

Studies in World Catholicism: vol. 1



BEYOND *the*
BORDERS
OF BAPTISM

CATHOLICITY, ALLEGIANCES, AND LIVED IDENTITIES

EDITED BY MICHAEL L. BUDDE

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STUDIES IN WORLD CATHOLICISM

Beyond the Borders of Baptism

Catholicity, Allegiances, and Lived Identities

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Contents

Acknowledgments | vii

Introduction by Michael L. Budde | 1

PART ONE: Identities, Allegiances, and Theological Reflections

1: Thinking Theologically about Identities and Allegiances:

Parables of a New “We” | 13

EMMANUEL KATONGOLE

2: Thinking Theologically about Identities,
Allegiances, and Discipleship | 28

DORIAN LLYWELYN, SJ

3: Church Matters | 47

STANLEY HAUERWAS

PART TWO: History, Context, Theology, and Eschatology: Notes, Experiences, Suggestions, and Possibilities

A: Europe, West and East

4: Engaging European Contexts and Issues: Some Reflections | 65

DANIEL IZUZQUIZA, SJ

5: The Challenge of Being a Catholic in Liberal Secular Europe | 77

A. ALEXANDER STUMMVOLL

6: Multiple Caesars? Germany, Bavaria,
and German Catholics in the Interwar Period | 91

MARTIN MENKE

7: Catholicism and Belonging, in This World | 104

SLAVICA JAKELIĆ

8: Multiple Belongings and Transnational Processes
of Catholic Formation in an Eastern Catholic Church | 123

PETER GALADZA

9: Baptismal and Ethnocultural Community: A Case Study of
Greek Orthodoxy | 141
PANTELIS KALAITZIDIS

B: Africa: Catholicity and Incarnated Identities

10: African Cases and Theological Reflections | 168
AGBONKHIANMEGHE E. OROBATOR, SJ

11: Cases and Controversies from Africa | 180
EUNICE KARANJA KAMAARA

C: Latin America

12: Poverty, Injustice, and Plurality:
A Complex Question for Catholics in Latin America | 199
MARIA CLARA LUCCHETTI BINGEMER

13: A Crown of Counterrevolutionary Thorns?
Mexico's Consecration to the Sacred Heart: January 6, 1914 | 214
MATTHEW BUTLER

D: North America

14: Kenotic Identities:
Political Self-Emptying and Redefined Belongings | 246
BRADEN P. ANDERSON

15: Is Catholicism a Religion? Catholics and Nationalism in America | 262
WILLIAM T. CAVANAUGH

E: Asia

16: Imagining Identity/Community as Christian/Filipino:
Implications for Doing Theology in East Asian Contexts | 279
JOSE MARIO C. FRANCISCO, SJ

PART THREE: In Lieu of a Conclusion

17: Loyalties, Allegiances, and Discipleship: Facing the Challenges | 301
MICHAEL L. BUDDE

Bibliography | 323
Subject/Name Index | 351
Scripture Index | 357

9

Baptismal and Ethnocultural Community: A Case Study of Greek Orthodoxy¹

PANTELIS KALAITZIDIS

Christianity has appeared in history not as a new religion but as a new sort of community, that is, a Eucharistic and eschatological community. If since its beginning this community did acknowledge the Eucharist as the constitutive sacrament and the very core of the church's identity, assuming at the same time the moral, social, and even political consequences that derive from this new experience, it has always considered Baptism to be the sacrament of initiation through which one might enter the Christian community, the sacrament which offered spiritual birth or rebirth to the faithful as well as membership in the Christian community. In fact, through the sacrament of Holy Baptism, the church was not only seeking the regeneration and rebirth of humans out of water and the Spirit, but also the formation of a new humanity according not to the natural rules and the worldly spirit, but the way set out by Jesus Christ and his gospel which is bringing "good news of great joy for all the people" (Luke 2:10 NRSV).

In this paper, I will first focus on the multiple and radical consequences that stem from the spiritual birth of the faithful through their participation in the baptismal and Eucharistic community regarding the issues of belonging and identities. I will then turn to the Greek and the wider Orthodox context and consider the relationship between baptismal and ethnocultural community, as well as baptismal and ethnocultural identity. Additionally, I will explore to what extent the Byzantine "symphonia" and, later, the

1. This paper is partly based on my previous writings: "Church and Nation in Eschatological Perspective," 339–73; "La relation de l'Église à la culture," 7–25; "Orthodoxy and Hellenism," especially 368–79; and, with Nikolaos Asproulis, "Greek Religious Nationalism," 201–21.

nationalized Orthodoxy played an important role in the fusion of the two identities, and if they do coexist harmoniously or not. I have to clarify here that I examine the Greek Orthodox case as a paradigm insofar as the same or analogous phenomena can be found in the majority of Orthodox churches or traditional Orthodox countries. In the last section (“In Place of a Conclusion”), an attempt will be made to raise the crucial issues that these matters entail for Greek and wider Eastern Orthodoxy.

Baptismal Community

What characterizes the Christian community is that it is constituted not on the basis of racial, ethnic, social, or political criteria—in other words, on any biological or even cultural foundation—but on the spiritual basis initiated by Baptism and fulfilled in the Eucharist. We have to be reminded here that Baptism is not so much about deliverance from original sin, nor about individual salvation and questions related to the issue of the sacrament’s validity; it is rather an act of the catholic church, embracing the whole of the ecclesial body, with social and cosmic dimensions insofar as it signifies the beginning of Christian life and the ecclesiological being, and leads to the creation of a new community, the Christian community, and a new humanity, the Christlike humanity.²

As the eminent Orthodox theologian of the Russian diaspora Fr. Alexander Schmemmann³ (perhaps the most important Orthodox liturgical scholar of the twentieth century) points out, through Baptism we are reborn out “of water and the Spirit,” and our rebirth constitutes a great gift of the Holy Spirit toward our personal Pentecost, which lays the way open toward the church, toward the kingdom of Heaven. We are baptized in order to become active members of the body of Christ and enrich our special gifts within the church, and this membership finds its fulfillment and expression through Eucharist. Some people’s miscomprehension of the connection between other sacraments and the Divine Eucharist is due to the fact that they have been influenced by another type of theological perspective. According to them, the Eucharist is nothing more than just a sacrament among the others, one that functions as a “vector of grace” and aims at the worshipper’s individual sanctification. In this perspective, the connection between Eucharist and the other sacraments is lost, while Eucharist itself is no longer considered the sacrament *par excellence*, in which the church is revealed and fulfilled as the body of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, and the

2. See Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 67–68.

3. Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, 115ff.

realization of God's kingdom within this world. Their misunderstanding comes from the distorted Western legalistic medieval theology which, for many centuries, has formed contemporary theological perception of the Eucharist (even in the Orthodox context), seeing the latter as a simple issue of "transubstantiation" of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, excluding, therefore, any other possibility and dimension of this sacrament. We should not be surprised, then, that we do not in fact share the same understanding with the Fathers concerning the link between Eucharist and the other sacraments.

According to Schmemmann's analysis,⁴ within the true Orthodox tradition, we find a totally different view. The *metabole*—the changing of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ—is viewed as the crowning point and the climax of the whole Eucharistic liturgy, whose meaning is that it constitutes the realization of the church as a new creation, redeemed as the Body of Christ, reconciled with God, and blessed by the Holy Spirit. In this perspective, the Eucharist is revealed as the self-evident and necessary fulfillment of Baptism. If Baptism integrates us within the church, then by necessity, the entrance to the church also involves entrance to the Eucharist, and consequently, participation in the Eucharist which is viewed as Baptism's fulfillment (to the extent that Eucharist is considered the sacrament *par excellence* of the church) and the church's ultimate being and essence. The best way to understand all of this, according to Schmemmann's analysis (which is based on the Orthodox *ordo* of Baptism), is to follow the newly baptized as they enter the church in procession. The deeper theological meaning of this liturgical *ordo* of entrance to the church is that the newly baptized are not seeking individual salvation or piety, but to join the body of Christ and to set out with the other believers to participate in the Eucharistic celebration. In the words of Fr. Schmemmann,

Indeed their entrance is first of all the act of joining the gathered community, the *Church* in the first and most literal sense of the Greek word ἐκκλησία, which means assembly, gathering. Their first experience of the Church is not that of an abstraction or idea but that of a real and concrete unity of persons who, because each one of them is united to Christ, are united to one another, constitute one family, one body, one fellowship. The Eucharist, before it is or can be anything else, is thus *gathering* or, better to say, the Church *herself* as unity in Christ. And this gathering is *sacramental* because it reveals, makes visible and "real," the invisible unity in Christ, His presence among those

4. Ibid., 117–18.

who believe in Him and in Him love one another; and also because this unity is truly *new unity*, the overcoming by Christ of “this world,” whose evil is precisely alienation from God and therefore disunity, fragmentation, enmity, separation.

This new unity, as the gathering that they have joined reveals to the newly baptized, is not limited to people alone. Having left the world behind the doors of the church, they find the same world, but purified, transfigured, filled again with divine beauty and meaning—the very icon of the kingdom of God. It is not a gathering of “escapees” from the world, bitterly enjoying their escape, feeding their hate of the world.⁵

Through Baptism and Chrismation we thus enter and through the Eucharist we fulfill the ecclesiological hypostasis and existence, the new life in Christ in which all previous forms of being are overcome or even left behind, and all kinds of worldly bounds (biological but also cultural/spiritual) are relativized. In the words of Fr. Georges Florovsky, probably the most preeminent Orthodox theologian of the twentieth century,

In Holy Christening the one to be enlightened leaves “this world” and forsakes its vanity, as if freeing himself and stepping out of the natural order of things; from the order of “flesh and blood” one enters an order of grace. All inherited ties and all ties of blood are severed. But man is not left solitary or alone. For according to the expression of the Apostle “by one Spirit are we all baptized,” neither Scythians nor Barbarians—and this nation does not spring through a relationship of blood but through freedom into one body. The whole meaning of Holy Christening consists in the fact that it is a mysterious acceptance into the Church, into the City of God, into the Kingdom of Grace.⁶

It has been established that Eastern Orthodoxy’s identity and existence, which is identified with the notions of “body” and “communion” commonly shared by the eschatological and Eucharistic community of the faithful, brings about a deep social dimension. As Florovsky characteristically remarks, following on this point the ancient patristic tradition, Eastern and Western alike, in its entirety:

Christianity from the beginning existed as a corporate reality, as a community. To be Christian meant just to belong to the community. Nobody could be Christian by himself, as an isolated individual, but only together with “the brethren,” in a

5. *Ibid.*, 118.

6. Florovsky, “On the Veneration of Saints,” 201–2.

“togetherness” with them. *Unus Christianus nullus Christianus* [one Christian—no Christian]. Personal conviction or even a rule of life still do not make one a Christian. Christian existence presumes and implies an incorporation, a membership in the community. This must be qualified at once: in the *Apostolic* community.⁷

The first Christians chose to use the Greek political term *ecclesia* (a term already used in the Septuagint Old Testament text to translate the Hebrew *qahal*) in order to define their identity, their understanding of charismatic co-belonging, and the social, communal, and “corporate” character of Christian existence. This is why Christianity, according again to Florovsky,

is fundamentally a social religion . . . Christianity is not primarily a doctrine or a discipline that individuals might adopt for their personal use and guidance. Christianity is exactly a community, i.e., the Church . . . The whole fabric of Christian existence is social and corporate. All Christian sacraments are intrinsically “social sacraments,” i.e., sacraments of incorporation. Christian worship is also a corporate worship, “*publica et communis oratio*” in the phrase of St Cyprian. To build up the Church of Christ means, therefore, to build up a new society and, by implication, to rebuild human society on a new basis . . . 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.⁸

During the second generation after the Pentecost, which is marked by Saint Paul’s decisive contribution, the church reached highly global and ecumenical levels. It was an all-inclusive church where all people—Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and barbarians, circumcised and uncircumcised, abiding or not by the law, slaves and free, men and women—were equally welcome, as Paul indefatigably repeats.⁹ If, for Paul, the participation in a nation or in a linguistic-racial community characterizes and accompanies our nature and our historical course,¹⁰ those characteristics are “relativized” and retreat in the perspective of faith and salvation.¹¹ Thus, participation in the church event goes beyond every natural bond (blood, race, language, social class,

7. Florovsky, “The Church,” 59.

8. Florovsky, “Social Problem,” 131–32.

9. See Col 3:10–11. Cf. Gal 3:26–29; 1 Cor 12:12–13.

10. See among others Rom 11:1; 2 Cor 11:22; Phil 3:5.

11. Rom 10:12–13.

etc.), making the formation of the Christian community an action overcoming nation and class. Physical definitions no longer constitute an important factor. Instead, they are replaced by the charismatic formation of the body of Christ through Baptism, leading to the fulfillment of the eschatological sacrament of unity (to which common participation testifies) bearing all evident social consequences, in the Eucharistic event.¹² The church is a spiritual genus, the new Israel, the “Israel in Spirit.”

This new community of Christians was indeed affected by the fact that they belonged to this “new society,” or even yet “new humanity.” They perceived themselves as an entirely distinct nation—the new Israel, the new people of God, *the third race*, neither Jews nor Greeks. Aristides, the apologist, states that Christians “trace their origin from the Lord Jesus Christ,”¹³ while according to Saint Basil, “all believers in Christ are one people; all Christ’s people, although He is hailed from many regions, are one Church.”¹⁴ Fr. Georges Florovsky, from his perspective, points out that “there is, after Christ, but one ‘nation,’ the Christian nation, *genus Christianum* . . . i.e., precisely the Church, the only people of God, and no other national description can claim any further Scriptural warrant: national differences belong to the order of nature and are irrelevant in the order of grace.”¹⁵

Consequently, common faith in Jesus Christ is what provides the solid foundation of this race of Christians, and not racial or ethnic criteria. There are no predetermined differentiating criteria that are based on birth in the flesh. Instead, what is of utmost importance is the unity being granted by the spiritual rebirth in Christ through Baptism and Eucharist, and the fidelity to the commandments of the gospel. This newly formed community’s mission is to become an all-inclusive one, embracing all humanity, all nations, in complete accordance with the concluding words of the Gospel of Matthew: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19 NRSV). This is the same understanding we witness being expressed in the Eucharistic anaphora of the Divine Liturgy of the Apostle Mark, when the celebrant prays, “O good Lord, remember in Thy good mercy the Holy and only Catholic and Apostolic Church throughout the whole world, and all Thy people, and all the sheep of this fold.”¹⁶

12. 1 Cor 10:16–17.

13. Aristides, *Apology* 15:1. Cf. Florovsky, “Antinomies of Christian History,” 131, and Florovsky, “Le corps du Christ vivant,” 55–57.

14. Basil, *Epistle* 161, 1, PG 32, 629 B.

15. Florovsky, “Revelation and Interpretation,” 35.

16. “Divine Liturgy of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Mark,” *Ante-Nicene Fathers* 7:555. Cf. also the Divine Liturgy from the *Apostolic Constitutions*, Book 8: “Let us pray

Within the earliest Christian communities, a sense that the Eucharist constituted a gathering of those who were scattered, a union of those who had previously been separated, and a form of participation in the supper of the kingdom, was prevalent. As the *Didache* (a Christian text from the second century AD with a strong eschatological connotation) notes, characteristically, in its chapter on the Eucharist, "Even as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together and became into one, so gather together your holy church out of every people and every land and every city and street and house, and make one living catholic church."¹⁷ The Sacramentary of Serapion of Thmuis (a liturgical *euchologion* of the fourth century) repeats and extends the *Didache* as follows: "And as this bread was scattered upon the mountains and having been gathered together became one, so gather together your holy church out of every people and every land and every city and street and house, and make one living Catholic Church."¹⁸ Therefore, we can conclude that *Eucharist, catholicity, and universality* are what shape the identity of the church and outline the sense of self-consciousness that was an eminent characteristic of the early Christian communities.

Taking all of the above into consideration, the church is seen as a spiritual homeland, a spiritual genus, in which all divisions based on nature (race, language, culture, genus, gender, social class) are surpassed and the mystery of unity in Christ and the fellowship of the previously divided humanity unfold.¹⁹ The church constitutes a new people—a new nation, a new belonging—which is not identified with any other people, race, earthly nation, or worldly belonging. This can be seen if we become aware of what are its main characteristics. These are certainly not blood ties or subjection to the natural state of affairs but the voluntary personal response to the call of God and the free participation in the Body of Christ and the life of grace.²⁰

In order to understand the above analysis we have to take seriously into account the eschatological dimension, that is, the active expectation of the kingdom of God, and the way of life that derives from it. It is well

for the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church which is spread from one end of the earth to the other" (*Ante-Nicene Fathers* 7:485).

17. *Didache* 9.4 (Lightfoot and Harmer, 261). Cf. also 10.5. For an eschatological interpretation of the "fraction" and the unity of the Church, cf. J. Taylor, "Fraction du pain," 284 ff.

18. Sacramentary of Serapion, in Bradshaw, *Eucharistic Origins*, 118.

19. John 11:52. Cf. John 10:16; 1 John 2:2.

20. I am glad to notice that this Orthodox understanding of baptismal community, inspired by the tradition and theology of the undivided church, meets many of the questions and concerns of Michael L. Budde's work, *The Borders of Baptism*.

known that eschatology is the fundamental constituent of primitive Christianity. It provides the solid foundation to Christians' paradoxical stance within the world which is summarized in the biblical "in the world, but not of the world"—in other words, a permanent tension between history and eschatology, the "already" and the "not yet." According to this perspective, which is of profound importance for our discussion, the believer could be considered an "alien" and an "exile" in this world (Cf. 1 Pet 2:11). He refuses to be situated within the world or rejects being identified with the here and now because, even though he lives in the world, he is not of the world: "but our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil 3:20 NRSV); "For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come" (Heb 13:14 NRSV). The believer does not despise the world, although he refuses to identify his life and mission in it with the forms and powers of the present age. While his faith can be described under the perspective of cosmic/worldly dimensions, he refuses to identify it with one existing in the world. Without disdaining history, he refuses to confine his purpose within the limits of history. History provides the context in which he lives, yet he refuses to be absorbed, or even assimilated, by it. While Christianity is primarily historical, it nevertheless aspires to point toward another reality—the kingdom of God—which is meta-historical, yet has already begun to influence and illuminate the historical present, just as the eschaton is continually (although paradoxically) breaking into history.

Certainly, since the Resurrection and Pentecost, a foretaste and glimmer of the coming kingdom has been provided in the Eucharist; however, the completeness of the new life will be revealed to us in the eschaton, at the end of history, when corruption and death are definitively abolished.²¹ The Christian, therefore, leads his life between these two ultimate points—the Resurrection and the eschaton—finding himself in the state of "in between," a state that leads neither to a flat rejection of the world nor to a firm acceptance of it in its present form. It is a state affecting all his choices and values: everything is assessed based on the eschaton perspective. The Christian's whole life is evaluated in the light of the anticipated new world and oriented toward it. The present time assumes both its identity and hypostasis, its meaning and its purpose, from this new world.²²

In light of the above analysis, we can understand why Florovsky so characteristically stressed that Christians had their own polis, their own

21. Vassiliadis, *Lex Orandi*, 110 [in Greek]. Cf. Florovsky, "Le corps du Christ vivant," 23–24.

22. Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, xix–xxi; Agourides, "Hope of the Orthodox Christian," 101–3 [in Greek].

“order of life,” “another system of allegiance.”²³ One can observe that from the beginning, Christianity was perceived as a particularly conscientious community, a new kingdom, a holy nation, and a chosen people.²⁴ Once again according to Florovsky, “the 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 extraterritorial ‘colony of Heaven’ on earth.”²⁵

A classic Christian text from the end of the second century AD, the *Epistle to Diognetus*, with strong eschatological overtones, seems to further affirm this analysis. It places an added emphasis on this notion of being a foreigner which stressed Christians’ paradoxical position within the world. This, of course, hardly leaves any room for them to be preoccupied with questions of ethnic identity. We read,

For Christians are not distinguished from the rest of humanity by country, language, or custom. For nowhere do they live in cities of their own, nor do they speak some unusual dialect, nor do they practice an eccentric life-style . . . But while they live in both Greek and barbarian cities, as each one’s lot was cast, and follow the local customs in dress and food and other aspects of life, at the same time they demonstrate the remarkable and admittedly unusual character of their own citizenship. They live *in their own countries*, but only as *aliens*; they participate in everything as citizens, and endure everything as foreigners. *Every foreign country is their fatherland, and every fatherland is foreign.* They marry like everyone else, and have children; but they do not expose their offspring. They share their food but not their wives. They are “in the flesh,” but they do not live “according to the flesh.” *They live on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven.* They obey the established laws; indeed in their private lives they transcend the laws.²⁶

Christianity, then, displays what could be described as a unique eschatological anarchism—an estrangement from every form of natural bond (such as language, customs, culture, marriage, family, homeland, ethnicity, law, etc.) deriving from eschatological ideas and aspirations. That is the new

23. Cf. Florovsky, “Christianity and Civilization,” 126.

24. Cf. Florovsky, “Social Problem,” 131.

25. *Ibid.*, 132.

26. *Epistle to Diognetus*, 5:1–3, 4–10 (Lightfoot and Harmer, 541). My emphases.

life in Christ, which has already begun and is expected to be completed at the eschaton.

Could we, therefore, realize the necessity of relativizing the concepts of nation and earthly homeland, of worldly identities and allegiances? If the church constitutes a spiritual genus as well as a spiritual homeland, can it, at the same time, revert to the “shadow of the law” and, in servitude to nature, be identified with a nation, serving the objectives and goals of the earthly, worldly homeland? Even if we consider these goals legitimate, can they serve as the core of the ecclesial *kerygma*, replacing and marginalizing the most essential and primary elements of the church—above all, the eschatological dimension? Perhaps such an eschatological dimension somehow abates and relativizes an otherwise legitimate patriotism—the interest in nations and homelands according to the flesh—precisely due to the fact that eschatology provides a solid foundation to another measure of evaluation. After all, isn't this the spirit of what St. Gregory of Nazianzus maintained with such astonishing boldness and clarity?

My friend, every one that is of high mind has one Country, the Heavenly Jerusalem, in which we store up our Citizenship . . . And these earthly countries and families are the playthings of this our temporary life and scene. For our country is whatever each may have first occupied, either as tyrant, or in misfortune; and in this we are all alike strangers and pilgrims, however much we may play with names.²⁷

Additionally, in his work *To the Holy Hieromartyr Cyprian*, Gregory of Nazianzus, in praising martyrdom, echoes the church's eschatological conscience, relativizing the earthly homeland as well as other worldly values. He even goes so far as to assure us that “there is one country for those of lofty character, the Jerusalem of the mind, not these earthly nations set apart in their little borders with their many changing inhabitants.”²⁸ The same church father, in his *Panegyric on Caesarius*, mentions and elaborates once again on the Pauline theology of unity and its eschatological realization in Christ's Resurrection, in which he clarifies that there is no room for any form of distinction. He even goes so far as to delineate distinctions based on gender, nation, or social class as “badges of the flesh” that mar the image and likeness of God in man. Regarding our topic, Gregory observes,

27. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Against the Arians*, PG 36, 229, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 7:332.

28. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 24, PG 35, 1188 AB (Vinson, 152).

This is the purpose of the great mystery for us. This is the purpose for us of God, Who for us was made man and became poor, to raise our flesh, and recover His image, and remodel man, that we might all be made one in Christ, who was perfectly made in all of us all that He Himself is, that we might no longer be male and female, barbarian, Scythian, bond or free (which are badges of the flesh), but might bear in ourselves only the stamp of God, by Whom and for Whom we were made, and have so far received our form and model from Him, that we are recognized by it alone.²⁹

This ecclesial perspective on the relationship between church and nation, ecclesial and ethnocultural identity (even if quite often it has been forgotten or distorted) cannot be described as a dead letter in the Orthodox tradition, because it has survived in the prophetic voices of each era. One such prophetic voice, a twentieth-century witness to the church's conscience, was the Serbian theologian Fr. Justin Popovich, who briefly described the aforementioned patristic tradition in his own theological language. He wrote the following, which is significant for the topic at hand:

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 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.³⁰

29. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Panegyric on His Brother*, PG 35, 785 C, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 7:237.

30. Popovich, “Inward Mission,” 23–24.

Vladimir Lossky,³¹ the great Russian theologian of the diaspora and historian of Western medieval philosophy, expresses the same sensitivity in his views on the subject. Lossky writes,

No differences of created nature—sex, race, social class, language, or culture—can affect the unity of the Church; no divisive reality can enter into the bosom of *Catholica*. Therefore it is necessary to regard the expression “national Church”—so often used in our day—as erroneous and even heretical, according to the terms of the condemnation of phyletism pronounced by the Council of Constantinople in 1872. There is no Church of the Jews or of the Greeks, of the Barbarians or of the Scythians, just as there is no Church of slaves or of free men, of men or of women. There is only the one and total Christ, the celestial Head of the new creation which is being realized here below, the Head to which the members of the one Body are intimately linked. At this point, any private consciousness which could link us with any ethnic or political, social or cultural group must disappear, in order to make way for consciousness “as a whole” (*kath’olon*), a consciousness greater than the consciousness which links us to humanity at large. In fact, our unity in Christ is not only the primordial unity of the human race, which has only one origin, but the final realization of this unity of human nature, which “is recapitulated” by the last Adam—*o esxatos Adam*. This eschatological reality is not some kind of ideal “beyond” but the very condition of the existence of the Church, without which the Church would not be a sacramental organism: her sacraments would have only a figurative sense, instead of being a real participation in the incorruptible life of the Body of Christ.³²

The words of the Metropolitan of Diokleia Kallistos (Ware), however, should be especially noted and attract our attention. As an eminent patristic scholar at Oxford University as well as a bishop of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Great Britain, his words are of great importance within the context of the Orthodox diaspora and especially within Western Orthodoxy. If we pay attention to them, all of us who were born Orthodox will be reminded of what is ecclesiastically and theologically self-evident for someone who consciously made the choice to be Orthodox:

31. It is worth noting that it was Lossky who nurtured generations of non-Orthodox and made Orthodoxy known in Europe and America with his book *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*.

32. Lossky, *Image and Likeness*, 184–85.

While respecting national identity, we should not forget that the Church is, in its essence, One and Catholic. The basic element in the structure of the Church on earth is not the nation, but the local *synaxis*, the gathering around the bishop each Sunday for the celebration of the holy Eucharist. And this Eucharistic gathering is supposed to unite all Christians in a given place, regardless of their national origin. According to the holy canons, the bishop is responsible not for an ethnic group, but for a particular region. The Church as a Eucharistic community is not organized on a national basis, but on a local basis. Therefore, the national element ought to serve the Church, not enslave it.³³

Even the Synaxis ("Assembly") of the Primates of the Orthodox Church at the Phanar (Nativity 2000), which is considered to be the higher instance of today's Orthodoxy regardless of the prevalent alienation that has been observed in the Orthodox world, is persistent in highlighting this eschatological vision of unity which enables us to overcome every type of discrimination:

When gathered in the Holy Eucharist, the Church realizes and reveals to the world and to history the incorporation of all in Christ, the transcendence of every discrimination and contrast, a communion of love wherein "there is neither male nor female, neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian or Scythian, slave or free" (Col 3:11 and Gal 3:28). In this way, it presents an image of the Kingdom of God, but at the same time also an image of ideal human society, and the foretaste of the victory of life over death, of incorruption over corruption, and love over hatred.³⁴

Having read the above analysis, one would not be out of context to ask the following, in regard to the topic of this paper dealing with a case study of Greek Orthodoxy: to what extent is the church in Greece today concerned with the above theological analysis (as in the case of every Orthodox Church in traditionally Orthodox countries) and, finally, why is the relationship of Orthodoxy with the modern Greek identity and the Greek nation so emphatically stressed? And if things are as described regarding the relationship of the church with the nation and the ethnocultural identity, then how should one explain the fact that the so-called Orthodox are known for their intense nationalism and messianic tendencies of national exclusivity?

33. Ware, "L'unité dans la diversité," 14.

34. "Message of the Primates of the Orthodox Church," §5.

The Byzantine Model of “Symphonia,” the Nationalized Orthodoxy, and the Fusion of Baptismal/Ecclesial with the Ethnocultural Identity

Because, to put it very simply, Baptism is absent from our life. It is, to be sure, still accepted by all as a self-evident necessity. It is not opposed, not even questioned. It is performed all the time in our churches. It is, in other terms, “taken for granted.” Yet, in spite of all this, I dare to affirm that in a very real sense it is absent, and this “absence” is at the root of many tragedies of the Church today.³⁵

Due to the almost universal application of the infant baptism practice (from the end of the fourth until the late sixth century), and the establishment of Christianity as the state religion of the Roman/Byzantine Empire by Emperor Theodosius (380), many things were changed regarding not only the understanding and interpretation of Baptism (as well as the sacramental liturgical *praxis* and the overall Christian life), but also the church’s formation itself. The prerequisite preparation period before Baptism, which sometimes lasted up to three years, had begun to become obsolete. Catechesis, which had been functioning as a form of initiation into the truths and experiences of new life in Christ, was eventually replaced by some form of mechanistic automation that makes the godfather and godmother of the infant responsible for his/her Christian awareness. However, we are all aware that this is scarcely the case, and at the same time, it is quite dubious whether the godparent herself has received any form of Christian “education,” or even if she has ever participated in any kind of church or sacramental life. Furthermore, the institutionalization of infant baptism as a commonly followed practice deprived the new members of the church community of the fundamental option to make their own personal, mature, conscious, and aware decision to belong to a new community and undertake a new way of life, bearing every respective ethical and social consequence this decision might have brought along. As a result, even the church’s members found it hard to distinguish the biological birth (which is natural and self-evident) from the spiritual birth or rebirth, which constitutes a seal of the Holy Spirit’s gift. This gift is bestowed in and through baptism of the new member. Such a gift presupposes a form of spiritual preparation, and above all, a denial of the old world and a rejection of Satan’s works. Through Baptism we enter a new order of grace, transcending the order of nature and mortal biological bonds. However, one could argue that the most important consequence of

35. Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, 16.

the universal application of infant baptism and of the official recognition of Christianity as the empire's religion was the gradual transformation of the church from a baptismal community (in other words, a spiritual and charismatic community that transcends every form of biological or socio-cultural bound) into an ethnocultural community with predefined "rules of entrance." The most important of these rules is that, in order to enter this community, one should have been born (in flesh) within it or have the privilege of "hereditary succession," or at best, be an active participant in a common culture or a common religious and cultural legacy.

As far as the Greek case is concerned, and in addition to what has so far been mentioned, we should take into consideration the disastrous consequences deriving from the persistent denial on the part of certain conservative and fundamentalist circles of the Greek Orthodox Church's use of liturgical translations. Such translations would facilitate the congregation's active participation in the liturgy, especially in the sacraments and the Eucharist. Certainly, Baptism is not an exception. This means that, because the faithful are not fully aware of the profound theological meaning of the blessings, they usually attend a secularized ceremony—in some sense, a form of magical ceremony—in which the highest point would be the time of name-giving. In this context, it would be completely irrelevant to even mention the terms "baptismal community" or "baptismal theology," since even the sacrament of Baptism itself—the first and foremost fundamental presupposition for anyone to enter the life and actions of that new community—remains completely incomprehensible and misinterpreted. In this perspective, the whole theological meaning and nature of Baptism remains an issue limited exclusively to theologians or liturgical scholars. It is not a surprise then that the baptismal community has been replaced by what could be considered to be the closest alternative to human beings' natural order or "biological hypostasis," that is, by an ethnocultural understanding of the church event—an understanding of faith in terms of patrimony, identity, and culture—since ignorance and absence of genuine participation in the church's life leave no room for any serious discussion of people's "ecclesial hypostasis." Besides, as we have already argued elsewhere,³⁶ the basic reasons that led to a rejection of the liturgical texts' translation were primarily ethnocultural and not theological. It is a rejection that comes as a stark contrast to the Orthodox Church's theological awareness, tradition, and missionary practices, by actually integrating into them a foreign element, that of the Western medieval "sacred languages" doctrine.

36. Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy and Modern Greek Identity*, 96–110 [in Greek].

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann's critical remarks regarding an individualistic and formalistic understanding of Baptism also apply in the case of Greek Orthodoxy. This deformed conception of Baptism still prevails among many Orthodox today, which in practice annuls any impact of baptismal theology on people's lives, or any visibility of Baptism's effects on society and the dominant worldview.

Finally, having ceased to feed Christian piety, Baptism obviously has lost its power to shape our Christian worldview, i.e., our basic attitudes, motivations and decisions. There exists today no Christian "philosophy of life" which would embrace the totality of our existence, family as well as profession, history as well as society, ethics as well as action. There is simply no difference between the "values" and "ideals" accepted inside the Christian community and those accepted outside of it. A Christian today may be a "parishioner in good standing" while living by standards and philosophies of life having nothing to do with, if not openly opposed to, the Christian faith.

A Christian of the past knew not only intellectually but with his entire being that through Baptism he was placed into a radically new relationship with all aspects of life and with the "world" itself—that he received, along with his faith, a radically new understanding of life. Baptism for him was the starting point and also the foundation of a Christian "philosophy of life," of a permanent sense of direction guiding him firmly throughout his entire existence, supplying answers to all questions, solving all problems.

This foundation is still here with us. Baptism is performed. But it has ceased to be comprehended as the door leading into a new life and as the power to fight for this new life's preservation and growth in us.³⁷

What lies beneath the problems raised above is, in fact, the oblivion of the eschatological consciousness and vision of the church, the loss of the dialectical tension between eschatology and history, the church and the world, and—to recall the well-known scheme of Fr. Georges Florovsky—the desert and the empire. In other words, what happened over time is a gradual slide from the realm of the ecclesiological hypostasis to the ethnocultural one, from the ecclesial to the imperial and secular belonging. All these elements are integral parts of what we may call "culturalistic slide,"³⁸ that is,

37. Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, 9–10.

38. See Kalaitzidis, "La relation de l'Église à la culture," especially 15–24. Cf. Papatomas, "Culturalisme ecclésiastique," 61–67; for the same paper, cf. *Epispepsis* 41:711 (March 31, 2010) 20–25.

the long-existing problematic (in the Orthodox context) relationship of the ethnocultural to the ecclesial, and the understanding of the faith and the ecclesial event in terms of culture, identity, and ancestral heritage; and eventually the replacement of the theological by the ethnocultural criteria, and of the history of salvation by the history of the national revival.³⁹

The first step toward this slide, and therefore a permanent confusion between religious and secular/ethnocultural belongings, can be traced back to the secularized political eschatology of Byzantium and its claim for the incarnation of the kingdom of God on earth. Another integral part of this process is the politico-religious model of "symphonia"—the Byzantine political ideal referring to mutual cooperation between church and state for the sake of the people, who are simultaneously members of the church and subjects of the empire—which was partly adopted later by the Balkan national states. However, the culmination of this long process of the recession of the ecclesial identity (obtained through Baptism and Eucharist) and the ascendance of the ethnocultural one (granted by natural birth and participation in an ethnic community) has to be related to the nineteenth-century emergence of the principle of nationalities, and the consequent phenomenon of "national Orthodoxy," that is, the identification of Orthodoxy with every single "Orthodox" nation or state, and the understanding of the church in national terms. Despite the fact that an abysmal gap separates Byzantine "symphonia" and the secularized political eschatology of Byzantium from nationalized Orthodoxy—insofar as the former was operating in the framework of a supranational, multiethnic empire and the latter was associated with the splintering of Byzantine and Ottoman *ecumene*, and the emergence of the Balkan national states—there are, nonetheless, common features uniting these two distinctive models.

We are now aware, after the work of many respected historians and theologians (Francis Dvornick, Steven Runciman, Gerhard Podskalsky, Hans-Georg Beck, Hélène Ahrweiler, Georges Florovsky, Savas Agourides), that the Byzantines saw their state and societal structures as the realization of the kingdom of God on earth. Runciman states this quite explicitly at the outset of his classic study, *The Byzantine Theocracy*, which he describes as an effort to give an "account of an Empire whose constitution . . . was based on a clear religious conviction: that it was the earthly copy of the Kingdom of Heaven."⁴⁰ In this not only political but also theological ideal, the emperor stood "in the place of Christ," and his kingdom was a reflection

39. For an extensive analysis of the last idea, see Kalaitzidis, "Temptation of Judas," especially 368–73.

40. Runciman, *Byzantine Theocracy*, 1.

of its heavenly counterpart. As Greek professor Savas Agourides notes, “The Byzantine state, particularly from the Justinian era forward, following as it does along the lines of Jewish apocalyptic literature . . . sees itself as the final actualization of Christian hope, as the eschatological prelude to the kingdom of God.”⁴¹ According to this viewpoint, we are clearly facing a deeply particular form of “realized eschatology” (one that can be described as political or secular) which seems oblivious of the tension between the “already” and the “not yet”—that is, between the first and the second coming of Christ, his resurrection and the expectation of our own resurrection along with the recapitulation of history, which will signal our personal incorruptibility and the end of death’s dominion. Christians are “aliens and exiles” (1 Pet 2:11), continuously moving toward the eschaton, in accordance with the biblical injunction to be “in the world, but not of the world.” Our loss, as Orthodox Christians, could be once again described as a disorientation from our focus toward the anticipated new world, from which the present takes its identity and hypostasis, its meaning and its purpose.

Therefore, realized eschatology and identification of the true and genuine faith with Byzantium, tsarist Russia, or with one of the Balkan monarchies exists in reality as a constant temptation, one that historical Orthodoxy faces to the extent that it annuls the paradoxical dialectics between history and eschatology as well as the eschatological expectation of the kingdom of God and the openness of history itself.

This capitulation—or conciliation, in the best of cases—of the church to the empire, and the identification of the faith community with the wider society, had many other serious effects for the topic under discussion: the emphasis on faith as that which is passed down from generation to generation and embraces entire peoples and nations; the addiction to spiritual self-sufficiency and the *ex officio* way of thinking under the influence of stereotypes of race and nation; the praise of our ancestors and the homeland, and, as a result of the above shift, the neglect, even the abolition of the element of innovation and personal choice that Christianity brought at its beginning. Meanwhile, the scornful way in which great theologians and Fathers of the church, such as St. Gregory of Nyssa,⁴² spoke of praising the achievements and virtues of one’s ancestors has been forgotten. We neglect the fact that the main criticism the opponents of Christianity expressed in the first centuries (Celsus, Porphyry) was that Christianity was abolishing the ancestral traditions.⁴³

41. Agourides, “Religious Eschatology and State Ideology,” 53.

42. See, for example, Gregory of Nyssa, *Ejusdem De vita Beati Gregorii*, PG 46, 896 C.

43. See the observations made by Papatanasious, “Postmodern Revival of Polytheism,” especially 6 [in Greek].

We Orthodox remain so spellbound and trapped in the premodern, medieval, or romantic communitarian model that we seem to have forgotten that acceptance of the gospel message and inclusion in the body of the church cannot be understood on the basis of collectives—such as that of a people, a nation, a language, a culture, etc.—but on the basis of a completely personal act, free of every kind of biological, cultural, or ethnic predetermination. That is why the personal call made by God through Jesus Christ for the evangelization, encounter, and relationship with him (as well as the answer to this call, which is also personal) is the new constituent introduced by the ecclesial way of life. Many of the gospel stories are not only purely personal events and choices—not mediated by any kind of group or community, or any religious, national, linguistic, cultural, or class collectivities; in fact, they are quite often directed *against* particular communities/collectivities, or violate any borders and limits that might have been set by these communities. However, these choices do not lead to a private religiosity or an individual version of faith and salvation.⁴⁴

Additionally, we Orthodox (primarily of the traditionally “Orthodox” countries) have become increasingly identified with our national churches and local traditions. Orthodoxy has been combined, in our mentality, with our individual national narratives (the “Great Idea,” nationalism, etc.) to an extensive degree, and we have interwoven faith with customs. All these have led to our losing the fundamental awareness of catholicity and universality, thus reducing Orthodoxy to the realm of custom, ancestral heritage, and ethnic-cultural identity.

Remaining self-content, we Orthodox refer to—or perhaps even boast about—Byzantism, Hellenicity, and Greek uniqueness, Holy Russia, the third Rome and the Slavophile movement, the Serbian people as the servant people of God, the Latin features of Romanian Orthodoxy, the particularity of Antiochian Christianity and Arabness, etc. This comes as a stark contrast to a well-established trend in other Christian—or, more broadly, religious—traditions in which there is an urge toward inculturation. Yet, in the case of the Orthodox peoples, with their well-known, firmly established bonds (even to the point of identification in some cases) between church and nation, as well as between church and local traditions, what seems to be of outmost importance, as well as need, is a disengagement from these particular cultures and local traditions (deculturation), a reordering of priorities vis-à-vis the theological and cultural criteria, ecclesial/baptismal and

44. For a more extensive analysis, see Kalaitzidis, *Orthodox Christianity and Modernity*, 64–67 (in Greek; English translation by Elizabeth Theokritoff, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press).

ethnocultural community—a new form of balance between the local and the universal, the particular and the catholic.

It is clear that the vast majority of us Orthodox have replaced the ecclesial sense of belonging with an ethnocultural or societal one. We have identified the communitarian structures and authoritarian models of a patriarchal society with what is considered the golden age of the church and “Christian” civilization. Mainly, that is why we continue being, among other things, so negative toward modernity, human rights, or any attempt to raise women’s place inside the church. In this regard, Enlightenment, modernity, and secularization, which marked the end of religiously organized societies (but not necessarily the end of the quest for the true God or the thirst for genuinely spiritual life), could be beneficial for the Orthodox Church, to the extent that they may help it adapt to the new situation, address the issues of today’s pluralistic postmodern societies, and free itself from the burdens of the so-called traditional “Christian” societies. Under some conditions, they could even help Orthodox Christians rediscover the dialectical tension between the church and the world, eschatology and history, the baptismal/Eucharistic community and the ethnocultural community. Quoting His Eminence, Metropolitan John D. Zizioulas of Pergamon,

The Orthodox Church, however, particularly after the fall of Byzantium, was in danger of confusing the Church with the world. During this time, the bishops of the Orthodox Church undertook purely secular—and even sometimes political—roles, such as ethnarch and leader of the struggle for peoples’ (national) liberation. The result is that today in countries such as Greece, the bishop is viewed as an official person, to such a degree even that as soon as the government does something which slights the clergy or takes away some of their secular authority, one can see an immediate reaction which betrays deep theological confusion. This example shows how important it is for Orthodoxy today to develop its own theological criteria, so that it can determine what is related to the structure of the Church as an eschatological community and what is related to the Church as a community that belongs to the world.⁴⁵

However, returning to the topic of baptismal and ethnocultural communities in the wider context of the relationship between Orthodoxy and Hellenism in contemporary Greece, an important question being raised that urgently seeks an answer could be summarized as follows: How and why did a church and a people with a universalistic tradition and mission reach

45. Zizioulas, “Déplacement de la perspective eschatologique,” 99.

such a point? Which are the historical or wider cultural factors that led to the permanent confusion between baptismal and ethnocultural community, between ecclesial and ethnocultural identity? To all these questions I will try to offer some answers in the rest of my paper.

The Complex and Controversial Historical Relationship between Orthodoxy and Hellenism, Church and Nation

For centuries, Hellenism—and Greek-speaking Orthodoxy along with it—has been experiencing several changes in its history that can be described as both extreme and excruciating. The most significant of these is that Hellenism has now been *marginalized in regard to history, diminished to the simple provincial power that is modern Greece after having constituted, for centuries, the focal point of history, political and economic power, literature, art, and culture—after the conquest of Constantinople by the Franks in 1204, the Frankish rule that followed, the fall of Byzantium to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, and finally the Asia Minor Catastrophe and the compulsory population exchange with Turkey in 1922–23. Hellenism ceased to be the center of the world, and Greece, following its liberation from the Turks, has deteriorated into a small, unstable Balkan country on the edge of Europe, which has existed and survived only with the help and assistance of the Great Powers of each era. This picture has changed during recent years after Greece's accession to the European Union's institutions and the Eurozone. However, the successive oversights and disastrous mistakes of the Greek governments have plunged the country into an unprecedented financial crisis and have caused the Greeks, once again, to live under the burden of feeling humiliated. Greek people, in responding to such feelings, resort to their common practice: touting the accomplishments and virtues of their glorious ancestors—primarily the ancient Greeks, but also, for those who are closest to the church, the Byzantines. This last point, however, is a stance that has characterized Hellenism for many decades now, if not centuries: Greeks exist and function in the world, based primarily on the accomplishments of the past rather than on anything they can display as an achievement or a reality of the present. They feel that this invocation of the past compensates for the lack of a constructive present. This attitude is directly connected with the founding myth of modern Hellenism, which pervades their collective imagination, foreign policy, education, as well as their overall understanding of history.*

The Greeks, and the Orthodox in general, were inseparably identified with Byzantium, a sense that led them to feel that the fall of the empire in

1453 inflicted an incurable wound upon them. From that date onward, the Greeks have felt as if they have somehow been orphaned and handicapped, with a sense that they have been deprived of something that history ought to give back; they are thus waiting for this restoration and their vindication within history. The greatest challenge for Hellenism around the world—for all of Orthodoxy as well—is to surmount this historical trauma, to right itself and clarify what its mission should be in today's world without bearing the usual reference to ancient Greece or Byzantium. Yet Orthodoxy, both Greek-speaking and non-Greek-speaking (although to different extents), derives its legitimacy as well as all of its points of reference (i.e., the source of its liturgical tradition, the rhetorical forms of its *kerygma*, and the theology of the Fathers and the Councils) from Byzantium. Many Greek clergymen and theologians, as well as Greeks who do not have any particular relationship with the church, regard all of these as part of an unbroken continuum. The establishment of this continuum is considered to have begun with Jesus's meeting with the Greeks and the so-called election of the Greeks as the new chosen people of God (see John 12:20–23)—bearing all kinds of attendant racial criteria and historical anachronisms. Trying to rationalize this continuum, they begin by stating that the books of the New Testament were written originally in Greek; move on to the use of Greek philosophical categories in patristic theology and the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils, as well as the “Greek” character of Orthodox worship; and conclude with Hellenism's unique role in the Divine Economy (due to all of the above). They also point toward some special honor and primacy entailed in that role, as well as the prominent role that modern Hellenism rightfully holds within Orthodoxy due to both its historical accomplishments and the innumerable martyrs it has offered in more recent times during its fight “for God and country.” These battles are above all connected with Greek Orthodoxy's period of rule by ethnarchs under the Ottomans and then its rule by the nation. A brief retrospect of the historical events can help us better understand this paradoxical situation.

The gradual slide of the Orthodox Church, from being the church of the multiethnic Byzantine Empire to becoming the ark of Hellenism and an elemental component of modern Greek identity, occurred in moments of exceptional historical urgency and need (viz., the Turkish occupation), when it laid aside its main mission and began concentrating on saving the Greek nation from destruction—saving its language, existence, and political representation. During that phase, the church (mainly the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople), being the only Christian institution that had survived the Ottoman conquest, undertook the responsibility to fill the political void, representing all the Orthodox people before the Muslim sultan,

trying to save the language and the tradition of the Orthodox people while at the same time rescuing them from the Islamization forced upon them. It was perhaps the first time that the church, so clearly and distinctively, was forced to become involved in matters that did not fall under its sphere of jurisdiction, such as the salvation of the race, the language, and the national identity. It did so because its people, its flock, and its very existence were in danger of becoming extinct.

However, the church is paying an unbearable price for forgetting its eschatological dimension and perspective and its supranational mission, which is actually creating distortions in its ecclesiological structure and its Eucharistic formation—confusing at the same time the national element with the religious one and becoming “the power and the authority of this era,” getting involved in procedures of ethnogenesis and national competitions. This heavy price is also closely connected with the alteration of its ecclesial identity, its full nationalization, the abandonment of its universality for the sake of some ethnic identity and particularism of Modern Hellenism, the adoption of a secularized eschatology that directly refers to the resurrection of the nation instead of the Cross and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Finally, due to all of the aforementioned changes both in its orientation and priorities, the church also pays for its relationship to the nation by being clenched into a defensive stance, steadily tied to the past—a social, cultural, and ideological anachronism, a conservatism that is constantly facing the temptation to turn back time and is entrenched in fundamentalism and anti-Westernism. To put it simply, the church displays an inability to participate in the modern world. By “provisionally” undertaking this role, the church in Greece eventually abandoned its primary spiritual, theological, and ecumenical mission, evolving into a form of aberration that is difficult to give up, even today, despite the establishment of the modern Greek state (1830, 1832), its territorial completion (1947), and its full entrance into European Community institutions (1981) and the core of the financial and numismatic union and the Eurozone (2000).

Now that the state has been firmly established and historical circumstances are completely different than they were at the end of the Byzantine Empire and the first centuries of the Ottoman occupation, many Greek theologians maintain that the time has come for them, on behalf of and for the church and theology, to call into question the identification of the church with the nation, of Orthodoxy with the modern Greek identity.⁴⁶

46. As an example of the new attitude of the younger generation of Greek theologians toward the relationship of church and nation, cf. the special issue (79, 2001) of the leading theological journal *Synaxi*, with the characteristic title “Church and Nation: Ties and Shackles.”

The most serious and urgent issue still unresolved—which is preserved by the aberration that does not want to end—is what I have otherwise characterized as the replacement of the history of salvation by the history of the national revival.⁴⁷ This replacement has crystallized a latent tendency within the Greek population, which identified the ecclesiastical with the national. The church assumed this range of political and secular responsibilities after the fall of Byzantium. It displayed such an absolute involvement and identification with national issues and patriotic ideals (while at the same time lacking eschatological self-consciousness and pure, authentic Orthodox theological criteria) that it finally became identified with the nation, and the ecclesial was considered as identical to the national identity and national life.

In the conventional ecclesiastical rhetoric, however, the events of the history of divine economy not only form a vision of unity beyond ethnicity and of transcending the consequences of sin, but are also symbolically connected and emotionally loaded with events from Greek national history. Thus, one can observe a significant shift, a slide in meaning, from the history of salvation or the history of the divine economy to the history of national revival. Therefore, we see that there is no feast of the church that is not somehow connected with patriotic symbolism or to some great national event: the Annunciation of the Mother of God with the feast of the 1821 Greek revolution (March 25),⁴⁸ and the Resurrection of Christ with the resurrection of the Greek nation after four hundred years of slavery; the Dormition of the Mother of God with the celebration of the armed forces; the Exaltation of the Holy Cross with the anniversary of the Asia Minor Catastrophe in 1922; the feast of the Holy Protection (*Aghia Skepi*) with the anniversary of the resistance against the Italians and the Nazis on October 28, 1940; the feast of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel with the celebration of the air force; St. Barbara with the artillery, St. Artemios with the police force, and so on. I stop here because the list seems endless.⁴⁹

In the context of this particular religious nationalism, worshipping Christ and overcoming all forms of division and fragmentation are replaced by national adoration and a sort of sanctified national egoism. The eschatological suspense of the final victory over evil and the inclusive unity in Christ is overshadowed by the worship of “our heroic and glorified ancestors” and the sanctification of a patriotic folklore. Christians’ consciousness

47. See Kalaitzidis, “The Temptation of Judas.”

48. The anniversary of the Greek national revolution of 1821 against the enslavement to the Ottoman Turks.

49. Cf. Kalaitzidis, “Temptation of Judas,” 370.

as being the new nation and the church's consciousness as the new spiritual homeland have been forgotten and racked by the exaltation of nationalisms, eliminating the differences between national and Christian identity, church and nation, Orthodoxy and Hellenism, spiritual life and patriotism, between personal/spiritual decisions (which are expressed in our personal commitment to the church) and inherited succession (which is expressed by the phrase "we are Orthodox, because we are Greeks").

Today, 190 years after the Greek Revolution of 1821, the church in Greece seems unable to be delivered from its identification with the nation; it seems unable to separate its work, teaching, preaching, and mission in general from the course of the nation; and it seems unable to realize that the boundaries of baptism, the boundaries of church, are no longer identified with national boundaries. And whenever the Greek state heads toward a policy that will adapt to the new international reality and moves in a direction that could lead to its formal separation from the church, the latter protests by pointing to the past as well as to the significant contribution it has made to the "struggles of the nation." In this way, it manages to sustain its codependence and absolute relationship to it. And while the Greek state—as a result of the broader realignment of globalization and multiculturalism—gradually *de*-nationalizes, the church *re*-nationalizes even more, displaying an inclination to feeling unsafe and uncertain if deprived of its special relationship with the state and its absolute relationship with the nation.

Thus, religious nationalism and phyletism seem to be the most prominent problems that the Orthodox Church—and especially Orthodox ecclesiology—has faced since the fall of Byzantium (1453), a decisive historical event that initiated an introverted period. More importantly, at the time and in the context of a multinational pluralistic postmodern society, Orthodoxy seems to reduce the theological and spiritual resources of the patristic and Eucharistic tradition to an "identities" rhetoric and an outdated religious tribalism which stands in stark contrast to the gospel's call for supraracial, even supranational, identities and communities. Many Eastern countries' insistence on seeing Orthodoxy as part of their national identity and culture, which has been and still is related to their customs and traditional folklore, undermines any other serious attempt to successfully confront the challenges that the contemporary world poses to Orthodoxy. Thus, Orthodoxy is confined in traditionalism, fundamentalism, social anachronism, or even reactionism. It is trapped in premodernity statuses after having adopted the authoritarian structures of patriarchal society.

In Place of a Conclusion

In light of what was presented and analyzed above, one could claim that this whole ideology constructed around “Greek Orthodoxy”—as well as its corresponding narratives and mythologies of Holy Russia, “Third Rome,” the Slavophile movement, the medieval Christian kingdom of Serbia, the idea of the Serbian people as the servant people of God, the Latin character of Romanian Orthodoxy, the Antiochian uniqueness and Arabhood, the Latin character of Romanian Orthodoxy, etc.—is nothing but a means of intensifying the historical and cultural conditioning of Orthodoxy, its collective cultural narcissism and intellectual self-sufficiency. At the same time, they function as a means of promoting a metaphysical essentialist view of an ethnocultural identity that is not receptive to change over time and within history, and that has come to be equated with the identity of the church. I think that what lies beneath all of the problems and difficulties that Orthodoxy is currently facing is the inversion of the paradoxical and antinomic relationship between eschatology and history, or the obliviousness of the biblical “in the world, but not of the world, for the sake of the world.” Orthodoxy has been commonly described as being defined by the eschatological vision of the church. Nevertheless, a more attentive approach to the issue will reveal that, without being completely stripped of its eschatological nature, Orthodoxy is to a large extent shaped by history. To be more precise, what has come to shape today’s Orthodoxy are the historical experiences and wounds of its peoples, as they can be traced especially in its social conservatism or even anachronism as well as in the phenomena of ecclesiastical culturalism and religious nationalism.

The time has come for Orthodoxy to close the “parenthesis” opened in 1453 with the fall of Byzantium and return to its main and fundamental mission, which is the evangelization and transfiguration of the world, the preaching of the coming kingdom of God for the salvation and restoration of the whole creation. A renewed and fresh theological reflection should be aware that the church constitutes a route to the eschaton and not a return to the glorious and painful story of Byzantium, the “Christian Empire,” or the heroic period of the Turkish occupation. If the church wants to address the modern world and its people in order to preach the gospel of the kingdom—and not what can be described as the bygone world of yesterday—it is urgent that it move beyond its ethnocentric discourse, to abandon any dream of a return to Byzantine theocracy, or any other antimodern romantic version of “Christian society.” Theocracy and neo-nationalism, which are presumably nothing but secularized forms of eschatology, constitute the permanent historical temptation of Orthodoxy, and they cannot, for any

reason, continue to form the Orthodox Church's political and social vision. In response to the modern person's thirst for life, the Orthodox Church can and ought to offer its own proposal, using its "words of eternal life" (cf. John 6:68), and not a continuous appeal to the past and its own achievements in the struggles and conflicts of the nation. For that reason, the adoption of an ecumenical ecclesiastical discourse, which will have freed itself from continuous references to the nation and to the schemes of the Constantinian era, is not just a demand for genuineness, authenticity, and faithfulness to the Orthodox Tradition. It is also an absolutely fundamental and imperative prerequisite, an inviolate condition that will help the church adjust to the century in which we live and avoid finding a convenient and safe shelter in the past. To this end, I consider that reflecting on the difference between baptismal and ethnocultural community, as well as baptismal and ethnocultural identity, is an absolutely necessary first step toward a theological hermeneutic and an eschatological fulfillment of history.

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