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ORTHODOXY AND HELLENISM IN CONTEMPORARY GREECE

Pantelis Kalaitzidis¹

“Modern Greeks are a deeply religious people,” one Greek historian recently observed.²

He continued:

They are religious in an obvious and all-encompassing way, in public and in their private lives, in good times and in bad times, in times of turmoil and in times of calm. The vast majority baptize their children, choose to be married in the Church, and bury their loved ones with a funeral service. They attribute a religious dimension to the most secular holidays, to national anniversaries, and to their political and military activities. They bless the Parliament, the courts, the schools [...]. They see the Church's leaders as playing a special role in preserving tradition and look to them for leadership on important national issues.

Modern Greeks call their religion “Christianity,” but it would be more correct to refer to it as “Orthodox Christianity” or, more precisely, “Greek Orthodox Christianity,” since they do not converse with other confessions, not even Orthodox confessions that are not Greek. Or, to the extent that they do converse with them, they distance themselves from them, criticize them, are at odds with them, and condemn them. Although they profess faith in one Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, catholicity is a foreign concept and something undesirable. [...]

1 Translated from Modern Greek by Fr Gregory Edwards.

2 D. Kyrtatas, “Modern Greek Christianity,” a paper presented at the workshop Helleno-Christianity (19th–20th century), organized by the School of History, Archaeology, and Social Anthropology of the University of Thessaly in Volos, Greece, on March 12, 2008 [in Greek].

Modern Greek religiosity has a strongly national character. It is something that concerns almost all Greeks, but no one else. Modern Greeks are not looking for Christian unity, nor are they interested in ecumenical goals. Ecumenism is considered by many, especially the clergy and the theologians, a heresy. Modern Greeks ascribe national significance to religious holidays and celebrate their national holidays inside the church. They are not interested in missionary work (which they do not consider a religious obligation) and they become angry when they detect encroachment onto Greek soil, Mount Athos, or even the Greek diaspora, by other confessions, including even the Russian Orthodox. The presence of non-Orthodox Christians and people of other religions in Greek territory is an ongoing affront to them; mosques and synagogues are considered a national provocation.

Any attempt at dialogue with other confessions is condemned from the outset. When Patriarch Athenagoras met with Pope Paul VI, he faced forceful protest not only from the Archbishop of Athens at the time, Chrysostomos, but also from the people. Archbishop Christodoulos also had difficulty speaking with Pope John Paul II, even though nothing important was discussed at that meeting. Slavic Orthodoxy, especially Russian, is sometimes seen as a bigger threat than the Unia. In short, the vast majority of modern Greeks believe that a universal Christianity is not something desirable. Each nation has its own particular, autonomous, and independent version of Christianity.

The first decisive move in this direction can be precisely dated. The generation of the rebellion of 1821 assigned the Church and its clergy a patriotic duty—to bless their weapons and sanctify their goals. The Church and its clergy, given autonomy by the Patriarchate, have, in turn, accepted this role consistently and selflessly. [...]

In modern Greek society, the Church is often in conflict with the state, claiming certain privileges and rights. But

primarily it reproaches the state when it believes that the state is not equating the Greek citizen with the Greek Christian (as occurred recently with the issue of the identity cards) or when the state fails to carry out its national agenda with perfect consistency (as is happening now with the Macedonian issue). The Greek Church is in conflict with the state because the Church sees itself as a more consistent guardian of the nation than the state.

One thus gets the impression that modern Greek religiosity, in stark contrast to the religiosity of historical Christianity, is purely Hellenocentric, with a focus on ritual and a tolerance of syncretism. Modern Greeks are not concerned with understanding the doctrines of the Church, and catechism is virtually non-existent. Moreover, the so-called “Sunday schools,” (which are very limited today) propagandize moral behavior without teaching anything about Christianity, which is taken as a given. [...]

What is very important, however, to modern Greek religiosity is the Hellenistic character of patristic thought, the language, and the continuation of Greek thought through Christianity [...]. Modern Greeks, to encapsulate the issue with an example, have no desire to learn what dogmas Cyril and Methodius preached, but rather to ensure and be assured that the Enlighteners of the Slavs, like all the great Fathers of the Church, were Greeks.

Even though some of these views may seem hyperbolic to some, the lengthy excerpt I just quoted is, perhaps, the best introduction to our topic. Of course, this reference to the relationship between Orthodoxy and Hellenism in contemporary Greece is a paradigmatic one; it is simply one example, since we also frequently encounter similar symptoms and attitudes in other Balkan or Eastern European countries. The only difference in this rosy “Orthodox” ethno-religious mythology is that every Orthodox people claims for itself the uniqueness of being “the new chosen people of God” and the “protector of Orthodoxy.” Another difference is the fact that the Greek narrative has, lying behind it, a rich legacy—more significant

contributions, more accomplishments, and a longer history—which allows it to speak of an “unbroken continuity” in space, time, and thought. Nevertheless, with this paper I will attempt to explain the Greek state of affairs and make a theological critique of it, in order to elucidate the debate in Greece today. I do not claim to speak for other contexts, such as the Greek-American one, in which the internal debate between Americanism and Hellenism is different from the debate in Greece.

However, to return to the topic of the relationship between Orthodoxy and Hellenism in contemporary Greece, the question that comes to the fore and urgently demands an answer can be summarized as follows: How and why did a Church and a people with a universal tradition and mission reach such a point? What historical, ecclesiastical, or theological factors led to the situation that was just described? And furthermore: Are there today in Greece any other approaches to the issue of the relationship between Orthodoxy and Hellenism? To all these questions I will try to give some answers with the present paper.

1. The Historical Trajectory, and a Theological Critique, of the Imbroglío between Orthodoxy and Hellenism

Hellenism—and, with it, Greek-speaking Orthodoxy—has been experiencing for centuries radical and painful changes in its history. The most important of these has to do with the fact that while for centuries it was at the epicenter of history, of political and economic power, of literature, arts, and culture, with 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 with the Asia Minor Catastrophe and the population exchange with Turkey in 1922–23, Hellenism has now been consigned to the margins of history and become simply a provincial power. Hellenism has ceased to be the center of the world; and Greece, since its liberation from the Turks, is a small, unstable Balkan country on the edge of Europe, which exists and survives only with the help and assistance of the Great Powers of each era. This picture changed only in recent years

with Greece's accession to the institutions of the European Union and the Euro zone, but the mistakes of successive Greek governments have plunged the country into an unprecedented financial crisis and have made the Greeks, once again, feel humiliated. The Greeks' usual response to this humiliation is to tout the accomplishments and virtues of their glorious ancestors—primarily the ancient Greeks, but also the Byzantines for those closest to the Church. This last point, however, is an attitude which has characterized Hellenism for decades now, if not centuries: Greeks live and operate in the world more on the basis of the accomplishments of the past than on those things which they have shown as achievements or as reality in the present. The invocation of the past makes up for the lack of a constructive present. And this attitude is directly connected with the founding myth of modern Hellenism, which pervades their collective imagination, foreign policy, education, and their understanding of history. Of course, this also applies to the dominant ecclesiastical rationale, as well as theology and its orientation, which most of the time do not seem able to abandon the Church's celebrated "national" role and their lament for the loss of universal Hellenism, nor can they seem to recover from the historical wound inflicted by their nostalgia for, and sanctification of, the lost empire, their myth of a "Christian" society, and their dream of a holistic unity.

The Greeks, and the Orthodox in general, were so closely identified with Byzantium that the fall of the Empire in 1453 appears to have inflicted an incurable wound.³ From that date onward, the Greeks have felt orphaned and handicapped, with the sense that history stole something from them which it ought to give back; they are thus waiting for this restoration and their vindication within history. The greatest challenge for Hellenism around the world, but also for all of Orthodoxy, is to overcome this historical trauma, to right itself and discern its mission to today's world, without reference to ancient Greece or Byzantium. Yet Orthodoxy,

3 For what follows in this part of my paper, I use material from: P. Kalaitzidis, "La relation de l'Église à la culture et la dialectique de l'eschatologie et de l'histoire," *Istina* 55 (2010): mainly 15ff.

both Greek-speaking and non-Greek-speaking (although to different extents), draws its legitimacy from Byzantium and all 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—trace back to Byzantium. Many Greek clergymen and theologians, as well as Greeks who do not have any particular relationship with the Church, see all these things as part of one unbroken continuum. This continuum is seen as beginning with Jesus' meeting with the Greeks and the reputed election of the Greeks as the new chosen people of God (see Jn 12:23)—with all the attendant racial criteria and historical anachronisms—covers the fact that the books of the New Testament were written originally in Greek, moves 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 concludes with Hellenism's unique role in the Divine Economy (due to all the above), the special honor and primacy that follows from this role, and the prominent role that modern Hellenism rightfully holds within Orthodoxy due to both its historical accomplishments as well as the countless martyrs it has offered in more recent times in its fight “for God and country.” These battles are connected above all with Greek Orthodoxy's period of rule by an ethnarch under the Ottomans and then its rule by the nation. A brief look at the historical events can help us better understand this paradoxical situation.

In moments of exceptional historical urgency and need (such as the Ottoman occupation), the Church, by abandoning its main mission and by concentrating on saving the Orthodox “nation” and the Greek people, its language, existence, and political representation from destruction, progressively became the ark of Hellenism and an essential component of the modern Greek identity.⁴ The history of

4 For what follows in this part of my paper I use material from: P. Kalaitzidis-N. Asproulis, “Greek religious nationalism facing the challenges of evangelization, forgiveness, and reconciliation,” paper presented at the consultation, *Orthodox Peace Ethics in Eastern and Oriental Christianity*, organized by the Institute for Theology and Peace, in collaboration with the Romanian Patriarchate, the WCC/DOV, the Institute for Peace Studies in Eastern Christianity and the Boston Theological Insti-

the encounter between Christianity and Hellenism is quite old. It begins even before Christ, with the first significant event being the translation into Greek of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament in the 3rd century BC under Ptolemy II Philadelphus in Hellenistic Alexandria, Egypt—a city that resembled in many ways our globalized world today. There, due to the mixture or juxtaposition of religions, races, and languages, the prevailing Greek civilization of the time encountered biblical Hebrew thought, the forerunner and progenitor of Christianity. With the Jewish author Philo, the theology of the Word of God in the Gospel of John, St Paul's missionary and theological advances into the gentile Greek world, the Apostolic Fathers, the Christian Apologists of the 2nd century, St Irenaeus of Lyons, and the climax of the theological synthesis of the great Cappadocian Fathers of the 4th century, the history of the encounter between Christianity and Hellenism, which found its institutional expression in the Byzantine Empire, is something more than a simple marriage of Greek language and philosophy with Christianity. It is the emergence of a new world, a new political form, a new "nation" and a new idea of citizenship, in which the synthesis of Hellenism and Christianity is used as an ideological vehicle and where the latter provides answers to questions posed by the former, i.e., to questions not inherently biblical or Christian, such as the question of unity and multiplicity, ontological concerns, etc. This new world, which historically is identified with "Byzantium," i.e., with the Roman world of the Christian East, expanded its influence throughout the Balkans and Eastern Europe and survived within the context of the Byzantine state until the 15th century, after which it continued to form the common substrata, the common component of all the Orthodox peoples throughout the period of Ottoman occupation up until today, even though the last centuries of the Byzantine Empire were essentially limited to the Greeks and essentially resembled a weak Greek state.

tute, Bucharest, Romania, June 29–July 2, 2009 (under publication in the volume of the proceedings of the conference). Cf. P. Kalaitzidis, "Orthodox Christianity and Modern Greek Identity. Critical Remarks from a Theological Viewpoint," *Indiktos* 17 (2003): 44–94 [in Greek].

The Orthodox peoples of the Balkans and Eastern Europe, who, according to Dimitri Obolensky's excellent analysis, participated in the "Byzantine Commonwealth,"⁵ maintained, during the period of Ottoman occupation, a community of people with common roots, common values, and a common orientation, a phenomenon which has been described by the Romanian historian Nikolai Iorga as "Byzance après Byzance" in his book of the same title.⁶ 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 peoples of the Balkans and Eastern Europe was marked by: 1) the *millet* (nations) system, which was constituted on a religious (not national) basis, and which fostered co-existence and cultural and religious variety within the Ottoman world, leading to the creation of an Ottoman *oikoumene*; and 2) the leading role of the Church in matters of secular or ethnic affairs (*ethnarchia*). In other words, it was characterized by the assumption—mainly taken by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople—of political responsibility and representation for all Orthodox people (*Romioi* [Romans]—not only for the Greeks) before the Sultan. While Steven Runciman, in his classic work, *The Great Church in Captivity*,⁷ described the brightest moments of this difficult venture, the great Russian theologian of the diaspora, Fr Alexander Schmemmann, in his book *The Historical Road of Eastern Orthodoxy*,⁸ recorded, among other things, the pitfalls of this venture, which were connected mainly with decisions by the Ecumenical Patriarchate that were biased in favor of the Greeks and against the Slavs.

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

6 N. Iorga, *Byzantium after Byzantium*, tr. Laura Treptow (Oxford: Center for Romanian Studies, 2000).

7 S. Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

8 A. Schmemmann, *The Historical Road of Eastern Orthodoxy*, tr. from the Russian by L. W. Kesich, (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1977), 271–91.

In this phase, the Church, as the only Christian institution to survive the Ottoman conquest, undertook the responsibility to fill the political void, assuming the duty to preserve the language and the tradition of the Orthodox people and rescue them from Islamization and from becoming Turkish. It is perhaps the first time that the Church, in such a clear and obvious manner, was forced to be involved in issues foreign to its nature and purpose, such as the preservation of a race, a language, and an ethnic 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 peoples, a sense of *belonging* within a shared identity. Its particular local ethnic variations did not yet constitute national identities but rather still 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 altered in the 18th century and especially the 19th century through the influence of the European Enlightenment and the rise of nationalism that this engendered. This national splintering and the definitive divorce of the Orthodox peoples 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, which converted them into departments of the state and organs for the spread of the national ideology. The epitaph for the idea of the Christian oikoumene was written when armed combat broke out between Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria in the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913 over rival claims for Macedonia (which may be the first time we have an official war among “Orthodox” peoples and states), and especially with the Asia Minor Catastrophe (1922) and the population exchange (1923) 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.

Going back to the Greek national consciousness and identity, we must note that, while it preceded the other Balkan and Orthodox peoples, it took shape rather late, the result of a long and slow centuries-long process. The Greek national consciousness seems to have crystallized around a combination of Enlightenment ideas and the principle of nationalities with the ideas of George Plethon Gemistus (15th century) and the Hellenizing intellectuals. These latter, although initially marginal in importance—since the vast majority of the people maintained their Orthodox Christian identity—in the end established themselves in the West, and from there their ideas were transplanted to Greece in the form of a fascination with everything ancient Greek or classical. The aim of these intellectuals was the creation of a national Greek state according to the European model, with the glory of ancient Greece as its foundational myth and symbol. It was, therefore, natural that Athens be the capital of such a legend. The goal of the second group—that majority of the people who held on to their Orthodox identity—was the reestablishment of the Christian *oikoumene*, the supra-national vision represented by the Byzantine Empire and theocratic ideology. The center and reference point for this second myth continued to be Constantinople. The champions and supporters of the first myth were the newly emerging class of urban bourgeois and merchants, all of whom had been educated in the West and had been influenced by the Enlightenment. For the second myth, the point of reference was the Church—before, that is, it was converted into an organ of Greek nationalist ideology. From this point of view, the emergence of Greek national identity, while it constituted a significant break with the past, at the same time also included aspects of continuity. In the end, of course, as is well known, the idea of a Greek national state prevailed, although it also included within itself the aims of the masses and of the Church, which gradually was transformed from an advocate of the multi-ethnic Christian *oikoumene* to a propagandist for the national Greek idea.⁹ Despite

9 For the history of the adoption of the national ideology by the Church of Greece, cf. C. Frazee, *The Orthodox Church and Independent Greece (1821–1852)* (Cambridge

the clear influence of the Enlightenment in this process, its power was, nevertheless, diluted in the case of Greece because: 1) despite initial reservations, the Orthodox Church adopted the national struggle (manifested in the participation of the clergy, particularly the lower clergy but including bishops as well), and this left no room for the emergence in Greece of radical anticlericalism or anti-Christian ideals; and 2) very early on, the “Great Idea,” which was aimed at securing the unity of Hellenism in one geographical space, and which was fueled by the myth of modern Greeks’ direct descent from the ancient Greeks and the desire to resurrect the classical past, promoted the idea of reclaiming all the former territories of the Byzantine Empire and anywhere there were Greek Orthodox people. The ideological vehicle for this claim was the idea of a Greek continuity throughout time (supported primarily by intellectuals and historians of the mid 19th century, such as Spyridon Zabelios from the western coast islands and Constantine Papanregopoulos from Constantinople), which therefore necessitated the ideological rehabilitation of Byzantium as an integral part of Greek history and identity, and its defense in the face of criticism from Enlightenment intellectuals, who exercised tremendous influence in the days leading up to the Revolution of 1821 and the creation of the modern Greek state, such as Koraes. On the official symbolic level, this continuity was not only expressed by Athens and the Parthenon but also by Constantinople and the Great Church of Hagia Sophia, while the idea of the continuity of the nation throughout time was to become one of the staples of the national narrative and rhetoric.¹⁰

University Press, 1969); J. Petrou, *Church and Politics in Greece 1750–1909* (Thessaloniki: Kyriakidis, 1992), especially 141ff. [in Greek]; A. Manitakis, *The Relationship Between the Church and the Nation-State in the Wake of the Identity Card Conflict* (Athens: Nefeli, 2000), 21–56 [in Greek]. For a comparative study of this phenomenon in the Balkan countries, see P. Kitromilidis, “Imagined Communities’ and the Origins of the National Question in the Balkans,” in: M. Blinkhorn-Th. Veremis (eds.), *Modern Greece: Nationalism and Nationality* (London-Athens: Dage-Eliamep, 1990), especially 51–60.

10 See more on this: P. Kitromilidis, “Imagined Communities’ and the Origins of the National Question in the Balkans,” op. cit.; Elli Skopetea, *The “Ideal Kingdom” and the Great Idea: Aspects of the National Question in Greece (1830–1880)* (Athens,

The Church, however, is paying a heavy price for becoming involved in secular and national affairs—by forgetting its eschatological dimension and perspective and its supra-national mission, by creating distortions in its ecclesiological structure and its eucharistic formation, by confusing the national with the religious, and by becoming “the power and the authority of this era,” involved in a process of ethnogenesis and national competition.¹¹ It has also led to the alteration of the Church’s ecclesial identity, its complete nationalization, the abandonment of its catholicity and universality for the sake of the identity and particularism of modern Hellenism, and the adoption of a secularized eschatology that too often seems to refer more to the resurrection of the nation than the Cross and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Finally, because of all the above, the Church also pays dearly for its relationship to the nation by being locked into a defensive posture, by its adherence to the past and to social, cultural and ideological anachronism and conservatism, by the temptation to turn back the clock, by fundamentalism and anti-Europeanism—in a word, by its inability to participate in the modern world. By undertaking this role “provisionally,” the Church in Greece abandoned its primary spiritual, theological, and

1988), mainly 119ff; G. Prévelakis, *Géopolitique de la Grèce* (Paris: éd. Complexe, 1997), 33ff; Fr. Thual, *Géopolitique de l'Orthodoxie* (Paris: Dunod, 1993); idem, *Le Douaire de Byzance. Territoires et Identités de l'Orthodoxie* (Paris: Ellipses/Marketing, 1998), 27 ff; Th. Veremis, “From the National State to the Stateless Nation,” in M. Blinkhorn-Th. Veremis (ed.), *Modern Greece: Nationalism and Nationality* (London-Athens: Sage-Eliamep, 1990), 9-22 [in Greek]; idem, “State and Nation in Greece: 1821–1912,” in D. G. Tsaousis (ed.), *Hellenism-Greekness: Ideological and Experimental Axes of Modern Greek Society* (Athens: Hestia, 1983), 61ff. [in Greek]. For a balanced approach to the Enlightenment, from a theological point of view (but far from the usual “Greek-Orthodox” condemnation), see P. Kalaitzidis, “Orthodox Christianity and the Enlightenment: The Issue of Religious Tolerance,” in P. Kalaitzidis-N. Ntontos (eds), *Orthodox Christianity and Modernity, winter program 2001–02 of the Vólos Academy for Theological Studies* (Athens: Indiktos Publications, 2007), 79–165 [in Greek].

- 11 Cf. P. Kalaitzidis, “Orthodoxy and Modern Greek Identity. Theological Approach to the Issue of Continuity,” A Lecture addressed to the Program in Hellenic Studies at Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey, January 14, 2009. Cf. Idem, “Orthodox Christianity and Modern Greek Identity. Critical Remarks from a Theological Viewpoint,” op. cit., mainly 63ff, 82ff [in Greek].

ecumenical mission, opening a period of aberration to which it is difficult to put an end, 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 Euro zone (2000).

The most serious and urgent issue in abeyance—which is preserved by this aberration that does not want to end—is what I have characterized as the replacement of the history of salvation by the history of national revival.¹² This replacement crystallized a latent tendency among the Greek people to identify the ecclesial with the national; of course, at the beginning, people understood the national through the ecclesial, but ultimately, due to historical events (the Greek Revolution in 1821, the clergy's participation in the Revolution, the prevalence of the principle of nationalities, etc.), they came to understand the ecclesial through the national. The Church assumed such a variety of political and secular responsibilities after the fall of Byzantium, its involvement and its identification with national issues and the patriotic ideal was so absolute, and there was such an obvious lack of eschatological self-consciousness and authentic Orthodox theological criteria, that finally the Church was identified with the nation, and the ecclesial was identified with national identity and national life.¹³

In the conventional ecclesiastical rhetoric, however, the events of the history of the Divine Economy form not only a vision of transcending the consequences of sin and of unity beyond ethnicity, but are also symbolically connected and emotionally loaded with events from Greek national history. Thus we see 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. Thus we see that there is no feast of the Church that is not somehow connected to some

12 See P. Kalaitzidis, "The Temptation of Judas: Church and National Identities," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 47 (2002): 357–79.

13 For an extensive analysis of this idea, see P. Kalaitzidis, "The Temptation of Judas: Church and National Identities," *op. cit.*; idem, "Orthodoxy and Modern Greek Identity," *op. cit.*

great national event or with patriotic symbolism: the Annunciation of the Mother of God with the feast of the 1821 Greek Revolution (March 25th)¹⁴ and the Resurrection of Christ with the resurrection of the Greek nation after 400 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'll stop here because the list seems endless.¹⁵

In the context of this particular religious nationalism, the worship of Christ and the overcoming of all division and fragmentation are replaced by adoration of the nation and the sanctification of various matters of national pride. The eschatological suspense of the final victory over evil and the unity and brotherhood of all in Christ is eclipsed by the decline into worship of "our heroic and glorified ancestors" and the sanctification of a patriotic folklore. The consciousness of Christians as a new nation and the Church as a new spiritual homeland was forgotten and was racked by the sacralization of nationalisms, creating a weak distinction between national and Christian identity, between the Church and the nation, Orthodoxy and Hellenism, the spiritual life and patriotism, and between personal/spiritual decisions (which are expressed by our personal commitment to the Church) and inherited succession (which is expressed by the phrase: "we are Orthodox because we are Greeks").

Today, almost one hundred and ninety years since the Greek Revolution of 1821, the Church in Greece seems unable to liberate itself from the tendency to identify with the nation and the Greek state; it seems unable to see its work, its teaching and preach-

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

15 Cf. P. Kalaitzidis, "The Temptation of Judas," op. cit., 370.

ing, and its mission in general as separated from the course of the nation. It also appears to remain unaware of the fact that identification with the nation and national ideology (like the Great Idea) was imposed on it by the state to serve its own ends, which gradually also became the Church's goals. Thus, in the official ecclesiastical discourse, Orthodoxy and Hellenism are exactly the same thing (like the slogan "Greece means Orthodoxy!"), and the limits of the Church are often confused with the limits of the nation. And whenever the Greek state moves toward adapting to the new international reality and moves in a direction that could lead to its divorce from the Church, the latter protests by pointing to the past and to its contribution to the "struggles of the nation," in order to keep alive its co-dependence and absolute relationship to it. And as the Greek state—as a result of the broader move toward globalization and multiculturalism—gradually *de*-nationalizes, the Church *re*-nationalizes more and more, feeling insecure and uncertain without its special relationship to the state and its absolute identification with the nation.

2. Contemporary Trends in "Greek Orthodoxy" and "Helleno-Christianity"

This gradual nationalization of the Orthodox Church in Greece—in order to preserve the nation, Greek identity and continuity, as well as the worldwide mission of Hellenism; in other words, the "national mission" of the Church—is not simply Greek Orthodoxy's *raison d'être*, nor is it an isolated phenomenon, but is part of a broader view that subsumes a variety of perspectives and expressions, in which the basic founding myth of the Greek state, i.e., the theory of Greek continuity, encounters various contemporary versions of "Greek Orthodoxy" and Helleno-Christianity. Thus, the aforementioned version of ethno-theology or patriotic theology, which is fostered by the historical vicissitudes of Hellenism and fuels, ideologically, the story of modern Greece and the national narrative, reached its zenith during the time of the late Archbishop of Athens Christodoulos, who seized every opportunity to promote

the idea that Greece equals Orthodoxy, i.e., that one cannot be truly Greek without being Orthodox, that national and ecclesial identity were one and the same, and that no Greek could separate faith in Christ from love for country. This same period witnessed an over-emphasis on the Church's contribution to the nation's struggles, and on its national and patriotic role as a bulwark against globalization, modernization, and Europeanization.

This trend has clearly lost momentum within the official ecclesiastical rhetoric since the election of the new Archbishop of Athens, Hieronymus II, in February 2008, but remains very strong among the clergy and the people, as well as in many monastic circles. In addition to this trend, there are also other versions of "Greek Orthodoxy" and different versions of the relationship between Orthodoxy and Hellenism—very often inspired by or connected in one way or another with Fr Georges Florovsky's theory of "Christian Hellenism"—which could be summarized as follows:

a) The "Greek Orthodoxy" Inspired by Fr Georges Florovsky's Theory of "Christian Hellenism"

As is well known, Fr Georges Florovsky, as early as his speech at the First Orthodox Theological Conference in Athens in 1936,¹⁶ and then in his classic work *Ways of Russian Theology* (1937),¹⁷ referred to the "Christian Hellenism" of the Fathers and called for a return to it. In fact, in the last chapter of this classic book, in an extended

16 See his paper presented at this conference: G. Florovsky, "Westliche Einflüsse in der russischen Theologie," in: H. S. Alivisatos (éd.), *Procès-Verbaux du Premier Congrès de Théologie Orthodoxe à Athènes, 29 novembre–6 décembre 1936* (Athens: Pysos Press, 1939), 212–31; the same text can be found in: Kyrios, II, nr 1, Berlin, 1937, 1–22. English translation (by T. Bird and R. Haugh): "Western Influences in Russian Theology" in: Georges Florovsky, *Collected Works*, vol. 4: *Aspects of Church History* (Belmont, MA: Büchervertriebsanstalt, 1987), 157–82; Idem. "Patristics and Modern Theology," in *Procès-Verbaux du Premier Congrès de Théologie Orthodoxe à Athènes*, op. cit., 238–42.

17 G. Florovsky, "Ways of Russian Theology," in: Florovsky, *Collected Works*, vol. 4: *Aspects of Church History*, 195. Cf. Idem, *Ways of Russian Theology*, in Florovsky, *Collected Works*, vol. 6, op.cit., 297. Idem, "The Christian Hellenism," *Orthodox Observer* 442 (January 1957), 9–10.

section, Florovsky maintains the timelessness and necessity of this theological paradigm for Christian theology and the Church. We must remember that Florovsky's "Christian Hellenism" is the Hellenism of the Gospel, the theology of the Fathers and the divine Liturgy, the dogmas of the Councils—and not the national or ethnic Hellenism of contemporary Greece or the Levant.¹⁸ Additionally, according to specialists on his thought (as we will see below), Florovsky's insistence on Hellenism is incomprehensible without reference to his declared opposition to Bulgakov's Sophiology on the one hand and the dogmatic minimalism of interwar liberal German theology on the other.¹⁹ However, the more the national(istic) version of Hellenism is excluded from his perspective, the more the scope is widened for the application of the "sacred" or "Christian" Hellenism, which, in Florovsky's thought, claims a normative or exclusive role not only for the Church's and theology's past, but also for the present and the future. What Florovsky is saying is that the truth of the Church and the catholicity of theology can only be formulated in Greek terms and Greek categories. According to Florovsky, the catholicity and the Hellenism of theology are inextricably linked; he would say in another paper at the conference in Athens in 1936, "Let us become more Greek so that we be truly catholic, truly Orthodox,"²⁰ while even in one of his last works, which serves as a "theological will," he claims that being Christian means being Greek, rejecting at the same time any attempt to recast the dogmas of the Church in terms of contemporary philosophy.²¹ Thus, according to Florovsky, any theologian incapable of thinking

18 G. Florovsky, "Ways of Russian Theology," in: Florovsky, *Collected Works*, vol. 4: *Aspects of Church History*, 195. Cf. Idem, *Ways of Russian Theology*, in Florovsky, *Collected Works*, vol. 6, op. cit., 297.

19 Cf. for example, Athanasios N. Papathanasiou, *The Church Is Being Realized as Long as It Opens Itself Up* (Athens: En Plo, 2008), 15–16, 21 [in Greek].

20 G. Florovsky, "Patristics and Modern Theology," in H. S. Alivisatos, ed., *Procès-Verbaux du Premier Congrès de Théologie Orthodoxe à Athènes, 29 novembre–6 décembre 1936*, éd. Pyrsos (Athens: Pyros Press, 1939), 238–42. The same paper can be find in *Diakonia* 4 (1969): 227–32.

21 G. Florovsky, ["Theological Will"], in Andrew Blane, ed., *Georges Florovsky: Russian Intellectual, Orthodox Churchman* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1993), 153–55.

in Greek categories should be concerned, because, quite simply, this person finds himself or herself out of tune with the Church, inasmuch as—and this is exceptionally important for our topic—Hellenism, for Florovsky, is something more than a passing stage in the Church,²² but rather assumed a perpetual character, something that is realized and at the same time is continually being realized, which seeks to address the challenges and questions posed to theology by the modern world, and which does not simply repeat answers from the past. This dynamic, timeless, and “eternal” function and mission of Hellenism within theology renders inadequate, unnecessary, and dangerous any attempt to return to the forms that preceded “Christian Hellenism,” i.e., to Hebrew categories, as well as any attempt to express and formulate the truth of the Church and the catholicity of theology in ways and with categories that the Fathers would not have used, such as, for example, the language of contemporary philosophy. Hellenism is and remains in Florovsky’s thought an eternal category, taking on a standing and permanent character in Christian existence, the criterion for verifying authenticity and fidelity to the tradition of the Church and theology.

We do not have space here to analyze the impetus behind Florovsky’s theory of “Christian Hellenism,” or to point out the contradictions and problems that this theory presents with regard to other fundamental aspects of his theology, such as history’s contingency and openness, its understanding as creation and as a critical assumption of the present.²³ What is important to note, however, is that,

22 G. Florovsky, “Ways of Russian Theology,” in: Florovsky, *Collected Works*, vol. 4: Aspects of Church History, 195. Cf. Idem, *Ways of Russian Theology*, in Florovsky, *Collected Works*, vol. 6, op. cit., 297.

23 I tried to deal with this difficult question in my paper: “L’hellénisme chrétien du Père Georges Florovsky et les théologiens grecs de la génération de ’60” (unpublished paper presented at the International Conference: “Le Père Georges Florovsky et le renouveau de la théologie orthodoxe au 20e siècle,” St Sergius Institute, Paris, November 27–28, 2009). Cf. also, from the same conference, the unpublished paper of Brandon Gallaher, “Waiting for the Barbarians’: Pan-orthodox Identity and Polemicism in Georges Florovsky,” and the unpublished papers of Paul Gavriluk: a) “Florovsky’s Christian Hellenism: A Critical Evaluation” (from the International Conference: “Neo-Patristic Synthesis or Post-Patristic Theology: Can Orthodox Theology Be Contextual?” or-

as one would expect, this theory quickly won the support of Greek theologians, both those of a conservative bent and those inclined toward renewal. We already spoke at the beginning of this text about the Greeks' great difficulty and ambivalence toward facing the challenges and changes posed by the contemporary world, difficulties that stem in part from the dramatic reversal in the position and importance of Hellenism, which had for centuries, at least until 1453, been at the center of the world's attention, but now has been relegated to the margins of political, economic, and cultural developments, i.e., a provincial power. Thus, it was inevitable that a theory would emerge that would elevate Hellenism's place in the realm of theology and culture in general, and that this theory would be warmly embraced, even by those theologians not known for being attached to nationalistic or ethnocentric stereotypes. It is not surprising to find, then, the overuse and Hellenocentric or cultural understanding of Florovsky's well-known passage about the determinative and normative nature of Hellenism in the field of theology, and about Christian Hellenism as a standing and eternal category of Christian existence. This famous passage, starting from its first published translation into modern Greek in 1962,²⁴ has been published and republished continuously since then at every

ganized by the Volos Academy for Theological Studies, in collaboration with the Orthodox Christian Studies Program of Fordham University, the Chair of Orthodox Theology of Münster University, and the Romanian Institute for Inter-Orthodox, Inter-Confessional, Inter-Religious Studies (INTER-Cluj-Napoca), Volos, Greece, June 3–6, 2010); and b) "The Case of 'Westernization' vs. Hellenization: the Methodological Limitations of Georges Florovsky's 'Neopatristic Synthesis'" (from the International Conference: "Orthodox Constructions of the West," organized by the Orthodox Christian Studies Program of Fordham University, New York, June 28–30, 2010). Cf. also the text by Athanasios N. Papatheanasiou, "Empire and Desert: History and its Antinomies in the Thought of Fr Georges Florovsky," in his book *The Church Is Being Realized as Long as It Opens Itself Up* (Athens: En Plo, 2008), 95–154 [in Greek]. M. Stokoe, "Christian Hellenism," thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Divinity (St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, April 17, 1981), explains that, in his view, "Christian Hellenism" could be considered a model of contextual theology, responding to the needs and expectations of every age and society.

24 Published in Greek as "Poreia tis Rosikis Theologias," *Theologia, Alitheia, kai Zoe* (Athens: Zoe, 1962), 17–59.

opportunity.²⁵ It is unnecessary to note that the passage in question was used in a condensed form—or simply as a concept or even as a slogan—predominantly by those who belonged to the theological generation of the '60s, even in the most conservative versions of that generation's spirit and orientation, in order to justify the uniqueness and indispensability of Hellenism and Romanity within Orthodoxy.

Florovsky's views on Christian Hellenism, when they were not providing—out of context or possibly even counter to their original intention—theological grounding for the exaggerated, provincial claims about the uniqueness of Helleno-Christianity (in both the ecclesiastical and the cultural spheres), or the theories about Romanity and the identification of Orthodoxy with Hellenism, or when they were not being cited as external—and therefore valid and objective—confirmation of Greek theories about national and cultural superiority, seem to have contributed greatly to the promotion and systematization, at least in the Greek world, of a Hellenocentric and culturalistic interpretation of theology and the Church. And this is because Florovsky's views provided not only a national/ethnic fig leaf (given his Russian descent), but also the theological/theoretical foundation for the formulation of the theory that Greekness and cultural/Byzantine Hellenism are the necessary prerequisites for genuine theology and authentic Orthodoxy, and the idea of the historical continuity and timelessness of (Greek) cultural Orthodoxy.

Of course, with these views, Florovsky was not *primarily* promoting the idea of cultural Hellenism per se, nor was he highlighting its historical value and continuity. Given the fact that his thought displays a certain “reactionary” and polemic character,²⁶ I think that

25 Such as in the series of translations into Greek of the Works of G. Florovsky. See, for example, “Oi dromoi tis Rossikis Theologias,” *Themata Ekklisiastikis Istorias*, tr. P. K. Pallis (Thessaloniki: Pournaras, 1979), 214–44, especially the excerpt found on pages 226–30. See also the article published in the well-known journal *Synaxis* under the title: “Eleftheria, Alitheia, Ellinismos stin Ekklisia,” which serves as an introduction to the volume, which is dedicated to “People, Nation, Church”; see G. Florovsky, “Eleftheria, Alitheia, Ellinismos stin Ekklisia,” *Synaxis* 48 (1993): 5–7.

26 In regard to this, cf. B. Gallaher, “Hellenism under the Sign of the Cross: Orthodox Identity and Polemicism in the Life and Work of Georges Florovsky (1893–1979)” (unpublished paper, used courtesy of the author).

Florovsky was more interested in: 1) responding to accusations of the “Hellenization of Christianity” levelled by the great German theologian and historian A. von Harnack in his classic work *Das Wesen des Christentums*,²⁷ in which he calls for a return to the original biblical and, more specifically, Semitic spirit, even calling for the overcoming of the deviation that the “Hellenization of Christianity” represented to him, which he considered the product of the Platonizing Fathers of the Church, the Councils, and the systematization of dogma (this issue is sufficiently well known and debated that I think, in this context, it is unnecessary for me to elaborate on it); and 2) the question of theological language and its capacity for change or radical adjustment in light of new challenges, as well as the use of new philosophical categories and terms to express the truth of the Gospel—terms and categories different from those of classical Greek philosophy and ontology which, at the apex of Christian theology (primarily the 4th century), provided the conceptual tools for the formulation of Orthodox dogma. Of course, we must not forget that when Florovsky speaks about “Christian” or “sacred Hellenism,” he is not speaking under the influence of the Greeks’ fixation on the Great Idea, nor is he obsessed with some lost Hellenism. He does not have in mind some supposed “cultural Orthodoxy,” or some form of superiority or primacy of cultural or Byzantine Hellenism over and against other traditions. This may, however, be one of the possible interpretations or even one of the unavoidable consequences of the internal logic of his theory of “Christian Hellenism” as a standing and eternal category of Christian existence. More importantly, though, as Florovsky himself stated explicitly, when he spoke about “Christian Hellenism,” he did not under any circumstances mean the national(istic) or ethnic Hellenism of

27 Ad. Von Harnack, *Das Wesen des Christentums* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1900). English translation: *What Is Christianity*, tr. T. B. Saunders, intro. R. Bultmann (New York: Harper, 1957), esp. 217–45. Florovsky criticized Harnack’s views not only in the texts we noted above, but throughout the whole of his work; see especially his article: “Revelation, Philosophy and Theology,” in G. Florovsky’s *Collected Works*, v. 3, *Creation and Redemption* (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Company, 1976), 21–40.

contemporary Greece or the East—even if frequently in Greece, for internal reasons, “Christian Hellenism” was read and understood in an ethnocentric and culturalistic/Hellenocentric way. Florovsky was interested *primarily* in excising German idealism and romanticism from the realm of theology, which the Slavophiles, some Russian religious philosophers of the pre- and post-revolutionary period, and even some of his colleagues at St Sergius, particularly Fr Sergei Bulgakov,²⁸ for example, had a tendency to utilize. According to Fr John Meyendorff, Florovsky’s preoccupation with the Fathers sprung from his desire to use their texts to refute Sophiology, so that the whole of his work is a passive response to Sophiology and Bulgakov’s thought in general, with which he fundamentally disagreed.²⁹

It is, nevertheless, important to note here that theologians in Greece (most characteristically Christos Yannaras, as we will see below) who understood Florovsky’s idea of “Christian Hellenism” (which itself is not totally clear) in a Hellenocentric and culturalistic way—which, if it does not completely exclude the other Orthodox peoples and their traditions from the Church and from the fullness of authentic Orthodoxy, at least regards them as incomplete or as second-class citizens—are the same ones who, in their theology, cultural philosophy, and vision of modern Hellenism, were influenced decisively (although perhaps unawares) by the Slavophile movement and the subsequent Russian religious philosophy, and, through them, by German romanticism and the attendant Euro-

28 Cf. Br. Gallaher, “Hellenism Under the Sign of the Cross”: Orthodox Identity and Polemicism in the Life and Work of Georges Florovsky, *op. cit.* For a general overview of the disagreement between Florovsky and Bulgakov and the former’s critique of the latter, see G. H. Williams, “Georges Vasilievich Florovsky: His American Career (1948–1965),” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 11 (1965): 27–29; *idem*, “The Neopatristic Synthesis of Georges Florovsky,” in A. Blane (ed.), *Georges Florovsky. Russian Intellectual and Orthodox Churchman* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1993), 301–02; A. Blane, “A Sketch of the Life of Georges Florovsky,” in A. Blane (ed.), *Georges Florovsky. Russian Intellectual and Orthodox Churchman* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1993), 60–68.

29 J. Meyendorff, “Predislovie,” in Georgii Florovskii, *Puti Russkogo Bogoslovii* (Vilnius: Vilnius Orthodox Diocesan Council, 1991), i–vi, mainly ii, as it is quoted in Br. Gallaher, “Hellenism Under the Sign of the Cross”: Orthodox Identity and Polemicism in the Life and Work of Georges Florovsky, *op. cit.*

pean pre-modern or even anti-modern political philosophy. The paradox is that the Slavophile movement not only was not known for its dedication to cultural Hellenism or to the uniqueness and superiority of the Greek cultural paradigm, but very often was drawn toward a rival cultural messianism, that of the uniqueness of Russian culture and the Russian cultural/theological paradigm, which they saw as having universal vocation and mission, and as having been earmarked for the enlightenment and support, spiritually and intellectually, of faltering and failing Europe—a view, for example, that we see expressed quite clearly in Dostoyevsky's final text, his Pushkin Speech, in 1880.³⁰

Given this overuse of Florovsky's idea of Christian Hellenism, which we encounter in many Orthodox theologians in contemporary Greece—a "utilization" that masks a fundamental ignorance of Florovsky's work and thought, which is the rule in contemporary Greek theology—it would be interesting for someone to compare the success of the critique of another great Russian theologian of the diaspora, Fr Alexander Schmemmann, on ecclesiastical and theological Hellenocentrism and the fixation on Byzantium.³¹ This critique,

30 For more on this, see Pantelis Kalaitzidis, *Greekness and Antiwesternism in the Greek Theological Generation of the 60's*, PhD Dissertation, School of Theology, University of Thessaloniki, 2008, 203–04, 509–26 [in Greek].

31 Schmemmann's critique can be seen most clearly and characteristically in the following works: *The Historical Road of Eastern Orthodoxy*, tr. from the Russian by L. W. Kesich (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1977), 271–91; and *Church, Mission, World: Reflections on Orthodoxy in the West* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1979), 85–116. A partial translation of the first work into Greek (from French) was published in the *Synaxis* issue dedicated to "People, Nation, Church" (Issue 48 [1993]: 9–16) immediately after the famous excerpt from Florovsky about Christian Hellenism, which we already discussed above) with the following note regarding its inclusion in the journal: "Despite our reservations about certain points in this text, we think that it behooves Greeks to read this, the first part of Fr A. Schmemmann's text 'The Dark Ages,' which forms one chapter of his book *The Historical Road of Eastern Orthodoxy*." It is a description and analysis of the "dark" centuries of Ottoman occupation that coincided, according to Schmemmann, not only with the rise of religious fanaticism, but also with the period of rise of the hegemonic and dominant role of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople over the other local Orthodox Churches, as well as with its biased decisions in favor of Greeks and against the Slavs. The second text by Schmemmann under discussion here was written in response to the Ecumenical

when it was not suppressed, was simply ignored and given no further discussion, critical engagement, or even an informed response.

While, however, Florovsky's theology proper (the dialectic between history and eschatology and between empire and desert, the theology of creation, the openness and contingency of history, the historicity of Christianity and of revelation, Christocentric ecclesiology, ecumenism and Christian catholicity, etc.) does not appear, with a few exceptions, to have found a reception or continuation in contemporary Greek theology, some elements of Florovsky's theory of Christian Hellenism are found, to a greater or lesser extent, in the works of prominent Greek theologians—without, however, this implying any fidelity to Florovsky's thought and theological vision. Characteristic in this regard are theologians such as Metropolitan of Pergamon John (Zizioulas), Christos Yannaras, Archimandrite Vasileios Gondikakis, and Fr John Romanidis, whose views I will engage briefly later in the text.

b) The Theological Hermeneutics of Fr Georges Florovsky's "Christian Hellenism": Orthodoxy and Hellenism according to Metropolitan of Pergamon John (Zizioulas)

Metropolitan of Pergamon John (Zizioulas), a student under Fr Georges Florovsky during the latter's years at Harvard, and a theologian of ecumenical renown in both academic and ecclesiastical circles, is considered the main continuator of the idea of a neo-patristic synthesis,³² and appears to be perhaps the only prominent

Patriarchate of Constantinople's reaction to the Moscow Patriarchate's granting of autocephaly to its former Metropolia in America (which from that point on has been known to them as the Orthodox Church in America [OCA]). Here, Schmemmann makes a sharp critique of Greek-speaking Orthodoxy's fixation on Byzantium and its inability to understand and accept post-Byzantine developments in the Orthodox world, as well as the Greek "imperial-national" ecclesiological outlook, which has its roots in Byzantine theocracy and the overinflated role of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which came about as a result of Ottoman millet system. The book circulated in Greek in several editions (cf. *I Apostolitis Ekklesias sto Synchrono Kosmo*, tr. from English by I. Roilidis [Athens: Akritas, 1983], 107–43), without, however, generating any significant discussion among Greek theologians.

32 A substantial exposition of Zizioulas' understanding of the neo-patristic synthesis

Greek theologian who seems to have a deep understanding of the work of the great Russian theologian of the diaspora.³³ His faithfulness to Florovsky and the uniqueness of his relationship with him does not lie simply in his assumption and reworking of the central themes of Florovsky's theology—such as, for example, the question of the relationship between Hellenism and Christianity, or between the existential and ecclesial dimensions and experiences of the Christian faith. Rather, it has to do with the fact that the approach to and discussion of such complex and vital issues occurs from a purely theological perspective, without sliding into Hellenocentrism, a cultural interpretation of the Church and theology, or a culturalistic understanding of the relationship between the Church and culture (in particular here the relationship between the Church and Hellenism), and without succumbing to the temptation of nationalism and anti-westernism.

The issue of the relationship between Hellenism and Christianity appears to form the framework on which the Metropolitan develops the whole of his work, while a more or less direct engagement with the issues can be found in, among others, his studies "Hellenism and Christianity: The Meeting of Two Worlds. Hellenism in the Historical Origins of Christianity,"³⁴ and "The European Spirit

is provided in his recent paper: "Actuality and Temporality of the Neo-Patristic Synthesis" presented at the International Conference: "Neo-Patristic Synthesis or Post-Patristic Theology: Can Orthodox Theology Be Contextual?," organized by the Volos Academy for Theological Studies, in collaboration with the Orthodox Christian Studies Program of Fordham University, the Chair of Orthodox Theology of Münster University, and the Romanian Institute for Inter-Orthodox, Inter-Confessional, Inter-Religious Studies (INTER-Cluj-Napoca), Volos, Greece, June 3–6, 2010.

33 From the younger generation of Greek theologians, the work of Athanasios N. Papatheanasiou, and especially his study: "Empire and Desert: History and its Antinomies in the Thought of Fr Georges Florovsky," published in his book *The Church Is Being Realized as Long as It Opens Itself Up* (Athens: En Plo, 2008), 95–154 [in Greek], and the work of Constantine Agoras (see for example his: "World, Human Being and History," in *Faith and Experience of Orthodoxy*, vol. I, *Doctrine, Spirituality and Ethos of Orthodoxy* [Patras: Hellenic Open University, 2002], 75–158 [in Greek]), show a high level of familiarity with and creative assimilation of Florovsky's theological thought.

34 In: *History of the Hellenic Nation*, vol. 6, 519–59 [in Greek]; also published sepa-

and Greek Orthodoxy.”³⁵ Certain other texts by the Metropolitan, which were written on the broader question of the relationship between Hellenism and Christianity, but which focus primarily on ontology and theology and not on ethno-cultural questions, also have a bearing on our topic, such as “The Contribution of Cappadocia to Christian Thought,”³⁶ or the first two chapters of his classic work *Being as Communion—“Personhood and Being”* and “Truth as Communion”³⁷—and also the older and newer studies that form his book *Communion and Otherness*,³⁸ as well as the first two lectures from a series he gave at King’s College in London in 1989 on a theological understanding of the ecological problem.³⁹

One of Zizioulas’ basic presuppositions in his approach to the relationship between Hellenism and Christianity is that we cannot move directly to a study of this relationship without first looking at Judaism—in other words, without studying first of all the relationship between Hellenism and Judaism, since recognition of the origins of Christianity came about primarily through the discovery of the eschatological character of early Christianity and particularly of the figure of Jesus Christ, as he is presented in the Gospels. Zizioulas, however, does not fail to remind us that, as early as the time of Alexander the Great’s successors, we can observe Hellenism making significant inroads into the Judaism of Palestine and the diaspora and exercising a considerable influence there, an influence which would reach its apex among Greek-speaking Jews—without, however, substantially altering the basic characteristics of the Hebrew tradition and mentality. With the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament in Alexandria, the Jewish writer Philo, the

rately by Apostoliki Diakonia, Athens, 2003.

35 Journal *Eythyni*, no. 163 (1985): 329–33, no. 167 (1985): 569–73 [in Greek].

36 In: *Sinasos in Cappadocia* (London-Athens: National Trust for Greece, 1986), 23–37.

37 J. D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1985), 27–65, 67–122, respectively.

38 J. D. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness. Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London-New York: T and T Clark, 2006).

39 J. D. Zizoulas, “Preserving God’s Creation,” *King’s Theological Review* 12 (1989): 1–5, 41–45.

preaching of the first martyr Stephen and the Hellenistic Christians, Paul's theology, and the Gospel of John, Zizioulas discerns already in primitive Christianity the beginnings of the gradual formation of an ontological Christology and the seeds of a new ontology that would become formulated more clearly in the patristic period. All this, of course, does not imply the Hellenization of Christology, but rather a substantial transformation of Greek thought in its meeting with Christianity. Through Christianity's doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, we see the transition from Greek cosmology to a Christian theology of creation, while the Resurrection of Jesus Christ introduces the reverse perspective of eschatological Christology and eschatological ontology, according to which: the meaning of the world, the cosmological "principle," lies in the recapitulation of all things in Christ at the end of the world—at the Eschaton, in that to which the Resurrection of Christ gives witness—and not in a Platonic protology.

Christianity, making full use of Greek culture in its modes of expression, thus contributed decisively to the birth of a new world and to the emergence of a Christianized Hellenism. With the identification of Being with truth and freedom, and further with the identification of Being with hypostasis, and Being with love, which all began with Irenaeus and Ignatius and was crowned by the Cappadocians' idea of personhood (in the framework of Trinitarian theology), Zizioulas sees Greek patristic theology influencing in a unique and decisive way the history not only of Greek culture, but also of European culture in general, and, of course, the fields of theology, philosophy, and anthropology.

This encounter between Hellenism and Christianity at the level of worldview created, according to Zizioulas, conflict, interaction, and historically significant transformations in both Hellenism and Christianity. While Greeks had to learn to think historically and to relate Being to freedom, Christians had to learn to find ways to express their faith in ontological categories—without, however, also accepting certain Greek presuppositions, i.e., without shackling God and His freedom to an essentialistic monistic ontology and a cosmological conception. And this is because the new element

introduced by biblical and, indeed, Christian thought is the dimension of freedom, which springs from Christianity's doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* and the radical otherness between God and the world—freedom, in other words, from ontological necessity, which results from the shattering of a closed ontology. Biblical thought, through its doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, laid the ontological foundations for freedom by viewing the world as not self-existent, self-explanatory, nor in itself immortal, and by locating as its principle and cause one being (the personal God), who is beyond the hierarchy of created beings, outside the world and absolutely free from the world, and who is not interpreted by the world but rather, it is presupposed, himself interprets the world.

Zizioulas, underlining the multifaceted consequences and the significance of the meeting between Hellenism and Christianity, as well as the new world that was born from this encounter, notes characteristically that:

[T]he ones who made this first attempt at the Christianization of Hellenism were the Greeks themselves. This means that this Christianization was not a denial of Hellenism. It was a transformation, in which the fundamental questions and interests of the Greek spirit were satisfied with answers that were no longer "Greek." Thus, this great transformation demonstrated that Christianity could make a sharp distinction between Greek culture's questions and its answers. And this is because they were pragmatic questions—of course, they were intellectual, but primarily they were existential—, which only the Greeks with their way of thinking were in a position to raise. Some of these questions—such as those dealing with cosmology, ontology, etc.—we have already noted. But the fact that such questions and concerns, typically and exclusively Greek, were satisfied by a worldview, which was, at its core, Jewish, and which never posed such questions, is the miracle wrought by the Greek Fathers.⁴⁰

40 J. D. Zizioulas, "Hellenism and Christianity: The Meeting of Two Worlds," op. cit., 554.

For this reason, according to Zizioulas, the historical trajectory of modern Hellenism and its attempt to meet with and participate in the contemporary world and the project for a united Europe is inconceivable and hopeless without a correct and deep familiarity with the age of the Fathers of the Church and their theology. In the same way, it is not possible, again according to Zizioulas, for there to be a Greek identity and Greekness without Orthodoxy's contribution. This, however, cannot happen simply through a nostalgic repetition of the forms of the past, because, as Zizioulas himself hastens to note:

A return cannot create spiritual identity if it is simply a return to the past. Julian, and with him the Greek identity he wanted to resurrect, failed, because he chose the path of return. Orthodoxy, then, forged Hellenism's way forward because it was not a return, but a creative synthesis. So also today, Orthodoxy, in order to bring Greek identity to light, must not be simply a return to the forms of the past, a nostalgic "love for Orthodoxy" that circumvents today's reality. And today's reality for Greece is Europe. Hellenism must be recast into its basic constituent elements, without losing its Greekness, as it moves into this new reality of Europe.⁴¹

c) The Cultural Hermeneutics of Fr Georges Florovsky's "Christian Hellenism": i) The "Greek Orthodoxy" of the "Unbroken Continuity of Greek Thought" Theory of the Neo-Orthodox— primarily Christos Yannaras and Fr Vasileios Gondikakis⁴²

The case of the very influential Greek theologian and philosopher of the generation of the '60s, Christos Yannaras, illustrates, I think,

41 J. D. Zizioulas, "The European Spirit and Greek Orthodoxy," *Eythymi* 163 (1985): 332–33 [in Greek]. For a more detailed analysis of Zizioulas understanding of the relationship between Christianity and Hellenism, apart from the writings of Zizioulas himself that we quoted, cf. C. Agoras, "Hellénisme et Christianisme: la question de l'histoire, de la personne et de sa liberté selon Jean Zizioulas," *Contacts*, no. 160, Vol 44 (1992): 244–69.

42 For a more detailed analysis and evidence regarding this part of my paper, cf. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, *Greekness and Antiwesternism in the Greek Theological Generation of the 60's*, PhD Dissertation, School of Theology, University of Thessaloniki, 2008,

in the most characteristic way, the cultural understanding of “Christian Hellenism” and the attendant theory of Hellenism’s unbroken continuity (which, of course, for Yannaras, is not about racial or historical continuity, but cultural). In the 19th century, the national historian Constantine Pappadopoulos and the scholar Spyridon Zampelios waged a rather successful campaign to restore the unity of the Greek nation and its history through their conception of a tripartite division into ancient, medieval, and modern Hellenism, and their promotion of the deeper unity of these three periods, by which they sought to refute the German historian Fallmerayer’s claims about the biological discontinuity between ancient and modern Greeks. Almost a century later, Christos Yannaras, under different circumstances and for entirely different reasons, laid out, using his own metaphysical principle, the ideology of Hellenism’s seamless continuity, not only in the realms of history, space, and time, but also in the realm of thought and culture, specifically in the realm of the dialogical/communal and apophatic version of truth, from Heraclitus through St Gregory Palamas, and his theory of the survival of an enduring cultural Greekness, which 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 ’70s, such as *Orthodoxy and the West—Theology in Greece Today* (1972), while after 1979–80,⁴³ 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 not an objective given but an on-going attainment of communion. The

249–353 [in Greek]; idem, “The Discovery of Greekness and Theological Antiwesternism in the Theological Generation of the 60’s,” in the volume: P. Kalaitzidis-Ath. N. Papatthanasίου-Th. Abatzidis (eds), *Critical Approaches to the “Theology of ’60s”* (Athens: Indiktos Publications, 2009), 488–501 [in Greek].

43 In 1980–1981, Yannaras published in Greek his two-volume work *An Outline of an Introduction to Philosophy* (Athens: Domos), in which he developed his view on this matter. It was then translated into French under the characteristic title *Philosophie sans rupture*, tr. from the Greek by A. Borrély (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1986).

truth is never exhausted in its formulation, just as a cognizance of propositional truth cannot be 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 which, as Yannaras would have it, “it is simply impossible to make any sense of the Greek way of life from the 5th century BC to the 15th century AD.”⁴⁴ It thus follows that the suggested epistemological continuity, premised on the concept, common to both pre-Christian and Christian Hellenism, of the truth as an event of interpersonal participation and communion, would now serve as a point of contact and a platform for the meeting of Hellenism and Christianity, chiefly through the grand theological synthesis of the Greek Fathers. It should be noted that the above analysis, so crucial to Yannaras’ overall thesis, is not part of his earlier position, which preserved a chasm between Hellenism and Christianity. At some point, Yannaras’ thesis of philosophical continuity became increasingly reified until it reached its classical formulation, now a permanent feature that runs throughout his work:

The [Greek] Fathers radically reject ancient Greek ontology, but they incorporate and preserve Greek epistemology, thereby breathing fresh life into Greek philosophical discourse. Being in truth is still identified with being in communion [in communal accord], except that henceforth, the social enactment of the truth no longer seeks to imitate logical harmony and order—that kind of harmony and order, which elevates the universe to the status of a jewel and the polis, accordingly, to an image of its heavenly prototype. Instead, the social realization of the truth now aims at the imitation of the Trinitarian Prototype of life, at the loving manifestation of the otherness and freedom that are

44 C. Yannaras, “Mystras: ‘From Byzantine to Modern Hellenism,’” *Critical Approaches*, 2nd expanded edition (Athens: Domos, 1987), 45 [in Greek]. Cf. idem, *Elements of Faith: An Introduction to Orthodox Theology*, tr. K. Schram (London-New York: T. and T. Clark, 1991), 153–54.

intrinsic to persons. The true image of Trinitarian divinity is manifested in the ecclesial communion of persons, in the Eucharistic setting, in the parish community.⁴⁵

For Yannaras, this version of the truth constitutes the very crux of the cultural identity of Hellenism, inasmuch as “yet still 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.”⁴⁶ It is actually this definition of the truth, above all else, that “determines every other difference between the two traditions or cultures”⁴⁷—that is, 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, a divergence that he sees 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 her consistent commitment to apophaticism, as is evidenced in the tradition spanning 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 forms authoritarian a priori. Would that the Greek intelligentsia learn at long last that Christianity once was split up in two, because the Greek Church consciousness and experience refused to walk along with the

45 C. Yannaras, “Mystras: ‘From Byzantine to Modern Hellenism,’” op. cit., 45–46. Cf. idem, *The Inhuman Character of Human Rights* (Athens: Domos, 1998), 49–50 [in Greek].

46 C. Yannaras, *On the Absence and Unknowability of God: Heidegger and the Areopagite*, ed. with an Introduction by A. Louth, tr. by H. Ventis (London-New York: T and T Clark, 2005), 17.

47 Ibid., 15.

then-barbaric West on the way to a 'religious' distortion of the ecclesial event and its submission to doctrines and infallible authorities.⁴⁸

Soon, Yannaras' theory of the unbroken continuity of Greek thought from Heraclitus to Gregory Palamas would be complemented by a more historical and "political"—and, at the same time, more fixated—dimension: one that likes to constantly discover not only the Greeks' enduring apophatic attitude vis-à-vis the issue of truth, but also sees in the Greeks an enduring civility and a sense of nobility, as well as their destiny, as an aristocratic people, to be at 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 the virtues, and to cultivate the art of politics. They thus leave work (which is identical to subjection to need) to other peoples, who are like sheep in their need for production—inasmuch as, for them, the highest goal of salvation has become intertwined with the idea of work and faithfulness, *Labor et Fides*—as the author himself writes characteristically in his book *Undefined Greece*,⁴⁹ in which the author records experiences, events, and discussions from his encounters with Greeks in the diaspora in Australia, Canada, and the USA.

This constant preoccupation with the theme of the inherent civility 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, 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, the later work of Yannaras, distinguished among other things by a disengagement from theology as such in favor of or because of philosophy and especially culture/identity, will refer consistently even to worship, and indeed

48 C. Yannaras, "With the Heretics in the Vanguard," in idem, *The Dissolution of the Political System in Greece Today* (Columnns 2007), (Thessaloniki: Ianos, 2008), 240 [in Greek].

49 C. Yannaras, *Undefined Greece* (Athens: Domos, 1994), 58. Cf. 59, 120–121 [in Greek].

to the Divine Liturgy, in terms not only of the nobility, civility, 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.⁵⁰

In this perspective, the “Greek Orthodox liturgy” seems to be, according to Yannaras, the most important, or rather the only, bulwark against the imminent destruction, dissolution, and collapse of the “little Greek state,” since ancient Greek drama continues every week in thousands of churches and communities of Greeks across 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 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 meal of the coming Lord, which constitutes the Body of Christ and the people of God. What matters in the passage under discussion is the cultural dimension of worship, the expression through liturgy of Greekness, and the spirit of resistance it 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 every week an ancient Greek tragedy. 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 in our hands something even more significant: a living, weekly act of the people, which continues the ancient Greek dramaturgy. It

50 C. Yannaras, *Undefined Greece*, 28–31 [in Greek].

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, wherever there is a Greek community, throughout the world.

I'll 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 "religification," 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.⁵¹

This unprecedented exploitation of Orthodoxy's liturgical tradition is not content simply with buttressing claims of unbroken Greek continuity, as it seems in many of Yannaras' texts.⁵² In his thought, Orthodox worship is inextricably tied to the search for identity and the 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 still less in an eschatological way, since 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

51 C. Yannaras, *Politics in the Greek Mode: Criteria and Proposals from an Opposite Point of View* (Athens: Ikaros, 1996), 175–76 [in Greek].

52 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 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 Theophilos."

the dominant globalizing western model.⁵³ Even the autobiographical work *On Himself* was not able to avoid a reference to or tangent about Orthodox worship as a mark of the Greeks' nobility, civility, 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.⁵⁴

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 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 each and every people of God 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 many of his recent writings,⁵⁵ the pivotal role that the cultural criterion plays in Yannaras' thought leads him to make the catholicity of each local Church (and the authentic manifestation thereof) dependent upon the conditions of its cultural milieu, with language the foremost criterion. For Yannaras, culture is a prerequisite for access to the ecclesial event and the ecclesial way of life. Small wonder, then, that Yannaras 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, and if one is not familiar with the unprece-

53 C. Yannaras, *Cultural Diplomacy: A Theory of Greek Planning* (Athens: Ikaros, 2003), 158–59 [in Greek]. In the same vein, see: Yannaras, *Resistance to Alienation: A Vital Critical Balancing Act* (Athens: Ikaros, 1997), 236 [in Greek].

54 C. Yannaras, *On Himself* (Athens: Ikaros, 1995), 184–85. Cf. 186 [in Greek].

55 In regard to this point, see his very important article: "Church and Culture," *Synaxis* 88 (2003): 11–17 [in Greek].

dented 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 from the flesh” of theology, the diachronic (and henceforth obligatory) historical-cultural flesh of the Church to such a degree, in fact, that, according to Yannaras, even today 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 to their cultural and intellectual retardation. Even today, he thinks that the peoples of mission, such as the Africans and Asians, have to be familiar with Greek cultural and philosophical achievements in order to be fully Orthodox.⁵⁶ 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, in Yannaras’ thought, is assigned a special role in the Divine Economy of salvation.

Indeed, a particular and crucial aspect of Yannaras’s Helleno-Christian theology, which was manifest already fairly early (1977),⁵⁷ but became more prominent over time throughout his later work, especially in his texts after 1990,⁵⁸ raises not only the idea of the diachronic unity and continuity of the individual phases of Hellenism’s cultural development, but also hints at a theory in which Greekness, as the historical flesh which offered Hellenism as the full expression of Orthodoxy, gives us the right to speak about Helle-

56 C. Yannaras, “Church and Culture,” *Synaxis* 88 (2003): 13–14, 15, 17 [in Greek].

57 C. Yannaras, *Truth and the Unity of the Church* (Athens: Grigoris, 1977), 273ff [in Greek]; French translation (by Jean-Louis Palierné): *Vérité et unité de l’Eglise*, (Grez-Doiceau, ed. Axios, 1989), 162ff; idem, *Modern Greek Identity* (Athens: Grigoris, 1978), 8–9 [in Greek].

58 Particularly in his articles: “Church and Culture,” op. cit., and “Nation, People, Church” (see below).

nism's unique (and not incidental) role in the plan of the Divine Economy, a role analogous to that of the incarnation of God from the Jews, which, for a believer, is also not incidental. More precisely, ecclesiastical catholicity for Yannaras is connected not only to ecclesiastical and theological presuppositions, but also to cultural ones. For this reason, beside the fundamental characteristics of the catholicity of the Church (such as the centrality of the Eucharist and the bishop to the composition of the ecclesiastical body), Yannaras adds also 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 directly connected 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 ecclesiastical 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."⁵⁹

Yannaras, however, goes further, highlighting the Christological concomitant of this theological/ecclesiological position of his, with an emphasis not simply on the historicity and reality of the Incarnation, but—not accidentally, as we will see shortly—also with an emphasis on ethnicity, on 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

59 C. Yannaras, "Church and Culture," *op. cit.*, 12.

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.⁶⁰

Based on this position, our author can conclude that:

since then, every time the Christological prototype of existence is realised, 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 which we adopt as a “superstructure” to the practice of our lives, a practice which varies according to our local customs and culture. The Gospel is embodied in the practice of life, and only when incarnate does it become a mode of being.⁶¹

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), but rather is content to highlight and, in fact, consider absolutely essential for every place and age, the cultural aspects of the historical Christ, which in this case can be summarized as Jewishness. 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.

One could claim to find here the influence of Fr Georges Florovsky. Indeed, we encounter a similar position in Florovsky's works,⁶²

60 C. Yannaras, “Church and Culture,” op. cit., 11. The same idea, in a more concise form, in his article: “Nation, People, Church,” tr. 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 (Montréal: Alexander Press, 2006), 98.

61 C. Yannaras, “Nation, People, Church,” op. cit., 98.

62 G. Florovsky, “Revelation, Philosophy and Theology” in: Florovsky, *Collected Works*, vol. 3, *Creation and Redemption* (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Company, 1976), 31–32; idem, “The Legacy of the New Testament,” in: Florovsky, *Collected Works*, vol. 5, *The Byzantine Fathers of the Fifth Century* (Belmont, MA: Büchervertriebsanstalt, 1987), 31–32.

when he maintains that there is a similarity between Hellenism and Hebraism with regard to their positions—which are not incidental—in the unfolding of the Divine Economy: the formulation of Christian truth and the writing of the Gospels in the Greek language is parallel to God's not-incidental selection of the Jewish people as "His" people. I am not in a position to answer with certainty the question of whether Yannaras was aware of this text, or whether he had in mind Florovsky's thoughts on this matter. My impression is that, apart from the issue of western influence on Russian theology or Orthodox theology in general, as well as certain biographical and secondary aspects of the thought of this great Russian theologian, Yannaras does not seem to be familiar with any of the major themes in Florovsky's work (eschatology, Christian catholicity, the historicity of Christianity and revelation, the antinomies of history—between empire and desert, ecclesiology, etc.), while his understanding of "Christian Hellenism" is cultural rather than theological. Florovsky presses this analogy (to ensure the determinative authority of "Christian Hellenism"), but ultimately concludes with the eschatological Christ and inaugurated eschatology, and this prevents him from ending up with a theory of a "new chosen people of God" (whether it be ethnophyletistic or cultural), despite the fact that the text in question leaves the door wide open to such a danger. This eschatological perspective as well as the eschatological Christ are absent, however, in Yannaras' thought, and perhaps this is why we have slipped into a cultural understanding of the Church and into Hellenocentrism.

The eschatological deficit in Yannaras' corpus also explains the 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 time, 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 pre-modern) 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 are particularly 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.⁶³ 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. 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 him to visualize Hellenism in terms of an unbreakable intellectual unity over the entire course of its history. Accordingly, Yannaras appears to take no notice of the blatant discontinuity between antiquity and Christianity, instead choosing to emphasize the cultural disparity between the Greek East and the Latin West. He attributes this alleged contrast, in part, to the "massive migration" of barbaric races from northern Europe, and the intellectual backwardness that this inflicted upon the West. Juxtaposing the cultural inferiority of the barbaric tribes that conquered the West with the Byzantines' more advanced level of cultural sophistication, Yannaras feels justified in affirming the "nobility of the Greek people" to the point of turning even their faults and "apparent" weaknesses into an indication of their aristocratic descent.

In a milder but no less problematic way, Archimandrite Vasileios Gontikakis, former Abbot of the Holy Monastery of Stavronikita and then of Iviron on Mount Athos, author of the well-known book, *Hymn of Entry* (1974),⁶⁴ and an exceptional spiritual and intellectual

63 See for example C. Yannaras, *The Freedom of Morality*, tr. Elizabeth Briere (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1984), 220–23.

64 Arch. Vasileios of Stavronikita [Gontikakis], *Hymn of Entry. Liturgy and Life in the Orthodox Church*, tr. from the Greek by Elizabeth Briere (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1984). For a more detailed analysis and evidence regarding Fr Vasileios' views on this point, see: Pantelis Kalaitzidis, *Greekness and Antiwesternism in the Greek*

representative of the Athonite monastic revival,⁶⁵ who has had a significant influence not only on theological audiences, but also on secular ones, has developed the idea of Hellenism's unbroken continuity from Heraclitus and Pindar up to the popular piety of our own time and Athonite spirituality⁶⁶ in a series of papers, newspapers articles, and public talks (most of them in English translation by Alexander Press, in Montreal), beginning with *The Holy Mountain and the Paideia of Our Greek People* (1984),⁶⁷ a text published by the Holy Community of Mount Athos. This continuity is perceived in terms of spirituality and culture (citing as evidence the perennial piety of the Greeks and their so-called "participatory epistemology"), and is seen as culminating in Christianity, which supports the idea of a dialectic between an authentic Greek Orthodoxy and a heretical West. This idealization of the Greek East goes hand in hand with attributing to the West—and, more especially, to the Enlightenment—a slew of ills and distortions that have plagued modern Greece. In his texts and talks, Fr Vasileos often points out the perils facing Greek continuity, the Greek nation, and Greek civilization or culture in general, perils that come from adopting modern (i.e., alien to tradition) forms of life and thought. Moreover, Fr Vasileios assigns to Hellenism a special, metaphysically predetermined, role in the Divine Economy of salvation, likening Hellenism (and its language, in particular) to the Theotokos' contribution to the

Theological Generation of the 60's, PhD Dissertation, School of Theology, University of Thessaloniki, 2008, 111–52 [in Greek]; idem, "The Discovery of Greekness and Theological Antiwesternism in the Theological Generation of the 60's," in the volume: P. Kalaitzidis-Ath. N. Papatthanasίου-Th. Abatzidis (eds), *Critical Approaches to the "Theology of '60s"* (Athens: Indiktos Publications, 2009), 453–78 [in Greek].

- 65 C. Yannaras, *Orthodoxy and the West: Hellenic Self-identity in the Modern Age*, tr. Peter Chamberas & Norman Russell (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2006), 298–99; Bishop Kallistos Ware, "Foreword" in: Arch. Vasileios of Stavronikita [Gondikakis], *Hymn of Entry. Liturgy and Life in the Orthodox Church*, tr. from the Greek by Elizabeth Briere (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1984), 7–8.
- 66 See, for example, his essay: *Pindar and the Greeks: From the Ancient World to the New Creation*, tr. from the Greek by Elizabeth Theokritoff (Montreal: Alexander Press, 2004).
- 67 English version: Arch. Vasileios, *What Is Unique about Orthodox Culture*, tr. by Elizabeth Theokritoff (Montreal: Alexander Press, 2001).

Incarnation of the Word, and interpreting the well-known excerpt about Jesus' encounter with the Greeks and the announcement of the glorification of the Son of Man (John 12:20–26) through the prism of Christian Hellenism.⁶⁸ He even adopts and promotes the stereotype of the Greeks as the new chosen people of God,⁶⁹ with a special universal mission assigned from above.⁷⁰ At the same time, Fr Vasileios reduces Orthodox spirituality to its Byzantine version, which is hailed as its most perfect expression. In this vision, Christian Hellenism is acclaimed as Europe's only hope for salvation, while the West is criticized for its alleged disdain for humankind, which has been manifested in its various totalitarian systems and the crimes they have committed. Fr Vasileios' rhetoric is abetted by a "poetic" patristic hermeneutic and a "Christianizing," de-contextualized interpretation of Ancient Greek thought. Both the patristic writings and Ancient Greek philosophy and literature are, for ideological reasons, detached from their historical backgrounds, which, methodologically, runs counter to a scholarly and academically sound theology.

Fr Vasileios' influence on theologians and clergymen, as well as on intellectuals, artists, and students, is well known, as is the impact he has had and continues to have in Greece and abroad. Given this, as well as the prestige that surrounds him as a person, it is not difficult to understand the climate and the mentality that his thought has created, and the contribution this had made to the subject that concerns us, not only within the ecclesiastical and theological milieu, but also more broadly among the intellectuals of modern Greek society, as well as of the Orthodox world in general. At any

68 Regarding this last point, see: Arch. Vasileios (Gondikakis), *Europe and the Holy Mountain*, tr. from the Greek by C. Kokenes (Montreal: Alexander Press, 1999²), 11–14.

69 Cf. Arch. Vasileios (Gontikakis), "The Encounter between Hellenism and Christianity," newspaper *To Vima*, January 18, 2004 [in Greek]. In the same text, Fr Vasileios, speaking about Byzantium, uses not only the usual term "Christian Empire," but also "the Empire of Christian Hellenism"!

70 Arch. Vasileios (Gontikakis), *The Fayyum Portraits: From the Humanity of Ancient Greece to the Divine-humanity of the Divine Liturgy*, tr. from the Greek by Elizabeth Theokritoff (Montreal: Alexander Press, 2001), 16–17.

rate, it is certain, in my opinion, that his contribution was decisive for the establishment and development of an intense anti-westernism and the theoretical groundwork that supported it, which both fed and was fed by the return to the fore—if we can say it ever disappeared—of a unique “Helleno-Christianity/Hellenocentrism.”

ii) The “Greek Orthodoxy” in Fr John Romanides’ Theory of Romanity

Fr John S. Romanides, first on the faculty at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Boston, Massachusetts, and then at the School of Theology at the University of Thessaloniki, Greece, also had the distinction of serving as a visiting professor at Balamand Orthodox Institute of Theology in Lebanon, and acting as a representative of the Church of Greece at various official theological dialogues. Although the term “Greek Orthodox” never appeared in his work—and was, on the contrary, strongly criticized—his theory of Romanity offers an apt illustration of Greek Orthodox triumphalism (and anti-westernism). In his doctoral dissertation (*The Ancestral Sin*, Athens, 1955),⁷¹ Romanides condemns Orthodox theology’s stifling confinement to both scholasticism and academism, and suggests as an alternative the healing ethos of Orthodoxy with a thoroughness that proved his theological acumen. Thereafter, with a series of important papers in English published primarily in the *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* between 1956–1965 (for example, on Ignatian ecclesiology, Justin Martyr and the Fourth Gospel, Palamism, the Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia, St Cyril of Alexandria, St John of Damascus, Alexis Khomiakov, but also on ecumenism, religious freedom and dialogue, Islamic universalism, etc.), Romanides proved himself a capable and pioneering theologian. The appearance of Fr Romanides’ *Romanity* in 1975,⁷²

71 English translation: *The Ancestral Sin*, tr. by George Gabriel (Ridgewood, NJ: Zephyr Publications, 1998).

72 J. S. Romanides, *Romiosyne, Romanity, Roumele* (Thessaloniki: Pournaras, 1975) [in Greek]. Romanides’ project is later supplemented by a historical/theological essay, published under the title *Francs, Romans, Feudalism, and Doctrine: An Interplay Between Theology and Society* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1981),

however, marked a dramatic turning point in his work, which drifted from theology into cultural criticism, historiography, and ethnology. Romanides' work pivots not around the infamous dichotomy between Greek (Orthodox) East versus Latin (Roman Catholic) West, but the polarity between a Greek and Latin-speaking Romanity, on the one hand, and a "Frankism" on the other, a contrast that was thenceforth to be 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, while Frankism is portrayed as the scene where endless conspiracies were wrought, aimed at the extermination of Romanity; in fact, Romanides' hermeneutic of conspiracies furnished a much-needed alibi for Hellenism's historical calamities by laying them all at the feet of western machinations.

Furthermore, it seems that beyond the boundaries of Romanity, whether it be Greek or Latin, Romanides sees no possibility for such things as repentance, spiritual struggle, holiness, sanctification, or even salvation; in fact, it sounds as if he restricts all these to a particular cultural domain. Based on his definition of Romanity and the "Roman," we can assume that, for this Greek American theologian, holiness, the vision of God, catholicity, and Orthodoxy in its pure form are intrinsically intertwined with a particular empire, viz. the Roman Empire (wrongly called "Byzantium") and its citizens. Romanity, in its twofold identity as a state and a culture, is therefore portrayed in terms of metaphysical authenticity. The combined lack, in Romanides' corpus, of an eschatological perspective along with a peculiar form of immanentism—an immanentism inherent in his theological schema of "purification, illumination, and theosis"—fits perfectly with his ascription of a "sacred geography" to Romanity, which he presents as a sacred realm inhabited by the hallowed race of the "Romans," the new chosen people who are alone receptive to salvation. As a result, Orthodox peoples who formed no part of this empire, by chance or choice—such as

offering a panoramic overview of his theological-political ideas.

the Slavs, for instance—are either ignored by Romanides or openly denounced as collaborators with the Franks and traitors to Romanity. It is certainly not accidental that Romanides, so far as I am aware, nowhere makes references to Slavic and especially Russian saints or ascetics. Likewise, in his ambitious and grandiose plans for the (political) rebirth of Romanity, he includes—based on culture, language, and national symbols—the present countries of Greece, Albania, Romania, and Cyprus, while also including at the heart of “Rum” or “Roman identity” the Orthodox populations of Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and the descendants of the Latin-speaking Romans of western Europe.

With the exception of Christos Yannaras, who will adopt it only gradually and selectively, this hermeneutic has become popular among notable Greek bishops, theologians and even secular scholars, such as Metropolitan Dr Hierotheos Vlahos of Nafpaktos, the Rev Dr George Metallinos of Athens University, Dr Anastasios Fillipidis, Kostas Zouraris, etc.), as well as Orthodox clerical and lay theologians in Lebanon, Syria, Jerusalem, and converts from North American Orthodoxy, who popularized and further developed Fr Romanides' analyses and ideas. In fact, Romanides has put an undeniable and lasting seal on Orthodox theology, Greek and non-Greek alike, to such an extent, in fact, that some, such as the Rev Dr George Metallinos, have gone so far as to talk about pre- and post-Romanidian theology,⁷³ while others, notably the French Orthodox priest and scholar Patric Ranson, whose work borders on zealotry, have called Romanides “the greatest living Orthodox theologian, whose work constitutes a critical reading of Augustine's corpus in light of patristic theology.”⁷⁴ It is interesting to note that one of Romanides' early theses regarding Romanity and the Franks can be found almost

73 Fr G. Metallinos, *Protopresbyter John S. Romanidis: The “Prophet of Romanity.” A Portrait Painted through Unknown or Little Texts* (Athens: Armos, 2003), passim [in Greek]. Cf. G. D. Dragas, “Introduction,” in: J. Romanides, *An Outline of Orthodox Patristic Dogmatics*, ed. and tr. with an Introduction and Bibliography by Protopresbyter G. D. Dragas (Rollinsford, NH: Orthodox Research Institute, 2004), xiv–xv.

74 P. Ranson, “Avant Propos,” in P. Ranson (dir.), *Saint Augustin* (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1988), 7.

verbatim in a speech by the then Metropolitan of Demetrias, Christodoulos, who later became Archbishop of Athens.⁷⁵

From the preceding brief analysis, it should become clear that Romanides' theology has dominated the Greek theological and broader ecclesiastical scene. It has had a decisive impact on the thought not only of bishops, priests, and especially monks, but of 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 Romanity. As an explanation, of course, it is devoid of even the slightest trace of repentance and self-criticism, since blame is always placed upon others: the heretics, the Franco-Latins, the Pope, westerners, Napoleon and his associates, the Slavs, etc. Small wonder, then, that Romanides' theology has won such a large and widespread following in conservative circles, both in the Church and the Greek far right: for, in truth, he pandered to the repressed frustrations, prejudices, and psychological complexes of the historically defeated modern Greeks, which had the effect of cultivating theological self-sufficiency, cultural introversion, aggressiveness, and an intemperate sense of superiority. What interests us here with regard to Romanides' texts and teaching is the total demonizing of the West, the conflation of Orthodoxy and spirituality with Romanity, and last but by no means least, the reductive geographical identification of all those graced with the vision of God and the uncreated light to the so-called citizens of Romanity! Romanides and his followers, of course, believe that the rediscovery of Romanity offered a theological and historical perspective that transcends all forms of nationalism and racism. In practice, though, exactly the opposite has happened: his theory of Romanity has played an absolutely critical role in the cultivation and development of Greek Orthodox triumphalism and of a static/essentialistic view

75 Compare: J. S. Romanides, "Saints Cyril and Methodius, Greek Representatives of the Latins to the Slavs against the Franks," *Gregorios Palamas* 54 (1971): 273–81 [in Greek], with: Christodoulos Paraskevaïdis (Metropolitan of Demetrias), *The Europe of Spiritual Values and the Role of the Greek Orthodox and Our System of Education. A Speech to Educators (Volos, January 30, 1995)* (Athens, 1995), particularly 8–9.

of identity, as well as in the development of a Hellenocentric, anti-western, anti-modern and, in some ways, racist tendency both inside and outside Greece.

It should be added here that Romanides' political involvement as a candidate for the far right in the 1977 parliamentary elections in Greece, a mere three years after the fall of the Greek junta, is in line with the overall ideas and stereotypes conveyed in his corpus. The moment we recall his unwavering position toward the "other," especially the heterodox "other" (Westerners, Franks, etc.), or even toward the Orthodox "other" (such as Slavs, Russians, etc.), we are forced to admit that his involvement in far right politics could hardly have been an unfortunate "accident," as some of his supporters have claimed in his defense.

Let us conclude this section by saying that Fr Romanides' overall theory of Romanity may well serve as a perfect, although not unique, illustration of two powerful tendencies in Greek Orthodoxy (and in Orthodoxy in general): on the one hand, it embodies the pernicious slide from the proper theological perspective to a cultural and historical one; on the other, it exemplifies the romantic tendency and perennial temptation of many Orthodox to long for pre-modern authoritarian social patterns and structures, which found a voice and inspiration in Romanides' insistence on "Romanity" and his accompanying anti-western rhetoric, which so seriously damaged not only his own theology, but also the presence and work of the Orthodox Church in Greece and the broader postmodern world stage.

d) The "Greek Orthodoxy" of the Fundamentalists and the Ecclesiastical Supporters of Greek Purity

Another, more radical and extreme version of "Greek Orthodoxy," which derives many of its features from Fr Romanides' rhetoric, is represented by the fundamentalists and the zealots, who in recent years have made anti-ecumenism and anti-westernism their rallying cry, along with opposition to globalization and Europe, any form of theological dialogue (which is considered a betrayal of the faith of the forefathers), any measure aimed at the social moderniza-

tion of Greek society (such as the removal of religion from identity cards or the potential, benign separation of Church and State), the further strengthening of human rights and the rights of immigrants, etc. These movements, whose ideology was simply a reproduction of classical Greek religious nationalism, which I outlined above, and the continuation and transformation of a very powerful anti-western sentiment that continues to flourish in ecclesiastical circles and Greek society in general, and the popularization and radicalization of anti-western views that were cultivated by theologians such as Christos Yannaras and some monastic circles on Mount Athos, thought at the beginning that, because of the ethnocentrism and anti-Europeanism of their rhetoric, they had found in the person of the late Archbishop Christodoulos their most fervent and true exponent, their staunchest defender. These fundamentalist movements ultimately broke with Archbishop Christodoulos as a result of his reception of Pope John Paul II in Athens in 2001, as well as what they perceived as his ecumenical overtures (such as his official visit to the World Council of Churches in 2006 and his official visit to the Vatican in December 2007). They now denounce almost everyone as traitors and ecumenists: His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, His Beatitude Archbishop of Athens and all Greece Hieronymus II and many other hierarchs and clerics of the Church of Greece, His Beatitude Archbishop of Tirana and Albania Anastasios, prominent theologians such as the Metropolitan of Pergamon John Zizioulas, Christos Yannaras, and other university professors. The most characteristic representatives of this movement are: Protospresbyter George Metallinos, Professor Emeritus at the University of Athens; Protospresbyter Theodore Zisis, Professor Emeritus at the University of Thessaloniki; the leaders of the mutated religious organizations, the well-known ultra-conservative press *Orthodoxos Typos*, pro-zealot religious blogs and websites, and monasteries on Mount Athos and elsewhere in Greece, etc. These groups' latest idea is the notorious "Confession of Faith," an extreme anti-ecumenical statement that seeks to rule out Orthodoxy's dialogue with other Christian traditions, and which wants to make its presence felt with

a mass collection of signatures. Although, so far, few bishops from the Church of Greece have signed this document, it should be noted that its influence among zealots and monastic circles has been great, and the collection of signatures has now expanded outside Greece, first to Cyprus and then to the populous Greek diaspora in Europe, America, and Australia, as well as to traditionally Orthodox countries such as Russia, Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria, etc.

Although the above movements represent the “far right” of the Greek Church—and even of the Greek political spectrum—it is not uncommon to see people from the extreme left coming to share almost the same ideals and attitudes, i.e., nationalism and anti-westernism, anti-ecumenism, a Hellenocentric understanding of the history and theology of the Orthodox Church, a refusal to look at social modernization, human rights, or economic immigrants’ right to stay in Greece, etc. These people joined Orthodoxy in different ways, but mostly through their participation in the Neo-Orthodox movement of the ’80s,⁷⁶ or after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the so-called “Socialist regimes” and the subsequent geopolitical turbulence, when the frustration provoked by the breakdown of Marxist or anti-imperialist ideology led them to replace the latter with an “Orthodox” ideology. In most cases, these people feel simply culturally “Orthodox” (the call to faith is another matter), and consider the Orthodox Church in Greece the last bastion in the struggle to preserve Greek identity, the most important bulwark against globalization and cultural homogenization. It is interesting to note that all these people and their ideals, better known as the “nationalist left,” have been welcomed in the fundamentalist circles of the Greek Church. They enjoyed generous hospitality during the tenure of the late Archbishop Christodoulos, being given a platform through all kinds of official Church organs (radio, journals and newspapers, meetings, etc.).

76 For an initial assessment of the “Neo-Orthodox Movement” in Greece in the ’80s see, O. Clément, “Orthodox Reflections on ‘Liberation Theology,’” *SVTQ* 29 (1985): 63–72, especially 69–71, and 128 (1984): 331–58 of the French Orthodox journal *Contacts*: “Le mouvement ‘Néo-orthodoxe’ en Grèce.”

Beside the classic topics of Greek religious nationalism—such as the Greeks as the “new chosen people of God,” the Greek character of Orthodoxy, the supremacy of the Greeks over other Orthodox peoples, the suspicion regarding the Slavs, the theological and historical justification for the Greek character of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, etc.—, one issue that has been brought up recently more and more by the fundamentalist groups in Greece, and which has a direct connection to our topic, is that of national homogeneity, which, according to these groups, is threatened by the presence of so many foreign immigrants to Greece, especially Muslims. Indeed, in the midst of broader geopolitical developments, Greece, in the span of one decade, suddenly went from a country that traditionally exported emigrants to a country receiving mass immigration, with all this entails for the question of sameness and otherness. For Greece, of course, these changes represent a tremendous leap, if one considers that only 35 years have passed since the end of the military dictatorship, while the transition from the model of an authoritarian, post-civil war ethnocentric state to a European-style liberal parliamentary democracy is even more recent. Thus, one of the most fundamental challenges currently facing the nascent multicultural Greek society seems to relate primarily to the formation of relationships between citizens and foreigners in such a way that their encounter will not lead to conflict, but to mutual understanding and a constructive interaction between their cultures. A big part of the responsibility for achieving this lies with the Church, which, through its theology and worship, its pastoral and philanthropic work, and, of course, through its catechesis, is called to play an important role in the creation of the conditions for the acceptance and recognition of pluralism and otherness as basic features of social life. However, the Greek government’s plan to grant Greek citizenship to children of immigrants who were born in Greece and to those legal immigrants who meet certain conditions, was seen through an essentialistic reading and interpretation of Greek identity, which sees this identity as being always Helleno-Christian, and

as always representing the indissoluble bond between Orthodoxy and Hellenism, and thus greeted with extreme, phobic reactions from official Church representatives, theologians, intellectuals, and ordinary believers. According to these views, which were not simply aired on television or preached from pulpits by priests and even bishops, but were even published in newspapers and blogs dedicated to ecclesiastical issues: "You are born Greek; you cannot become Greek," "Immigrants will pollute the Greek blood if they get citizenship," "The center of Athens is blackened by the presence of immigrants," "Greeks have Orthodoxy in their genes," etc.! Clearly, such views compromise the Church as well as the Greek government's ability to handle this delicate issue. In addition, or, many times, alongside this extreme, phobic stance, which in no way represents the ethics of the Gospel or the ecclesial ethos, there are many dioceses, parishes, and ecclesiastical organizations that care in various ways for these immigrants, with food, shelter, education, health care, social services, pastoral care for prisoners, legal assistance, social networking, integration into Greek society, etc. Moreover, a small but substantial group of primarily young hierarchs has expressed radically different views on the issue of how to deal with immigrants. Putting the Christological criterion before any ethnic, cultural, or identity-related one, they assert that the Church cannot be inconsistent with the preaching and practice of its founder and Lord and, through its silence or its phobic reactions, take the side of the powerful over and against the weak, the side of the perpetrators over and against the victims. Moreover, these bishops, in addition to the prophetic word of the Church and theology that they invoke, also insist on the fact that Hellenism was always universal and not xenophobic, while from very early on it defined its identity not on the basis of race or blood, but on the basis of education and culture, recalling the famous saying of the Athenian orator Isocrates in the 4th century BC: "They are Greeks because they have shared in our education."

3. Challenges and Outlooks

Today, when the state has been established and the historical situation is completely different than it was 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. The decade of the late Archbishop Christodoulos (1998–2008) and his fervent support for the “national mission of the Church,” and the government initiatives in Greece in 2000 for the modernization of the state, its laws and its administration (in order to harmonize with other European countries, which included removing any reference to religion on identity cards), fired a passionate debate among Greek scholars and theologians about the relationship between Orthodoxy and modern Greek identity, Church and nation, Orthodoxy and Hellenism. Because of all these events, the younger Greek theological generation started to clamor for a return to the authentic ecclesiastical self-consciousness, by pointing out the Church’s Eucharistic constitution and its eschatological dimension, and by recalling its forgotten social commitment. They insist on the fact that there is a real differentiation between ecclesiastical and national interests, between ecclesial and national criteria. As an example of this new attitude of the younger generation of Greek theologians toward the relationship between Church and nation, one can consult the special issue (79, 2001) of the leading Greek theological journal *Synaxis*, with the indicative title: “Church and Nation: Ties and Shackles.” In this issue, many of the younger Greek theologians very strongly criticize the Church’s national rhetoric and its complete nationalization and dependence on the Greek state, and they beseech the Church to speak from now on in terms of civil society and not of the nation.⁷⁷

77 Unfortunately, not one of these articles was included in the three volumes of *Synaxis* articles that were translated and published into English by Alexander Press in Montreal, in 2006.

In my opinion, the most serious dilemma for Greek Orthodoxy today seems to center on the question of whether or not we are ultimately “children of Abraham”—with whatever consequences that has for the issues before us—or “children of Plato.” Whether we as believers, in other words, are connected to Abraham and to the exodus “from your country and your kindred” (Gen 12:1 RSV) that Abraham himself realized and foreshadowed—i.e., to the exodus from one’s “heritage”—or to some Greek continuum, to some supposedly enduring cultural Greekness. Whether we as Christians consent to incarnate again and again in our lives the call that God directed archetypically to Abraham: “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. [...] and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves” (Gen 12:1–3 RSV). Life, according to the example set by Abraham, includes the elements of estrangement and migration, of exodus, journey, and diaspora, and even of voluntary exile. Without these existential experiences, there is no spiritual life or theology. And this is because theology does not take place in a safe environment of intellectual self-sufficiency that is provided by its installation in and attachment to a place, a culture, or a country. The Christian life is one of continual movement and journey. “A Christian is one who moves ‘toward,’ not one who remains ‘within,’” as the French philosopher Régis Debray has observed.⁷⁸ It seems to me that this whole ideology of “Greek Orthodoxy”—as well as the analogous theories and mythologies of Holy Russia, the “Third Rome,” the Slavophile movement, the medieval Christian kingdom of Serbia, the “Serbian people as the servant of God,” Antiochian uniqueness and Arabhood, the Latin character of Romanian Orthodoxy, etc.—do nothing but intensify the sense of geographical conditioning and isolation, our collective cultural narcissism and intellectual self-sufficiency, while also promoting a metaphysical essentialist view of an ethno-cultural identity that is unsusceptible to change within time and history, and which has come to be equated with the

78 R. Debray, *Dieu, un itinéraire* (Paris: Odile Jacob Poches, 2003), 195.

identity of the Church. We Orthodox (primarily in the traditionally “Orthodox” countries) have become so identified with our individual national Churches and local traditions, we have combined Orthodoxy with our individual national narratives (the “Great Idea,” nationalism, etc.) to such a degree, and we have so interwoven the faith with customs, that we have largely lost awareness of catholicity and universality, and we have reduced Orthodoxy to the realm of custom, ancestral heritage, and ethno-cultural identity. It is clear that the vast majority of us Orthodox have exchanged the ecclesiastical sense of “belonging” for an ethno-cultural or societal one, and we have identified the structures and authoritarian models of a patriarchal society with the golden age of the Church and “Christian” culture. This is why, contrary to the trend in other Christian—or, more broadly, religious—traditions, in which there is a push for inculturation, in the case of the Orthodox peoples, with their well-known close ties (even to the point of identification in some cases) between Church and nation, and between Church and local traditions, what seems to be needed most urgently is a deculturation, a re-ordering of priorities vis-à-vis the theological and cultural criteria, a new balance between the local and the universal, between the particular and the catholic.

For the Orthodox Church in Greece, however, the adoption of an ecumenical ecclesiastical discourse, free from the continuous references to the nation and to the outward forms of the Constantinian era, is not just a demand for genuineness, authenticity and faithfulness to the Orthodox Tradition; it is also an absolutely indispensable and an urgent prerequisite, and an inviolate condition for the Church, in order for it to participate in the century in which we live and not to find an easy and safe shelter in the past. Without this element, no true or lasting revelation of God in creation and history can exist, the Church cannot pray, dialogue, or struggle “for the life of the world,” nor can any real discourse take place regarding catechesis or the Eucharistic and the eschatological consciousness of the people of God.

On the basis of what we have just described and analyzed regarding the relationship between Orthodoxy and Hellenism in contem-

porary Greece, it is obvious that we find ourselves far removed from an eschatologically-oriented theology that is anchored in the future of the Kingdom of God, and which highlights the view of man as a dynamic being that is being realized eschatologically—far removed, in other words, from a theology that professes that man's identity is not to have his own identity but to come out from himself, to come out from his land, his family, and his culture, in order to realize eschatologically the constitution of his identity.⁷⁹

79 For an introduction to man's eschatological constitution, see G. Skaltsas, "Man as a Mirror of the Eschaton According to Saint Gregory of Nyssa," *Synaxis*, issue 59, (1996): 45–49 [in Greek]. See also G. Skaltsas, *La dynamique de la transformation eschatologique chez Grégoire de Nysse. Etude sur les rapports de la pensée patristique à la philosophie grecque ancienne*, thèse de doctorat, Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (Paris: Sorbonne, 1998).

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