannaras refers consistently in these later works even to worship and to the Divine Liturgy in terms not only of the nobility, gentleness, and culture of the Greeks but also of the leading role played by Orthodox worship in the living cultural witness to Hellenism throughout the Greek diaspora in America and the modern world in general.<sup>69</sup>

From this perspective, "Greek Orthodox liturgy" seems, according to Yannaras, to be the most important or rather the only, bulwark against the imminent destruction, dissolution, and collapse of the "little Greek state": ancient Greek drama continues every week in thousands of churches and communities of Greeks around the world, recapitulating the historical development of the Greek language. All the discussion about Orthodox worship, and especially the Divine Liturgy, as a foretaste of and participation in the

68 Christos Yannaras, *Άόριστη Ελλάδα. Κοντσέρτο για δύο αποδημίες* [Undefined Greece: Concerto for Two Migrations] (Athens: Domos, 1994), 58; cf. 59, 120–1.

69 Yannaras, *Άόριστη Ελλάδα*, 28–31.

eschatological kingdom and all that this entails in theological and ecclesiastical terms does not appear to interest Yannaras here. The Divine Liturgy is not seen in terms of participating in the eschatological banquet of the coming Lord, which constitutes the Body of Christ and the people of God. Rather, what matters in the passage under discussion is the cultural dimension of worship, the expression through liturgy of Greekness and the spirit of resistance the latter preserves. For this reason, this understanding of the Divine Liturgy concerns every Greek – regardless of faith and regardless of his spiritual struggle and the existential leap of faith that this presupposes. In the words of Yannaras himself:

Imagine if in every neighborhood of a Greek city, in every village, in every Greek community of the diaspora, we were to stage an ancient Greek tragedy every week. We would consider it a tangible, dynamic presence and witness to Hellenicity. We would have assured the survival of the language, as well as the ethos and way of life that Hellenism carries with it, even if the little Greek state were to be destroyed.

And we ordinary and unimportant citizens have something even more significant in our hands: a living, weekly act of the people that continues ancient Greek dramaturgy. It recapitulates the historical evolution of our language and our cultural contribution in dazzling poetry, revelatory painting, and engrossing melody. We have the Greek Orthodox liturgy – every week in thousands of churches, throughout the world, wherever there is a Greek community.

I will be so bold as to say that it does not matter whether someone “believes” or not, whether someone is “religious” or not. The tangible expression of Greekness that is the liturgy is our living and active culture and must be preserved at all costs. It is up to every Greek to save it.

We must preserve the cultural dynamic of the Greek Orthodox liturgy, and we must all enlist in the service of cleansing it from “religionization,” which is foreign to it. Specifically, this is what I propose: That we establish groups toward this end in every city, every neighborhood, and every village and community.<sup>70</sup>

This unprecedented instrumentalization of Orthodoxy’s liturgical tradition is not content with simply buttressing claims of unbroken Greek continuity, as is evident in many of Yannaras’ texts.<sup>71</sup> In his thinking, Orthodox worship

70 Christos Yannaras, *Ἑλληνότροπος πολιτική. Ἐξ ἀντιθέτου κριτήρια καὶ προτάσεις* [*Politics in the Greek Mode: Criteria and Proposals from an Opposite Point of View*] (Athens: Ikaros, 1996), 175–6.

71 For a representative example, see this characteristic piece from Yannaras’ column in the widely read Athenian newspaper *Kathimerini* (9 September 2001): “Three and a half thousand years of rich Greek culture are on display in the living worship of the Orthodox

is inextricably tied to the search for identity and reflection on Greek uniqueness. Orthodox worship, then, comes to be understood in some of Yannaras' works in a cultural rather than a theological way and less in an eschatological way. It is conceived of as the most, if not only, defining characteristic of Greeks today, and thus represents that expression, that aspect of life, by which the Greek people still manage to be culturally distinct from the dominant globalizing Western model.<sup>72</sup> Even in his autobiographical work *On Himself*, Yannaras was not able to avoid a reference to or tangent about Orthodox worship as a distinctive mark of the Greeks' nobility, gentleness, and culture or about the liturgical act as fidelity to and confirmation of the cultural superiority of the Orthodox and the Greeks over all others.<sup>73</sup>

In such a reading and understanding of worship, it is of little importance that this wonderful "we" is not national/racial but cultural. It matters little that the divisive role of ethnophyletism is undertaken by cultural or ecumenical/universal Hellenism since it is diametrically opposed to the liturgical "we" that highlights the church as a spiritual homeland for all people in one spiritual race and since it contradicts the very core of the Gospel, the consciousness of the Orthodox Divine Liturgy as a work of every single believer everywhere throughout the world.

But Yannaras' theory of the unbroken continuity of Greek thought from Heraclitus to Gregory Palamas is inconceivable without his understanding of the relationship between church and culture, between truth and cultural context, as it has taken shape over the last few years. In fact, in his writings,<sup>74</sup> the pivotal role the cultural criterion plays in Yannaras' thought leads him to make the catholicity of each local church (and the authentic manifestation thereof) dependent on the conditions of its cultural milieu, with language regarded as the foremost criterion. For Yannaras, culture is a prerequisite for granting access to the ecclesial event and way of life. Small wonder, then, that Yannaras

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Church: There we have the continuity of ancient Greek politics, the 'assembly [ecclesia] of the people [*dimos*]' as the gathering [*ecclesia*] of the faithful. There we have the continuation of tragedy, drama that functions as revelation. There we have the historical continuity of the language, from Homer to Gerasimos Mikragiannanitis, at every Vespers and Matins service. There we have the unbroken continuity of poetry, the continuity of music, and painting, from Fayyum to Theophilus."

72 Christos Yannaras, *Πολιτιστική Διπλωματία. Προθεωρία ελληνικού σχεδιασμού* [Cultural Diplomacy: A Theory of Greek Planning] (Athens: Ikaros, 2003), 158–9. In the same vein, see Yannaras, *Αντιστάσεις στην αλλοτρίωση. Έπικαιρη κριτική σχοινοβασία* [Resistance to Alienation: A Vital Critical Balancing Act] (Athens: Ikaros, 1997), 236.

73 Christos Yannaras, *Τά καθ' ἑαυτὸν* [*On Himself*] (Athens: Ikaros, 1995), 184–5; cf. 186.

74 In regard to this point, see his very important paper: "Ἐκκλησία καὶ πολιτισμός" [Church and Culture], *Synaxi* 88 (2003), 11–17.

has increasingly supported the view that one cannot be fully Orthodox if one does not participate in the ultimate synthesis of Hellenism and Christianity that was produced by the great Greek Fathers of the 4th century AD, if one is not familiar with the unprecedented achievements of ancient Greek philosophy and semantics, or if one is not conversant in the language of Greek ontology that contributed so much to the formulation of Christian doctrine.

This remarkable and unique position of Christian Hellenism makes it part and parcel or “flesh of theology’s flesh,” the diachronic (and henceforth obligatory) historical-cultural flesh of the church. It is this to such a degree, in fact, that even today, according to Yannaras, the church must formulate and preach the truth of the Gospel of salvation in every place and time in Greek cultural and philosophical terms. In the same way, Yannaras routinely attributes the limited – and, in his view, problematic – assimilation of Christianity by the so-called “barbaric tribes” that conquered Rome in the 5th century AD to their cultural and intellectual retardation. Even today, he thinks that the people of mission, such as Africans and Asians, have to become acquainted with Greek cultural and philosophical achievements in order to become fully Orthodox.<sup>75</sup> Hellenism is thus elevated to the status of a crucial and indispensable prerequisite for the manifestation of the true, catholic church, just as “Jewishness” was deemed the necessary medium for the Incarnation of Christ, God’s manifestation in the flesh. In this way, Hellenism is assigned a special role in Yannaras’ thought in the Divine economy of salvation.

Indeed, a particular and crucial aspect of Yannaras’ Helleno-Christian theology, which was manifest already fairly early (1977)<sup>76</sup> but became more prominent over time throughout his later work, especially in his texts after 1990,<sup>77</sup> not only raises the idea of the diachronic unity and continuity of the individual phases of Hellenism’s cultural development. It also hints at a theory in which Greekness, as the historical flesh that presented Hellenism as the full expression of Orthodoxy gives us the right to speak about Hellenism’s unique (and not incidental) role in the plan of the Divine economy, a role analogous to that of the Incarnation of God through the Jews, which, for a believer, is also not coincidental. More precisely, ecclesiastical catholicity for Yannaras is connected not only to ecclesial and theological presuppositions but also to

75 Yannaras, “*Εκκλησία και πολιτισμός*,” 13–14, 15, 17.

76 Christos Yannaras, *Αλήθεια και ενότητα της Εκκλησίας* [Truth and the Unity of the Church] (Athens: Grigoris, 1977), 273ff.; French translation (by Jean-Louis Palieme): *Vérité et unité de l’Eglise* (Grez-Doiceau: éd. Axios, 1989), 162ff.; idem, *Νεοελληνική ταυτότητα* [Modern Greek Identity] (Athens: Grigoris, 1978), 8–9.

77 Particularly in his articles “*Εκκλησία και πολιτισμός*” and “Nation, People, Church” (see below).

cultural ones. This is why, in addition to the fundamental characteristics of the catholicity of the church (such as the centrality of the Eucharist and the bishop to the constitution of the ecclesial body), Yannaras also adds a basic component of his theology and his theory/philosophy of culture in general, stating that the authentic manifestation of every local church's catholicity is connected directly to its cultural/historical flesh, to its native language, and the expression of its living, native culture. This is such a critical parameter for Yannaras, such an absolute necessity, that he goes so far as to claim that

if we underestimate or misunderstand the local language, the expression of its living, native culture (defined geographically and temporally), we remove its enhypostatic reality from the ecclesial mode of existence. We change it into a mental conception and moralistic deontology, into abstract “beliefs” and expedient canonical “principles.” Without the flesh of culture, the Church becomes an “ism”: Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, or “Orthodoxism” – different ideological versions of rationalistic metaphysics and utilitarian ethics, all with ambitions of universalism, i.e., geographical “catholicity.”<sup>78</sup>

Yannaras goes further, however, highlighting the Christological concomitant of this theological/ecclesiological position, emphasizing not simply the historicity and reality of the Incarnation but –not incidentally, as we will see shortly– also ethnicity, the particular language and cultural background of the Incarnate One:

the Causal Principle of any being, inaccessible to the mind and senses, assumed the flesh of biological individuality, the flesh of a rational subject of a particular background and a particular historical place. He assumed ethnicity and language and, with that, the inherent worldview of the time in order to deify this assumption.<sup>79</sup>

Given this, he concludes that:

since then, every time the Christological prototype of existence is realized in each particular eucharistic community, it too has its specific historical “flesh” – national, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural. The Gospel of the Church is not an ideological premise that we adopt as a “superstructure” to the practice of our lives, a practice that varies according to our local customs and culture. The Gospel is

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78 Yannaras, “Εκκλησία και πολιτισμός,” 12.

79 Yannaras, “Εκκλησία και πολιτισμός,” 11. The same idea is present in a more concise form, in his article “Nation, People, Church,” originally published in 1994, and translated by Elisabeth Theokritoff, in: *Synaxis: An Anthology of the Most Significant Orthodox Theology in Greece Appearing in the Journal Synaxi from 1982 to 2002*, vol. III (Montreal: Alexander Press, 2006), 98.

embodied in the practice of life, and only when it is incarnate does it become a *mode of being*.<sup>80</sup>

It is quite obvious here that Yannaras makes no reference to – or simply ignores – the eschatological Christ, the coming Lord of glory who will unite all previous differences and overturn, through the Cross, every type of division and fragmentation (such as those based on sex, race, ethnicity, language, culture, social class, and background). Rather, he is content to highlight and, in fact, considers the cultural aspects of the historical Christ, which in this case can be summarized as Jewishness, as absolutely essential for every place and age. Obviously, the goal of this pivotal theological choice is its applicability by analogy to Greekness (which, of course, is the historical flesh of the Church), i.e., to a vital and irreplaceable part of tangible catholicity and authentic church life.

The eschatological deficit in Yannaras' corpus also explains his emphasis on culture. His work has a blatantly protological orientation, with a strong yearning for origins in the form of a call to return to roots and tradition. Theologically, this tendency translates into a view of the Eucharist as a manifestation in the present of God's eschatological promises, with little or no emphasis on the Church's intrinsically eschatological nature. It is in the name of culture, then, that the (unwaveringly premodern) classical Greek and Byzantine past is justified and extolled up to and including the Greek Orthodox communities from the period of Ottoman occupation. These communities in particular are lauded as the embodiment of authentic social life, as the ideal social setting for the emergence of true personhood, on account of their being grounded in the true ecclesial way of life.<sup>81</sup> Contemporary Greece and Europe, by contrast, are perceived as areas of decline and estrangement (from a glorious past), while the future is viewed with pessimism.

The espousal of a supposedly seamless cultural continuity running throughout the entire history of Hellenism has resulted in a gradual redirection of Yannaras' work from a theological to a cultural emphasis and the adoption of a hardened anti-Westernism with pronounced cultural underpinnings.<sup>82</sup> It is precisely the implementation of this cultural criterion that causes Yannaras to blur the lines between theology and philosophy, a move that, in turn, allows

80 Yannaras, "Nation, People, Church," 98.

81 See, for example, Christos Yannaras, *The Freedom of Morality*, trans. Elizabeth Briere (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 220–3.

82 Cf. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, "The Image of the West in Contemporary Greek Theology," in George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou (eds), *Orthodox Constructions of the West* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 142–160.

him to visualize Hellenism in terms of an unbreakable intellectual and cultural unity over the entire course of its history.

The above examples of ethnotheology are surprising, and even awkward for their ethno-religious or cultural proud and the sense of greatness/“Great Idea,” for the glorification respectively of the Romanian, Roman (Byzantine) or Hellenic people and culture as well as for the aggressive anti-Westernism (and also anti-Semitism, in Staniloae’s case), and the praise of Orthodox isolationism. Nevertheless, the three of them remained on the level of a self-sufficient, self-justifying discourse, and a romantic self-exaltation rhetoric and were not actively involved in any kind of violent or aggressive acts, in wars and crimes. Unfortunately, this was not the case with the following examples which are involved in violent acts, while supporting aggressive ideologies.

*Metropolitan of Montenegro Amfilohije Radovic and Bishop of  
Herzegovina Atanasije Jevtic*

Ethnotheology seems to be strongly rooted in contemporary Serbian Orthodox theology, finding sound expression in the persons of Metropolitan Amfilohije Radovic and Bishop Atanasije Jevtic (but not limited only to them, although we cannot classify the whole of contemporary Serbian theology under the heading of ethnotheology). Previously, the great figures of modern Serbian Orthodoxy, Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic and Father Justin Popovic (both of them now recognized as saints by the Serbian Orthodox Church), developed the idea of the “Serbian people as servant of God,”<sup>83</sup> or of “[t]he mystery and spiritual meaning of the battle in Kosovo,”<sup>84</sup> consolidating thus a messianic self-consciousness,

83 Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich, *The Serbian People as a Servant of God*, trans. Rt Rev. Theodore Mika and Very Rev. Stevan Scott (Grayslake IL: The Serbian Orthodox Metropolitane of New Gracanica, Diocese of America and Canada, 1999).

84 Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich and Archimandrite Justin Popovic (select writings of), *The Mystery and Meaning of the Battle of Kosovo*, trans. in honor of the 600th Anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo by Rt Rev. Todor Mika and Very Rev. Stevan Scott (Grayslake IL: The Serbian Orthodox Metropolitane of New Gracanica, Diocese of America and Canada, 1999). Cf. Thomas Bremer, “The Attitude of the Serbian Orthodox Church towards Europe,” in Jonathan Sutton and William Peter Van Den Bercken (eds.), *Orthodox Christianity and Contemporary Europe: Selected Papers of the International Conference held at the University of Leeds, England, in June 2001* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 423–30; Julia Anna Lis, *Antwestliche Diskurse in der serbischen und griechischen Orthodoxie: Zur Konstruktion des “Westens” bei Nikolaj Velimirović, Justin Popović, Christos Yannaras und John S. Romanides* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2019). In contrast, see the defence of the two Serbian theologians (now recognized as saints by the Serbian Orthodox Church) undertaken by Vladimir Cvetković in his “The Reception of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the 21st-Century German Academia,” in Mikonja Knežević (ed.), in collaboration with Rade Kisić and Dušan Krcunović, *Philosophos – Philotheos – Philoponos: Studies and Essays as Charisteria*

and a theory of victimization among the Serbian people. In doing so, both authors are well within the prevailing (at the time) understanding and application of the tradition of saintsavaism, which as a theological orientation appears in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in the 1930s. The movement took its name from the founder of the Serbian Church, St. Sava, a fact that emphasizes the national character of Serbian Orthodoxy as opposed to the catholic character of the Orthodox Church.<sup>85</sup> Saintsavaism was nominally rooted in and particularly promoted by Popovic's views on it as a holistic philosophy of life.<sup>86</sup> This philosophy placed the primacy of the Divine over the human at its center and – because of its very strong exclusivist soteriology, ecclesiology, and theology of virtues – was criticized to promote and expand antimodernist ideas, religious intolerance, and ethnoreligious nationalism and even to have affinities with totalitarian ideologies such as National Socialism.<sup>87</sup> The debate

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*in Honor of Professor Bogoljub Šijaković on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday* (Belgrade and Podgorica: Gnomon Center for the Humanities Matica srpska – Društvo članova u Crnoj Gori, 2021), 993–1004, who opposes Julia Anna Lis' and my own analysis (on Yannaras and Romanides, and their relation to Serbian theology).

- 85 Cf. also on this Christos Mylonas, *Serbian Orthodox Fundamentals: The Quest for an Eternal Identity* (Budapest/New York: Central European University Press, 2003), 52: "Saint-Savism (Svetosavlje) as a primordial given factor of Serb culture constitutes the principled and fundamental expression of the love of and the life in Orthodoxy, in accordance with the national traditions. It is 'the soul [which] kept its memory alive [...]' when the body succumbed to the Turks" to partly paraphrase Ivo Banac's account of the relationship between the Nemanjic Kingdom and the Serbian Church, or rather the foundations of heavenly Serbia. In the case of the former, Orthodoxy's transcending nature and spirituality connotes – in an ironic manner, when considering the destruction of St. Sava's remains by the Turks – my primary hypothesis, which has identified Orthodoxy as the sacralisation of the Serbian identity."
- 86 See Justin Popovic, *Pravoslavna Crkva i ekumenizam; Svetosavlje kao filozofija života* [The Orthodox Church and Ecumenism – Saintsavaism as a Philosophy of Life], ed. Atanasije Jevtic (Belgrade: Manastir Celijski; Naslednici Oca Justina, 2001).
- 87 Cf., e.g., Maria Falina, "Svetosavlje a Case Study in the Nationalization of Religion," *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Religions und Kulturgeschichte* 101 (2007), 505–27; Neven Vukic, "Saintsavaism(s) and Nationalism: An Overview of the Development of the Serbian Orthodox Phenomenon of Saintsavaism, with a Special Focus on the Contribution of Justin Popovic (1894–1979)," *Exchange: Journal of Contemporary Christianities in Context* 50 (2021), 77–98; idem, *Engaging the Religious Other: Studies in Orthodox-Muslim Dialogue*, PhD Dissertation (Leuven: KU Leuven Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, 2021), 87–91; Branimir Anzulovic, *Heavenly Serbia: From Myth to Genocide* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), especially 23–31; Lis, *Antiwestliche Diskurse in der serbischen und griechischen Orthodoxie*, 225–36. A more sympathetic approach to Popovic's saintsavaism is proposed by Bogdan Lubardić, "Revolt against the Modern World: Theology and the Political in the Thought of Justin Popović," in Kristina Stoeckl, Ingeborg Gabriel, and Aristotle Papanikolaou (eds.), *Political Theologies in Orthodox Christianity: Common*

concerning this last point (saintsavaism and National Socialism) focuses on a speech by Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic delivered in Belgrade in 1935 called “The Nationalism of Saint Sava.” In this speech he not only establishes a connection between Saint Sava and Adolf Hitler but also praised Hitler for doing what the founder of the Serbian Orthodox Church did in the 13th century:

One must render homage to the present German leader who, as a simple craftsman and man of the people, realized that nationalism without religion is an anomaly, a cold and insecure mechanism. Thus, in the twentieth century he arrived at Saint Sava’s idea and as a layman undertook the most important task in his nation that befits a saint, genius, and hero.<sup>88</sup>

Taking into account Velimirovic’s later biography and his detention in the Dachau Nazi concentration camp during WWII, many would agree with Neven Vukic’s opinion that, at worst, the above unfortunate quotation was “an error in judgement on the part of Velimirovic, with regards to the character of the German dictator.”<sup>89</sup>

The cases of the distinguished late Serbian hierarchs and eminent theologians of the Belgrade Faculty of Theology (both died of COVID during the academic year 2020–21, refusing to practise social distancing), the former Bishop of Zahumije and Herzegovina Atanasije Jevtic, and Metropolitan Amfilohije Radovic of Montenegro and the Littoral, should be listed among the examples of ethnotheology in Orthodoxy. Both developed an ethnotheological discourse, tolerating – if not encouraging and blessing – violent acts, war crimes, or even crimes against humanity while both were criticized as being among those who energetically opposed peace plans during the Yugoslav wars.<sup>90</sup> Both bishops were among the most influential hierarchs of the Serbian Orthodox Church with great influence not only within church related milieus but also among politicians, journalists, intellectuals, university professors, and the wider society of Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the context of the dramatic conditions of the breakup of the former Yugoslavia, these hierarchs increasingly slipped away from theology into ethnotheology and “patriotic

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*Challenges and Divergent Positions* (London: Bloomsbury/T&T Clark, 2017), 207–28, here 215–9.

88 See Nikolai Velimirovic, *Nacionalizam svetoga Save* (Belgrade: Association of the Serbian Orthodox Clergy of the Belgrade–Karlovci Eparchy, 1935), 27–8, quoted in Anzulovic, *Heavenly Serbia*, 30.

89 Vukic, *Engaging the Religious Other: Studies in Orthodox-Muslim Dialogue*, 88–9.

90 See for example Radmila Radic, “The Church and the ‘Serbian Question,’” in Nebojsa Popov and Drinka Gojkovic (eds), *The Road to War in Serbia: Trauma and Catharsis* (Budapest/New York: Central European University Press, 2000), 247–73, here 269.

theology” in their post-1992<sup>91</sup> texts, discourses, sermons, and public interventions. Time and space do not suffice to record, analyze, and discuss all the relevant sources and evidence related to these two well-known Serbian hierarchs. In addition, the linguistic barrier is a major problem for people who do not speak the Serbian language but want to get a well-informed understanding of the tragic events that took place in the former Yugoslavia and the way hierarchs, theologians, and the Orthodox in general reacted to them. But many of us – especially in Greece, where the two late bishops felt at home, having a wide audience, and were allowed to express themselves during lectures and round tables in a free and confident way – were left with the impression that these great ecclesiastical and theological personalities were won over by the defense of the Serbian national cause and that theology had taken a back seat.

Thus, to limit myself to just a few elements, in a 1990 interview with the Belgrade weekly NIN Metropolitan Amfilohije Radovic maintained that “Milosevic and other leading politicians in Serbia should be commended for understanding the vital interests of the Serb people at this moment. [...] If they continue as they have started, the results will be very impressive.”<sup>92</sup> In addition, as reported in Neven Vukic’s doctoral dissertation (1995), the convicted war criminal, Vojislav Seselj, an extremely controversial figure, was awarded a medal for his role in the Kosovo War, for his service to the justice of God against the inhumane justice of the International Criminal Tribunal exercised against the former Yugoslavia in The Hague (The Netherlands). In addition, he

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91 In some cases, these phenomena could be found even before 1992, as these bishops, and others too, were among those who enflamed Serbians about the Kosovo issue, and presented Kosovo as the “Serbian Jerusalem,” and enthusiastically praised Milosevic’s relevant speech in June 1989. Metropolitan Amfilohije Radovic, for example, will state in an interview to the foreign press that, “between 1987 and 1989, as it was so clear during the jubilee of the Kosovo Battle (sc. in 1989), Serbia has demonstrated a national unity, unseen probably since 1914.” See the bishop’s statement to the BBC evening radio news (4 August 1989), *Religion, Politics, Society* (17 August 1989), as quoted by Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States* (Oxford/ New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 143. On this, see Marko Živković, “Stories Serbs Tell Themselves: Discourses on Identity and Destiny in Serbia since the Mid-1980’s,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 44, no. 4 (1997), 22–29, especially 24. Cf. Srdjan Vrcan, “A Christian Confession Possessed by Nationalistic Paroxysm: The Case of Serbian Orthodoxy,” *Religion* 25 (1995), 357–70, especially 359, 363–6. The Serbian Orthodox reply to all these critiques, and the interpretation of the relevant historical events can be found in the volume, *The Christian Heritage of Kosovo and Metohija: The Historical and Spiritual Heartland of the Serbian People* (Los Angeles CA: Sebastian Press, 2015).

92 *Naša Borba*, 8 April 1998, quoted by Perica, *Balkan Idols*, 143.

called on Vojislav Seselj to continue his chivalric work of defending the soul and face of the Serbian people.<sup>93</sup>

In addition, Metropolitan Amfilohije Radovic, took it upon himself to organize a conference in Cetinje, Montenegro, in 1996 in the wake of the end of the Bosnian War, and looming war crimes proceedings, on the relation between Orthodox Christianity and war. At this conference, he did not fail to include the leader of the Bosnian Serbs of that time, Radovan Karadzic, among the invited speakers. Karadzic is now a convicted war criminal, who has been found guilty of the charge of genocide and of other crimes committed during the war in Bosnia (1992–995), and who had already been indicted at that time by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague (Netherlands) for his direct responsibility in the Srebrenica Genocide.<sup>94</sup> The proceedings of that conference were published later that same year by the publishing house of the Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral with the blessing of Metropolitan Amfilohije as *The Lamb of God and the Beast from the Abyss*.<sup>95</sup>

This volume contains contributions by Radovan Karadzic, scholars and a number of clerics, especially from Montenegro. It seeks primarily to justify the Serbian war in Bosnia and provide for a general “philosophical” opposition to the anti-war literature published in Yugoslavia.<sup>96</sup>

As to the connection of Karadzic and his ethnoreligious project to the Serbian Church, according to Radmila Radic,

The leader of the Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Radovan Karadzic, confirmed at the beginning of 1994 that the relationship between the church and the state was excellent, stating that, “Our clergy are present at all our deliberations and in the decision making processes; the voice of the church is respected as the voice of highest authority.” Karadzic also added that everything he achieved in life he

93 Vukic, *Engaging the Religious Other*, 103, n. 293, from whom I borrow most of the information in the present section.

94 Vukic, *Engaging the Religious Other*, 103–4.

95 See the collective volume *Jagnje Bozije i Zvijer iz Bezdana* [The Lamb of God and the Beast from the Abyss], ed. Rados M. Mladenovic and (Hierodeacon) Jovan Culibrk (now Bishop of Pakrac and Slavonia) (Cetinje: Svetigora 1996), and Vukic, *Engaging the Religious Other*, 103–4.

96 Florian Bieber, “Montenegrin Politics since the Disintegration of Yugoslavia,” accessible at <https://web.archive.org/web/20100703005659/http://www.policy.hu/bieber/Publications/bieber.pdf/> (accessed 19 March 2022). Bieber refers also to Stjepan Gredelj, “Klerikalizam, etnofiletizam, antiokumenizam I (ne)tolerancija,” *Sociologija* 41. no. 2 (April–June 1999), 157–8.

owed to religion and the church and that whatever he did, he did “with God in mind.”<sup>97</sup>

In his turn the former Bishop of Herzegovina Atanasije Jevtic, who also contributed to the aforementioned conference in Cetinje, and to its Proceedings, went so far as to argue that: “war is intrinsic to the whole of creation (even angels warred against each other), that is simply the way of the world.” Apparently, he was under a strong emotional shock provoked by aggressions of the rival side of the Yugoslavian wars (Bosnian Croats, the allies of Muslims in the civil war, destroyed his cathedral church of the Holy Trinity in Mostar, in 1992). According to Bishop Atanasije Jevtic, the Serbs fought a valiant and heroic war, a defensive war that was conducted as self-defence against probable genocide at the hands of the Croats and Muslims. Here, he was referring to the war crimes committed by the Nazi-collaborationist government of Ustashe of the so-called “Independent State of Croatia,” a puppet state of the Axis Powers, which had implemented its own racial laws and ran its own death camps. Atanasije Jevtic was even opposed to the peace that was established in Bosnia with the Dayton Accords (1995), and defended this view theologically by asserting that “any war is better than a peace that separates one from God.”<sup>98</sup>

Neven Vukic attempts to recount and frame the wider context in his doctoral dissertation. He writes:

Similar sentiments on the preference for war rather than the “wrong kind of peace,” had been expressed [...], in the official journal of the Serbian Church, *Pravoslavlje*, by Archpriest Bozidar Mijac. In addition to elaborating on the preference for a “good war” over a “bad and godless peace,” the author apparently argues for the presence of not only “just” and “unjust” individuals in wars but also for that of “just” and “unjust” nations. Moreover, the enemies of the Serbian forces in the wars are likened to the apocalyptic beasts and the forces of chaos described in the Book of Revelation.<sup>99</sup>

97 Radic, “The Church and the ‘Serbian Question,’” 268. Cf. Vukic, *Engaging the Religious Other*, 102–3.

98 See Atanasije Jevtic, “Najgori od svih mogućih ratova,” in the volume *Jagnje Bozije i Zvijer iz Bezdana*, 69–76, quoted in Vukic, *Engaging the Religious Other*, 104, from whom I am borrowing this information.

99 See Bozidar Mijac, “Mir, da, ali kakav?” [Peace, Yes, but What Kind?], *Pravoslavlje* 600 (15 March 1992), 5, quoted by Vukic, *Engaging the Religious Other*, 104. We should note that there were, however, Orthodox theologians like the hieromonk (now Bishop) Ignatije Midic, who condemned the war as a means to achieve “higher aims, either defensive or aggressive” and who thought the war an unacceptable and unjustifiable means from the human point of view, let alone the church perspective.” See Radic, “The Church and the ‘Serbian Question,’” 264–5. A self-critical approach to a range of difficult issues with regard to the Serbian Orthodox Church is also provided by the writings of the the late

Before closing this section with examples from Serbian ethnotheology or “patriotic theology” or even “war theology,” it should be noted that both hierarchs at the beginning of their theological journey seemed to follow a different path. In commenting on the religious nationalism and ethnophyletism in a very dense, penetrating, and theologically promising paper published in Greek in 1971, Metropolitan Amfilohije raised the pertinent question of the role played by Ottoman domination and the Qur’an (with its conflation of religion and nation) in the emergence and shape of religious nationalism in Orthodoxy.<sup>100</sup> In the same work,<sup>101</sup> this distinguished Serbian clergyman and theologian, alluding to the related formulations of the 1872 Synod of Constantinople’s dogmatic “decree,” connects the phenomenon of ethnophyletism, which annuls the catholicity and universality of the church, to the resurgence of a particular “Jewish temptation.” This temptation lies in the priority of physical realities and the worship of ancestors and relatives according to the flesh, in the overvaluation of the “religion of the ancestors” and the “national god” over and against the universal call to salvation and ecumenicity.<sup>102</sup> On the other side, Bishop Atanasije Jevtic, then an hieromonk preparing his PhD dissertation at Athens University, was the first to translate and introduce to the Greek public the work of Father Justin Popovic and especially his now illustrious collection of articles, *Ἄνθρωπος καὶ Θεάνθρωπος* [Man and the God-Man], which was published in Greek in 1969, and then in different languages. One of the famous quotations of this book deals exactly with the issue of the church-nation relationship, summarizing the foregoing patristic tradition in Popovic’s theological language:

The Church is ecumenical, catholic, God-human, ageless, and it is therefore a blasphemy – an unpardonable blasphemy against Christ and against the Holy Ghost – to turn the Church into a national institution, to narrow her down to

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Father Radovan Bigović, *The Orthodox Church in the 21st Century* (Belgrade: Foundation Konrad Adenauer / Christian Cultural Center, 2013); idem, *My Brother’s Keeper: Human Dignity, Freedom and Rights from the Perspective of the Orthodox Church* (Alhambra CA: Sebastian Press, 2013). See also, Vukašin Miličević, “Religion and National/Ethnic Identity in the Western Balkans: Serbian Orthodox Context,” in *Balkan Contextual Theology: An Introduction*, ed. Stipe Odak and Zoran Grozdanov (London: Routledge, 2022), 30–44.

100 Hieromonk Amfilohije Radovic, “Ἡ καθολικότης τῆς Ὀρθοδοξίας: Σομπόρνοστ ἢ ὁ βυθὸς τῆς ἀλογίας” [The Catholicity of Orthodoxy: Sobornost or the Height of Absurdity], in the volume edited by Elias Mastroyannopoulos, *Μαρτυρία Ὀρθοδοξίας* [Orthodox Witness] (Athens: Hestia, 1971), 9–39, here 38.

101 Radovic, “Ἡ καθολικότης τῆς Ὀρθοδοξίας,” 36–8.

102 For the manifestations of this view in the current ecclesiastical climate, cf. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, “The Temptation of Judas: Church and National Identities,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 47 (2002), 357–79.

petty, transient, time-bound aspirations and ways of doing things. Her purpose is beyond nationality, ecumenical, all-embracing: to unite all men in Christ, all without exception to nation or race or social strata. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus," (Gal. 3:28), because "Christ is all, and in all." The means and methods of this all-human God-human union of all in Christ have been provided by the Church, through the holy sacraments and in her God-human works (ascetic exertions, virtues). And so it is: in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist the ways of Christ and the means of uniting all people are composed and defined and integrated. Through this mystery, man is made organically one with Christ and with all the faithful.<sup>103</sup>

Even under the tragic and very difficult circumstances, defined by the war and the persecution, it is difficult to reconcile what was said at the beginning of the 1970s with what was done during the 1990s. I have consciously avoided generalizing the discussion on the complex issue of the attitude and responsibilities of the Serbian Orthodox Church during the wars and ethnic conflicts of the 1990s in former Yugoslavia, as such a discussion is neither easy nor can it be conducted without certain presuppositions (such as knowledge of the language and free access to the relevant sources). It is clear that further research should be done in this area, while self-criticism and the healing of memories and the reconciliation process (like the one undertaken in 2012–2013 by the Serbian Orthodox Bishop Grigorije of Herzegovina [now Serbian Bishop in Germany] and the Catholic Bishop of Dubrovnik in Croatia ([now Archbishop Coadjutor of the Archdiocese of Rijeka], Mate Uzinic), is greatly needed.<sup>104</sup>

### Russkii Mir ("Russian World")

In fact, the recent Russian invasion of and war in Ukraine brought the notorious theory of *Russkii Mir* (Russian World),<sup>105</sup> to the forefront again. This is a

103 Justin Popovich, "The Inward Mission of Our Church," in *Orthodox Faith and Life in Christ*, trans. Asterios Gerostergios (Belmont MA: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 2005), pp. 23–4. The same essay is also included in a newer version in Archimandrite Justin Popovich, *Man and the God-Man* (Alhambra CA: Sebastian Press, 2008).

104 On this, see also Vjekoslav Perica, "Religion in the Balkan Wars," in *Oxford Handbooks Online*; <https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935420.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199935420-e-37?print=pdf/> (accessed 20 March 2022). For the discussion on Orthodoxy and democracy in Serbian Orthodoxy see the paper by Branko Seculić, "Eyes Wide Shut: Discussion about Orthodoxy and Democracy in Serbian Theology and Thought," in the present volume.

105 The presentation and analysis of the *Russkii Mir* is based mainly on the following: Nicholas Denysenko, "Fractured Orthodoxy in Ukraine and Politics: The Impact of Patriarch Kyrill's 'Russian World,'" *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 54.1–2 (2013), 33–68; Sergei Chapnin, "A Church of Empire: Why the Russian Church Chose to

new “theopolitical ideology [...] which is supposed to unite at least East-Slavic Orthodoxy (if not other Orthodox Churches) and their host countries against the perceived threats of ‘Western’ globalization”<sup>106</sup> and which is considered to provide the ideological basis, and the theological justification of the aggression. Yet we cannot appreciate this “Russian World” ideology without connecting it to the “Third Rome” theory, which henceforth forms part of the *Russkii Mir* and the Russian “Great Idea” that is actively promoted – at least since 2009 and the accession of Patriarch Kyrill to the patriarchal see of Moscow – by church and state in Russia.

As it widely regarded by scholars, the monk Filofei of Pskov (d. ca 1542) sent a letter (1515) to the Grand Duke Vasily III of Moscow (1479–1533) in which for the first time he called him to the high office of Emperor (Tsar) of the Third and Final Rome. According to this monk, the first two Romes had failed to their mission as a result of a combination of corruption and heresy (for instance, Constantinople had capitulated to the First Rome at the Council of Florence). Since then, however, and until the coming of the Kingdom of God, it appears that all Christian kingdoms “have merged into one”: “Two Romes have fallen. The third stands [firm]. And there will not be a fourth. No one will replace your Christian tsardom.”<sup>107</sup>

Taking advantage of the “Third Rome” idea and extending it further, now in view of the challenges posed by globalization and within the post-Soviet,

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Bless Empire,” *First Things* (November 2015); Brandon Gallaher, “The Pure Signifier of Power: Remembering, Repeating and Working through the Significance of the Papacy and Pope Francis for Eastern Orthodoxy,” in Jan De Volder (ed.), *The Geopolitics of Pope Francis* (Leuven: Peeters, 2019), 169–98; Moritz Pieper, “*Russkiy Mir*: The Geopolitics of Russian Compatriots Abroad,” *Geopolitics* 25, no. 3 (2020), 756–79. It takes also advantage from the recent international “Declaration” by Orthodox theologians on the “Russian World” teaching (see <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2022/03/13/a-declaration-on-the-russian-world-russkii-mir-teaching/#more-10842/> and <https://www.polymerwsvolos.org/2022/03/13/a-declaration-on-the-russian-world-russkii-mir-teaching/> (accessed 19 March 2022)). Cf. further in the present contribution for more details on this, and the article by the Lebanese Orthodox public intellectual Antoine Courban, “Les nations sacralisées des terres saintes,” <https://icibeyrouth.com/monde/50702/> (accessed 21 March 2022). I also consulted the Address by Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev) of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Department of External Church Relations in the Moscow Patriarchate, and *de facto* number two of the Russian Orthodox Church. The Address was given at the conference on “Russia-Ukraine-Belarus: A Common Civilizational Space?” held at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland, 1 June 2019. Without using the term “Russian World,” the text of the Address perfectly reflects this idea and defends the political project that sustains it. See <https://mospat.ru/en/news/46324/> and <https://orthodoxie.com/en/conference-in-fribourg-russia-ukraine-belarus-a-common-civilizational-space/> (accessed 23 March 2022).

106 Denysenko, “Fractured Orthodoxy in Ukraine and Politics,” 33.

107 See Gallaher, “The Pure Signifier of Power,” 190.

post-communist context, President Putin and Patriarch Kyrill developed the idea and the ideology of the “Russian World” in numerous discourses and church-state initiatives. Kyrill delivered two speeches at the Assembly of the Foundation of “Russian World” in 2009–2010, articulating his vision and defining the preservation and sustainability of the endangered Russian culture in the context of globalization as the priority.<sup>108</sup> By appealing to spirituality and the ecumenical character of Orthodoxy, Kyrill outlined “bold objectives (sc. in his speeches), including (sc. the) assertion that only a strong *Russian World* will be able “to become a ‘strong subject of global international politics, stronger than all political alliances.’” Deacon Nicholas Denysenko commented as follows, “Kyrill’s teaching seeks to galvanize and solidify the unity of the people of Rus’ through the ministries proposed by the Moscow Patriarchate, which would hypothetically result in an alliance founded upon Orthodox spirituality, stronger than worldly political alliances.”<sup>109</sup> In sum, “Russian World” is more a political/“imperial” and ethnocultural project than an ecclesial or theological one, an ideological manifesto, as became evident from the long quotation by Sergei Chapnin who worked with the Moscow Patriarchate for years<sup>110</sup> and understands from inside the “logic” behind the support provided by the Russian Church to the “Russian World” teaching:

The Church has taken on a complex ideological significance over the last decade, not least because of the rise of the concept of *Russkiy Mir*, or “Russian World.” This way of speaking presumes a fraternal coexistence of the Slavic peoples – Russian, Ukrainian, Belarussian – in a single “Orthodox Civilization.” It is a powerful archetype. It is an image of unity that appeals to Russians, because it gives them a sense of a larger destiny and supports the imperial vision that increasingly characterizes Russian politics. The currency of “Russian World” within the Church today indicates that Orthodoxy is becoming a political religion. That the Church has come to mirror the state in its rhetoric and animating vision is hardly surprising. [...] In these cultural circumstances, people in high places in both the government and Church see that, with an imperial outlook of her own, Orthodoxy might be able to fill the vacuum left by the defunct Communist Party in the system of post-Soviet administration. This potential has been clear even to those functionaries who keep their distance from the Church. The need for a political religion was formulated by state authorities around 2010 – something that coincided with the election of Kyrill, a Russian World enthusiast, to

108 Denysenko, “Fractured Orthodoxy in Ukraine and Politics,” 41–42.

109 Denysenko, “Fractured Orthodoxy in Ukraine and Politics,” 42–43.

110 Before becoming an independent Russian Orthodox columnist, Sergei Chapnin served as editor-in-chief of the periodical *Dary*, and as the former editor of the official organ of the Russian Orthodox Church, *Zhurnal Moskovskoi Patriarkhii*, and deputy editor-in-chief at the Publishing House of the Moscow Patriarchate.

the Patriarchal See of Moscow. It is in one sense natural that church leaders such as Kyrill would wish to promote a Russian World that transcends the political boundaries of present-day Russia. Orthodox believers are united theologically even if they live in different countries, and many are formally united under the authority of the Patriarch of Moscow. Church leaders are certainly right to further this unity, expanding and deepening our friendship in Christ across geographical borders. But as critics point out, speaking of a Russian World serves the state more than it serves the Church. It mobilizes religion, especially the esteem of the Slavic peoples for the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia, for political purposes. Its primary effect will surely be not church unity, but rather the strengthening of Russian influence in Ukraine and Belarus.<sup>111</sup>

This more political, ideological, and ethnocultural than ecclesial or theological character of the project of the “Russian World” clearly appears from the following long and significant quotation from Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev:

Russia, Ukraine and Belarus constitute one spiritual space framed by the Russian Orthodox Church. This space was formed over a thousand years, during which national borders appeared, disappeared and were moved many times, but spiritual commonality remained intact despite numerous external efforts aimed at shattering this unity. [...]

As far back as the 10th century, the diptychs of the Church of Constantinople first mention the Metropolia of Rus'. Initially the title of its head had no additional naming of a city, but was just τῆς Ῥωσίας, that is “of Rus.” When Prince Vladimir Svyatoslavovich and after him the whole Rus' embraced Christianity, Orthodoxy became the main spiritual and moral pivot for all the East Slavic ethnic groups that soon appeared in these territories. That moment marked the outset of the history of “Holy Rus” – a historical phenomenon which owed its existence to the powerful unifying role of the Russian Church in the vast territories of the Great, Little and White Rus' and in other territories which at different times were in the sphere of its influence.

[...] [I]t was the Church of Constantinople that defended the unity of the Russian Metropolia in the 12th century. Patriarch Luke Chrysoberges added a word “all” to the old title of Metropolitan of Kiev – τῆς πάσης Ῥωσίας (“of All Rus'”) – in order to emphasize the indivisibility of the Russian Church.

[...] Signs of crisis in the life of the Soviet Union were constantly increasing in the late 1980s. [...] On 17 March 1991, the all-Union referendum, the only one in the history of the USSR, was conducted on whether to preserve the united state or not. The majority of citizens of the Soviet Union voted in favor of its preservation. However, on 8 December 1991, leaders of the three USSR Republics – Ukraine,

111 Sergei Chapnin, “A Church of Empire: Why the Russian Church chose to Bless Empire,” *First Things* (November 2015).

Byelorussia and the Russian Federation – signed the so-called “Belovezha Accords” which established the Commonwealth of Independent States. What is the Church’s attitude towards these centrifugal processes? On the one hand, the fall of the atheist regime was welcomed, for it marked the end of years of persecution and discrimination against believers, of uprooting from people’s consciousness any reminder of Christ, Gospel, Church. [...]

On the other hand, the disintegration of the united state and establishment on its basis of a whole number of independent countries with their own views on future development caused numerous divisions that affected not only territories, but also people, their families. [...]

Such a dramatic situation was caused, according to His Holiness Patriarch Kyrill of Moscow and All Russia, by, among other things, “the decay of national consciousness, national pride, by the inability to comprehend history in all its complexity and to realize an immense importance of historical commonality of people for their material and spiritual prosperity.”

By God’s mercy the disintegration of the Soviet Union did not bring about the disintegration of our Church, which now, just like hundreds of years ago, carries out its mission in the lands of its historical presence.

The unity of the Russian Church is the most important aspect of spiritual and cultural commonality of the Slavic nations in the post-Soviet countries – of the Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians. Disregard for this historical fact and, moreover, attempts to shatter this unity, as well as interference of authorities and politicians in church affairs with the view of gaining momentary benefits are a crime against this and future generations.

[...] We believe that the one Church is the strong Church. Its strength lies not in the secular attributes of power, welfare or might, but in its ability to exert spiritual and moral influence on human souls, on the attitude to those near and those far off, and even on the relations between nations and people on the global level.

We pursue the upholding of Gospel values in the life of European society because Orthodox people in many countries of pastoral responsibility of our Church live in Europe. Their faith, spiritual ideals, culture and traditions bring an important contribution to the European Christian heritage. Therefore, we bear our part of responsibility for civilizational space of the European continent.

We cannot stay indifferent to the attempts to destroy the traditions of the family, to erode the notion of Christian marriage and the God-commanded foundations of relations between man and woman, and to abortions and euthanasia that devalue human life.

At all international forums, including the European ones in the first place, we bear witness to the Gospel truth. This witness, as well as acts of mercy and peacemaking serve the reinforcing of the Christian roots of Europe and foundations of its civilization.

As to the question put in the title of our conference, I would like to underscore that Russia, Ukraine and Belarus are one spiritual space. We contest neither national self-identification of the three Slavic nations, nor the boundaries of the independent states, but we will continue our struggle for the preservation of the unity of the Russian Orthodox Church which assures spiritual unity of all Orthodox believers living within its space irrespective of their national and ethnic belonging. Simple words of the holy elder Lavrenty of Chernigov “Russia, Ukraine, Belarus – all these are Holy Rus” remain topical and resound in the hearts of millions of people.<sup>112</sup>

The whole “Russian World” idea and the way it has been implemented meet the main criteria of ethnotheology, i.e., the pre-eminence of the political and national element over the ecclesial, the uniqueness of Russia as a Christian civilization, and the understanding of faith in terms of culture, civilization, and ancestral heritage, as well as the inversion of the paradoxical and anti-nomic relationship between eschatology and history, or the oblivion of the biblical “in the world, but not of the world, for the sake of the world.” Thus, according to the “Russian World” teaching, there is a transnational Russian sphere or civilization or *ecumene* (another translation for the word *mir*) or peace (an alternative translation for *mir* along the lines of the *Pax Romana*), called Holy Russia or Holy Rus’ (to make a clear reference to the connection of all “Russian” peoples to the Baptism of Rus’) that includes Russia, Ukraine and Belarus (and sometimes Moldova and Kazakhstan) as well as ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking people throughout the world. It thus introduces an ecclesiological conception that understands the church on the ethnocultural identity of its members (“phyletism”). It holds that this “Russian World” is bonded together by a common spiritual center (Kyiv as the “mother of all Rus”), a common political center (Moscow), a common language (Russian), a common church (the Russian Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate), and a common Patriarch (the Patriarch of Moscow) who works in “symphony” with a common president/national leader (Putin) to govern this *Russian World*, as well as upholding a common distinctive spirituality, morality, and culture.<sup>113</sup> Thus, Patriarch Kyrill is supposed to work

112 Address by Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev) of Volokolamsk, given at the conference on “Russia-Ukraine-Belarus: A Common Civilizational Space?” held at the University of Fribourg, in Switzerland, 1 June 2019. See <https://mospat.ru/en/news/46324/> and <https://orthodoxie.com/en/conference-in-fribourg-russia-ukraine-belarus-a-common-civilizational-space/> (accessed 23 March 2022).

113 See “Declaration”; Gallaher, “The Pure Signifier of Power,” 191–2, 193; Courban, “Les nations sacralisées des terres saintes.”

in “symphony” with the common national leader (Putin) in order to consolidate morally, culturally, and spiritually this space of civilization distinct from all others. Thus, there is an indisputable continuity between the soil, ethnic identity, belonging to the same people, the same church, and subjection to the same power.<sup>114</sup>

With all these ideological characteristics, it becomes clear that a central place in the “Russian World” is occupied “not by a nation but an imagined civilization. In this regard, the Russian world is one of those ‘imagined communities’ described by Benedict Anderson. As an ideology, the Russian word does not reflect an empirical reality but resides in and captivates the imagination of a people.”<sup>115</sup>

In addition, and as a logical consequence, on the occasion of Patriarch Kyrill’s meeting with Pope Francis in Havana in 2016, he described himself in his remarks to the press as the Patriarch of “All Russia,” meaning, in his own view, the “historical [i.e., greater] Russia.” If that is the case, then and as soon as the Moscow Patriarchate and its leader constitute the canonical Church of historical Russia and the bearer of its eternal Orthodox values, and it is Patriarch Kyrill, rather than the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople (regarded in this light as the Second Rome), who is the only legitimate leader of the Orthodox worldwide.<sup>116</sup> Or to put it in other words, with reference to the conflict between the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Moscow Patriarchate, “Kyrill’s mobilization of a trans- and multi-national *Russian World* consolidated through the Moscow Patriarchate serves as a sober reminder that in practice, global Orthodoxy has two competing ‘ecumenical patriarchates’ in Constantinople and Moscow.”<sup>117</sup>

Commenting on the close and supposed indissoluble ties between all these parts and components of the notorious “Russian World” and highlighting their implications for the 2014 Donbas war and the annexation of Crimea (as well as for the current Russian invasion of Ukraine, I would add), Deacon Brandon Gallaher explains that following this “ethnophyletist ideology,” the division “of Russia from Ukraine is quite unnatural (hence the present spiritual and political crisis of the Russian Federation and the Moscow Patriarchate given its clash with Ukraine).” And he concludes, by criticizing the 2016 Havana Joint Declaration between Patriarch Kyrill and Pope Francis, that “the break between the two nations, the Joint Declaration claims, is not due to any

114 Courban, “Les nations sacralisées des terres saintes.”

115 Hovorun, *Political Orthodoxies*, 183.

116 Gallaher, “The Pure Signifier of Power,” 191–2.

117 Denysenko, “Fractured Orthodoxy in Ukraine and Politics,” 65.

external Russian aggression but fratricidal ‘hostility in Ukraine’ (§26: nothing is said about the annexation of Crimea in 2014 or the proxy war in Donbass in Eastern Ukraine).”<sup>118</sup>

Furthermore, and in light of the recent aggression and tragic developments, the place and role of the city of Kyiv and Ukraine in general in this theopolitical image is of crucial importance if we want to understand the ethnocultural character of the ideology of the “Russian World” but also recent events related to the Russian invasion of and war in Ukraine. Deacon Nicholas Denysenko remarks as follows:

Kyrill [...] identifies the city of Kyiv and contemporary Ukraine as key agents on the *Russian World* strategy, equal to Moscow in the propagation of his *Russian World*. Kyrill refers to Kyiv as the “mother of Rus’ cities” [...] that is now poised to become “one of the most important political and public centers of the Russian World.” The role of Kyiv and Ukraine is to vivify the ideal of ecumenical Orthodoxy by contributing to the development of Rus’ civilization. Kyrill clearly establishes the active agency of Kyiv and Ukraine in building the *Russian World* as opposed to being “locked in its nationalist cell.” Kyrill envisions Ukraine’s role by presenting a contradistinction between embracing all people through a *Russian World* and choosing isolation in nationalism through Orthodox ecclesiological vocabulary, as Ukraine is to “preserve Holy Orthodoxy and manifest in its life its all-peoples or ecumenical character – to be a home for many people.”<sup>119</sup>

Thus, according to the 2016 Havana Joint Declaration, the “Russian world” is regarded as an exemplary, holistic and providential Christian civilization that has experienced an “unprecedented renewal of Christian faith” after a long period under the communist atheist regime (§14). The Orthodox heritage and experience of the “first millennium of Christianity” (§4) ascribes to the Russian world a unique position of uninterrupted Christian witness in our modern world, which is characterized by the bold secularization of Western Europe. To the degree that Russia remains the last genuine Orthodox Christian civilization, it is a sort of God-inspired imperative to fight terrorism (§11), to protect Christian victims of violence in the Middle East and North Africa (§§8–11), and to support and cultivate peace, bring justice, and do everything one can to avoid a “new world war” (§11).<sup>120</sup>

The “Russian world” ideology appears then to be a form of civilizational nationalism with a clearly Messianic character that includes a full-scale

<sup>118</sup> Gallaher, “The Pure Signifier of Power,” 193.

<sup>119</sup> Denysenko, “Fractured Orthodoxy in Ukraine and Politics,” 44–5.

<sup>120</sup> Gallaher, “The Pure Signifier of Power,” 192.

critique of human rights as well as active collaboration with the far-right.<sup>121</sup> In accordance with this, only Russia and its Church can claim to be the guardian of the traditional Christian identity of the Christian East as well as of Europe, and only it can lead a confused West back to its senses with its teaching of the “Russian world.” That is why many in the Moscow Patriarchate see the West “as corrupt and having fallen away from the truths of its own original Christian identity. This corruption, some in the Moscow Patriarchate contend, can be seen in Western attacks on traditional Christianity and morality through its pervasive secularist and liberal humanist agenda,” promoting feminism, gender theory, homosexual rights in gay parades, globalization, and Christianophobia.<sup>122</sup>

Over and against the West and those Orthodox who have fallen into schism and error (such as Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and other local Orthodox churches that support him) stands the Moscow Patriarchate, along with Vladimir Putin, as the true defenders of Orthodox teaching, which they view in terms of traditional morality, a rigorist and inflexible understanding of tradition, and veneration of Holy Russia.<sup>123</sup>

It is hard not to see in all these actions and talks the influence and reasoning of the Russian philosopher and ideologist Alexander Dugin who serves as personal advisor of President Putin. Over against the failure of the three dominant political theories of the 20th century, i.e., capitalism, communism, and fascism, Dugin suggests inventing a fourth theory rooted in traditional spiritualities in order to face the future in a victorious way. So, according to this Russian thinker who is very close to Putin’s system of power, one has to guard against Western postmodernity, by force of arms, to preserve unconditionally the geopolitical sovereignty of the Eurasian continental powers: Russia, China, Iran, India, guarantors of the freedom of the people of the world. The very core of this Eurasian ideal is none other than *Russkii Mir*. Moscow is therefore, in Dugin’s view, the pivot of this continental fellowship/collectivity. Against this morbid West and all those who support it stands the Third Rome, a fortress of inflexible tradition, that of the Holy Russia and its people, guardian of an Orthodox truth that will determine “the salvation of every man,” according to the homily of Patriarch Kyrill at the cathedral church of Christ the Savior, in the Kremlin on Sunday 6 March 2022.<sup>124</sup>

121 Gallaher, “The Pure Signifier of Power,” 191; Kristina Stoeckl, *The Russian Orthodox Church and Human Rights* (Oxford/New York: Routledge, 2014).

122 Gallaher, “The Pure Signifier of Power,” 173–4.

123 See “Declaration.”

124 Courban, “Les nations sacralisées des terres saintes.”

The war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in the name of the Orthodox tradition during the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine did not remain theologically unaddressed. The barbarian acts justified theologically by Patriarch Kyrill (in his sermon of March 6, 2022, the Sunday of Forgiveness, the last Sunday before the beginning of the Great Lent in the Orthodox calendar) on the basis of the “Russian World” teaching (both the Patriarch and President Putin routinely justify the invasion of Ukraine on the basis of bringing it back into the fold of the “Russian world”), the Anti-Western rhetoric, and the appealing to the “metaphysical meaning of the war,” provoked strong reactions and emotion both among the Orthodox and Christians of other traditions, as well as religious and secular people. Far from condemning Russian aggression against Ukraine, the Russian Orthodox Church constantly repeats Kremlin propaganda about the invasion of Ukraine as a “special military operation” aimed at “de-nazistification,” and the protection of the break-away Donbas region of Ukraine against Ukrainian aggression and Western ideas, such as gay rights. All these concerns led a group of pioneering Eastern Orthodox Christian scholars around the world to unite with one voice in a sound “Declaration on the ‘Russian World’ (*Russkii mir*) Teaching” that denounces the religious ideology driving Vladimir Putin’s invasion and repudiating the Russian Patriarch’s support of the war in Ukraine. As noted in a relevant press release, over against this ideology, Orthodox scholars uphold the original teachings of Jesus in the New Testament and the writings of the church fathers. Among other things, the “Declaration” affirms:

That the church should not subject itself to the state or become an agent of the state for the promotion of geopolitical goals dictated by personal ambition or the assertion of superiority of one group over another, such as Russians over Ukrainians.

That love is the core of the Christian message and that engaging in war is the ultimate failure of Jesus’ commandment of love.

That Christians are called to be peacemakers, not warmongers, and to stand up for justice and to condemn injustice.

The “Declaration” of the Orthodox theologians did not fail to call to mind that “the principle of the ethnic organization of the Church was condemned at the Council of Constantinople in 1872” and that “the false teaching of ethno-phyletism is the basis for the ‘Russian world’ ideology.” It also notes that “if we hold such false principles as valid, then the Orthodox Church ceases to be the Church of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Apostles, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, the Ecumenical Councils, and the Fathers of the Church.”

To date (6 April 2022), the “Declaration” has had over 130,000 views on different websites and social media; it has been published into 19 languages (English, Russian, Ukrainian, Greek, French, Italian, Romanian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Georgian, Arabic, Dutch, German, Finnish, Croatian, Estonian, Hungarian, Japanese, Polish), and has been signed by more than 1,300 individuals (bishops, priests, theologians, scholars, and ordinary faithful; the number of signatories rises every day) from all over the world (Russia itself included), from the north and the south, from the East and the West, from Europe and the Americas. Drawing on elements and schemata from two historic ecclesial texts, the “Synodikon of Orthodoxy” (843 AD), and the “Barmen Declaration” (1934), the “Declaration” of Orthodox theologians was prompt to express “universal Christian values” and has been signed not only by Orthodox but also by Christians of other traditions as the latter recognized it contained universal Christian truths.<sup>125</sup>

Perhaps the most severe and radical critique of the “Russian World” comes from an Orthodox public intellectual from Lebanon, a place where traditionally – but especially since the Syrian war – the politico-religious influence of Russia has been strongly felt. It is not merely a condemnation but rather a warning against and in-depth analysis of the risks encountered by the prevalence of this ideology:

There is clearly a kind of messianism attested in this discourse on the “Russian World” and Russianness. Such an impulse has been running throughout the whole of Christian history for two thousand years. To realize the eschatological hope here below by means of a political project is not a new utopia. This hope is no longer that of the coming kingdom, that of the end of time. The kingdom is already here, realized in advance by the State of the Good, that of a sacred nation from a holy land. In such a view, there is no room for transcendence. Everything is immanence. How much blood has been spilled out in the name of the State of Good by a chosen people since biblical times. [...] In the East and in the West, this utopia has never ceased to agitate minds. It is expressed in several forms, but its main characteristic is a homogenization of the chosen group to which every individual is subjected. The ideology of the Russian World is at the heart of Dugin’s Fourth Political Theory. Basically, behind all these considerations, we find the good old communist utopia of Marxism-Leninism that has not yet been eliminated from Russia. The vision of Dugin, Putin and Patriarch Kyrill is a Soviet communism with a thin veneer of purely formal Byzantine Orthodoxy, with no substance other than will and power politics.<sup>126</sup>

125 The full English original text of the “Declaration” can be found on these websites: <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2022/03/13/a-declaration-on-the-russian-world-russkii-mir-teaching/#more-10842/> and <https://www.polymerwsvolos.org/2022/03/13/a-declaration-on-the-russian-world-russkii-mir-teaching/> (accessed 27 March 2022).

126 Courban, “Les nations sacralisées des terres saintes.”

### Here and Now or Immanence and Christian Delocalization

Having described in some detail certain trends tending toward various versions of ethnotheology, one can clearly see that anti-Westernism is regarded as the common denominator and an implied or subconscious perception that truth is fully realized within the confines of history and culture, a tendency to consider culture, history, and even the state (the “Christian” one) as the locus (*topos*) of the realization of truth and authenticity. In other words, there is a peculiar sense of immanence, a “sacred” and “theoptic” but at the same time intra-historic perspective that goes so far as to identify truth and authenticity with specific given historical forms, with cultures or civilizations labeled “Holy,” “Christian” or indeed “Orthodox,” such as Byzantium, Romiosyne, Holy Russia, the medieval Christian kingdom of Serbia, etc. This peculiar sense of immanence leaves no room for the eschatological outlook and expectation, for the utopian character (from the Greek *οὐτοπία, οὐ-τόπος, utopia*, no land, no locus) of Christian preaching about the kingdom of God. In other words, it makes no room for the anticipation and vision of another world, for the dialectics between the present and the future – the “already” and the “not yet,” the lasting city and the city to come – nor to the ultimately migratory character of Christian existence,<sup>127</sup> or to the reality of the “in part” and “in a mirror, dimly” which defines our present experience (cf. 1 Cor 13:9–12).

Trapped in this peculiar, secularized eschatology, we remain virtually unaware of the radical changes that the broader New Testament perspective has introduced, such as the overcoming of exclusivity, radical “delocalization,” and a radical cancellation of geographical borders – ideas that come into direct conflict with the identification of truth with a particular land, a particular historical form, or a particular state and people. In this perspective, there is no place for theories about a “chosen people” or a “promised land” – there is no room, in other words, for any “sacred” geography or topography, for any kind of idolization of religion and nation, for a paganism of the land or the homeland, for “God-bearing” people, or for the various forms of collective conceit, such as nationalism, whether it be secular or ecclesiastical, ethnic or cultural.

The most reliable historical and theological/liturgical references<sup>128</sup> inform us that the concept of “holy places” only started in the time of Constantine and

127 Cf. Heb 13:14: “For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.”

128 Bernard Flusin, “Religious Life, Christians and the Mundane – Monasticism,” in the volume: Cécile Morrisson (ed.), *Le Monde byzantin*, vol 1: *L'Empire romain d'Orient, 330–641* (Paris: PUF, 2004), 228, which also includes a rich bibliography; Gregory of Nyssa, *Letter 2: On Pilgrimages to Jerusalem*, PG 46, 1009C, 1012D, 1015C–1016A. (English translation by

that it was unknown and foreign to early Christianity. Given that, we can easily imagine what a tragic misunderstanding of the Christian faith and the spiritual life resulted from this association – or even worse, identification – with a land, an empire, with a governmental and historical form, with a special culture and civilization. From this perspective, this identification forms a peculiar cultural theology or ethnotheology.

Historical Orthodoxy's connection with a particular place and culture, or with a particular nation, appears to be the most serious – but unfortunately not the only – obstacle in Orthodoxy's attempt to adapt to the new conditions of globalization that so frightens the Orthodox. It is worth mentioning here the analysis provided by the French professor Olivier Roy,<sup>129</sup> a specialist in political Islam and religious phenomena. According to Roy, with globalization – with satellite TV, the internet and virtual networks – religions that are overly connected or identified with a particular place or culture, such as Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, have greater difficulty adapting. Conversely, religious traditions that are noted for their mobility, their disconnection from any particular culture and from being entrapped by narrow geographical limits, such as Evangelical Protestantism and Salafi Islam, move with greater ease and have greater “success” in the “free” religious market. The implications here are obvious and alarming, especially for the Orthodox and for those who insist on identifying religion with ethno-cultural identity.

### In Place of a Conclusion

The above remarks make me think that the time has come to pose some painful questions about our ecclesial self-awareness. For example, if we believe that the church images and prepares the coming Kingdom of God, a new world of love, justice, reconciliation, and communion with God and fellow human beings, then we should accept that all people potentially belong to the church: Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, men and women, thus overcoming all kinds of divisions (race, sex, religion, culture, social class, hierarchy and office) in

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William Moore and Henry Austin Wilson, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd series, vol. 5, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1892], 42–3.); Father Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, trans. by Asheleigh E. Moorehouse (Crestwood NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 116; idem, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 20.

129 See Olivier Roy, *Sainte Ignorance: Le Temps de la Religion sans Culture* (Paris: Seuil, 2008); English edition: *Holy Ignorance. When Religion and Culture Part Ways*, trans. Ros Schwartz (London: Hurst & Company, 2010).

Christ, to recall St. Paul's relevant quotations (Gal 3:27–28; Col 3:10–11). If we consider the church to be a spiritual *genos*, a spiritual homeland, with its truth lying beyond and above the earthly nations and earthly homelands, then for Christians there is only one homeland, the spiritual homeland of every person longing for God, according to Gregory of Nazianzus.<sup>130</sup> In critical and extremely difficult moments (e.g., Turkish occupation), the Orthodox Church in the Balkans and the East emptied itself in a *kenotic* mood, deviated from its main mission and undertook the role of saving a *genos*/an ethnos, its language, existence, and political representation. But it is a completely different reality today in which the (secular) state and the wider historical context by no means resemble the centuries of the Ottoman rule.

In the context of a multinational, pluralistic, postmodern society, Orthodoxy seems to be exhausting the theological and spiritual richness of its patristic and eucharistic tradition in a rhetoric of "identities," and in an outdated religious phyletism and tribalism that goes in the opposite direction of the ethos and practice inspired by the Gospel. The theocratic dreams of some lay and especially Orthodox monastics as well as the insistence of many Orthodox countries to understand Orthodoxy as merely a part of their ethnocultural identity and heritage undermines any serious attempt by Orthodoxy to finally meet the challenges posed by the modern world, thus condemning it to traditionalism, fundamentalism, social conservatism, and anachronism.

But theocracy, ethnotheology, and neo-nationalism, which are nothing more than secularized forms of eschatology, constitute the permanent historical temptation of Orthodoxy and cannot by any means continue to be the political proposal of the Orthodox Church in the 21st century. It is time to close the parenthesis that began in 1453 with the fall of Constantinople and for the Church to return to its fundamental mission, which is the witness to the Gospel and the transformation of the world and humanity. To the thirst of today's persons for life, the church can and must respond with its own proposal of life, with its own "words of eternal life" (Jn 6:68), and not by constantly invoking its contribution to the historical battles of the nation. That is why the adoption of an ecumenical ecclesial discourse, free from constant references to the nation and the forms of the Constantine era, is not merely a demand for authenticity and fidelity to the Orthodox tradition; it is at the same time an absolutely necessary and urgent prerequisite for our Church to enter the century we live in and not find refuge in bygone eras.

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130 Gregory of Nazianzus, *Against the Arians, and Concerning Himself* (Oration 33), PG 36, col. 229; idem, *Oration 24*, PG 35, col. 1188; idem, *Panegyric on His Brother St. Caesarius* (Oration 7), PG 35, col. 785.

# Synodal Democracy and the Oriental Orthodox Churches

*K. M. George (Kondothra)*

## The Oriental Orthodox Churches

The Oriental Orthodox Churches of Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, Ethiopian, Eritrean and Indian traditions have been variously called by outsiders – depending on authors and contexts – as Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Ancient Oriental, Lesser Eastern or Churches of Three Ecumenical Councils.<sup>1</sup> It was in the context of the World Council of Churches in the 20th century that they began to be called *Oriental* Orthodox in order to distinguish them from the *Eastern* Orthodox Churches of the Byzantine liturgical tradition that accept seven councils as Ecumenical. The Oriental Orthodox conventionally acknowledge only three councils, namely, Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381) and Ephesus (431) as Ecumenical. In light of the 20th-century theological dialogue with the Eastern Orthodox family, however, they may recognize the Council of Chalcedon and the rest on the basis of “the Orthodox interpretation” of those councils, though not as Ecumenical Councils as such.<sup>2</sup> Although these Oriental Churches never convened a common council after Ephesus in 431 AD, they remained in the same apostolic faith in Christ and sacramental communion among them. So, some theologians have raised the question whether an Ecumenical Council is essential at all for the maintenance of the Orthodox faith and Eucharistic communion. The heads of these ancient autocephalous Churches met on a historically unique occasion in Addis Ababa in 1965 when they were convened by the then Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia.

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1 Paulos Gregorios, William H. Lazareth and Nikos A. Nissiotis (eds.), *Does Chalcedon Divide or Unite?* (Geneva: WWC, 1981), ix–xii; On the six “Oriental Orthodox Churches,” see also R.G. Roberson, *The Eastern Christian Churches: A Brief Survey* (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 2016).

2 The four unofficial conversations between the Eastern Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox families took place in a series: Aarhus 1964, Bristol 1967, Geneva 1970 and Addis Ababa 1971.

## The Dialogue

The unofficial dialogue between the Eastern and the Oriental churches started in 1964 under the auspices of the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC through the joint initiative of Prof. Nikos Nissiotis, then director of the Bossey Ecumenical Institute, and Father Paul Verghese (later Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios of New Delhi from the Malankara Orthodox Church), then Associate General Secretary of the WCC. This dialogue was taken up at the official level from 1985 onwards, in meetings that took place in Chambésy, Geneva and Amba Bishoy Monastery of the Coptic Church in Egypt. Both the unofficial and official dialogues resolved the 1500-year-old Christological dispute and came to the formal conclusion that both families of churches held the same apostolic faith, though linguistic, terminological and cultural issues in the 5th century exacerbated the Christological issue that had divided them.<sup>3</sup> In a meeting in Chambésy, Geneva, follow-up steps were suggested by the joint commission in order to bring the two families to full Eucharistic communion. There was a follow-up meeting of a core committee held in Athens as recently as 2014.<sup>4</sup>

The unity in faith of the Oriental Orthodox Churches is underscored by their great diversity in terms of culture, race, language and liturgy. Unlike in the Eastern Orthodox Churches, which are held together by the common Byzantine liturgical tradition, the Oriental Orthodox churches have no common Eucharistic liturgical order that they can celebrate together. They are primarily African and Asian churches, (provided the “Middle East” of European colonial geography is more appropriately called West Asia), and their spiritual sensibility and liturgical-theological ethos are very close to the Eastern Orthodox Churches, and, of course, doubly removed from the Western Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions.

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- 3 K.M. George, “Oriental Orthodox-Orthodox Dialogue,” in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, ed. N. Lossky *et al.*, (WCC: Geneva, 1994); “Agreed Statements between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches (June 1989 & September 1990),” Orthodox School of Theology Trinity College University of Toronto, <https://www.trinityorthodox.ca/sites/default/files/Agreed%20Statements-Orthodox-Oriental%20Orthodox%20Dialogue-1989-1990.pdf>; Ciprian Toroczka, “Eastern Orthodox Churches and Oriental Orthodox Churches in Dialogue: Reception, Disagreement and Convergence,” *Review of Ecumenical Studies* 8, no. 2 (2016): 253–70; Christine Chaillot, ed., *The Dialogue Between the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches* (Volos: Volos Academy Publications, 2016).
- 4 The meeting was convened by the co-chairmen, Metropolitan Emmanuel of France and Metropolitan Bishop of Damietta, Egypt. The present author participated in the meeting as a member of the pastoral-liturgical sub-commission of the Joint Commission.

### *The Synodal Democratic Perspective*<sup>5</sup>

The principle of democracy is central to the governance of these churches. But there are some qualitative differences between what we call parliamentary democracy and the democracy practiced in the churches. In the latter case, biblical ideas such as the “Body of Christ” and the “People of God” redefine the body politic of the *demos* into the royal priesthood of all believers. In the political system of modern democratic nations, the decisive voters are simply adult citizens who elect the office-bearers to govern them at various levels.

The synodal system in its broad theological sense of *synodos*, i.e., “walking together,” or “taking the same road” in mutual love and understanding, goes beyond the principles of adult franchise and majority rule in our modern political domain. In the church, there is no age factor for membership. All baptized children and all believing men and women are members of the Body of Christ, irrespective of their age. Together, they constitute the *Laos tou Theou*, the people of God and are a worshipping community, praising the Triune God together with their departed faithful, the heavenly hosts and the whole creation, visible and invisible. All clerical orders such as deacons, presbyters, bishops and patriarchs are in this “household of God” and not above it.

It is sometimes said in some of our Oriental churches, particularly in legal contexts, that the church is both episcopal and congregational (democratic) at the same time. But the election of bishops and the head of the Church in some of our churches is done directly by the people or people’s representatives. So, the distinction between the episcopal and congregational in this context is not as neat and stable as imagined by some. They are so closely intertwined that the ordained ministry has no theological validity outside the community of the *People of God* who elect and consecrate them. Without the constant approval of the believing body of the church that declares their ministers *axios* (worthy) in the liturgical context, the ordained clergy may also run the risk of being qualified as *anaxios* (unworthy). This crucial reference to the Body of Christ, the People of God, should be maintained throughout the life of the elected and ordained clergy.

### The Synodal Structure Exemplified

To explain the synodal democracy practiced in the Oriental Orthodox Churches, we need to see the broader context of the synodal system in our churches as well as some aspects of political democracy in our contemporary

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<sup>5</sup> Kondothra M. George, “Ecclesiology in the Orthodox Tradition,” in *The Routledge Companion to the Christian Church*, ed. G. Mannion and L.S. Mudge (New York: Routledge, 2008), 155–69.

society. As it is too risky and unfair to make sweeping statements on a vast culturally and liturgically diverse family such as the Oriental Orthodox Churches, I shall limit myself to my own Indian Church's practice as a case in point.

Let me say at the very beginning that I take the word synod in its etymological sense of "taking the same road" or "walking together" (*syn+hodos*) because it provides a beautiful and tangible image to anyone in any cultural setting. I do not wish here to go into the technical meaning the word *synod* has acquired in several churches, where it is a formal assembly of bishops to transact official agenda. But in my ancient apostolic Malankara Orthodox Church in India today, whenever we use the word synod for the meeting of bishops, we qualify it with the adjective "episcopal" because, in our earlier tradition, a synod meant a representative assembly of the whole church – lay people and priests together with the bishops. This assembly is still the highest decision-making body. Since the number of elected lay representatives from parishes is proportional to the number of parish members, the majority in the assembly are laypeople. They meet every five years, elect the regular governing bodies, and when necessary, elect the bishops and the Catholicos, and make necessary amendments in the constitution of the Malankara church. Every member whether layperson, priest or bishop has only one vote.

Unlike in earlier ages when authority structures were very clear in church and society, our present world lives in conditions of confusion and uncertainty. On the one hand, liberal democracies emphasize individual freedom whereas theocratic societies and dictatorial regimes with fascist tendencies place great restrictions on individual freedom on the other. These tendencies exist side by side in our contemporary world. Secularism and irreligion coexist with religious fundamentalist tendencies. It is in between such extremities that the members of the church are seeking counsel and guidance.

We may identify at least a few christological, pneumatological, and trinitarian principles that underlie the practice of synodical democracy in the Church.

### *The Pneumatological/Inspirational Dimension*

The first Christian community arising from the Pentecost experience of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem as described in the Acts of the Apostles relied on the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The early Christians' mode of life as the Spirit-inspired Christian fellowship set the model for the later Church. Examples of this are the election of Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:12–26), the election of "seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom" to minister as deacons (Acts 6:1–15) and the very first meeting of the synod of the Church. In the Synod of Jerusalem, "the Apostles and elders, with the whole Church, decided ..." (Acts 15:22) on crucial issues like circumcision, food taboos, etc. The celebrated phrase "it seemed good to the Holy

Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28) became the fundamental principle of synodality in the Church. The experience of a genuine *sisbro* (sister-brother) feeling in Christ and the consultative mode of church governance guided by the Holy Spirit constitute the synodical character of the Church. The way of life of the early church was synodical at its best. Whether it was a matter of election to a responsible position or urgent ethical and legal issues affecting the community, there was a great effort to promote consensus among the members of the church and dependence on the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

### *The Christological-Anthropological Dimension*

The New Testament view of the fullness of the human person and of the human community is expressed in the image of Christ as the head of the Church which is the body of Christ. The person of Christ dynamically unites the divine and the human, redeems humanity to his own fullness in the process of theosis. As the body of Christ, the Church stands for the human community and, by extension, all created reality that can experience God's salvation in Christ. The person and the world at large as envisaged here are to be participants in God's compassionate love and the salvific process. Therefore, an appropriate christological approach to anthropology and cosmology has to be derived from the image of the Church as the Body of Christ. When the apostle Paul envisages the individuals and the whole Church growing into the full measure of the stature of Christ (Eph. 4:13) he means that humanity and all creation can aspire to grow into the infinite dimension of the Word incarnate. This is a never-ending process of ascent, as in the ever-continuing *anabasis* of Moses climbing the holy mountain of Sinai to experience the presence of God in thick darkness, a biblical image so dear to the Cappadocian Fathers and several others. We can also take other biblical images like the banquet of the Kingdom, in which people from East and West, from North and South take part. Here we get a glimpse of synodical democracy in its broadest sense. Thus, synodality is an expression of the ultimate *koinonia* in and through Christ.

### *The Trinitarian-Holistic Dimension*

The *perichoretic* unity in Trinity has always helped the Orthodox tradition to conceive its ecclesial structures in proper perspective.<sup>6</sup> Here is a source of authority that negates all false hierarchies and worldly human goals. Since

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<sup>6</sup> *Perichoresis*, translated into Latin as *circumincession*, is a patristic metaphor borrowed from choreography to allude to the infinitely dynamic interpenetrative movement between the persons (*hypostases*) of the Trinity.

there is no hierarchy in the Trinity in the sense of our human logic of order and number, as taught to us by fathers like St Basil of Caesarea and St Gregory the Theologian, a genuine reflection of divine *perichoresis* in the Church would help us envisage a new world order in radically different ways. Jesus very clearly draws a contrast between the mode of authority as exercised by rulers in this world and the mode of authority exercised by his followers. “You know that the rulers of the gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them” (Matthew 20:25). He is emphatic when he says to the disciples: “It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you, must be your servant [...] just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:25–28). This is radically subversive in the sense that He turns our sense of hierarchy and the order of our perceived reality upside down. The values of the kingdom of God are clearly distinguished from the norms of the order of the world. Jesus literally exemplified this when he washed the feet of his own disciples.

### Democratic Governance in the Church

Long before parliamentary democracy became an acceptable mode of governance in modern states, the Church led the way in practicing its fundamental principles. Modern Western democracy, whose origin is traditionally attributed to ancient Greek city states, probably took over some of these Christian elements. For example, in the British democratic system followed by the former British colonies, the bureaucrats are called *civil servants* or servants of the people. A *minister* in government is literally one who serves or a servant. Paradoxically, the kind of privileges and position enjoyed by the top bureaucrats and ministers may not have anything to do with the life of a servant or the committed service of anyone who is inspired by the message of Christ.

Democracy loses its quality and power whenever the process of consultation and consensus is weakened. In big democracies like India elections are the decisive expression of the will of the people and the convergence of public opinion. In small communities there may be chances of direct debate and the effort to reach consensus. But elections, however well they are conducted, do not fully represent public opinion in all its different shades. There is also the danger that they can be manipulated by big business and political power brokers. Parliamentary democracy, as in my country, projects a secular state in its constitution. Therefore, even if all the citizens of a country follow some religion or other, the secular state and its governance are supposed to distance

themselves from favoring any religion or promoting the doctrines of one religion. In other words, a democratic system is not required to have any reference to a transcendent reality.

### An Indian Buddhist Ruler

The classical tradition of India includes the history of a great ruler called Ashoka (ca. 268–239 BCE) who became the emperor of a large part of India some 500 years before Constantine became the emperor of Rome. He accepted the Buddhist way of life and became a conscientious follower of the Buddha who had lived 300 years before him. Like Constantine who accepted the Christian faith and became its defender some 300 years after the incarnate life of Jesus Christ, Ashoka became the defender of Buddhism and sent out missionaries to Asian countries and as far as the Mediterranean coast. Unlike Constantine, Ashoka laid down all his weapons as a Buddhist after witnessing a bloody war with a neighboring kingdom, became a great pacifist, embraced the great Indian principle of *Ahimsa* or non-violence, and erected pillars and rock edicts throughout India urging people to practice compassion to all creatures, care for the common good, and toleration and harmony among the various competing religions.

Ashoka's period illustrated "what the ruler and the ruled owed to one another," as phrased in a recent article by Rajeev Bhargava, a political theorist in Delhi.<sup>7</sup> The Indian word for emperor is *chakravarti*, a Sanskrit word that means "one who turns the wheel." The *chakra* or wheel is that of *dharma* (*dhamma* in Pali), that is, the law inspired by morality. Buddha turned the wheel of dharma in the religious, philosophical and ethical spheres. You can still see a wheel in the state emblem of India, adapted from an extant stone sculpture with Ashoka's edicts that was erected in Sarnath in 250 BCE, (near the city of Benares), where Buddha preached his first sermon. Bhargava says that the turning of the wheel is a radical restructuring of the world in accordance with a politico-moral vision. The king initiates political and administrative measures inspired by public morality with the goal of justice, peace and prosperity for his subjects. The conquest of other kingdoms is to occur not by physical force but by the moral appeal of dharma. The Pillar Edict 7 shows that compliance with dharma must arise largely from *nijjihattiya* (persuasion), not only from *niyama* (legislation). The people have to internalize dharma because

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<sup>7</sup> *The Hindu*, 4 March 2018.

it is good, not merely because the ruler so commands. Pillar Edict 6 speaks about the welfare and happiness of all living beings in this world and hereafter in heaven. The Buddha sent the missionaries on a totally peaceful mission, whose principle was the welfare and happiness of all people (*bahujanahitaya, bahujanasukhaya*).

The king or ruler is not above dharma but is subject to the collective moral order that all people have to follow. He is not just a ruler, but the leader, teacher, father, healer and moral exemplar. These principles practiced by the emperor Ashoka are relevant in modern democracy and its ideals of justice, tolerance, freedom, equality and civic friendship. “The *Chakravarti* tradition remains a valuable resource for our democratic republic” (Bhargava).

### The Social Media

The second decade of the 21st century was marked by the pervasive use and influence of social media – Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter and Instagram, in addition to hundreds of TV channels and traditional print media. Since, given that this phenomenon is totally new, we are now completely taken up with it, we are unable to make a thorough judgment from within. In a political democratic system, the role played by the social media is still being hotly debated.

- There are positive and negative elements. Some of the positive aspects are:
- unlike print media and TV channels, social media provide instant opportunities to debate or respond to an issue
  - the participation of the people in a debate on common political and social interest can be maximized, provided all people can make use of the social media and there is complete connectivity
  - all social hierarchies are abolished, and everyone irrespective of one’s position, age, religion, gender, nationality, location and profession can take part and voice their opinion in any issue.
  - a literally global discussion on any subject is possible since the net is literally worldwide
  - voters can interact directly with their elected representatives to bring their issues to parliament or the constitutional assembly
  - people can challenge their political leaders individually and collectively without fear of physical suppression or retaliation
  - mass movements for social and political change that once required a bloody political revolution can be organised on the Internet in a possibly non-violent manner.

These are some of the very important positive features that underscore social media. In a way, they were embedded as fundamental principles in the notion of democracy from the very beginning in ancient Greece to contemporary India.

The negative elements are now clear to all users of social media:

- generating and spreading fake news continue to haunt democratic governments in many countries; this is particularly venomous in times of election.
- the enormous waste of words and images wantonly thrown up on the Net through social media does not edify society nor promote democracy in a creative way; it undermines many of humanity's venerable principles
- human freedom in a democratic system that goes along with responsibility, care for the other and concern for the common good is increasingly abused on social media without any controls
- the evil forces of jealousy and vengeance can jeopardise great educational and social causes
- the concept of post-truth itself arises mainly from the negative use of social media in relativizing factual truth and erasing all ethical norms in favour of political or financial gain.

Tanmoy Chakraborty, then product manager at Facebook, discusses the effect of social media on democracy.<sup>8</sup> He frankly admits that social media, which was heralded as the technology of liberation during the time of the Arab Spring, can damage even a well-functioning democracy. He laments that Facebook, originally designed to connect friends and family, is now being used in unforeseen ways with societal repercussions that were never anticipated because unprecedented numbers of people channel their political energy through this medium. The use of social media as an information weapon for cyberwar, as a forum for hate speech, hoaxes, misinformation and disruption of social causes increasingly offsets its positive features. The phenomenon social scientists call “confirmation bias” is corrupting the value of social media since its users are drawn to information that strengthens their preferred narratives, and they reject information that undermines those narratives.

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8 “Hard Questions: What Effect Does Social Media Have on *Democracy?*”, 22 January 2018, <https://about.fb.com/news/2018/01/effect-social-media-democracy/>.

## Conclusion

It is interesting that we are still confronting, in a highly sophisticated technological way, the old dichotomy of good and evil. In the cyber world, any good that is created will instantly have its evil counterpart. Such is the ambiguity of human creativity: every good and useful software will have to face an equally or even more powerful and disruptive malware.

Now why did we speak about synodality in the Christian Church along with democracy in the secular world and the role of social media? Principles like people's participation, consultation and consensus are conceived sacramentally and safeguarded liturgically and canonically in the Body of Christ, while in secular democracy they have no transcendent reference. We used to say that the people, the body politic, are the ultimate authority in a parliamentary democracy. Now with the emergence of the Internet and the social media this authentic principle is taken to crazy extremes by many where there is no reference to any authority or care for the common good. While the Church and the democratic state have built-in structures that can moderate the extremes of lawlessness or misuse of freedom, it is hardly possible in the present condition of social media.

Well versed in classical Greek philosophy and literature, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, the Theologian, called the corpus of that vast knowledge "bastard letters" in the 4th century because their *logos* did not connect to the Logos of God the Creator and Redeemer of all that is. He wanted to take up the mission of leading those letters to their authentic source. We can probably use the same attribute that great and erudite theologian himself used to qualify the mind-boggling technological advances in the digital information universe. Now, this places a very significant responsibility on the Church as the Body of Christ, which is the community of the Holy Spirit. The Church constantly calls in faith and hope and love on the perfecting Spirit of God to provide authentic meaning and direction to the infinite potential of human creativity. The Church's own in-house practice of the apostolic tradition of synodal democracy and the style of life and governance that it implies can set new standards for the secular world and all human aspirations for the Common Good.

# Welcoming the Thorn in the Flesh: Orthodox Theology, (Post)Modernity and (Post-)Secularization

*Georgios Vlantis*

The relation between Orthodox theology, (post)modernity and (post-)secularization is being intensively studied nowadays from the point of view of sociology of religion and religious studies in general. Many modern Orthodox theologians writing on the matter seem to be overcoming schematic hermeneutic patterns that characterized eastern contributions in the past. This volume contains contributions that cover partial but nevertheless decisive aspects of the topic; no discussion on Orthodoxy and its encounter with the modern world should overlook themes like Church and politics, Orthodoxy and nationalism or human rights. My own contribution, with its hopelessly ambitious and abstract subtitle, opts for a more general approach, although I wish neither to provide one more survey of the literature nor to summarize the main points of the discussion.<sup>1</sup> I will merely express, in a schematic manner, some fragmentary observations and raise a few questions that may be useful for further consideration. I write from the point of view of Orthodox systematic theology. Even if I sometimes comment on the history of the relation mentioned above, I am mostly interested in its future.

## De nominibus

A demanding discussion on the definition of terms like Orthodoxy, (post)modernity and (post-)secularization exceeds both the framework and the

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<sup>1</sup> See the extensive bibliography in: Pantelis Kalaitzidis, *Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ Νεωτερικότητα. Προλεγόμενα* [Orthodoxy and Modernity: Prolegomena] (Athens: Indiktos, 2007; to be published in English translation by Brill/Schöningh in the fall of 2022 under the title: *Orthodoxy and Modernity: Introducing a Constructive Encounter*); Vasilios N. Makrides, "Orthodox Christianity, Modernity and Postmodernity: Overview, Analysis and Assessment," *Religion, State & Society* 40, nos. 3–4 (2012): 248–85; Paul Ladouceur, *Modern Orthodox Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2019); Nikolaos Asproulis, "Östliche Orthodoxie und (Post-)Moderne: Eine unbehagliche Beziehung," *Una Sancta* 74 (2019): 13–37.

intention of this paper.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, a theological examination of their relation inevitably faces the following question: Is Orthodoxy primarily a theological quality or is the term simply being ascribed to a family of Eastern Churches for the purpose of their identification and classification in the whole spectrum of Christian traditions? If we discuss modernity and secularism in terms of preservation of a specific paradigm of Christianity with concrete doctrinal, historical and cultural characteristics, mainly defined in its Byzantine past, the concerns and priorities would be different than the ones arising when speaking of Orthodoxy to signify the postulate of an authentic relation of the Body of Christ to the revealed truth of God in every here and now of history. In the first case, the conservative nature of the intention becomes evident; in the second, the challenge is how to be Christian and how to be church in the present time. Perhaps no Orthodox theologian would interpret the distinction as a radical dichotomy, but it is crucial to be clear about the focus of the challenge in order to set the equivalent priorities. In this contribution, I will look at the discussion taking place in the Eastern Church(es), but my focus will nevertheless be on Orthodoxy as a theological quality.

The more inclusive of the many definitions of modernity emphasize the criterion of contextuality: when studying the current answers by religions and churches on questions related to gnoseology, metaphysics, ethics, political theory, etc. and the practices arising from their approaches, many speak of Catholic, Protestant, Islamic, Buddhist modernity, etc., even if these answers more or less contradict central principles of the currents of thought that shaped modernity in the last centuries – often in implicit or explicit conflict with religious traditions. The narrative of “multiple modernities” is supported by plenty of interesting arguments that remind one of the constitutive ambivalences of modernity.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, this approach, even when it serves no explicit

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2 Vasilios N. Makrides summarizes the discussion on fundamental terms in his paper “Orthodox Christianity, Modernity and Postmodernity.” Among the most recent publications, see Christopher David Shaw, *On Mysticism, Ontology, and Modernity: A Theological Engagement with Secularity* (Oxford: Peter Lang: 2018); Justin Beaumont, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Postsecularity* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2019); Daniel Weinstock, Jacob T. Levy and Jocelyn MacLure, eds., *Interpreting Modernity: Essays on the Work of Charles Taylor* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press: 2020); Przemyslaw Tacik, *A New Philosophy of Modernity and Sovereignty: Towards Radical Historicization* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021). See also Konstantinos Papapetrou, *Ἡ οὐσία τῆς θεολογίας: Συστηματικὴ μελέτη ἐπὶ ἐνὸς πατερικοῦ ἐρμηνευτικοῦ ἔργου* [The Essence of Theology: A Systematic Study on a Patristic Hermeneutic Work] (Athens 1970). This study remains unsurpassed in providing an Orthodox systematic theological examination of the notion of “Orthodoxy.”

3 Makrides, “Orthodox Christianity, Modernity and Postmodernity,” especially 247–55, in *Multiple Modernities and Postsecular Societies*, ed. Massimo Rosati and Kristina Stoeckl

apologetic purposes, leads to a blurred understanding of modernity: if, in the final analysis, everything is regarded as modern, then nothing is really modern nor needs any kind of legitimacy.<sup>4</sup> The loss of the challenging sharpness of modernity and postmodernity may be of interest for the phenomenology or sociology of religion, but theology needs provoking interlocutors, otherwise its discourse becomes merely self-referential. For the sake of the argument, I prefer a more normative and somehow traditional meaning of modernity, focusing on the Kantian “Copernican turn” and its consequences, indicating an anthropocentric epistemology, reservation toward theology and metaphysics, rationalization, demythologization, democratization and liberalization processes.<sup>5</sup>

I relate postmodernity to pointing to the dead ends, the limits and the relativity of the modern worldview(s) and of every worldview in general. Critics see a rather anti-modern attitude in postmodern relativism, whereas others recognize in its priorities a consistent continuation of modern thinking. Some Orthodox thinkers seem to welcome postmodernity as a supposed justification of their own anti-Western and anti-modern attitude. Nevertheless, it would be apologetically naive and simply false to overestimate the affinities of the pre- and the postmodern. Postmodernity presupposes the discourse of modernity. Its critique of modern ideals is also explicitly or implicitly directed against pre-modern perspectives: The insistence on the relativity of *ratio* implies a strong critique of *revelatio* and its absolute gnoseological demands.<sup>6</sup>

In talking about the secular, one often means a way of thinking and living, not necessarily polemical in its style, that provides no real place for God and metaphysics, excludes theistic and religious understandings of transcendence or remains indifferent to them and insists on the immanent character of reality. The affinities between the secular and the modern cannot be overlooked, even if the modern appears to be more inclusive and less rigorous than the secular and its postulates. The post-secular signifies not only the phenomenon of the intellectual overcoming of strictly secular understandings of reality but

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(Farnham: Ashgate, 2012). Cf. Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

4 Hans Blumenberg, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*, 6th ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2012).

5 On the importance of Kant’s “Copernican turn” for the self-understanding of modernity, see Blumenberg, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*; idem, *Die kopernikanische Wende* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1965); Alfredo Ferrarin, *The Powers of Pure Reason: Kant and the Idea of Cosmic Philosophy* (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015), the emphasis on Kant in this contribution has a rather symbolic character because of the centrality of his thought in Western modernity and is not meant to underestimate the complexity, variety and importance of other currents that shaped and continue to shape the modern world philosophically.

6 Cf. the remarks in Makrides, “Orthodox Christianity, Modernity and Postmodernity,” 273–4.

also the coexistence of people adopting secular views with the faithful of various religions and denominations in the same social contexts.

### The Orthodox world and Modernity: Traces in History and the Narrative of a Babylonian Captivity

Due to well-known historical reasons, the intellectual encounter of Orthodoxy with modernity did not produce many fruitful results, at least compared to other Christian traditions. Should one attribute this fact to theological reasons as well? A discussion on this matter would exceed the framework of this contribution. In any case, something similar to the five volumes of Emanuel Hirsch's *Geschichte der neuern evangelischen Theologie im Zusammenhang mit den allgemeinen Bewegungen des europäischen Denkens* could hardly be written for the theology of the East in the second millennium.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, one should be wary of essentialist approaches and claims that Orthodoxy and modernity are *ex definitio* incompatible. One can trace various encounters between Orthodoxy and modernity, even if they appear fragile. Appropriate hermeneutical keys enable us to see and evaluate these traces fairly so we can get a more nuanced picture of the history of Orthodox theology and also of its potential. Orthodox theologians in the 20th century like Georges Florovsky adopted the idea of a pseudomorphosis of Orthodox theology and its Babylonian captivity in Western patterns of thought; the critique of the Russian philosophy of religion became fierce sometimes; academic theology in Greece before the 1960s was schematically seen as "scholastic."<sup>8</sup>

Russian theologians of the 19th century do not always focus on the church fathers, but they try to engage Kant and Hegel; Greek theologians, church historians and philosophers on the threshold of the 20th century studied under the *crème de la crème* of the German liberal theological and philosophical intelligentsia. Is Vasilios Stefanidis' (1878–1958) historicism not a fruit of a consequent intellectual encounter with modern thought and its methods? Is a reading of history like the one John Romanides (1927–2001) attempts methodically more solid, less ideological and rather Orthodox than Stefanidis'?<sup>9</sup> Is Nikolaos Louvaris' (1887–1961) sovereign approach to the Western philosophy

7 E. Hirsch, *Geschichte der neuern evangelischen Theologie im Zusammenhang mit den allgemeinen Bewegungen des europäischen Denkens* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1949–1954.)

8 See Paul Gavrilyuk, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Paul Ladouceur, *Modern Orthodox Theology*, especially 59–156.

9 Vasilios Stefanidis, *Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ἱστορία ἀπ' ἀρχῆς μέχρι σήμερον* [Church History: From the Beginnings until Today], 2nd ed. (Athens 1959); Daniel P. Payne, *The Revival of Political*

of his times less solid than Christos Yannaras' reading (b. 1935)?<sup>10</sup> In spite of reservations regarding some of its contents, is Christos Androutsos' (1869–1935) rigorous system not important, also because of its academic methodology, in comparison to later Orthodox aversions to any notion of a system and the Orthodox recourse to essay form with its pros and contras?<sup>11</sup> How many contributions of Father Bulgakov to a discussion with modernity have been overlooked because of his attitude in the sophiological controversy?<sup>12</sup>

I do not propose a radically revisionist reading of the history of Orthodox theology; rather, I am arguing for a more nuanced approach to its past. Some quite strongly polemic, “ideological” readings of it are available, but a rigorous scholarly history of Orthodox theology in the second millennium has yet to be written.<sup>13</sup> And it is an interesting question as to why it has not yet appeared – and also why some encounters like the ones I mentioned above could not prove fruitful on a larger scale. Should the notion of Western influence be always evaluated negatively?<sup>14</sup> And should an Orthodox encounter with modernity always retain a strong confessional character? Should it have to be demonstrably Orthodox? Does one serve one's confession by strengthening confessionalism?

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*Hesychasm in Contemporary Orthodox Thought: The Political Hesychasm of John S. Romanides and Christos Yannaras* (Lanham MD: Rowmann and Littlefield, 2011).

- 10 Nikolaos Louvaris, *Ιστορία τῆς φιλοσοφίας* [History of Philosophy], I-II (Athens 1933); Christos Yannaras, *Σχεδιάσμα εἰσαγωγῆς στὴ φιλοσοφία: Ἡ ἑλληνικὴ ὀπτικὴ καὶ ἡ δυτικὴ ἀντιστροφή τῆς* (Athens: Ikaros, 2013); English translation: *The Schism in Philosophy: The Hellenic Perspective and its Western Reversal*, trans. Norman Russel (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2015).
- 11 Christos Androutsos, *Δογματικὴ τῆς Ἀνατολικῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας* [Dogmatics of the Eastern Orthodox Church] (Athens 1907); cf. Ladouceur, *Modern Orthodox Theology*, 125–6, who is rather one-sided in his evaluation of Androutsos' work.
- 12 Sergij Bulgakov, *Bibliographie. Werke, Briefwechsel und Übersetzungen: Mit ausgewählter Sekundärliteratur und einem tabellarischen Lebenslauf*, compiled by Regula M. Zwahlen and Ksenija Babkova, ed. by Barbara Hallensleben and Regula M. Zwahlen (Aschendorf: Muenster, 2017).
- 13 Some of the most important contributions of recent years, which are mostly focused on the 20th century: Yannis Spiteris, *La teologia ortodossa neo-greca* (Bologna: Dehoniane, 1992); Karl Christian Felmy, *Die orthodoxe Theologie der Gegenwart: Eine Einführung*, 3rd ed. (Muenster: LIT Verlag, 2014); Andrew Louth, *Modern Orthodox Thinkers: From the Philokalia to the Present* (London: IVP Academic, 2015); Ivana Noble, Katerina Bauerova, Tim Noble and Parush Parushev, *The Ways of Orthodox Theology in the West*, (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2015); idem, *Wrestling with the Mind of the Fathers* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press: 2015); Ladouceur, *Modern Orthodox Theology*.
- 14 George Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanicolaou, eds., *Orthodox Constructions of the West* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

In the discussion with modernity, confessionalism can indeed become a neurosis, with problematic theological and aesthetic consequences.

### The Four Kantian Questions

After the short comment on history above, I would like to structure the main part of my contribution according to four fundamental questions formulated by one of the great figures of modernity, Immanuel Kant.<sup>15</sup> In a certain way, these include the core of the challenge of (post)modernity and (post-)secularism.

1) By asking “What can I know?”, Kant accentuates what is perhaps the most decisive point for the Copernican turn associated with modernity. “What can I know?” is directly connected to “How I know” and has serious implications for the understanding of authority and power in modernity. The quest for solid criteria for knowledge characterizes the whole history of modern thought from Descartes’ *Discours de la méthode* right up until Jürgen Habermas and modern philosophy of mind or neurophilosophy.<sup>16</sup> Modern individuals are also reluctant to become members of religious communities because of doubts about the validity of the faith preached by them. While Roman Catholic and Protestant theologies tried to respond extensively to this challenge from neo-Thomism and natural theology to Karl Barth’s prophetic pathos, Orthodox theology does not seem to focus sufficiently on this issue. The few serious critiques to modern approaches to the theory of knowledge<sup>17</sup> are often versed in anti-Western contexts, emphasizing the supposed individualistic basis of modern gnoseologies (as if gnoseological challenges can be refuted merely on the basis of ethical categories) and interpreting it, in the final analysis, as a result of the erroneous development of Western theology.<sup>18</sup> This critique oversimplifies and proposes monocausal explanations for a very complicated history. Sometimes, it allows the impression that the critique of theology modernity exercised has nothing to do with Orthodoxy and its presuppositions: on the contrary, it sounds like a

15 Patrick Frierson, *Kant’s Questions: What is the Human Being?* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

16 Gottfried Gabriel, *Erkenntnis* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015).

17 On the contrary, numerous studies have been published concerning the gnoseology of the church fathers. Nevertheless, these are contributions to the history of gnoseology, not systematic approaches.

18 Cf., e.g., Christos Yannaras, *Χαίντεγγερ και Ἀρεοπαγίτης: Ἡ περὶ ἀγνώστιας και ἀπουσίας τοῦ Θεοῦ*, 2nd rev. ed. (Athens: Domos, 1988<sup>2</sup>); see also the English edition, *On the Absence and Unknowability of God: Heidegger and the Areopagite*, trans. Haralambos Ventis (London: T&T Clark, 2005).

confirmation of its truth because it proves the error of its Latin opponents. The genealogy of a critique is one thing, and its gnoseological relevance another. Modernity's critique of metaphysics is much more radical; it is not directed only at Western metaphysics but at every religious ontology, including the Orthodox worldview.<sup>19</sup>

By representing a polemical attitude toward profane knowledge, fervent contemporary supporters of Palamism show no will to discuss epistemological challenges to their worldview. Theologians who focus more on Maximus the Confessor's ontology also seem to overlook radical critiques of medieval ontologies, however delicate and promising in their speculative vitality such critiques may sound.<sup>20</sup>

Modernity criticizes Christianity not only on metaphysical but also historical grounds. The use of the historical-critical exegesis of the Bible and of approaches to the Christian past that do not presuppose dogmatic-confessional dependence and pointing to the parallels to Christian doctrines and practices in other religions inevitably call into question absolute claims made in the name of Christianity. Many classics of this literature have not been translated in traditionally Orthodox countries.

It is unrealistic to expect that the relation between faith and reason will ever find a definite solution. Nevertheless, Orthodox theology could contribute to this crucial matter on a more solid basis. The challenge is not to articulate correct, definitive answers but rather to understand the decisive questions. Orthodox theology could i) liberate itself from anti-Western interpretations of modern gnoseology; ii) engage in a discussion with truly modern approaches to knowledge; iii) work more intensively for a stronger connection between biblical studies and systematic theology; iv) reflect further on hermeneutics, which is also a crucial condition for a sufficient understanding of tradition; and v) find the prophetic courage to criticize situations when mythology, superstition and bigotry is being propagated in the name of faith.

2) The second Kantian question is: "How should I act?" Important contributions on human rights or democracy, politics and Orthodoxy, etc. appear in this volume. Therefore, I would just like to focus on one question: What is the theological and soteriological value of non-religious aspects of life? In spite of Orthodox critics of the term religion, Orthodoxy insists upon a deeply religious

19 Panajotis Kondylis, *Die Neuzeitliche Metaphysikkritik* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1990.)

20 Cf. Payne, *The Revival of Political Hesychasm*; Maxim Vasiljević, ed., *Knowing the Purpose of Creation Through the Resurrection: Proceedings of the Symposium on St. Maximus the Confessor* (Alhambra CA: Sebastian Press and The Faculty of Orthodox Theology, University of Belgrade, 2013).

model of life (participating in liturgy, ascetics, prayer, etc.) It is perhaps easy to find a theological dimension in ecological or social engagement, but, what about secular art, for example? Does it have a value per se or only insofar the modern artist is a faithful member of his community? Is the Orthodox message relevant only to the homo religiosus or does it go beyond the borders of religiosity? Orthodox theologians would claim that it does, but affirmative, systematic theological reflections on non-religious dimensions of life are still missing in the Eastern Christian thought. Finding common space with the non religious modernity becomes therefore more difficult.<sup>21</sup>

3) The third question Kant asks is “What can I hope for?” Modernity has indeed great difficulties with hope and even greater ones with expectation, at least when we mean an eschatological hope and expectation like the one proclaimed by Christianity: the second coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, life after death. Even secularized eschatologies that played an important role in the past seem to have frustrated modernity and have become rather indifferent for postmodernity.<sup>22</sup>

Christianity seemed to touch a sensitive point with the renaissance of eschatology that took place in the theology of the 20th century, although there is a justified assumption that this revival is no longer strongly present in the West. Modern Orthodox theology still emphasizes eschatology and provides original contributions.<sup>23</sup> Considering its relation to modernity, I would like to mention the following challenges:

i) The question of the legitimacy of eschatology, as one of the legitimacy of faith in general, makes a certain tension unavoidable. Modernity asks the “How do you know” question. The expectation of life after death is surely an important reason why many people declare themselves Orthodox. Theologians of

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21 In the West there are theologies of culture, for example Tillich's, that tried to emphasize the theological importance of the profane. See Euler Renato Westphal, *Secularization, Cultural Heritage and the Spirituality of the Secular State between Sacredness and Secularization* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2019).

22 Cf. William Gibson, Dan O'Brien and Marius Turda, eds., *Teleology and Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2020).

23 Georgios Vlantis, “In Erwartung des künftigen Äons: Aspekte orthodoxer Eschatologie,” *Ökumenische Rundschau* 56 (2007): 170–82; idem, “Pneumatologie und Eschatologie in der zeitgenössischen orthodoxen Theologie: Richtlinien und Perspektiven,” in *Wir glauben an den Heiligen Geist: XII. Begegnung im bilateralen theologischen Dialog zwischen der EKD und dem Ökumenischen Patriarchat*, ed. Petra Bosse-Huber, Konstantinos Vliagkoffis, and Wolfram Langpape, Beihefte zur Ökumenischen Rundschau 130 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2021), 119–37. Cf. Georg Essen, *Geschichtstheologie und Eschatologie in der Moderne: Eine Grundlegung*, Lehr- und Studienbücher zur Theologie 6 (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2016).

the Eastern Church have also written marvelous pages on this hope and vision. But what is their convincing power beyond the context of those who already believe? How can modern people be persuaded by the eschatological message of Christianity?

ii) The content of eschatology. What do we mean exactly when we speak about eschatology? In the 20th century, many Orthodox insisted that eschatology is not just the last chapter of dogmatics. This is true, but what about this last chapter and its very specific content? The Western Churches have made serious explicit or implicit developments in their eschatological teachings. In his book *Die Zivilisierung Gottes*, the German sociologist and theologian Michael Ebertz summarizes such developments and discusses the dynamics they provoke for the understanding of faith, such as the disappearance of hell from theological discourse. What is the response of the Orthodox to such issues?<sup>24</sup>

iii) The character of eschatology. Orthodox theologians criticize nationalistic alienations of Orthodox eschatology that appeared due to the close relation between Church and state in the Orthodox world. They apply eschatological teachings to political theology and encourage a realization of the implications of eschatology for social engagement. What are the criteria of this extension of eschatological thinking? What does it mean for the Christian thought when secularized eschatologies are being re-Christianized? Does this broadening of eschatological thinking make eschatology more convincing in its dogmatic core or does the latter (and theologically more decisive) still remain problematic?<sup>25</sup>

4) “What is the human being?” Kant thought that all his three previous questions are summarized in this one. Anthropology is indeed crucial in modernity, which is sometimes schematically understood as the passage from theocentrism to anthropocentrism. Metropolitan Kallistos Ware claims that anthropology will define the agenda of theology in the 21st century.<sup>26</sup> This is not yet the case in Orthodoxy, which has nevertheless started to work in a courageous way

24 Michael N. Ebertz, *Die Zivilisierung Gottes: Der Wandel von Jenseitsvorstellungen in Theologie und Verkündigung*, Glaubenskommunikation Reihe Zeitzeichen 14 (Ostfildern: Schwabenverlag, 2004).

25 Aristotle Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012); Pantelis Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy and Political Theology* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012); Kristina Stoeckl, Ingeborg Gabriel, and Aristotle Papanikolaou, eds., *Political Theologies in Orthodox Christianity: Common Challenges – Divergent Positions* (London: T&T Clark, 2017); Haralambos Ventis, *Ἐσχατολογία καὶ ἑτερότητα* [Eschatology and Otherness] (Athens: Polis, 2019).

26 Kallistos Ware, *Orthodox Theology in the Twenty-First Century* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012).

toward modern understandings of gender and human sexuality.<sup>27</sup> Of course, many traditional or extremist opinions on anthropological matters can still be found among the faithful and bishops.

What are the anthropological implications of Orthodox personalism? Orthodox notions of the human person and of communion are too harmonious, too affirmative.<sup>28</sup> It could be important to provide a greater place for the category of negation. As far as history is concerned, negation is a decisive experience for human relations, and not only for them but also for the self-understanding of the human person and discrepancies of that self-understanding. Negation is decisive for an encounter with modernity, because it enables and justifies critique. No pragmatic understanding of the human person and human society can work without offering this space, not just for the other but also for the conflict with the other. Orthodoxy can do much more for the elaboration of this idea.

### Structures of the Church

This short remark on critique serves as bridge from the Kantian questions to the connection of Orthodox theology and the structures of the Church in modern contexts. For the Orthodox, the Church is the natural place for theology, even if Orthodox theology mostly flourishes in contexts where the connection with Church hierarchy does not suffocate it.<sup>29</sup> The encounter of Orthodox theology with modernity is expected to have an impact on Church life, but this presupposes adequate structures in the Church. The faithful live in the modern world and have concerns that come directly from their contexts; their voice should be heard in the structures of the Church and be further elaborated. Synodality is indeed a central point in the Orthodox approaches and concerns

27 A promising example is the document *For the Life of the World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church*, ed. David Bentley Hart and John Chryssavgis (Brookline MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2020) <https://www.goarch.org/social-ethos> (accessed 13 February 2022).

28 Aristotle Papanicolaou, "Personhood and Its Exponents in Twentieth-Century Orthodox Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, ed. Mary Cunningham and Elisabeth Theokritoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 232–45; idem, "The Hermeneutical and Existential Contextuality of Orthodox Theologies of Personhood," *The Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 69 (2017): 51–67.

29 One of the last unpleasant examples: Rodoljub Kubat, "Redeverbot für Dozenten an der Theologischen Fakultät in Belgrad," 30 April 2020, Nachrichtendienst Östliche Kirchen, [https://noek.info/hintergrund/1520-redeverbot-fuer-dozenten-an-der-theologischen-fakultaet-in-belgrad?fbclid=IwAR2SWhGTmqrKc3Y46\\_P8XLJNnw9wmZZMm5YMcvd24wcMRY5GdkTLhcHCrY](https://noek.info/hintergrund/1520-redeverbot-fuer-dozenten-an-der-theologischen-fakultaet-in-belgrad?fbclid=IwAR2SWhGTmqrKc3Y46_P8XLJNnw9wmZZMm5YMcvd24wcMRY5GdkTLhcHCrY) (accessed 13 February 2022).

on ecclesiology. Even if one could claim that the Church is not a democracy in the modern sense of the world, synodality remains a central expression of the Church on all levels of its life, not only in that of the bishops. Not only is its existence crucial but its *modus operandi* is as well. What is crucial for modernization processes in any case is to learn how to live with minorities and majorities, and also with critique.

### Pastoral Aspects

Up until now, I have presented the challenges of Orthodoxy's encounter with modernity, implicitly recommending that change is needed. But does the Orthodox Church wish for such a change? Encounter leading to change may also cause pain; there is a price. Phases of instability and conflict are inevitable in this process.

Another question is whether such a fruitful encounter with modernity could lead to an acceleration of the secularization of the Church itself and the loss of a great part of its flock, as many conservative Christians believe. Many think that the Church should not abandon elements that add to its aura. Peter Berger reflected on the substitution of Latin by vernacular languages in the liturgical life of the Roman Catholic Church, which thereby lost part of its fascination for the populace. This idea was thoroughly explored in Germany by Martin Mosebach.<sup>30</sup> Cynical critics of the Church could provocatively say: The Church lives in myth, provides myth and gains popularity because of this myth. If this works, why should it be abandoned?

Many are of course not willing to declare liturgical and doctrinal matters mythical and are not willing to get rid of them. And they believe that the insecurity and unclarity are caused by the lack of will to accept the Christian truth as it has been revealed and to experience the implications of this faith in a consequent and uncompromising way. "Do not be afraid, little flock" (Luke 12:32) – this biblical verse is quoted very often in traditionalist contexts. This discussion considers the so-called "Benedict option," namely, the thesis that Christians who wish to preserve their faith should segregate themselves to a certain extent from modern society, which is drifting from traditional

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30 Peter Berger, "First Things First: 'The Vernacularist Illusion,'" April 1995 <https://www.firstthings.com/article/1995/04/the-vernacularist-illusion> (accessed 13 February 2022); Martin Mosebach, *Häresie der Formlosigkeit: Die römische Liturgie und ihr Feind* (Munich: Hanser, 2007).

Christian values (particularly those regarding sex, marriage and gender) and live their faith consistently, uninfluenced by the *Zeitgeist*.<sup>31</sup>

Consistency is a virtue, also for Christians, insofar theology is something that develops with the assistance of the Holy Spirit and does not change in the name of *Zeitgeist*. On the other hand, such an approach should not lead to a theology refusing to accomplish its incarnational duty, the function of sanctifying the world, a theology preferring to encase itself in a sterile sphere, with no communion with the world. Such a practice leads in the long run to more tension than the one it avoids; it is not easy to ignore the encounter with modern questions. These are waiting at every corner.

### The Experience of the Ecumenical Partners

Other Christian Churches, at least in Western contexts, have a great deal of experience in this dialogue with modernity. The encounter of every Christian tradition with modernity should take place in an ecumenical context and atmosphere: everyone needs the others and learns from them.

The encounter is not over because the project of modernity and Enlightenment is not finished<sup>32</sup> and because the Church continues on its way in history. The tension between Churches and modernity is still present and should not encourage maximalist ambitions. On the other hand, the challenges of the modern world can also vitalize Church life and activate reform appeals and discussions in the Church. Perhaps a last example is the “synodal way” of the Roman Catholic Church in Germany,<sup>33</sup> a process that began in the shadow of the child abuse cases and has expanded into more general reform questions. One can discuss the solidity of the criteria of this process and the influence of the *Zeitgeist* and the highly emotional argumentation patterns in the demands of a great amount of German Catholics. It is very important, however, that a large part of the flock participates and also protests, that it becomes active and is unhappy with the understanding of faith based on traditionalistic views

31 Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Sentinel, 2018).

32 Jürgen Habermas, *Die Moderne: Ein unvollendetes Projekt. Philosophisch-politische Aufsätze, 1977–1992*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Reclam, 1992).

33 Michaela Labudda and Marcus Leitschuh (eds.), *Synodaler Weg – letzte Chance? Standpunkte zur Zukunft der katholischen Kirche* (Paderborn: Bonifatius, 2020); Anne Kathrin Preckel, *Der Synodale Weg: Fragen und Antworten* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk 2020); Bernhard Sven Anuth, Georg Bier and Karsten Kreuzer (eds.), *Der Synodale Weg: Eine Zwischenbilanz* (Munich: Herder, 2021).

of authority. Many Christians live in modernity, live modernity and articulate their modern concerns in their appeals.

### Conclusion

In his voluminous, 1700-page book *Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie*, which appeared in the year when he celebrated his 90th birthday,<sup>34</sup> Jürgen Habermas aims at a reconstruction of the intellectual history of the Western world from the perspective of the relation between faith and reason. On the last page of this book, he calls religious experience “a thorn in the flesh of modernity,” leaving open the question as to whether there is still semantic content that should be translated into the language of the profane. Religion as thorn in the flesh of modernity – perhaps modernity is also and should be a thorn in the flesh of the Church, or something like Socrates’ gadfly.<sup>35</sup> It is important that the terms retain their sharpness, their challenging character; this is a condition for every sincere encounter. And it is this for every non-boring encounter, and the one between Orthodoxy and the (post)modern / (post-)secular world should be anything but boring.

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34 Jürgen Habermas, *Auch einer Geschichte der Philosophie*, I-II (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2019).

35 Plato, *Apology*, 30e.

# Primacy, Synodality and Liberal Democracy: An Uneasy Relationship

*Nikolaos Asproulis*

## Introductory Remarks

After the fall of communism, the debate that seems to be prevalent in the research among theologians, sociologists and political scientists is the one concerning the relationship between the Church and liberal democracy. Although Eastern Orthodoxy does not seem to be completely absent from the discussion,<sup>1</sup> the dissemination and consolidation of the (post-)modern principles, globalization and all the major political, social and economic developments that have taken place or are in progress have led to an unprecedented amount of interest in the field of political theology<sup>2</sup>, where the topic under discussion is situated.

Too often the Orthodox present themselves, in a rather arrogant way, as the democratic church par excellence, as the church where the synodal spirit pervades its whole life, as the Church of the Synods that positions itself between the authoritarian structure of the Roman Catholic Church and the extreme relativism or fragmentation of the Protestant world. Although such an understanding does not take seriously into account the varied patterns of organization or long historical developments, it still occupies a central place in the Orthodox imagination, determining in advance any discussion of the relationship between Orthodoxy and democracy. At the same time, however, the very concept and reality of democratic governance, ethics and values have been

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- 1 Cf. Paschalis M. Kitromilides, *Religion and Politics in the Orthodox World: The Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Challenges of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2019); Aristotle Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political. Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy* (Notre Dame IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2012); Emmanuel Clapsis, "An Orthodox Encounter with Liberal Democracy," in *Christianity, Democracy and the Shadow of Constantine*, ed. George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 111–26; Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu, "The Orthodox Churches and Democratization in Romania and Bulgaria," in *Religion and Politics in Post-Socialist Central and Southeastern Europe*, ed. Sabrina Ramet (Hampshire UK: Palgrave 2014), 263–85; Boris Begovic, "Must Orthodoxy be a Barrier to Liberal Democracy? The Case of Serbia," *Public Orthodoxy*, 5 June 2018, <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2018/06/05/orthodoxy-serbia-liberal-democracy-2/>.
  - 2 Cf. Kristina Stoeckl, Ingeborg Gabriel and Aristotle Papanikolaou (eds.), *Political Theologies in Orthodox Christianity: Common Challenges – Divergent Positions* (London: T&T Clark, 2017).

much debated. This occurs to the extent that there are frequent shifts or mutations either towards more liberal and social or more authoritarian and populist forms of democratic organization, especially in Western societies (Trumpency is a recent example), which leads to a necessary reconsideration of the present and future of liberal democracy.

After describing the context within which the debate should take place (namely post-modernity, secularization and globalization), I will discuss some fundamental methodological terms of this dialogue from a theological point of view. The goal of this introductory text is to show that the Orthodox Church is not incompatible with the basic principles of liberal democracy (e.g., church-state separation, representation, participation by the people, human rights) at the level of theology. To the contrary, the Orthodox Church is the eschatological fulfillment of the latter, even if, in the realm of history, Church life often displays dysfunctions (undermining of the laity, imperialistic attitudes, nationalism) that cause embarrassment. Unless the Church is viewed primarily in terms of *communion*, an event, and not just as a fixed community or institution, it cannot be fully defined as democratic.

### The Context of the Discussion

To cope better with the issue under discussion, one needs to make use of “contextual hermeneutics” to avoid projecting general socio-political theories onto completely different contexts. This applies especially to the relationship between Orthodoxy and post-modernity, secularization and globalization, phenomena to which the development of Orthodoxy has contributed little. This is particularly important to the extent that liberal democracy itself, as we know it today, is a product of post-modernity, as especially exemplified in certain parts of the Western world. Therefore, “it is wrong if we discuss this issue to attribute either a democratic or non-democratic ethos to Christianity before the birth of modern democracy itself.”<sup>3</sup> Orthodoxy, as a historical product of late antiquity, already existed before modernity.

It has been rightly argued<sup>4</sup> that Eastern Orthodoxy came more or less to a halt before modernity, succumbing in some cases to an innate desire to move backwards to pre-modern forms of organization of life and society (for

3 Stavros Zoumboulakis, “Jacques Maritain: Χριστιανική Πίστη και Δημοκρατία” [Jacques Maritain: Christian Faith and Democracy] in *Θρησκεία και Πολιτική* [Religion and Politics], ed. Stavros Zoumboulakis (Athens: Artos Zoes, 2016), 281.

4 Pantelis Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy and Political Theology* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012).

example, the adoption of forms and symbolisms of rural society). The Orthodox Church, especially in the so-called Orthodox countries (in the Balkans and Eastern Europe), often seems to have completely rejected the major achievements of modernity, such as human rights language or political liberalism, expressing instead a preference for pre-modern organizational structures, an inclination towards the glorious theocratic or even anti-democratic past, a patriarchal lifestyle and generally a worldview that represents Orthodoxy as fully anti-modern. This is the dominant attitude of Orthodoxy towards modernity, despite some exceptions, such as the Russia of Tsar Peter I and Catherine II or the plethora of important thinkers of the Russian Religious Renaissance of the late 19th and early 20th centuries who often fruitfully addressed, regardless of the result, certain aspects of modernity. So, the question is not so much whether or not Orthodoxy stopped developing before modernity,<sup>5</sup> but rather why Orthodoxy did not succeed in embracing fundamental democratic values, with the result that its encounter with modernity still remains at a preliminary stage today.

Against this ambivalence regarding to modernity, there is a consensus among contemporary sociologists of religion that secularization is a more nuanced and complex phenomenon that varies widely depending on the specific context. It has been justly argued that the religious and the secular are “inextricably bound and mutually conditioned.”<sup>6</sup> By saying this, one is obliged to talk about multiple secularizations or patterns of secularization, following the most recent analysis in this vein that accounts for “multiple modernities.”<sup>7</sup> Regardless of this general agreement, certain features have already been determined by which an attempt has been made by sociologists and political theorists to describe or evaluate this phenomenon: a) structural differentiation of the secular sphere; b) decline of religious belief and c) privatization of religion.<sup>8</sup>

5 Nikolaos Asproulis, “Ostliche Orthodoxie und (Post) Moderne: Eine unbehagliche Beziehung,” *Una Sancta* 74, no. 1 (2019): 13–37; idem, “Is a Dialogue between Orthodox Theology and (Post) modernity Possible? The Case of the Russian and Neo-patristic ‘Schools,’” *Communio Viatorum* 54, no. 2 (2012): 203–22.

6 See Jose Casanova, “Rethinking Secularization: A Global Comparative Perspective,” *The Hedgehog Review* (Spring & Summer 2006): 7–22, 10 and passim.

7 Casanova, “Rethinking Secularization,” 11. This term was initially coined by S. N. Eisenstadt, “Multiple Modernities,” *Daedalus* 129, no. 1 (Winter, 2000): 1–29.

8 In this perspective see Casanova, “Rethinking Secularization,” 7ff.; Nicos Mouzelis, “Modernity: Religious Trends: Universal Rights in a World of Diversity. The Case of Religious Freedom,” *Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, Acta* 17, (2012): 71–90. Cf. also David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978); David Martin, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Rhys H. Williams, “Movement

Even if one or more of these features apply in most Western societies, the reality in predominantly Orthodox countries, such as Greece, Serbia, Russia, etc., appears quite different. Despite a certain change or progress in various aspects of institutions or daily life and the experience of the Orthodox people (e.g., adoption of digital technology), one could hardly trace a robust decline of religiosity and practice among the Orthodox, despite the frequency of church-going or church attendance, which remains high, according to relevant studies, especially in Eastern European countries. For instance, the Greeks are deeply religious – whether indifferently Orthodox or pagan.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, despite the efforts by especially socialist or left-wing governments to reconfigure the state-church relationship towards a more secular perspective, intending to limit the public role or often the hegemony of the Orthodox Church in state affairs – since it was always the state that took any kind of initiative in this direction – it would not be easy for one to argue for a clearly secularized Greek, Serbian or similar society.

On the one hand, it would be true to argue that religion in Greece, for instance, has increasingly essentially been a lesser direct influence on the various institutional spheres (professional, etc.), thus providing space to what has been described as “inter-institutional secularization,”<sup>10</sup> i.e., the theory of the institutional differentiation of the secular spheres. On the other hand, however, due to its strong and diachronic tie with the Greek national ideology,<sup>11</sup> as well as with charity and solidarity works, the Church still strongly intervenes in the political or public sphere, in this way inhibiting any real process of secularization understood as a high wall of separation between church and state or as a decline in religiosity. It seems then that any attempt to approach the distinctiveness of the Greek experience (or any other traditional Orthodox country)

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Dynamics and Social Change: Transforming Fundamentalist Ideology and Organizations,” in *The Fundamentalist Project: Accounting for Fundamentalisms*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, vol. 4 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 798.

9 See for instance the recent study by the Pew Research Center: “Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe,” 10 May 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/>. For an overview see Riboloff’s text (infra).

10 Cf. Casanova, “Rethinking Secularization,” 7ff.; Nicos Mouzelis, “Modernity: Religious Trends,” 71–90.

11 See Daphne Halikiopoulou, *Patterns of Secularization: Church, State and Nation in Greece and the Republic of Ireland* (Farnham and Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2011).

through the lens of so-called “Christian nominalism,”<sup>12</sup> “vicarious religion,”<sup>13</sup> “top-down secularization theories,”<sup>14</sup> or a more inclusive European secularization than a more limited American one<sup>15</sup>, although having some merit, does not finally grasp the core nature of the religiosity of the Orthodox people.

The ambivalence Orthodoxy is experiencing towards the achievements of (post)modernity has become apparent thus far, as in liberal democracy. This fact points to the need to define the theological preconditions of the discussion on the compatibility of Orthodoxy and democracy, with special reference to the democratic or non-democratic character of the synodal institution. This sort of discussion is not a luxury but an inevitable necessity that seeks to prevent unnecessary polemics and ideological entanglements.

### Basic Theological Prerequisites of the Dialogue

#### *The Relationship between Nature and Grace*

The relationship between nature and grace has occupied a central place in the history of theology since the early period of the Church. It was with St. Augustine and Pelagius that the role of grace and its relationship to human nature was discussed in detail in the context of Christian anthropology from the point of view of soteriology. The whole discussion gradually evolved during medieval times (St. Thomas Aquinas) arriving at its climax with the Reformation, where a radical separation between the two levels finally prevailed. In this context, the impossibility of the created level (humans, world) to participate in the uncreated because of the Fall into sin was boldly emphasized. Through *ressourcement* theology,<sup>16</sup> namely, the appeal to the study of the Greek patristic tradition, the strict critique of Neo-Thomism and the rapid developments on all levels of life with the emergence of modernity (e.g., emphasis on the autonomy of created existence and humanity), a new approach emerged in which the full gracious character of nature and the innate tendency of human and creation towards

12 For the meaning of the term, see Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995).

13 For the meaning of the term, see Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case. Parameters of Faith in the Modern World* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2002), 46.

14 See Charles Taylor, *The Secular Age* (Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 530; cf. Mouzelis, “Modernity: Religious Trends,” *passim*.

15 Cf. Casanova, “Rethinking Secularization,” 8ff.

16 Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray (eds.), *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

the level of the uncreated and grace was re-emphasized. An ontology of participation then became the banner of this new theological perspective, according to which “nature is not only made for Grace, but is made, from the beginning, by Grace.”<sup>17</sup> To some extent, this view understands the whole creation as the Church, and no aspect of human existence and life can be understood as outside of the realm of grace. Obviously, such an understanding of the relationship between nature and grace is firmly rooted in the patristic tradition (e.g., Justin the Philosopher’s “spermatikos logos,”<sup>18</sup> Maximos the Confessor’s theory of *Logos-logoi*,<sup>19</sup> and Gregory Palamas’ essence-energies distinction<sup>20</sup>) and in modern (including Orthodox) theology. Suffice it here to recall *nouvelle théologie*<sup>21</sup>, Radical Orthodoxy<sup>22</sup> or the sophiology of certain Russian emigrants,<sup>23</sup> an attitude represented also in thinkers like John Milbank, William Cavanaugh, Vigen Guroian, Christos Yannaras, etc.<sup>24</sup> Such a *holistic* perspective (where, for instance, “democracy is clearly the Church”)<sup>25</sup>, although correctly recognizing that nature, as a product of God’s creative will, can always be firmly oriented to its creator. At the same time, however, it degrades the distinction (otherness) between the two fields, which seems that they alone can ensure personal otherness and freedom, the existence of a field of action where the human is called to freely decide whether or not she will move towards grace. A more Chalcedonean (“without confusion and separation”) understanding of the relationship between nature and grace in this regard prevents the Church and its theology from embracing authoritarian or unfree ideologies and forms of social organization. After all, the source of the Church’s authority comes from God and not from this age. Therefore, the identification of any *polis*, even

17 Nikolaos Loudovikos, *Θεοποιία: Ἡ μετανεωτερικὴ θεολογικὴ ἀπορία* [God-Making: The Post-modern Theological Question] (Athens: Armos, 2007), 87.

18 Cf., for instance, Ragjtak Holte, “Logos Spermatikos, Christianity and Ancient Philosophy according to St. Justin’s Apologies,” *Studia Theologica-Nordic Journal of Theology* 12 (1958): 109–68.

19 Cf. Torstein Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), ch. 3.

20 For a full recent account of Gregory Palamas’ theology, see Norman Russell, *Gregory Palamas and the Making of Palamism in the Modern Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

21 Jürgen Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie-New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II* (London: Continuum, 2010).

22 Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider (eds.), *Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy: Transfiguring the World through the Word* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

23 Paul Gavrilyuk, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

24 For an overview see Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, 138.

25 Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, 140.

the most ideal democratic state with the Church, could hardly be justified theologically insofar as the relationship (and distinction) between nature and grace does not prevent but also does not force nature to turn towards grace, respecting thus the (post-modern) autonomy and dignity of nature and the loving but free action of grace. In this light, matters like the way in which decisions are made in the Church or in a democratic state (e.g., unanimity or majority) should be treated as belonging to different levels. Grace can always be expressed unanimously and freely, in contrast to nature, especially created nature, which is always subject to majority rule (either relative or absolute), defined by necessity due to the innate fragmentation of the created order. At this point, one needs to insist even more: to better understand the relationship between nature and grace, one should allude to Augustine's theory of the two cities. For St. Augustine, the *city of God* (here grace) is an alternative society, which maintains its otherness while coexisting with the earthly one (nature). The two cities coexist while in dialogue in space and time. They are not identical but two distinct parts of the *saeculum*. It is a dynamic relationship that can protect the Church from the threat of secularization or any escapist tendency from history while fully maintaining its worldly character.<sup>26</sup>

### *The Relationship between History and Eschata*

A second fundamental methodological condition is the eschatological perspective (outlook) that defines Christian and especially Orthodox theology. Since the beginning of the 20th century, eschatology<sup>27</sup> seems to have regained its central place in the body of Christian theology. As primarily a sort of "eschatological revolution" within the Protestant world, this revitalization of the eschatological outlook soon spread out over the entire Christian world. Fathers Georges Florovsky (1893–1979) and Sergii Bulgakov (1871–1944), and Metropolitan John Zizioulas of Pergamon (1931) are only some of those who

26 Cf. Robert Markus, *Christianity and the Secular* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006) as cited in Luke Bretherton, "Power to the People: Orthodoxy, Consociational Democracy, and the Move beyond Phyletism," in *Christianity, Democracy, and the Shadow of Constantine*, ed. George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 68–9.

27 For my perception of eschatology, I depend mainly on John D. Zizioulas' "Towards an Eschatological Ontology" (lecture, London King's College, 1999); "Eschatologie et Société," *Irénikon* 73, nos. 3–4 (2000): 278–97; "Déplacement de la perspective eschatologique," in *La Chrétienté en débat*, ed. G. Alberigo et al. (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1984), 89–100; "Eschatology and History," in *Cultures in Dialogue: Documents from a Symposium in Honor of Philip A. Potter*, ed. T. Wieser (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1985), 62–71, 72–3.

pointed out the central role eschatology plays in contemporary Orthodox theology.<sup>28</sup> The eschatological outlook is determined by the fresh and always innovative Spirit of God, and is perceived not as a fixed reality but as an expectant hope (as freedom from every kind of historical, individual, or communal pathogen or failure, like nationalism, self-referentiality, egocentricity, ecclesiastical culturalism, oppression and many other temptations). To the extent that it is so, it becomes quite obvious that the eschata, or rather the Eschatos that is the coming Lord, is the one who finally judges both our individual and ecclesial being and way of theology. In other words, Christ's Kingdom is the very criterion that manifests the truth of every single human individual (Christian) or communal (Church) enterprise, and by no means the most developed or comprehensive aspect of Tradition, not to say any merely historical construction. The real dynamism of this eschatological outlook allows the Church and its theology to search for new and necessary syntheses in the realm of the ongoing history of salvation, (late modernity and secularization considered as the current phase of this history), insofar as the Church has not yet fully articulated every aspect of the revealed truth in history – for instance, has the Church expressed itself synodally about politics, or democracy? If this is the case, the Church and its theology should be critical of any historical formation, ideology, or institution, and especially those that restrict human freedom or downgrade human dignity, hindering the direct dialogue and reciprocity with the grace of God. At the same time, in specific forms of organization of human life, and exceptionally in liberal democracy,<sup>29</sup> the Church and its theology must recognize the seeds of a worldview that could be critically received and justified in the eschata. If, according to participation ontology, everything that exists is considered to be the bearer of a divine logos, why can democracy itself not be understood by analogy, a logos that calls for “dialogical reciprocity” between the created and the uncreated in line with the model of the perichoretic being and life of the Trinity? After all, like any form of dialogue in history, the truth of democracy will ultimately be judged in the Kingdom of God.

28 For an overview of the reception of eschatology in contemporary Orthodox theology, cf. Marios Begzos, “L’eschatologie dans l’orthodoxie du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle,” in *Temps et Eschatologie: Données bibliques et problématiques contemporaines*, ed. J.-L. Leuba (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1994), 311–28; George Vlantis, “In Erwartung des Künftigen Äons. Aspekten orthodoxer Eschatologie,” *Ökumenische Rundschau* 56, no. 2 (2007), 170–82.

29 Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*.

### *Personhood and the Individual*

As has been specifically argued by prominent Orthodox theologians, the concept of personhood is perhaps the most important contribution of Christianity to the history of ideas.<sup>30</sup> Starting from the Eucharistic experience of the Fathers of the Church, a person-centered understanding of the human was formed: having been created in the image of God, the human being expresses the Triune God's personal way of existence as is experienced in the Divine Eucharist par excellence. In this light, the human is seen through the lens of personhood, as a pre-eminently relational being, whose being stems from a constant, loving, and free relationship with the other (neighbour, animals, God). The unique, irreducible character of each person is then stressed in contrast to the dominant individualism, which, on the basis of a closed perception of human rights, considers the human as a self-conceivable, and self-existent being, defined autonomously and irrespective of the surrounding world. The classic philosophical problem of the relationship between the One and the Many re-emerges here. In this respect, the goal is to affirm otherness within communion, without turning communion into a gathering of fragmented individuals. From this point of view, insofar as democracy is basically understood through the lens of the rule of popular sovereignty, i.e., that the authority of a certain state is drawn from and sustained by the consent of the people, this principle necessarily requires a network of relations between the members of society. This goes beyond a simple sum of individuals, thus forming a framework of interpersonal relationships where individuals seek, both individually and collectively, the realization of the common good, whether transcendently grounded (in the case of Christians) or intra-worldly (from any other secular perspective). Therefore, in the context of the discussion on the relationship between Orthodoxy and democracy, one could argue that the human is called to evolve from a preliminary stage, that of the democratic being (see individuality, self-determination, human rights language, etc.) to a different mode of being, the ecclesiastical being (personhood) that, without canceling the former, constitutes its fulfillment. In this case, where we are talking about the same person who can be both a citizen of a state and a member of the Church, we need to distinguish carefully between these two different modes of being that, without being identified, are inextricably linked to and dependent on each other. Again, a Chalcedonian politics is at work here.

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30 Cf. Georges Florovsky, "Eschatology in the Patristic Age," in *The Patristic Witness of Georges Florovsky: Essential Theological Writings*, ed. Brandon Gallaher and Paul Ladouceur (London: T&T Clark 2019), 322.

### *Synodal institution and Democracy*

It is considered a commonplace among theologians that the synodal institution constitutes the “trunk of the administration and the canonical structure”<sup>31</sup> of the Church. It is an institution that, although borrowing elements from organizational forms of late antiquity (e.g., Athenian democracy), its main source lies in the very identity and nature of the Church not only as community but primarily as communion, as the Body of Christ. It is not my intention here to take up the details of the historical evolution of the synodal institution. Suffice it to say that it appears in the New Testament (Synod of Jerusalem, Act 15); is explicitly associated with the Eucharistic assembly of the whole Church; expresses a clear hierarchy (in terms of personal otherness, not of pyramidal structure) in the relationship of its members; acquires over time a clear episcopal character. The ongoing evolution and consolidation, development and diversity of the synodal institution at the various levels of organization in the life of the Church (local, regional, ecumenical) will be expressed in the later canonical tradition of the Church, with the well-known 34th apostolic canon.<sup>32</sup>

The main axes of this canon are the following: a) in every “nation” (ἔθνος) there is the “first” (*primus*/πρῶτος) bishop who is recognized as head (κεφαλή) of the Church; b) all the bishops of the region should act in accordance with the *primus*; and c) the *primus* cannot act without the consent of the other bishops. It is obvious that the 34th canon “defines, in a remarkable way, the competence and the authority of the *primus*, as a relationship of interdependence with the other bishops [...] since the function of the *primus* aims to ensure the balance between the local Church and the synodal institution.”<sup>33</sup> In light of the 34th canon, one of the basic dimensions of synodality, the relationship between *primus* and synod, is strongly highlighted. In terms of political theology, one could compare this relationship to an indirect dispute between Carl Schmitt and Erik Peterson on the perception of the Holy Trinity and its impact on the organization of human society.<sup>34</sup>

31 John D. Zizioulas, “The Synodal Institution: History, Ecclesiastical and Canonical Problems,” *Θεολογία* [Theologia] 80, no. 2 (2009), 5.

32 <http://patristica.net/apostolic-canons&g&e&r&c>. cf. Canon 34: “The bishops of every nation must acknowledge him who is first among them and account him as their head and do nothing of consequence without his consent; but each may do those things only which concern his own parish, and the country places which belong to it. But neither let him (who is the first) do anything without the consent of all; for so there will be unanimity, and God will be glorified through the Lord in the Holy Spirit.”

33 Zizioulas, “The Synodal Institution,” 19.

34 For a critical comparison of them, see Gyorgy Gereby, “Political Theology versus Theological Politics: Erik Peterson and Carl Schmitt,” *New German Critique* 35 (2008): 7–33.

In relation to the synodal institution, it is obvious that its two terms (*primus* and synod) are inextricably linked, a fact that excludes either the authoritarianism of the one/*primus* or the populism of the many. It is not merely a functional relationship, as is perhaps the case in some versions of liberal democracy, where the primacy of, for example, the President of the Republic may be only honorary and without actual power, or the Prime Minister may be the captive of political balance within his own party. Rather, it is a deeply ontological relationship between the two poles. Regardless of the actual form that the synodal institution can take in light of the 34th canon, using political terms, either the form of the presidency (see for instance the synodal institution in the Ecumenical Patriarchate) or the form of the presiding democracy (e.g., the Church of Greece), one and many, primacy and synod can by no means be understood separately. On the contrary, they are concentric circles (and less a pyramidal, hierarchical structure) that express an identity of will and unanimity, echoing the common albeit distinct *ad extra* activity of the three Trinitarian persons in creation. Such a perspective, however, could hardly be put into practice in the realm of history where the fragmentation of nature does not allow for consensus. Such a view would possibly echo authoritarian institutional expressions, while it would be far from its eschatological archetype. If not taken into account, this historical antinomy very often turns the Church into a secular institution, with all the problems that it entails, like authoritarianism, the excess of power, and finally, its entrapment in history and loss of the eschatological vision.

### Conclusion

This contribution has attempted to reflect on basic methodological parameters presupposed in the dialogue between Orthodoxy and liberal democracy. Any examination of individual issues that constitute part of this problem cannot be properly evaluated without first engaging in methodological clarification. This preliminary discussion, however, is by no means intended to justify, like a new pool of Siloam, the historical failures, the institutional deviations, or the anti-democratic mentality that often marks the historical journey of the Church. Although it is obviously impossible or perhaps undesirable to return to glorious models of the past (see the apostolic or the patristic age) to the extent that historical circumstances have irreversibly changed, the Church is called upon to consolidate in practice the democratic ethos evident in its ethos and structure. In this spirit, the active participation of the people of God, of the faithful of the local community in its administration and life, the mobilization of all

its members in the transformation of the unjust social structures, the rejection of every despotic spirit and pyramidal mentality in the organization of the ecclesiastical body, can only reflect aspects of its eschatological vision. At the same time, however, we should be seriously concerned with the evident discordance between theory and practice in the life of the Church, both as community and as individuals. Although historical antinomies can in no way find an intra-world solution, the more the Church is inspired by the eschatological, liberating spirit of the Divine Eucharist, where all members of the community actively participate in the life of the Triune God, the more democratic it will be. In contrast, the more the Church turns to a fixed historical reality, trapped in the *saeculum*, and identified with the city of this age, the more it is in danger of adopting the mentality and manifesting the problems of the various forms of democracy, from populism to corruption and from authoritarianism to the restriction of human freedoms and rights. Whenever the Church forgets that "it is not of this world," that it is more a communion, an event, that derives its identity from the eschata, it risks being trapped in intra-world patterns, as one among many communities, or associations. Otherwise, as a *communion of the eschata*, the Church can be the eschatological justification of democracy, cleansed of its historical failures and imperfections, always bearing in mind that an establishment of the Kingdom of God in the historical present is as dangerous as the idealization of any form of worldly organization of human life. The above methodological principles attempt precisely to point out this antinomy that runs through the relationship between Orthodoxy and democracy, as they are primarily manifested in its synodal institution.

# Constitutional Tradition and Eastern Orthodoxy: Political-Theological Aspects

*Atanas Slavov*

## **Constitutional Encounters: Modern and Contemporary Interaction between Constitutional Orders and Eastern Orthodoxy in SEE Countries**

Without exception, the process of founding of new nation states in the SEE (Southeast Europe) region in the 19th century took the legal shape of the modern constitutional state. Newly formed states with predominantly Orthodox populations (Greece, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria) were shaped as constitutional monarchies, based on popular sovereignty, accepting the rule of law and the separation of powers as their guiding principles, protecting fundamental civil and political rights. National Orthodox Churches that achieved their independence and autocephaly from the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople, not without temporary tensions and even schisms, coexisted and cooperated with established constitutional authorities without questioning their form and legitimacy from a Christian theological perspective. That is to say, Orthodox Churches did not struggle with the values, principles, and structures of the new constitutional architecture. They relied on governmental recognition and support of their privileged status as official state churches, publicly visible and institutionalized, having specific roles in the fields of public education, social policies and state ceremonies. It was not uncommon for some members of the clergy to be engaged politically, assuming offices in the parliament, government or the local municipal councils. Struggles or tensions between constitutional states in the region and national churches occurred not because of principles or values of the system of government but concerned more specific policies or the attitude of authorities towards different day-to-day issues. The political engagement of the autocephalous Orthodox Churches was through the prism of ethnonationalism and their role in the process of liberation and nation-building. Thus, they substituted the history of the national awakening and liberation for the history of divine economy and salvation.<sup>1</sup> Merging

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<sup>1</sup> Pantelis Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy and Political Theology* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012), 54, 65–9.

and equating religious and national identity created a powerful and explosive amalgam that was easily instrumentalized on political battlefields.<sup>2</sup>

The doctrine of establishing and protecting the “Christian nation” (in each of the nation states in the region) emerged as a specific nationalized and regionalized form of the traditional Byzantine *symphonia* model.<sup>3</sup> It was a by-product of a religious-political synthesis in which several processes developed simultaneously: the nation-building process in the 19th century that aimed at spiritual emancipation from the very powerful Ecumenical Patriarchate and political independence from the Ottoman Empire, resulting in the founding of the new sovereign nation states. At the end of that process, the political and cultural boundaries of the nations coincided with those of the national Orthodox Churches, thus blurring the important difference between religious and national identity.<sup>4</sup>

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Orthodox Churches lacked a comprehensive political theology with respect to fundamental principles and doctrines of constitutional government. Rather, they accommodated themselves to the situation in place, taking for granted established institutions and forms of government as far as they were perceived as overall Christian institutions. They thus chose the strategy of mutual recognition and cooperation, rather than questioning their legitimacy or calling for institutional reform and transformation. This more conformist view of the Orthodox Churches could be explained by the predominantly theological focus of Orthodox doctrines and teaching, directed to the Christian community of individual persons and not to the secular societal forms and structures in general. Hence, religiously based requirements set for the secular governments were very broad (to administer justice, not to be abusive or oppressive, to help the poor), but they did not translate into concrete political-theological teachings on constitutional forms and structures. Moreover, the political context of having new Christian monarchs and governments was very preferable to the previous oppressive government under the Ottoman Empire.

It should be noted, however, that, for most of that period, behind the constitutional form of a democratic state, the political regimes in these countries departed significantly from democratic principles and values. In reality,

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2 Pedro Ramet, “Autocephaly and National Identity in Church-State Relations in Eastern Christianity: An Introduction,” in *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Pedro Ramet (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1988), 4–7.

3 Victor Roudometoff, *Globalization and Orthodox Christianity: The Transformations of a Religious Tradition* (Oxford: Routledge, 2014), 79–101.

4 John Meyendorff, *The Byzantine Legacy in the Orthodox Church* (Crestwood NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1983), 225–9.

national Orthodox Churches very often coexisted and cooperated with weak semi-democratic or non-democratic authoritarian regimes. That, in turn, affected their role and recognition in society when political regimes transformed to more democratic forms in the latter decades of the 20th century.

Currently, all countries in the region with predominantly Orthodox populations (Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, North Macedonia, Montenegro) have established constitutional regimes that are qualified as constitutional, republican and democratic, endorsing principles of the rule of law, popular sovereignty, the separation of powers, protection of fundamental rights, and respect for international law (including human rights conventions). All countries are members of the Council of Europe and implement the European Convention of Human Rights, while three are full members in the European Union (Greece, Bulgaria, Romania). According to the Freedom House reports in 2020, three countries are considered *free* (Greece, Bulgaria, Romania) and the rest *partly free* (Serbia, North Macedonia, Montenegro), and, with respect to democracy – one is a *consolidated democracy* (Greece), two are *semi-consolidated democracies* (Bulgaria, Romania), and the rest are qualified as *transitional or hybrid regimes*.<sup>5</sup> To illustrate the complex dynamics of church-state relations through the prism of constitutional government, it is useful to focus on specific country models.

### *Greece*

Greece was the first among the countries in the region to face the challenges of globalization, democratization and EU accession and thus had a chance to elaborate meaningful answers that could be considered by the rest of the states. In this respect, it is worth providing a brief overview of the role the Greek Orthodox Church played in that process – most importantly, of the direction it has influenced the new constitutional order of the republic (established with the 1975 Constitution).

The recent history of church-state relations in Greece is also indicative for the complex and often ambiguous position of the Orthodox Church. In some cases, the Church sided with ultra-nationalist, reactionary and even authoritarian governments (1967–1974). Nowadays, the Church of Greece supports the democratic constitutional order, while remaining very sensitive to its privileged status of official religion.

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5 “Freedom House,” 2020 Freedom in the World Report, <https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores>, accessed 26 September 2020; Nations in Transit Report, <https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores> (accessed September 26, 2020).

In Greece the official state status of the Church of Greece is constitutionally entrenched in Article 3 of the 1975 Constitution, which stipulates as follows:

The prevailing religion in Greece is that of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ. The Orthodox Church of Greece, acknowledging our Lord Jesus Christ as its head, is inseparably united in doctrine with the Great Church of Christ in Constantinople and with every other Church of Christ of the same doctrine, observing unwaveringly, as they do, the holy apostolic and synodal canons and sacred traditions. It is autocephalous and is administered by the Holy Synod of serving Bishops and the Permanent Holy Synod [...].

The preamble of the Constitution consists of a direct invocation of the Holy Trinity in the Orthodox dogmatic formula: “in the name of the holy, consubstantial and indivisible Trinity.” Moreover, it is noteworthy that the section of church-state relations is placed in second position in the Greek Constitution, after the section on the form of government, thus indicating the importance of the church-state relations for the constitutional order as a whole. There are special privileges accorded to the Greek Church: protector of the text of the Holy Scriptures; participation of high clergy during official ceremonies of solemn oaths taken by political officials invoking the name of the Holy Trinity (Art. 33, par. 2; Art. 59);<sup>6</sup> restrictions on proselytism; recognition of the Church’s role in the field of public education (Art. 16, 2), including daily prayers at schools.<sup>7</sup>

The strong connections between the state and the church are further revealed in the public sphere: many national holidays coincide with the most celebrated religious feasts; the state continues to pay the salaries of the Orthodox clergy who enjoy the *de facto* status of civil servants<sup>8</sup>; metropolitans are appointed by the president on the proposal of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece. This mode of church-state relations is often defined by scholars of religion and politics as *sunallelia* (“being together”).<sup>9</sup>

Beyond its protected constitutional status, two tendencies often collide in the Greek Church: the one focused on nationalism and the nation state and

6 Respecting the freedom of religion and conscience, there is an option for a non-religious ceremony.

7 Evangelos Karagiannis, “Secularism in Context: The Relations between the Greek State and the Church of Greece in Crisis,” *European Journal of Sociology* 50, no. 1 (2009), 146.

8 Though there were considerations and plans in the opposite direction during the final year of Alexis Tsipras government, in 2019 the New Democracy government agreed to continue the established practice: Reuters, “Greek conservatives scrap plans to take clergy off state payroll,” *Reuters*, 16 July 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-greece-church/greek-conservatives-scrap-plans-to-take-clergy-off-state-payroll-idUSKCNiUB1IW>.

9 Basilius J. Groen, “Nationalism and Reconciliation: Orthodoxy in the Balkans,” *Religion State & Society* 26, no. 2, (1998), 116–8.

opposing globalization and modernity, the other emphasizing the universality of the Christian faith and the church's mission, addressing positively the process of democratization and globalization.<sup>10</sup>

### *Romania*

In the 1991 Constitution of Romania, the autonomy of the religious denominations from the state is safeguarded along with the provisions on the freedom of religion. The right of the religious institutions to receive support from the state for its public presence and social mission is also guaranteed ("including the facilitation of religious assistance in the army, in hospitals, prison, homes and orphanages" – Art. 29, 5).<sup>11</sup> The public presence of religion is also visible in the official state ceremonies – for instance, the ceremony of taking the constitutional oath by the president during his inauguration ends with the solemn formula of the invocation of God ("So help me God!"; Art. 82, 2). This constitutional regulation, based on the principles of autonomy and cooperation between the state and religious communities, was laid down after a heated debate on the role of the Romanian Orthodox Church (ROC). The church's claims had emphasized its traditional role as a national church with significant contributions to the formation of the Romanian nation.

In December 2006, the new Law on Religious Freedom was adopted, securing to some extent the privileged position of the ROC – the law specifies the state's recognition of the "important role of the Romanian Orthodox Church" as well as the role of "other churches and denominations as recognized by the national history" of the country.<sup>12</sup> Specific provisions in the law were included that limit religious proselytizing. Religious minorities (some Evangelical Christian denominations) and independent international observers deem them highly restrictive. Some of the controversial provisions include restrictive requirements for religious associations on eligibility for state support. Only the registered religious denominations (preferential status is limited to 18 religious organizations) are eligible for state financial and other support. Other restrictions include limits on certain forms of freedom of expression

10 Victor Roudometoff, "Greek Orthodoxy, Territoriality, and Globality: Religious Responses and Institutional Disputes," *Sociology of Religion* 68, no. 1 (Spring 2008), 71–2.

11 Ina Merdjanova, *Religion, Nationalism, and Civil Society in Eastern Europe: The Postcommunist Palimpsest* (Lewiston NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), 15–26.

12 US Department of State Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, *2018 Report on International Religious Freedom: Romania*, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/romania/> (accessed 12 May 2020).

and free speech that are considered to be in violation of established religious symbols (Art. 13 of the Law).<sup>13</sup>

The ROC continues to play an important role in the public sphere. On numerous occasions, the Church has successfully influenced legislation (e.g., in the field of religious education in the public schools); it has addressed public opinion on important issues of bioethics (on abortion and euthanasia) and public morals (against the legalization of homosexuality); politicians regularly seek support for their public campaigns from the church leadership and promise to defend their agenda in the decision-making process.<sup>14</sup>

### *Bulgaria*

In recent years, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (BOC) developed good and constructive relations with Bulgarian institutions, especially the executive branch. In general, the BOC is supportive of the democratic constitutional order, while it remains concerned about its privileged status. The specific public law status of Eastern Orthodoxy as the *traditional religion* was negotiated in the first years of democratization and established with specific constitutional provisions in the new democratic 1991 Constitution: “Eastern Orthodox Christianity shall be considered the traditional religion in the Republic of Bulgaria” (Art.13.3). This status reflected the historical role of the predominant religion for preserving and cultivating Bulgarian national identity and culture. This constitutional provision does not secure any specific privileged position for the Church, though the practices that have emerged and subsequent legislation have moved in this direction. In line with the prevailing liberal and democratic character of the 1991 Constitution, it provides for church-state separation (Art. 13.2), as well as guaranteeing the freedom of religion and its free exercise (Art. 37). A specified provision bans the use of religious institutions, communities and beliefs for political ends (Art. 13.4), thus limiting the possibility for religiously motivated political extremism.<sup>15</sup>

The current law on religious organizations (Denominations Act) was adopted in 2002 in an attempt to modernize the existing legal framework on religious entities and to provide legislative protection of the Bulgarian Patriarchate weakened by an internal division movement (Alternative Synod). This new framework established a privileged role for the Bulgarian Patriarchate,

13 Cristian Romocea, *Church and State: Religious Nationalism and State Identification in Post-Communist Romania* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 33–4.

14 Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu, *Church, State and Democracy in Expanding Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 148–9.

15 Merdjanova, *Religion, Nationalism, and Civil Society*, 12–3.

providing a special *ex lege* recognition of its legal personality (there is no need to register as a religious institution with the court register as required for other denominations).

The preamble of the 2002 law is also indicative for the general principles and objectives of the regulation. First, the freedom of religion and the equality before the law is proclaimed for all persons, regardless of their religious convictions. Second, the “traditional role” of the Bulgarian Church in the history of the country and in the development of its culture and spirituality is emphasized. Thus, the constitutional protection of Eastern Orthodoxy (as the traditional religion) is legislatively interpreted and implemented as a “traditional role” of the BOC. Third, the preamble states that legislators pay due respect to Christianity, Islam, Judaism and other religions while supporting mutual understanding, tolerance and respect among them.

The historical role of Eastern Orthodoxy for the state and society is further defined in the law (Art. 10). It stipulates that Eastern Orthodoxy is represented by the self-ruling (autocephalous) Bulgarian Orthodox Church – Bulgarian Patriarchate, which is the legitimate successor of the Bulgarian Exarchate and a member of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. It is stated that the Church is governed by the Holy Synod and is represented by the Bulgarian Patriarch, while its more detailed organizational structure is laid down in its own statute. As a preventive measure against internal divisions, the law prohibits persons and groups who seceded from a registered religious institution to use the same name as new legal entity or the property and assets of the original religious institution.<sup>16</sup>

Nowadays there is a drive within the BOC to acquire official status vis-à-vis the state.<sup>17</sup> This can be seen as deeply encoded in the more traditional model of church-state relations as perceived by the high clergy in Bulgaria. The BOC’s improved relations with the state are often interpreted as the revitalization of the traditional Orthodox political-theological concept of *symphonia* and ethnoreligious “Christian nation” model.<sup>18</sup>

16 This provision was used to silence the internal divisions in the BOC. Some aspects of the 2002 law were found to contravene the standards of the European Convention (Art. 9): Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (Metropolitan Inokentiy) and Others v. Bulgaria (Judgement on Just Satisfaction), no. 412/03; 35677/04, Judgment of 16 September 2010, § 49.

17 Atanas Slavov, “From Traditional to Official Religion: The Legal Status of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church after 2019,” *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 40, no. 5 (2020), 9–27 available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol40/iss5/3>.

18 Kristen Ghodsee, “Symphonic Secularism: Eastern Orthodoxy, Ethnic Identity and Religious Freedoms in Contemporary Bulgaria,” *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 27, no. 2 (2009), 227–52.

The public presence of the BOC has been changing in a positive way in recent years. While its public image suffered in the 1990s from decades of collaboration by high clergy with the totalitarian regime<sup>19</sup> and deep internal divisions<sup>20</sup>, the BOC increased its public visibility in the most recent decade. It gradually became an influential player in public debates, delivering public statements on a variety of issues, some of them quite controversial (the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, registered cohabitation in the Family Code, reproductive procedures). In criticizing certain policies and measures, the BOC does not question the legitimacy of the established democratic constitutional structures. As of 2020, the BOC enjoys a very high public trust (above 50%), thus one of the most supported institutions in the country.<sup>21</sup>

### Orthodox Churches Endorsing Constitutional Democracy

After the democratization of the SEE countries, opportunities for active participation in church life as well as public witness of the Christian faith were revived. Thus, at the beginning of the 21st century, an important evolution in the understanding of the Orthodox Churches in the SEE region is under way: from a traditionally nationalist-oriented political theology, they have begun to develop a public theology enhancing democratic values and institutions while remaining sensitive to the national culture and traditions. When some new claims to rights or status arise that are presented as modern and democratic (e.g., abortion, gay marriage), it is typical for Orthodox Churches to react against them because these claims are seen to be contrary to certain core Christian values and doctrines. This, however, is not a reaction against democracy or fundamental human rights but rather an expression and exercise of the freedom of religion, which also means being allowed to profess the faith as a particular community understands it. Moreover, in the SEE societies, as in many others, there is no popularly accepted negotiated compromise on some of these issues, and the public space remains open to challenging views represented by different civic, political or religious groups.

19 Momchil Metodiev, *Between Faith and Compromise: The Orthodox Church and the Communist State in Bulgaria 1944–1989* (Sofia: CIELA, 2010).

20 James Lindsay Hopkins, "Post-Glasnost, Contemporary Bulgaria & The Orthodox Church," chap. 7 in *The Bulgarian Orthodox Church: A Socio-Historical Analysis of the Evolving Relationship between Church, Nation, and State in Bulgaria* (Boulder CO: East European Monographs, 2008).

21 "Research Center Trend," October 2020 poll, <https://rctrend.bg/project> (accessed November 2020).

### *The Ecumenical Patriarchate*

Among the autocephalous Orthodox churches, the Ecumenical Patriarchate is the one most publicly engaged with the values of human rights, human dignity, and democracy. On various and numerous occasions (religious holidays, international cooperation, pan-Orthodox meetings) the Ecumenical Patriarchate expresses its commitment to these values and tries to build international alliances for their further implementation. It is also significant that this position is not accommodational but is instead fully grounded in Orthodox doctrines and concepts:

Beyond any political stance, we categorically condemn once again the use of all forms of violence, appealing to the rulers of this world to respect the fundamental human rights of life, honor, dignity and property, recognizing and praising the peaceful lifestyle of Christians as well as their constant effort to remain far from turmoil and trouble. [...] The Ecumenical Patriarchate will never cease, through all the spiritual means and truth at its disposal, to support the efforts for peaceful dialogue among the various religions, the peaceful solution to every difference, and a prevailing atmosphere of toleration, reconciliation and cooperation among all people irrespective of religion and grace.

[...] If human institutions are afraid of human freedom, either dispelling, or disregarding, or even abolishing it, the institution of the Church, generates free persons in the Holy Spirit [...]. The indefinable nature of freedom is the rock of our faith.

Human rights and the freedom of religious conscience are gifts which were "once given to the saints" (Jude 1:3), but which are constantly acquired along the journey of life. They are acquired through the experience of communion in Christ within the harmonious cosmic liturgy. We have been talking for 1700 years about the freedom of human conscience.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Holy and Great Council**

This rather open, universalistic and pro-democratic public position of the Ecumenical Patriarchate was embraced by the majority of the autocephalous Orthodox Churches that took part in the Holy and Great Council in 2016. In the official statements of the Council (mainly the Encyclical and the Mission

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22 His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, "Patriarchal and Synodal Encyclical on the 1700th Anniversary since the Edict of Milan" (19 May 2013), [https://www.patriarchate.org/edict-of-milan-seminar/-/asset\\_publisher/5nTd6nw2DeZ9/content/patriarchike-kai-synodike-enkyklios-epi-tei-1700eteridi-apo-tes-ekdoseos-tou-diatagmatos-ton-mediolanon](https://www.patriarchate.org/edict-of-milan-seminar/-/asset_publisher/5nTd6nw2DeZ9/content/patriarchike-kai-synodike-enkyklios-epi-tei-1700eteridi-apo-tes-ekdoseos-tou-diatagmatos-ton-mediolanon) (accessed 25 September 2020).

statements), emphasis is placed on the dignity and fundamental rights of the human person that stem from the belief of divine creation of the human “in the image and likeness of God.” Furthermore, values of freedom, justice, peace, tolerance and mercy are reaffirmed in the light of a genuinely Christian engagement with this world; their implementation is seen as a specific Christian responsibility and care for the other, thus answering the divine call for the transformation of one’s life and salvation. The realm of the political is also perceived in terms of the genuine public engagement of the Church and, more practically, as a precondition for constructive church-state relations for the benefit of society at large.

In the official Encyclical of the Council, the conciliar Orthodox Church openly engages with these values providing profound theological justification of their importance for contemporary Orthodox Christians:

(16.) The Church does not involve herself with politics in the narrow sense of the term. Her witness, however, is essentially political insofar as it expresses concern for man and his spiritual freedom. The voice of the Church was always distinct and will ever remain a beneficial intervention for the sake of humanity.

The local Orthodox Churches are today called to promote a new constructive synergy with the secular state and its rule of law within the new framework of international relations, in accordance with the biblical saying: “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s” (cf. [Matthew] 22.21).

This synergy must, however, preserve the specific identity of both Church and state and ensure their earnest cooperation in order to preserve man’s unique dignity and the human rights which flow there from, and in order to assure social justice.<sup>23</sup>

In its official statements, Ecumenical Orthodoxy endorses fundamental human rights “as a response to contemporary social and political crises and upheavals and in order to protect the freedom of the individual.” To that extent, the Orthodox Church is mindful of the challenge that the concept of “rights” is often understood in overtly individualistic and atomistic terms that erode the social aspects of human freedom. Such interpretation is seen as easily undermining “the foundations of social values, of the family, of religion, of the nation and threatens fundamental moral values.”<sup>24</sup>

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23 Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, Crete 2016, <https://www.holycouncil.org/-/encyclical-holy-council> (accessed 10 October 2020).

24 Encyclical, Section 16.

Among the fundamental rights, the Orthodox Churches underlined the importance of the freedom of religion in all its aspects as related to the protection of the human dignity:

A fundamental human right is the protection of the principle of religious freedom in all its aspects – namely, the freedom of conscience, belief, and religion, including, alone and in community, in private and in public, the right to freedom of worship and practice, the right to manifest one's religion, as well as the right of religious communities to religious education and to the full function and exercise of their religious duties, without any form of direct or indirect interference by the state.

The key conciliar document that engages with contemporary issues (democracy, human rights, globalization, church-state relations, international relations, peace and security) and delivers a comprehensive public theology is the *Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World*.<sup>25</sup> Its subtitle (“The contribution of the Orthodox Church in realizing peace, justice, freedom, fraternity and love between peoples, and in the removal of racial and other discriminations”) points to the importance of this document for understanding the active role in diverse societies that the Orthodox Church is expected to play. Its six parts consecutively reveal the specific internal logic of Christian personalism and communion: starting with the fundamental value of “The Dignity of the Human Person” (part one), moving towards “Freedom and Responsibility” (part two), expanding towards “Peace and Justice” (part three), “Peace and Aversion of War” (part four), “The Attitude of the Church toward Discrimination” (part five) and proclaiming “The Mission of the Orthodox Church As a Witness of Love through Service” (part six).

Each part of the document deserves specific attention, combining a deeply scriptural and patristic understanding of the core Christian values and message with an assessment of their contemporary relevance. The value of the dignity of the human person is viewed through the prism of the creation of humankind in *the image and likeness of God*, followed by the Incarnation of the divine Word and directed to the deification of the human being. Safeguarding the dignity of the human person presupposes engagement with peace-keeping efforts, dialogue, inter-Christian and interreligious cooperation. As proclaimed: “as *God's fellow workers* (I [Corinthians 3:9]), we can advance to this common service together with all people of good will, who love peace that is pleasing

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<sup>25</sup> The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World, Crete 2016, <https://www.holycouncil.org/-/mission-orthodox-church-todays-world> (accessed 10 October 2020).

to God, for the sake of human society on the local, national, and international levels. This ministry is a commandment of God ([Matthew] 5:9).<sup>26</sup>

The value of freedom is presented as “one of God’s greatest gifts to the human being.” At the same time, it has a rather ambivalent nature: it creates opportunities for human development towards perfection and full communion with God but also allows the person to choose a different path away from the divine plan and grace. The Orthodox Church unequivocally states that “Freedom without responsibility and love eventually leads to loss of freedom.”

In this official document, the Orthodox Church recognizes the centrality of peace and justice in human life, while emphasizing “the universality of the principles of peace, freedom, and social justice,” which should lead to “the blossoming of Christian love among people and nations of the world.” The Orthodox Church openly endorses peace-fostering and peace-keeping efforts while recognizing “her duty to encourage all that which genuinely serves the cause of peace and paves the way to justice, fraternity, true freedom, and mutual love among all children of the one heavenly Father as well as between all peoples who make up the one human family.”

In the document, this genuine emphasis on peace, solidarity and justice leads logically to the express condemnation of all kinds of war and aggression that cause the destruction of life and the erosion of human dignity. In the view of the Church, the state of war cannot be justified; there is no *just war*; and religion should not serve to legitimate wars. Along with that, the Church’s view remains realistic: “When war becomes inevitable, the Church continues to pray and care in a pastoral manner for her children who are involved in military conflict for the sake of defending their life and freedom, while making every effort to bring about the swift restoration of peace and freedom.”

The Church engages openly with the values of equality, tolerance and non-discrimination and interprets them as universally valid:

The Orthodox Church confesses that every human being, regardless of skin color, religion, race, sex, ethnicity, and language, is created in the image and likeness of God, and enjoys equal rights in society. Consistent with this belief, the Orthodox Church rejects discrimination for any of the aforementioned reasons since these presuppose a difference in dignity between people.

The Church, in the spirit of respecting human rights and equal treatment of all, values the application of these principles in the light of her teaching on the sacraments, the family, the role of both genders in the Church, and the overall principles of Church tradition.<sup>26</sup>

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26 The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today’s World, Crete 2016, <https://www.holycouncil.org/-/mission-orthodox-church-todays-world> (accessed 10 October 2020).

### Autocephalous Orthodox Churches

Autocephalous Orthodox Churches in SEE countries express more nuanced views of democracy and church-state relations either in their official statements or in the publicly presented opinions of their ecclesiastical leaders. One of the most influential defenders of human rights and democracy from an Eastern Orthodox perspective is the Archbishop of the Albanian Orthodox Church, Anastasios Yannoulatos. In his writings and public witness of Orthodox Christianity, Yannoulatos recognizes the difference in sources, methods and inspiration between concepts of human rights on the one hand and Christian notions of the person and human-divine relations on the other. A common understanding can be found in relation to the respect of human dignity and the necessity of participation in and service to the community. In Yannoulatos' view, concepts of human rights should not be understood as hyper-individualistic but as oriented to others and the community. The transcendental model of this participation is the image of the Holy Trinity. Yannoulatos also admits that "Orthodoxy nurtures a willingness to accept people as they are, with deep respect for their freedom and without requiring them to adopt Christian views. [...] It also instills a deep respect for human rights and an eagerness to work with others to attain universal acceptance for human rights and to defend them."<sup>27</sup>

Yannoulatos emphasizes the explicitly Christian origin of some fundamental values (equality, freedom, justice, brotherhood) that are at the centre of democracy and human rights ideas. Insofar as secular movements and regimes employ human rights concepts for their own purposes, this should not lead to hostility and negation towards them. He views these secular forces rather "as collaborators in the struggle to realize our universal spiritual goals of world understanding and rapprochement."<sup>28</sup>

In the case of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, the Holy Synod's official statements often oscillate between endorsement and ambivalence on specific issues of democracy and human rights while accepting the general political framework of constitutional democracy.<sup>29</sup> In 2013, in the official statements of the Patriarch and the Holy Synod during the mass demonstrations and

27 Anastasios Yannoulatos, *Facing the World: Orthodox Christian Essays on Global Concerns* (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 77.

28 Yannoulatos, *Facing the World*, 18–9.

29 Atanas Slavov, "Between Endorsement and Ambivalence: Democracy and Eastern Orthodoxy in Post-Communist South East Europe" (CAS Working Paper Series no. 7, Sofia, 2015) available at: <http://www.cas.bg/uploads/files/WPS-APP-7/Slavov;%20Atanas.pdf>.

protest movements against the corrupted political elite, some democratic political ideas were also endorsed: the right to live under a just political order and a limited and accountable government, the idea of popular consent for the government, the right to protest against an unjust and arbitrary rule and values of religious and ethnic tolerance. Even before that, in 2011, the Synod issued a declaration that emphasized that the principle of justice originates from God and demands a just punishment for crimes committed and that the state should be responsible for the administration of justice. The Synod defended the view that principles of justice and solidarity are the foundation of the state and should be implemented by the government and that in cases when the just political order is not guaranteed, the people have the right of resistance against an unjust rule.<sup>30</sup>

One of the recent public debates the BOC took part in involved human rights issues. The case concerned the ratification of a key Council of Europe human rights instrument – the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). Unfortunately, in this case, the Holy Synod opposed the ratification of the Convention<sup>31</sup> and sided with an odd coalition of nationalist-populist and far-right political parties, some members of the government coalition and some conservative Protestant groups and alliances. These groups all advocated the preservation of the so-called “traditional values” against the “gender ideology” that was allegedly hidden in the document (this was the major argument of the opponents of ratification). In fact, the BOC’s arguments against the Convention were completely detached from its authentic legal meaning and human rights objectives formulated in the official text.

Despite its problematic recent past, related to endorsing nationalist policies during the Milošević regime, the official institutional position of the SOC currently supports democratic values and constitutional structures. At the same time, some influential high-ranking clergymen (late Metropolitan Amfilohije Radović, Bishop Atanasije Jevtić, former Bishop Artemije Radosavljević, Bishop Danilo Krstić) are developing positions openly critical of Western democratic values and its political system, while defending forms of close church-state cooperation (the traditional *symphonia* model) or the traditional

30 Encyclical of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church for Peace and Unity of the People, 29 September 2011, <http://dveri.bg/a8> (accessed 12 May 2020).

31 Bulgarian Orthodox Church, Opinion of the Holy Synod regarding the Istanbul Convention, 22 January 2018, <https://bg-patriarshia.bg/news.php?id=254101> (accessed 12 May 2020).

ethnocentric view of the Serbian Orthodoxy.<sup>32</sup> Other influential clergy (Bishop Irinej Bulović, the late priest Radovan Bigović<sup>33</sup>) engage more constructively with democratic values, human rights and institutional structures, also having more experience in ecumenical relations.

It is also important to note that Orthodox Churches and communities that are present in Western democracies express views generally supportive of human rights and democratic values. They are reflective and active in both church and civic life through social and charity activities. Public engagement and participation shape their internal organizational ethos.<sup>34</sup>

### Christian Orthodox Scholars on Constitutional Democracy

In the last decade, leading Orthodox scholars have creatively engaged issues of democracy, constitutional government and human rights from a political-theological perspective.<sup>35</sup> One of these distinguished scholars of Orthodoxy is Aristotle Papanikolaou. In his recent study, he frames a political-theological system that favours a liberal-democratic political community. His approach centres the political-theological dimension on the principle of divine-human communion (deification, *theosis*), which is essential and characteristic of the Orthodox understanding of relations between human beings and the divine. This approach predetermines an activist and participatory aspect when it is projected into the political realm. A key aspect of his approach is the emphasis on the compatibility between Orthodoxy and liberal democracy understood broadly. Papanikolaou advocates

a political theology grounded in the principle of divine-human communion [...] one that unequivocally endorses a political community that is democratic in a way that structures itself around the modern liberal principles of freedom of

32 Klaus Buchenau, "The Serbian Orthodox Church," in *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Lucian N. Leustean (Oxon UK: Routledge, 2014), 68–94.

33 Radovan Bigović, *The Orthodox Church in the 21st Century* (Belgrade: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2009).

34 John Witte Jr., *God's Joust, God's Justice: Law and Religion in the Western Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 91–3.

35 Aristotle Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012); Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy and Political Theology; Political Theologies in Orthodox Christianity: Common Challenges – Divergent Positions*, ed. Kristina Stoeckl, Ingeborg Gabriel and Aristotle Papanikolaou (London: T&T Clark, 2017).

choice, religious freedom [...] the protection of human rights [...] and church-state separation.<sup>36</sup>

Papanikolaou also rejects any possibility of employing pre-modern models of church-state relations (e.g., the Byzantine *symphonia*) as they are not suitable or adaptable to the context of contemporary open, secular and pluralist Western societies.<sup>37</sup> He argues that the Orthodox Church should accept diversity and pluralism in society in order to remain faithful to its defining features – the understanding of divine-human communion and the centrality of the Eucharist. Thus, instead of seeking religious, political and cultural unity and harmony (as in the traditional *symphonia* model), the Church should remain compliant with its voluntary and non-coercive nature. As long as this diversity is vital for liberal democracy, the Church should also endorse a liberal political community.<sup>38</sup>

Papanikolaou continues his argument by emphasizing the role of “public morality” and “public good” as shared moral values. He contends that

democracy itself implies a particular notion of the common good including freedom, equality, justice, fairness, inclusivity, participation, diversity, and otherness. More concretely, it includes those institutions and structures designed to preserve and protect such goods and that provide the space for the conversation over further concrete determinations of democratic goods.<sup>39</sup>

From a Christian perspective, political communities need to support and promote values of human dignity and respect, recognizing the uniqueness of every human being as iconically created in the image and likeness of God.

Without fully accepting a particular form of a liberal political regime, Papanikolaou endorses a concept of human rights that is in many ways progressive. He emphasizes the right to life, the right to moral equality, and the right to religious freedom and also advocates basic social rights: the right to healthcare, food and shelter, employment and environmental rights. He strongly supports social rights as creating “relations in a political community such that human beings are treated as irreducibly unique,” thus enhancing the perspective of divine-human communion.<sup>40</sup>

Another influential scholar on political theology in Orthodox perspective is Pantelis Kalaitzidis. He studies the political-theological potential of Orthodox

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36 Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, 12.

37 Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, 70–1.

38 Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, 77.

39 Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, 77.

40 Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, 127.

doctrines and how they can be reinterpreted in support of progressive movements, social justice and democracy. Kalaitzidis grounds his approach to political theology on two basic Christian doctrines: the Trinity and the Incarnation. He evaluates critically some political-theological models experienced within the Eastern Christian context and rejects both Byzantine political eschatology and nationalist political theology as not corresponding to contemporary pluralist democratic societies. Kalaitzidis also admits that the authoritarian elements that appear in the political theology of the Christian East and West alike are due to the “sacralization of the mechanisms of authority and dominance [...] the authoritarian version of a mingling of the religious and the cultural/political.”<sup>41</sup> Kalaitzidis is critical of both Christian traditions (East and West) that followed the way leading to a “theology of authority” that served the sacralization of political power.

In his criticism, Kalaitzidis follows John Zizioulas’ theology of “being as communion,” with its emphasis on Christian personalism, on free, loving and engaging relation with God, excluding any sort of coercion and external authority in this relationship.<sup>42</sup> Zizioulas emphasizes the *kenosis* of the Incarnation of the Son of God who revealed to humans the Trinitarian mode of life in communion, love and mutual respect and honour. He also insists on the anti-nomic character of Christian theology that prevents any political regime from being identified with the Church and Christianity.<sup>43</sup> Yet he is mindful of the fact that Eastern Orthodoxy enjoys a rich and continuous conciliar tradition (the church council or synod being the supreme authority, not a single person such as the patriarch), presupposing active engagement and open debate; on the other, there is no fully developed democratic ethos of deliberation in the church or the traditional Orthodox societies.

In his study of Orthodox political theology, Vasilios N. Makrides underlies its basic features. From a historical perspective, one of its main characteristics is the legitimization of the existing political order, which, in turn, had to ensure imperial protection of the church and the Orthodox Christian faith.<sup>44</sup> In modern times, the dependence of the Orthodox Church on the state also led to the development of a political theology that is rather complementary to the one elaborated by state authorities and, at the same time, remained a rather

41 Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy and Political Theology*, 35–6.

42 John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997).

43 Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 36–7.

44 Vasilios N. Makrides, “Political Theology in Orthodox Christian Contexts: Specificities and Particularities in Comparison with Western Latin Christianity,” in *Political Theologies in Orthodox Christianity*, ed. Stoeckl, Gabriel and Papanikolaou, 25–54, 30.

peripheral problem for mainstream Orthodox theology. The output of this process is a modified version of the traditional *symphonia* concept, intertwined with the dominant ethnoreligious ideology, that is applied in the modern nation states in the SEE region.<sup>45</sup> Current developments in Orthodox political theology include reflections and discourses on and engagements with the concepts of democracy, human rights, and constitutional government in the former communist states.<sup>46</sup>

In my recent studies, I examined the political-theological potential of core Orthodox theological doctrines and concepts (*theosis* and synergy, *ecclesia* and Eucharist, conciliarity and catholicity, economy and eschatology) and attempted to link them to secular values of personalism, participation, community and universalism. This synthesis is called “participatory political theology,” that is, a system of values and principles, that requires respect for human dignity and human rights, and support for a liberal constitutional state, based on active civic participation and democracy. The main challenge remains as follows: if we assume that these values and principles may well be accepted among certain Orthodox Christian communities, Christian civic organizations or public intellectuals, or even endorsed in official church documents, they are much less recognized among the high clergy and are often neglected in day-to-day ecclesiastical life and organization. Thus, the main issue of this type of political theology is not its doctrinal possibility but its viability in the social ethos of a larger Orthodox community.<sup>47</sup>

## Conclusion

Since the formation of nation states in the SEE region, Orthodox Churches have had to coexist with different political regimes: constitutional monarchies, authoritarian and totalitarian dictatorships and constitutional democracies. Thus, in a very condensed and intensified form, Orthodox Churches had to experience struggles, tensions and contradictions with political modernity in its very late phase. Despite the compromises made in the past, which led to an ambivalent public presence, there is now a positive trend. In their official

45 Makrides, “Political Theology,” 32–3, 42–3.

46 Makrides, “Political Theology,” 45–8.

47 Atanas Slavov, “Towards Participatory Political Theology: Democratic Consolidation in Southeastern Europe and the Role of Eastern Christianity in the Process” (PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 2016) <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/7337/>; Atanas Slavov, “Православна политическа теология на участието. Основни принципи” (Orthodox Political Theology of Participation. Key Principles), *Christianity and Culture* 10, no. 107 (2015): 5–22.

public statements, the majority of Orthodox Churches recognize and support constitutional democracy along with its fundamental values and principles: the rule of law, respect for human dignity and rights, popular sovereignty and civic participation and the separation of powers.

With the fall of the communist regime, the reunification of Europe and of Orthodox Christianity became possible. Relations of mutual benefit, of cooperation and collaboration with emerging constitutional democratic states were established. Hence, it became necessary for the Orthodox Church to elaborate its new political theology, as is visible in the documents of the Holy and Great Council in Crete as well as in some official documents of autocephalous churches. The general tendency is to endorse democratic values and principles while still having reservations and concerns regarding specific policies and measures.

In recent decades, it has also become important that a new field of Orthodox scholarship emerged that studies different aspects of Orthodox political theology in dialogue with the social sciences and humanities as well as other Christian traditions. Recent developments in the field emphasize Christian personalism and a participatory ethos, thus endorsing a political regime that is constitutional and democratic as well as providing support for international multilateral cooperation and deepening regional integration.

# Church and State in the Orthodox World Today and the Challenges of the Global Age

*Sveto Riboloff*

## Diversity in the Orthodox World

Perhaps most of you know that the Orthodox world, i.e., societies where the majority of the population are affiliated with Orthodox Christianity, is broadly diverse. Some of these countries, such as Greece, Cyprus, Romania, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Ukraine and Georgia, are already part of the Western political alliance to varying degrees. On the other side is the authoritarian Russian Federation, with its closely allied countries like Belarus, Serbia and Moldova. It is not a unified space, but one of a great variety of types or models of church-state relationships, ranging from “established Church” to “strict separation.” A further difficulty – and even a paradox in our topic – is that, legally speaking, the most secular country with a strict church-state separation model like Russia, is more authoritarian and much less democratic than, for example, Greece, which reflects an imperfect secular model and has an establishment type of church-state relationships.<sup>1</sup> Balkan countries such as Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania, North Macedonia and Montenegro are working democracies that sometimes suffer from economic problems and political corruption, but no one can doubt their democratic regimes. The respect for human and religious rights is part of their political system.<sup>2</sup> International human rights reports for some of these countries, however, reveal unflattering facts. During the last decade, Ukraine and Georgia left the Russian sphere of influence and still have problems with economic freedom, but they have made some remarkable achievements in securing human rights and political freedom. In all these achievements, however, one can observe features of a crisis in church-state relationships. It is a specific problem in their social life.

With the breakup of the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires after WWI, the Orthodox Church entered a deep crisis that reflects events

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1 See Pantelis Kalaitzidis, “Church and State in the Orthodox World: From the Byzantine ‘Symphonia’ and Nationalized Orthodoxy, to the Need of Witnessing the Word of God in a Pluralistic Society,” in *Religioni, Liberta, otere: Atti del Convegno Internazionale Filosofico-Teologico Sulla Liberta Religiosa*, ed. Emanuela Fogliadini (Milan: V&V Vita e Pensiero 2014), 39–74.

2 Kalaitzidis, “Church and State.”

dating back to the late Middle Ages. To be sure, the dependence on the particular model of complete legal convergence between secular and ecclesiastical law in Byzantium (and its satellite countries like Bulgaria, Serbia, Valahia, Georgia and Armenia<sup>3</sup>) has left its traces in the particular reflexes of Orthodox Christians to the surrounding world. The obligations of the Orthodox Church in the Ottoman Empire, i.e., to represent Christians before the sultan and to function as a court and tax collector, also had an impact, as did the particular hybrid form of state control, following the Protestant model, of the Russian church by the tsar. The Austro-Hungarian discriminative regime also exerted some influence on the Orthodox Christians in its territory.<sup>4</sup>

The so-called National Churches, which appeared in the new national states in the territories of the old empires, have chosen different constitutional models. Nevertheless, they share some common features. According to Pantelis Kalaitzidis, they share the cultural legacy of Byzantium.<sup>5</sup> Regardless of their constitutional regime, all these countries exercise state intervention under unwritten laws in the religious affairs in support of the Orthodox Church in a discreet (democratic regimes) or brutal (authoritarian regimes) manner for purely political purposes.<sup>6</sup> Undoubtedly, behind this political practice lies a certain public mood that politicians take into account.

### Religion and National Identity

In May 2017, the Pew Research Center<sup>7</sup> published a study on *Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe*. The results give a realistic and intriguing picture of the religious self-consciousness of the Christians in the region and emphasize the specific approach of the Orthodox Christians to the relationship between church and state. Here I shall present just some points and elements of the study related to my topic that explain the political practice in question and the problems that may occur in the near future.

3 The Armenian Church is included in this study because of Armenia's social structure and history. Nevertheless, its Church is not part of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

4 See S. Riboloff, "The Orthodox Church in the Ottoman Empire and its Perspectives for Theological Dialogue," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 33 (2013), 7–24.

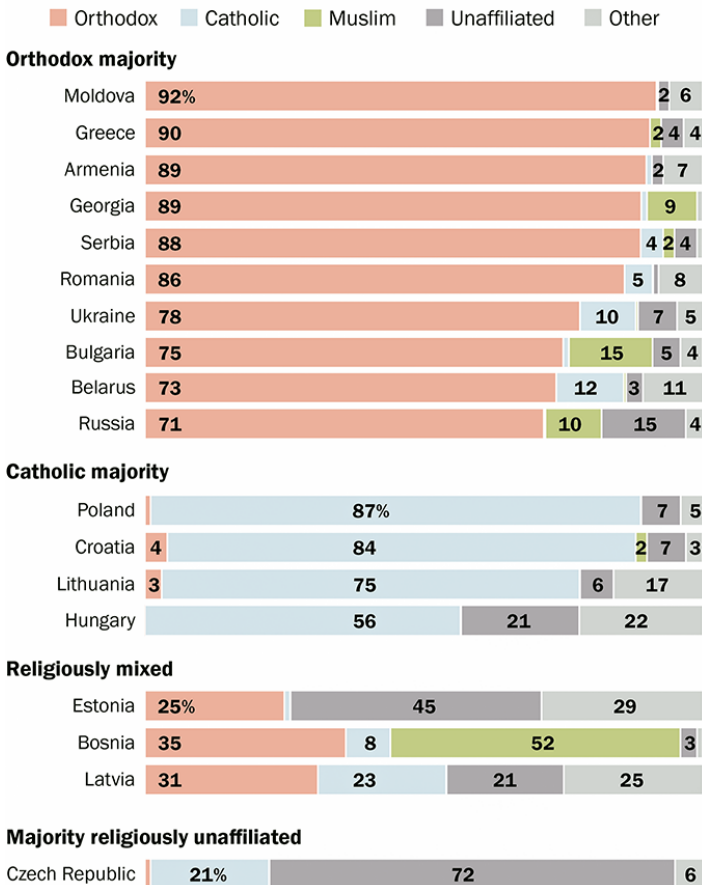
5 Kalaitzidis, "Church and State," 39–40.

6 Kalaitzidis, "Church and State," 39–40.

7 See *Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe* <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/> (accessed 6 September 2019).

## Religious landscape of Central and Eastern Europe

% who identify as ...



Note: 13% of respondents in Hungary identify as Presbyterian. In Estonia and Latvia, 20% and 19%, respectively, identify as Lutherans. And in Lithuania, 14% say they are “just a Christian” and do not specify a particular denomination. They are included in the “other” category. A negligible share of respondents in each country decline to answer the question. They are included in the “other” category. Source: Survey conducted June 2015-July 2016 in 18 countries.

See Methodology for details.

“Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe”

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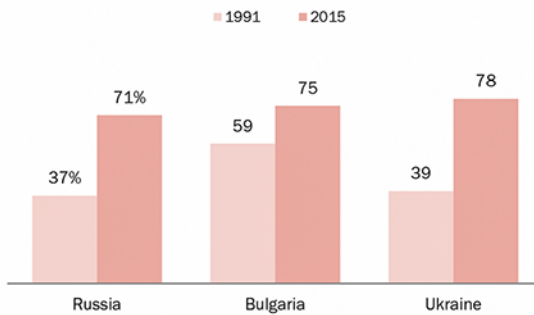
Fig. 14.1 Religious landscape of Central and Eastern Europe<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> All figures are taken from the research of Pew Research Center: Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe. *National and religious identities converge in a*

This graph (Fig. 14.1) shows the general landscape in the region – Orthodox, Catholics, Protestants and Muslims. It can also be pointed out that the Orthodox Christianity is the dominant religion in the region but also coexists with considerable Catholic and Muslim communities. Unlike the communist era, when most citizens expressed their alienation from religion, the percentage of the so-called unaffiliated is now very small except in countries like the Czech Republic (72%), Estonia (45%), Latvia (21%) and Hungary (21%). The largest atheistic community is found in Russia (15%). Of the population of countries like Moldova, Georgia, Greece, Romania and Serbia, between 92 and 86% consider themselves Orthodox Christians. The number of those who view themselves as Orthodox Christians in the other countries in the study, such as Bulgaria, Belarus, Russia and Ukraine, suggests a greater diversity of religious ideas.

### In Eastern Europe, sharp rise in share of adults who describe themselves as Orthodox Christians

% who identify as Orthodox



Note: 1991 data are from "Pulse of Europe" survey conducted by Pew Research Center's predecessor organization, the Times Mirror Center for the People & the Press. The 1991 survey in Russia excluded the eastern part of the country, which represents approximately 33% of the population. However, a survey conducted by the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) in all parts of Russia in the same year found the share of Orthodox in Russia to be roughly the same as the Times Mirror survey (31%).

Source: Survey conducted June 2015-July 2016 in 18 countries. See Methodology for details.

"Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe"

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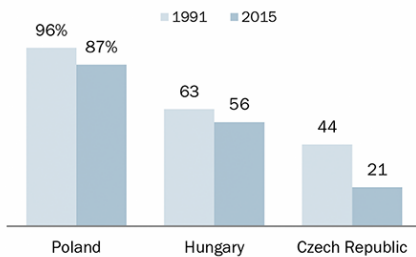
Fig. 14.2 In Eastern Europe, sharp rise in share of adults who describe themselves as Orthodox Christians

*region once dominated by atheist regimes. May 2017, <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/> (accessed 23 October 2021).*

According to the study in question, after the fall of the atheist regimes in the early 1990s, interest in religious beliefs rose sharply, and the authority of the traditional social structures as a whole increased (Fig. 14.2). One can observe a considerable difference between 1991 and 2015 in Russia, Bulgaria and Ukraine. If Bulgaria experienced a rise of about 16%, in Russia and Ukraine it was huge – almost 40%.

### Catholic shares declining in parts of Central Europe

% who identify as Catholic



Note: Data from 1991 for Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic are from a 1991 survey by Pew Research Center's predecessor, the Times Mirror Center for the People & the Press. In Hungary, the 1991 survey used a two-step religion question (respondents were first asked if they identify with a religion; those who said "yes" were then asked to identify their religion). Typically, two-step questions yield a considerably lower share of people identifying with a religion than one-step questions, suggesting that in Hungary, the decline of the share of the Catholic population may have been steeper. Czechs were polled as part of Czechoslovakia in 1991. Only results for Czech speakers are shown.

Source: Survey conducted June 2015-July 2016 in 18 countries. See Methodology for details.

"Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe"

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Fig. 14.3  
Catholic shares declining in parts of Central Europe

This graph can be easily explained. In these three cases, the rise in interest is a result of political conflicts. In Bulgaria in the 1980s, the communist regime was carrying out a strongly nationalistic and anti-Muslim propaganda programme and used the Orthodox cultural heritage of the Bulgarian people to this end. So the state mobilized people in accordance with their affiliation with the Orthodox Church and the trauma of the Ottoman past of the country. On other hand, after 1989, the Russian state started searching for a new ideology to replace the communist one.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, Ukraine was implementing a

9 See S. Riboloff, "Η Αγία και Μεγάλη Σύνοδος και ο Όρθόδοξος Νεοσυντηρητισμός" [The Holy and Great Council and Orthodox Neoconservatism], paper presented at *The 8th International Conference of Orthodox Theology: The Holy and the Great Council of the Orthodox Church:*

**People in former Soviet republics see their countries as more religious today than in 1970s and 1980s**

% who say ...

Post-Soviet republics	Their country is very/somewhat religious today	Their country was very/somewhat religious in 1970s & 1980s	Difference
Georgia	87%	25%	<b>+62</b>
Ukraine	59	15	<b>+44</b>
Russia	55	15	<b>+40</b>
Armenia	81	52	<b>+29</b>
Belarus	57	29	<b>+28</b>
Latvia	43	23	<b>+20</b>
Estonia	23	11	<b>+12</b>
Lithuania	53	49	+4
Moldova	46	56	<b>-10</b>
<i>Other countries</i>			
Serbia	69%	46%	<b>+23</b>
Bosnia	75	53	<b>+22</b>
Bulgaria	53	33	<b>+20</b>
Croatia	73	64	<b>+9</b>
Hungary	51	47	+4
Czech Republic	22	30	<b>-8</b>
Greece	60	87	<b>-27</b>
Romania	59	86	<b>-27</b>
Poland	56	86	<b>-30</b>

Note: Statistically significant differences are highlighted in bold.  
 Source: Survey conducted June 2015-July 2016 in 18 countries. See Methodology for details.  
 "Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe"

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Fig. 14.4 People in former Soviet republics see their countries as more religious today than in 1970s and 1980s

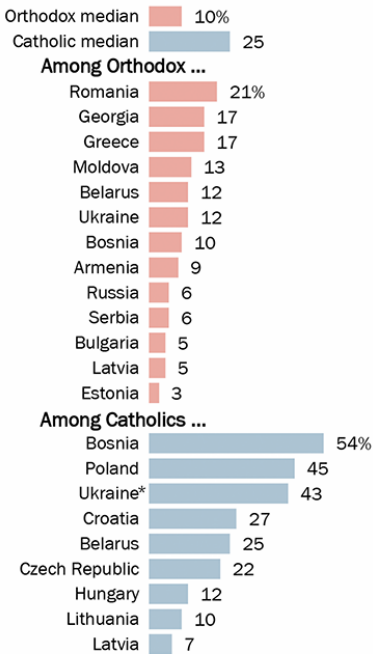
new national identity programme also closely related to Orthodox Christianity. Its Orthodox Church became a very important element for distancing the nation from aggressive Russian interventionism. Simultaneously, a considerable decline in interest in religious practices can be detected in the countries with a Catholic majority population (Fig. 14.3).

*Orthodox Theology in the 21st Century*, ed. Dimitra Koukoura, Anna Nikita-Koltsiou and Anna Karamanidou, Thessaloniki, 21–25 May 2020, 65–71.

If one compares the results for the whole region, the countries that are closer to Moscow – in line with pro-Russian sentiments – indicate an intensification of interest in religion since the 1970s. In the countries where Russia has more influence, these tendencies are related to Orthodox Christianity to a greater degree (Fig. 14.4). Pro-Western countries display an obvious tendency towards less interest in a nominal declaration of religious affiliation. In these countries, faith appears less intense and less politicized. Nevertheless, the people in these countries are better informed about religion and appear to be more interested in active practice (fewer people, but more active).

**Relatively low shares of Orthodox across Central and Eastern Europe attend church weekly**

*% who say they attend church weekly*



\* In Ukraine, most Catholics identify as Byzantine Rite Eastern Catholics, whereas in most other countries, Catholics are Roman Catholics.

Source: Survey conducted June 2015-July 2016 in 18 countries. See Methodology for details.

"Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe"

**Fig. 14.5**  
Relatively low shares of Orthodox across Central and Eastern Europe attend church weekly

The opposite is true of the Orthodox. As a whole, there is a tendency towards less interest in church services and mission, i.e., the active practice of religion (Fig. 14.5). The graph here shows the weekly attendance at church services. Orthodox Christians are less active than Catholics. This strongly contradicts the canon law of the Orthodox Church because anyone who does not receive the Eucharist at least four times per year excludes himself or herself from the Church. On this point, already it is obvious that, for the majority of nominal Orthodox Christians, national affiliation transforms into a religious one. In their minds, Orthodoxy is already a *political religion*. This graph shows us the level of importance religion has in someone's life. As we see here, personal faith is less important in the countries with atheist regimes in the near past. Religion then becomes social loyalty rather than personal spirituality.

**Just 15% of Russians say religion ‘very important’**

% who say religion is \_\_\_\_ in their lives

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not too/not at all important
Greece	55%	28%	17%
Bosnia	54	31	14
Armenia	53	34	13
Georgia	50	42	7
Romania	50	40	10
Croatia	42	34	24
Moldova	42	44	13
Serbia	34	47	18
Poland	29	48	20
Ukraine	22	45	30
Belarus	20	45	32
Bulgaria	19	49	31
Lithuania	16	43	40
Russia	15	42	38
Hungary	14	31	55
Latvia	10	34	53
Czech Republic	7	15	76
Estonia	6	25	68

Note: Don't know/refused responses are not shown.  
 Source: Survey conducted June 2015-July 2016 in 18 countries. See Methodology for details.  
 "Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe"

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Fig. 14.6 Just 15% of Russians say religion ‘very important’

**‘Personal faith’ just one reason people identify as Orthodox, Catholic**

% who say that to them personally, their religious identity is mainly a matter of...

	Personal faith	National culture/family tradition	Personal faith and family tradition/national culture	None/DK/ref.
<b>Among Orthodox</b>				
Armenia	34%	55%	8%	3%
Belarus	34	55	6	5
Bosnia	25	55	19	1
Bulgaria	34	37	27	2
Estonia	28	55	10	7
Georgia	57	29	13	2
Greece	41	26	32	1
Latvia	31	58	4	6
Moldova	50	41	6	3
Romania	32	48	19	2
Russia	35	52	8	6
Serbia	23	48	28	1
Ukraine	36	46	12	7
<b>Among Catholics</b>				
Belarus	40%	42%	18%	1
Bosnia	31	30	39	1
Croatia	34	36	29	1
Czech Republic	37	49	12	1
Hungary	13	76	7	4
Latvia	30	62	3	5
Lithuania	32	48	17	3
Poland	50	27	20	2
Ukraine	36	40	16	8

Note: Figures may not sum to 100% because of rounding.  
 Source: Survey conducted June 2015-July 2016 in 18 countries. See Methodology for details.  
 "Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe"

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Fig. 14.7 ‘Personal faith’ just on reason people identify as Orthodox, Catholic

As we can see in these graphs, personal belief does not play that important a role for the Orthodox majority. For instance, just 15% of Russians say that religion is very important in their everyday lives (Fig. 14.6). This point, i.e., that faith does not play an important role in personal life, leads to the conclusion that the most of the Orthodox Christians in Russia and the countries in the region view their Orthodox Church much more as a communal organization for social mobilization, i.e., the political element is much more important than the spiritual one (Fig. 14.7). For instance, there is also a graph regarding faith *in life after death*. Here the results, as seen in Fig. 16.8 are also very discouraging. Moreover, only 25% of Russians believe God exists, and only 30% of Bulgarians do so – much less than the Greeks, Georgians or Romanians (59 to 73%) (Fig. 14.8). As we have stated, a large section of Orthodox Christians view their religious identity as national and vice versa. In Central Europe, one can see a similar picture among the Catholics but to a lesser extent (Fig. 14.9).

### While most believe in God, fewer are absolutely certain

% who say they ...

	Believe in God, absolutely certain	Believe in God, fairly certain	Believe in God, not too/not at all certain	Do not believe in God
Armenia	79%	15%	1%	4%
Georgia	73	22	2	1
Bosnia	66	24	4	4
Romania	64	28	2	4
Greece	59	26	7	6
Serbia	58	26	3	10
Croatia	57	24	5	10
Moldova	55	35	5	3
Poland	45	35	3	8
Lithuania	34	34	7	11
Ukraine	32	45	6	9
Bulgaria	30	40	7	17
Latvia	28	34	7	15
Belarus	26	47	11	9
Hungary	26	26	7	30
Russia	25	38	10	15
Czech Republic	13	13	3	66
Estonia	13	24	7	45

Note: Respondents who say "don't know/refused" as to whether they believe in God, or say "don't know/refused" as to how certain they are about their belief in God, are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted June 2015-July 2016 in 18 countries. See Methodology for details.

"Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe"

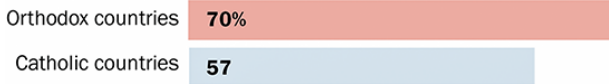
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Fig. 14.8 While most believe in God, fewer are absolutely certain

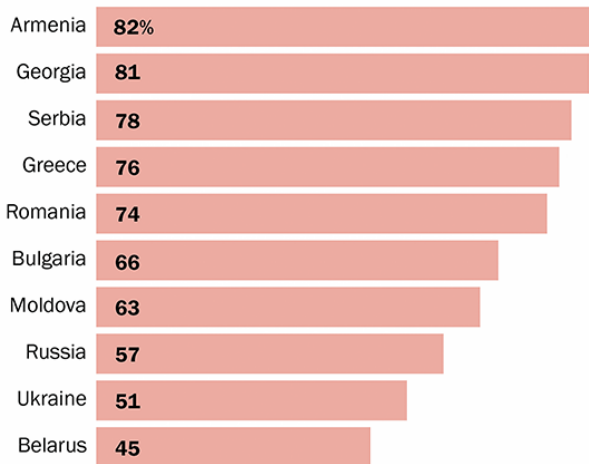
## Strong association, especially in Orthodox-majority countries, between religion and national identity

*% who say being Orthodox/Catholic is very or somewhat important to truly share their national identity*

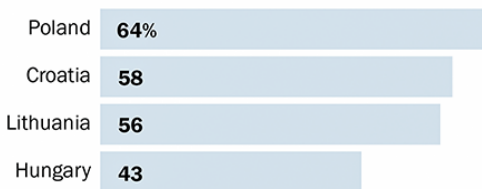
Median results of **surveyed countries**



Among those in **Orthodox-majority countries**, % who say being **Orthodox** is very or somewhat important to truly be a national of their country



Among those in **Catholic-majority countries**, % who say being **Catholic** is very or somewhat important to truly be a national of their country



Source: Survey conducted June 2015-July 2016 in 18 countries.  
 See Methodology for details.  
 "Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe"

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Fig. 14.9 Strong association, especially in Orthodox-majority countries, between religion and national identity

This is closely connected to the next phenomenon. A general mood of *cultural superiority* can be observed among Orthodox Christians (Fig. 14.10). While this is not strange to other Christians in Eastern Europe, it is very strong among the Orthodox. As this is characteristic of the whole region, even Greece, which has been part of the Western world for the last two centuries, it is perhaps a feature of a delayed modernization in the whole area. I really do not know if it has something to do with Byzantium. That these societies in Eastern and Southeastern Europe cannot at least admit to a true secularization speaks of a strong inertia on their part that is rooted in the past. Thus, it will not come as a surprise that the majority of Orthodox Christians do not support the freedom of expression of the different minority groups. Perhaps the only exception in this respect is Greece.

The next graph shows that the identification between nation and church naturally leads to mass support for governments promoting religion (Fig. 14.11). The people view the Church as a power for the consolidation of society and part of the governing elite. Another graph gives a paradoxical picture of Orthodox parents who are not inclined to offer religious education to their children.<sup>10</sup> So here we again encounter an image of a political Orthodoxy that has nothing to do with spirituality. The study on the support for democracy among the people in the region is related to this topic. Orthodox Christians are deeply divided on this issue. Greeks traditionally support democracy, and Serbians, Russians, and Moldavians do not. As a whole, the Orthodox do not like democracy.

The support for Russia in the next graph is also disturbing (Fig. 14.12). A considerable percentage of the people in all the countries of East Europe consider Russia to be an equal counter to the West. It is not just sympathy but a widespread feeling for the presence of Russians in the region. In my opinion, this means that Russian media has created a broad imaginary propaganda space, and the so-called “Russian Worlds” is considered an alternative to the West.<sup>11</sup> If we delve deeper into the details of this topic, it seems that the countries that were longer under Russian influence and strong Russian propaganda during the last two decades are more susceptible to this propaganda. In these countries, we can find more Russian investments in the media business and more political representatives of the Russian interests – Belarus, Bulgaria, Hungary, Serbia, Bosnia, etc.

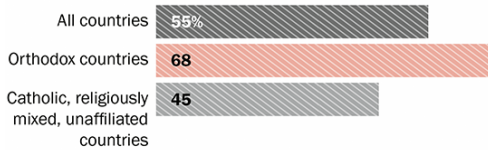
10 See *Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe* <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/> (accessed 6 September 2019), 68, 78.

11 Sveto Riboloff, “Neo-Konservativizmat i choveshkite prava” [Neo-Conservatism and Human Rights], *Hristianstvo i kultura* 124 (2017), 35–47 (in Bulgarian).

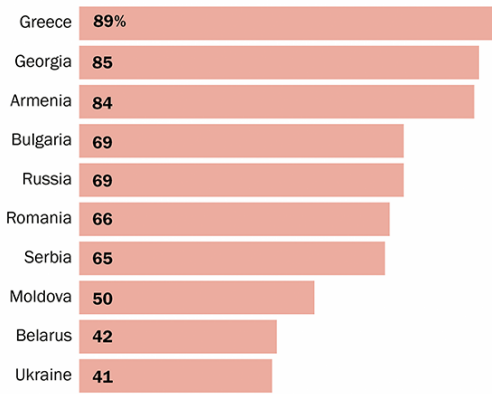
**In Orthodox-majority countries, majorities say their culture is superior**

*% who completely/mostly agree with the statement, "Our people are not perfect, but our culture is superior to others."*

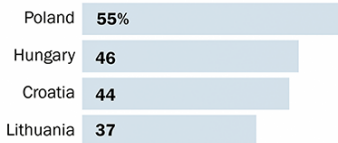
**Median results of surveyed countries**



**Among those in Orthodox-majority countries**



**Among those in Catholic-majority countries**



**Among those in religiously mixed countries**



**Among those in majority religiously unaffiliated countries**



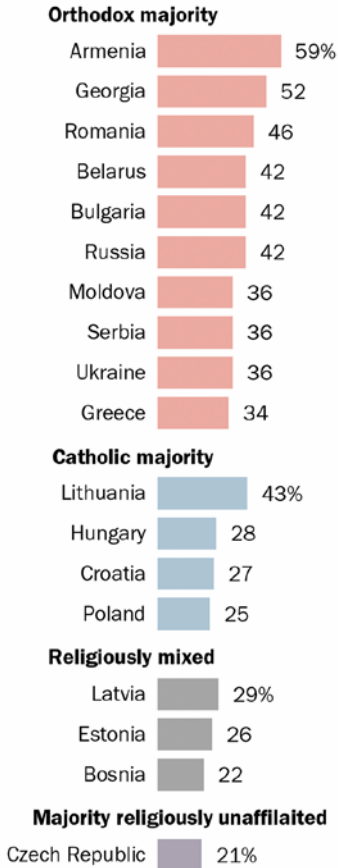
Source: Survey conducted June 2015-July 2016 in 18 countries. See Methodology for details. "Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe"

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**Fig. 14.10** In Orthodox-majority countries, majorities say their culture is superior

## Higher support in Orthodox-majority countries for governments promoting religion

*% who say governments should support the spread of religious values and beliefs in their country*



Source: Survey conducted June 2015-July 2016 in 18 countries. See Methodology for details.

"Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe"

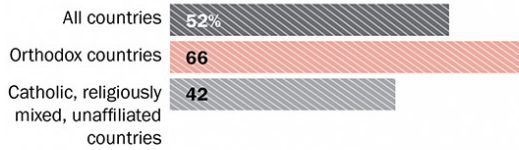
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Fig. 14.11  
Higher support in Orthodox-majority countries for governments promoting religion

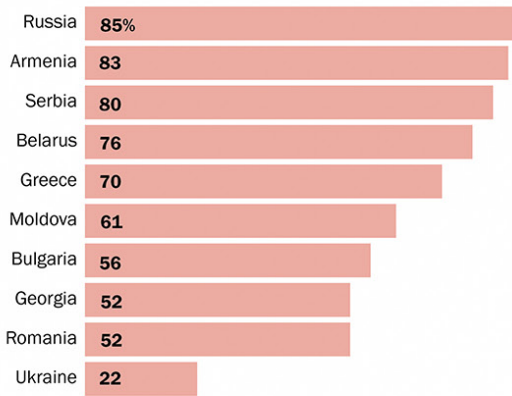
## Majorities in Orthodox countries look to Russia to counter the West

*% who completely or mostly agree with the statement, "A strong Russia is necessary to balance the influence of the West"*

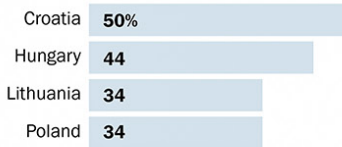
### Median results of surveyed countries



### Among those in Orthodox-majority countries



### Among those in Catholic-majority countries



### Among those in religiously mixed countries



### Among those in majority religiously unaffiliated countries



Source: Survey conducted June 2015-July 2016 in 18 countries.

See Methodology for details.

"Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe"

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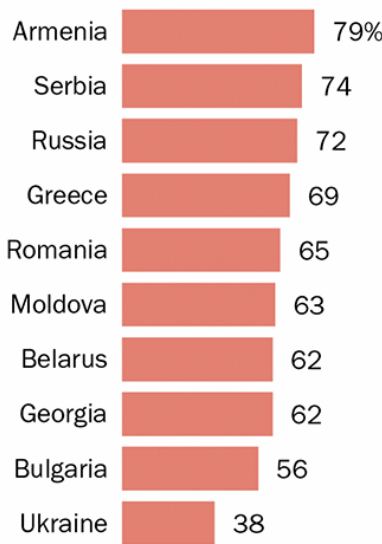
Fig. 14.12 Majorities in Orthodox countries look to Russia to counter the West

I believe that the next graph is the most disturbing. It shows that most Orthodox Christians – at least in 2017 – support Russia as a protector of Orthodox Christians worldwide (Fig. 14.13). We can assume that in the last three years this influence has been diminished due to the conflict in Ukraine and the multiple attempts of the EU and NATO to tackle the information war.

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## In Orthodox-majority countries, widespread support for Russia protecting Orthodox Christians

*% who say, “Russia has an obligation to protect Orthodox Christians outside its borders”*



Source: Survey conducted June 2015-July 2016 in 18 countries. See Methodology for details.

“Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe”

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Fig. 14.13  
In Orthodox-majority countries, widespread support for Russia protecting Orthodox Christians

### Inferences and Forthcoming Challenges

According to this study, the following can be concluded.

1. A small number of Orthodox Christians practise their religious obligations and have interest in religious education, mission and spirituality.
2. In most Orthodox majority countries, the public image of Orthodoxy coincides with the nationalist party or the communal national organization with an anti-Western character. It explains the unwritten support of the states for the Orthodox churches.
3. In most countries, there is strong sympathy for the Russian authoritarian regime and Orthodoxy is seen as an anti-Western ideology to replace communist ideology. This explains the religious interventionism of Russia in all these countries. This certainly creates a problem between the church and state for countries that are now part of NATO and the EU.
4. Minority groups and human rights are also a problem for the Orthodox majority. This again creates a problem for the governments of the countries allied with the West because the Church starts looking like the defender of the values of the native peoples and the state starts looking like the external power that fights against them.
5. Support for democracy is generally very weak. This again turns into a serious problem for governments because many local Orthodox churches sometimes flirt with anti-democratic organizations.

It turns out that there are several points of concern between the Church and state in the Orthodox world today. Bearing these data in mind, we can conclude that no one government in the region, unless it is extremely reformist, can actually make the separation of Church and state a reality. The strong identification between Church and nationality confounds every single attempt by every government to interfere in Church policy on the field. Thus, despite their constitutional arrangements, countries with a dominant Orthodox majority will continue to support their local or "national Churches," despite the inconvenience and problems they cause.

This is a serious problem as democratic regimes have to and will have to comply with strongly pre-modern attitudes among the Orthodox population. This is cleverly used by the authoritarian Russian regime, which aims everywhere and, in every way, to discredit democracy as a way of governing. Orthodoxy is used in these countries as the main weapon of propaganda to this end, and the pre-modern attitudes in question are reinforced and even brought to extremes through the media and digital networks. This constantly leads to microcrises and church-state disagreements in these societies. Greece and Romania seem to be happy exceptions to the Orthodox countries in this respect, but they are not immune to such developments either.

In my opinion, the biggest challenge facing the Orthodox world today is the maintenance of democratic regimes in Orthodox countries in the Western Alliance and the preservation of public security and human rights in these countries. In the near future, Moscow-sponsored far-right nationalist parties, affiliated with ideological Orthodoxy, will try to divert these countries from their European and democratic path of development and seek cohesion with Moscow. For decades, Russian Orthodoxy has been the official ideology of the Russian Federation and its main ideological weapon for expansionism. As a result, democratic regimes with a majority Orthodox population will have to constantly face internal sabotage by figures in their Orthodox churches.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that the relationships between church and state represent an unstable system in most of the countries in Eastern Europe. They are the reason for a number of crises in these societies. Only strong reformist governments deeply integrated into the Western political system can carry out profound reforms to free the churches from political exploitation. Also, all these churches need courageous and determined bishops to carry out such reforms on the part of the Church. On the other hand, an eventual lack of state control over some of these churches in countries that are allied with the West may lead to uncontrolled influence by the Russian Federation on their clergy. It will lead to a kind of asymmetry between the political obligations of the state and the political implications of the actions of certain representatives of the churches. One encounters such a case in the refusal of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the Georgian Orthodox Church to take part in the Pan-Orthodox Council in 2016. Both churches are often opposed to the political course of their governments and their highest-ranked clergy openly oppose NATO and the EU. In addition to clear expectations of a deepening crisis in the Orthodox churches in the region, with the exception of the churches of Greece and Romania, we can add the persistent lack of vision for the development of these relationships between church and state. This instability and the inability of these societies to modernize these relations opens up space for the influence of extreme ideas promoted by authoritarian regimes such as the Russian.

# Liberal Democracy, Spiritual Values and Nihilism: Prefatory Notes to a pending Discussion in the Orthodox World

*Haralambos Ventis*

Owing to the panic raised by the collapse of past certainties and the sweeping march of pluralism in the Western world, liberal democracy is nowadays increasingly accused, among other things, of undermining established normative principles in the name of a disoriented relativism intolerant of any collective and traditional vision of life. Moreover, according to this view, liberalism is broadly incriminated for inducing atheistic nihilism as well as an open hostility to religion and spirituality. As a result, liberal culture is presented on the whole as intrinsically incompatible with the metaphysical and, by extension, normative claims of monotheistic religions. Meeting the above indictment head-on, we shall argue that not only is liberal democracy not devoid of ethical principles but in actuality constitutes a valuable ally for Christianity, one that is more dignified and trustworthy than neoconservative alternatives of a communitarian bent vying for faith's comradeship.

## Politics and Ontology

Arguably one of the most crucial questions currently engaging political theory in the Western world is the legitimacy of the interplay between politics and ontology (as well as eschatology, the teleological horizon of ontology). Stated more elaborately, we believe that the debate on whether politics is entitled to pose ontological questions derived from religious and other transcendental sources is only bound to intensify insofar as politics stands for democracy and the promotion of human rights. This is demonstrated by the cultural wars raging almost everywhere in the Western world nowadays, particularly in the United States. This controversy is fuelled by the perception of metaphysical foundations of morality (and by extension, of policymaking) as inherently incompatible with the fluidity of revisable truths that appear more suitable to

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\* I would like to extend warm thanks to Dr. Ioannis Kaminis for the English translation of the shorter version of the paper at hand.

the struggle towards an evolving, forward-looking, and inclusive society feeding off the modern (Humean and Kantian) “is-ought” distinction.

The debate is not new; it goes back several decades, predating World War II, when pro-Nazi theorists like Carl Schmitt and Martin Heidegger, and before them Oswald Spengler, unleashed a relentless attack against liberal democracy, accusing it of being a cause of decline and disintegration. In their obstinately anti-liberal mindset, the notion of human rights, far from being valued at all, was considered – as it is today in similar circles – pernicious in its social repercussions, the trademark of a self-indulgent, egotistical society centred on the gratification of an individual’s base desires. To be sure, throughout the post-war years and in the wake of such recent atrocities as the Holocaust, the disposition towards human rights improved immensely, at least theoretically. The collective consciousness of Western societies, broadly aided by sensible intellectuals with considerable social influence, started to regard human rights as the most valuable and non-negotiable accomplishment of humankind, inextricably intertwined with the open, civil society and the latter’s constitutionally protected freedoms of conscience and lifestyle. The inherent link between human rights and liberal democracy lies in the realization that the recognition and safeguarding of human rights does not constitute a *fait accompli* but a precipitously fragile process subject to further development – a rather ceaseless project shaped by new knowledge and the growth of social sensibilities allowing for the inclusion of more groups along with their respective needs under the aegis of state protection. Nowadays, however, the unbridled expansion of rights has already begun to appear provocative and even intolerable in some circles, to the extent that the said expansion has challenged and continues to question traditional normative principles in the name of what seems to be an excessive relativism gone awry, leaving little room for inherited social bonds.

Thus, in view of the peril of relativism effecting changes faster than most people could stomach (a worry abetted by the near-global economic crisis attributed to globalization), the championing of liberal causes – including the discourse on human rights – backfired, triggering a reactionary rejoinder on many levels. The reaction ranges from the populist rhetoric of politicians and religious fanatics who often join forces in demonizing liberal pluralism as the main culprit behind every current social ill (be that unemployment, migration or high divorce rates), to the more sophisticated condemnations by conservative thinkers supporting communitarianism. In the latter’s critique, liberalism is accused of an assortment of harms: it is regarded as utterly spineless and nihilistic, detrimental to spirituality and religion, hence responsible for the desacralization of life; it is accused of exalting a blatant indifference to the common good, in effect instigating the deconstruction of society itself

and its perverted transformation into a sum of unrelated, egocentric individuals. More poignantly, perhaps, liberalism is reproached for the obsolescence of politics by dint of the autonomous function of the economy, which allegedly results in a disparaging submission of entire nations to the unaccountable self-interest of the markets. Collectively, the most considered strands of this critique hearken back to Alasdair MacIntyre's urges to the Western world to regain the notion of some form of (neo-)Aristotelian eschatology, which was fatally deconstructed by Nietzsche, as an antidote to the moral relativism that undermines communal thinking and hence the notion of solidarity. The same critique is abundant in the fascinating studies of Michael Sandel, for whom certain goods, values and norms are fundamentally incompatible with those we associate with markets.

Permit me to add a few words on Alasdair MacIntyre's contribution to the revitalization of the Aristotelian notion of the "common Good" from a communitarian standpoint. MacIntyre stands as a watershed in contemporary moral theory, and his work is considered to be of the same calibre as the philosophical output of John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas, i.e., sufficiently thought-provoking and original so as to generate a new venue for ethics and moral reflection. But unlike these thinkers, he has sought to revive the long disdained philosophical strand of "virtue ethics" that lost ground to the "procedural" kind of moral discourse that has mainly dominated the field till this day. In that sense, MacIntyre has been a contrarian to the modern spirit of moral iconoclasm, which (by his own account) began as early as the Renaissance. At this point, Renaissance philosophy broke free from the teleology of Aristotelian physics, only to gradually extend the rejection of that particular aspect of Aristotelianism to the realm of ethics as well – in reaction to the medieval religious worldview known for its perhaps intemperate and problematic (by many accounts) assimilation of Aristotelian metaphysics into Christian theology. Consequently, as MacIntyre would have it, the denunciation of teleological ethics, particularly in its religious apparel, was picked up and further worked out by the Enlightenment,<sup>1</sup> and was to be given its final, decisive blow

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1 MacIntyre's disdain for the Enlightenment philosophers is starkly evident as early as his book *A Short History of Ethics*, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 183: "We can bring out Rousseau's importance best by considering the different attitude to liberty taken by the typical writers of the Enlightenment and by Rousseau. For Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Helvétius alike the ideals of political liberty are incarnated in the English Revolution of 1688. Freedom means freedom for Whig lords and also for intellectuals like themselves. But for those whom Voltaire called 'the rabble' obedience is still the order of the day. Thus on the only point on which the writers of the Enlightenment were predisposed to be moral innovators they adopted a position which was essentially arbitrary,

in the fuming prose of Nietzsche. In MacIntyre's assessment, this replacement could only have led, disastrously enough, to the advancement of a gross individualism, of the kind that Nietzsche would eventually hail in his startlingly frank celebration of the "will to power": this is the inevitable outcome of post-platonic, post-Aristotelian and post-Christian ethics, according to MacIntyre. (Incidentally, in upholding this view, MacIntyre is the exact antithesis of the popular moralist Ayn Rand, who glorified Nietzsche and vilified Plato in her promotion of what appears to the present writer as an overblown individualistic ethos that lent support to aggressive capitalism.)

In his classic study *After Virtue*<sup>2</sup>, MacIntyre offers a prolonged critique of Nietzsche, to the point of ending the book by presenting readers with the stern dilemma "Nietzsche or Aristotle?"<sup>3</sup> In his view, Nietzsche represents everything that is morally reprehensible in the modern history of ideas. But more than simply pinpointing the "beast," MacIntyre is particularly interested in tracing the true intellectual culprit responsible for the progressive arrival to the Nietzschean ideal of the "Overman." Thus, in his search for the doctrines that he believes laid the groundwork for the nihilism so shamelessly exalted in works such as *The Antichrist*, MacIntyre blames the modern "is-ought" dichotomy,<sup>4</sup> as was particularly promulgated by David Hume, and before him (as MacIntyre would have it) by Blaise Pascal. Therein lies, in his view, the philosophical trick most instrumental in occasioning the fundamental turning point away from the Aristotelian disparity between man as he is (the actual, *unrealized* human being) and "man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-telos."<sup>5</sup> Beyond Hume, MacIntyre attributes this split to the "mechanics of action" (as he calls it) mentality of the Enlightenment, thanks to which ethics was re-shaped in accordance with the mechanistic and individualistic empiricism that gradually replaced Aristotelian teleology.<sup>6</sup>

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which accepted the status quo as a whole, while questioning it in part, especially where it affected their own interests. No wonder that these would-be radicals so eagerly sought and accepted relationships with royal patrons, Diderot with Catherine of Russia, Voltaire with Frederick of Prussia." On the whole, MacIntyre seems to prefer, if critically, the pessimism of a Schopenhauer as "an important corrective to the easy liberal optimism of so much of nineteenth-century life" (222).

2 Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* 3rd ed. (Notre Dame IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2007).

3 MacIntyre, "Nietzsche or Aristotle: Trotsky and St. Benedict," in *After Virtue*, 256ff. The question "Nietzsche or Aristotle?" was first posed in the ninth chapter of the same book.

4 See MacIntyre, "Why the Enlightenment Project of Justifying Morality Had to Fail," in *After Virtue*, 51–61.

5 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 54.

6 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 80–81.

In the field of Greek Orthodox theology, Christos Yannaras is well known for his continuous elegy about the suicidal retreat and eventual loss of politics structured “according to truth.” Pursuant to the Yannaras’ philosophical requirements, the very notion of citizenship should be shaped by a “deep” ontology inspired by what is sacred and not along the arbitrary lines of a conventional discourse about “rights,” a discourse often driven by the markets. In fact, Yannaras, author of *The Inhumanity of Rights*<sup>7</sup>, a monograph emblematic of his reactionary agenda, goes so far as to claim that the communitarian ideal of Orthodoxy is the only efficient bulwark against the neoliberal globalization that levels all cultural differences under the guise of progress and individual freedoms and thus subjugates human life and its needs to the private interests of a greedy elite. Worth mentioning here is an interesting philosophical shift that occurred near the end of the 20th century, concerning a joint condemnation of the individualistic character of liberalism by Christians and Marxists alike, former intellectual adversaries currently turned into part-time allies:<sup>8</sup> in their eyes, liberalism is nothing but an ideology of political egoism, insofar as it ignores the social predisposition of people and the relationality that forges human subjectivity, as well as the clash of interests that separates the classes. Thus, in light of liberalism’s heightened predilection for private property and its endorsement of social inequality as a natural phenomenon, critics bemoan that the moral and political values of solidarity and hospitality are alien to liberal principles.<sup>9</sup> For these and similar reasons, the disaffection with liberalism is now common to a wide range of left-wing and Christian scholars committed to communitarian ideals, secular and/or religious alike. Their common resentment is also visible in the congruence between the “right-wing” invocation of national identity as a paragon of togetherness and the “left-wing” litany condemning individuality, neatly summed up in the Marxist slogan: “The Left is the struggle of the collective ‘us’ versus the ‘ego’s’ instincts.”

A common denominator of the above criticisms is their conclusion that liberal democracy suffers from an existential poverty of the sort that leaves people

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7 Christos Yannaras, *Ἡ ἀπανθρωπία τοῦ δικαιώματος* [The Inhumanity of Right] (Athens: Domos Publications, 2006).

8 Literary theorist Terry Eagleton is a noteworthy example of this trend as an outspoken defender of both Marxism and Christianity. See especially Terry Eagleton, *Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate* (New Haven CN: Yale University Press, 2010); idem, *Why Marx was Right* (New Haven CN: Yale University Press, 2018). Slavoj Žižek is another major representative of this trend. Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse core of Christianity* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2003).

9 Philippos Vasiloyannis, *Τὸ μίσος γιὰ τὴ φιλελεύθερη δημοκρατία* [The Hatred of Liberal Democracy] (Athens: Eurasia Publications, 2019), 94.

spiritually destitute, deprived of values and afflicted by the worst form of loneliness: the lack of a comprehensive profound answer to the meaning of life. The fact that human beings are predominantly not content with mere survival but aspire rather to know why they exist in the first place, thereby in search of a deeper purpose in life, often leads them to religion (for, after all, humans are *theopoietic* or god-making creatures as well). Alternatively, they are given to the lure of utopias as a refuge from life's nagging uncertainties. Conservative intellectuals increasingly underscore the significance of existential meaning as an indispensable requirement for a fulfilling life, which is why they flaunt the fear of "nihilism" and "depression" affecting northwestern societies in support of their communal or even nationalistic rhetoric. In doing so, however, they make an unfair demand of politics, asking from it what is alien to its nature – sanguinely disregarding or concealing the fact that whenever metaphysics of any sort is forcefully mixed with politics, the result is disastrous, as has become painfully evident in the various totalitarianisms that bedeviled the previous century.

Nevertheless, while the ghost of totalitarianism haunts progressive historians and intellectuals, it is invisible to the average person who is left acutely frustrated when stripped of familiar, domesticated coordinates. Quite evidently, people deeply resent the resulting emptiness that follows the ebb of the "great narratives" serving as purveyors of a fixed grand meaning; they find the ensuing reign of a "confusing" pluralism that only grounds us in prosaic, "small scale" life goals just as unnerving – particularly when such minimalism is combined with the uncertainty of a fluid and constantly changing world such as ours. As a result, the demand for a spiritual port providing a meaning that supersedes daily turmoil and the vacuity of consumerism is recurrently on the rise – usually in the form of an instinctive regression of societies to a conservative mindset often manifested in the electoral support of populist demagogues (merchants of political messianism) backed by similar trends in philosophy and art.

This "black hole" allegedly ailing contemporary life is habitually associated with Western civilization as its unmistakable malaise after the advent of modernity, with liberal democracy being designated as the main culprit for the said dead-end. It is worth mentioning that Yannaras refers scornfully to liberal democracy as "the right-wing pole of historical materialism," a witticism intended to depict liberalism as the worldly, lewd flipside to Marxism. Philosophical and literary adversaries of modernity and the liberal versions of the social contract articulate their consternation by asking a series of reasonable, if exaggerated, questions, occasionally bordering on emotionalism: "Can the 20th century mass society with its technological development provide a

satisfactory meaning for life to ordinary people? God is dead, the ancient regime is also past us, but what succeeds them? At the end of the day, is the human race really receptive to improvement? Did modernism live up to its promise to instill liberation or has it delivered nothing but a void?" Intellectuals nostalgic for the "lost pre-modern centre" mockingly conclude that "the 20th century did not provide us with optimistic answers to these questions, even though in theory it should have been the era of the triumph of the Enlightenment's." The Czech philosopher Karel Kosík, for one, was unflinchingly caustic in his uncharitable judgment of modern liberal culture. He faults it for comprising the realm of the "accidental" and the "meaningless," which recklessly erased every trace of tragedy from the human radar, blithely surrendering the modern conscience to the dictatorship of the markets without resistance.<sup>10</sup> He ascertained that

humans nowadays are hasty and anxious. They rush from one place to another, stripped of any sense of real direction [...]. The essential meaning in human life is now long lost, having been replaced by the pursuit of the non-essential. The philosophical formula encapsulating the immersion in what is downright meaningless is the phrase 'God is dead.' [...] Having thoughtlessly glorified the trivial, people find a purpose in life in the accumulation of products, in property and the unlimited consumption of things, goods, pleasures and information [...]. Production has become the predominant means of shaping how humans relate to the world: production has absorbed creativity and initiative [...]. [Kosík concludes, adding ruefully that] "the modern age is a time of crisis, because its foundations are in crisis."<sup>11</sup>

In a similar vein, the unsung anatomist of totalitarianism, Costas Papaioannou, one of the first to discern the roots of Soviet dictatorship in the gaps of Marxist theory, uttered a verdict reminiscent of the rhetoric spouted by such anti-liberal theorists as McIntyre, Yannaras and Kosík. As Papaioannou argues in his study *The Birth of Totalitarianism*:

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10 Liberal democracy does not assume it should be shielded from criticism, if anything, thanks to its open-ended, dialogical nature. Thus, it can converse with and learn from serious conservative critics such as Michael Oakeshott. For a condensed exposition of his conservatism, see Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (London: Methuen, 1962). For a more recent challenging critique of liberal democracy akin to Kosík's negative appraisal of it (minus the latter's emphasis on the so-called "existential meaninglessness" supposedly intrinsic to liberal culture), see Adrian Pabst, *The Demons of Liberal Democracy* (Cambridge UK: Polity Press, 2019).

11 Karel Kosík, *Η κρίση της Νεωτερικότητας* [The Crisis of Modernity] (Athens: Psychogios Publications, 2003), 72–4.

Nietzsche denounces the century that killed God and is unwilling to understand the broader consequences of the replacement of God by various abstract ideas: Progress, Ethics, Democracy, Socialism, Nationalism, Rationalism and other resounding concepts bound to collapse under the crashing wave of the coming Nihilism. The more optimistic and reassuring these false gods appear to be, the more humans are convinced of their self-sufficiency. But they will be stripped just as quickly of all that is meaningful and essential; and the erosive work of Nihilism that nullifies the foundations of existence will be all the easier. The bond of humankind with its own life will be even more troubling and the inversion of values will be more effective, transforming human spirituality into a problem.<sup>12</sup>

### Liberalism and Ethics

In light of the above accusations, the equation of liberal democracy with nihilism, individualism and the self-negation of politics in general would seem to be self-evident. This equation is overwhelmingly popular among theological circles, especially in Greek Orthodoxy, where the cultural model of Christian Hellenism is touted as a unique purveyor of universal existential meaning. The alluring promise of this cultural paradigm, however, is marred by a resentful elegy for the past, a craving for the lost glamour of a once imperial, flourishing Orthodoxy, which presently lies in hopeless decline. How so? Because (so the story goes) Orthodox culture was foolishly exchanged for (deleterious!) foreign, Western socio-political models and customs, unreflectively imitated by modern Greeks unappreciative of the value of their own tradition. Yannaras, the premier representative of this antimodern trend, sums up its reactionary core neatly when he states that:

the co-inherence of ecclesiastical and state power was possible in Byzantium, in the context of a culture opposed to the modern one, when the goals of secular power were to organize a state mirroring the celestial hierarchy [in contrast to the current type of nation state that] has as its sole goal the debauchery of its citizens.<sup>13</sup>

The lament for the loss of the socio-political primacy of Christianity and the monopoly of Christian values in Western society is often portrayed as a devious

12 Costas Papaioannou, *Η γένεση του ολοκληρωτισμού. Οικονομική υπανάπτυξη και κοινωνική επανάσταση* [The Birth of Totalitarianism: Economical Underdevelopment and Social Revolution] (Athens: Enallaktikes Publications, 1991).

13 Christos Yannaras, *Κεφάλαια Πολιτικής Θεολογίας* [Chapters of Political Theology], 2nd ed. (Athens: Gregoris Publications, 1983), 166–7.

persecution of faith, as an exile of the sacred from the public sphere, all thanks to the malevolent anti-religious prejudice of liberalism. For example, in the same collection of essays penned by Yannaras, we are told bluntly – without further analysis and substantiation – that “the notion of social and political ‘Liberalism’, as formed in Western Europe by the so-called ‘progressive’ movements of past centuries, sternly presupposes an open opposition to the clergy and institutional Christendom.”<sup>14</sup> Is this assessment valid? Definitely not. To begin with, we should be reminded that liberal democracy is intrinsically secular, not atheistic. The difference between freedom of and from religion on the one hand and atheism on the other is vast and fundamental to any attempt at discussing liberal democracy’s stance on faith responsibly. It must therefore be thoroughly delineated because it is frequently obscured, often due to ignorance but occasionally also deliberately. Liberals include in their ranks people of all metaphysical beliefs, from agnostics and the religiously indifferent to believers and atheists.<sup>15</sup> Monumental figures in European history such as Hugo Grotius, Pierre Bayle, Johannes Althusius, the Jesuit theologian Balthasar Gracián and the empiricist John Locke could be listed, among others, as practicing Christians and liberals. Liberal democracy does not engage in debates on religious doctrines, meaning it abstains from adjudicating their reasonableness, plausibility or worth, unless doctrines are deemed detrimental to the freedom and security of citizens. We are indebted to John Rawls, the father of modern political liberalism, for the crucial reminder that the model of the social contract he favours, leaves religious beliefs completely untouched, if not respectfully insular from scientific or philosophical criticism.<sup>16</sup> Rawls does not embrace any philosophical or ideological worldview,

14 Yannaras, *Κεφάλαια Πολιτικής Θεολογίας*, 79.

15 Instances of enlightened theological affirmation of religious liberty, medieval as well as modern, are discussed in Brian Tierney, “Religious Rights: A Historical Perspective,” in *Religious Liberty in Western Thought*, Emory University Studies in Law and Religion, ed. Noel B. Reynolds and W. Cole Durham, Jr. (Atlanta GA: Scholars Press, 1996), 29–57.

16 As a person of faith (a practicing Orthodox Christian) and a liberal, I was drawn to Rawls’ later work because unlike alternative forms of liberalism, such as Richard Rorty’s, for one, his version refrains from assailing religion or from likewise setting up Enlightenment secularism as an indispensable prerequisite for democracy. It thus strikes a much-needed balance between the private and the public domains, instilling as it does a neutrality that is valuable in all agendas, like my own, aiming to de-politicize faith and de-theologize politics. See John Rawls, “The Idea of Public Reason Revisited,” in *The University of Chicago Law Review* 64, no. 3 (Summer 1997), 766: “Central to the idea of public reason is that it neither criticizes nor attacks any comprehensive doctrine, religious or nonreligious, except insofar as that doctrine is incompatible with the essentials of public reason and a democratic polity.” To further clarify his point, Rawls also adds that “we must distinguish public reason from what is sometimes referred to as secular reason and secular values

such as the Enlightenment, for example, as more suitable for democracy in the present era. Moreover, according to Rawls, even atheism falls into the category of metaphysical or “comprehensive doctrines,” inasmuch as it constitutes an all-inclusive worldview not corroborated by science. As such, it is considered unsuitable for invocation in public debates from the liberal angle in much the same way that religious doctrines *per se* are excluded.<sup>17</sup>

But whence their exclusion? At this point, a further clarification is in order: theists, agnostics and atheists should be equally entitled to join debates on any matter of public interest, with the sole provision that they express their views in the idiom of public reason, agreed upon in advance by every interlocutor. Such an idiom is, by definition, as metaphysically neutral as possible: argumentation so structured may contain scientific facts, statistics, references to historical precedents, as well as reasonably expected results and reliable data subject to scientific checks and falsifiability. Given this requirement, standpoints that are based on religious traditions and doctrines, including atheism, clearly cannot be endorsed as appropriate for deliberating public affairs – not only by virtue of their divisive nature but chiefly because the metaphysical justification of any view does not constitute a genuine form of argumentation; it is but a mere tautology, a question-begging reference unable to contribute anything substantial to the debate beyond simply indicating partisan preference. For example, quoting the Qur’an or the New Testament cannot demonstrate in a rational way (as befits the ancient Greek tradition of *λόγον διδόναι* or being accountable to reason for one’s statements) the intrinsic uncleanness of eating pork or the wrongness of blood transfusions as advocated by Jehovah’s Witnesses. To be sure, the whole issue of determining the criteria demarcating legitimate from illegitimate argumentation in public debates as regards the social contract is deep and much too complicated to be analyzed here in any meaningful length. Suffice it to point out then, given my space restrictions, that liberal democracy is fully and sincerely respectful of everyone’s religious and/or ideological beliefs without discriminating in favour of any party. At the

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[since] these are not the same as public reason. For I define secular reason [itself] as reasoning in terms of comprehensive nonreligious doctrines. Such doctrines and values are much too broad to serve the purposes of public reason. [...] Moral doctrines are on a level with religion and first philosophy. By contrast, liberal political principles and values, although intrinsically moral values, are specified by liberal *political* conceptions of justice and fall under the category of the political” (775–6). The above thesis is integral to Rawls’ later magisterial work, see his *Political Liberalism, with a New Introduction and a Reply to Habermas* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

17 Rawls famously insisted that “to deny certain metaphysical doctrines is to assert another such doctrine.” See *Political Liberalism*, 379, n. 8.

same time, however, it raises limits aiming to forestall the hijacking of public debates by fundamentalist, partisan and similar defective forms of circular reasoning. In doing so, liberal democracy categorically assumes that in free, non-theocratic or other non-totalitarian societies, policymaking occurs by consensus attained through compromise than it does by submission to revealed truths – whether divinely dictated or imposed by the so-called iron laws of history. In fact, the neutrality upheld by liberal democracy with regard to metaphysics, secular or religious alike, is precisely what safeguards everyone's rights to either worship (privately or in public) or abstain completely from any kind of worship without suffering persecution. Interestingly, the impartiality of Rawlsian liberalism runs counter to the "paternalistic" version of autonomy maintained by Cornelius Castoriadis,<sup>18</sup> who set atheism as a *sine qua non* prerequisite for the success of democracy.

For all its neutrality versus doctrine, though, liberal democracy is not morally spineless, nor does it lack sufficient spiritual coordinates. Much less does it promote a kind of morbid individualism devoid of social empathy,<sup>19</sup> as is so irresponsibly claimed. On the contrary, liberal democracy is motivated by high ethical principles. As was alluded above, it values tolerance, rational and sober argumentation, respectful disagreement, innovation, and above all the twin freedoms of conscience and thought. These are some of the key virtues

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18 Some of Castoriadis' major works available in English include Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998); *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy: Essays in Political Philosophy*, ed. David Ames Curtis (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); *Figures of the Thinkable*, ed. Werner Hamacher, trans. Helen Arnold (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007); *A Society Adrift: Interviews and Debates, 1947–1997*, trans. Helen Arnold (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010); *Democracy and Relativism: A Debate*, trans. John V. Garner (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2019); *World in Fragments: Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis, and the Imagination*, trans. David Ames Curtis (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997); *Political and Social Writings, 1946–1955: From the Critique of Bureaucracy to the Positive Content of Socialism*, ed. & trans. David Ames Curtis (Minneapolis & London, The University of Minnesota Press, 1988); *Political and Social Writings*, vol. II, 1955–1960, trans. David Ames Curtis (Minneapolis & London, The University of Minnesota Press, 1988); *Political and Social Writings: 1961–1979: Recommencing the Revolution: From Socialism to the Autonomous Society*, vol. III, trans. David Ames Curtis (Minneapolis & London, The University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

19 For a communitarian, albeit non-reactionary, critical comment on economic liberalism, see Michael Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2012). Sandel's egalitarian thesis is powerfully argued. Egalitarianism, however, is not absent from liberalism, especially in its American version, as has been convincingly demonstrated by, among others, Alan Gewirth in *The Community of Rights* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996); and Adam Gopnik in *A Thousand Small Sanities: The Moral Adventure of Liberalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2019).

comprising the value system of liberalism, widely appreciated as a major cornerstone of Western culture: an expanded update of the classical Greek concepts of *παρρησία* and *ισηγορία* (freedom of speech), along with the paramount freedom of choosing one's own lifestyle, without fear or the required approval of any clergyman, government or monarch. These values are perfectly compatible with religious faith and especially with Orthodoxy, insofar as its head, Jesus Christ, famously redefined faith and virtuous living as a matter of conscience, namely as the fruit of a free and responsible choice, apart from any coercion.

Speaking of responsibility as it applies to every walk of life, we cannot afford to omit its inextricable intertwinement with individuality, a concept so badly misunderstood in communitarian circles as to be regarded as coextensive with selfishness. To set the record straight on this, we should be reminded that any developed, mature state offers the maximum number of choices to its citizens, expecting them in return to assume their share of civic responsibilities precisely as individuals and not as collectivities. For our part, as Orthodox Christians, we need not shy away from the term "individual" because we have long been accustomed to juxtaposing it with "person," a theologically keener concept sanctified as a relational, selfless entity. Personhood, even when envisaged in terms of uttermost relationality, is unthinkable apart from individual distinctiveness and otherness. As Markos Dragoumis, an unsung Greek liberal, perceptively pointed out:

the primacy of the individual has often been the subject of insults and humiliation by the worshipers of collectivities, who look down upon it as a disdainful way of life. [...] Remnants of this contempt can be traced in some Greek intellectuals who [...] accuse the individual of being indifferent to noble and elevated ideals, such as revolution, social change, the right faith, the arts, the glory of the motherland, and nowadays the clean environment. [...] [T]his feared primacy of the individual, however, does not mean that collectivism is an illusion or that coexistence by itself is problematic, as some other philosophers have maintained. It merely means that the individual bears sole responsibility for her relations with others and that any collective body depends for its existence on the free will of the individuals consenting to its formation; that it exists, in other words, for as long as these individuals persist in their choice. [...] No one can be a collective product. [...] The party does not "generate" people. People are those who generate, constitute and form it. If they change their mind, the party ceases to exist, it dissolves and becomes an event of the past. [...] Liberalism fosters the humanist tendency – a tendency born in Greek antiquity – [to question the givens of life]: instead of resting content with merely asking "why" about whatever already exists, liberalism asks "why not" about something new that can be imagined. Reason aside, as humans we could not have outgrown the sovereignty of instincts without the gift of imagination, an overflowing of the soul permitting us to cut off the ropes and let our life vessel sail out to the open sea. On the opposite end of this innovative curiosity are the frantic worshipers of

prescribed “ends” and ultimate goals, the lovers of censorship bent on uprooting or stigmatizing dissenters as “selfish.” Liberalism does not prescribe policies. It is content with securing the freedoms of thought, speech, religious worship, the press, communication and suffrage for everyone. Citizens dwelling in liberal states enjoy the rights to life, dignity, self-determination, equal treatment by the authorities, free speech, equality before the law and of course the right to private ownership. These principles do not by themselves establish a systematic ethics, but they can nonetheless shed some light on human actions.”<sup>20</sup>

Liberal democracy certainly respects majority rulings when these are freely administered. At the same time, however, it strives to protect minorities from the tyranny and impunity of the majorities, for, as the historical record demonstrates, the masses are never keen on willingly granting freedoms or privileges to helpless minorities, notwithstanding the former’s self-exonerating rhetoric. One need only cite the tribulations of Frangoyannou, the literary heroine from A. Papadiamantis’ novel *The Murderess*, and the near stoning of the adulteress in the New Testament as atrocities enacted by the pious, yet inhuman, will of the majority. Given the perpetuating tyranny of majorities, then, what line of defense could be mounted against it? Perhaps the most potent theoretical weapon in that direction comes from John Stuart Mill, whose argument is in line with the unequivocal Christian (as well as Kantian) emphasis on *the distinction and dignity of persons*. Mill submits that governments must indeed heed the “will of the people” yet warns vehemently against its unrestricted glorification. Mill was among the first to perceive that, because masses feel immune from trouble, they are often so set in their ways as to become insensitive to the plight of the unprivileged – worse still, they are even likely to desire the oppression of voiceless members of society, given the chance. A major insight of modern political thought is that power corrupts both leaders and citizens when left unchecked, meaning if it is not curtailed by constitutional provisions drawn up for the protection of the weak and marginalized. For these reasons, Mill insisted, the “tyranny of the majority” must now be included among the evils against which society must be on guard.<sup>21</sup> Christians, more than others, should feel especially motivated to stand in support of vulnerable and marginalized people, assuming, of course, that they are determined to follow in the steps of Christ and not the self-righteous Pharisees – the religious leaders whose legalism incited the stoning of certain women.

20 Markos Dragoumis, *Πορεία προς τὸ φιλελευθερισμὸ* [Path to Liberalism] (Athens: Fileleftheros Typos Publications), 106–8.

21 John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, ed. David Bromwich & George Kateb (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 74–5.

Further arguments along similar lines could be added in support of liberal democracy's worth. Yet, for all their reasonableness, such contentions could be challenged by a set of objections that, at first glance, might seem to cast serious doubts on the proposed compatibility of liberalism with mainstream Christianity. Let us consider some of those. For one thing, as a worldview entailing metaphysical as well as normative premises, Christianity aspires to provide an all-encompassing narrative based on truth claims as opposed to subjective opinions. In view, then, of the ontological constitution of Christian doctrines, whose existential vigor once contributed to the creation of Western culture (along with Greek and Enlightenment ideals), would it really be a good choice to trade in their time-honored guidelines for a shallow and sometimes vulgar pluralism and fluid version of truth? Moreover, did Christianity initially not emerge, at least partially, as a collective ethic advocating the transcendence of individualism? Is the Church not primarily a community, whose Eucharistic celebration unites partakers so strongly as to mystically transform them into a single body, the Body of Christ, in sharp contrast to individualistic modes of praying alone from home, with Bible in hand? Finally, if (as liberals maintain) human rights are considered inalienable as opposed to merely "bestowed" on citizens, thus irrevocable by the whims of authority, would they not be better shielded within an ontological framework rather than seen as mere convention and a matter of contract? In response to this tempting task, theologians could invoke the neo-Patristic notion of personhood as a valuable tool for safeguarding the dignity of persons as ends in themselves, made in the image of God. If so, however, are we not led back to metaphysics as a guide to morals all over again, placing politics on a transcendent pedestal?

Demur of this sort is definitely reasonable, legitimate and indeed deserving of reply, although an extensive discussion of it would take us too far afield. Given our space restrictions, we can only submit some rough thoughts in response.

In the first place, the notion of "culture," so precious to hard-line communitarians and neo-Orthodox Christians alike, is not reducible to a purveyor of existential meaning that surpasses materialism and the mundane affairs of daily life. Adherents of the "cultural" version of faith have long sold a lopsided picture of Christianity as primarily inhibitive of nihilism, hence as a culture-creating bulwark of meaning promoting social cohesion. While this is true, "culture" or civilized living is a far richer signified than is denoted by the banal definition of it as a socially embodied sense of direction structured along the lines of Byzantine Christianity. A sane view of culture means prosperity, not only in terms of material comfort but particularly in the broader sense of a constitutionally guaranteed peaceful coexistence of people of different colour,

race, ethnic origin, education, and sexual orientation espousing diverse, even contrasting beliefs. The importance of this requirement cannot be overstated, given the flagrant historical failure of organized religion (including Orthodox Christianity) to restrain themselves from violence against “others.” A healthy model of culture is one that respects people’s life options and preferences (to the extent that these are not harmful to others), and not only permits but actively encourages the pursuance of one’s dreams, even when it runs counter to the tastes of social majorities – in essence, allowing for the unimpeded possibility of citizens’ self-realization as they see fit for themselves. “Culture” (unless the term refers to mere folklore) means the actual transition from the category of *subject* to that of *citizen*. The shift denotes the liberation of individuals and societies from the fear of an arbitrary authority (whether secular or religious) set on monopolizing and preemptively determining the meaning and content of the “public good” on behalf of its subjects. Lastly, “civilization,” in its advanced stage, is synonymous with the enrichment of human life through its exposure to a wealth of different cultural affairs, as in the case of 5th-century BC Athens, where citizens gained immensely from the free exercise of an incredible variety of sophisticated events, schools and ideas – a myriad of life perspectives, whose combined interplay caused the city to shine through as “the education center of Greece.” In contrast, intellectual atrophy – partial or total – is the proven outcome of the monopoly of public space by a single faith or ideology.

As stated in *Pericles’s Funeral Oration*, moreover, civilization is the recognition of the citizens’ right to privacy, one of the most sacred and inviolable principles of democracy and one of the first freedoms to suffer prohibition in theocratic or otherwise totalitarian regimes. Finally, civilization is synonymous with the smooth operation of democratic institutions, which are the first and the last refuge of the weak. The liberal democratic state, whose forerunner was the Athenian Republic, respects and protects religion, unlike ignorant pseudo-liberals who naively and pretentiously attach political value to their aversion to religion. At the same time, though, liberal democracy is equally protective of individuals from religion, ensuring that its doctrines and principles are never enforced on citizens. On the whole, liberal democracy is astutely aware of its definite limits, which is why it refrains from providing “existential” or other similar psychotherapeutic “visions” to citizens – the freedom it upholds and strives towards is always a *political* freedom, not a *soteriological* one imbued with metaphysical and/or ascetical undertones. The disparity between these two versions of freedom cannot be overstated. Christ has given us an inspiring blueprint for exercising freedom from self-centredness, but it is not the state’s role to make us pious or virtuous people, just good citizens, inasmuch as its

role is regulatory, not soul-saving: democracy seeks to salvage freedoms and rights, alongside setting up civic obligations. At the end of the day, as history dramatically demonstrates, the safeguarding of human rights is certainly more ensured when it arises from the free consent of rational subjects rather than from “revealed truths.”

It is doubtlessly pleasing for all open-minded theologians that Orthodox Christianity is in possession of the aforementioned valuable tool known as the neo-Patristic concept of the person.<sup>22</sup> If properly applied in Church life, the notion could prove an excellent theological ally to any social struggle demanding justice and equality before the law for all people. Unfortunately, however, institutional Christianity generally recognizes only those rights that do not oppose its narrow (and permanently fixed) normative principles. As a result of its selective sensitivities, the Church is not only indifferent to the plight of groups of people socially viewed as disreputable, but even sides against them, often counter to all reason and reality. This sad truth has been earnestly pointed out by Professor Ioannis Petrou in his study on multiculturalism and human rights. “Usually, when religions are the majority in any given society,” Petrou says, “they could not care less about minorities; instead, they seek to impose their will on everyone, claiming it is for their own good. On the contrary, when they are in the minority, they stoutly demand the implementation of human rights and religious freedom”<sup>23</sup> – obviously in pursuance of their own protection and interests. As for the theologically nuanced term “personhood” in particular, Petrou is quick to deconstruct its boastful but cheap mention in what are at bottom ultraconservative neo-Orthodox circles. As he postulates, insofar as the Church likes to accentuate the notion of the person, it must uphold it consistently, in a manner encompassing every dimension of human freedom. Personhood, so defined, is intrinsically incompatible with stifling, oppressive power structures. In view of its very nature, the concept of the person does not fit in with abusive authority but with such ends as responsibility, freedom,

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22 The role of the Christian concept of personhood as a partial but significant contributor to the emergence of modern subjectivity and human rights, along with the achievements of modernity and secularism, has been acknowledged, among other scholars, by Larry Siedentop, see Larry Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism* (Cambridge MA: Harvard Belknap Press, 2014); Maureen P. Heath, *The Christian Roots of Individualism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). For a well-argued attempt to build an honest, meaningful bridge between liberal democracy and Orthodox Christianity, see Aristotle Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy* (Notre Dame IN: The University of Notre Dame Press, 2012).

23 Ioannis Petrou, *Πολυπολιτισμικότητα και θρησκευτική ελευθερία* [Multiculturalism and Religious Freedom] (Thessaloniki: Paratiritis Publications, 2003), 151.

uninhibited participation and inclusion, open processes, and dignified forms of relatedness.<sup>24</sup>

To understand how liberals and democratically minded theologians view social coexistence, we could benefit from an analogy brought to our attention by Metropolitan of Pergamon John Zizioulas. Inspired by the Christology of Chalcedon, Zizioulas reminds us that, in the Church, and by extension society, we are called to coexist *indivisibly* and yet *unconfusedly*. This formula combines unity in diversity, in the sense of applauding the vision of a common life, while also championing otherness as a fundamental component of the person. The ecclesiastical venue par excellence for enacting this balanced blueprint is the Eucharistic setting, whose celebration generates unity while always upholding the distinctiveness of persons. At a socio-political level, on the other hand, liberalism counterbalances oppressive modes of unity more successfully than alternative political models do, by consistently implementing in its vision the above two adverbs “indivisibly” and “unconfusedly” as crucial to the open, forward-looking society – in effect protecting the freedoms of thought, conscience, appearance and behaviour against the perils of ostracism and persecution.

To uphold these freedoms, however, one must first be willing to cast a detached, critical look at cultural traditions and inherited beliefs, instead of passively endorsing them as flawlessly sacrosanct – not necessarily with a view towards tarnishing or undoing them, but for the sake of breaking the chains of habit and blind reverence that hide their latent injustice from our view. After all, to begin with:

if our only possibility for meaningful existence lies in reclaiming pre-Enlightenment (medieval or ancient) cosmologies [and worldviews], as some thinkers seem to suggest, do we have any resources for meaningfully criticizing oppressive social regimes like those that ruled the roost in the Middle Ages? [...] [The need for such a critical mechanism becomes acutely apparent when taking into account that] these histories and traditions are not the monolithic apparatuses that communitarians and radical-orthodox thinkers are wont to claim.<sup>25</sup>

Christians are not relativists and cannot modify their core doctrine of God without giving up on the Gospel altogether. But as the relatively recent rediscovery of Christian eschatology indicates, history, from the biblical perspective

<sup>24</sup> Petrou, *Πολυπολιτισμικότητα*, 75.

<sup>25</sup> John Wall, William Schweiker and W. David Hall, “Introduction: Human Capability and Contemporary Moral Thought,” in *Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary Moral Thought*, ed. John Wall, William Schweiker and W. David Hall (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 6.

at least, is not deterministic and its future course is open-ended, entailing many surprising – even stunning – reversals of what is nowadays considered or has been thought of as natural and acceptable. This is true not as a result of capitulating to transient secular fashions and ideologies but because it is the business of the Holy Spirit to refresh history and the physical cosmos by creating new social and biological realities, as He guides the Church's vessel to the Kingdom's shore, to the *eschata*. The Church is still on the way to God's Kingdom, and so it is still in the process of formation – still open (ideally speaking) to new and unanticipated forms of grace that may currently offend our moral, social and cultural standards, even those favoured by the institutional churches. The theological implications of linking pneumatology so intimately with eschatology are staggering and far-reaching as their combination leaves plenty of room for bold reconsideration and progress with regard to anthropology and cosmology. If this sounds surprising, it is because we tend to forget that the biblical God is always ahead of us and does not seek our permission to upset the established order, including its ecclesiastical counterpart. The sharp iconoclasm of the Old Testament prophets, who vehemently challenged the religious establishment of their days, is a good witness to that, as is the breaking of nearly every sacred social and religious taboo by Christ in his earthly ministry. The upshot of these remarks is that Christians, while drawing from a cumulative tradition, must be future-oriented, looking towards the eschaton. This means that they must learn anew to open themselves up to the continuous enrichment and the new forms of grace created by the Holy Spirit who “blows where He wills” (John 3:8), unrestrained by our ethnic, racial, cultural and social prejudices or narrow-mindedness. As Greek theologian Pantelis Kalaitzidis beautifully remarks:

Christians do not worship the past, because they are turned toward the future, the *eschaton*, from which they await the fulfilment of their existence. This, however, is not a denial of the present, because the eschaton does not destroy but rather transforms history, turning it into eschatological history and imbuing it with meaning and purpose (cf. Heb. 13:14: For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come).

All of this dictates an attitude of anticipation and expectation, a tension between the “already” and the “not yet,” between the first and second comings of Christ: the anticipated general resurrection is not simply about a return to a Platonic protology or the reclamation of an original, ideal state but a new creative act of God, a complete and comprehensive renewal of all creation. Thus, the fullness and identity of the church is not located in the past or the present, in what the church was given as an institution or in what it is today,

but in the future, in the *eschaton*, in what it will become. As the scholia attributed to St. Maximus the Confessor note regarding symbols in the commentary on the *Corpus Areopagiticum*, “For the things of the Old Testament are shadow, the things of the New Testament are image, and those of the future state are truth.”<sup>26</sup> As the theology behind this passage suggests, there is plenty of room for considered innovation in the Christian faith, and it is the business of theology to spell out ways of making room for the new while maintaining the proper balance between past tradition and future enlargement – fallibility as well as innovation are virtues fit for the world’s faiths as well.

For all these and more reasons, it should be added by way of conclusion that the notion of “progress” should not scare or disconcert us Orthodox Christians as we move forward in our somewhat bumpy trajectory well into the 21st century. Contrary to what conservative theorists, more or less eschewers of liberal democracy (of the likes of Georges Sorel<sup>27</sup>, Karl Kraus, Max Nordau<sup>28</sup>, Oswald Spengler<sup>29</sup>, and others of the same ilk), were fond of rehashing, social and political progress is real and has been attained in a significant way. It may be very fragile and subject to terrible setbacks, but it has occurred and, more often than not, is the accomplishment of contractualist visionaries who dared to think – at least partially – outside the box of communal, inherited wisdom. “Freestanding,” namely liberal ethical and political concepts are not ghosts; they are real and concern the shared values that helped shape Western civilization as a tolerant, open-ended and forward-looking culture.

## Conclusion

In the public sphere, Christians are no less willing (or entitled) than others to proclaim their own vision of justice, featuring a world that respects the dignity of its citizens as living images of God. Drawing on its founding principles,

26 Pantelis Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy and Political Theology* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012), 110–2. Maximus’s saying at the end of Kalaitzidis’ passage comes from Maximus the Confessor, *Commentary on the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, PG 4, 137D. As noted by Kalaitzidis himself, today, most scholars attribute this work to John of Scythopolis.

27 Georges Sorel, *The Illusion of Progress*, Foreword by Robert A. Nisbet, John and Charlotte Stanley, trans. (Berkeley and Los Angeles CA: University of California Press, 1969). For a liberal critique of Sorel’s reactionary views of science and culture, see Isaiah Berlin, *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 296–332.

28 Max Simon Nordau, *Degeneration* (Eastford CT: Martino Fine Books, 2014).

29 Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, trans. Charles Francis Atkison (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

Christianity is indeed able to contribute constructively towards such efforts, albeit not in the sense of advancing a political project, i.e., on condition that Christians remain mindful of the insurmountable asymmetry between the heavenly and the earthy kingdoms. Losing sight of this asymmetry is precisely what liberals warn about. The alluring temptation facing Christians, shared by members of most organized religions, consists of the desire to make the world more *pious*, not *just*; in practical terms, this theocratic seduction is tantamount to forcing the coming of the Lord's Kingdom in history, with a view to establishing paradise on earth, even at the expense of people's freedoms and rights. The problem with utopias, secular and religious alike, however benevolent, is (as Karl Popper has wisely pointed out) that they inevitably end up being falsified by reality, which turns out to be much more complex and unpredictable than even the brightest utopians could ever imagine. Insofar as they rely on a single mind's soteriological plan, utopias are totalitarian from their very inception, as they allow for little or no room at all for the unexpected, for life's exceptions that inexorably contradict ambitious determinisms. To sustain themselves, theocracies and utopias are forced to grow murderous to the point of sacrificing people in the name of goals that have become ends in themselves: integral to them is a suffocating one-way road that nullifies critical thought, prevents contact with external reality and punishes any departure from the project's predetermined "official line." Any prospect for freedom and innovation in such a rigidly crafted system (secular or theocratic) is out of the question. Even the noblest of visionaries are predominantly conservative because, in their desire to change the world for the better, they want to change it at once and for all in a single way. This is why liberalism insists that, instead of new grand utopias, we need self-knowledge, realism, moderation, open-mindedness and compassion – the very things that utopias destroy – only to prove at the end of the day that small minds and endless carnage usually hide behind "great ideas."

The rejection of theocracy notwithstanding, liberalism is by no means an adversary of religion. Far from that, it should be considered a useful ally to faith and Christianity in particular, if anything, due to the categorical distinction between God and Caesar raised by Christ Himself in the Gospels. What institutional Christianity must accept, though, in our pluralistic post-Christian milieu is that while Christians enjoy complete freedom of speech and worship, as indeed they should, theirs is but one voice among several others claiming our attention. Liberals would agree that the Church, like other religious communities, must be free to win over people again but should not seek to do so with state support, counting for its success on the authority of the monarch and the police. Instead, the Church should learn to rely on the quality of its kerygma as a means of attracting people. The question is, however: Does its

voice meet the standards of quality expected from a hallowed institution of its stature? This is the sole fundamental question that should concern the Church nowadays. The answer depends on whether institutional Christianity has abrogated humanism for the sake of embracing legalism and state force as a way of remaining “afloat,” at the expense, of course, of being relative. The Church stands a chance to make its voice respected if it appears sincerely willing to engage in dialogue with modern society and its members – not as an immovable and self-righteous catechist, but as an empathetic listener of the pain and the anxieties of people, as something that remains alive to the anguish striking the world and learns from it, even as it brings this world to a free, sacramental union with Christ. It is a fundamental principle of Christianity that no one should be dragged to salvation in handcuffs. Liberalism ensures the observance on the political level of this valuable but often forgotten (by the institutional Church) principle as it uncompromisingly fights against the lecherous entanglement of the priesthood with Caesar. Thus, liberalism demonstrates in principle a more courageous resistance of the third temptation famously resisted by Christ atop the mountain than the historical Church has done.

# The Reception of Human Rights in the Eastern Orthodox Theology: Challenges and Perspectives

*Ioannis Kaminis*

## Introduction: The Notion of Human Rights

Human rights are ethical principles or social norms that set certain standards of human conduct and are protected as legal rights by domestic and international law.<sup>1</sup> They are generally regarded as inalienable, fundamental rights that every person possesses by birth simply because he or she is a human being, and these rights are inherent in all human beings regardless of their nationality, location, language, religion, ethnic origin or any other status.<sup>2</sup> Human rights are applicable everywhere and at all times in the sense that they are universal and also egalitarian because they are the same for every person. They require compassion and the rule of law and impose on every person the duty to respect the rights of others. They should not be taken away except as a result of due process or on the basis of specific circumstances.<sup>3</sup> For example, human rights may include freedom from unlawful detention, torture or execution.<sup>4</sup> As Andrew Clapham states, “Human rights are about each of us living in dignity. [...] [T]he human rights project is not simply about implementing a set of obligations fixed in history; rather, the human rights movement is about people standing up to injustice and showing solidarity in the face of

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1 James W. Nickel, *Making Sense of Human Rights: Philosophical Reflections on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1987), 1–27; idem, “Human Rights,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2021 edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rights-human/> (accessed 5 December 2021).

2 Magdalena Sepúlveda & Theo Van Banning et al., *Human Rights Reference Handbook* (Ciudad Colon: University of Peace, 2004), 6; United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *What are Human Rights?* <https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/pages/whatare-humanrights.aspx> (accessed 5 December 2021); B. H. Weston, “Human Rights,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 5 March 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/human-rights> (accessed 5 December 2021); Amnesty International UK, *What are Human Rights?* 24 July 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/what-are-human-rights> (accessed 5 December 2021).

3 United Nations Human Rights, *What are Human Rights?*

4 *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v., “Human Rights,” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/human%20rights>, (accessed 5 December 2021).

oppression.”<sup>5</sup> Moreover, we usually consider human rights to be a combination of universality, empathy, equality and the rule of law along with national or international enforcement mechanisms. However, we can also see them as an international mass movement that operates beyond the state system. Samuel Moyn, for example, sees them as “a set of global political norms providing the creed of a transnational social movement” or “an internationalism revolving around individual rights.”<sup>6</sup>

The human rights doctrine is a cornerstone of contemporary global politics, having a significant impact on international relations, international law, the work of global and regional institutions, the policies of individual states and the work of non-governmental organizations. As a matter of fact,

the doctrine of human rights is the articulation in the public morality of world politics of the idea that each person is a subject of global concern. It does not matter what a person’s spatial location might be or which political subdivision or social group the person might belong to. Everyone has human rights, and responsibilities to respect and protect these rights may, in principle, extend across political and social boundaries.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, human rights continue to provoke considerable skepticism as well as controversy about their scope, nature and justifiability. The precise meaning of the term “rights” is controversial in itself and subject to ongoing philosophical debate.<sup>8</sup> While there is consensus that human rights encompass a wide range of rights, such as the right to a fair trial, protection from slavery, prohibition of genocide, freedom of speech, right to education etc., there is no agreement as to which of these specific rights should be included in the general rights framework. Apart from this, we also

encounter the reaction that rights have to be implemented according to the cultural and economic context of the country concerned. This is sometimes seen as the death knell for the credibility of the so-called “universality” of human rights. It is, however, a mistake to imagine that human rights can, or should, operate

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5 Andrew Clapham, *Human Rights: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), xiii.

6 Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 11, 8; See also, Gary J. Bass, “The Old New Thing,” *The New Republic*, 20 October 2010, <https://newrepublic.com/article/78542/the-old-new-thing-human-rights> (accessed 5 December 2021); See also Samuel Moyn, *Christian Human Rights* (Philadelphia PA: University of Pennsylvania Press).

7 Charles R. Beitz, *The Idea of Human Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1.

8 Malcolm N. Shaw, *International Law*, 8th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 210–3.

divorced from any local context. Even the application of an accepted right, such as the right to life, can lead to different interpretations depending on the country context.<sup>9</sup>

Some authors argue that the definition of human rights should be relatively narrow so as to prevent the worst violations, while others advocate higher requirements.<sup>10</sup>

### The Origin of Human Rights

It is important for our study to determine first of all the origins of the idea of human rights in order to understand the current debate in the Orthodox world regarding them and their compatibility with Eastern Orthodoxy. Like any other idea, human rights did not come from nothing but are the product of philosophical and cultural evolution. What we can be sure of, however, is that the idea of human rights emerged in Europe. Unfortunately, there is a misconception that human rights are a product of the French Revolution and the Enlightenment. For example, the prominent Greek theologian and philosopher Christos Yannaras argues that

The institutionalization of the protection of individual rights defines European modernity. It marks the end of the experience of the “Middle Ages”: centuries of torture and insecurity of Western European man – oppression of the weakest by the most powerful social classes, of serfs by feudal lords, of the poorest by the most powerful classes, by the nobles and the clergy. But if, for specific historical reasons, the central and western part of Europe was submerged for many centuries in despotism and oligarchic arbitrariness, if with its altogether admirable “Renaissance” it managed to enter the pre-political phase of the establishment of the rights of the individual, this does not mean that the demand and achievement of politics has not been already historically known and realized.<sup>11</sup>

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9 Clapham, *Human Rights*, 47.

10 James W. Nickel, “Human Rights,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rights-human/> (accessed 6 December 2021); Alan Gewirth, “The Basis and Content of Human Rights,” *American Society for Political and Legal Philosophy Nomos*, vol 23, Human Rights (1981), 119–47; James Griffin, *On Human Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 78–82.

11 Christos Yannaras, *Ἡ Ἀπανθρωπία τοῦ Δικαιώματος* [The Inhumanity of Right] (Athens: Domos, 2006; my translation), 246.

I am not going to comment here on the superficial description of the Western Middle Ages, which clearly represents the author's ideological construct along with a dualistic view of European history that is not based on factual evidence. It is well known that Yannaras equates the Western Middle Ages with barbarity, putting history into black and white boxes. Of course, human societies are so much more complex than that, in the sense that people and nations cannot be boxed straightforwardly into a set of categories that accommodate our ideological constructs.<sup>12</sup>

First of all, the French historian of law Michel Villey brings to light the medieval and late medieval roots of modern legal philosophy, indicating that there was a continuity between the last medieval scholastics (notably Duns Scotus and William of Ockham) with the scholastics of the modern period (Francisco Suárez), along with the first great modern political thinkers. According to him, only this continuity allows us to understand how the idea that law has its source in the will of a superior power has been imposed. If modern thinkers such as Hobbes or Locke "secularize" the thought of the scholastic theologians, they do it by a simple replacement: actually, they substitute the will of the God by that of the sovereign, passing from theology of law to modern legal philosophy. Of course, Villey's thesis, simplified in this way, certainly does not do justice to the finesse of the argument and the concrete analyses proposed by him. In this spirit, Villey states that the modern idea of subjective rights is based in the nominalist philosophy of the 14th century and, more concretely, in the nominalist philosophy of William of Ockham.<sup>13</sup> Of course, like any strong thesis, Villey has also been questioned and criticized. All in all, however, his study prompted other scholars to look for the origins of natural rights and consequently human rights in the Middle Ages. Brian Tierney, for example, even though he criticizes Villey, acknowledges at the same time his contributions in this area. Nevertheless, according to Tierney, Villey has exaggerated the importance of Ockham as an innovator.<sup>14</sup> Tierney traces the origin of natural rights back to the earlier literature of Franciscan controversies, along with the

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12 For a more thorough critique of Yannaras' thesis, see Kristina Stoeckl, "The 'We' in Normative Political Philosophical Debates: The Position of Christos Yannaras on Human Rights," in Alfons Brüning and Evert van der Zweerde (eds.), *Orthodox Christianity and Human Rights* (Leuven: Peeters, 2012): 187–201; Aristotle Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 89–92.

13 Michel Villey, *La Formation de la pensée juridique moderne* (Paris: PUF, 2013), 225–6, 261.

14 Brian Tierney, *The Idea of Natural Rights: Studies on Natural Rights, Natural Law, and Church Law 1150–1625* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 35.

writings of certain medieval canonists. It is very interesting to note Tierney's observation that

if we go back to the early days of the Order, the whole Franciscan movement can be seen as a culmination in the religious sphere of the personalism or individualism that also influenced twelfth-century law. From the beginning, there was a special kind of individualism in Francis's attitude to the world around him; he did not love mankind in the abstract but particular men and women. Francis laid down in his Rule that all the brothers were to obey their superiors, but then added: "in everything that is not against their conscience."<sup>15</sup>

We also have to mention that, according to Tierney, natural rights and consequently human rights started to evolve during the Middle Ages and more concretely in the 12th century and afterwards. For example, the ancient Greeks had no doctrine of natural rights and whether they had any concept of subjective rights it is still being discussed. In addition, early Christianity did not have any concept of natural or subjective rights either. As Tierney points out: "Paul wrote of a law written on the hearts of men; but he did not assert that 'all men are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights'."<sup>16</sup> Tierney also cites numerous examples from the Middle Ages that show the evolution of natural rights during this period, and he substantiates his position by presenting various texts related to the language of canonistic rights.<sup>17</sup> Particularly interesting and important is his observation concerning the interpretation of Jean Gerson of 1 Corinthians 6:12, "All things are lawful." According to Tierney, Gerson associates *ius natural* with Paul's text, transforming the ceremonial Jewish precepts "into a more generalized doctrine of natural liberties," and "it was not that Christianity first conferred rights on its followers; rather, by not imposing the restrictions of the Old Law it left them free to exercise their pre-existing natural rights."<sup>18</sup>

To summarize, it is clear from the sources that Tierney puts forward the seminal idea by Villey that natural rights and therefore human rights derive from a particular interpretation and development of Christianity that took place in Western Europe. This means that human rights are not a product of secularization, the Renaissance or the Enlightenment, as Yannaras implies. On

15 Tierney, *The Idea of Natural Rights*, 35; See also Paolo Grossi, "Usus facti: La nozione di proprietà nella inaugurazione dell'età nuova," *Quaderni Forentini per la storia del pensiero giuridico moderno I* (1972), 285–355. In this paper, Grossi deals with the Franciscan stress on the individual will as the origin of subjective rights.

16 Tierney, *The Idea of Natural Rights*, 46.

17 Tierney, *The Idea of Natural Rights*, 58–77.

18 Tierney, *Ἡ Ἀπανθροπία τοῦ Δικαιώματος*, 68.

the contrary, we could in a way argue that secularization itself is a product of Christianity, of the freedom that Christianity provides to the human spirit. Paul's saying, "All things are lawful," is ultimately prophetic; what matters is personal responsibility, not some external heteronomous force that imposes its will on the individual, subordinating her to the collective.

Yannaras has a holistic approach related to the so-called "ecclesiastical event." He points to the continuity and heritage of the assembly of citizens in the democratic city states of ancient Greece and their relation to the Christian church (*ecclesia*). The fact that the same word (*ecclesia*) is being used for the assembly of the citizens in the city state does not, however, mean that it denotes the same thing or that it is invested with the same meaning. With this leap of imagination, the Greek theologian identifies to some extent the political art that he considers to "the struggle of co-shaping with the rationality of the harmony of relationships – the way of the actual being, the universal common reason that ensures participation in existential truth and genuineness,"<sup>19</sup> with the "ontological basis of politics, which will more fully clarify the Christian experience."<sup>20</sup>

It is obvious that Yannaras' ideological construct has nothing to do with historical reality since the Christian church not only had nothing to do with Athens' political democracy but was born within an imperial and, to some extent, totalitarian and authoritarian regime that later actively supported it and was supported by it when it became the official religion of the Roman-Byzantine state. On the other hand, the emergence of democracy in the city states of ancient Greece – or in some of them because the ancient Greek world is not characterized only by democracy but also by oligarchy – is not only related to metaphysical philosophy but to economic, geographical and social causes that Yannaras either ignores or simply does not take into account. Modern studies attempt to explain the phenomenon of democracy in the city states, basing it, however, not on philosophical arguments but on actual evidence.<sup>21</sup>

19 Yannaras, *Ἡ Ἀπανθρωπία τοῦ Δικαιώματος*, 49.

20 Yannaras, *Ἡ Ἀπανθρωπία τοῦ Δικαιώματος*, 49–50.

21 For more on this, see Josiah Ober, *Mass and Elite In Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989); idem, *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens: Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998); idem, *Democracy and Knowledge: Innovation and Learning in Classical Athens* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); idem, *The Rise and Fall of Classical Greece* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); idem, *The Athenian Revolution: Essays on Ancient Greek Democracy and Political Theory* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Melissa Schwartzberg, "A Discussion of Josiah Ober's *The Rise and Fall of Classical Greece*," *Perspectives on Politics* 14, no. 4 (2016): 1144–5, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592716003212>.

The truth is that Christianity began as a radical, almost revolutionary, theory that united people regardless of gender, ethnicity or social class. Later, however, it was appropriated by the Roman Empire and became an official religion, losing to some extent its radicalism, which nevertheless persisted in certain monastic circles and individuals.<sup>22</sup> The imperial structure, however, remained autocratic and centralized, not conducive to the independence of the individual nor to the emergence of natural and, by extension, individual rights. The successful combination of the emergence of the latter was achieved in the West precisely because social structures were feudal and fragmented. Tierney describes this fact brilliantly:

Since neither the spiritual nor temporal power could wholly dominate the other, medieval government never congealed into a rigid theocratic absolutism in which rights theories could never have taken root. Instead, in the vigorous, fluid, expanding society of the twelfth century, old rights were persistently asserted and new ones insistently demanded.<sup>23</sup>

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22 A great example of such an individual is St. Maximus the Confessor, who refused to submit to the official doctrine of the Byzantine authorities and was consequently condemned, had his tongue and his right hand cut off and died in exile. By today's standards, this saint could be considered a true dissenter or anarchist for the greater glory of God. If he was living in 19th-century Russia he would have been sent to Siberia as a political criminal. Regarding the anarchist dimension of the teaching of St. Maximus the Confessor, see Emma Brown Dewhurst, "To Each According to their Needs: Anarchist Praxis as a Resource for Byzantine Theological Ethics," in *Essays in Anarchism and Religion*, ed. Alexandre Christoyannopoulos and Matthew S. Adams, volume II (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2018). For more on anarchism and Christianity from a political science perspective, see Alexandre J. M. E. Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism: A Political Commentary on the Gospel* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2010); for anarchism from an Orthodox Christian perspective, see Davor Džalto, *Anarchy and the Kingdom of God: From Eschatology to Orthodox Political Theology and Back* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2021). Here we should also note what Pantelis Kalaitzidis says about the early church supporting his argument in the *Epistle to Diognetus* in Pantelis Kalaitzidis, "Church and Nation in Eschatological Perspective," *The Wheel* 17/18 (Spring/Summer 2019), 52–3: "The early church was not just a voluntary association for 'religious' purposes. It was rather the New Society, even the New Humanity, a *polis* or *politeuma*, the true City of God, in the process of construction. [...] [T]he church was conceived as an independent and self-supporting social order, as a new social dimension, a peculiar *systema patridos*, as Origen put it. Early Christians felt themselves, in the last resort, quite outside of the existing social order, simply because for them the church itself was an 'order', an extra-territorial 'colony of Heaven' on earth. Nor was this attitude fully abandoned even later [in Byzantium] when the empire, as it were, came to terms with the church."

23 Tierney, *The Idea of Natural Rights*, 55.

He continues by saying that a feudal lord could simultaneously enjoy all the rights enumerated in Hohfeld's modern classification,<sup>24</sup> the claim to rents and services, the power to administer justice, immunity from external jurisdictions or the freedom to hunt, for example, in the neighboring forest. There was undoubtedly a situation of pluralism and class struggle, but the problems were solved by the establishment of the rights of each class and not by revolutionary violence:<sup>25</sup>

Cathedral canons asserted their rights against bishops. Bishops and barons demanded their rights against kings. Newly-founded communes sometimes bought their rights and sometimes fought for them. Even peasants, emigrating to found new villages in the still vast expanses of forest and wasteland, could claim enhanced liberties from lords who needed fresh supplies of labor. Medieval people first struggled for survival, then they struggled for rights.<sup>26</sup>

Theologian Konstantinos Delikostantis has a more comprehensive and systematic view of human rights that is based on an Orthodox point of view. He underlines the universal value of human rights and analyzes in a convincing way the affinity between human rights and the rights that Christianity offers. By exploring the historical roots and relations between the doctrine of human rights and Christianity, he emphasizes that "human rights have inherited much from Christianity, but they have conflicted with it, and he is certain that they express a different idea of freedom than the Christian one."<sup>27</sup> The tension that exists between Christianity and modernity today must lead to a creative dialogue and not to a fruitless conflict. The reason is that, if we want to understand and realize human rights, "an enlightened society of believers is better than a society that is comprised only of believers." The same author concludes that

24 Nikolai Lazarev, "Hohfeld's Analysis of Rights: An Essential Approach to a Conceptual & Practical Understanding of the Nature of Rights," *Murdoch University Electronic Journal of Law* 12, nos. 1–2 (2005), <http://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/MurdochUeJlLaw/2005/9.html> (accessed 8 December 2021).

25 Clapham, *Human Rights*, 12; speaking of revolutionary violence, it is interesting that Karl Marx did not like the idea of human rights because he believed that rights were not useful in creating a new political community, according to Clapham: "For Marx, these rights stressed the individual's egoistic preoccupations, rather than providing human emancipation from religion, property and law" (*Human Rights*, 12).

26 B. Tierney, *The Idea of Natural Rights*, 55; Alan Harding, "Political Liberty in the Middle Ages," *Spectrum* 55 (1980), 423–43; Alan MacFarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism: The Family Property and Social Transition* (New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

27 For this and the following two quotes, see Konstantinos Delikostantis [Κώστας Δελικωσταντής], *Τὰ Δικαιώματα τοῦ Ἀνθρώπου: Δυτικό Ἰδεολόγημα ἢ Οἰκουμενικό ἦθος?* [*Human Rights: A Western Ideology or Ecumenical Ethos?*] (Thessaloniki: Kyriakides, 1995), 73.

“Church and theology cannot ignore the great importance of human rights.” As for the Orthodox tradition, Delikostantis maintains that the idea of human dignity has been developed differently in the East and the West:

Human freedom, which is a gift of the divine grace, does not insist on claiming rights but considers itself embedded in a web of love, which is realized as a constant self-overcoming and movement towards one’s fellow human being. The fundamental human right that can be inferred from the thought of Orthodox spirituality is the right “to love God in the fellow human being, to love one’s fellow human being for God’s sake.”<sup>28</sup>

In contrast to the notion of human dignity and freedom developed in the West, which, according to Delikostantis is quite individualistic and self-centered, Orthodox spirituality is “identified with freedom as community and love”,<sup>29</sup> that is, Orthodoxy is characterized by a “particular communality,”<sup>30</sup> while for Orthodoxy God Himself is a community of persons and this divine community has no relation to individualistic salvation but “communalizes” every human being. For Delikostantis, “the Orthodox theological foundation and interpretation of human rights open up the horizon of the social dimension of human freedom. The ethos of responsible freedom, which the human rights express, is recognized, while their essential social meaning is restored.”<sup>31</sup> Thus, human rights are part of universal tradition that stresses the love of others and has reconciled freedom and love, the individual and the society, while uniting people and cultures and honored the human person. The depth of Orthodox ethos can be revealed only in dialogue with human rights and modernity. Delikostantis points to the value and goal that human rights can have for Orthodox theology if they are interpreted accordingly because such an interpretation can help one break away from fanaticism and sterile dogmatism on the one hand and provide the initiation of dialogue with contemporary philosophical currents and modernity on the other. Sincere and open-minded dialogue is the only way for the Eastern Orthodox Church to avoid isolation and to communicate with the modern world.

The question that arises here is the following: If the doctrine of natural and thus human rights has its roots to some extent in Christianity and more specifically in the experience of Western Middle Ages, then what happened in the Christian East? Could there have been a similar development there as

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28 Delikostantis, *Τὰ Δικαιώματα τοῦ Ἀνθρώπου*, 79.

29 Delikostantis, *Τὰ Δικαιώματα τοῦ Ἀνθρώπου*, 80.

30 For this and the next quote, see Delikostantis, *Τὰ Δικαιώματα τοῦ Ἀνθρώπου*, 76.

31 Delikostantis, *Τὰ Δικαιώματα τοῦ Ἀνθρώπου*, 82.

well? This is a question of grave importance that requires historical analysis. To some extent, Eastern Orthodoxy is sufficiently pluralistic to embrace human rights, but its intolerance of modernity is due to historical and theological reasons that will be examined in the fourth part of this contribution.

### Christianity as a Source of Human Rights and Individualism

Christianity acted largely as a precursor to human rights, the rise of the subject and individuality. As Pantelis Kalaitzidis notes, Christianity has led to the

de-secralization of Caesar and civil authority; the release of the human being from religious subordination and submission to the city, the state or the sacralized civil authority and biological subordination to the tribe, the patriarchal family, the clan and the family group; to the new emphasis given by the Gospel on the unrepeatable uniqueness and value of the human person [...] What else was ultimately the early Christian struggle for the 'right' to conversion, if not the 'right' of individuals to free themselves from their ancestors' religious beliefs, or from their community tradition, as prerequisites for adopting Christian faith?"<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, P. Kalaitzidis substantiates the aforementioned argument by taking into account the "analysis of the phenomenon of spiritual autobiography, as it is exemplified by Augustine in the Latin West, but especially by Gregory of Nazianzus in the Greek East."<sup>33</sup> In light of these facts, it seems that Christianity provides something more in the way of thinking about the human being and the individual, something that seems to have been missing from the pagan Greco-Roman society of that time.

In general, there is a lack of depth and an understatement concerning human rights found in Orthodox writers. Undoubtedly, Yannaras' view of human rights is part of his general polemic towards the West, the selective collection of studies that support his position, and an imaginary view of Orthodoxy representing authentic Christianity as opposed to the West, which supposedly distorted Christianity. The identification of the West with barbarism is also wrong because by today's standards we can accuse the Byzantine Empire of the same

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32 Pantelis Kalaitzidis, "Individual versus Collective Rights: The Theological Foundation of Human Rights. An Eastern Orthodox View," in *Orthodox Christianity and Human Rights in Europe: A Dialogue Between Theological Paradigms and Socia-Legal Pragmatics*, ed. Elisabeth-Alexandra Diamantopoulou and Louis-Léon Christians (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2018), 288.

33 Kalaitzidis, "Individual versus Collective Rights," 289.

barbarism, which was also institutionalized.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, the opinion held by Archbishop Anastasios of Albania is also ambivalent. The fact that he suggests that Orthodox theologians and members of the church should engage in the dialogue about human rights while maintaining the (Orthodox) theological conceptual framework indicates the fact that Orthodox hierarchs do not understand that human rights are already established in the consciousness of human beings, men and women alike. Aphorisms such as “the contents of human rights documents are just beginnings; they do nothing to safeguard the dignity of persons against domination of their egos”<sup>35</sup> seem void of meaning because, in my opinion, human rights can prevent actual atrocities or at least provide a practical framework for condemning violence against human beings.

The situation is more aggravated if we take into account *The Russian Orthodox Church's Basic Teaching on Human Dignity Freedom and Rights*.<sup>36</sup> The introduction of the document sets the tone, which is in contrast with the human rights doctrine: “Christians have found themselves in a situation where public and social structures can force and often have already forced them to think and act contrary to God’s commandments, thus obstructing their way towards the most important goal in human life, which is deliverance from sin and finding salvation.” The problem here is that human rights project a universal moral framework and a view of the human being that can be applied to all people regardless of their religious beliefs, while the Orthodox Christian framework sets deliverance from “sin” and finding “salvation” as the goal of

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34 Here we can refer to the persecutions, exclusions and purges of “heretics” and all kinds of dissenters from the “one and only truth,” from the official doctrine of imperial Christianity, which was formulated by the Ecumenical Councils. The massacre of 30,000 civilian Byzantine subjects by Justinian and Theodora at the Hippodrome of Constantinople in 532 AD was an actual inhuman event that was established *de facto* and *de jure* in the principle of absolute monarchy. The ruthless controversy between iconoclasts and icon worshipers lasted from 727 to 843 AD with numerous victims on both sides, along with the destruction of works of art and books. There was the inhuman act, one of the greatest atrocities in human history, by Emperor Basil II the Bulgar Slayer following his victory at Kleidion (1014 AD): he divided 15,000 Bulgarian captives into companies of one hundred men each, blinded 99 in each company and removed one eye from the hundredth in order to lead the remaining blind soldiers! When King Samuel of the Bulgarians saw this, he fainted and died shortly afterwards of a heart attack. The above facts indicate that the situation in the Byzantine Empire was far from the idealized version that some Orthodox writers support.

35 Anastasios Yannoulatos, “Eastern Orthodoxy and Human Rights,” *International Review of Mission* 73 (1984), 454–66.

36 Nanovic Institute for European Studies, University of Notre Dame, “The Russian Orthodox Church’s Basic Teaching on Human Dignity Freedom and Rights,” [https://nanovic.nd.edu/assets/17001/seminar\\_ii\\_russian\\_orth\\_church.pdf](https://nanovic.nd.edu/assets/17001/seminar_ii_russian_orth_church.pdf).

human being. Again, I think that terms such as “sin” and “salvation” cannot be a part of a sincere dialogue with the human rights doctrine. In the same vein, a Buddhist can object to human rights by saying that the goal of the human being is *nirvāṇa*, while not taking into account that human rights refer to the human person on a whole different level that transcends any religious dimension. According to the same text:

In Orthodoxy the dignity and ultimate worth of every human person are derived from the image of God, while dignified life is related to the notion of God’s likeness achieved through God’s grace by efforts to overcome sin and to seek moral purity and virtue. Therefore, the human being as bearing the image of God should not exult in this lofty dignity, for it is not his own achievement but a gift of God. Nor should he use it to justify his weaknesses or vices, but rather understand his responsibility for the direction and way of his life. Clearly, the idea of responsibility is integral to the very notion of dignity. (I.2)

It is God alone as the source of freedom Who can maintain it in a human being. Those who do not wish to part with sin give away their freedom to the devil, the enemy of God and the father of evil and captivity. While recognizing the value of freedom of choice, the Church affirms that this freedom will inevitably disappear if the choice is made in favor of evil. Evil and freedom are incompatible [...]. (II.2)

As Kristina Stoeckl states:

the difference between the secular and the religious understanding is straightforward: secular documents postulate human dignity as a natural quality of human beings, while the religious document links human dignity to the act of divine creation. In both cases human dignity is an inalienable quality of the human being, but in the first this inalienability lies within human nature, while in the second it lies with the divine will.<sup>37</sup>

I do not think there is any need to dwell on the ROC document. Its weaknesses are obvious, while its discourse is purely religious, with the goal of contrasting religious-Christian terminology to the language of human rights. On this point, I agree with Stoeckl who states that “even when a conservative religious tradition like Russian Orthodoxy engages in the work of ‘translation’, what it renders understandable to a secular audience is far from reconcilable

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37 Kristina Stoeckl, “The Russian Orthodox Church’s Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Liberty, and Rights: Analysis and Interpretation,” in Lucian Leustean (ed.), *The Russian Church and Human Rights* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 71; in this study Stoeckl offers a thorough analysis of the document in question.

with liberal democracy.”<sup>38</sup> I also agree with the critical statements by Aristotle Papanikolaou<sup>39</sup> and Pantelis Kalaitzidis<sup>40</sup> on the same document. For my part, what I would like to note is the absence of the concept of love in the Russian text. It is interesting that love is presented mainly in the context of love for the homeland and compatriots, and not for the whole world, love for the stranger, and the totally “other.” The text points out that “human rights should not contradict love for one’s homeland and neighbors” (III.4), which means that the homeland is superior to human rights, probably even if my “homeland” sends me to an unjust or war of conquest against other people. I do not think that such ideas are compatible with Christian teaching, St. Paul’s hymn to love in 1 Corinthians 13:1–13 or with the *Epistle to Diognetus*, which states that for Christians “every foreign country is fatherland to them, and every fatherland is foreign.” This brand of moralistic, legalistic and nationalistic Christianity seems more like a Christianity of compromises, a Christianity that has succumbed to the so-called temptation of Judas, an issue not only for the ROC but for the most autocephalous Orthodox Churches.<sup>41</sup> This stance of the ROC can be explained historically. In fact, ever since the time of Joseph Stalin, the ROC has gradually begun to become an instrument of influence on behalf of the foreign policy of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The unsuccessful attempts of the ROC as early the late 1940s and early 1950s to convene a “Pan-Orthodox Synod” in Moscow are well known; its aim was to declare itself an Orthodox Vatican and to govern the rest of the autocephalous churches. Although the Soviet authorities continued to persecute the Church in the areas under their control, this policy remained the same throughout the entire historical period of the USSR and even after the formation of the Russian Federation in 1991. It is in this context that we understand the hostility and constant attacks by the Russian media against the leader of the Orthodox Church, namely, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. Nevertheless, the truth is that Russian pressure on the Patriarchate of Constantinople began as early as the Ottoman period and has gradually increased with the emergence of Pan-Slavism in the Russian Empire and the countries under its influence. At

38 Stoeckl, “The Russian Orthodox Church’s Basic Teaching,” 75.

39 Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, 93–95.

40 Kalaitzidis, “Individual versus Collective Rights,” 277–9.

41 Panteleimon Kalaitzidis, “The Temptation of Judas: Church and National Identities,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 47, nos. 1–4 (2002), 357–79; Rev. John Chryssavgis, “Alfeyev & Lavrov/A Glimpse into Church-State Relations in Russia,” *Volos Academy for Theological Studies*, 2 July 2011, <https://acadimia.org/en/news-announcements/topic-article/876-rev-john-chryssavgis-alfeyev-lavrov-a-glimpse-into-church-state-relations-in-russia> (accessed 6 December 2021).

present, the government of the Russian Federation, represented by President Putin's party "United Russia," clearly exploits pro-Orthodox, communist, far-right and nationalist parties and groups in the Balkans to consolidate its influence and to strengthen anti-European and anti-Western sentiments. The nationalist Russian version of Orthodox politics has been used in the international arena and was fully activated during the war in Ukraine, thus making Orthodoxy an important political factor in international relations. What is essentially happening in the Russian Federation today, according to the Russian priest and historian Yakov Krotov, is the "nationalization of Orthodoxy" and its transformation into government ideology while the ROC assumes "the functions of a colonel military chaplain, who performs administrative duties."<sup>42</sup> Since 2001, President Vladimir Putin, a former KGB officer, and the Patriarch Kyrill of Moscow have been collaborating to restore the Soviet regime and systematically reject universally accepted human rights while presenting a distorted and false image of Orthodoxy as an "anti-Western ideology" and substitute for European democratic values. This kind of distorted ideology is promoted systematically by pro-Russian media, especially in the Balkans and countries with predominantly Eastern Orthodox believers, as a political alternative that can replace democracy, freedom and human rights.<sup>43</sup>

Another more recent text that we would like to consider is the text *For the Life of The World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church*<sup>44</sup>, which contains a separate section dedicated to the human rights issue. This text intends to continue the engagement with modernity initiated by the Holy and Great Council of Crete in 2016. In view of some new issues and challenges, additional efforts were needed to provide new impulses for the Church and its faithful. A

42 Dilyan Nikolchev, "Политическа религия и православна църква в източна и югоизточна Европа – политически процеси и тенденции," ["Political Religion" and Orthodox Church in Eastern and Southeastern Europe – Political Processes and Tendencies] *Християнство и Култура* 4, no. 91 (2014), 36 [in Bulgarian].

43 Patriarch Kyrill, "Выступление Святейшего Патриарха Кирилла на торжественном открытии III Ассамблеи Русского мира," [Address by His Holiness Patriarch Kyrill at the official opening of the Third Assembly of the Russian World], Русская Православная Церковь, November 3, 2009 <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/928446.html> (accessed 11 December 2021) [in Russian]; see also Sveto Riboloff, "Η Άγία και Μεγάλη Σύνοδος και ό Όρθόδοξος νεοσυντηρητισμός" [The Holy and Great Council and Orthodox Neoconservatism], paper presented at the 8th International Conference of Orthodox Theology under the Auspices of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Thessaloniki, 21–25 May 2018.

44 <https://www.goarch.org/social-ethos>; see also Dietman Schon, *Berufen zur Verwandlung der Welt: Die Orthodoxe Kirche in sozialer und ethischer Verantwortung* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 2021).

comparison with the documents of the Council shows that the *Social Ethos* text is quite significant in this regard. Moreover, the ideas of the text are addressed to a global audience and not only to countries with a predominantly Orthodox population. There is an obvious realization that globalization is now a fact and that we live in a world in which we depend on each other. That is why the *Social Ethos* text emphasizes that: "There can be no such thing as 'Christian nationalism', or even any form of nationalism tolerable to Christian conscience."<sup>45</sup> This statement is totally opposite to what ROC's text says about the homeland. It is also very important that the Orthodox Church seems – perhaps for the first time – to be moving beyond Byzantinism and its preoccupation with the once glorious past. This means, in part, that it does not only agree to enter into dialogue with modernity but also to accept certain aspects of it that have already been established in social life. That is why this text points out the following:

The Orthodox Church earnestly seeks unity with all Christians out of love and desire to share the spiritual riches of her tradition with all who seek the face of Christ. Moreover, it understands that the particular cultural forms of tradition must not be confused with either the true apostolic authority or the sacramental grace with which it has been entrusted. The Church seeks sustained dialogue with Christians of other communions in order to offer them a full understanding of the beauty of Orthodoxy, not in order to convert them to some cultural "Byzantinism." It does so also in order to learn from the experiences of Christians throughout the world, to understand the many cultural expressions of Christianity, and to seek unity among all who call upon the name of Jesus. (6.51)

It becomes apparent that the Ecumenical Patriarchate has assumed a leading global role and can address not only Orthodox Christians but humanity as a whole. Thus, its approach is not exclusively narrow or confessional like that of the ROC but involves a broader global context. Furthermore, the Ecumenical Patriarchate takes heed of the "signs of the times," such as the pluralism of Christian denominations, religions and different worldviews. For example, the *Social Ethos* text does not take sides in the cultural wars related to sexuality but transcends sexuality itself, since the identity of the human being is not based on her sexual preferences but on something more important, that is, the fact that she is an image of God:

A great many political and social debates in the modern world turn upon the distinct demands and needs of heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, and other sexual "identities." It is true, as a simple physiological and psychological fact, that the nature of individual sexual longing is not simply a consequence of private

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45 Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, "For the Life of the World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church," <https://www.goarch.org/social-ethos>.

choice regarding such matters; many of the inclinations and longings of the flesh and the heart to a great extent come into the world with us and are nourished or thwarted – accepted or obstructed – in us at an early age. It must be accounted, moreover, a basic right of any person – which no state or civil authority may presume to violate – to remain free from persecution or legal disadvantage as a result of his or her sexual orientation. But the Church understands human identity as residing primarily not in one's sexuality or in any other private quality, but rather in the image and likeness of God present in all of us. (III.18)

Thus, the social ethos of the Orthodox Church, as expressed in this document, is an ethos of reconciliation and love. Furthermore, the text of the *Social Ethos* acknowledges the importance of human rights and traces its Christian roots: "It is not by chance that the language of human rights, as well as legal conventions and institutions devised to protect and advance those rights, notably arose in nations whose moral cultures had been formed by Christian beliefs" (VII.61). Moreover, in addition to recognizing the importance of human rights, the text also encourages believers to embrace and promote them: "Orthodox Christians, then, may and should happily adopt the language of human rights when seeking to promote justice and peace among peoples and nations, and when seeking to defend the weak against the powerful, the oppressed against their oppressors, and the indigent against those who seek to exploit them" (VII.61). Undoubtedly, the text does not replace Orthodox ethics by the doctrine of human rights, while recognizing and accepting them, without being assimilated by them. This means that Christian freedom is something that transcends rules and measures and cannot be confined solely to human rights.

To be fully free is to be joined to that for which one's nature was originally framed, and for which, in the depths of one's soul, one ceaselessly longs. The conventions of human rights cannot achieve this freedom for any of us; but those conventions can help to assure individuals and communities liberty from an immense variety of destructive and corrupting forces that too often conspire to thwart the pursuit of true freedom. (VII.61)

It is evident that the Orthodox Church accords with the language of human rights, but, in addition, the text of the *Social Ethos* goes further, stressing the importance of social rights such as "the right to free universal health care, equally available to persons of every economic condition, the right to social security pensions and provisions for the elderly sufficient to insure them dignity and comfort in their last years, the right to infant care, and the right to adequate welfare provisions for the indigent and disabled" (VII.63). Unquestionably, this approach is relevant to the signs of the times because it seems that the problems the world community faces can no longer be solved by invoking the doctrine of human rights. The latter used to be a convenient

framework for cooperation between nation states, but decisions are taken today at the global level, with nation states taking a less active part. Moreover, with the coronavirus crisis we have seen how global institutions have taken responsibility for managing the health crisis. What we need even more now is a global ethics, ethics based on love and the relation with the “other.” This is an ethic of relationality that can be traced in the Trinitarian teaching of the Orthodox Church and especially with the interpretation of this teaching by Metropolitan of Pergamon John Zizioulas.<sup>46</sup>

### **The Historical Compatibility of Eastern Orthodoxy with the Doctrine of Human Rights: The Lost Opportunity for Byzantine Humanism**

A crucial question that arises from the analysis so far is the following: Why do we observe such an intolerance of the doctrine of human rights in the Orthodox world? The Orthodox often believe that the only right way to confront the West or the image of the West that they have in mind is to react against any real change or to adopt a stance of sterile negativism. It is as if they suffer from a fear of persecution, of feeling constantly threatened by the West, which is supposedly planning the erosion of the Orthodox East. This mentality leads to an absolutism, a form of orthodox integralism and theories that not only do not help Orthodoxy but keep it stuck in an imaginary past. This peculiar conservatism often manifests itself in the idealization of the golden age of the church fathers, the praising of the Byzantine system of *symphonia* and the attachment to a monastic morality that seems outlandish and very far from the issues that the modern world faces.<sup>47</sup>

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46 For this, see John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997); Aristotle Papanikolaou, “Personhood and its Exponents in Twentieth-Century Orthodox Theology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Metropolitan John (Zizioulas), “Communion and Otherness,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, vol. 38 no. 4 (1994), 347–61; idem, “The Church as Communion,” keynote lecture given at the World Council of Churches’ Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, Santiago de Compostela, Spain, 3–14 August 1993, *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 16 (1994), 3–16.

47 Nikolaos Asproulis, “Orthodoxy or Death’: Religious Fundamentalism during the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries,” in *Fundamentalism or Tradition: Christianity after Secularism*, ed. Aristotle Papanikolaou and George E. Demacopoulos (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), 180–204.

The above characteristics marked the thought of many famous Orthodox thinkers. Father John S. Romanides, for example, constructed the idea of *Romiosyne*, a Manichaean political theory based in an East versus Latin (Roman Catholic) narrative, where the West wants to erode the Orthodox “Romiosyne,”<sup>48</sup> both the Greek and Latin-speaking, by imposing the heretical “Francosyne.” As Pantelis Kalaitzidis notes, “hereafter, the West is wholly demonized and proclaimed responsible for all the misfortunes of the Orthodox, both theological and historical/national.”<sup>49</sup> A similar anti-Western view has also been constructed by Yannaras since he sees only nihilism and a “religionized” Christianity in the West. It is interesting, however, to note that Yannaras has been influenced by Martin Heidegger, the famous German existentialist philosopher, in constructing these ideas.<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately, in this kind of anti-Western ideas, monastic circles play a pivotal role in opposing any attempt for dialogue with the West by identifying it with the “antichrist” or with “evil.” Actually, most monastic circles in Orthodox countries are the avant-garde of fundamentalism and anti-Westernism, being almost uncontrollable and influencing a large percentage of Orthodox Christians. Most of the time, this anti-Western sentiment goes hand in hand with fundamentalism. Bearing in mind the conservatism that permeates in Orthodoxy, the detachment of theology from reality and the great influence of monastic circles on the faithful, the chances of theology being controlled only by fundamentalist clerics are even greater, and in such an environment not only human rights but also modernity will be rejected more and more while Orthodoxy is transformed into Orthodoxism.

This tendency, however, has its roots in Orthodox theology itself and, more concretely, in the rejection of a “humanistic” theology that could transform the Byzantine Empire and bring it closer to the West, especially before the emergence of Hesychasm. The turn that Byzantine thought and consequently Orthodox theology took with Hesychasm was a turn towards a closed spirituality, isolated in the monastery, detached from the outside world and largely indifferent to the developments in society. It is exactly this kind of spirituality

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48 In the thought of Father John S. Romanides, the term “Riomiosyne” does not have a Greek nationalistic character; rather, it defines all the Orthodox Christians East and West that stay true to the Orthodox fathers and adhere to the sacramental and hesychastic tradition of the Orthodox Church.

49 Pantelis Kalaitzidis, “The Image of the West in Contemporary Greek Theology,” in *Orthodox Constructions of the West*, ed. George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 143.

50 Basilio Petrà, “Christos Yannaras and the Idea of ‘Dysis,’” in *Orthodox Constructions of the West*, 161–80.

that is promoted today as ideal for all Christians, regardless of whether they are monks or laypeople, and many consider it to be the only authentic Orthodoxy. Here we would like to add that the relations between monasticism and scholarship in Byzantium were usually characterized by mutual dislike, while Byzantine monasteries – in contrast to Western ones – took a rather hostile stance towards the teachings of antiquity.<sup>51</sup> This stance had been strengthened even more in the Orthodox tradition by the affirmation of St. Gregory Palamas' teaching and the adoption of this teaching as the foundation of the anti-Thomist and more generally the anti-Latin debate in the 14th century. Not all monks were against secular knowledge, however, and some of them had rather interesting theological opinions that can be related to the Christian tradition of the West. One example was Nikephoros Blemmydes (1197–1272) who was closely interested in secular disciplines.<sup>52</sup> Blemmydes focuses on the human cognitive faculty, the purpose of which is to understand the wisdom of the world as well as what leads human beings beyond the human dimension of life by emphasizing the human as the image of God. According to him, the pure spirit attains an immediate knowledge of the highest intelligible objects, in which knowledge does not depend anymore on logic, syllogisms or proofs. Blemmydes' worldview is characterized by two principles: one is a continuous striving towards God and the other a striving towards the *logoi*, which – in his view – are gifts of God, “a benefaction which is the first in order, in this way science, philosophy and the ascent to God are united and do not negated each other.”<sup>53</sup> Moreover, according to Blemmydes, philosophy is precisely the intellectual pursuit that corresponds to the spiritual purpose of human beings. In addition, when he points to the common source of all forms of spiritual life, all of them are unified and harmonized – whether they stand on experiential, extra-experiential or even transcendental grounds. This approach makes it possible to “justify” secular knowledge and consequently secularity, which emerges from this perspective.<sup>54</sup> As the Russian scholar Viktor Bychkov points out, it is characteristic of thinkers with a proto-Renaissance orientation to strive to remove all contradictions in spiritual culture and at the same time to

51 Anna Kladova, “The ‘Autobiography’ of Nikephoros Blemmydes on the Issue of Relations Between Monasticism and Scholarship in Byzantium,” in *Patrologia Pacifica Tertia: Selected Papers Presented to the Asia-Pacific Early Christian Studies Society*, ed. Pauline Allen and Vladimir Baranov (Piscataway NJ: Gorgias Press, 2013), 229.

52 Kladova, “The ‘Autobiography,’” 230.

53 Kladova, “The ‘Autobiography,’” 234.

54 Ivan Christov [Иван Христов], *Византийското Богословие през XIV в.: Дискурсът за Божествените енергии* [Byzantine Theology in the 14th Century: The Discourse on Divine Energies] (Sofia: Iztok-Zapad, 2016), 35.

unify and reconcile every kind of knowledge acquired by humanity throughout history, whether that of science and philosophy or religious experience.<sup>55</sup>

Even more interesting for our discourse is how Blemmydes defines philosophy. He underlines rationality and places a strong humanistic emphasis on philosophy, going far beyond St. John Damascene in this respect. Philosophy is an *imitatio Dei* according to the capabilities of human being and his rational activity.<sup>56</sup> On the one hand, the philosopher's activities come close to the cognitive energies of God by means of which God knows things even before their creation and thus the philosopher contemplates what exists and knows the nature of constituent things (721 C). On the other hand, philosophy in its practical sense guides human conduct and thereby becomes akin to the providential energies of God (721 C). Consequently philosophy in both its theoretical and practical aspects is an image of God – an image of His cognitive and providential energies. The fact that our human wisdom is an image of God is made possible altogether by the fact that God Himself is wisdom, or rather wisdom in itself (724 A). Thus, Blemmydes goes beyond the patristic tradition up to his time since he considers philosophy to be an *imitatio Dei*.

Blemmydes' approach proves that Byzantium was much closer to the West and that Byzantine humanism could well have produced a distinct Renaissance of its own if it had avoided well-known historical adventures and its subjugation to Ottomans and if the hesychastic approach to theology, which puts more emphasis on prayer and disdains philosophy, had not prevailed.

In Blemmydes' thought we see the roots of the teaching of the Byzantine humanists of the 14th century. During the disputes with St. Gregory Palamas and his followers, these humanists asserted the self-sufficiency of natural reason as the highest state of the human being. Blemmydes' reflections in the *Preface of the Epitome of Logic* relate his philosophy to the governance of the state. The ruler should rule according to philosophical knowledge, and if he does, he is like God on earth, caring for his subjects on the basis of the knowledge of what exists.<sup>57</sup> I believe that this is a validation of a new way of rational governance that is very different from the so-called Byzantine *symphonia*. The ruler should use philosophy, that is, secular knowledge to rule and truly care

55 Victor V. Vuchkov [Виктор В. Бычков], *Малая история византийской эстетики* [A Short History of Byzantine Aesthetics] (Kiev: Put k istine, 1991), 342; <https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Patrollogija/malaja-istorija-vizantijskoj-estetiki/> (accessed 10 December 2021).

56 Nikephoros Blemmydes, *Epitomes Logicae*, PG 142, 721 C–D; Cf. Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, “De Divinis Nominibus,” in *Corpus Dionysiacum*, ed. Beate Regina Suchla (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990), 193.

57 Nikephoros Blemmydes, *Epitomes Logicae*, PG 142, 689 AB; See also Ivan Christov, *Byzantine Theology in the 14th Century*, 36.

for his subjects. Accordingly, as a product of secular philosophy, human rights would probably be totally legitimate for Blemmydes and other Byzantine humanists of his era.

### **In Place of a Conclusion**

In light of the above, it is evident that the Orthodox Church is at a crossroads. On the one hand, the Ecumenical Patriarchate and those Churches under its jurisdiction are friendlier towards human rights and, as can be seen from the *Social Ethos* text, fully accept them and feel comfortable in a secularized society. On the other hand, the Russian Orthodox Church and probably those Churches closer to it, such as the Serbian Church, are not only reluctant to accept human rights but also maintain a general, consistent anti-Western attitude and project Orthodoxy as opposed to them and at the same time promoting a supposedly alternative “orthodox” worldview and thus political philosophy. It is evident from our brief analysis of Byzantine humanism, however, and more particularly of Blemmydes that the seeds of the acceptance of a secular philosophy result in a different mode of government and possibly the emergence of a human rights doctrine were present in Byzantine thought. Of course, more research will be needed to ascertain this trend and to see whether it could be combined with Western philosophy and theology.

# Civil Society and Orthodoxy: A Counter-Discourse

Irena Pavlović

## Introduction

Two American authors who published their prominent works in the early 1990s are relevant to the central discourses on the relationship between democracy, civil society, modernity in general, and “Orthodoxy”: on the one hand, the political scientist Samuel P. Huntington cites his concept of the *clash of civilizations* (1993, 1996) and, on the other, the sociologist of religion José Casanova presents his concept of *public religion* (1994). Both authors see religion as a highly controversial public matter. After the publication of their works, dazzling images shaped the political, scientific, and media discourse: “God’s Century,”<sup>1</sup> “God’s Revenge,”<sup>2</sup> “Return of the Gods”<sup>3</sup> or “Vitality of the Religious,” as Jürgen Habermas soberly tried to explain this *Zeitgeist*.<sup>4</sup> Another common ground can be found in the fact that both Huntington and Casanova are dedicated to the global perspective: the one from the perspective of political science, the other as a sociologist of religion. So much for the similarities.

The things that separate them show them to be diametrically opposed thinkers. Huntington represents the typical postcolonial figure of a Eurocentric, “old, white man” from “the West” who explains to “the rest of the world” its defective essence that stands in the way of democracy and who wants to impose upon it the only correct world order – by struggle if necessary. Casanova, on the other hand, reveals himself to be a modest thinker who reflects the “shortcomings or limitations”<sup>5</sup> of his own thinking by consciously applying to his own thinking as well as sociology of knowledge’s stress on sociocultural conditions of knowledge production.<sup>6</sup> Their discursive effects on the (social) scientific pro-

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1 *God’s Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics*, ed. Monika Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott and Timothy Samuel Shah (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011).

2 Gilles Kepel, *Die Rache Gottes: Radikale Moslems, Christen und Juden auf dem Vormarsch* (Munich/Zurich: Piper, 1991).

3 Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, *Die Wiederkehr der Götter. Religion in der modernen Kultur* (Bonn: C.H. Beck, 2004).

4 Jürgen Habermas, *Nachmetaphysisches Denken II.: Aufsätze und Repliken* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2012), 310.

5 José Casanova, “Public Religions Revisited,” in *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, ed. Hent de Vries (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 101–19, here 102.

6 José Casanova, “From Modernization to Secularization to Globalization: An Autobiographical Self-Reflection,” *Religion and Society: Advances in Research* 2, no. (April 2011), 25–36, here 25.

duction of knowledge of “Orthodoxy” and its relationship to democracy, civil society and modernity are also diametrically opposed. Huntington’s discursive statements on the supposed incommensurability of “Orthodoxy” with the basic ideas of democracy, civil society, and even modernity in general, as well as essentialist and determinist statements about the supposedly unchangeable nature of the religion of the other can be qualified as hegemonic, with a broad reception and reproduction. Even Orthodox scholars who emigrated to “the West” are not immune to the reproduction of such statements. On the other hand, Casanova’s statements are not to be found in the discourse on “Orthodoxy”; in other words, its discursive effect simply remains unnoticed.

Using a counter-discourse from the perspective of observation in Postcolonial Studies, I have identified and criticized Huntington’s discursive statements at several points as racism<sup>7</sup> and orientalism or an “othering” strategy.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, I have sketched out a proposal for methodological principles of a cultural and social science perspective of observing the religious other that is oriented towards recognition, understanding and mutual trust.<sup>9</sup> The “othering” strategy is characterized by a binary reduction (civilized/barbaric, modern/pre-modern, normal/abnormal, democratic/undemocratic, enlightened/unenlightened, etc.), which essentially serves to construct one’s own fantasies of superiority and to stabilize dominance over the other. For this reason, this approach, which postulates an allegedly intrinsically defective and deficient relationship of “Orthodoxy” to democracy, civil society, and modernity, will not be pursued here. In this paper, I will present and reflect on Casanova’s counter-discourse in terms of its possible discursive effects on and implications for speaking of “Orthodoxy.” This concept was chosen for two main reasons: first, because it emphasizes the public significance of religions in modern societies

7 I define racism from the perspective of Postcolonial Studies. According to Varela and Mecheril, “At the center of racist thinking is the binary construction of natio-ethno-culturally coded We and Non-We and with it the evaluative distinction between We and Non-We”; cf. María do Mar Castro Varela and Paul Mecheril, “Die Dämonisierung der Anderen. Einleitende Bemerkungen,” in *Die Dämonisierung der Anderen: Rassismuskritik der Gegenwart*, ed. María do Mar Castro Varela and Paul Mecheril (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2016), 7–20.

8 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2014 [1978]).

9 Varela and Mecheril, “Dämonisierung”; Irena Zeltner Pavlović, “Imagining Orthodoxy: Eine postkoloniale Beobachtungsperspektive der Repräsentation des religiös Anderen,” in *Ostkirchen und Reformation 2017: Begegnungen und Tagungen im Jubiläumsjahr. Dialog und Hermeneutik*, vol. 1, ed. Irena Zeltner Pavlović and Martin Illert (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2018), 217–29; idem, “Postkoloniale und postsozialistische Studien. Repräsentierte Orthodoxie,” in *Postkoloniale Theologie II: Perspektiven aus dem deutschsprachigen Raum*, ed. Andreas Nehring and Simon Wiesgickl (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2018), 226–42.

and, second, because it seems particularly fruitful for a recognition-oriented perspective of the religious other and his engagement in the public sphere. By drawing on this perspective of observation in the discourse on “Orthodoxy,” I would like to propose the thesis that the effect of this counter-discourse on the production of knowledge has an enormous global socio-political relevance in that this perspective could/would promote recognition, understanding and trust between the respective “religious others.”

I will first briefly discuss the relevance of the Spanish-American sociologist of religion and theologian José Casanova, who is currently “internationally regarded as one of the most important contemporary sociologists of religion,”<sup>10</sup> for the discourse of sociology of religion. I will then present Casanova’s deprivatization thesis, whereby he decisively deconstructs the Eurocentric secularization episteme. Following that, I will introduce the localization of religion and religious actors in civil society, which was stimulated by the concept of *public religions* that is presented as part of the intermedial space of a modern, pluralistic society, as well as its later correction. In addition, I will outline Casanova’s later concept of *global denominationalism* because of its importance for the observation of the “religious other” that is presented here using the example of the discursive treatises on “Islam.” Finally, I will answer the question what consequences Casanova’s concepts can have for the observation of “Orthodoxy” and its relationship to civil society.

### Religion in the Modern Age

The visibility of religion in the modern world has been extensively discussed by Casanova in his book *Public Religions in the Modern World*, which was published in 1994 and is now considered a key work in the sociology of religion.<sup>11</sup> As Astrid Reuter remarked, the book is “avant-garde” in the sense that the persistence of the public relevance of religion in modernity was recognized here, much earlier than, for example, the notion of a “post-secular society”

10 Hermann-Josef Große Kracht, “Öffentliche Religion im säkularen Staat (Casanova),” in *Religion und Säkularisierung: Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch*, ed. Thomas M. Schmidt and Annette Pitschmann (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2014), 114–26, here 114.

11 José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); see also Hubert Knoblauch, “Portrait: Jose Casanova. Deprivatization, the Public Sphere and Popular Religion,” *Religion and Society: Advances in Research* 2, no. 1 (March 2011), 5–36, here 5. <https://doi.org/10.3167/arrs.2011.020102>.

(Habermas) arrived in scientific discourses in the German-speaking world.<sup>12</sup> Casanova, for example, is one of the authors who made a decisive contribution to the fact that the so-called “return narrative” or narrative about the “return of religions” has become firmly established in the cultural and social sciences.<sup>13</sup> What is special about his work is that it has challenged the (Western) European secularization narrative or at least, according to the majority of interpretations in the literature of this thesis, has brought it to a close, and “a clear predominance of critics of the secularization thesis can be observed”<sup>14</sup> at this time. At this point, it must be emphasized that there are still attempts by the defenders of the secularization thesis to “save” it, as Karl Gabriel noted, but Casanova’s work introduced a “scientific revolution,” a paradigm shift in Thomas Kuhn’s sense.<sup>15</sup>

Casanova’s deconstruction of the secularization narrative is based on two central analytical instruments that he presented in his early works: the deprivatization thesis, whose division into three sub-theses is considered his most important merit in the sociology of religion<sup>16</sup>, and the concept of *public religions*. These central aspects and their further development or reformulations in later works will be presented in the following.

### *The Deprivatization Thesis*

The central thesis of his study is “that we are witnessing the ‘deprivatization’ of religion in the modern world.”<sup>17</sup> Casanova understands deprivatization as “the fact that religious traditions throughout the world are refusing to accept the

12 Astrid Reuter, “José Casanova: Public Religions in the Modern World (1994),” in *Schlüsselwerke der Religionssoziologie*, ed. Christel Gärtner and Gert Pickel (Wiesbaden, 2019), 449–58, here 457.

13 Albrecht Koschorke, “‘Säkularisierung’ und ‘Wiederkehr der Religion’: Zwei Narrative der europäischen Moderne,” in *Moderne und Religion: Kontroversen um Modernität und Säkularisierung*, ed. Ulrich Willems, Detlef Pollack, Helene Basu, Thomas Gutmann and Ulrike Spohn (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2013), 237–60; Oliver Hidalgo, “‘Rückkehr der Religionen’ und ‘Säkularisierung’: Über die Verwobenheit zweier scheinbar gegensätzlicher Narrative,” in *Das Narrativ von der Wiederkehr der Religion*, ed. Holger Zapf, Oliver Hidalgo and Philipp W. Hildmann (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2018), 13–34.

14 Karl Gabriel, “Der lange Abschied von der Säkularisierungsthese – und was kommt danach?” in *Postsäkularismus: Zur Diskussion eines unstrittenen Begriffs*, ed. Matthias Lutz-Bachmann (Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 2015), 211–36, 212f.; see also Karl Gabriel, “Säkularisierung und öffentliche Religion: Religionssoziologische Anmerkungen mit Blick auf den europäischen Kontext,” *Jahrbuch für Christliche Sozialwissenschaften* 44 (February 2003), 13–36, here 15.

15 Gabriel, “Abschied,” 220.

16 Reuter, “Casanova,” 457.

17 Casanova, *Public Religions*, 5.

marginal and privatized role which theories of modernity as well as theories of secularization had reserved for them.”<sup>18</sup> Based on empirical observations of four countries (Spain, Poland, Brazil, and the United States), he critically questions the West European religious-sociological secularization narrative. This is the narrative that shapes the discourse on the relationship between religion and modernity and is thus based on the premise that religion was “bound to either disappear or become increasingly privatized and therefore, ‘invisible.’”<sup>19</sup>

To deconstruct the hegemonic secularization narrative, which “appears as a closed secularization thesis,”<sup>20</sup> he proposes splitting up three sub-theses of the secularization thesis analytically so that he can question to what extent partial aspects are constitutive for modernity, as was the case in the dominant secular narrative of consensus.<sup>21</sup> The first aspect, or rather the first sub-thesis is, that secularization is understood first of all *as the functional differentiation of religion and politics* or church and state during the course of modernization processes. For Casanova, this sub-thesis initially remains of central importance as a sign of modernity and thus valid. In Casanova’s words, “The differentiation and emancipation of the secular sphere from the religious institutions and norms remains a general modern structural trend.”<sup>22</sup> The second sub-thesis is about *the erosion of religious beliefs and practices*. Even if this represents a dominant trend, especially in (West) European societies, it is “manifestly not a modern structural trend,”<sup>23</sup> according to the early Casanova. This also applies to the third sub-thesis on *the privatization of religion* in modernity, which is decisive for the concept of *public religions*. The formula “religion is a private matter” is not constitutive for Western modernity; it is merely one of the possible “historical options.”<sup>24</sup>

Since these sub-processes occurred simultaneously in Western Europe, “the leading sociological theories assumed that they were not only historically, but

18 Casanova, *Public Religions*, 5.

19 José Casanova, “Religion in Modernity as Global Challenge,” in *Religion und die umstrittene Moderne*, ed. Michael Reeder and Matthias Rugel (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2010), 1–16, here 1.

20 José Casanova, “Chancen und Gefahren öffentlicher Religion: Ost- Westeuropa im Vergleich,” *Das Europa der Religionen: Ein Kontinent zwischen Säkularisierung und Fundamentalismus*, ed. Otto Kallscheuer (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1996), 181–210, here 182.

21 Cf. Casanova, “Public Religions” (see footnote 17), 212ff.; Casanova, “Chancen,” 184ff.

22 Casanova, “Public Religions,” 212; Casanova, “Chancen,” 184.

23 Casanova, *Public Religions*, 213; see also Casanova, “Chancen,” 185f.

24 Casanova, *Public Religions*, 215; see also José Casanova, “Private und öffentliche Religion,” in *Zeitgenössische Amerikanische Soziologie*, ed. Hans-Peter Müller and Steffen Sigmund (Opladen: Leske and Budrich, 2000), 249–80, 249.

also structurally and inherently connected”<sup>25</sup> and thus presented a universal path to modernity exemplary for the whole world. The others, if they want to become modern, must follow this same path. But this premise reveals itself to be untenable on closer examination. A comparison with the USA, in which both the private and public vitality of the religions becomes visible, already shows, according to Casanova, that these secular premises are not tenable even for “the West.”<sup>26</sup> At this point it should be emphasized that he does not question either the empirical validity of these processes in (Western) Europe or secularization as the theoretical basis for the analysis of Western European modernization processes. This applies both to his early works<sup>27</sup> and currently insofar as he states that “the secularization of most West European societies remains an unquestioned *fait accompli*.”<sup>28</sup> The West European narrative of secularization is regarded here merely as a singular or particular European development.<sup>29</sup> The early Casanova’s point here is that there is no uniform path in Western modernity; rather, the various paths in it can diverge. This means that Western societies can also have religion in both the private and public spheres and still be considered modern. So much for the early Casanova.

By adopting a global research perspective, Casanova wanted to correct a central “limitation” of his own earlier thinking, including “*Western-centrism*, i.e. a decidedly ‘Western’ perspective,”<sup>30</sup> with the intention of expanding his theoretical framework to make “it more applicable beyond [the?]Western Christian context.”<sup>31</sup> He successively revised his concepts and presented them systematically in the text *Public Religions Revisited*<sup>32</sup>, which was published almost simultaneously in English and German in 2008. As Große Kracht

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25 Casanova, “Chancen,” 182.

26 Casanova, “Chancen,” 182ff.

27 Casanova, “Chancen,” 197.

28 Casanova, *Public Religions*, 4; see also José Casanova, “Religion, European Secular Identities, and European Integration,” in *Religion in an Expanding Europe*, ed. Timothy Byrnes and Peter J. Katzenstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 65–92, here 65.

29 José Casanova, “Civil Society and Religion: Retrospective Reflections on Catholicism and Prospective Reflections on Islam,” *Social Research* 68, no. 4 (December 2001), 1041–80, here 1057; José Casanova, “Rethinking Secularization: A Global Comparative Perspective,” *The Hedgehog Review* 8 (March 2006), 7–22, here 1.

30 José Casanova, “Public Religions Revisited,” in *Christentum und Solidarität: Bestandaufnahmen zu Sozialethik und Religionssoziologie*, ed. Herman-Josef Große Kracht and Christian Spieß (Paderborn, Schöningh, 2008), 313–38, here 315.

31 José Casanova, “Rethinking Public Religions,” in *Rethinking Religion and World Affairs*, ed. Timothy Samuel Shah, Alfred Stepan, Monica Duffy Toft (Oxford, New York, 2012), 25–36, here 25.

32 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 29); Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 5).

correctly noted, this is a “massive reaccentuation”<sup>33</sup> of his concept. Two changes are relevant to Casanova’s deprivatization thesis.

The first change concerns the territorial validity of the deprivatization thesis, which now no longer applies only to certain regions outside Western Europe. He considers it to be more than sufficiently confirmed; furthermore, “the best confirmation of the validity of the deprivatization of religion can be found in the heartland of secularization, that is, in West European societies.”<sup>34</sup> This does not mean that there has been an increase in religious beliefs and practices, but rather that “a significant shift in the European *Zeitgeist*”<sup>35</sup> has taken place, and religion has become a discursive event or “as a discursive reality.”<sup>36</sup> Or, as he pointedly states elsewhere: “We are not yet ‘religious’ again. However, we are concerned with religion as a problem, especially as a public matter.”<sup>37</sup> So, unlike his early works,<sup>38</sup> he also sees this as a global trend, as a “global social fact.”<sup>39</sup>

The second change to his earlier assumptions becomes relevant through his questioning of the whole secularization thesis, which – according to my reading – concerns three different aspects. The first is that all three subtheories of the secularization thesis are now being questioned, including the previously defended thesis of the constitutive relevance of the structural differentiation of the subsystems of modern societies. According to Casanova,

One could at most, on pragmatic historical grounds, defend the need for separation between “church” and “state,” although I am no longer convinced that complete separation is either a necessary or a sufficient condition for democracy. The attempt to establish a wall of separation between “religion” and “politics” is both unjustified and probably counterproductive for democracy itself.<sup>40</sup>

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33 Hermann-Josef Große Kracht, “Öffentliche Religion im säkularen Staat (Casanova),” in *Religion und Säkularisierung: Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch*, ed. Thomas M. Schmidt and Annette Pitschmann (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2014), 114–126, here 122.

34 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 5), 101.

35 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 5), 101; José Casanova, “Das Problem der Religion und die Ängste der säkularen europäischen Demokratien,” in *Europas Angst vor der Religion*, ed. José Casanova (Berlin: Berlin University Press, 2009), 7–30, here 23; Casanova, “Modernity,” 313.

36 Casanova, “Modernization,” 32.

37 José Casanova, “Die Erschließung des Postsäkularen: Drei Bedeutungen von “säkular” und deren mögliche Transzendenz,” in *Postsäkularismus. Zur Diskussion eines umstrittenen Begriffs*, ed. Matthias Lutz-Bachmann (Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 2015), 9–41, here 33; see also Casanova, “Identities” (see footnote 27).

38 Casanova, “World,” 223.

39 Casanova, “Modernization,” 32; see also Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 30), 313; Casanova (see footnote 29) “Rethinking,” 25.

40 Casanova, “Secularization” (see footnote 28), 20.

A second aspect concerns the hegemonic and ideological use of the secularization narrative. Thus, the secularization thesis is still useful for explaining certain “particular internal and external dynamics of the transformation of Western European Christianity from the Middle Ages to the present.”<sup>41</sup> But, according to Casanova the concept of secularization becomes problematic if one attempts “to reinterpret the particular Western Christian historical process of secularization in a universal teleological process of human development from faith to disbelief and from primitive, irrational religiosity to a modern, rational, secular consciousness.”<sup>42</sup> The secularization narrative is thus used as an ideology when it is stylized as the only teleological path to modernity and as the norm and normality of modernity.

Closely related to this is the third aspect, which concerns the questioning of the transferability of this theory to other contexts. In Casanova’s words, it “becomes problematic once it is generalized as a universal process of societal development and once it is transferred to other world religions and other civilizational areas with very different dynamics of structuration of the relations and tensions between religion and world, or between cosmological transcendence and worldly immanence.”<sup>43</sup> Since one can observe multiple secularizations and multiple modernity even in “the West,” this applies all the more to the rest of the world.<sup>44</sup> For the global context, insisting on an intrinsic correlation between modernization and secularization is, according to Casanova, also a problematic, ideological use and not very persuasive.<sup>45</sup> For observing other contexts, therefore, other theoretical perspectives are needed. Casanova finds these in the model of *multiple modernities*, which was first designed by Shmuel N. Eisenstadt. Eisenstadt opposes both secular cosmopolitanism, which he regards as the consequence of a secularization narrative, and the thesis of a *clash of civilizations*:

The multiple-modernities position rejects both the notion of a modern radical break with traditions and the notion of an essential modern continuity with tradition. All traditions and civilizations are radically transformed in the processes of modernization, but they also have the possibility of shaping in particular ways the institutionalization of modern “religious” and “secular” traits. Traditions are

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41 Casanova, “Secularization” (see footnote 28), 12; see also Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 30), 319.

42 Casanova, “Modernity,” 58f.; see also Casanova, “Identities” (see footnote 28), 66; Casanova, “Erschließung,” 16.

43 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 5), 105; see also Casanova, “Secularization” (see footnote 29), 12; Casanova, “Modernization,” 33.

44 Casanova, “Secularization” (see footnote 29), 11.

45 Casanova, “Secularization” (see footnote 29), 13.

forced to respond and adjust to modern conditions, but in the process of reformulating their traditions for modern contexts, they also help to shape the particular forms of “religious” and “secular” modernity.<sup>46</sup>

The consequence of his questioning of the entire narrative of secularization is a plea that “[i]t is time to revise our teleological conceptions of a global cosmopolitan secular modernity, against which we can characterize the religious ‘other’ as ‘fundamentalist.’”<sup>47</sup> Programmatically, he proposes a counterstrategy, i.e., the “recognition of the irremediable plurality of universalisms and the multiplicity of modernities, namely, that every universalism and every modernity is particularistic.”<sup>48</sup>

It is noticeable here that Casanova’s argumentation pattern is very much based on Eisenstadt: where Eisenstadt talks about modernity, Casanova writes about secularization. For this reason, the criticism, which has been voiced in the context of postcolonial studies, that Eisenstadt essentializes the different modernities without considering their connectivity<sup>49</sup> could also be applied to Casanova. This would be a mistake, however, because he explicitly emphasizes the interwoven nature of the world, even in reference to the terminology of *Postcolonial Studies*: “Intercivilizational encounters, cultural imitations and borrowings, diasporic diffusions, hybridity, creolization, and transcultural hyphenations are [...] part and parcel of the global present [...]”<sup>50</sup>

### *Public Religions and their (Re-)Localization*

Building on the thesis of the deprivatization of religion, Casanova developed his central concept of *public religions*, according to which – in contrast to assumptions of the liberal concepts of the public sphere – religions have not lost their public relevance in modernity. The concept does not refer to an increase in private religiosity but rather to the visibility of religions in the public sphere, which was described as a new Phenomenon “already in the 1980s”<sup>51</sup> worldwide.

Following the subdivision of the three “arenas” or spheres of the public sphere made by the political scientist Alfred Stepan, Casanova identifies three ideal types of public religions, each of which can act on the state, political or

46 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 5), 106.

47 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 5), 119.

48 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 5), 119; see also Casanova, “Modernity,” 15.

49 Gurinder K. Bhambra, *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

50 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 5), 119.

51 Casanova, “Private” (see footnote 24), 264.

civil society level.<sup>52</sup> In principle, the public religions can be located on all three levels, but it is true that “*civil society has now become the public place of the church*, and no longer, as before, the state or political society,”<sup>53</sup> according to the early Casanova. Elsewhere, he speaks in the imperative, stating “that modern religious institutions *must* necessarily be in civil society [...]”<sup>54</sup>

In doing so, he considers the public religions’ “actions” or religious actors in public to be ambivalent because they can function both as a danger to and an opportunity for democratization processes. They are a danger when they highlight conflicts. He distinguishes between religious-secular, ethnic-religious and confessional conflicts.<sup>55</sup> They are an opportunity if they stand up for human rights, act as a moral resource in social discourse, stimulate public reflection on the normative structures of a society and plead for the common good and “‘solidarity’ with all people.”<sup>56</sup>

In retrospect, he also regards this restriction of public religions to the civil society arena as a second “limitation” in his thinking.<sup>57</sup> In 2006, he revised this position, considering it a preferable option, but not an absolutely necessary one:

If today I had to revise anything from my earlier work, it would be my attempt to restrict, on what I thought were justifiable normative grounds, public religion to the public sphere of civil society. This remains my own personal normative and political preference, but I am not certain that the secular separation of religion from political society or even from the state are universalizable maxims, in the sense that they are either necessary or sufficient conditions for democratic politics.<sup>58</sup>

After becoming aware of his own preconceptions, Casanova later says goodbye to them for good. He revises his earlier position by self-critically distancing himself from his own “modern Western secular prejudices,”<sup>59</sup> which manifest themselves in “assumptions about the separation of the religious and secular spheres and about the idea of a public sphere of civil society,” as well as his own denominational (Catholic) preconception, which was shaped by the

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52 Casanova, “World,” 61; 252; Casanova, “Chancen,” 190f.

53 Casanova, “Chancen,” 194, italics his.

54 Casanova, “Chancen,” 209, italics his.

55 Casanova, “Chancen,” 200.

56 Casanova, “Chancen,” 209.

57 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 5), 102.

58 Casanova, “Secularization” (see footnote 29), 21.

59 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 17), 29.

experience of the *aggiornamento* of the 1960s.<sup>60</sup> The restriction of religion to the sphere of civil society is not suitable from a global comparative perspective. Because of this, the democratic-theoretical concept of civil society no longer plays a role in his later publications.

Now public religion was dis- or relocalized programmatically beyond civil society. This corrects the previously primary localization of public religion in civil society by no longer rejecting the influence of public religions in the realm of politics and the state.<sup>61</sup> Public religions are also relocalized beyond disestablishment. This means that, on closer examination, the “great secular European narrative” of democratization, which is based “on the secularization of society and the privatization of religion”<sup>62</sup> is revealed as a “myth.”<sup>63</sup> Rather, it is empirically evident that divergent models<sup>64</sup> of the shaping of state-church relations compete with each other in Europe: from state churchism (establishment) to the “model of the formal separation of church and state in the case of an informal remaining influence of one or more churches (quasi-establishment)”<sup>65</sup> to the French *laïcité* (deestablishment; laicism). Thus, according to his corrected position, “the strict secular separation of church and state is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition of democracy.”<sup>66</sup>

Instead of secularist assumptions, Casanova proposes an alternative model for a global observation perspective, the model of twin tolerations by Alfred Stepan,<sup>67</sup> which he considers “a promising approach.”<sup>68</sup> Casanova points out that, based on empirical analytical democracy research, Stepan has shown that neither secularity nor a disestablishment model is among the constitutive characteristics of modern democracies,<sup>69</sup> as liberal theories of democracy

60 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 30), 321f.

61 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 5), 106.

62 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 30), 327.

63 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 30), 110.

64 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 30), 326; see also Casanova, “Problem der Religion,” 19.

65 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 30), 326.

66 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 5), 112.

67 Alfred Stepan, “Military Politics in Three Political Arenas: Civil Society, Political Society, and the State,” in *Rethinking Military Politics. Brazil and the Southern Cone*, ed. Alfred Stepan (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 1–12; Alfred Stepan, “The World’s Religious Systems and Democracy: Crafting the ‘Twin Tolerations,’” in *Arguing Comparative Politics*, ed. id. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 218–25; Alfred Stepan, “Religion; Democracy, and Human Rights,” in *Rethinking Religion and World Affairs*, ed. Timothy Samuel Shah, Alfred Stepan, and Monica Duffy Toft (Oxford and New York: 2012), 55–72.

68 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 30), 321.

69 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 30), 329.

assume. For a democratic polity, a minimum of mutual acceptance or tolerance between political and religious actors would suffice, which in Stepan's words is constantly being constructed and deconstructed.<sup>70</sup> Accordingly, the following applies:

Religious authorities must 'tolerate' the autonomy of democratically elected governments without claiming constitutionally privileged prerogatives to mandate or to veto public policy. Democratic political institutions, in turn, must 'tolerate' the autonomy of religious individuals and groups not only in complete freedom to worship privately, but also to advance publicly their values in civil society and to sponsor organizations and movements in political society, so long as they do not violate democratic rules and adhere to the rule of law.<sup>71</sup>

This means that religions – like all other social groups – can raise their voices in all public arenas of a democratic community and cannot be prohibited *a priori* from participating. Casanova holds Stepan's findings to be important: they have shown that it is relevant to base the shaping of the state-church relationship in a political system on a minimal definition<sup>72</sup> of democracy.<sup>73</sup> This relativizes the secularist assumptions that democracy is only possible by separating the religious and political spheres.

#### *Reciprocal Recognition: Global Denominationalism*

If the early Casanova dealt primarily with "the West" and, due to the methodology of Western sociology, limited himself to national contexts, he retrospectively considers this to be the third "limitation" of his earlier positions. It is deficient because it does not take into account the transnational and global dimension<sup>74</sup> that is decisive for the later Casanova: "The adoption of a global perspective switches the focus from methodological nationalism and the

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70 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 17), 59.

71 Casanova, *Public Religions* 113; see also Casanova, "Das Problem der Religion," 18f.

72 Stepan views democracy from an institutional perspective and defines it as follows: "Democracy is a system of conflict regulation that allows open competition over the values and goals that citizens want to advance. In the strict democratic sense, this means that as long as groups do not use violence, do not violate the rights of other citizens, and stay within the rules of the democratic game, *all* groups are granted the right to advance their interests, both in civil society and in political society" (Casanova, *Public Religions* [see footnote 17], 56f.).

73 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 5), 113.

74 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 5), 102.

dynamics of state secularization it entails to the paradigm of religious pluralism which accompanies the process of globalization.”<sup>75</sup>

Through the processes of globalization, according to Casanova, the world religions have the opportunity for the first time to become “truly world religions.”<sup>76</sup> This is caused decisively by two factors: mass media and mass migration. Mass media have broken through their former “relatively closed communication spaces.”<sup>77</sup> For example, “[t]he Bishop of Rome may have always claimed to speak *urbi et orbi*, to the city and to the world. But in fact this first became a reality in the twentieth century.”<sup>78</sup> Mass migration brought about a deterritorialization of public religions. The novelty of globalization is thus that the world religions “can be presented for the first time as de-territorialized global communities.”<sup>79</sup> This leads to complex, permanent interdependencies between religions that contribute to or rather cause change. According to Casanova,

Under conditions of globalization, world religions do not only draw upon their own traditions but also increasingly upon one another. Inter-civilizational encounters, cultural imitations and borrowings, diasporic diffusions, hybridity, creolization, and transcultural hyphenations are all part and parcel of the global present.<sup>80</sup>

He regards deterritorialized, transnational, global communities as “global *denominationalism*,”<sup>81</sup> which he defines based on the American model of regulating the religious sphere. *Denominalization* thus means “a system of mutual recognition of groups within society, which is not regulated by the state”;<sup>82</sup> global denominationalism means the same process of mutual interreligious recognition at the global level.<sup>83</sup> Based on the aforementioned statement that “every universalism and every modernity is particularistic,”<sup>84</sup> he predicts: “One could say that we are moving from the condition of competing particularist universalism to a new condition of global denominational contextualism.”<sup>85</sup>

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75 José Casanova, *Global Religious and Secular Dynamics: The Modern System of Classification* (Brill: Leiden 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004411982>.

76 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 5), 116.

77 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 30), 333.

78 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 5), 116.

79 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 30), 333.

80 Casanova, “Secularization” (see footnote 29), 17; see also Casanova, “Modernity,” 15.

81 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 30), 335.

82 Casanova, “Modernity,” 13.

83 Casanova, “Dynamics,” 65.

84 Casanova, “Modernity,” 15.

85 Casanova, “Modernity,” 15.

### Relevance for the Representation of the Religious Other

Casanova's treatises are relevant to the discursive representation of the "religious other" because they provide a hermeneutical framework for correcting the current discourse about the "other democracy," civil society and modernity, and thus enable the establishment of a counter-discourse. In what follows, I would like to highlight three aspects that seem to be central to this before sketching – using the example of his treatises on "Islam" – how he concretely challenges the hegemonic discourse of Islam. I will then discuss the implications about/for "Orthodoxy."

The first aspect concerns the questioning of the common categorization of the other by suggesting an "ontological difference."<sup>86</sup> In his essays, he decodes the common mark of the religious vitality of the other, which is described as "anti-modernist fundamentalism,"<sup>87</sup> as "a reaction of a traditionalist collective identity to the process of globalization,"<sup>88</sup> as "annoying and hopelessly anachronistic,"<sup>89</sup> as "the rise of fundamentalism in not-yet-modern societies,"<sup>90</sup> as a sign of "failed modernity"<sup>91</sup> or as the incommensurability of the other with modernity per se.<sup>92</sup> He shows that the public visibility of religions "did not have to be interpreted necessarily as an antimodern, antiseccular, or antidemocratic reaction."<sup>93</sup> As shown, the vitality and public visibility of religion itself is present in "the West" and is not an obstacle to modernity, so that also applies to the religious other. From this follow implications regarding speaking about the religious other, which is aimed at recognition, understanding and trust.

The second aspect relates to the recognition of the plurality of paths to modernity. Thus, adaptation to a secular Western European norm is not a universal planetary path from primitive, traditional or pre-modern to modern societies, as modernization theories suggested, and "as Europeans like to think."<sup>94</sup>

86 Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept," *Cultural Studies* 21, nos. 2–3 (April 2007), 240–70, here 253; <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162548>.

87 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 5), 119.

88 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 30), 336.

89 Casanova, *Identities* (see footnote 28), 70.

90 Casanova, "Problem der Religion," 23; Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 30), 314.

91 Casanova, "Modernity," 3.

92 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 30), 314; Casanova, "Problem der Religion," 23.

93 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 17), 25.

94 José Casanova, "Welche christliche Säkularisierung und Globalisierung," in *Europas Angst vor der Religion*, ed. José Casanova (Berlin: Berlin University Press, 2009), 85–120, here 103.

On the contrary, these paths are to be thought of in the plural. The recognition of this plurality, according to Casanova, “should allow a less Euro-centric comparative analysis of patterns of differentiation and secularization in other civilizations and world religions.”<sup>95</sup>

Closely related to this is a third aspect that emphasizes the connectivity of modern societies and religions. The pluralistic paths to modernity are never to be considered in isolation, but intersectionally – with crossings. This emphasizes the contingency in the dynamics of change, which also arises from the encounter with the other. At this point, I suggest speaking of *connected religions*. Just as the moderns are to be regarded as *connected modernities*<sup>96</sup>, histories as *connected histories*<sup>97</sup>, so this also applies to religions. They are also connected. This aspect is directed explicitly against essentialist and naturalizing imaginations of the religious other.

Casanova himself illustrates the implications of his theses and concepts on the representation of the other in numerous texts using the example of “Islam” or the much-discussed question of the supposed incompatibility of modern democracy, individual liberty rights and “Islam.”<sup>98</sup> He devotes himself to “Islam” for two reasons: on the one hand, Huntington’s thesis “has found the greatest resonance and has provoked the most heated debates,”<sup>99</sup> and “Islam” has since then been represented “as ‘the other’ of the Western civilization.”<sup>100</sup>

He leaves the answer to the question “Are Islamic norms, values, and practices compatible with modern democratic political structures and with an open pluralist civil society?”<sup>101</sup> he leaves to Muslim actors themselves. At the same time, he says that those voices are multivocal: “Obviously, given my lack of expertise I am not in a position nor is this the proper place to attempt to address these questions systematically. In any case it is up to Muslim practitioners to answer these questions in their own multivocal ways.”<sup>102</sup> Furthermore,

95 Casanova, “Secularization” (see footnote 29), 11.

96 Bhambra, “Modernity.”

97 Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Connected Histories: Notes toward a Reconfiguration on Early Modern Eurasia,” *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (1997): 735–62.

98 José Casanova, “The End of Islamic Ideology,” *Social Research* 67, no. 2 (June 2000), 475–518; José Casanova, “Civil Society and Religion: Retrospective Reflections on Catholicism and Prospective Reflections on Islam,” *Social Research* 68, no. 4 (December 2001), 1041–80; Casanova, *Identities* (a / see footnote 27); José Casanova, “Religion, Politik und Geschlecht im Katholizismus und im Islam,” in *Europas Angst vor der Religion*, ed. José Casanova (Berlin: Berlin University Press, 2009), 31–84.

99 Casanova, “Society,” 1052.

100 Casanova, “Identities” (see footnote 28), 71.

101 Casanova, “Society,” 1054.

102 Casanova, “Civil Society,” 1054.

he considers Muslim actors to be reflexive subjects who are able to take a position on these questions. In addition, he does not regard them as a monolithic block but emphasizes the plurality of their positions. Moreover, they are not only capable of articulating their position but already do so. For example, whenever “open public spaces appear, either in Muslim countries or in the diaspora, Muslims seem to find a way of reformulating their tradition in a civil, democratic direction.”<sup>103</sup> Casanova hereby reverses the hegemonic discourse by transforming the other from the object of observation to the subject of the discourse.

Instead of discussing these individual discursive statements and discourse fragments and interpreting them from his own horizon of normality, he looks at the question of (in)compatibility on the level of discursive statements on “Islam.” In doing so, he draws attention to the parallelism or “striking similarities”<sup>104</sup> of the debates on the compatibility of “Catholicism” with democracy that were conducted until Vatican II.<sup>105</sup> He regards the comparison as fruitful because Catholicism “was viewed for a long time as the paradigmatic anti-modern fundamentalist religion.”<sup>106</sup> Just as “Catholicism” was viewed at that time as “an inner Orient, a primitive and atavistic remnant within Western civilization,”<sup>107</sup> that was neither compatible with modern democracy nor with individual freedoms, so today Islam is imagined “as the other of Western secular modernity.”

Against essentialist imaginations of the religions, he emphasizes that “Islam is also subject to immense processes of change, and likewise has no “unchanging core essence.” Just as “Catholicism,” which is strongly dogmatically structured, has undergone processes of change<sup>108</sup>, so this possibility exists all the more for Islam: “The premise of an unchanging core essence should even be less valid for other world religions with a less dogmatically structured doctrinal core or with a more pluralistic and contested system of authoritative interpretation of the religious tradition.”<sup>109</sup>

The point of this comparison is to set up a hermeneutical frame that is oriented towards understanding and acceptance, by which the “others” are

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103 Casanova, “Civil Society,” 1076.

104 Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 5), 108.

105 Casanova “Private” (see footnote 24), 80; Casanova, “Religion” (see footnote 98), 31; Casanova, “Identities” (see footnote 28), 80; Casanova, “Religion,” 31.

106 Casanova, “Civil Society,” 1054.

107 Casanova, “Religion,” 44.

108 Casanova, “Religion,” 47.

109 Casanova, “Civil Society,” 1051f.; see also Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 5), 108; Casanova, “Religion,” 47.

recognized as reflexive subjects. Thus he considers “today’s Muslim changes as forms of Muslim *aggiornamenti* [...], i.e. as multiple and often antithetical attempts by individual and collective Muslim actors to create their own version of Muslim modernity [...].”<sup>110</sup> He does not expect an unanimous voice and emphasizes: “There are many Western modernities and there will probably be many Muslim ones as well.”<sup>111</sup> What this would look like concretely remains open because, as he emphasizes, “When it comes to religion, there is no global rule.”<sup>112</sup>

The counter-discourse on “Islam” presented above is relevant for the discursive representation of “orthodoxy,” since the discourses also show “astonishing” or “striking” parallelisms.<sup>113</sup> From the perspective of Postcolonial Studies, however, it is not very “astonishing” because this is *orientalism* or the strategy of *othering*. In other words, no matter what objects are at the focus of this strategy (“the Jews,” “the women,” “the blacks,” “the migrants,” etc.), every representation of the Western European other in history and the present shows parallels.<sup>114</sup>

From there, everything Casanova says about “Islam” also applies to the “inner Orient” of Christianity, “Orthodoxy” and its alleged incompatibility with democracy, civil society and modernity. Here, too, a hegemonic discourse, hardly questioned by the devaluation and essentialization of “Orthodoxy” dominates, a discourse that has received great resonance through Huntington’s treatises. Here, too, a deficient “unchangeable essence” of “Orthodoxy” is imagined. But a counter-discourse can also be established for “Orthodoxy.” The Orthodox actors too are to be regarded as reflexive subjects as well who develop their own vision or version of modernity. “Orthodoxy” is also multivocal.

For reflection on the relationship between Orthodoxy and civil society, Casanova’s remarks mean: Orthodoxy *can* but does not *have to* engage in civil society. Whether the Orthodox churches in their self-positioning want to see themselves as an integral part of civil society and choose this *locus* as central to their public commitment or prefer other *loci* of activity is – to use Casanova’s words – “up to them.” If engagement in civil society is to be understood “as self-organized and independent, as public, conflict-prone and pluralistic, as ‘civil’, i.e. non-violent and non-military, and as solidarity, i.e. not only self-interested

110 Casanova, “Religion,” 64; see also Casanova, “Society,” 1061.

111 Casanova, “Religion,” 56; see also Casanova, “Society,” 1063.

112 Casanova, “Secularization” (see footnote 29), 17.

113 Irena Pavlović, *Schieder, Rolf: Sind Religionen gefährlich? Religionspolitische Perspektiven für das 21. Jahrhundert*, Berlin 2011 in *Theologische Revue* 110 (2), 1–2.

114 Varela and Mecheril, “Dämonisierung.”

but also oriented towards the common good,<sup>115</sup> then, of course, nothing speaks against this commitment. This applies in the context of democratic states.

But Orthodoxy acts – to express it metaphorically – “from Jerusalem to Moscow” in completely divergent social contexts in which this choice (cannot/must not) is not made. In some contexts, it *cannot* get involved because there are no civic virtues in society – neither with church actors nor with other dialogue partners. In many post-socialist countries, for example, it is customary to interpret in the style of communist rulers any public activity of the church as “undue interference in politics” and to discuss away the question of the legitimacy of the church’s public speech. On the other hand, in the context of the Serbian Orthodox Church, for example, certain media and even academic speaking positions are strictly regulated by church actors, even by bans or dismissals. Finally, if Orthodoxy opts for the civil society option, it can contribute to the stabilization of a democratic culture of discussion and democracy. This option is certainly preferable to dictatorships and other unjust states.

Here it should be emphasized that, as Antonius Liedhegener remarked, current political science considers it “misleading” to locate religion and the church exclusively in civil society “because it fails to recognize the autonomy of religion in the cultural-religious sphere of a society and the multifunctionality of religion in its organized form, which enables religious actors to be part of other areas or systems of differentiated societies, for example in the context of the provision of services by the welfare state or the political decision-making process in the public sphere and the government system.”<sup>116</sup> “Orthodoxy” can also interfere in other public spheres and need not limit its public engagement to the sphere of civil society.

## Conclusion

The use of the “collective singular[s]”<sup>117</sup> is simply wrong if it is applied in a generalizing manner to certain ethnic and religious groups (such as “the Jews,” “the Muslims,” “the Arabs,” etc.). Thus, speaking of “Orthodoxy” is also

115 Antonius Liedhegener, “Ein kleiner, aber feiner Unterschied: Religion, zivilgesellschaftliches Engagement und gesellschaftliche Integration in der Schweiz,” in *Integrationspotenziale von Religion und Zivilgesellschaft. Theoretische und empirische Befunde*, ed. Edmund Arens, Martin Baumann, and Antonius Liedhegener (Zurich: Nomos, 2016), 112–82, here 125.

116 Liedhegener, “Unterschied,” 128.

117 Paul Sailer-Wlasits, *Verbalradikalismus. Kritische Geistesgeschichte eines soziopolitisch-sprachphilosophischen Phänomens* (Vienna/Klosterneuburg: Edition Va Bene, 2012), 215f.

a simplifying portrayal that disregards the plurality and diversity of patterns of interpretation within the various autocephalous churches and within the various sub-publics within these churches, such as academia, the media, and church. In other words, to speak of “Orthodoxy” suggests its “unchangeable nature,” a uniformity and homogeneity that does not correspond to reality. Furthermore, it neglects its connectivity to other religions or denominations, which seems particularly important for questions of socio-political relevance.

In view of the current state of civil society research, according to which “religion and civil society [...] must always be seen or analyzed in the context of existing political systems and their relationship to civil society and civil society engagement,”<sup>118</sup> a uniform relationship of “Orthodoxy” can also be assumed. Again, the Orthodox Churches function in completely divergent socio-political contexts that require careful empirical analysis. For practical research reasons, however, this could not be done within this contribution.

For this reason, I have argued here on the level of discourse. In any case, I have deliberately ignored the hegemonic mainstream discourses of threat and deficit about Orthodoxy and democracy, civil society and modernity. The escalating effect of this discourse is a reminder of ethical responsibility in the production of knowledge. Just as “Catholicism” was both “a construct and an effect of the anti-Catholic discourse,”<sup>119</sup> so “Orthodoxy” also constructs itself in relation to this “anti-Orthodox” discourse. Therefore, the counter-discourse has to be initiated to present and establish a new hermeneutical-analytical framework that is oriented towards recognition, respect and understanding of the “religious other” and its positioning in society and modernity that could be implemented and made fruitful for future research on “Orthodoxy.”

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118 Antonius Liedhegener and Ines-Jacqueline Werkner, *Religion, Zivilgesellschaft und politisches System – ein offenes Forschungsfeld in Religion zwischen Zivilgesellschaft und politischem System. Befunde – Positionen – Perspektiven*, ed. Antonius Liedhegener and Ines-Jacqueline Werkner (Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaft, 2011), 9–36, here 9 (Translation I.P.).

119 Casanova, “Religion,” 47.

# Mission(s) and Politics: An Orthodox's Approach

*Athanasios N. Papathanasiou*

## Introduction

Since the focus of my paper is mission, allow me to begin with two clarifications. It is wellknown that many, especially in Europe, are uncomfortable with the concept of mission inasmuch as they identify (in a rather essentialist manner) mission with colonialism. Since the 1960s, the notorious “guilt feeling” has very often led them not only to reject colonialism (which is the right thing to do) but also to repudiate any concept of mission. But the repudiation of mission *per se* is extremely problematic because it fails to account for all the radically different approaches to mission. The sense of mission that I advocate is a witness and invitation that is given freely and a participation in a global dialogue, a dialogue that enriches humankind. Mission has profound anthropological importance, and this must be understood by all, be they religious, atheist, or agnostic. It has to do with the human's fundamental ability to choose his/her own spiritual orientation, to opt for the meaning of life, to change him-/herself. In other words, mission reminds us that we are not immovable boulders nor rolling stones but (as Terry Eagleton has said), “we are clay in our own hands.”

In this process of self-shaping, action and passivity, the strenuously willed and the sheerly given, unite once more, this time in the same individuals. We resemble nature in that we, like it, are to be cuffed into shape, but we differ from it in that we can do this to ourselves, thus introducing into the world a degree of self-reflexivity to which the rest of nature cannot aspire. As self-cultivators, we are clay in our own hands, at once redeemer and unregenerate, priest and sinner in the same body.<sup>1</sup>

In this regard, mission resembles politics since both deal primarily with human responsibility and the human ability to make decisions and through them to inoculate creativity into the determinism of the natural world.

My second clarification has to do with the reservation of certain Orthodox theologians about mission. They do not reject mission, but they conceive it as something secondary; as something that does not define the identity of the Church and is not a decisive component of it. To the contrary, I believe that

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<sup>1</sup> Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford & Victoria: Blackwell & Malden, 2000), 11.

mission concerns the very being of the Church since it does not exist for its own sake but for the sake of the entire creation. The Church is not the end; it is not the Kingdom of God; it is the sign, the foretaste, the herald and deacon of the Kingdom. In that sense, the Church does not have a mission; it is mission.<sup>2</sup> That is why mission has no temporal or geographical limitations. It is directed both to human contexts that have come to know Christianity and those that have not. After all, since as early as 1963 the World Council of Churches' Commission on World Mission and Evangelism has made it clear that Christian witness is about "mission in six continents."<sup>3</sup>

In this contribution I will approach mission as the specific actions of proclaiming and inculcating the Gospel in diverse contexts (actions that imply both evangelization and solidarity indiscriminately). This approach moves beyond talking about mission in the abstract, as the salvific task of the Church at large. So, I will take into account the varied historical experience of missions as well as the theologies of mission and will try to delineate current quests.

### What Kind of Politics?

I now come to my subject and pose one key question: Does the proclamation of the Gospel have a political dimension? My answer is that the proclamation of the Gospel *is* a political act, but this requires clarification. The Gospel has a political character in the sense that it gives meaning to human life and calls people to make decisions. The real question, then, is not whether the mission has a political dimension, but what kind of political dimension it has. There are enormous differences between various strands of theology here, and interpretation always plays a crucial role. For example, Trinitarian doctrine may be interpreted so as to inspire a type of anarchist, direct democracy (based on the – let us say – egalitarian community of the three Persons), or, on the contrary, to reinforce absolute monarchy and authoritarian regimes (based on the so-called monarchy of the Father). So, I take the responsibility to point out here what seems to me to be the key features of the political dynamics that are brought out by missionary work.

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2 See Athanasios N. Papatheanasiou, "The Church as Mission: Fr Alexander Schmemmann's Liturgical Theology Revisited," *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 60 (2010): 6–41.

3 Kenneth R. Ross, Jooseop Keum, Kyriaki Avtzi, and Roderick R. Hewitt, eds., "Mexico City 1963: Witness in Six Continents," in *Ecumenical Missiology: Changing Landscapes and New Conceptions of Mission* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2016), 82–5.

As I said earlier, the proclamation of the Gospel recognizes each person's ability to choose his/her own spiritual orientation. The call to a personal conversion is the backbone of the Gospel.<sup>4</sup> Even when an explicit invitation from the Church does not exist at all, God's unseen invitation to conversion is always taking place. God desires every human being in every culture, to hunger for true love and thirst for true life, and therefore God acts both manifestly and in secret to invite people to the Kingdom.<sup>5</sup> The task of the Church therefore is to serve the mission of the missionary God and to affirm both that Christ works inside and outside the boundaries of the institutional Church and that God identifies with those in need. This is a political choice that every human being is called upon to make at his own risk and at his own cost, even if it breaks with his cultural tradition or social reality.

This emphasis on the responsibility of the human subject obviously flows into the church's traditional system of government, i.e., *synodality* (or collegiality). At the same time, however, it reminds us of modern liberal democracies and their fundamental view that every adult corresponds to one vote, that everyone is equal before the law, and that everyone is entitled to basic freedoms. Of course, those who deal with political theory know that these things are very complex and that there is a vast literature regarding democracy, its types, their virtues, and their drawbacks.<sup>6</sup> Capitalism tends to transform the citizens into consumers and to replace politics with marketing. The human being often surrenders not merely to outer oppression, but to its own enslavement through the narcissistic pursuit of individual success.<sup>7</sup> Besides, in representative democracy, political pluralism is a blessing. Nevertheless, participation in the decision-making process is very often replaced by the authority of elected elites or may be subjected to the power of a parliamentary majority that disdains the axiom that human rights exist for all and are

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4 See Athanasios N. Papathanasiou, "An Orphan or a Bride? The Human Self, Collective Identities and Conversion," in *Thinking Modernity: Towards a Reconfiguration of the Relationship between Orthodox Theology and Modern Culture*, ed. Assaad Kattan and Fadi Georgi (Balamand: St John of Damascus Institute of Theology, 2011), 133–63.

5 See Athanasios N. Papathanasiou, "If I Cross the Boundaries, You Are There! An Affirmation of God's Action Outside the Canonical Boundaries of the Church," *Communio Viatorum* 53, no. 3 (2011), 40–55.

6 See, for example, Frédéric Worms, *Les Maladies Chroniques de la démocratie* (Paris: Éditions Desclée de Brouwer, 2017); John Keane, *The Life and Death of Democracy* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2009). For an affirmation of liberal democracy from an Orthodox point of view, see Aristotle Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 55–146.

7 Cf. Byung-Chul Han, *The Agony of Eros*, trans. Eric Butler (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2017), 9–15.

not dependent on majority's options. At the same time, the great advantage of democracy is the fact that self-criticism belongs to its very being, together with its capacity to reform itself and heal its maladies.

The Christian understanding of humans as relational beings (as beings who live authentically insofar as they love) and of every person as the image of Christ excludes totalitarianism from its midst and at the same time endorses the concerns outlined above and a critical reception of democracy. Moreover, there is another point that, in my view, is particularly relevant to the political implications of Christian witness and its dialogue with liberal democracy: the appraisal of the human subject cannot only be expressed as equality before the law. If class inequality and social injustice run rampant, then individual rights exist in theory but not in practice. A child, for example, has a legal right to attend school, but in practice s/he will do so only if s/he is not forced to drop out of school or college because of poverty. In Betty Smith's work, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1943), Johnny, a son of Irish immigrants, goes for a walk with his daughter, Francie. He shows her the hansom cabs and explains that in free America everyone can ride a Hansom cab, after paying the fare of course. Francie then asks what kind of freedom it is when it is only enjoyed by those who are not poor. Johnny cannot answer the question but triumphantly asserts instead: "Because that would be Socialism, and we don't want that over here." "Why?" insists Francie. "Because we got Democracy and that's the best thing there is."<sup>8</sup> Already in Johnny's last sentence we not only meet an ideological disconnection of civil rights from social justice, but we also hear the argument that his brand of democracy represents a universal good. We will deal with this a little later.

Tangible acts of love are the criterion of the Last Judgment and thus the criterion of the attitude of Christians in history. Mission cannot, therefore, preach eschatology as an ontological theory without concern for the "least" of Christ's brothers and sisters (cf. Matthew 25:40), the unprivileged and the marginalized. This means that missionary work must develop in two ways. It must be practised as *inculturation* (i.e., turning the culture into the flesh of Christ), but it cannot be limited to inculturation: inculturation must be combined with *liberation*. Cultures are not monolithic; every culture contains structures of humanity and inhumanity, but the Church cannot take up forces that produce inhumanity. I would say therefore that inculturation is the politics of incarnation, while liberation is the politics of resurrection. The grandfather of "Liberation Theology," Gustavo Gutiérrez, has aptly noted that the mission of the Church includes both *proclamation* and *denunciation*:

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<sup>8</sup> Betty Smith, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (New York: Harper & Row, 1947), 166–8.

The realization that the Lord loves us and the acceptance of the unmerited gift of the Lord's love are the deepest source of the joy of those who live by God's word. Evangelization is the communication or sharing of this joy. It is the sharing of the good news of God's love that has changed our lives. The proclamation is in a sense free and unmerited, just as is the love that is the source of our proclamation. [...] The language of prophecy denounces the situation of injustice and exploitation [...] and denounces as well the structural causes of this situation.<sup>9</sup>

Father George Florovsky, a leading Orthodox theologian in the 20th century, emphasized the double task of mission (proclamation and denunciation). He did not articulate a political approach to mission yet he laid the theological foundation for it:

The first task of the Church in history consists in proclaiming the Good News. And the proclamation of the Good News inevitably conveys pronouncing a judgment on the world [...]. [The Church] does this by word and by acts, for the true announcing of the Gospel consists precisely in the practice of the new life, in the demonstration of faith through its acts [...]. Conversion is a new start that must be followed by a long and difficult race. The Church needs to organize the new life of the converted. The Church needs to show the new mode of existence, the new mode of life that is of the world to come. God claims the entire person and the Church gives witness to this total claim of God revealed in Jesus Christ. The Christian must be a new creature. This is why a Christian is unable to find a stable place within the confines of the "old world." In this sense the Christian attitude is always revolutionary by its relation to "the old order" of this world.<sup>10</sup>

Identifying the inhumane forces in each particular context is a matter of carefully studying and respectfully becoming familiar with each culture so that the missionary can truly understand the real situation and not simply reproduce his/her own homeland and society's stereotypes. It is, therefore, important to look at the subcultures of the culture in question and discover the voices of the "least" of Christ's brothers and sisters who are crying out against their own society. I refer you, by way of example, to the traditional Korean mask dance, which has been used by the lower classes to critique the ruling elite.<sup>11</sup> There is also the traditional ritual in Africa of spirit possession in which women who are oppressed by their husbands pretend to become possessed by a spirit that

9 *Gustavo Gutiérrez, The Truth Shall Make You Free: Confrontations*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 16.

10 Georges Florovsky, *The Body of the Living Christ: An Orthodox Interpretation of the Church*, trans. Robert M. Arida (Boston: The Wheel Library, 2018), 83–4.

11 Hong Jei Lee, *The Comparative Study of the Christology in Latin American Liberation Theology and Korean Minjung Theology*, PhD diss. (University of Glasgow, 1990), 196–7; <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/2397/>.

is respected in their tribe. The spirit ostensibly speaks through the woman and publicly castigates the authoritarian husband, without the husband being able to retaliate.<sup>12</sup> What is of special importance here is that missiology has recently acknowledged that the marginalized and the unprivileged are not only the recipients of the mission but also agents of it. The 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Busan, Republic of Korea (2013) *defined* and affirmed the “Mission from the Margins.” The document reads:

We affirm that marginalized people are agents of mission and exercise a prophetic role which emphasizes that fullness of life is for all. The marginalized in society are the main partners in God’s mission. Marginalized, oppressed, and suffering people have a special gift to distinguish what news is good for them and what news is bad for their endangered life. In order to commit ourselves to God’s life-giving mission, we have to listen to the voices from the margins to hear what is life-affirming and what is life-destroying. We must turn our direction of mission to the actions that the marginalized are taking. Justice, solidarity, and inclusivity are key expressions of mission from the margins.<sup>13</sup>

In my opinion, the recognition of the marginalized as agents of mission (in collaboration with all people who stand in solidarity with them), somehow echoes the practice of the ancient Church and specifically the role of the seven deacons who came from the underprivileged members of the community and contributed greatly to the missionary opening up of the Church (Acts 6:1–6, 8:4).

12 Heike Bahrend and Ute Luig, “Introduction,” in *Spirit Possession: Modernity and Power in Africa*, ed. Heike Bahrend and Ute Luig (Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), xvii.

13 *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes (CWME)*, World Council of Churches, [https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/Together\\_towards\\_Life.pdf](https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/Together_towards_Life.pdf), par. 107, p. 39 (accessed 25 November 2020). As Rev. Deenabandhu Manchala states: “In order to understand the reasons for this attempt to re-imagine mission from the margins, we must recognize a few common features of the experience of those on the margins. First, these groups of people are a part of the church in many contexts around the world that unfortunately experience discrimination and marginalization right within it. Secondly, they have also been victims of churches’ missionary expansion and theologies that took shape amidst and legitimized historical processes of discrimination and oppression of the weak and the vulnerable. And thirdly, these groups of people have been generally referred to or seen as recipients or objects of churches’ mission. Therefore, it is unique that these marginalized sections, the former victims, former objects of mission, now attempt a missiological reflection, not as a reaction to what mission has been to them in the past but of what they imagine God intends for the whole world and creation today.” See Deenabandhu Manchala, “Mission from the Margins. Toward a Just World,” *International Review of Mission* 101, no. 1 (2012), 153–4.

In fact, missionary activity faces many predicaments, dilemmas and temptations, however. One problem, for example, is posed by widespread missionary tactics throughout history to win over the sovereign and the ruling class of the people they are addressing. This of course makes sense, but it entails an enormous risk: the mission is considered to be a success if the leader is converted, regardless of what kind of politics s/he practices (or, at best, with the hope that Christian faith would later soften the heart of cruel sovereigns or make legislation more humane). The history of missions in Byzantium and medieval Western Europe is full of such cases. Let us nevertheless mention, by way of example, some attitudes in modern times, when the issue of democracy became central in the life of Western societies.

In China, in the 16th century, the distinguished Jesuit Matteo Ricci addressed the elite. In Korea, however, at the beginning of the 20th century, Protestants turned to poverty-stricken people and thus Minjung theology, Korea's liberation theology, began.<sup>14</sup> In 19th-century Africa, missionaries "almost inevitably tended to concentrate their attention and their powers of persuasion upon royals."<sup>15</sup> Another example, not immediately connected with the missionary field but certainly crucial for a Christian approach to politics, comes from Europe. With the emergence of the Nazi regime in Germany, Protestants all over the world found themselves divided. Some denounced Nazism as an anti-Christian ideology while others were charmed by Hitler as a virtuous leader: he neither drank nor smoked, encouraged modesty among women and was not a communist. Only those directly opposed to the Church were considered anti-Christian.<sup>16</sup> We can find a similar attitude everywhere, including the Orthodox world in the 20th century, when pro-fascist and anti-Semitic sentiments found expression in Orthodox movements in traditionally Orthodox countries like Romania.<sup>17</sup>

It may be helpful here to illustrate a contradiction hidden in the very being of traditional Orthodox thought. In much traditional theological literature, the "irreverent" ruler is usually seen merely as the leader who opposes right doctrine. But this overlooks the fact that the truly irreverent leader is first and foremost s/he who disregards justice. It is indicative that St. Nicodemus the Athonite (1749–1809) limits the duty to resist ("We must obey God rather than

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14 Bong Rin Ro, "Korea, South," in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 2000), 545–6.

15 Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa 1450–1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 307.

16 William Loyd Allen, "How Baptists Assessed Hitler," *Religion Online*; <https://www.religion-online.org/article/how-baptists-assessed-hitler/> (accessed 25 November 2020).

17 Cyril Hovorun, *Political Orthodoxies: The Unorthodoxies of the Church Coerced* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018), 60–3.

men”; Acts 5:29, RSV) only to those instances in which the ruler turns against the faith. But when Nicodemus looks for hagiographical passages to depict the unworthy ruler, he comes up against a different sense: in the Bible, the unworthy ruler is the one who tramples on social justice – not only Orthodox dogma. Nicodemus thus quotes from the prophets: “Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves. Everyone loves a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not defend the fatherless, and the widow’s cause does not come to them” (Isaiah 1:23, RSV). “Her princes [of the country] in the midst of her are like wolves tearing the prey, shedding blood, destroying lives to get dishonest gain” (Ezekiel 22:27, RSV).<sup>18</sup>

At this point, I suppose all our thoughts turn toward the emblematic phrase “liturgy after the Liturgy.” Coined in the 1970s, this “catchphrase” has been a major contribution of Orthodox theology to global Christianity. It emphasizes that what was made manifest during the celebration of the Eucharist within the ecclesial gathering needs now to be practiced as an “exodus,” by witnessing through word and deed in everyday life. This “exodus” means actual solidarity with the weak and a break with the forces of intolerance, oppression and social exclusion. In my opinion, this stance entails something extremely important and yet often overlooked. The “liturgy after the Liturgy” does not envision simply the Christianization of the whole of society; it also represents the Church’s vision for how a society ought to act in a public sphere in which both Christians and non-Christians freely coexist.

In our time, it seems that all theologians subscribe to the idea of the “liturgy after the Liturgy.” But I do not think it is quite that simple. Many see the Church’s celebration of the Eucharist as completely sufficient and thus treat the Church’s “exodus” as something additional or secondary. But the formula “liturgy after the Liturgy” means precisely the opposite: that witness – opening up toward the world – is a *continuation* of (and not an accessory to) the Divine Liturgy. If there is no continuation, then the very validity of the Divine Liturgy is cast into doubt.<sup>19</sup> It is no coincidence that this concept of the “liturgy after the Liturgy” was formed in the field of mission in 1975 by the pillar of mission, Anastasios Yannoulatos, Archbishop of the Orthodox Church in Albania since 1992.<sup>20</sup>

18 See Athanasios N. Papathanasiou, “Αντίσταση, λαϊκή εξέγερση, επανάσταση: Έρωτήματα για την κανονική παράδοση” [Resistance, Rebellion of the People, Revolution: Questions for the Canonical Tradition], *Synaxi* 146 (2018): 71–83.

19 See Athanasios N. Papathanasiou, “Social Engagement as Part of the Call to Deification in Orthodox Theologies,” *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 57, nos. 1–4 (2016), 87–106.

20 Ion Bria, “The Liturgy after the Liturgy,” *International Review of Mission* 265 (1978), 86–90.

Diametrically opposed to this concept of the “liturgy after the Liturgy” are Neo-Pentecostal theology and the “Prosperity Gospel,” which see the Church’s mission exclusively as individual redemption from the devil and his wicked spirits, who bring poverty and sickness as just punishment to those who are not faithful Christians. According to this view, there is no such thing as social injustice, since the poor themselves are at fault. Interestingly, we find similar views among Orthodox Christians who attribute society’s misfortunes either to the will of God or the personal laziness of the poor – apparently contrary to the teachings of the Bible and the church fathers, who interpret social injustice as opposition to God’s will.<sup>21</sup>

### Anthropology and Politics: A Perennial Crossroads

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union (i.e., since the 1990s), political scientists have examined the question whether liberal representative democracy is a universal human good or – to the contrary – a product that only makes sense in Western culture. If the values of democracy are not universal, then their application to other cultural contexts is nothing more than cultural imperialism. Samuel Huntington and Francis Fukuyama triggered the discussion, and a tsunami of critique, refutations and elaborations followed. I will remind the reader here only that Huntington claimed that the fall of the dictatorship in Portugal in 1974 fired a global wave of democratization that reached Latin America and Asia in the 1980s and Eastern Europe and Africa in the 1990s.<sup>22</sup> Fukuyama argued that liberal democracy is, in fact, the final stage of human political development.<sup>23</sup> I am not going to take up the particular discussion of these much debated views but will only deal with the question of the universality of liberal democracy in connection with mission. This question is perennially important for Christians, in spite of the changes that have been taking place on the global level. The current neo-colonialism differs from classical colonialism (which collapsed after World War II) in that neo-colonialism does

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21 See Athanasios N. Papathanasiou, “Liberation Perspectives in Patristic Thought: An Orthodox Approach,” in *Hellenic Open University: Scientific Review of Post-Graduate Program Studies in Orthodox Theology* 2 (2011), 419–38.

22 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991). According to Huntington, the first wave of democracy sprang from early 19th-century reforms in the USA and affected several countries until the emergence of 20th-century totalitarianisms. The second wave started after the World War II and ended in the early 1960s.

23 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin Books, 1992).

not need Christian missions as one of its vehicles; advanced technologies and globalized stockexchange market are sufficient weapons or perhaps its new expansionist religion.

The question pertains to mission diachronically in the sense that mission by its very nature requires an encounter between cultures. But many of the theologians who discuss the relationship of Christianity and democracy take modern political Islam into account, but –surprisingly enough – they are rather unaware of the field of mission’s vast experience (both positive and negative, past and current), and are thus deprived of an enormous amount of research material. For example, in the *vita* of the 9th century Byzantine missionaries Cyril and Methodius, we find Cyril’s dialogue with the Khazars of Crimea regarding their hereditary monarchy, which the Khazars had and the Byzantines (to the Kazars’ surprise) did not:

Having boarded a ship, Constantine set out for the land of the Khazars by way of the Meotis Sea and Caspian Gates of the Caucasus Mountains. The Khazars sent a cunning and resourceful man to meet him, who entered into conversation with him and said to him: “Why do you follow the evil custom of replacing one emperor with another of a different lineage? We do this only according to lineage.” The Philosopher said to him: “Yet in place of Saul, who did nothing to please Him, God chose David, who was pleasing to Him, and David’s lineage.”<sup>24</sup>

Moving now to the modern age, the 19th century was marked by the missionary messianism of Americans in particular. Many missionaries believed that their mission was to spread the Gospel, science and democracy around the world. The eminent American theologian H. Richard Niebuhr wrote sarcastically in 1937 that American missionaries were eager to give light to the Gentiles but used lamps made in the USA.<sup>25</sup> The echo of the Social Gospel in America was still strong and made the German theologian Karl Heim comment: “The kingdom of God means nothing more than the League of Nations, democracy and the coming of militant capitalism.”<sup>26</sup> And in our time, Ian Buruma, assessing the American mindset, has scathingly pointed out that “the difference between selling the gospel, agricultural machinery, or a political candidate is

24 Marvin Kantor, trans., “The Vita and Life of Our Blessed Teacher Constantine the Philosopher, the First Preceptor of the Slavic People,” in *Medieval Slavic Lives of Saints and Princes* (Ann Arbor MI: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1983), 45; <http://macedonia.kroraina.com/en/kmsl/index.htm>.

25 H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 179.

26 Timothy Yates, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 65.

not always obvious in the United States. For all mix show business with popular sentiment, the reassuring air of the regular guy, and the braggadocio of the carnival huckster."<sup>27</sup>

But neither have European missionaries escaped this kind of fair vitriolic criticism. "When your fathers fixed the place of GOD," wrote T. S. Eliot at the same time as Niebuhr,

And settled all the inconvenient saints,  
Apostles, martyrs, in a kind of Whipsnade,  
Then they could set about imperial expansion  
Accompanied by industrial development.  
Exporting iron, coal and cotton goods  
And intellectual enlightenment  
And everything, including capital  
And several versions of the Word of GOD:  
The British race assured of a mission  
Performed it, but left much at home unsure.<sup>28</sup>

The export of democracy together with the Gospel, during the colonialist missions, has haunted the whole discussion. But some elaborations are quite necessary. Two different issues are involved here. On the one hand, we have to trace the politics that derive from the Gospel itself. On the other hand, we have to consider the political system of the missionary's homeland whenever the missionary considers it to be the proper application of the Gospel in social life. Despite being a widespread belief, it is not true that every mission was simply a tool of colonial states. Of course, many were just that. But, for example, non-conformist missionaries – i.e., Protestants who were in favour of separating church and state and who were persecuted in their homelands – are a different case. They were not financed by the state, and they emphasized individual freedoms in particular. Already in the late 18th century, the catalyst for modern mission, William Carey, urged the British to boycott products made in India under inhumane conditions,<sup>29</sup> and there is a strong movement today to support global fair trade.

<sup>27</sup> Ian Buruma, *Taming the Gods: Religion and Democracy on Three Continents* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 16.

<sup>28</sup> T. S. Eliot, "Choruses from *The Rock*, II," in *Collected Poems 1909–1935* (London: Faber & Faber, 1936), 100–1.

<sup>29</sup> Darren Cronshaw, "A Commission 'Great' for Whom? Postcolonial Contrapuntal Readings of Matthew 28:18–20 and the Irony of William Carey," *Transformation* 33, no. 2 (2016), 115–8.

Nonconformists (i.e., non-state-supported Protestant denominations) historically suffered from discrimination and persecution by governments and state churches. Thus they fought for religious liberty and against state interference in civil society. [...] Nonstate missionaries moderated colonial abuses, particularly when abuses undermined conversions and in British colonies [...]. To reach their religious goals, nonstate missionaries punished abusive colonial officials and counterbalanced white settlers, which fostered the rule of law, encouraged less violent repression of anticolonial political organization, and facilitated peaceful decolonization. Of course, Protestant economic and political elites were as selfish as anyone else. Protestant slave owners fought slave literacy, and Protestant settlers exploited indigenous people; however, when missionaries were financially independent of the state, of slave owners, and of white settlers, missionaries undermined these elite co-religionists in ways that fostered democracy.<sup>30</sup>

We have to take the complexity of the whole issue under serious consideration. On the one hand, numerous missions served colonialism while, on the other, several missions cultivated respect towards cultural otherness. The case of the Protestant missionary Hudson Taylor (1832–1905) in China and his clash with other missionaries who could not share his respect for Chinese culture is indicative.<sup>31</sup> As the colonization of mind and cultural imposition, missions have really deep roots; but the trends in favour of contextualization were intensified especially after World War I. This merciless war between (so to say) Christian states filled the European soul with a new bitter feeling that it no longer made sense to offer Christianity along with the political and economic implications of desolate European civilization. At the same time, this bitter feeling contributed to a liberating shift. The ecclesiastical centres of Europe thus began to acknowledge the need for missionaries in the Third World to maintain, as far as possible, the traditional structure of indigenous societies and shape local churches with indigenous features.<sup>32</sup> In missionary discourse, the need for respect towards the culturally other had been stressed by some already in the middle of the 19th century<sup>33</sup>, but after the subversive World War I it began to touch the metropolitan church centres.

As I said, the notion of conversion lays crucial emphasis on the importance of the human person. Consequently, this emphasis proves to be a catalyst for the evaluation of every regime. The capacity for self-orientation implies the

30 Robert D. Woodberry, "The Missionary Roots of Liberal Democracy," *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 2 (2012): 246.

31 J. Herbert Kane, "The Legacy of J. Hudson Taylor," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 8, no. 2 (1984), 74–8.

32 Ronald Oliver, *The Missionary Factor in East Africa* (London: Longmans, 1952), 232.

33 See, for example, Wilbert R. Shenk, "The Contribution of Henry Venn to Mission Thought," *Anvil* 2, no. 1 (1985), 25–42.

human subject's ability to judge his or her own culture, even to break from specific institutions of his or her culture. The purpose of this break is not the exit of the human subject from its culture and from its societal relations but their reorientation. No matter how difficult it may be in reality, conversion does not ask the human subject to become a fleshless (that is, cultureless) phantom, but to insert new meaning into common life. This inevitably implies a dialectics of affirmations and negations of customs, institutions and concepts. Of course, to what degree any conversion is genuine or false (colonization of mind) is an open question, as is every human action. But what interests us here is conversion as a basic anthropological capacity. This capacity emerges as a real revolution in contexts where the human subject has atrophied within a powerful hierarchical or collectivist system, such as the caste system in India or Confucianism in the Far East (or even in traditionally Orthodox countries when a strong sense of collectivism identifies religious identity with ethnic DNA at the expense of personal conversion).<sup>34</sup>

An early manifestation of this issue (somehow like an introduction to or anticipation of political theology) has been the missionaries' stance pro or contra slavery. Mark Twain's work, *King Leopold's Soliloquy*, written in 1869, is typical. In this work, the American author denounces Belgium's brutality in the Congo. Twain admits that these cruelties came to light only through missionaries, who were the only ones to stand in solidarity with the indigenous people.<sup>35</sup> Twain's testimony is important because he generally disliked missionaries, regarding them as fugitives from life and accusing them of serving "the Blessings-of-Civilization Trust," as he called imperialism.<sup>36</sup> It goes without saying that not all missionaries had the same views. The Dutch Reformed Church, for example, supported apartheid in South Africa.<sup>37</sup>

The missionary work of translating the Bible and other texts into vernacular languages contributed to strengthening the self-confidence of the receivers. Translations not only conveyed the message the missionaries wanted to spread but also gave the indigenous people new possibilities for expressing themselves in every field. For the Orthodox Church, the case of Saint Nicolas Kasatkin, missionary to Japan (1836–1912), has been exemplary. The tiny Orthodox Church

34 See Athanasios N. Papathansiou, "Signs of National Socialism in the Greek Church?," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 57, nos. 3–4 (2013), 461–78.

35 Mark Twain, *King Leopold's Soliloquy: A Defense of His Congo Rule* (Boston: P. R. Warren, 1905), 6–7.

36 Mark Twain, "To the Person Sitting in Darkness," *North American Review* 531 (1901), 165.

37 Woodberry, "The Missionary Roots," 245, 255.

in Japan was aptly called “the Church of the Translations.”<sup>38</sup> Yet Protestant missions played a special role in this matter. Protestants’ firm conviction that everyone should be able to read the Bible in his/her own language – and, by extension, leaflets and newspapers – led to a particular emphasis on cultivating the conditions necessary for democratic governments in the Third World.

It is an established fact that, in many colonies, colonial governments implemented educational programmes for the locals. The missionaries’ educational programs, however, tended to be more radical, in that, while governmental programs were aimed at men, missionaries included women.<sup>39</sup> Through their educational and publishing programmes, missionaries obviously seek to spread their own particular views. But, as I said earlier, the crucial point here is that these programmes unleash a valuable force that often transcends the missionaries’ visual horizon or intentions. Many anti-colonial independence movements in the Third World came together through the very means provided by their access to the written word and the exchange of ideas.<sup>40</sup> In the 32 years after the introduction of the printing press in India in 1800, three British missionaries managed to print over 212,000 books in 40 languages, as well as newspapers that could be read by anyone. Hindi and Muslim publishing endeavours began later as a reaction to Christian literature. It stands to reason that the decisive factor in emancipation was not printing itself but the spirit that accompanied this publishing activity: the Gospel emphasis on the human subject. In the Far East (China, Japan, and Korea), printing existed 600–800 years before it existed in Europe. Its use, however, was limited to the elite.<sup>41</sup> Very interesting initiatives took place in Africa as well:

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38 Charles F. Sweet, “Archbishop Nikolai and the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission to Japan,” *International Review of Mission* 2 (1913), 144; cf. Athanasios N. Papathanasiou “Tradition as Impulse for Renewal and Witness: The Introduction of Orthodox Missiology into the IRM,” *International Review of Mission* 393 (2011), 203–15.

39 Tomila Lankina and Lullit Getachew, “Mission or Empire, Word or Sword? The Human Capital Legacy in Post-Colonial Democratic Development,” *American Journal of Political Science* 56, no. 2 (2012), 465–83. Especially for India: Tomila Lankina & Lullit Getachew, “Competitive Religious Entrepreneurs: Christian Missionaries and Female Education in Colonial and Post-Colonial India,” *British Journal of Political Science* 43, no. 1 (2013), 103–31. The Catholics also developed an extensive printing operation, sometimes before the Protestants, but they mainly addressed the local elites. See Woodberry, “The Missionary Roots,” 256.

40 James S. Coleman, “The Problem of Political Integration in Emergent Africa,” *The Western Political Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (1955), 54.

41 Woodberry, “The Missionary Roots,” 250.

The first newspaper intended for black readers, the *Umshumayeli Wendaba* (“Publishers of the News”), written in Xhosa, was published as an irregular quarterly in 1837 and printed at the Wesleyan Missionary Society in Cape Colony. *Isigidimi samaXhosa* (“The Xhosa Messenger”), the first African newspaper edited by Africans, was first released in 1876 and printed at the Lovedale Mission Press in South Africa. In 1884, the English/Xhosa weekly *Imvo Zabantsundu* (“The African Opinion”), the first black-owned and controlled newspaper in South Africa, was published. On the contrary, in regions where Protestant missions were less active, the first newspapers appeared only at the beginning of the 20th century, and no indigenous newspapers were created before WWI. The first paper in Ivory Coast to be owned and edited by an African, the *Éclairteur de la Cote d’Ivoire*, only appeared in 1935.<sup>42</sup>

### Current Issues

I will now touch upon some indicative examples of current discourse between non-Western cultures and Western-style democracy. I will refer to three contexts: the Far Eastern, the sub-Saharan African and the Latin American. Each of them needs extensive discussion of course, but I feel that even a few words are useful here, so that we take into account the fact that every culture is an active process (and not a static essence), every culture has to be in dialogue with itself and other cultures, and the Church has to be ready to accept their wisdom and enrich the articulation of the Good News in human life.

In the Confucian tradition of the Far East, the principle of “one person, one vote” remains difficult to digest. Governance must be exercised by the virtuous, i.e., an elite. But some Confucians who are interested in a synthesis of Confucianism and democracy argue that, in order for the virtuous to emerge, every individual must participate in the public square. So it is argued that

It is [...] possible that Confucian values can emend the less positive features of Western-style democracy, such as rampant individualism and the lack of commitment to family and community. Democracy, when forged with Confucian ideals, could result in a system of individualism, participation, consensus, and authority. In Confucian Democracy, for example, Sor-Hoon Tan proposes an alternative to liberal democracy. Tan argues that unlike a liberal democracy that operates under the constraints of interest groups, Confucian democracy is capable of promoting both individual freedom and the common good. Confucianism may also be capable of strengthening democracy. For example, Yung-Myung Kim writes that the Confucian emphasis on social order and respect for authority, harmony,

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42 Julia Cagé and Valeria Rueda, “The Devil Is in the Detail: Christian Missions’ Heterogeneous Effects on Development in sub-Saharan Africa,” VOXeu CEPR, <https://voxeu.org/article/christian-missions-and-development-sub-saharan-africa> (accessed 25 November 2017).

and consensus may aid in the survival of burgeoning democracies. Fetzer and Soper contend that, like other religions, Confucianism can bend to emerging democratic trends. Conversely, Confucianism can “temper the excesses” of individualism and promote more consideration of past generations.<sup>43</sup>

In my opinion, the critical question here is whether the so-called “Asian values” (understood as the justification of authoritarianism after their renowned contribution to the “economic miracle” of Far Eastern countries since the 1970s) will prevail, or whether they can be oriented to new syntheses like the one described above.<sup>44</sup> What is of special importance is the fact that right now Chinese Christian theologians are making fascinating attempts at critically applying the concept of inculturation (with important political implications, even if they are not voiced loudly), advocating for the place of Christian theology in the public sphere. At the same time, it has been suggested that the ecclesiastical community takes the place of the biological family, which stands in the Confucian tradition as the political subject.<sup>45</sup> The emergence of the faith community (based of free choice) seems to be an important step. Yet my own skepticism here is whether this transition reinforces the role of the church leader in the way the absolute power of the father is understood in the Confucian family. In this case, the political implications will again lean towards authoritarianism.

In sub-Saharan Africa, things are quite different. The human subject is emphasized in the pre-Christian African tradition, but not as the autonomous individual of the European enlightenment. To exist as a human subject without a community is inconceivable. The *sui generis* African personalism endowed Africa with a unique political path through history. As Nelson Mandela aptly noted:

Then [before colonialism] our people lived peacefully under the democratic rule of their kings [...]. There were no classes [...] and no exploitation of man by man. All men were free and equal and this was the foundation of government. [...] The council was so completely democratic that all members of the tribe could participate in its deliberations. [...] There was much in such a society that was primitive and insecure and it certainly could never measure up to the demands

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- 43 Nicholas Spina, Doh C. Shin and Dana Cha, “Confucianism and Democracy: A Review of the Opposing Conceptualizations,” *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 12, no. 1 (2011), 155.
- 44 Mark Richard Thompson, “Pacific Asia after ‘Asian Values’: Authoritarianism, Democracy, and ‘Good Governance,’” *Third World Quarterly* 25, no. 6 (2004), 1079–95.
- 45 Alexander Chow, *Chinese Public Theology. Generational Shifts and Confucian Imagination in Chinese Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 92–105, 146–59.

of the present epoch. But in such a society are contained the seeds of a revolutionary democracy [...].<sup>46</sup>

Mandela captures the African variety. Traditional African societies existed in two different types: centralized societies and non-centralized or stateless societies. Wherever a leader existed, his power was often limited by councils of elders or assemblies of all adults, while stateless societies enjoyed a kind of immediate democracy. Decisions were usually not taken by a majority but by consensus (unanimously).<sup>47</sup> Mandela apparently exaggerates when he describes traditional society as classless, but it does seem that there was a combination of equality before the law and social justice, which was disturbed when colonialism introduced the ideal of individual freedom alongside competitive capitalism.

There has been a great deal of debate about the political evolution of Africa from the 1950s until today. As we know, the states that emerged after colonialism have been plagued by a nightmarish alternation between authoritarianism, democracy and dictatorship. The colonial disintegration of the traditional African political model altered the way leaders emerged, the councils' control over the royal authority passed away, and the artificial creation of states brought various tribes into conflict. Africa's great contribution to the current global discussion about the nature and problems of democracy are the tug-of-war between representative democracy and immediate democracy on the one hand and majority or consensus on the other. Right now there is an extensive debate among African scholars, to which I cannot go into here (I will only note that I am already working on this).<sup>48</sup>

In Latin America, liberation theology inspired political initiatives and experimentations. It is well known that there, in the 1970s and 1980s, the "ecclesial base communities" tried to apply types of Christian socialism. What is less wellknown, however, is that the path toward "ecclesial base communities" had already been blazed four centuries earlier by Catholic missionaries. In 1537, the Catholic bishop Vasco de Quiroga, inspired by Thomas More's *Utopia*,

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46 Quoted by George B. N. Ayittey, *Indigenous African Institutions* (New York: Transnational Publishers, 2006), 105.

47 M. Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard, "Introduction," in *African Political Systems*, ed. M. Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 5; George B. N. Ayittey, *Indigenous African Institutions* (New York: Transnational Publishers, 2006), 106–41.

48 Athanasios N. Papathanasiou, "Is a Dialogue between 'African' Anarchism" and Orthodox Anarchist Principles Possible?" in *Anarchism and Orthodoxy: Contemporary Approaches to Orthodox Theology and the Issues of Freedom and Power*, ed. Davor Džalto (forthcoming).

established two model indigenous communities in Mexico. They were classless communities, with processes of direct democracy, distribution of profits as needed, free medical care, 6-hour workdays, etc.<sup>49</sup> Seventy years later (in 1609), Jesuit missionaries established an autonomous, very successful Christian welfare state in Paraguay<sup>50</sup> (the case became widely known through the film *The Mission*, written by Robert Bolt and directed by Roland Joffé). This state survived for 150 years until it was overthrown by Christian colonial troops.

The Latin American missionary experience was truly multidimensional and has a lot to teach us, despite the decline of liberation theology in the 1990s. Two questions are of special importance, in my opinion. First is whether the missionaries practised inculturation, taking into account pre-Colombian elements of immediate democracy in indigenous communities.<sup>51</sup> The second question is whether the attitude of the missionaries towards the converted Indian Americans was paternalistic or, on the contrary, led to their emancipation and their acceptance as true and responsible participants in democratic processes.

### Conclusion

In a world where the economy now appears to be swallowing up politics, where the esotericism of the New Age ignores history, and where nationalisms are being emboldened, Christian mission is very important. Human life needs the witness that the blessed ones are those who bring the light of the future Kingdom into history, *hungry and thirsty for righteousness*.

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49 Bernardino Verástique, *Michoacán and Eden: Vasco de Quiroga and the Evangelization of Western Mexico* (Austin TX: University of Texas Press, 2000).

50 Walter Nonneman, "On the Economics of the Social Theocracy of the Jesuits in Paraguay (1609–1767)," in *The Political Economy of Theocracy*, ed. Mario Ferrero and Ronald Wintrobe (New York: Pargrace Macmillan, 2009), 119–42.

51 See, for example, Lizzie Wade, "It Wasn't Just Greece: Archaeologists Find Early Democratic Societies in the Americas," *Science AAAS*, 15 March 2017, <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2017/03/it-wasnt-just-greece-archaeologists-find-early-democratic-societies-americas>.

# The Sin of Phyletism: A Multicultural Perspective on Ethnic Bigotry in the Orthodox Church

*Chris Durante*

## Introduction

During the violent intra-Orthodox conflicts that occurred in the 19th century as a result of ethnonationalistic warfare, the Patriarch of Constantinople declared *phyletism*, or tribalistic bigotry, a sin in 1872. Unfortunately, tensions involving ethnic, cultural and national belonging continue to plague the Orthodox Christian world. To that end, I will begin this essay with a moral analysis of phyletism and an examination of the socio-ontological and ethical dimensions of ethnic and cultural identity as they relate to the Orthodox Christian tradition. Subsequently, I will place Orthodox Christianity in dialogue with contemporary multiculturalism as a means of better enabling Orthodox Christianity to come to terms with its own internal cultural diversity and position within global society. Finally, I will suggest that the cultivation of the virtue of *philoxenia* can serve as a counterforce to the sin of phyletism and enable the Orthodox Church to develop a more multicultural understanding of itself as a global institution.

## Modernity and the Sin of Phyletism

With the “secularization” of social life that occurred during modernity came a penetrating empiricism that shifted the world’s social imaginary from one in which notions of transcendence were pervasive to one in which we could not see past, what Charles Taylor calls the “immanent frame”: a frame that “constitutes a ‘natural’ order, to be contrasted to a ‘supernatural’ one, an ‘immanent’ world, over against a possible ‘transcendent’ one”<sup>1</sup> that decentred people’s sense of place and purpose in history. Social life became inconceivable outside of the immanent frame, and hence people sought objects of devotion in the worldly order. As José Casanova has claimed, in our secular modern age we

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1 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2007), 542.

have come to sacralize a variety of secular phenomena, including the nation.<sup>2</sup> But what is a nation? and how have we come to revere and sacralize it?

The Latin term *natio* referred to a place of birth and hence originally implied a “people-hood” rooted in an ancestral place, and the Greek term *ethnos* referred to a group of people accustomed to living together. Thus, both terms initially held a sense of cultural heritage. In modernity, however, our understandings of “nation” and “ethnicity” have been transformed so that “nationality” became politicized while “ethnicity” became biologically grounded or “racialized,” so to speak. Unlike our contemporary notion of “culture,” “nationalisms” (such as ethnic nationalism, civic nationalism, religious nationalism, and ideological nationalism) now carry with them politicized identity narratives. Hence, they produce a teleology in which any distinct collective’s aim must be to create a nation state for themselves so that their community can fulfill its purpose in history. This gave rise to the sacralization of ethnonational groupings as “political sovereignty” began to operate as a secularized concept of salvation. For the peoples of the Balkans, the idea of “ethnonationalism” emerged during the 19th century as an object of devotion worshiped through political means.

In response to the rise of ethnonationalism among Orthodox communities, the Patriarchate of Constantinople declared phyletism, which we might view as “tribalistic bigotry,” a sin in 1872. Initially, phyletism referred to a group’s attempt to acquire either autonomy or autocephaly as a separate ecclesial community based solely on the grounds of ethnic identity. Such pursuits were often accompanied, if not encouraged, by ethnic communities seeking political autonomy from imperial powers that fomented dissension from ecclesial seats of power, especially when such seats were held by ethnolinguistically distinct groups or individuals or even when minority groups in a region maintained a separate ethnocultural existence outside of the larger ecclesial community. Hence, ecclesial unity became perceived as a threat to ethnonational unity and, by sacralizing the ethnonational – or political – community over and above the ecclesial community, these groups developed geopolitical hatreds and eventually descended into sanguinary warfare.

Many in North America also use the term phyletism to refer, however, to the existence of ethnolinguistically defined ecclesial jurisdictions that have come to characterize the Orthodox presence in North American and Australian society. In the North American and Australian contexts, there is a large degree of intercultural Orthodox interaction and communication, and violence is virtually absent from their existence; furthermore, any animosities that do exist rarely – if ever – erupt into violence. Despite a current lack of collaborative

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2 José Casanova, “The Secular and Secularisms,” *Social Research* 76, no. 4 (2009), 1064.

projects, the cultural bastions of Orthodoxy in American and Australian society are hardly guilty of phyletism in the historical sense in which it was declared a sin. This is a salient point because the mere presence of linguistic difference and an acknowledgement of its entanglement in ethnocultural histories and traditions within Orthodox Christianity is not a negative phenomenon and ought not necessarily be likened to the murderous and genocidal acts and modes of behaviour that accompanied the events of the Balkan wars. Unlike the circumstances of the extreme violence resulting from deep hatreds that erupted in the Balkans during the 19th century, the – originally – primarily immigrant and ethnolinguistically grounded churches formed in North America and Australia were simply seeking a semblance of home as they simultaneously sought peace and prosperity in their new homelands, which were often hostile towards immigrants of different cultures and foreign religious traditions. While the term phyletism ought to apply to any form of tribalistic bigotry based on a person's or group's race, ethnicity, language or cultural background, we must be extremely careful not to apply the term to the existence of racial, ethnic, linguistic or cultural diversity itself. Arguably, part of the problem with the later Byzantine and Rum-Ottoman modes of constructing social identity within the Orthodox community was precisely the fact that they overemphasized homogeneity at the expense of diversity and finding a means of discovering unity in plurality. Be it in the Balkans or North America, in the 19th or 21st century, the Orthodox world desperately needs to reconcile its historical ability to embrace ethnic and linguistic difference with its pursuit of *catholicity*.

When ethnicity and language become nationalized, they cease to be merely cultural phenomena with robust histories but become politicized and used as agents in the pursuit of state sovereignty and hence instruments of division rather than unity and handmaidens of power rather than of compassion. Even though the notion of ethnolinguistic heritage has become deeply ingrained in the nationalistic narratives of a great many modern nation states, language and ethnicity are not akin to modern nationality. Nationality, while often containing a shared language, is grounded in the geopolitical sphere in ways in which language is not. Language can transcend political interests and geographical borders and can therefore bond and unite a community regardless of whether they have any politicized nationalistic interests or aims in becoming a nation state. To a large extent, the same may be said of ethnicity when construed in historical-cultural terms rather than biological and racial ones. As the sociologist Anthony Smith writes, "When people identify with ethnies, they feel a sense of wider kinship with a fictive 'super-family,' one that extends

outwards in space and down the generations.”<sup>3</sup> Smith’s observation highlights the interpersonal and affective dimensions of communal bonding that takes place within ethnic communities and does not in and of itself necessarily imply any overtly politicized identity narrative. The idea of an *ethnos* implies a people with a common ancestry united by place of origin and historical rootedness in a particular territorial locality in which they developed and came to share common linguistic and cultural practices. Hence, the notion of *ethnos* originally had as its focus a community of persons bound together by shared regional customs and language. Hence, it was deeply tied to conceptions of locality and territoriality, but more importantly: community. In contrast, the modern concept of “nation” tends to be construed in terms of political statehood (even when the “nation” is currently stateless, the term is often invoked to imply aspirations for national political sovereignty). The concept of “nation” does indeed imply the notion of territorial boundedness, albeit as a politicized form of collective belonging and territorial identity (whether based on ethnic or civic criteria). Both ethnies and nations presuppose a community united by a shared set of similarities (be it ideology, race, ethnicity, language or some combination of these), in what has become an inherently political concept. But in the concept of nation, each individual is conceived of as relating to a centralized authoritative entity (such as the state) or a political concept (such as democracy, liberalism, laicism) rather than towards one another in the connectedness of historically and socially embedded webs of interpersonal relation – like cultural and linguistic understandings of community – that do not necessarily rely on state-related political structures for their existence and continuation.

Insofar as the sin of phyletism inherently involves ethnicity, many commentators – both from within the ranks of Orthodox Christianity and observers from without – have criticized the ethnolinguistic ecclesial affiliations that have come to characterize contemporary Orthodox Christian communities. Simply because phyletism is immoral, however, it does not necessarily follow that an affectionate fondness for one’s ethnocultural traditions and linguistic community is in and of itself a moral wrong. Just as self-conceit, or egoism, involves a form of self-concern but is not identical to it, phyletism is not identical to a love of culture. We must be careful not to confuse ethnolinguistic communal fraternity with either ethnocentric theological claims or prejudice based upon ethnonationalistic bigotry. Simply because an Orthodox

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3 Anthony Smith, “Chosen Peoples: Why Ethnic Groups Survive,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 15, no. 3 (1992), 438. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.1992.9993756>.

Christian community values its cultural and linguistic traditions does not necessarily imply it is guilty of phyletism.

As a sin, phyletism is not simply a love of one's ethnocultural group. Rather, the immorality embodied in phyletism is a sense of an ethnoracial (phylogenetic) supremacy that distorts an affectionate sense of kinship with others into a malicious sense of superiority of one's own ethnoracial group while eschewing others. This sin becomes worse when an ethnic group links such a malicious sense of superiority to their membership in an Orthodox Christian ecclesial community, for it undermines the very Christian ethic of *agapê* that such a community is supposed to embody. Phyletism is immoral precisely because it involves an egotistical form of collective self-recognition coupled with either non-recognition or misrecognition of other groups and their members. Phyletism emerges when a collective becomes so self-absorbed that they fail to recognize any value in the customs and culture of other communities and is thus a distortion of what a morally sound affinity for and fondness of one's own ethnolinguistic cultural community can be.

The reason why phyletism has been such a problem in the Orthodox world is that, for many of the world's Orthodox Christians, their religious traditions are intimately bounded by the ethnolinguistic cultures through which they first experienced and through which they seek to preserve their religiosity. The diverse cultural expressions of a common faith embody these communities' unique ways of living out their Orthodoxy and for which they often seek recognition. When this is denied, anger and hatred become instilled within the group that is not recognized or negatively characterized and hence morph into a desire to separate from, or even harm, any group perceived as a potential threat to their in-group (at times rightfully so due to historical instances of violence). The issue of non-recognition may at times apply to both groups that have held more ecclesiastical power historically as well as those that have not. Ethnolinguistic groups that have held less ecclesiastical power will naturally feel harmed if their ethnolinguistic traditions and cultural communities are not recognized or mischaracterized in a derogatory fashion and seek to ensure their group's autonomy as a means of ensuring its survival as a unique cultural community. On the other hand, dominant groups may feel betrayed when others seek to break away – when they were united in a common way of life, common faith, common struggles and a common ethos in the past. And thus they feel as though the groups seeking autonomy are refusing to recognize their shared history and identity and may become vengeful due to a sense of betrayal and a refusal to recognize the two groups' shared narrative, especially when such a group is being portrayed as being or having been “an oppressor” by the other when they do not view themselves as such. The point is that recognition

of ethnolinguistic and cultural uniqueness plays a crucial role in coming to a nuanced understanding of what phyletism is as well as the ways in which it takes root and begins to develop. Charles Taylor claims that “Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need.”<sup>4</sup> He explains:

The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.<sup>5</sup>

Arguably, part of what spawned the emergence of phyletism in the first place was precisely the fact that various ethnic groups felt that they were not being given due recognition of their unique cultural identities by the ethnic groups that held positions of power and authority within the Church. For instance, the case of the Bulgarian demand for autocephaly, which led directly to the condemnation of phyletism, was certainly the result of ethnonationalism and the politicization of the Bulgarian Orthodox identity. But it was also partly motivated by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople's prior attempts to enforce the use of the Greek liturgy as part of a larger process of Hellenization that sought the unification of the Ottoman Rum *millet* through cultural assimilationism. But to assert any narrative identity that eradicates portions of its history of intercultural encounter and influence in the interests of national sovereignty may also be seen as a form of cultural erasure and, hence, a negative form of homogenization that seeks the same end as assimilationist acts. Both are merely two methods of striving for the same goals: homogeneity and autonomy in the sense of separation from otherness. To this end, an ecclesial *telos* of homogeneity does nothing but create fertile ground for phyletism in that it fails to comprehend the plural nature of human sociality and fails to recognize that another's language and cultural heritage are as valuable to that person as one's own language and cultural customs are to oneself. Consequently, to deny recognition to the various ethnocultural and linguacultural traditions of the Orthodox world by excluding their experiences and concerns from ecclesiastical considerations may itself be a form of harm against the members of these communities as it stifles their sense of identity, historicity and social relationality. Rather than exclude or assimilate, the Orthodox Ecumene must

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4 Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” in *Multiculturalism*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 26.

5 Taylor, “Politics of Recognition,” 25.

learn how to narrate their uniqueness as a faith tradition embedded within various cultural and linguistic traditions without forsaking attention to the values and principles that ought to be binding and uniting them, namely, those of love, mercy, forgiveness and fellowship.

### Towards an Orthodox Christian Multiculturalism

“Multiculturalism” is a term that has been widely used in recent years as societies continue to become more culturally diverse and as nations attempt to cope with novel forms of religious and cultural pluralism within their borders. As a term, “multiculturalism” has both a descriptive and normative sense. In the first sense, it is often used to describe the cultural pluralism and diversity of contemporary societies; here, “multiculturalism” refers to the contemporary phenomenon that a variety of cultural traditions have come to occupy the same social spaces. In its normative sense, “multiculturalism” has been put forth as a socio-political ideal, tied to public policy and, as an ethical theory, tied to our perceptions of identity and the ways in which we relate to those who differ from us culturally. Both ties entail some positive evaluation of the phenomenon of cultural pluralism. Normatively, endorsements of “multiculturalism” often promote cultural pluralism and defend ethnic and linguistic diversity.

As a normative social or political philosophy, multiculturalism can be regarded as a reaction and alternative to the hegemonic enforcement of cultural homogeneity that is said to have resulted from earlier assimilationist attitudes and policies in Western democratic societies.<sup>6</sup> To this extent, multicultural political theories seek ways in which the phenomenon of cultural pluralism can be incorporated into the political philosophy of the state and can be accounted for in the types of policies and legislation that are subsequently enacted. It may thus be argued that a “multicultural society” is one in which the state attempts to respect, accommodate and promote cultural pluralism and is a society in which a high degree of linguacultural, ethnocultural and religiocultural diversity is seen as compatible with political unity. A multicultural society then is one in which pluralism is not conceptualized as a problem to be overcome but one in which pluralism is thought to be conducive with the ends and aims of that sociopolitical entity, namely, the stability of the

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6 See Christian Joppke, “Multiculturalism and Immigration: A Comparison of United States, Germany & Great Britain,” *Theory & Society* 25 (1996), 449–500.

state, social peaceability, and political order. In sum, a multicultural society is heterogeneous and pluralistic and is a political community in which the state takes measures to ensure rather than stifle the pluralism of its social landscape.

In the descriptive sense, Orthodox Christianity is unquestionably multicultural; even the casual observer of Orthodox Christianity's presence in society will immediately notice that there are numerous cultural monikers associated with Orthodox Churches: "Greek Orthodox," "Russian Orthodox," "Antiochian Orthodox," – to name just a few in the Eastern Orthodox sphere. Despite the fact that the history of the Eastern Orthodox Churches has been fraught with strife and conflict, as mentioned previously, many of the tensions and conflicts that have arisen have been the result of nonrecognition or misrecognition of cultural otherness by members of culturally distinct churches. Such instances of nonrecognition or misrecognition have often been tied to the politicization of ecclesiastical identity, which has often been the result of nationalistic aspirations by various groups in the Balkans and eastern Europe to wed their religious identity to their newly emergent forms of ethnonationalism. Insofar as it addresses ways in which a common social and institutional body can reasonably accommodate and grant recognition to a variety of cultural identities, normative multiculturalism may be able to assist the Eastern Orthodox Churches, as a global ecumene, in coming to terms with its own internal cultural pluralism as it attempts to foster ecclesial unity despite its cultural diversity.

Although there are a variety of ways in which a multicultural political philosophy can be construed, Will Kymlicka, a prominent advocate of multicultural political theory, has claimed that there are at least three features common to most forms of multicultural political thinking. These three features of multiculturalism are:

- 1) The *rejection of the idea that the state belongs to a single ethnocultural group*; the state belongs to all citizens equally;
- 2) The *rejection of assimilationist policies* and exclusionary policies and practices that place undue pressure upon individuals coming from minority cultural groups to hide or overcome their cultural heritage in order to be afforded equal recognition by the state;
- 3) The acknowledgment of the *historical injustice* that has been perpetrated against ethnocultural minorities as a result of *assimilationist policies* and hence an attempt to prevent such injustices from occurring in the future.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Odysseys: Navigating the New International Politics of Diversity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 65–6.

If applied to the ecclesiastical affairs of the Eastern Orthodox Church, these three features of multiculturalism could be reformulated within the framework of Orthodox Christianity in the following way.

*The Rejection of the Notion that the Global Orthodox Church as a Whole Belongs to a Single Ethnocultural Group*

The Church's catholicity implies that all members are equally Orthodox regardless of their cultural heritage. While this idea might seem obvious at first, it is foundational to Orthodox Christian theology and ecclesiology that we must not succumb to naive ways of conceptualizing universality and, by extension, the idea of the Church's catholicity. We must not mistakenly believe that Orthodox Christianity's universal moral and spiritual message can only be realized through a decoupling of the ethnocultural and religious dimensions of Orthodox churches, which would result in some form of cultural uniformity. As Aristotle argued, the universal must always actualize itself through the particular. Historically, any universal faith tradition will always manifest itself through the particular, which is especially true of the ways in which Orthodox Christianity took root within the world, in which ethnolinguistic diversity was incorporated into the very fabric of the tradition's global and local presence itself. We must acknowledge the ways in which Orthodox Christianity was embraced by distinct ethnolinguistic cultures as it spread and hence recognize cultural plurality as a salient aspect of the catholicity of faith itself.

Unlike the term "universal," the term "catholic" derives from the Greek *katholikos*, which means something more akin to "that which pertains to the whole," and thus implies *a shared commonality*. The concept of catholicity does not necessarily entail the notion of uniformity that the term "universal" – both terms are derived from the Latin *unus* ("one") – tends to carry with it and hence the idea of "catholicity" is more amenable to being conceptualized as "commonality in diversity" and "unity in plurality" than the idea of "universality." As a result of overly exclusivist understandings of universalism that seek to ensure uniformity of belief and practice, we tend to conceptualize the Church's unity as being predicated on the annihilation of our differences and hence we have been neglectful of diversity to the point where we seek the homogenization of cultures in our attempts to proclaim a single shared faith tradition as the sole possessor of truth. Yet the Orthodox Church must find a middle way between the extremes of divisive diversity and unifying homogeneity if it is going to successfully navigate the social terrain of the 21st century.

*The Rejection of Assimilationist and Exclusionary Attitudes and Practices that Seek to Coercively Ensure that Any and All Members of the Church Community are Culturally Homogenous*

Various forms of cultural assimilationism have been – or presently are – operative within the Orthodox world. Whether we are talking about the Greek Orthodox attempt to Hellenize Slavic communities in the 19th century or contemporary attempts by agents in the Russian Orthodox Church seeking the Russification of other Slavic Orthodox Christian communities or even those within America's pan-Orthodox movement seeking to Anglicize liturgies and Americanize Orthodoxy in the United States, what we are witnessing is an understanding of catholicity predicated upon linguistic homogeneity and cultural uniformity. A multicultural understanding of the Church's catholicity, however, will be one in which religious universality does not imply cultural uniformity but rather acts as an avenue through which members of culturally distinct churches can bear witness to a shared faith and sense of mission in the world while recognizing the value of their different cultural heritages.

On a very basic sociological level, the active participation or integration of a local church in the life of a community will necessarily influence and be influenced by the sociocultural customs and practices of the community. When religion and culture intertwine in a people's history, they become braided into a community's narrative identity and together form a common way of life nourished by faith, custom and heritage. Through this symbiosis of religion and culture, faith becomes embodied in the practices and the material expressions of cultural custom; ultimately, it is through culture that faith can become incarnate in history. When religious faith becomes embodied in the material practices and historical memory of a peoples' ethnocultural customs and heritage, an *ethnos* is infused with an onto-metaphysical and meta-ethical paradigm as the religion gains a conduit through which it can narratively ground itself in history.

This means that we must be able to differentiate the ethically positive ethnolinguistic dimensions of cultural belonging from the bigoted phyletic distortions of ethnonationalism. To a large extent, this will entail the rejection of the politicization of the Orthodox Church as well as our ecclesial identities by those whose sole or primary purpose is to advance nationalistic agendas. Orthodox Christians must work to prevent the Church from becoming a handmaiden to any political state and hence must vehemently combat the sacralization of the idea of the *nation* by nationalistic groups seeking to coopt the Church for their political aspirations.

*The Acknowledgment that Local Orthodox Christian Communities have Historically Perpetuated Culturally Assimilationist Injustices Against One Another and Must Now Attempt to Prevent Such Injustices from Occurring in the Present and Future by Giving Due Recognition to the Cultural Pluralism Characteristic of the Historical Church*

As a means of combating phyletism, Orthodox Christianity must look to harmonize the particularities of ethnocultural communities with the catholicity of the Orthodox faith and find ways in which they complement one another rather than becoming caught in a binary mode of thought that forces the Church to the extremes of endorsing one at the expense of the other. Phyletism may be overcome by recognizing the value in another's culture and by acknowledging the other's need for cultural recognition. An authentically Orthodox response to the social climate of the contemporary era will be one in which the nation is desacralized, whereby Orthodox communities will be able to effectively decouple their identity narratives from politicized ethnonationalistic aims while still retaining the ethnocultural traditions and languages that imbue them with a deep sense of kinship and identity. This will entail alternative ways of envisioning social solidarity as we come to terms with cultural pluralism as an unavoidable social reality and persistent feature of human existence as well as sustained efforts to enact a continual forum for intercultural dialogue among the hierarchs, clergy and laity of the various Orthodox Christian churches.

Instead of reifying exclusivist ethnic identities through cultural enclosure to other Orthodox communities, ethnoreligiosity has the potential to be an avenue through which members of such communities can come to recognize one another as fellow carriers of historical ethnolinguistic cultures as well as adherents of a common faith tradition. Members of the Orthodox communities are capable of identifying with the ways in which another relates to his or her faith through an ethnolinguacultural tradition – even when the ethnolinguistic culture is not shared. Such circumstances are a fertile ground for the cultivation of a type of intercultural sentiment in which an affection and affinity for one's own particular ethnic and/or linguistic culture is not antithetical to an authentic sense of fellowship with others.

These intercultural Orthodox dialogues must not collapse into shallow formalities or empty platitudes but must seriously engage in open and truthful discussions of historical injustices as well as attempts to work toward reconciliation through genuine forgiveness and mutual acceptance. This last point will not be easy, but it is crucial if Orthodox Christianity is to resolve its

long-standing internal tensions about the role that cultural identity ought to play within the Church and attempt to forge anything even remotely resembling authentic unity among the global Orthodox Christian ecumene.

### Philoxenia: Empathy and Love of the Cultural Other

If phyletism is to be truly and sincerely overcome in the Orthodox world, we cannot simply focus our attention on matters that pertain to the Church as a social institution; the aforementioned suggestions can only go so far in resolving the issues associated with phyletism. We must reflect more deeply on the moral and psychological dimensions of interpersonal relationality and identity formation. What is required is an authentically heartfelt response on behalf of Orthodox Christians whereby they seek to develop the virtues and patterns of thought that will enable them to genuinely embrace the cultural other in love and fellowship.

Charles Taylor argues that by recognizing the centrality of relationality in our conceptions of human nature (as Orthodox Christian theology does), we ought not overlook the cultural realities that such relationality produces in the social sphere. As Taylor claims, we must acknowledge the value of culture and begin our analysis from the perspective that each traditional culture has potentially something important to say about human fulfillment and flourishing. He writes,

cultures that have provided the horizon of meaning for large numbers of human beings [...] over a long period of time – that have, in other words, articulated their sense of the good, the holy, the admirable – are almost certain to have something that deserves our admiration and respect, even if it is accompanied by much that we have to abhor and reject.<sup>8</sup>

If it is true that persons always relate to humanity through the particular socio-cultural communities that give rise to a sense of social identity and belonging, I would like to propose that the Orthodox ethical concept of *philanthropia*, of “love of humanity,” ought to entail the recognition of cultural particularity as an integral aspect of the human condition and a person’s ability to exist in a meaningful relation with others. Conceptions of *philanthropia* and universal love that seek to effectively replace all regional, cultural, ethnic and linguistic forms of fellowship with a mutual benevolence to a global community founded

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8 Taylor, “Politics of Recognition,” 72–3.

solely on our shared humanity, to the neglect of our particularities, is arguably both untenable and undesirable. It is untenable insofar as it neglects the ways in which persons actually relate to one another and genuinely establish authentic friendships. It is undesirable in that it fails to grant due recognition to difference and hence, while well-intentioned, can lead to a form of caring for the other only insofar as I see myself in the other. To develop a care for the other based on aspects of her identity that resemble my own or that we share implies that the love and care I express for her may actually be a form of self-love, thereby neglecting our differences and negating my love for another as a love for what is other. In such a scenario, I come to love the other as a mirror of my own image rather than as a unique person whom I love precisely for her distinctiveness. Once we come to recognize the saliency of culture to human identity, philanthropia will come to entail not simply loving-kindness among individual persons irrespective of their personal human uniqueness but because of it, and part of the dialogical uniqueness of each person is his/her identity as a member of a particular cultural community. To this end, a philanthropic response to Orthodoxy's internal cultural pluralism seems to require the cultivation of the disposition of *philoxenia* or a willingness to encounter the foreign, embrace the foreigner, recognize the value to be found in the customs and cultures of others, as one remains open to the possibility of forging an authentic friendship with the other.

Understood as a disposition, philoxenia must not be reduced to some idealized and unrealizable goal; rather it must be understood as a habituated mode of thinking and acting that becomes part and parcel of our self-identity and way of relating to others. In this way, philoxenia speaks less to some deontological dimension of moral obligation and more to the cultivation of virtuous character. To this end, philoxenia entails an ability to imaginatively and empathetically transpose oneself into foreign and novel circumstances. By cultivating this imaginative capacity for the relocation of one's points of view, the embodiment of philoxenia implies a proclivity towards empathy with another's perspective, life experiences, and ways of relating with others. The moral psychologist, John Deigh has observed that "it is distinctive of empathy that it entails imaginative participation in the other's life without forgetting oneself."<sup>9</sup>

While Christian understandings of acts of compassion, loving-kindness, and benevolence must always strive to be *kenotic*, or self-emptying, in the sense of displacing one's self-interest and disavowing self-conceit in one's relation to

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9 John Deigh, "Empathy and Universalizability," in *Minds and Morals: Essays on Ethics and Cognitive Science*, ed. Larry May, Marilyn Freedman and Andy Clark (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 199–220, 213.

another, philoxenia implies a relation between strangers that presupposes a mutual recognition of difference, which in turn presupposes a sense of self. A genuine and habitual compassionate concern for culturally distinct others will require a certain degree of empathy for their perspectives and their circumstances but can never truly involve a forgetting of one's self-identity as a person. This is because it is through our pre-existing self-identity and understanding of the world that we are even capable of making sense of novel situations, concepts and practices. As Hans-Georg Gadamer argued, "Only the support of the familiar and common understanding makes possible the venture into the alien, the lifting up out of the alien, and thus the broadening and enrichment of our own experience."<sup>10</sup> Moving outwards from the self without forgetting it in an empathetic mode of relating to the other requires attentiveness to the particularities of their situation, which entails understanding what they are partial to and why they value what they do as well as an awareness of self that is mindful of the prejudices and predispositions associated with one's own set of circumstances.

As Aristotle suggested, genuine friendship (*philia*) requires experiencing a deep fondness for the other and not merely a general sense of goodwill towards her.<sup>11</sup> Arguably, experiencing a deep fondness for another creates an intimate relation that fosters partiality towards the other one is fond of. This in turn imbues the person with a sense of fidelity to those others she considers friends and a special responsibility both to those who are approached in friendship and a future state of affairs regarding the conditions of their shared life. Such relations carry with them a deep sense of caring and often entail a faithfulness to the other person and her well-being. This faithfulness to others entails a mutual responsibility so that all involved in the friendship (*philia*) are committed to the well-being of one another, ready to respond to one another's needs, devoted to the promises and goals they have set for themselves as a unit, prepared to actively assist one another in pursuing their own personal goals and are thus willing to be open to one another's perspectives, practices and modes of reasoning, even when they differ. This type of mutual fidelity found within authentic friendships necessarily implies that the persons involved in the relationship are partial towards one another, which disposes friends toward

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10 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem," in *Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy, and Critique*, ed. Josef Bleicher (London: Routledge, 1980), 128–40, here 138–9.

11 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terrence Irwin (Indianapolis IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999), 1126b 20–8; 1166b 32.

mutual empathy for each other's concerns, experiences, values and point of view.

Consequently, as a result of predisposing us toward empathizing with others, partiality primes persons to be receptive to the points of view and circumstances of another. Ultimately, partiality is not simply an exclusionary attitude or seed of in-group tendencies. Rather, if partiality is a core feature of friendship or *philia*, then this implies that our ability to care for the stranger and embrace the cultural other emerges from the expansion of our horizons of partiality, and not from some imagined sense of impartiality or neutrality towards the other's sense of cultural belonging. In the context of members of a shared ethnocultural and linguistic tradition – who share a common heritage, linguistic and cultural practices, and thereby share a common historically rooted narrative identity with others with whom they are currently un-acquainted – partiality towards unknown selves enables them to develop a sense of care and concern for and even kinship with those not immediately related to them. To reiterate Anthony Smith's observation regarding ethnic belonging, "When people identify with ethnies, they feel a sense of wider kinship with a fictive 'super-family,' one that extends outwards in space and down the generations."<sup>12</sup> Smith's observation highlights one of the ethically positive aspects of ethnocultural and linguacultural communities, namely, that they are capable of binding people together in a transgenerational and trans-regional sense of communal fellowship. In such a communal bonding, a transcendence within immanence occurs whereby the self goes beyond itself in affectionate relation to a family, families to ethnies, the ethnocultural community's transcendence of temporality as an intergenerational phenomenon and, in the case of global diasporas of ethnocultural and linguacultural groups, as communities capable of transcending spatiality.

If we remain mindful of the ways in which the formation of a sense of social self-identity occurs within the types of ethnocultural and linguacultural communities of which the Eastern Orthodox ecumene is comprised, we can begin to comprehend more fully how it is possible for philoxenia to be conceived of as an extension of, rather than an eradication of, the sense of loving fellowship and kinship one holds for one's own cultural community. As a person's sense of self begins to emerge, the person begins to empathize with others whom she feels emotionally close to; initially, this will often take place within a family setting and eventually begin to expand beyond the familial circle towards the extended family and neighbors who happen to be a part of the self's ancestral,

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<sup>12</sup> Smith, "Chosen Peoples," 438.

cultural and linguistic group. Here we begin to witness an expansion of a person's capacity to imagine herself in the place of the other – an expansion of her horizon of empathetic engagement as she moves ever increasingly through the concentric circles of her social encounters. With this empathy comes a fondness and affection for those whom a self has empathetically encountered and engaged. A person will come to experience those others as inseparable from her own self-existence and come to hold a unique bond with and affection for those persons. As a result of empathizing with others, a person's fondness for another primes here for receptiveness to the other's points of view and circumstances. As one develops an affinity towards others, she begins to recognize the other's distinctiveness while simultaneously recognizing the other's place in her own self-narrative. Through this awareness, a person's capacity for taking the other's concerns and concern for the other into her deliberations and sense of agency in the social world emerge; the capacity to truly become a person in communion.

As one continually engages others in the concentric circles of sociality moving from the imagined 'self in solitude' through the family, extended family, cultural collective and then out towards the world, affinity with the initially unknown selves immersed in one's concentric circles of sociality enables a person to empathize with others. One then develops a penchant for recognizing the connection one has to even more distant others – with whom one is not yet acquainted – and a genuine sense of care and concern for those with whom we do not share immediate experiences or shared personal histories. As people engage in interpersonal encounters, hold meaningful conversations and share practices with others, they begin to develop a mutual partiality for one another, and, by empathizing with one another's point of view, they can begin to see the value in those things the other is partial towards and they themselves might even develop a certain degree of partiality towards them. Thus, it is through extended fields of partiality that one is able to empathetically imagine the situation of another and hence develop a unique concern for the well-being of that particular person. Our capacity to comprehend other perspectives on a psychological level emerges from the empathetic expansion of our horizons of affinity and affection and an engagement with various forms of particularity in ever-expanding spheres of social engagement. Once we begin to cultivate this, we develop an ability to perceive the value of another's cultural customs as we engage in a self-reflective contemplation of the affection we feel for our own cultural communities and attempt to imagine the ways in which the other holds similar affections and affinities towards their own communities. Hence, it is out of a person's tendency towards partiality that empathy emerges and

out of empathy that the recognition of difference and otherness can be implemented in cultivating a philoxenia for ethnically distinct and culturally diverse others.

### Conclusion

As a means of combating phyletism, Orthodox Christianity must look to harmonize the particularities of ethnocultural communities with the catholicity of the Orthodox faith and find ways in which they complement one another rather than becoming caught in a binary mode of thought that forces the Church to the extremes of endorsing one at the expense of the other. Phyletism can be overcome by recognizing the value of another's culture and by acknowledging the other's need for cultural recognition. An authentically Orthodox response to the social climate of the contemporary era will be one in which the *nation is desacralized* whereby Orthodox communities will be able to effectively decouple their identity narratives from politicized ethnonationalistic aims while still retaining their ethnocultural traditions and languages that imbue them with a deep sense of kinship and community. This will entail *envisioning multicultural models of ecclesial unity* as we come to terms with cultural pluralism as an unavoidable social reality and persistent feature of human existence. Additionally, much like an Assembly of Canonical Bishops exists in the United States, the global Orthodox ecumene needs to engage in sustained efforts to enact a continual forum for intercultural dialogue among the hierarchs, clergy and laity of the various Orthodox Christian churches that actively seeks to depoliticize itself and avoid the trappings of nationalistic agendas. As mentioned previously, these intercultural Orthodox dialogues must not collapse into shallow formalities or empty platitudes but must seriously engage in open and truthful discussions of historical injustices as well as commitments to work towards reconciliation through genuine forgiveness and mutual acceptance. To reiterate, this will by no means be an easy task, but it is crucial if Orthodox Christianity is to resolve its long-standing internal tensions on the role that cultural identity ought to play within the Church and attempt to forge anything even remotely resembling authentic unity in the global Orthodox Christian ecumene.

Lastly, rather than adopting a dismissive attitude toward the phenomenon of ethnocultural belonging, the Church should be attentive to the positive as well as to the negative dimensions of ethnocultural and ethnolinguistic identity. Instead of reifying exclusivist ethnic identities through cultural enclosure

to other Orthodox communities, the phenomena of bicultural, bilingual and trans-regional communal identity that exist in the culturally diverse communities of the Orthodox world have the potential to be an avenue through which members of such communities can come to recognize one another as fellow carriers of historical ethnolinguistic cultures as well as adherents to a common faith tradition. We must recognize that members of Orthodox communities are capable of identifying with the ways in which another relates to his or her faith through an ethnolinguacultural tradition – even if the ethnolinguistic culture is not shared. Such circumstances are a fertile ground for the cultivation of a type of intercultural philoxenia in which affection and affinity for one's own particular ethnic and/or linguistic culture is not antithetical to an authentic sense of fellowship with the culturally diverse others that comprise the global Orthodox Church.

# Orthodox Spirituality in Democratic Pluralities

Kateřina Kočandrle Bauer

## Introduction

Universalistic egalitarianism, from which sprang the ideals of freedom and a collective life in solidarity, the autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, the individual morality of conscience, human rights and democracy, is the direct legacy of the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love. [...] To this day, there is no alternative to it. And in light of the current challenges of a post-national constellation, we continue to draw on the substance of this heritage.<sup>1</sup>

This statement from Jürgen Habermas suggests that we already see the roots of democratic values and ideas in Judaism and Christianity and that to nourish these values and ideas is to return to these roots. In addition to these positive values that we appreciate in contemporary democratic societies, however, we must also consider their illnesses, both sociological and psychological. With the help of two thinkers, the Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1925–2017) and his book *Liquid Modernity*, and the German philosopher Byung-Chul Han (born in Seoul in 1959) and mainly his book *The Burnout Society*,<sup>2</sup> I will unmask some of the illnesses of postmodern democratic life, such as societal liquidity and the lack of boundaries, over-transparency, individualization and hyperactivity. I will then look for possible antidotes in the roots of Orthodox spirituality and explore how these antidotes might transform these destructive elements in democratic societies and restore a sense of integrity, wholeness and harmony.

I will work with different discourses. I will speak about the illnesses in post-modern democratic pluralistic societies using sociological and psycho-political discourse, but I will respond to them using the language of theology and spirituality. I will draw on those theological models within Orthodox spirituality that could help fill out Bauman's analysis and especially Han's. At the same time, I will take into consideration my own context of the Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, especially the Czech context.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Jürgen Habermas, "A Conversation about God and the World," in *Time of Transitions*, ed. and trans. Ciaran Cronin and Max Pensky (Cambridge MA: Polity Press, 2006), 150–1.

2 See Byung-Chul Han, *The Burnout Society*, trans. Erik Butler (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2015).

3 For more information about the Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, see Kateřina Bauerová and Tim Noble, "The Ways from Diaspora to Local Churches," in *The*

### Liquid and Positive Human Societies

The Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia represents a small autocephalic church in the centre of Europe, where Orthodoxy is connected to neither land nor nation. Its members are mostly Russian, Ukrainian, Greek and Romanian believers and Czech converts to Orthodoxy so it is multicultural. It exists in a democratic pluralistic country. But our society also bears many of the illnesses of postmodern times that find their way into the church.

I have found an accurate description of these destructive elements in the Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman and the German philosopher Byung-Chul Han. Bauman describes the transition from modernity to postmodernity as the transition from a *solid society* to a more *liquid* one. He notes that while modernity was characterized by the need for order, the need to categorize and rationalize the world in order to make it controllable, predictable, and understandable, late modernity (or postmodernity) is characterized by the need for constant change. In Bauman's view, the term *liquid modernity* describes the condition of constant mobility and change in relationships, identities, and global economics within contemporary society. The only constant thing is change, and this can be seen everywhere, even in approaches to self-identity. In liquid modernity, it has become impossible to construct a durable identity – that is, one that coheres over time and space.

Han's analysis of late modernity is similar to Bauman's. For Han, the difference between modernity and postmodernity lies in the transition from a disciplinary society, governed by regulations and restrictions, to a society of pure positivity, where negativity is entirely absent. The society of positivity is characterized by a limitless "can." It is a "can-do" society. As Han writes: "Prohibitions, commandments, and the law are replaced by projects, initiatives and motivation."<sup>4</sup> People are free from any external power, repression and domination, and they are called to personal motivation and responsibility. Thus, the "subject of achievement" gives itself the freedom to maximize achievements. Overwork and the drive for performance escalate into self-exploitation: "The exploiter is simultaneously the exploited,"<sup>5</sup> as Han says.

How can we deal with this liquidity and positivity in democratic postmodern countries? Are there any spiritual antidotes that would lead us back to

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*Ways of Orthodox Theology in the West*, Ivana Noble, Kateřina Bauerová, Tim Noble, Parush Parushev (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2015), 183–239.

4 Han, *The Burnout Society*, 9.

5 Han, *The Burnout Society*, 11.

conditions that support the values of democracy that, as Habermas suggests, are found at the very roots of Christianity?

### Back to Being a Pilgrim

From this brief introduction, we can see that the first issue we need to deal with is the concept of human identity. Both authors describe human identity in the postmodern world in terms of instability on all levels of reality. They use similar metaphors for this unstable human identity: Bauman uses the metaphor of the “nomad,” and Han that of the “tourist.” Bauman’s nomads are continually changing jobs, values, spouses, and political and secular identities – and, I would add, church identities. This liquid society, without restrictions and regulations, places more responsibility on individuals, who are often unable to carry such a burden. The result is an emphasis on “shifting” rather than on “staying,” and people find it more and more difficult to make permanent commitments. Han’s description of the unstable identity of the tourist lies in the person’s inability to embark on a real journey. The tourist does not understand the meaning of “journey.” In Han’s view, such tourism is characterized by the absence of both a guiding narrative and a final purpose. The “touristic journey” “is not a semantically rich way.”<sup>6</sup>

With increased globalization and religious pluralism, spiritual seekers are not fixed to any particular place or community and are free to taste and experience whatever spirituality takes their fancy. I am not sure we can avoid this phenomenon, but the question remains: How can we integrate these features of postmodern identity into the Christian context and replace them with a metaphor that has deeper spiritual meaning? I offer here the older metaphor of “pilgrim.” Seeing our lives as a spiritual pilgrimage has a long history within Christianity; it is not a new concept. The metaphor is found in the Bible and in the writings of the fathers, such as Gregory of Nyssa.<sup>7</sup> The Orthodox Church in the Czech Republic is made up mostly of people who came from different countries and Czech believers who came from other Christian denominations. Pilgrimage does not necessarily require a change of geography. It is a journey with God, with other people, and with the whole of creation. The spiritual

6 Byung-Chul Han, *The Transparency Society*, trans. Erik Butler (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 35.

7 See, e.g., Tim Noble, “Pilgrims Progressing: Ignatius of Loyola and John Bunyan,” *Baptistic Theologies* 3, no. 2 (2011), 64–78, here especially 64.

journey is full of meanings, both contained within our memory and accompanied by the eschatological hope of the fulness of God's presence in God's kingdom.

The pilgrim's perception of space is different from that of the nomad or the tourist. Bauman's nomad is not fixed to a particular place but is always moving. The pilgrim's perception of space is of a different quality. As Heidegger says, space is not distinguished by its various places but by one's sense of *being*.<sup>8</sup> Han's tourist has no sense of being, lives only in the present, consumes places, and sees only what is completely transparent.<sup>9</sup>

The pilgrim's sense of being on a journey emerges from the cosmological understanding of being part of the space of creation. The Orthodox theological emphasis on the material and spiritual worlds emanating from a single source, as expressed in articles and books by Elizabeth Theokritoff<sup>10</sup>, helps pilgrims to understand that the spiritual journey unites them with God. They are not consuming the space of creation they dwell in but nourishing it. The natural world around us is not to be consumed. It is to be used sacramentally. Only then will we see its real meaning – that it points to God, as Alexander Schmemmann says.<sup>11</sup>

This cosmological notion of creation as the space of the incarnate Word of God enables the pilgrim, in contrast to the tourist, to see what is hidden – to see places that are not transparent. What become especially visible are the walls and boundaries that form part of the structure of space. Structuring the world by building walls and demarcating boundaries and borders is all very well until it brings an ontological hierarchy of the inside and the outside.<sup>12</sup> The pilgrim is able to notice and appreciate the meaning of windows and doors as places of welcome and of letting go; as points of contact for those both inside and outside. What is more, if the churches are literally or metaphorically closed, if the walls are too high to enable people to get in or out, pilgrims always find other ways, other journeys on which to encounter God. To nourish the space around us also means to nourish those tiny corners and forgotten paths where pilgrims encounter God, people and the whole of creation.

8 See Martin Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," in *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*, ed. D. Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), 356.

9 See Han, *Transparency Society*, 31.

10 See, for example, Elizabeth Theokritoff, *Living in God's Creation: Orthodox Perspectives on Ecology* (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009).

11 Alexander Schmemmann, *The World as Sacrament* (London: Darton, Longmann and Todd, 1965), 16.

12 For more, see Zygmunt Bauman, *44 Letters from the Liquid Modern World* (Cambridge MA: Polity Press, 2010), 168.

### Back to an Iconic Understanding of Reality

Democratic pluralistic societies appreciate transparency, especially political transparency, whereby citizens have access to information about their government. But transparency is not limited to the political sphere. It is present everywhere in society. Han sees this emphasis (or overemphasis) on transparency as destructive: the omnipresent social media force us into hyper-communication and tire us out. For Han, this kind of transparency in which people are present all the time can be seen all the time, and communicate constantly is a sign of a society that lacks any sense of negativity. And a society that lacks negativity is just a new kind of totalitarianism. Such a society excludes all negativity; it is based on total positivity. As transparent language loses any plurality of meaning and loses all ambivalence, we lose the hermeneutic of depth and mystery. Han goes further and applies the hermeneutics of total positivity to our understanding of ourselves and of each other, which manifests itself in the permanent pressure to exhibit and externalize ourselves. Han calls this phenomenon *hypervisibility*.

How can we overcome this transparency, this over-visibility, and this negative view of mystery? Are there any aspects of Orthodox spirituality that can help negate these destructive processes? I believe one such remedy can be found in the very heart of Orthodox spirituality, and that is the spirituality of icons. Father Sergei Bulgakov finds the answer in the roots of the historical debates regarding the iconoclastic controversies of the 8th century. In his treatise "Ikona i ikonopochtanie" (Icon and Icon Worship),<sup>13</sup> Bulgakov defines an icon as an antinomy: God cannot be depicted; God is revealed. An icon is the invisible made visible and the depiction of the undepictable.<sup>14</sup> Without this antinomy, an icon is an idol.

In the context of the fine arts, Bulgakov sees a tendency towards idolization in pure naturalism and photography. Each of these art forms seeks to overcome the abyss between the ideal image of a thing and its image, which is neither possible nor desirable. For Bulgakov, art is not about the real but the ideal; it is about the human ability to uncover the ideal meaning and to see truly. To be blind is to be unable to see the invisible. To see in a contemplative way iconizes the world: to contemplate, uncover and co-create the ideal meaning of the world. This is what Han says is missing in our computerized and digital society

13 See Sergius Bulgakov, "Ikona i ikonopochtanie: dogmatičeskij očerk," in *Pervoobraz i obraz: Sočinenija v dvuh tomah* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1999), 241–309.

14 For this and the comments in the following paragraph, see Bulgakov, "Ikona i ikonopochtanie," 155, 161, 162.

in which people become blind in order to see more. Han adds that sometimes we need to close our eyes to hear music and see beauty.

This same antinomy is valid for the broader meaning of icon in theological anthropology. People made in God's image and likeness are not fully transparent. There is a difference between people as God's image and people as masks. Han describes this difference as that between a real person and a dressmaker's dummy. The latter is dead, naked, and can be decorated with whatever clothes one likes. But a living person who bears God's image is also the bearer of a mystery; she is not transparent. As Olivier Clément says in a typically poetic way, the human body both reveals and covers a person.<sup>15</sup> To kill God's image in others means to destroy the invisible and make them slaves – people without faces. Similarly, Han and Bauman suggest that regarding a person in such a way objectifies them as “the other.” To see and nourish God's image in the other means not reducing the mystery.

### Back to Contemplation and Co-Creativity with God

Han describes contemporary society as a society of achievement. Everyone is affected and slowly becomes a subject of achievement, and this includes the Orthodox Church and the theological milieu. In Han's view, what drives this lust for achievement, what drives the “I can” society, is the lack of regulation. Without the prohibitions and regulations that provide boundaries, we end up in hysterical hyperactivity and become driven people for whom work and production is all. In the digital era, this hyperactivity has transformed the *homo sapiens* into a *homo digitalis*, a person who writes with atrophied hands.<sup>16</sup>

Han sees the situation as a crisis of the spirit, whose medium is not hyperactivity but silence. Within the Orthodox tradition, the spiritual healing of hyperactivity and production can be seen in the complementarity of apophatic and cataphatic ways of knowing God, as described clearly by Vladimir Lossky in his *Théologie dogmatique* (Dogmatic Theology).<sup>17</sup> Apophasis guards God's infinite otherness by applying the divine “no” to all attempts to assess God's perfection by the use of our own categories.<sup>18</sup> We find this way of knowing God in the

15 See Olivier Clément, *On Human Being: A Spiritual Anthropology* (London: New City, 2000), 30–3.

16 Byung-Chul Han, *In the Swarm: Digital Prospects*, trans. Erik Butler (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2017), 32.

17 Vladimir Lossky, *Théologie dogmatique*, ed. Olivier Clément and Michel Stavrou (Paris: Cerf, 2012).

18 Lossky, *Théologie dogmatique*, 62.

mystical tradition and contemplative praxis, as found in the life and work of Father Sophrony of Essex. Father Sophrony's description of *theosis* as encountering God in the Uncreated Light is drawn from his practice of the Lord's Prayer, which helps the person praying overcome rational categories and unite with God. One necessary stage on the spiritual path towards encountering God in the Uncreated Light is meeting with darkness.<sup>19</sup> Cleansing one's senses, one's way of life, descending into one's own hell, is a pre-condition for being resurrected with Christ. Whereas the society of positivity and transparency is about attaining maximum profit or maximum information, the apophatic way is about attaining a clean heart. Mystical theology and contemplative praxis can bring healing to the people of a society characterized by hypercommunication and hyperactivity, people who live in a world without spatial or temporal breaks.<sup>20</sup>

The apophatic way is complemented by the cataphatic way. The cataphatic way emerges through the narratives and symbols in which revelation has taken place and that are accessible to people because they are based on a common experience.<sup>21</sup> Here we can use another example from the Orthodox monastic tradition, such as the life and work of Mother Maria Skobtsova. She saw the creative act as a feature of human freedom, and, when she was in exile in Paris during the Second World War, she was active in social engagement with Russian emigrants and Jews. Her theological argument for the importance of creative work and its spiritual meaning stems from the event of the Incarnation. The Incarnation represents an invitation to embrace rather than reject the material world. Chalcedonian doctrine teaches us not to deny the materiality of the world or of nature, or the human potential to create. Made in God's image, human beings embody the connection between the natural and transcendent worlds and so must display a creative spirit similar to God's. God's creativity is mirrored in the creative processes on the earth and in the creative cooperation between people and God.<sup>22</sup> Without this cooperation, without two sides – the human and the divine – creative processes would not exist.<sup>23</sup> Mother Maria

19 See Archimandrite Sophrony, *We Shall See Him As He Is* (Essex: Stavropegic Monastery of St. John the Baptist, 2004), 99.

20 Han, *The Burnout Society*, 22.

21 Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction* (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978), 32–3.

22 For more on the issue of creativity and freedom in the Russian diaspora, see Kateřina Bauerová, "Mystery of Divine-Human Cooperation in Freedom and Creativity: An Example of Liturgical Life from the Russian Diaspora in France," in *Approaching the Threshold of Mystery: Liturgical Worlds and Theological Spaces*, ed. Joris Geldhof, Daniel Minch and Trevor Maine (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2015), 155–6.

23 Mother Maria Skobtsova, "Istoki tvorčestva," in *Vospominanija, stat'i, očerki* II (Paris: YMCA, 1992), 136–54, here 140.

shows us the difference between production and creation. The human ability to create is fundamental to human being and is part of being made in the image of God. But to create also means to rely on God as a partner. Han describes the difference between production and creative acts in terms of two forms of tiredness: production and hyperactivity bring “solitary and divisive tiredness,” which prevent the subject from seeing what is outside him- or herself; on the other hand, creative acts bring a tiredness that is “reconciliatory” and opens the “I” to the world.<sup>24</sup>

Han suggests that contemplation makes people human. He is right that this way can save us from all kinds of hyperactivity, both social and political. But the two ways, the apophatic and the cataphatic, the *via contemplativa* and the *via activa* (if the latter is understood as cocreation rather than production), interpenetrate each other, critique and enrich each other.

### Back to Community Based on Spiritual Love

Our opening quotation from Habermas suggests that democratic values are the direct legacy of the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love. How do we define this Christian ethic of love? Han and Bauman are equally sceptical of the human ability to form and sustain relationships based on love in contemporary society. Both see the digital media as a principal cause of the fragmentation of a society now composed purely of individuals. Bauman sees a world where people have stopped communicating face to face, have stopped knocking on each other’s doors.<sup>25</sup> Han suggests that other causes of fragmentation in society include the absence of negativity and the absence of otherness. Transparency makes real relationships impossible: what keeps a real relationship alive is precisely the impossibility of complete interpersonal transparency. It is the space and distance between people that makes relationships possible. Han writes: “[D]istance and shame refuse to be integrated into the accelerated circulation of capital, information and communications.”<sup>26</sup> The other from whom otherness is taken is no longer a person and thus cannot be truly loved. Without the presence of another, communication slowly degenerates into an information exchange and relationships are replaced by connections.

This is where Orthodox theology and spirituality can help us, especially the Orthodox theology of personhood, which stems from their theology of the Trinity in which the categories of love, freedom and otherness are necessary

24 Han, *The Burnout Society*, 31.

25 Bauman, *44 Letters*, 160.

26 Han, *The Transparency Society*, 4.

elements. Relationships of love and freedom are what define a person. We find one of the ideas behind this equation in the ontology of a person as described by Metropolitan John Zizioulas.<sup>27</sup> Zizioulas is seeking to create an ecclesiology that expresses the church as a way of being. But he is also aware that the mystery of the church is deeply bound to human being and to the being of the world and of God.

In describing the mystery of the life of the Trinity, Zizoulas shows that, unlike the Latin fathers, the Greek fathers see the person (*hypostasis*) of the Father, rather than some inert substance, as the ontological principle and cause of the life of God as Trinity. The being of God is therefore not ontological necessity but personal freedom. The Father freely “begets the Son and brings forth the Spirit.” Outside of the Trinity there is no other being of God. A person’s true identity can be found only in relationships. There is no true being without communion. Being comes from the person who loves freely and who affirms his or her own being by means of communion with other persons. This concept is not just theoretical but existential. The communion of divine persons is essential for human relationships. Without proper relationships with others, a human can be an individual but not a person.

God’s ontological freedom lies in his personal existence, in the authentic relationships of the persons of the Trinity. Freedom is possible only by way of love as the primordial predicate. In the Trinity, love and freedom are identical. People created in God’s image always have the hope of being authentic persons. We are not talking about the freedom of negation, of denying one’s own existence, but the freedom of love. In Zizioulas’s view, even freedom understood merely as the ability to choose is false as this is just another kind of necessity. This view resonates with Han’s criticism of the contemporary notion of freedom. Han suggests that the imperative “be free” inflicts violence on the subjects and leads to tiredness and depression: “*You can* exercise even greater constraint than *You should*.” Independence does not bring freedom and emancipation: the dialectic of freedom lies in the fact that it always generates new limitations.<sup>28</sup> On the contrary, Zizioulas’s ontology says that the real ontology of personhood is based on freedom not “from” the other but “for” the other. It thus becomes identical with love. “Being as communion” also means accepting the otherness of the other. Without the otherness of the other, we would have

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27 John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004). The comments that follow here are taken from this work, pp. 15, 18, 43, 44.

28 Han, *The Burnout Society*, 38.

no communion. As Zizioulas says: "We can love only if we are persons, that is, if we allow the other to be truly other, and yet to be in communion with us."<sup>29</sup>

### Conclusion

Bauman's sociological analysis and Han's psycho-political analysis of contemporary society show us trends in the development of democratic pluralistic societies. I have chosen to use their critique as it resonates with my own context of the small Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia Orthodox Church and with my personal experience. I also believe that in Orthodox spirituality we see the potential to reverse these trends and to create the conditions necessary for a truly integrated life in democratic countries.

Returning to the metaphor of the spiritual pilgrim can anchor the nomads and tourists in democratic pluralistic countries into a broader body of creation and help them experience God on their journey. Being anchored in creation seen as God's word will encourage a tolerance towards space for others and remove the ontological dualism of a hierarchical inside and outside. Returning to an iconic understanding of reality will lead to the fullness of life where our relationship to God, others and the whole of creation is not objectified and where mystery is still present as the condition for the fullness of life and mutual respect.

Returning to the contemplative life and to creative activity will mean applying both the apophatic and the cataphatic ways of knowing God to spiritual praxis and thereby helping people in a society of hyperactivity and mere production (including theological production) to truly encounter themselves, others and God. It will mean that, even in the tiredness that comes after creative work, it will be possible to see the world around us. Returning to a spiritual form of love will help us in democratic pluralities to understand the freedom that transcends cultural and national freedom but at the same time nourish them. By freedom, we mean freedom not of choice but of love. A theological understanding of a person provides an alternative notion of anthropology, in which people are seen not as mere objects or separate individuals but as unique persons who bear God's image and are able both to love and be loved. Relationships based on freely given love transcend all individualism and division.

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29 John D. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 10.

# Orthodox Christianity in the Context of Postcolonial Studies

Vasilios N. Makrides

## Introduction

The emergence of postcolonial studies can certainly be considered a seminal development in the modern cultural sciences with numerous applications and repercussions in a variety of other domains and disciplines (including religious studies<sup>1</sup>) that have radically changed traditional perspectives, evaluations and orientations.<sup>2</sup> It was a paradigm change that went hand in hand with the gradual political decolonization process, especially from the 1970s onwards. The main aim was the critical examination of the culture and identity of countries, nations or population groups that were historically shaped by colonial control and contexts, mainly under the influence of West European and generally Western powers. This implied a critical questioning of the long history of Western colonialism, which was also combined with concrete emancipatory interests, not only in political but also in cultural and intellectual terms. It is about a multifaceted and multilayered development to combat the lasting effects of colonialism on native peoples, given that there are various legacies of colonial agency and practice, as well as numerous modes of colonial hegemony and interdependencies (with regard to power, subordination, race, gender, inequality, and class struggles).

Needless to say, we are talking about a development that is still evolving, calls into question established certainties and commonplaces, and exhibits various

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- 1 Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); David Chidester, "Colonialism," in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, ed. Willi Braun & Russell T. McCutcheon (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), 423–37; Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Richard King, "Orientalism and the Study of Religions," in *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. John R. Hinnells (Abington, Oxon: Routledge, 2005), 275–90; David Chidester, "Colonialism and Religion," *Critical Research on Religion* 1 (2013), 87–94; Daniel Dubuisson, *The Invention of Religions*, trans. Martha Cunningham (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing, 2019).
  - 2 Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray, eds., *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2000); Gregory Castle, *Postcolonial Discourses: An Anthology* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001); Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2001).

new and controversial facets. Suffice it to say that the latest protest actions in the context of the wider “Cancel Culture” movement<sup>3</sup> and the Afro-American criticism of Classical Studies in academia as perpetuated and disseminated by Western colonial powers and ideologies<sup>4</sup> owe much to the postcolonial turn. It is thus not unusual to observe major academic and public institutions as well as organizations and states in the Western world today officially initiating their own self-critical decolonization process.<sup>5</sup> Even if there are reservations sometimes regarding the extreme application of postcolonial perspectives on concrete cases and their potential repercussions or regarding other epistemological issues at stake,<sup>6</sup> postcolonial critique is generally an established research paradigm nowadays, both within academia and in society and culture at large.

Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, first published in 1978, is commonly considered as the birth of (or at least a turning point in) postcolonial studies. Basically, he tried to show that Western experts on the Orient constructed the subject of their research as an inferior other. Moreover, the knowledge produced in this way was used to consolidate and legitimize colonial power structures (e.g., in the educational canon of the colonized subjects). Said used material on power structures, production and dissemination of knowledge and concomitant relations of dependence (e.g., by Michel Foucault<sup>7</sup>). This shows the affinities between postcolonial and postmodern studies, two parallel yet not identical movements, which engaged in a strong critique of various Western patterns of development and worldwide dissemination in recent decades. This publication triggered a huge “Orientalism debate” that still continues in various forms, especially in connection with Islam and its quite problematic relations to the Western world.<sup>8</sup>

3 Pippa Norris, “Cancel Culture: Myth or Reality?” *Political Studies* (2021), 1–30; doi: 10.1177/00323217211037023.

4 Dan-el Padilla Peralta, “Citizenship’s Insular Cases, from Ancient Greece and Rome to Puerto Rico,” *Humanities* (MDPI) 8 (2019), 134; <https://doi.org/10.3390/h8030134>.

5 Jan C. Jansen and Jürgen Osterhammel, *Decolonisation: A Short History* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press; 2017); Priyamvada Gopal, “On Decolonisation and the University,” *Textual Practice* 35 (2021), 873–99.

6 Vinay Lal, “The Politics of Culture and Knowledge after Postcolonialism: Nine Theses (and a Prologue),” *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 26 (2012), 191–205.

7 Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge; Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977* (Brighton: Vintage, 1980); see also Richard Fardon, ed., *Power and Knowledge: Anthropological and Sociological Approaches* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985).

8 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Vintage, 1978), 1–8; see also the new “Preface” and “Afterword” in a later edition of the book (2003).

Two further developments are worth mentioning in this context. First, the “Orientalism thesis” has expanded *mutatis mutandis* to other cultures beyond the original ones and was considered – with all the necessary adaptations and modifications – a key perspective for understanding their overall development. This was also the case with Eastern and Southeast Europe, which were historically influenced in a decisive way by Western Europe<sup>9</sup> and remain dependent on it in numerous ways, even today.<sup>10</sup> This particular situation led to indignant inferiority complexes vis-à-vis the West as well as derogatory Western views about the “cultural lag” of the East. No doubt, this long-term process also had a colonial “Orientalist character,” albeit a different one than in the original case. Not accidentally, this fresh paradigm opened new vistas for understanding and evaluating the modern development of Eastern and Southeast Europe.<sup>11</sup> Ideas about “nesting Orientalisms”<sup>12</sup> or the ideology of “Balkanism”<sup>13</sup> revealing the West European ways of dealing with and constructing the East have become quite prominent in recent decades, despite various critiques and different appraisals.<sup>14</sup> Not least of all, this topic is particularly interesting for this contribution, given that it is exactly in the Eastern parts of Europe that Orthodox Christianity is predominantly found, both in history and at present. Characteristically enough, the Western mind has placed East Central Europe, which has been shaped religiously by Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, at a higher level than Orthodox Eastern and Southeast Europe.<sup>15</sup> This is also

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- 9 Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).
- 10 Katherine E. Fleming, “Orientalism, the Balkans, and Balkan Historiography,” *The American Historical Review* 105 (2000), 1218–33; Kerstin S. Jobst, “Orientalism, E. W. Said und die Osteuropäische Geschichte,” *Saeculum* 51 (2000), 250–66.
- 11 Dorota Kołodziejczyk and Cristina Şandru, eds., *Postcolonial Perspectives on Postcommunism in Central and Eastern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2018); cf. also various related book series, such as *Postcolonial Perspectives on Eastern Europe* (Peter Lang).
- 12 Milica Bakić-Hayden and Robert M. Hayden, “Orientalist Variations on the Theme ‘Balkans’: Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics,” *The Slavic Review* 51 (1992), 1–15; Milica Bakić-Hayden, “Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia,” *The Slavic Review* 54 (1995), 917–31.
- 13 Maria Todorova, “The Balkans: From Discovery to Invention,” *The Slavic Review* 53 (1994), 453–82; Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Andrew Hammond, “The Uses of Balkanism: Representation and Power in British Travel Writing, 1850–1914,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 82 (2004), 601–24.
- 14 Holm Sundhaussen, “Der Balkan: Ein Plädoyer für Differenz,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 29 (2003): 608–24; Diana Mishkova, “In Quest of Balkan Occidentalism,” *Tokovi istorije* 1–2 (2006), 29–62.
- 15 Maria Todorova, “Hierarchies of Eastern Europe: East Central Europe versus the Balkans,” *Balkan Review* 11 (1997), 5–47.

indicative of the role played by religious criteria in defining and classifying the other, thus creating related widespread “mental maps” next to geographical borders.<sup>16</sup>

Second, the initial “Orientalism thesis” was also extended beyond the dominant pattern of the West vs. the rest of the world. Even if it is the most prevalent form historically, Western colonialism is not the sole and exclusive form of hegemony, influence, dependence, classification and exploitation. Forms of colonialism can be located at varied frequency and intensity in numerous other parts of the non-Western world, sometimes even within the Western world itself. It is also not unusual that those who have been colonized and have experienced the many consequences of such colonization may themselves apply colonial policies and strategies to others under their direct influence or control. This can be observed even within Islamic cultures that have often experienced Western colonialism in extreme forms. This is due to the fact that there is a gradation of Islamic cultures according to internal criteria. For instance, following the reforms during the Tanzimat period (1839–1876), Ottomans started treating other Muslims in an “Oriental” way, especially those in the Arab provinces of the Empire. They looked down on them and viewed themselves as superior, as setting the pace, while “Ottomanism” became the role model for Islamic modernization.<sup>17</sup> Hence, colonialism is a multilayered issue that does not only concern the West. Deconstructing colonial discourses of all kinds and in all possible settings has become one dominant goal of post-colonial studies.

It is also pertinent in this context to explain the various meanings of colonization and colonial dependence and how these terms may be conceptualized in different contexts. First, the terms may be used in a narrow sense to denote the military conquest, domination, control, exploitation and forced adaptation of a given culture to a stronger colonial power, be it Western or not. In the context of Western colonialism, this adaptation was usually understood and legitimized as a “civilizing process” for the colonized culture, which was regarded by definition as inferior to the colonizing one. This is basically the key characteristic that distinguishes colonial rule from mere foreign rule.

Second, there is also another understanding of colonization in a broader sense. Here, it is about the “colonization of the mind,” following the famous quote of social anthropologist Mary Douglas: “[T]he colonization of each

16 Frithjof Benjamin Schenk, “Mental Maps: Die Konstruktion von geographischen Räumen in Europa seit der Aufklärung,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 28 (2002), 493–514.

17 Ussama Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism,” *The American Historical Review* 107 (2002), 768–96.

other's minds is the price we pay for thought."<sup>18</sup> This case basically applies to the unconscious of the colonized people who may adopt foreign thinking, without being politically subjugated by a colonial power. In other words, this happens when the gap between two cultures under question is perceived as huge and when the inferior culture is trying to reach the level of the superior one out of admiration and without external coercion. As a result, the adoption and internalization of a foreign dominant thinking, perspectives, horizons, knowledge production, language and hegemonic colonial discourse are quite vital in this category. For example, the reception of Western psychotherapeutics in Greece has been considered a "colonization of the Greek mind."<sup>19</sup> The main problem is that this category of colonization is not always clearly discernible and cannot be classified as such, a fact that can leave several colonial cases undetected for a long time.

There are many related issues in this context that are equally instrumental in capturing the multiple intricacies of the whole topic. One concerns the timeframe of colonialism, which in the Western context specifically started with the beginning of the early modern period onwards. Are there any forms of colonialism before that era, such as a kind of proto-colonialism? Several scholars distinguish here between pre-modern (e.g., with regard to ancient Greece<sup>20</sup> or medieval Western Europe<sup>21</sup>) and modern forms of colonization. More recently, George Demacopoulos has tried to locate Western colonizing practices in the context of the Crusades and especially that of the Latin occupation of the Byzantine Empire in the 13th century, attesting to a pre-modern form of "colonial Christianity." In general, Byzantines were feeling superior to other peoples and the West, yet, after the sacking of Constantinople in 1204, they started revising their traditional superiority. Since then, there is almost no Greek Orthodox text that does not refer to the West either as an alien culture as such or against the Westernized Orthodox. Aside from the theological differences, the cultural differences between East and West also acquired greater significance in this context.<sup>22</sup>

18 Steven Shapin, "Citation for Mary Douglas, 1994 Bernal Prize Recipient," *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 20 (1995), 259–61, here 260.

19 Charles Stewart, ed., *Colonizing the Greek Mind? The Reception of Western Psychotherapeutics in Greece* (Athens: DERE – The American College of Athens, 2014).

20 Gabriel Zuchtriegel, *Colonization and Subalternity in Classical Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

21 Felipe Fernández-Armesto and James Muldoon, eds., *Internal Colonization in Medieval Europe* (London: Routledge, 2008); Lucy K. Pick, "Edward Said, Orientalism, and the Middle Ages," *Medieval Encounters* 5 (1999), 265–71.

22 George E. Demacopoulos, *Colonizing Christianity: Greek and Latin Religious Identity in the Era of the Fourth Crusade* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019).

Another important distinction is the one between the usual overseas colonialism, associated with the expansion of Western Europe, and the continental one pertaining to other regions in various guises, including Europe itself. Continental colonialism tends to exploit colonial subjects from within the state. There is also the condition of “reverse colonialism,” namely, when previously colonized cultures start colonizing Western countries in various ways. In the end, colonialism always flows both ways, and there is perhaps no place, country or culture on earth that has remained totally immune to some kind of colonial encounter and experience. In fact, the relations between the colonizers and the colonized are viewed today as being much more complex than previous theories held. This is because the top-down approach to the topic has been relativized, while more emphasis is placed upon the dynamics and the reciprocal interactions between the two and the concomitant transformations. Another interesting case is that of neo-colonialism or neo-Orientalism. This concerns an indigenized colonial thinking, a “double bind,” namely, indigenous people seeking national sovereignty and self-determination while reproducing colonial positions and attitudes themselves.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the notion of crypto-colonialism or shadow colonialism is also intriguing. According to Michael Herzfeld, it is “the curious alchemy, whereby certain countries, buffer zones between the colonized lands and those as yet untamed, were compelled to acquire their political independence at the expense of massive economic dependence, this relationship being articulated in the iconic guise of aggressively national culture fashioned to suit foreign models. Such countries were and are living paradoxes: they are nominally independent, but that independence comes at the price of a sometimes humiliating form of effective dependence.”<sup>24</sup> All this is relevant and applicable to a certain extent, as we shall see, to the case of Orthodox Christianity.

For example, modern Greece has been considered a prime case of crypto-colonialism. The new independent (since 1830) Greek state remained totally dependent on West European and generally foreign powers that had treated it in an explicit or implicit colonial way. Related examples from the 19th century<sup>25</sup> down to the recent deep economic crisis (since 2009)

23 Sotiris Mitralaxis, “Studying Contemporary Greek Neo-Orientalism: The Case of the ‘Underdog Culture’ Narrative,” *Horyzonty Polityki/ Horizons of Politics* 8, no. 25 (2017), 125–49.

24 Michael Herzfeld, “The Absent Presence: Discourses of Crypto-Colonialism,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 1001, no. 4 (Fall 2002), 899–926, here 900–01.

25 Rodanthi Tzanelli, “Unclaimed Colonies: Anglo-Greek Identities through the Prism of the Dilessi / Marathon Murders (1870),” *The Journal of Historical Sociology* 15 (2002), 169–91.

abound.<sup>26</sup> The new Greek state has been rightly regarded as an imperfect and Athenocentric simulacrum of the West's imaginary construction of ancient Hellenic glories. In fact, it was mainly for this imagined Hellenic antiquity and not so much for its Orthodox Christian heritage that Greece received considerable support from the West for its independence. The modernizing Greek elites, as representatives of the West European others, opted for a collective subjugation of their country to a Western (and later on global) cultural hegemony.<sup>27</sup> The modern Greek relationship with the West has been often criticized from various perspectives, including postcolonial ones. More specifically, the Western reception of Greek antiquity was regarded as being a particular one since it obeyed Western criteria and ignored the cultural specifics of Hellenic civilization as a way of viewing the world and living in it. Hence, the West ended up distorting the ancient Greek tradition. By contrast, several modern Greeks – despite the wholesale subjection of the country to Western colonialism – claimed to have rediscovered the genuine meaning of Greek antiquity unfettered by Western influences and to have reassessed it in light of the country's past, present and future.<sup>28</sup> It is exactly here we can observe the kind of postcolonial reaction that we shall also observe below regarding the rediscovery of authentic Orthodoxy unpolluted by the West.

### Orthodox Christianity and Postcolonial Theory

Launching now onto our main subject, the key question here would be to locate the ways and the areas in which Orthodox Christianity can be analyzed and theorized from a postcolonial perspective. This may initially surprise us, given that the Orthodox majority states and cultures of Eastern and Southeast Europe have never been Western colonies in the strict sense of the word. There were a few notable exceptions, however – for example, the island of Cyprus, which was under British rule (1878–1960) and was even officially a crown

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- 26 Tereza Capelos and Theofanis Exadaktylos, “‘The Good, the Bad and the Ugly’: Stereotypes, Prejudices and Emotions on Greek Media Representation of the EU Financial Crisis,” in *The Politics of Extreme Austerity: Greece in the Eurozone Crisis*, ed. Georgios Karyotis and Roman Gerodimos (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 46–68; George Tzogopoulos, *The Greek Crisis in the Media: Stereotyping in the International Press* (London: Routledge, 2016).
- 27 Stathis Gourgouris, *Dream Nation: Enlightenment, Colonization, and the Institution of Modern Greece* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).
- 28 Christos Yannaras, *Wem gehört die griechische Antike?* Erfurter Vorträge zur Kulturgeschichte des Orthodoxen Christentums, 8 (Erfurt: Universität Erfurt, 2009).

colony (since 1925), a fact that also had an impact on the Orthodox Church there. Characteristically enough, independent Cyprus did not get rid of all colonial influences.<sup>29</sup> But can this case alone justify a broader consideration of Orthodox Christianity via postcolonial analysis and critique? The answer to this question relates to the broader understanding of colonialism explained above, which involves many facets of colonial dependence and devaluation that are relevant to Orthodox Christianity in many respects. After all, Western Europe/the West and its colonial practices have been a perennial problem and challenge for the Orthodox world at various levels.

### *Deconstructing Western Constructions of the Orthodox Other*

One of the main areas where postcolonial theory applies to our case concerns the deconstruction of the numerous, pervasive and influential Western essentializations of the Orthodox East, both historically and at present as well, which were in fact a mirage of Western consciousness. This is perhaps a classical domain in postcolonial studies, considering that “(Western) Europe/the West” has been the dominant point of reference and criticism for non-Western cultures, including Orthodox ones. In our case, this is mainly due to the multi-dimensional Western “expansion” to the East, especially since the early modern period, which had far-reaching consequences in numerous areas. Due to the manifold Western superiority and the concomitant power of defining the other, Orthodox Christianity was often presented in a particular light and not least in a derogatory and negative one, a fact that led to related lingering representations of it both in academic and public discourse.<sup>30</sup> Western social theory has also often considered Orthodox Christianity from Western presuppositions and led to the establishment of various related images.<sup>31</sup> This often happened in close connection with the Western negative evaluation of Eastern and Southeast Europe as a whole (e.g., its lacking modernization), where Orthodoxy has always been considered an important factor shaping its history and present reality. This centuries-old situation has given rise to a massive dependence of the Orthodox East on Western developments and strong

29 Vassos Argyrou, “Independent Cyprus? Postcoloniality and the Spectre of Europe,” *The Cyprus Review* 22 (2010), 39–47.

30 Larry Wolff, *The Enlightenment and the Orthodox World: Western Perspectives on the Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe* (Athens: Institute for Neohellenic Research, 2001).

31 Peter McMylor and Maria Vorozhishcheva, “Sociology and Eastern Orthodoxy,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity*, ed. Ken Perry (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 462–79, especially 475–78; Chris Hann, *Eastern Christianity and Western Social Theory*, Erfurter Vorträge zur Kulturgeschichte des Orthodoxen Christentums, 10 (Erfurt: Universität Erfurt, 2011).

pro-Western tendencies, a fact that also triggered massive reactions that fall under the broader spectrum of Orthodox anti-Westernism, old and new alike.<sup>32</sup> Postcolonial analysis of these East-West relations not only yields important insights in capturing their entanglements. It is also relevant *mutatis mutandis* for understanding the particularities of Orthodox identity building across history and may help deconstruct the Western discourse about the Orthodox East.

To be more specific, there have been numerous representations of Orthodox Christianity articulated from a Western perspective: exotic, archaic, mystical, irrational, incapable of development, resistant to reform, conservative, other- and outerworldly, nationalistic, patriarchal, anti-modern, violent, world-negating and world-indifferent, and many more. For example, Orthodox ritual practices and spirituality were often viewed as uncanny and bizarre by modern Western people. It seemed a rather strange and remote religiosity that did not fit into the growing rationalization of Western Christianity, especially in the post-Reformation era. In turn, this putative construction of the Western imagination also had an impact on the Orthodox self-description of alterity (“We of the East” – ἡ καθ’ ἑμᾶς Ἀνατολή), which also reinforced even more the centuries-old separation line between Orthodox and Latin Christianity. Truth be told, most of these Western characterizations of the Orthodox East belong mostly to a rather distant past, given that there has been some significant rapport between Orthodox and Western Christianity in recent decades.<sup>33</sup> The dominance of Western modernity as the sole way to modernization has also been seriously called into question,<sup>34</sup> and this applies to Orthodox Christian cultures in Eastern and Southeast Europe<sup>35</sup> where various indigenous alter-

32 Vasilios N. Makrides and Dirk Uffelmann, “Studying Eastern Orthodox Anti-Westernism: The Need for a Comparative Research Agenda,” in *Orthodox Christianity and Contemporary Europe*, ed. Jonathan Sutton and Wil van den Bercken, (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 87–120; Thomas Bremer, “Der ‘Westen’ als Feindbild im theologisch-philosophischen Diskurs der Orthodoxie,” in *Europäische Geschichte Online* (EGO), edited by the Leibniz-Institut für Europäische Geschichte (IEG), Mainz, 19-03-2012, <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/bremert-2012-de>.

33 Donald Fairbairn, *Eastern Orthodoxy through Western Eyes* (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002); Robert Letham, *Through Western Eyes: Eastern Orthodoxy. A Reformed Perspective* (Tain UK: Mentor, 2010).

34 Shmuel Eisenstadt, “Multiple Modernities,” *Daedalus* 129, no. 1 (2000), 1–29; Walter Dignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

35 Vasilios N. Makrides, “Orthodox Christianity, Rationalization, Modernization: A Reassessment,” in *Eastern Orthodoxy in a Global Age: Tradition Meets the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Victor Roudometoff, Alexander Agadjanian and Jerry Pankhurst (Walnut Creek CA: AltaMira Press, 2005), 179–209.

native roads to modernity have been proposed.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the numerous older constructions of the Orthodox East by the West can be deconstructed and analysed from a postcolonial perspective, which attests to the utility of this research paradigm.<sup>37</sup>

An area where such Western perceptions still linger on, however, is Western politics and mass perceptions, which are dictated to a large degree by the Western mass media and their sweeping influence in global terms. Especially in post-communist times and in the context of new military and other conflicts, Orthodox Christianity was portrayed in an extremely negative way and colours. This was especially the case with the consecutive wars in former Yugoslavia (1991–2001), when many stereotypes and less flattering characterizations circulated about the Orthodox Serbs and Orthodox Europe at large.<sup>38</sup> In this context, Orthodox Christianity was portrayed as one of the main driving forces behind alleged Serb nationalism, aggressiveness and backwardness.<sup>39</sup> “Orientalist” and “Balkanist” discourses thrived during that period and led to many misconceptions about Orthodox Christianity, which was starting to emerge again and play a more crucial public role after suffering from long-standing discrimination and persecution by communist regimes. In turn, such Western discourses were often criticized and deconstructed<sup>40</sup>, either by Orthodox<sup>41</sup> or even Western actors<sup>42</sup>, a fact that shows the wider potential and

36 Roumen Daskalov, “Ideas about, and Reactions to Modernization in the Balkans,” *East European Quarterly* 31 (1997), 141–80.

37 Irena Zeltner Pavlović, “Imagining Orthodoxy: Eine postkoloniale Beobachtungsperspektive der Repräsentation des religiösen Anderen,” in *Ostkirchen und Reformation 2017. Vol. 1: Dialog und Hermeneutik*, ed. Irena Zeltner Pavlović and Martin Illert (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2018), 217–28; eadem, “Postkoloniale und postsozialistische Studien: repräsentierte Orthodoxie,” in *Postkoloniale Theologien 2: Perspektiven aus dem deutschsprachigen Raum*, ed. Andreas Nehring and Simon Wiesgickl (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 2018), 226–41.

38 Elizabeth Prodromou, “Paradigms, Power, and Identity: Rediscovering Orthodoxy and Regionalizing Europe,” *European Journal of Political Research* 30 (1996), 125–54.

39 Srdjan Vrcan, “A Christian Confession Possessed by Nationalistic Paroxysm: The Case of Serbian Orthodoxy,” *Religion* 25 (1995), 357–70.

40 Stevan K. Pavlovitz, “Who is ‘Balkanizing’ Whom? The Misunderstandings between the Debris of Yugoslavia and an Unprepared West,” *Daedalus* 123, no. 2 (1994), 203–23.

41 Bogoljub Šijaković, *A Critique of Balkanistic Discourse: Contribution to the Phenomenology of Balkan “Otherness”* (Toronto: Serbian Literary Company, 2004).

42 Klaus Roth, “Von Europa Schwärmen? ‘Europa’ und die Europäische Union in den Vorstellungen der Menschen in Südosteuropa,” in *Prowestliche und antiwestliche Diskurse in den Balkanländern/Südosteuropa*, ed. Gabriella Schubert and Holm Sundhaussen (Munich: Sagner 2008), 165–79; Valeska Bopp, Katharina Lampe and Andrea Schneiker, eds., *Balkanbilder in Ost und West. Mythen und Stereotypen auf der Spur: Anregungen zur Didaktik interkultureller Studienseminare* (Berlin: MitOst-Editionen, 2007).

appeal of the postcolonial paradigm. This also concerns other Western stereotypes about Orthodoxy in other contexts, such as those about its alleged “exotic” character, which are again in need of critical appraisal.<sup>43</sup>

We are talking, however, about a new phase of Western constructions with far-reaching consequences that cannot be always effectively stopped. This is because after the fall of communism, the West as a whole acquired a new legitimacy, self-assurance and prominence that became visible in numerous instances. It is not accidental that, in the notorious geopolitical theory of Samuel P. Huntington about the “clash of civilizations” after the end of the Cold War, the model of the West vs. the rest of the world acquired new significance. In this frame, Orthodox Christianity was not portrayed in positive colours and was – among other factors – held responsible for the overall cultural lag of Eastern and Southeast Europe. This once more triggered sharp critiques of Huntington’s ideas as representing a new form of colonialism in the context of the propagated “new world order.” The same can be said for other Western theories (e.g., Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History and the Last Man*, 1992), which prophesied the worldwide victory of liberal democracy and the free market economy and once more prompted postcolonial critiques.

A prime target of Western political and other critical voices is still Russia, however, which, in the era of Vladimir Putin (since 2000), has once again become anew a major opponent of Western political and other designs and strengthened its traditional anti-Westernism in many forms. Not least, the war against Ukraine in 2022 attests to this. The role of the Russian Orthodox Church in post-communist times is anything but negligible since it has systematically promoted “traditional” values against Western ones (e.g., liberalism, secularism, individualism), supported the policies of the Kremlin and attempted to craft broader anti-Western alliances and fronts.<sup>44</sup> This close connection between state and church policies has been often criticized by Western actors.<sup>45</sup> As the Swedish ex-Foreign Minister Carl Bildt once tweeted on 24 March 2014, the “force of Putin’s new anti-Western and anti-decadent

43 John Anthony McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to its History, Doctrine and Spiritual Culture* (Malden MA: Wiley-Blackwell 2008), 1.

44 Christopher Selbach, “The Orthodox Church in Post-Communist Russia and her Perception of the West: A Search for a Self in the Face of an Other,” *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 10 (2002), 131–73; Alexander Agadjanian, “Tradition, Morality and Community: Elaborating Orthodox Identity in Putin’s Russia,” *Religion, State & Society* 45 (2017), 39–60.

45 Zoe Knox, “Russian Orthodoxy, Russian Nationalism, and Patriarch Aleksii II,” *Nationalities Papers* 33 (2005): 533–45; Gaziza Shakhanova and Petr Kratochvíl, “The Patriotic Turn in Russia: Political Convergence of the Russian Orthodox Church and the State?” *Politics and Religion*, (2020), 1–28, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000620>.

line” builds “on deeply conservative orthodox ideas.”<sup>46</sup> Such utterances, either official or private, abounded in recent decades and led to counter-reactions by Orthodox and other actors, reinforcing their anti-Western predispositions. Not least, they prompted postcolonial deconstructions of related Western discourses. In general, it should not be denied that Orthodox Christianity and its cultures may exhibit such characteristics in one way or another for socio-historical and other reasons. But the way such characteristics are portrayed in Western discourses and media is in most cases fragmentary, misleading, oversimplifying and generalizing, a fact that underlines and justifies again the necessity of subjecting them to postcolonial analysis.

### *Provincializing the West European/Western Discourse*

Another area in which postcolonial perspectives may prove especially useful for the study of Orthodox Christianity concerns the long established and dominant Western Eurocentric view about non-Europeans and their cultures and the concomitant divide between the West and the rest of the world.<sup>47</sup> After all, this was a cardinal aspect of the West European overseas expansion, which imposed its own colonial perspectives, even forcibly, on other peoples and cultures across the globe. This concerned, for example, historical consciousness, which was then articulated on the basis of related Western Christian presuppositions and ignored non-Western historical traditions. The same applied to the study of non-Christian religions, which were conceptualized anew through Western Christian criteria, premises and intellectual tools. Against this long-established colonial tradition, postcolonial theory attempted not only to call into question this expansion of Eurocentrism but to also deconstruct the coherence of the Western view of history and narrative about the world. This has happened through various means, such as through the development of comparative philology. The “West” was regarded in this context as a hybrid and heterogeneous product,<sup>48</sup> while (Western) Europe was also considered as a province from the point of view of global history.<sup>49</sup>

The above also becomes quite relevant when applied *mutatis mutandis* to Eastern and Southeast Europe and their Orthodox cultures, which have been marginalized in the wake of the Western colonial discourse. For instance,

46 <https://twitter.com/carlbildt/status/448069450437513216>.

47 Stuart Hall, “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power,” in *Formations of Modernity*, ed. Bram Gieben and Stuart Hall (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 275–320.

48 Christopher GoGwilt, *The Invention of the West: Joseph Conrad and the Double-Mapping of Europe and Empire* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press 1995).

49 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

West Europeans have constructed their own view of Europe, which mostly excluded the East and Southeast (especially the Balkans) parts of the continent. The Europeanness of the latter was often called into question, a fact that still lingers on in various forms. There are still courses, study programmes and books in Western languages talking about Europe in an inclusive way, although they refer solely to its Western parts and virtually ignore its Eastern and Southeast areas.<sup>50</sup> “West European history” then easily turns into an all-encompassing “European history” and claims for itself alone the whole of the continent. Even a country like Greece, where, in fact, the term “Europe” arose in antiquity in the first place, was not considered a fully European one in Western eyes. This became evident when Greece officially joined the European Economic Community back in 1981, as the first Orthodox majority country to do so. The Orthodox Christian tradition of the country was also regarded as a hindrance to its Europeanization.<sup>51</sup> The same holds true for other Orthodox majority countries that exhibit both anti-Western and anti-European sentiments.<sup>52</sup> Here one can spot a clear difference along confessional lines with the Roman Catholic or Protestant countries of East Central Europe, which, as already mentioned, have been treated more positively by the West due to their greater religious affinity to Western Christianity. It is also no accident that for a long time Europeanization was almost coterminous with modernization and Westernization. We are talking here about established and still widespread stereotypes, categorizations and discourses of Western provenance, which post-colonial theory has only partially deconstructed so far.

There are also further issues in this category in terms of subjecting Western historiography and its consequences regarding the Orthodox world to postcolonial critique, which may deconstruct the discourse about the alleged overall European coherence from an exclusive West European perspective. To mention one telling example, this concerns especially the way “Byzantium” was constructed and treated by Western Europe in highly negative and inimical terms,

50 Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case. Parameters of Faith in the Modern World* (London: Orbis Books 2002); Hans Joas and Klaus Wiegandt, eds., *The Cultural Values of Europe*, trans. by Alex Skinner (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008).

51 Vasilios N. Makrides, “Griechenland zwischen Ost und West, zwischen Antiozkizidentalismus und Verwestlichung,” in *Prowestliche und antiwestliche Diskurse in den Balkanländern/Südosteuropa*, ed. Gabriella Schubert and Holm Sundhaussen (Munich: Sagner, 2008), 115–36; idem, “Orthodox Anti-Westernism Today: A Hindrance to European Integration?” *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 9 (2009), 209–24.

52 Alena Alshanskaya, *Der Europa-Diskurs der Russischen Orthodoxen Kirche (1996–2011)* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2016); Julia Anna Lis, *Antiwestliche Diskurse in der serbischen und griechischen Orthodoxie: Zur Konstruktion des “Westens” bei Nikolaj Velimirović, Justin Popović, Christos Yannaras und John S. Romanides* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2019).

given the long-standing animosities between East and West and the definitive schism between the two churches in 1054.<sup>53</sup> It is well known that “Byzantium” – not as a geographical indication but as a normative neologism – was coined by the German humanist Hieronymus Wolf (1516–1580), who thereby intended to deprive the Hellenized “Eastern Roman Empire” of any continuity with ancient Rome. By contrast, the latter was in fact the sole true and legitimate heir to the Roman Empire in a Christian frame, given that the Western Roman Empire had ceased to exist after 476 AD and continuity with it was claimed there by other peoples (e.g., Franks, Germans). As a result, the later invention of “Byzantium” should not occasion any surprise, given that it was the outcome of the hard-fought claim to Roman heritage in the Latin West and of the concomitant denial of any such continuity in the Greek East. All this went hand in hand with the negative depictions of Byzantium in Western historiography for many centuries, which only came to be critically reassessed since the early 20th century. Despite all this, terms like “Byzantinism”<sup>54</sup> are still widespread, especially in journalistic but sometimes also in academic circles in a negative sense. The same holds true for other expressions (e.g., “Byzantine intrigues”) in general usage, thus pointing to the lingering of related remnants of Western misconceptions and misrepresentations.<sup>55</sup> All of this is not unrelated to the role ascribed to Byzantium in the historical formation of Europe, which has been downplayed in recent decades on different occasions, even in the context of the European Union (cf. the 1990 book *Europe: The History of its Peoples* by Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, which had been commissioned by European authorities).<sup>56</sup> After all, Byzantium was an Orthodox Christian Empire, and this fact has been regarded for a long time as a hindrance by the Roman Catholic and Protestant West to its being part of Europe. Characteristically enough, one can observe here a “colonization of the Orthodox mind,” given that the Western

53 Johann P. Arnason, “Approaching Byzantium: Identity, Predicament and Afterlife,” *Thesis Eleven* 62 (2000), 39–69.

54 Dimitar G. Angelov, “Byzantinism: The Imaginary and Real Heritage of Byzantium in Southeastern Europe,” in *New Approaches to Balkan Studies*, ed. Dimitris Keridis, E. Elias-Bursac and N. Yatromanolakis (Dulles VA: Potomac Books, 2003), 3–23.

55 Milica Bakić-Hayden, “What’s so Byzantine about the Balkans?” in *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation*, ed. Dušan I. Bjelić and Obrad Savić (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2002), 61–78.

56 Paschalis M. Kitromilides, “Europe and the Dilemmas of Greek Conscience,” *Greece and Europe in the Modern Period: Aspects of a Troubled Relationship*, ed. Philip Carabott (London: Centre for Hellenic Studies, 1995), 1–15.

negative evaluation of Byzantium was also shared by many Western-educated Orthodox and other intellectuals in Eastern and Southeast Europe.<sup>57</sup>

Last but not least, similar problems appeared with the Western reception of ancient Greece and its heritage, which has been exclusively claimed by West Europeans from the beginning of the early modern period onwards. But this process presented West Europeans as the sole legitimate heirs to and worthy continuators of this rich tradition, whereas modern Greeks were mostly left out. The history of ancient Greece was thus conceived and written in most cases through Western lenses, while the results of that Western reading subsequently acquired a canonistic and strong normative significance.<sup>58</sup> In addition, modern Greeks (including their Christian Orthodoxy) were often negatively portrayed by the West as being unworthy of creatively continuing the ancient Greek heritage and its immense legacy. It is obvious, then, that Greece, both ancient and modern, had diachronically become an attractive focus of Western imagination, wishes and related projections.<sup>59</sup> The Western currents of Humanism, Philhellenism, Romanticism and Neoclassicism attest to this. The questions of whom ancient Greece belongs to and how modern Greece should be approached are therefore central to our topic and reveal once more the many consequences of the Western dominant perspectives on the East that are in need of systematic deconstruction through postcolonial analysis.

### *Orthodox Christian Subalternity and Indigenism*

Among the typical postcolonial terminology used, “subalternity” occupies a central place.<sup>60</sup> Initially coined by the Italian Marxist philosopher and politician Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), it denoted the condition of lower social classes, which were not in a position to decide their social status independently.

57 Rōxanē D. Argyropoulou, *Les intellectuels grecs à la recherche de Byzance (1860–1912)* (Athens: Institute for Neohellenic Research, 2001); Dimitris Stamatopoulos, *Byzantium After the Nation: The Problem of Continuity in Balkan Historiographies* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2022).

58 Joachim Jacob and Johannes Süßmann, eds., *Das 18. Jahrhundert: Lexikon zur Antikerzeption in Aufklärung und Klassizismus* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2019).

59 Wolfgang Hautumm, ed., *Hellas: Die Wiederentdeckung des klassischen Griechenland* (Cologne: DuMont, 1983); Wolfgang Löhneysen, “Ideal und Wirklichkeit: Deutsche Reisende in Griechenland 1800–1840,” *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 38 (1986), 133–66; Christopher Meid, *Griechenland-Imaginationen: Reiseberichte im 20. Jahrhundert von Gerhart Hauptmann bis Wolfgang Koeppen* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012).

60 Ranajit Guha, ed., *A Subaltern Studies Reader 1986–1995* (Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories, Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

In the postcolonial context, the term generally refers to minority, marginalized and oppressed social groups and colonized peoples that try to live up to expectations foisted upon them by a prevailing colonial power. The context of the Indian subcontinent was a prime case, for which this concept was initially used.<sup>61</sup>

The question is whether and how this concept can be applied to the Orthodox Christian case, which does not exhibit the above characteristics. Yet, Orthodox subalternity should not be understood as submissiveness, subjugation, exploitation, domination and oppression, as in the classical postcolonial context. Rather, it relates more to notions of alterity, inferiority, dependence, subordination, unimportance, backwardness, deficiency, failure, marginalization, lack of recognition and exclusion. These characteristics were generated mostly from the Western side in its evaluation of the Orthodox East and were subsequently internalized by the latter so that they became dominant in related discourses. Western Europe thus became a model to be imitated in the East, which felt it was by definition inferior and lagging behind. Although various traces of this condition can already be observed in the late Middle Ages, the East-West gap became gradually bigger and bigger from the early modern period onwards. This was due to the radical and pioneering development of Western Europe in many crucial domains (e.g., science and technology), which made the differences to the East immense and almost unbridgeable. This far-reaching change gave rise to various and widespread discourses in the West about the notorious backwardness of Eastern and Southeast Europe, which has persisted through centuries and partially exists even until today.<sup>62</sup> The “Asiatic burden” and the non-Europeanness of Russia from a Western perspective constituted a usual topos that survives in various forms right up to the present.<sup>63</sup> The same pertains to the inferior and outlandish status of the Balkans vis-à-vis the West, which gave rise to the aforementioned Western ideology of “Balkanism,” including Greece.<sup>64</sup> The latter did not only relate to the Orthodox Christian cultures in the region, but also to Islam, especially in the

61 Gayatri C. Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson (Urbana IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.

62 Daniel Chirot, *The Origins of Backwardness in Eastern Europe: Economics and Politics from the Middle Ages until the Early Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Chris Hann, “Backwardness Revisited: Time, Space, and Civilization in Rural Eastern Europe,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 57 (2015), 881–911.

63 Christian Sigrist, *Das Rußlandbild des Marquis de Custine: Von der Zivilisationskritik zur Rußlandfeindlichkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1990); Bruno S. Sergi, *Misinterpreting Modern Russia: Western Views of Putin and His Presidency* (New York: Continuum, 2009).

64 Sotirios Mitralixis-Georgakakos, *Can the Underdogs Speak? Contemporary Greece’s “Subaltern” Political Theories through the Lens of Critical Geopolitics and Post-Secularism* (PhD Diss., University of Peloponnese, 2018).

form of the Ottoman Empire, which was viewed negatively and scornfully by West Europeans.<sup>65</sup> This sense of inferiority was shared by many élites in these areas (political, economic, intellectual etc.), who tried to emulate the Western prototype as far as possible and transform their states and cultures accordingly. Yet this often created deep gaps within the respective societies and triggered strong anti-Western reactions, which were also mostly supported by the Orthodox Church and related circles.<sup>66</sup>

This process can be also described by the notion of “self-colonization”<sup>67</sup> or “self-orientalization,”<sup>68</sup> namely, a self-imposed colonial status that always puts a culture on an inferior and dependent status, which obstructs its free and autonomous development. This concerns cultures that have succumbed to the cultural power of the West without having been conquered and turned into colonies. Hence, by feeling inferior to the West on numerous levels, many Orthodox Christians often exhibited a defensive and fortress mentality. The question is here how the Orthodox can overcome this self-imposed colonization. In fact, the growing impact of Western theological influences upon the Orthodox world has led to counter-reactions and a strengthening of an Orthodox “indigenism” that was supposed to fight off such adulterating external elements. In addition, this process was coupled with the search for a genuine and authentic Orthodoxy beyond the Western alienating and colonizing elements. The main motto was: Orthodox Christianity is (or should ideally be) what Western Christianity is not. Although not limited to the theological domain, the West was here pre-eminently perceived as the religious and cultural other. These multifaceted reactions across the East-West binary for rediscovering a true Orthodox self-identification unfettered by Western influences can be thus conceptualized as an Orthodox postcolonial search and movement.

Here are some examples. The well-known and widely disseminated theory of the Russian theologian Georges V. Florovsky (1893–1979) about the “Babylonian captivity” of Russian Orthodox theology in early modern times through various

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65 Ash Çırakman, “From Tyranny to Despotism: The Enlightenment’s Unenlightened Image of the Turks,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 33 (2001), 49–68.

66 Gabriella Schubert and Holm Sundhaussen, eds., *Prowestliche und antiwestliche Diskurse in den Balkanländern/Südosteuropa* (Munich: Sagner, 2008).

67 Alexander Kiossev, “The Self-Colonising Cultures,” in *Cultural Aspects of the Modernisation Process*, ed. Dimitri Ginev, Francis Sejersted and Kostadinka Simeonova (Oslo: TMV Senteret, 1995), 73–81.

68 Plamen K. Georgiev, *Self-Orientalization in South East Europe* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2012).

“pseudomorphoses” under Western influence is a case in point.<sup>69</sup> The same applies to the views of the Orthodox theologian and philosopher Christos Yannaras (b. 1935) on the distortion of the genuine Orthodox perspectives and criteria since late Byzantium due to growing Latin (Scholastic) influences.<sup>70</sup> The same also holds true for various Orthodox rigorist/fundamentalist circles in Orthodox majority countries or in Western settings who dream of restoring the “traditional Orthodoxy” that became lost in the context of modern pluralization, individualization, secularization and liberalization, not least in the wake of the Western intellectual colonization of the Orthodox East.<sup>71</sup> Another similar case concerns the attempt to create a purely genuine and traditional Orthodox theological education, given that Orthodox Theological Schools have been modelled to a large extent according to Western prototypes (Roman Catholic or Protestant Faculties of Theology). The reason for this lies in the fact that Orthodox theology is considered to be charismatic and experiential, whereas Latin theology is regarded as intellectualistic, rationalized and worldly in many respects.<sup>72</sup> All these reactions, no matter their differences, are in fact postcolonial in nature. They are in favour of an Orthodox indigenism as a nostalgia and a search for a forgotten, neglected, lost or ignored authentic, pre-colonial Orthodox voice. The main question is of course whether there is indeed such a religious and cultural purity at all. This notwithstanding, the postcolonial character of these reactions is unmistakable.

69 Georgij V. Florovskij, *Puti russkogo bogoslovija* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1937; with several later editions); English edition: *Ways of Russian Theology*, part I, trans. by R. L. Nichols, The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky, vol. 5 (Belmont MA: Nordland Publishing, 1979); part II, trans. by R. L. Nichols, The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky, vol. 6 (Vaduz: Büchervertriebsanstalt, 1987); see also Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 159–200.

70 Christos Yannaras, *Ἄρθοδοξία καὶ Δύση στὴ νεώτερη Ἑλλάδα* [Orthodoxy and the West in Modern Greece] (Athens: Domos, 1992); see also the shortened English edition, *Orthodoxy and the West: Hellenic Self-Identity in the Modern Age*, trans. Peter Chamberas and Norman Russell (Brookline MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2007); see also Brandon Gallaher, “Orthodoxy and the West – The Problem of Orthodox Self-Criticism in Christos Yannaras,” in *Polis, Ontology, Ecclesial Event: Engaging with Christos Yannaras’ Thought*, ed. Sotiris Mitralaxis (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2018), 206–25.

71 George E. Demacopoulos, “‘Traditional Orthodoxy’ as a Postcolonial Movement,” *Journal of Religion* 97 (2017), 475–99.

72 George Metallinos, “Das Problem der deutschen Einflüsse auf die griechische akademische Theologie in der Gründungsphase der Athener Universität,” *Orthodoxes Forum* 3 (1989), 83–91; Athanasios Vletsis, “Charismatische oder akademische Theologie? Das Ringen der orthodoxen Theologie um ihren Platz an einer staatlichen Universität am Beispiel der griechisch-orthodoxen Kirche,” *Una Sancta* 66 (2011), 123–32.

Furthermore, many Orthodox actors are also annoyed by the fact that Orthodox ideas and suggestions remain rather marginal in current international debates on modern issues of broader significance (e.g., human rights<sup>73</sup>), that in the past were largely dominated by Western perspectives in a normative manner. Can the Orthodox, despite their residual subalternity, speak for themselves and become vocal within the global discursive field? Historically speaking, it is not amiss to argue that, for a long time, the Orthodox remained anonymous and mute; their voice was hardly heard and even less taken into account. Even today, despite some improvements, there is still a notable absence of Orthodox perspectives on various issues that do not seem to play a significant role internationally or to be taken into account by prominent (often Western-led) forums and respective actors. Suffice it to say that the Orthodox Churches have only lately begun to systematically expose their official views on social issues.<sup>74</sup> This marginalized status of the Orthodox discourse usually strengthens the traditional Orthodox defensive mechanisms against Western dominance, which again bear postcolonial characteristics, even if subdued in most cases. Interestingly enough, it is possible that some Orthodox may find the postcolonial critique of the West a “stroke of luck” for their own anti-Western purposes and may use it accordingly, even if they distort its original motives and intention. The point here, however, is that Orthodox anti-Westernism as such and the formation of Orthodox identities may be subjected to postcolonial analysis and deconstruction too, as we shall see later on.

### *Orthodox Christian Internal Colonization*

Another area that can be examined from a postcolonial perspective pertains to cases when a previously “colonized” Orthodox culture has tried to apply its own colonial policies to other peoples within newly acquired territories and to homogenize these peripheries culturally and religiously according to a dominant centre and prototype. This concerns colonial policies within one and the same country or culture (as a second conquest) with the purpose of rendering it uniform. In this case, we observe a colonialism “from within.” As already mentioned, the distinction between the colonizers and the colonized is not an absolute one, given that the latter may act like the former under specific circumstances, yet in a different direction.

73 Vasilios N. Makrides, “Orthodox Christianity and Modern Human Rights: Theorising their Nexus and Addressing Orthodox Specificities,” in *Global Eastern Orthodoxy: Politics, Religion, and Human Rights*, ed. Giuseppe Giordan and Siniša Zrinščak (Cham, CH: Springer, 2020), 13–39.

74 Vasilios N. Makrides, “Why Does the Orthodox Church Lack Systematic Social Teaching?” *Skepsis: A Journal for Philosophy and Interdisciplinary Research* 23 (2013), 281–312.

The case of Orthodox Russia is paradigmatic for this category, not least because of its particular geographical position both in Europe and in Asia.<sup>75</sup> On the one hand, Russia was exposed to an extensive “Western colonization,” decided from above by its own leaders (e.g., through the Petrine reforms), on its way to modernization. After all, as already mentioned above, Western Europe had always looked down upon it as an Asian and not fully European country. On the other hand, due to its immense gradual territorial expansion (Caucasus, Central Asia, Siberia, Alaska), Russia undertook a similar colonial role as a *force civilisatrice* of its own “Orient” in many ways.<sup>76</sup> This concerns Russia’s internal colonization, a colonization “from within,” which is also often subsumed under the category of continental colonization. Thus, Russia became both the subject and object of colonization as well as its corollaries (e.g., Orientalism).<sup>77</sup> In another interesting case, Ukraine was also treated by Russia in a “colonial” way, both historically and at present. This explains the heated conflicts between Russia, the West and Ukraine and the concomitant war in 2022, which are basically about the latter’s decolonization. Ironically enough, this may lead in the future to another colonization of Ukraine, namely, by the West. In the ecclesiastical realm, this decolonization was instigated by the declaration of autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in 2019, which was supported by the political leadership of the country and the West. This autocephaly was initiated and effected by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, a fact that subsequently led to a schism between Moscow and Constantinople.<sup>78</sup>

Systematic missionary activities were the primary way to engage in Russia’s internal colonization. These were also supported and coordinated not only

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75 Dmitry Shlapentokh, ed., *Russia between East and West: Scholarly Debates on Eurasianism* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

76 Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzarini, eds., *Russia’s Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700–1917*, (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1997); Kaplana Sahni, *Crucifying the Orient: Russian Orientalism and the Colonization of Caucasus and Central Asia* (Oslo: White Orchid Press, 1997); Austin Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire: North Caucasus Mountain Peoples and the Georgian Frontier, 1845–1917* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002); Nicholas B. Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers: Forging Russia’s Empire in the South Caucasus* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

77 Alexander Etkind, *Internal Colonization: Russia’s Imperial Experience* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011).

78 Alexander Ponomariov, “Ukrainian Church Autocephaly: The Redrawing of the Religious Borders and Political Identities in the Conflict between Ukraine and Russia,” *Russian Analytical Digest* 231 (25 January 2019), 2–9.

by the Russian Church but also the state since they served the objectives of homogenizing a steadily expanding Russia. After all, the intrinsic connection between missions and colonization has already been evident historically in the Western overseas expansion. Hence, “missions in Russia were part of a non-certified colonization process directed by the state and, as such, were subservient to government interests.”<sup>79</sup> On the one hand, the historical model of Orthodox missions prescribed a different agenda. This was evident in the Byzantine missionary legacy of Cyril and Methodius, the “Apostles of the Slavs,” who respected the local languages, customs and traditions of the Christianized peoples and contributed to their literary development (e.g., through the creation of the first Slavic alphabet).<sup>80</sup> This was a model of missionary inculturation (including indigenization and vernacularization) that exhibited features of pluralism, openness and tolerance. On the other hand, Russian missions in modern times were strongly affected by state-imposed processes of Russification (*Obrushenie*) of the newly acquired territories, which obeyed various strategies of convergence, centralization and homogenization. Yet such Russification policies were not very coherent and thus remained generally unsuccessful. Aside from this, there were significant variations within the Russian Orthodox missionary endeavours, such as the differences between the culturally highly indigenous missions (in the Aleutian Islands and Alaska) and the culturally non-indigenous missions (mainly in Siberia but initially also in China).<sup>81</sup> Moreover, this Russian colonization did not always meet with indigenous reactions. In a characteristic case, the Dena’ina people in Alaska preferred to defend their own Russian Orthodox identity, which was the result of a previous Russian colonization, than to accept the new Protestant missionaries

79 Michael Khodarkovsky, “The Conversion of Non-Christians in Early Modern Russia,” in *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia*, ed. Robert P. Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 115–43, here 142.

80 Vasilios N. Makrides, “The ‘Individuality of Local Cultures’: Perceptions, Policies and Attitudes in the Context of Orthodox Christian Missions,” in *Individualisierung durch christliche Mission?* ed. Martin Fuchs, Antje Linkenbach and Wolfgang Reinhard (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag 2015), 152–69.

81 Sotirios A. Mousalimas, *The Transition from Shamanism to Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1995); David N. Collins, “Culture, Christianity and the Northern Peoples of Canada and Siberia,” *Religion, State & Society* 25 (1997): 381–92; Michael J. Oleksa, “The Orthodox Church and Orthodox Christian Mission from an Alaskan Perspective,” *International Review of Mission* 90 (2001), 280–88; Eric Widmer, *The Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Peking during the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1976).

and their concomitant colonial practices who became active there after Russia sold Alaska to the USA in 1867.<sup>82</sup>

Historically, Russia did often exhibit an “Orientalist attitude” towards others, especially towards the Ottoman Empire, with which it had numerous war engagements and from which it had profited territorially over a long period of time.<sup>83</sup> It is also worth mentioning that these centuries-old Russian contacts with Asia, the Far East and the Orient led to the establishment of a specific robust tradition of Oriental Studies in the country. These have been established as an academic discipline since 1804 in Kazan, a historical centre of Russian Islam but also later in Moscow and St. Petersburg, a tradition that was continued in the Soviet Union.<sup>84</sup> The question arises here as to the parallels between the Russian and Western Oriental Studies, given that we can find a colonial background in both and that the Western ones have been so much criticized in recent decades in the wake of the aforementioned works by Edward Said. In general, Russian “Orientalology” (*Vostokovedenie*), as it is called, is different from Western Oriental Studies, which have been directly or indirectly condemned for supporting colonialism, imperialism and Orientalism. On the contrary, Russian Orientalologists at the turn of the 20th century (e.g., Sergei F. Oldenburg, 1863–1934, in St. Petersburg) had already touched upon multiple interconnections between power, dominance and knowledge regarding their research subject – interestingly enough, long before Said.<sup>85</sup> These are interesting cases showing the multiple ways through which Eastern Europe is historically connected with modern postcolonial studies.

### *Intra-Orthodox Colonization Processes*

An additional area worthy of examination concerns various processes of intra-Orthodox colonization. It is well known that the Orthodox world exhibits some extensive internal variation, given the existence of many local autocephalous Orthodox Churches and concomitant cultures. Pluriformity in unity and not centralized uniformity has been the traditional motto in Orthodox Christianity. This can be attested in numerous cases, and reference was made above to a related tradition in Orthodox missions. Yet, the question of intra-Orthodox

82 Andrei A. Znamenski, *Shamanism and Christianity: Native Encounters with Russian Orthodox Missions in Siberia and Alaska, 1820–1917* (Westport CT: Praeger, 1999), 94–137.

83 Viktor Taki, “Orientalism on the Margins: The Ottoman Empire under Russian Eyes,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 12 (2011), 321–51.

84 Michael Kemper and Stephan Conermann, eds., *The Heritage of Soviet Oriental Studies* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

85 Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

colonization arises when a specific Orthodox culture becomes strong, central, influential and dominant, so that it can dictate the development of another, less powerful Orthodox culture. Historically, there have been numerous cases like this, which have led to intra-Orthodox tension and conflicts and can be examined and analyzed through postcolonial lenses.

A most prominent case relates to Byzantine Orthodoxy and its influence upon the Rus' (Old Russia) and the formation of Russian Orthodoxy as a whole. It concerns processes that exhibit various facets of a colonization, even in pre-modern terms. It is well known that Russian Orthodoxy remained dependent on the Byzantine Church for centuries and on many levels, including jurisdictionally. Thus, the multiple influences from Byzantine Orthodox spirituality as well as the artistic and literary traditions are unmistakable.<sup>86</sup> There are some long-standing debates about the literary condition of the Rus' and whether the formative influence of Byzantium on it has been exaggerated in related colonial discourse. The so-called "intellectual silence" and lack of the development of a high culture in the Rus' have given rise to various discussions, including the question whether it was actually the Orthodox Church and not the Mongols that stifled the development of East Slavic intellectual thought.<sup>87</sup> Such an interpretation has been variously criticized as reflecting later colonial critiques of Orthodox Christianity as being a force that inhibited reform, development and modernization.<sup>88</sup>

Be that as it may, we know for sure that the Russians wanted to get rid of this broader "colonial dependence" in religious and political terms as they gradually grew stronger and Byzantium declined. This process was accelerated after the fall of Byzantium to the Ottoman Turks in 1453. This independence plan of a "Russification of Orthodoxy" included the realms of theology, art and ritual practice, in which Russian Orthodoxy managed to develop its own local traditions that differed from the Byzantine ("Greek") ones. This happened even before the official declaration of the autocephaly of the Russian Church (1589/93). As Tsar Ivan IV (1530–1584) is reported to have said once to the

86 Gerhard Podskalsky, *Christentum und theologische Literatur in der Kiever Rus' (998–1237)* (Munich: Beck, 1982).

87 Francis J. Thomson, "The Nature of the Reception of Christian Byzantine Culture in Russia in the Tenth to Thirteenth Centuries and Its Implications for Russian Culture," *Slavica Gandensia* 5 (1978), 107–39.

88 William Veder, "Old Russia's 'Intellectual Silence' Reconsidered," in *Medieval Russian Culture*, vol. 2, ed. Michael S. Flier and Daniel Rowland (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 20–64; Simon Franklin, "Po povodu 'intelektual'nogo molchaniia' Drevnei Rusi," *Russia mediaevalis* 10 (2001), 262–70; Donald G. Ostrowski, *Europe, Byzantium and the "Intellectual Silence" of Rus' Culture* (Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2018); David Prestel, "Kievan Rus' Theology: Yes, No, and It Depends," *Russian History* 46 (2019), 177–92.

Roman Catholic legate Antonio Possevino (1533–1611): “We do not believe in the Greeks, but in Christ. We accepted the Christian faith at the very beginning of Christianity when Andrew, brother of Peter apostle, entered these regions on his journey to Rome.”<sup>89</sup> The dissociation from the “Greek” version of Orthodoxy grew even stronger at times, although there were more productive encounters and interactions between these two Orthodox traditions. In fact, the schism of the Old Believers (1666/67) was a reaction of this kind to the reconnection of Russian Orthodoxy with the Greek ritual tradition, attempted by Patriarch of Moscow Nikon (1652–1658).<sup>90</sup> The involvement of other factors (e.g., nationalist, Panslavist) in these mutual relations later rendered the situation even more complex,<sup>91</sup> a fact reflecting the broader state of affairs that seriously affects pan-Orthodoxy unity today. The Moscow Patriarchate tries to develop its own policies independently of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which it criticizes for following a colonial centralizing agenda by trying to dictate the future pace of the Orthodox world on its own. Nevertheless, as a powerful religious institution, the Moscow Patriarchate applies “colonial policies” explicitly or implicitly upon other, less influential Orthodox Churches and cultures (especially Slavic ones) that remain within its immediate range of influence or even tries to expand its jurisdictional presence in new areas (e.g., Western Europe)<sup>92</sup> and canonical territories (most recently, in 2020/21, in Africa at the expense of the Patriarchate of Alexandria).<sup>93</sup>

It becomes evident once more that colonizing mentalities and policies can be located everywhere in various overt and covert forms, and the Orthodox world is not free of such antagonisms. There are further examples of such intra-Orthodox tensions due to colonial practices. This pertains, for instance, to the Hellenization of various Orthodox peoples under Ottoman rule in the Balkans, both in religious and non-religious domains. This was mostly a free process without coercion at that time because of the widespread great fondness for the

89 Daniel H. Shubin, *A History of Russian Christianity*, vol. 1: *From the Earliest Years through Tsar Ivan IV* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2004), 9.

90 Paul Meyendorff, *Russia, Ritual, and Reform: The Liturgical Reforms of Nikon in the 17th Century* (Crestwood NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1991).

91 Lora Gerd, *Russian Policy in the Orthodox East: The Patriarchate of Constantinople (1878–1914)* (Warsaw/Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014).

92 Sebastian Rimestad, *Orthodox Christian Identity in Western Europe: Contesting Religious Authority* (London: Routledge, 2021).

93 Efi Efthimiou, “The Moscow Patriarchate received 102 priests of the Patriarchate of Alexandria, as announced at the Holy Synod of the Church of Russia, which met today,” *Orthodox Times*, 19 December 2021; <https://orthodoxtimes.com/moscow-adopted-102-clergy-men-of-the-patriarchate-of-alexandria-forms-exarchate-of-africa-upd/>.

Greek language and culture.<sup>94</sup> By contrast, the emerging nationalisms among the Balkan peoples in the 19th century put an emphasis on local cultures and languages and by consequence put an end to this Hellenization process, which was then regarded by them not only as a burden but as a serious threat for the respective national awakening and identity.<sup>95</sup> Earlier state-supported Hellenization processes (e.g., in the Danubian Principalities under Phanariot rule) were also retrospectively criticized as colonial policies that obstructed the rise of the Romanian national identity. The entire issue has to do with the broader normativity that Greek Orthodoxy has traditionally enjoyed vis-à-vis other Orthodox cultures. This went unquestioned in many cases in the past, yet in other instances and especially in the context of modern ecclesiastical nationalisms, there was a strong reaction to such broader Greek influence. An analogous situation may be observed in another context, which has already been mentioned, namely, in the relations between Russia and Ukraine and the concomitant tensions. Russia was able to exert strong influence upon Ukraine (“Little Russia”) in numerous areas, including the ecclesiastical one, and keeps raising objections to Ukrainian attempts at more independence. From a Ukrainian perspective, however, this relationship exhibited clear colonial characteristics that were not beneficial to the development of Ukrainian national specificities and ecclesiastical independence.<sup>96</sup>

### *Deconstructing Eastern Orthodox Discourses*

Finally, postcolonial studies can be quite useful and fruitful in another direction, namely, in the deconstruction of various Eastern Orthodox discourses that have been articulated both historically and at present. Here the numerous interconnections between postcolonial and postmodern perspectives become quite obvious once again. In actual fact, it is not only Western discourses about non-Western peoples that interest us in the present context but also the Orthodox ones, which basically fall under the following two categories.

94 Vasilios N. Makrides, “The Enlightenment in the Greek Orthodox East: Appropriation, Dilemmas, Ambiguities,” in *Enlightenment and Religion in the Orthodox World*, ed. Paschalis M. Kitromilides (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2016), 17–47.

95 Paschalis M. Kitromilides, *Enlightenment, Nationalism, Orthodoxy: Studies in the Culture and Political Thought of Southeastern Europe*, 2nd ed. (Aldershot: Variorum, 2003); idem, *An Orthodox Commonwealth: Symbolic Legacies and Cultural Encounters in Southeastern Europe* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2006).

96 Stephen Velychenko, “The Issue of Russian Colonialism in Ukrainian Thought: Dependency, Identity and Development,” *Ab Imperio* 1 (2002), 323–367; Vitaly Chernetsky, “Postcolonialism, Russia and Ukraine,” *Ulbardus Review: The Slavic Review of Columbia University* 7 (2003), 32–62.

First, there are also Orthodox discourses about the West that are based on stereotypes, false caricatures, artificial binaries, schematic depictions, negative nuances and a lack of thorough knowledge of the Western tradition.<sup>97</sup> Thus, there are various misrepresentations of the East-West differences by the Orthodox, which end up in the construction of related ideologies about the West that may be subsumed under the category “Latinism.” Here it is not about the West as a geographical location, but as a form of civilization that was historically shaped by Latin Christianity and against which the Orthodox usually tended to identify themselves. Evidently, it is not only the Latin West that constructs the Orthodox East, but also vice versa. The ideas of Christos Yannaras about the “barbarian West” with regard to Latin Christianity offer a good example of how the West is constructed by an Orthodox intellectual and how the concomitant Orthodox superiority is subsequently fabricated.<sup>98</sup> The Orthodox receptions of Augustine<sup>99</sup> and Scholastic theology (especially that of Thomas Aquinas)<sup>100</sup> are also prime examples of how Orthodox actors have evaluated and constructed the West throughout history. The same applies to post-communist Russian Orthodox constructions of the decadent West.<sup>101</sup> No doubt, the relations between these two were historically asymmetrical, given that the West was, from a certain point in history, stronger and dominant and could influence the East in more decisive ways. Yet the Orthodox reactions to this wholesale Western influx should not be ignored or underrated, given that they are dictated by a similar logic in their attempt to fight off Western colonial influences. Furthermore, the Orthodox case is not unique as it belongs to the broader reactions of non-Western cultures in global terms to Western colonial expansion and formative influences. These anti-Western cases have been subsumed under the term “Occidentalism,” which indicates not only various forms of infatuation with the West and resulting anti-Western attitudes,

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97 George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou (eds.), *Orthodox Constructions of the West* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

98 Vasilios N. Makrides, “The Barbarian West: A Form of Orthodox Christian Anti-Western Critique,” in *Eastern Orthodox Encounters of Identity and Otherness: Values, Self-Reflection, Dialogue*, ed. Andrii Krawchuk and Thomas Bremer (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 141–58.

99 George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou, eds., *Orthodox Readings of Augustine* (Crestwood NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2008).

100 Marcus Plested, *Orthodox Readings of Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

101 Alfons Brüning, “Morality and Patriotism: Continuity and Change in Russian Orthodox Occidentalism since the Soviet Era,” in *Eastern Orthodox Encounters of Identity and Otherness: Values, Self-Reflection, Dialogue*, ed. Andrii Krawchuk and Thomas Bremer (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014) 29–46.

but also the non-Western ideological perceptions and constructions of the Western other.<sup>102</sup>

Second, characteristically enough, there are not only Orthodox constructions of the West, but also those of the East that can be analyzed and deconstructed through postcolonial analysis. Such constructions of the East may take different forms and articulations. It may concern invented, simplistic and non-sophisticated views about the Orthodox East, coupled with claims for uniqueness, absoluteness and exclusivity. Such constructions are typical in the realm of Orthodox rigorists/fundamentalists, who narrow the variety and reduce the richness of Orthodox identities across time.<sup>103</sup> It may also concern various complex, highly reflected and systematically theorized constructions of the East with the aim to locate its particular “essence” in ideal terms beyond space and time. The latter case relates to various Orthodox intellectuals, either with a philosophical background or not, who look for and reflect upon a true and genuine Orthodoxy that satisfies them personally and intellectually, even if such an Orthodoxy is never to be found historically.<sup>104</sup> In both cases, however, we are dealing with ideologizations (“Orthodoxism”) that can be analyzed through postcolonial lenses. In most cases, the usual trigger of such ideologies is again the West and its perceived opposition to the Orthodox East across history. In this context, one may also encounter various subtle forms of colonial dependence, such as an Orthodox neo-colonialism or neo-Orientalism. In actual fact, some Orthodox reactions to Western colonial influences may, in their argumentation, inadvertently themselves reproduce *mutatis mutandis* analogous patterns of colonial thought and practice.

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102 James G. Carrier, ed., *Occidentalism: Images of the West* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of its Enemies* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004).

103 Vasilios N. Makrides, “Orthodox Christian Rigorism: Attempting to Delineate a Multifaceted Phenomenon,” *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society* 2, no. 2 (2016), 216–52; idem, “The Notion of ‘Orthodoxy’ as the Sole True Faith: A Specific Cause of Orthodox Christian Rigorism/Fundamentalism,” in *Orthodoxy and Fundamentalism: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Davor Džalto and George E. Demacopoulos (Lanham: Lexington Books / Fortress Academic, 2022), 31–50.

104 Vasilios N. Makrides, “Religion, Kirche und Orthodoxie: Aspekte orthodox-christlicher Religionskritik,” *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 15 (2007), 53–82; idem, “Église contre religion et critique de la religion dans la théologie orthodoxe grecque moderne,” *Contacts: Revue française de l'orthodoxie* 69, nos. 259–60 (2017), 356–401.

### Concluding Remarks

The short presentation above of various categories of cases relating Orthodox Christianity to postcolonial studies has hopefully shown that this new research paradigm can offer fresh and fruitful insights in analyzing the construction of Orthodox identities, the Orthodox self-understandings and Western perceptions about the Orthodox, both in history and at present.<sup>105</sup> No doubt, the specific topics and cases mentioned above are not new and have already drawn scholarly attention from diverse angles so far. Yet postcolonial analysis promises to offer novel perspectives that enable a better grasping of various processes and developmental trajectories within Orthodox Christianity and particularly numerous legacies of colonial agency. The heuristic potential of this new paradigm is also attested by the growing number of scholars who decide to use it in examining Orthodox Christianity without of course absolutizing it.

What has become evident from the foregoing presentation is the importance of the East-West connection in our context, not only in Europe,<sup>106</sup> but also beyond it. It is exactly this connection that renders this topic so apt for a postcolonial analysis. At the same time, such an investigation invites a reconsideration of the absolute lines of separation that have often been postulated between East and West and have polarized their mutual relations over centuries. In fact, a postcolonial analysis may well show that the categories “East” and “West” involve a great deal of construction and fabrication, especially if they are to be considered from a broader and especially global perspective. What is “Western” about the West and what is “Eastern” about the East? – these are questions that need to be seriously considered in this context of today’s global entanglements, especially because of the far-reaching implications of such concerns. Truth be told, this is not a completely original issue; it has been discussed earlier many times and in various contexts.<sup>107</sup> Yet, postcolonial perspectives may offer new and inventive directions to the related research as they put emphasis on previously neglected aspects of the topic.

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105 George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou, “Orthodox Naming of the Other: A Postcolonial Approach,” in *Orthodox Constructions of the West*, 1–22.

106 Alexander Maxwell, ed., *The East-West Discourse: Symbolic Geography and its Consequences* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011).

107 Fairy von Lilienfeld, “Ost’ und ‘West’ als Kategorien im ökumenischen Sprachgebrauch in Bezug auf ihre Behandlung in der russischen Geschichtsphilosophie des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts,” in *The Religious World of Russian Culture: Russia and Orthodoxy*: vol. II. *Essays in Honor of Georges Florovsky*, ed. Andrew Blane (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), 315–48.

To be more specific, this relates to the issue of religious and cultural purity and authenticity, which is of great concern for the Orthodox in their relationship to the West, as we have already seen. There is, however, a danger lurking that this quest for Orthodox purity may be transformed into a sterile East-West polarity. Can there be an ideal condition of religious purity at all without any external influences, a condition for which the Orthodox display such an intense and pervasive longing? Referring to a seminal postcolonial thinker, Homi K. Bhabha's categories of hybridity, ambivalence, mimicry/irony/mockery, dislocation, and interstitial space (third space)<sup>108</sup> are quite useful here and may offer ways to consider such issues in a more nuanced and differentiated way. For him, all identities are basically hybrid, hence religious and cultural purity is a myth and never a tangible reality. This also concerns the construction of Orthodox identities across history, which have been often viewed as having been alienated by external Western influences. But does it concern an alienation here, pollution and the "pseudomorphosis" of genuine Orthodoxy or perhaps unavoidable inter-confessional contacts and consequently inter-confessional permeability that affects both the East and the West?<sup>109</sup> In all probability, the existence of hybrid Orthodox identities cannot be excluded in numerous cases, especially if we consider how many Orthodox critics of the West have lived and were educated and intellectually formed in the West while partly adopting Western perspectives and using them for their own sake. Ironically, in other words, the Orthodox critics of the West are in many cases themselves "products of the West," employ its intellectual categories and tools and in fact end up by being "cultural and religious hybrids." Their shrill anti-Western polemic renders them, even inadvertently, often ever more dependent on the West and blinds them by drawing their identity from the Western other.<sup>110</sup>

Such a standpoint reveals the sheer relativity entailed in the absolute demarcation lines drawn between East and West that lead to the construction of related ideologies, which are widely disseminated and still enjoy popular support in various contexts. Nevertheless, the experience of the global

108 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

109 Dorothea Wendebourg, "Pseudomorphosis: Ein theologisches Urteil als Axiom der kirchen- und theologieggeschichtlichen Forschung," in *The Christian East: Its Institutions and its Thought: A Critical Reflection*, ed. Robert F. Taft, SJ (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1996), 565–89; see also its English translation in *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 42 (1997), 321–42.

110 Brandon Gallaher, "Waiting for the Barbarians': Identity and Polemicism in the Neo-Patristic Synthesis of Georges Florovsky," *Modern Theology* 27 (2011), 659–91, especially 679–83.

condition and postcolonial analysis allow us to discuss the multiple effects of the colonial dispositive from another angle. The growth of an Orthodox migration and settlement in the West, especially from early 20th century until today,<sup>111</sup> and the concomitant rise of a new “Orthodox cosmopolitanism”<sup>112</sup> render the above East-West distinction in absolute terms very questionable. If nothing else, postcolonial studies are able to offer an alternative stance on such matters and call into question the proclaimed certainty and validity of such ideologies. They can contribute to self-critical attitudes in both Eastern and Western Christianity and to the deconstruction of their negative projections and ideological products respectively.

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111 Antoine Arjakovsky, *The Way: Religious Thinkers of the Russian Emigration in Paris and their Journal 1925–1940* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013); Maria Hämmerli and Jean-François Mayer (eds.), *Orthodox Identities in Western Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

112 Vasilios N. Makrides, “Le nouveau document social de l’Église orthodoxe: Son orientation, son élaboration, son contexte et son importance,” *Istina* 65 (2020), 387–413, especially 395–410.

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