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Orthodox Political Theology

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Cyril Hovorun

This entry outlines the evolution of various political theologies in the Eastern Christian milieux, from the time of the apostles up until the present. It begins with the definitions of and distinctions between political and public theologies. Then it explores the dialectics of the relationship between the church, the state, and the public square in the Graeco-Roman world, both before and after the latter recognized and merged with Christianity. The article continues exploring the modifications of *symphonia* (a view of the church and state as complementary) under the conditions of secularization and disestablishmentness. It focuses on the earliest instances of the culture wars in Eastern Christianity and on the Russian religious renaissance. This entry differentiates between two major trends, one conservative, the other liberal, in modern Orthodox political theology. The conservative trend dominated in the interwar period, while liberal currents attained prominence after the Second World War. The most recent theories of civilizational exceptionalism, including the idea of the 'Russian world' that underpins the war in Ukraine, will be explored. There are two positions in current Orthodox political theology: one that accepts and appreciates modern liberal democracy and one that criticizes it. This entry concludes with an analysis of modern Orthodox social doctrines.

Keywords: Political Theology, Eastern Orthodox theology, Ecumenism, Modernity, The church and state, Symphonia, Exceptionalism, Anti-Westernism, Public ecclesiology, Liberal democracy, Nationalism, Hierarchy

Table of contents

1 Definitions

1.1 Orthodox political theology acknowledged

1.2 Orthodox political theology as political ecclesiology

1.3 Orthodox ‘political’ and ‘public’ theologies

2 Premodern political theologies

2.1 *Symphonia*/*synallelia*

2.2 Original Christian nonconformism

2.3 An early ‘accommodationist’ political theology

2.4 Neoplatonic influences

2.5 A millennialist political theology

2.6 Eastern Christian theocracy

2.7 Trinitarian and christological underpinnings of political theology

2.8 The church as *res publica*

2.9 ‘Desymphonization’ of Eastern Christianity

2.10 *Symphonias* after the *symphonia*

3 The Orthodox churches and modernity

3.1 The secularization of Eastern Christian milieux

3.2 Enlightenment and anti-Enlightenment in Greece

3.3 ‘Westerners’ and ‘Slavophiles’ in Russia

4 Orthodox political theology before the Second World War

4.1 Liberal political theologies

4.2 Conservative political theologies

4.3 Fascist political theologies

4.4 Nikolaj Velimirović and oscillations of political theologies

5 Post-war political theologies

5.1 Political theologies of the 1960s

5.2 Byzantinism in support of dictatorships

5.3 Christos Yannaras

5.4 Russian political theology in diaspora

5.5 Theology of exceptionalism and its critique

5.6 ‘Russian world’ and its critics

6 Discussing liberal democracy

6.1 Advocates for liberal democracy

6.2 Christian anarchism

6.3 Critique of liberal democracy from the right

7 Social doctrines

7.1 *The Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church*

7.2 *For the Life of the World*

1 Definitions

1.1 Orthodox political theology acknowledged

Orthodox political theology is being increasingly acknowledged as distinct from other theological fields, as a separate theology in its own right. A growing number of Orthodox theologians from other disciplines, especially patristics, are willing to contribute to it. This contrasts with the earlier generations of theologians, who either abstained from it as dangerously political, or rejected it as presumably 'Western' and therefore not genuinely Orthodox. For those generations, an Orthodox political theology would be impossible. However, it has become possible and even preferable to other theological disciplines for the current generation of Orthodox theologians.

One can distinguish two tracks in modern Orthodox political theology. Those following one of them seek to develop a distinctively Orthodox political theology and make it emphatically confessional, often anti-Western. The other track is more ecumenical and accommodating of ideas borrowed from the West. In contrast to the polemical approach of the former track, the latter is more in dialogue with global political theologies.

1.2 Orthodox political theology as political ecclesiology

Both of these tracks in Orthodox political theology converge in their stress on the importance of the church. The ecclesiological dimension is a common feature of various Orthodox political theologies, however different they might be. For example, two modern Greek political theologians with often opposite views, Christos Yannaras and Thanasis Papathanasiou, agree on the centrality of the phenomenon of the church for the Orthodox understanding of political theology. For Yannaras, political theology 'means the particular experience of the Church' (Yannaras 1983: 12). For Papathanasiou, it 'is per se the theology as a relief of the ecclesial experience and Christian faith, which, keeping its metaphysical load complete, meets and wrestles with the realities of this age' (Papathanasiou 2015: 10).

Seen from this perspective, Orthodox political theology can be also defined as political ecclesiology. It is effectively an ecclesiology rendered in political terms. Ecclesiology, in turn, can be seen as a political theology that focuses on the church operating in the public square. Therefore, it is not a surprise that those theologians who have made crucial contributions to modern ecclesiology, have produced, either implicitly or explicitly, distinct political theologies, even if they did not acknowledge their views as a political theology.

Such an intrinsic connection between ecclesiology and political theology is possible because many modern Orthodox theologians see the church itself as a *polis*. This *polis* reflects both the Heavenly Jerusalem and the ancient Greek *politeia*, polity. It is, therefore,

not a coincidence that Jesus' movement came to be identified as *ekklesia* – a central institution of the ancient Greek democracy, that has come to broadly denote any assembly or congregation. The exploration of the convergences and divergences between the institutions and concepts of *ekklesia* and *polis* constitutes a leitmotif in modern Orthodox political theology.

1.3 Orthodox 'political' and 'public' theologies

The original idea of *ekklesia* as *polis*, in the centuries that followed the conflation of the church and the empire, evolved into the modern debate over the church's relationship with the state. This does not mean that the church ignored other aspects of *politeia* beyond statehood, including what we now call society. However, there are scarce references in premodern Eastern theological literature to *politeia* understood broadly. For example, the late Byzantine theologian Gregory Palamas described the church as 'coming together' with the state *and* the *politeia* (*Orationes apologeticae* V 5; Christou 1966), which can be interpreted as an urge for the church to engage with society and not only the state.

Notwithstanding such premodern references, it was only with the modern separation between the church and the state, as well as the clear articulation of society as different from the state, that the church was able to realize the importance of distinct relations with civil political entities. The relationship of *ekklesia* with *polis* turned from two- to three-dimensional. Civil society added an important dimension to it.

This helps to differentiate between two aspects of modern political theology. Sometimes, they are distinguished as two disciplines: 'political' and 'public' theologies (Stackhouse 2004). The former focuses on the church's relations with the state, while the latter on the church's relations with society. The differentiation between the two disciplines is helpful when applied to Orthodox theology. For most of their history, the Orthodox churches lived in symbiosis with the state, usually empires. Such symbiosis has shaped their specific understanding of politics as related to the state only. This specific historical context is what has given rise to Orthodox political theology as a field distinct from other types of Christian political theology.

Nevertheless, 'modernity', which has affected Eastern Christianity in many ways, forced it to discover and acknowledge society. The experience of politics as differentiated from the state, instigated the rapid development of the Orthodox public theology. Public theology explores issues relating to secularity, social justice, and democracy, among other things. In the Orthodox context, public theology is often perceived and rendered as public ecclesiology. In sum, while political theology focuses on the phenomenon of the state and how the church relates to it, public ecclesiology explores the church in relationship with the institutes of civil society, as well as the issues that stem from the processes of modernization and secularization.

2 Premodern political theologies

2.1 *Symphonia*/*synallelia*

All variants of Eastern Christian political theology before the emergence of modernity were shaped strictly by the relationship of the church with the Roman Empire, including its later Eastern form known as Byzantium. This relationship was dialectical and dramatically reshaped both the church and the empire. Through what has been called *symphonia* or *synallelia*, they reached almost complete convergence. In this point, Byzantine Christianity radically diverged from the early Christian ethos of nonconformism.

2.2 Original Christian nonconformism

Christianity emerged in the Graeco-Roman civilizational setting as a Jewish sect. Together with mainstream Judaism, it constituted an oppressed monotheistic minority. Both refused to comply with the dominant Roman political religion, which required religious loyalty to the imperial authority. Such loyalty was supposed to be demonstrated through participation in public cult. Although Jews were exempted from such participation, Christians, as they increasingly differentiated themselves from Jews and counted more converts from polytheism, were expected to practice Roman political religion, even while inwardly retaining their belief in Christ. This caused tensions in the relationship between the Christian church and the Roman state. Sometimes these tensions became violent and they have become known as anti-Christian persecutions.

Tensions between the Roman political religion and the Christians refusing to comply with its requirements propelled the earliest forms of the Christian political theology. This theology featured nonconformism. It regarded as fundamental dicta of Jesus Christ such as ‘[m]y kingdom is not of this world’ (John 18:36). At the same time, it violated the basic principle of the Roman political religion, according to which the state authorities determine public cult – an early form of the principle *cuius regio*, *eius religio* (‘whose region, his religion’). In the spirit of nonconformism, early Christians often practised and professed their religion as different or even incompatible with politics, in contrast to the mainstream Graeco-Roman religion, which hardly distinguished between religion and politics. Against the inherently coercive character of the Roman political religion, Christians often emphasized free choice as the foundation of true religion. Thus, freedom of consciousness, in its early form, was accepted and promoted by some Christian theologians, particularly apologists, as a feature of the distinctively Christian political theology.

Sometimes, early Christian nonconformism reached extremes. Its adherents looked at religion and politics through utterly dualistic lenses, as divided by existential chasm. For them, both politics itself and the Roman Empire, as the only incarnation of politics that

they knew, were substantially evil. The Roman state was seen as the kingdom opposite to the kingdom of God promised by Christ. Correspondingly, some emperors, especially those who cruelly mistreated Christians, were seen as antichrists. Nero is the most notable example of this.

2.3 An early 'accommodationist' political theology

In contrast to such a dualistic understanding of Roman statehood held by some radical circles within the church and championed by figures such as Hippolytus of Rome, a more moderate attitude to politics emerged. It inspired a political theology, which was more comprehending and accommodating of the Roman Empire and its political culture. Such a moderate approach was expressed, for example, in the *Epistle to Diognetus* by an unknown author written in the second century. In the spirit of reconciliation with the Graeco-Roman world, the epistle acknowledged that Christians 'inhabit both Greek and barbarian cities, according to the lot assigned to each. And they show forth the character of their own citizenship in a marvelous and admittedly paradoxical way by following local customs' (*Ad Diognetum* 5; Ehrman 2003).

An 'accommodationist' faction was growing within the early Christian church. Origen emerged as a champion of this faction. Although his father Leonides was killed by the Romans for confessing Christ and he himself suffered at Roman hands under the Emperor Decius, Origen managed to overcome the feeling of alienation and hostility to the empire. He also urged his fellow Christians to appreciate some imperial facilities, such as communication networks and roads. He argued that God's providence allowed the apostles to use Roman facilities to disseminate Christianity:

> God was preparing the nations for his [Jesus'] teaching, that they might be under one Roman emperor, so that the unfriendly attitude of the nations to one another, caused by the existence of a large number of kingdoms, might not make it more difficult for Jesus' apostles to do what he commanded them when he said, 'Go and teach all nations' (Matt 28:19). (*Contra Celsum* II 30; Chadwick 2009)

The network of Roman roads continued playing a crucial role in the development of the church during Origen's time and after him. Thus, it allowed Christian communities to send their representatives to gatherings that became known as *synodoi*. Commonly translated as 'council', the word *synodos* (plural: *synodoi*) derives from *hodos* ('road'). From this perspective, what has become known as conciliarity or synodality in the church, implies an appreciation of the Graeco-Roman world and its facilities.

Such an appreciation reached its peak and became an officially endorsed standard in the writings of the Palestinian bishop Eusebius. He suggested an historiosophy, which

encapsulated early Christian political theologies and adapted them to the contemporary developments. Eusebius' writings flourished in the period of transition when the empire gradually abandoned polytheism, together with political theologies based on it, and embraced monotheism in its Christian form. Eusebius constructed a political theology based on the idea of one God. This theology became mainstream in the eastern part of the Roman Empire and in the universal Christian church for a millennium. Eusebius, therefore, can be considered a father of Orthodox political theology. In the East, his role was equivalent to the one played by Augustine in the West.

2.4 Neoplatonic influences

Similarly to Augustine, Eusebius, in his theological and political views, was influenced by Neoplatonism – a school of thought that in the second century replaced Stoicism as the dominant philosophy. Although Neoplatonism despised both politics and Christianity, indirectly it made a significant contribution to the formation of Christian political theologies. After Neoplatonism was appropriated by Christian theology, its political influence increased. More than a century after Eusebius, a Christian Neoplatonist writing under the pseudonym of Dionysius the Areopagite, became a proponent of probably the most powerful political idea borrowed by Christians from Neoplatonism – that of hierarchy. Neoplatonists, such as Proclus, had developed this idea to structure various emanations from the One. They sorted out various manifestations of the divine, including the gods of Graeco-Roman polytheism, hierarchically. Following in his steps, Pseudo-Dionysius applied this concept to angels and church structures. He imagined both invisible, heavenly worlds and visible, earthly worlds as pyramids. Everything good was distributed in these pyramids from top to bottom. God reigned at the top in both the invisible hierarchy and the visible, ecclesial hierarchy; all levels of the pyramids received his deifying grace from above and passed it further down. In Pseudo-Dionysius's own words, '[h]ierarchy is a sacred order, a state of understanding and an activity approximating as closely as possible to the divine. And it is uplifted to the imitation of God in proportion to the enlightenments divinely given to it' (*De coelesti hierarchia* III 1; Lulbheld 1987).

Although completely apolitical himself, Pseudo-Dionysius inspired Christian political theologians to apply the Neoplatonic idea of hierarchy to the political realm. The sixth-century anonymous *Dialogue on Political Science* summarized this as follows: 'From the imperial office itself would pour, as it were, political illumination on the first state offices beneath it, and through their holding sway […], over the second, third and all the other tiers [of offices]' (*Dialogue on Political Science* V 60; Bell 2009: 158).

In the Roman Empire, in contrast to the Roman Republic, all major political appointments were ordered from above and did not stem from below, i.e. through elections. Early Christians, before the conversion of the empire, had favoured promotions to their

leadership from below. After the conversion, the principle of hierarchy, introduced through the Christianized Neoplatonism, preserved the imperial idea and practice of instilling power from above. It also synchronized the procedures of promotion to leadership in the church with the imperial practices. Owing to the Neoplatonic concept of hierarchy, political, social, and ecclesial stratification within Byzantium became theologically justified.

Imperial political theologians also assumed another Neoplatonic idea – that the visible world mirrors the invisible one by participating in the latter. Neoplatonists applied this idea to laws. They dwelled on Plato, who believed that laws are gifts from gods. He had illustrated this by a story of the semi-divine lawgiver from Crete Minos, who learned the laws from Zeus himself (*Leges* 624a; *Minos* 319b–320b). The Neoplatonists added a twist to this story: Minos not just borrowed laws from gods but created them in the image (*eidōla*) of what he saw when he was contemplating Zeus (see Plotinus, *Rep* 500c5, 500e3–501b7).

Christian political theologians who were inspired by Neoplatonism, such as Eusebius of Caesarea and Synesius of Cyrene, applied the idea of participation to the Roman Empire. In their interpretation, after its conversion to Christianity, this empire began reflecting the kingdom of the one God, while emperors stood as the images of God himself. This idea was summarized by the sixth-century poet Flavius Cresconius Corippus: 'Christ granted the Lords of the earth to have power over all things. He is omnipotent; and he [the emperor] is the likeness of the Omnipotent' (Corippus 2.427–8; Bell 2009: 31). Such imagery was designed to appease Christian emperors, and they appreciated it – because it boosted their legitimacy. Before Constantine, emperors' legitimacy rested on their divine status. After Constantine, they retained divine status, but on different premises. Now they were regarded not as gods, but as the images of the one God. This idea constituted the core of the post-Constantinian political theology.

2.5 A millennialist political theology

Eusebius and his confederates adopted another pre-Constantinian idea and made it fit post-Constantinian political theology. This was the promise from the book of Revelation (20:4) that Christ would reign one thousand years before the end of the world. Christian political theology since Constantine extrapolated this vision to *Pax Romana*, with Eusebius being among the first who drew parallels between biblical eschatology and the Roman Empire. Thus, he applied Daniel's prophecy about 'the people of the saints of the Most High' who shall rule 'an everlasting kingdom' (Dan 7:27) to Constantine's sons: 'By the appointment of the Caesars [Constantine's sons whom he made his co-rulers], He [God] fulfils the predictions of the divine prophets, which ages and ages ago proclaimed that "the saints of the Most High shall take up the kingdom"' (*Tricennial Oration* 3.1–3.2; Drake 1976: 121).

In this vein, the new Christian political theology propagated the transformation of the Roman Empire from the kingdom of the Antichrist to the millennial kingdom of Christ. Christ did not rule this kingdom directly, but through the mediation of emperors. Seen from this perspective, the Roman Empire, especially its eastern part which we now call Byzantium, was a millennialist state. It was also an incarnation of *Platonopolis* – an ideal society envisaged by Neoplatonists as built around religious and philosophical principles (see O'Meara 2003).

2.6 Eastern Christian theocracy

One could argue that the Eastern Roman Empire was not only millennialist but also theocratic (Runciman 2003). However, it was not ruled by priests, as in typical theocracies, but by emperors who closely collaborated with priests. Additionally, sometimes emperors regarded themselves as priests (see Dagron 2003). They were seen as mediators between God and the peoples of the empire. As the author of the *Dialogue on Political Science* pointed out, 'The truly imperial man is moved in sympathy with heaven and the universe' (*Dialogue on Political Science* 5.200; Bell 2009: 185).

The theocratic character of Byzantium was reflected in the system of ascending to and descending from power. It was not regulated by laws, but conditioned by peoples' reception of the potential or actual ruler. Such a reception depended on natural disasters, military victories and defeats, and other factors, often out of the control of the ruler who sought to attain or maintain their power. People believed that if the empire failed in something, this was a sign from God that the emperor was not fulfilling his duty as a mediator with the divine. Such emperors were often toppled.

As a result of the millennialist and theocratic character of the christianized Roman Empire, its theological and political models converged up to the point of assimilation. Socio-political stratifications and especially the accumulation of power by Christian emperors not only were influenced by theology, but also in turn influenced theology itself. This can be seen particularly in the case of the theological movement that its opponents called 'Arianism.' It was a case of subordinalism, which understands the Trinity as a hierarchy of persons. In this hierarchy, the Father is believed to be superior to the Son and the Holy Spirit. Such hierarchical understandings of God were as old as Christian theology itself. In the fourth century, they became central to the theology of the Alexandrian presbyter, Arius. Discussed at the Council of Nicaea in 325, a hierarchical model of the Trinity was rejected in favour of a more egalitarian vision, which saw all divine persons being completely equal.

2.7 Trinitarian and christological underpinnings of political theology

The ‘Arian’ controversy underpinned two different political theologies (see Peterson 1935). One was based on the idea of hierarchy: in both divine and political spheres. It stipulated the superiority of the Father in God, and of the emperor in the empire. Most emperors who ruled during the fourth century, endorsed this doctrine. They linked political monarchy with the idea of one God and the Father on the top of the Trinity. Eusebius, in his panegyric to Constantine, symptomatically presented him as someone who:

> frames his earthly government according to the pattern of that Divine original, feeling strength in its conformity to the monarchy of God. […] And surely monarchy far transcends every other constitution and form of government: for that democratic equality of power, which is its opposite, may rather be described as anarchy and disorder. Hence there is one God. (*De laudibus Constantini* 3.5–3.6; Robertson 2007: 39)

Those who opposed theological subordinalism, such as notably Athanasius of Alexandria and the Cappadocians, implied a different sort of political theology. It presupposed the sharing of political power. Gregory of Nazianzus, for example, implicitly contested Eusebius’ monarchical theological vision: ‘We most respect monarchy. However, this is not a monarchy, which is defined by one person, [. . .] but the [monarchy], which is set together (συνίστησι)’ (*Oratio* 29.2).

Several centuries later, the patriarch of Constantinople, Photius, tried to implement a vision, according to which political monarchy should not be absolute, but balanced by the church (see Aerts, Bochove, and Harder 2001). According to Photius’ vision and the political theology he represented, the church is supposed to be an equal partner for the state. For this reason, the patriarch was called ‘a living and animate image of Christ’ (*Eisagoge* III 1; Geffert and Stavrou 2016: 117) – in the same way as earlier emperors had been called. Photius cautiously opposed imperial absolutism. In his *Bibliotheca*, he highlighted political theologies concurrent with his own views. One of them was the above-mentioned *Dialogue on Political Science*. According to Photius’ summary of this dialogue, a constitution suggested by its author ‘must be constructed out of the three forms: the imperial, the aristocratic, and the democratic’ (see Bell 2009: 10). It is not impossible that Photius himself was in favour of such a political model.

2.8 The church as *res publica*

It is plausible that Photius and his confederates saw the role of the church as similar to the republican institutions in the pre-Christian era. The church, in fact, became a new republican institution in the christianized Roman Empire. Sometimes, it collaborated with the old ones, such as the senate, and sometimes competed with them. The church, on the

one hand, enhanced the legitimacy of the emperors. On the other, it counterbalanced their absolutism and preserved some republican features in the empire.

The republicanist system of power-sharing between the state and the church has been called *symphonia*. This term implies harmony in relations between the church and state. The synonymous term *synallelia* stresses a complete synergy and mutual penetration between the symphonic partners. *Novella* 6 from Emperor Justinian's *Corpus iuris civilis* explained this harmony as 'the greatest gifts that God, in his celestial benevolence, has bestowed on mankind'. The same tract contains several allusions to the Neoplatonic concepts. Thus, in the spirit of Plotinus, the document presents both the church and the state as emanating 'from one and the same source'. In the Proclean spirit, the church secures 'a balanced harmony to ensure whatever may be of value to the human race' (Miller and Sarris 2018: 97).

This was an idealized vision that compared the coexistence of the church and the state with soul and body in a human being. It presupposed a complete conflation of both political and religious elements – in a way that resembled pre-Christian times. There was no space left for religious nonconformism. In the centuries that followed, the state and the church would come to be unimaginable without each other. For example, in the fourteenth century, the patriarch of Constantinople Anthony IV summarized such symphonic ideal in his letter to the Grand Duke of Moscow Basil I: 'It is not possible for Christians to have a church and not to have an Emperor' (in Wolff 1959: 299).

When Anthony was penning these lines, the Byzantine state and church had been reduced to small fractions of what they used to be in the times of Justinian, after large swathes of territory were taken over by the Islamic empires. This was an irony, because contemporary Islam embraced the Justinian vision of *symphonia*, with religion being inseparable from politics. The Muslim '*symphonia*' came to destroy the Byzantine symphonic ideal.

2.9 'Desymphonization' of Eastern Christianity

The process of 'desymphonization' of Eastern Christianity began soon after the process of its 'symphonization' had become advanced. It started on the eastern edge of the Graeco-Roman world, with Persian incursions across its borders. Having been an arch-rival of this world since at least the battle of Thermopylae, Persia often utilized Christianity in this rivalry. Sometimes, the Sassanid shahs persecuted the church to punish the christianized Roman Empire. Other times Persia sought to shake the integrity of its rival by welcoming groups which had been expelled from Byzantium as heretical: first following the Council of Ephesus (431) and later, in the aftermath of the Council of Chalcedon (451). Such instrumentalization of religion for political purposes cemented the first Great Schism in global Christianity, following the christological disputes. These disputes, thus, while purely theological, had unexpected political consequences.

One of these consequences was the facilitation of the advance of Islam, as many Christian groups in the imperial borderlands, who disagreed with the christological doctrines promoted by the empire, preferred to collaborate with the invaders rather than to fight for the cause of a Christian state. Soon, almost the entire Christian East found itself under the rule of the Islamic empires: Arab, Mongolian, and Turkic. This created a situation in which most Orthodox churches were disestablished. However, such a situation was not properly reflected in theology. No specific political theology was born out of it.

A distinct political theology was born not out of collapse of *symphonias*, but out of their abuses. Such were state's interventions in the matters of doctrine. Doctrine was a point of significant contention in relations between the church and the empire. The latter sometimes overstepped their purview in this respect. The most obvious cases of such conflict were two doctrines, which were eventually condemned by the church: monothelitism in the seventh century, and iconoclasm in the eighth and ninth centuries.

Those theologians who opposed these doctrines also exercised critique to the abuses of *symphonia*. Maximus the Confessor, for example, was a protagonist of resistance to the imperial monothelitism. He was eventually tried for political disloyalty. During his trials, he had a chance to express his political theology. Thus, when asked by a prosecutor whether every Christian emperor is also a priest, he answered no (in Allen and Neil 2002: 57). Maximus' was a political theology of moderate nonconformism. It envisaged not a separation between the church and the state, but a clear demarcation line, which should not be crossed by either party.

Even clearer in his critique of *symphonia* and its abuses was John of Damascus – the most prominent polemicist against iconoclasm. Because he lived on the territories controlled by the Umayyad caliphs, he was able to be more outspoken about abuses of Byzantine emperors against the church. He stated:

> Kings have no right to make laws for the church. […] Kings have responsibility for political welfare, pastors and teachers for the state of the church. And this [iconoclasm], brothers, is a raid. […] Is not this an act of brigands? (*Orationes de imaginibus tres* II 12; Louth 2003)

2.10 *Symphonias* after the *symphonia*

Even after the collapse of the Christian empires and the end of formal symphonic relations with the state, the Orthodox churches attempted to establish sorts of *symphonia* with the states that did not want such relations. They offered to the states various services. In the Persian Empire, the Church of the East kept the Christian population under its control away from the Roman influence. For this reason, it enhanced its theological differences from the Byzantine Orthodoxy. In the Ottoman Empire, the church hierarchs functioned as

‘tax farmers’ (*mültezim*) (see Papademetriou 2015: 11). In the Soviet Union, the Russian Orthodox Church allowed the atheist regime to use the church as a form of soft power in propelling Soviet propaganda and agenda abroad.

All these were *symphonias* after the Byzantine *symphonia*. Such simulacra of *symphonia* became a feature of the Orthodox churches in the modern era. They have been captured in the title of the famous book by a Romanian Byzantinologist Nicolae Iorga, *Byzance après Byzance* (*Byzantium after Byzantium*; Iorga 1935). Iorga had a chance to implement his symphonic vision of ‘Byzantium after Byzantium’ as Romania’s prime minister in 1931–1932, under King Carol II. Carol II experimented with the restoration of *symphonia* by appointing the Romanian Patriarch Miron Cristea as another prime minister. However, all attempts at the restoration of the Byzantine-like *symphonia* in the modern era have failed. The latest failure has been the Russian war in Ukraine, which was underpinned by the special relations between the Kremlin and the Moscow Patriarchate.

3 The Orthodox churches and modernity

3.1 The secularization of Eastern Christian milieux

With the emergence of modernity, the Taylorian immanent frame of secularity (see Taylor 2007) eventually reached the Orthodox lands. These lands were incorporated mostly to the Russian and Ottoman empires, where the waves of modernization from the West arrived after some delay. Russia’s programme of modernization, formulated in pursuit of European modernity, was initiated by Czar Peter I Romanov in the early eighteenth century, while the Ottoman *Tanzimat* reforms (see Özyasar 2019) were geared up in the mid-nineteenth century. The Orthodox churches during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries reacted in different ways to the modernization and secularization that were both imported from the West and imposed by their governments. These reactions can be seen as the early forms of the modern Orthodox political theology.

Although there were sporadic exchanges between some of the main figures of the European Enlightenment and Russian intellectuals of the same period, such as the famous correspondence between Voltaire and Czarina Ekaterina II, these exchanges did not trigger any significant reactions from within the Russian church. In contrast to Russia, Greece became the playground where new Western ideas were tested, contextualized, and caused fruitful intellectual reactions from Orthodox theologians.

3.2 Enlightenment and anti-Enlightenment in Greece

Some Greek Orthodox clergymen embraced the European Enlightenment. For example, an Athonite monk Benjamin from Lesbos (d. 1824; see Argyropoulou 2003) published several treatises, in which he elaborated on some Western ideas, such as human rights. In his *Elements of Ethics*, Benjamin described six rights pertinent to human nature: (1) to

live; (2) to sustain one's existence with food, clothes etc.; (3) to have and use property; (4) to improve one's condition, including through education; (5) to exercise freedom of thinking and acting; (6) and finally, to preserve the freedom given to all human beings by birth (Benjamin of Lesbios 1994: 163). This text contains one of the earliest Orthodox references to the modern concept of human rights. Benjamin used this concept to justify the struggle of the Greeks for their political independence from the Ottoman Empire. This struggle, which led to the revolution in 1821 and the subsequent creation of the Greek state, created a new momentum for Greek political theology. This theology envisaged not only contemplation and pursuing inner peace, but also social awareness and public action motived by Christian beliefs.

Not all Orthodox theologians shared Benjamin's enthusiasm about human rights and liberty. A group of theologians emerged that criticized the ideas of the Enlightenment and their Western pedigree. They tended to interpret freedom as an esoteric category, which is to be exercised regardless of whether a person is free or enslaved. Their criticism was supported by ecclesial authorities, particularly the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which sided with the Ottoman Empire in containing the Greek Revolution. The protagonist of this group was a monk from the Aegean Isle of Paros, named Athanasios (d. 1813). He criticized Western ideas of liberty and free thinking, which he called 'φιλοζοφία' (*philosophia*). He substituted in the word 'φιλοσοφία', philosophy, σ with ζ to demonstrate how the European influence turned the traditional Greek 'love for wisdom' to 'love for darkness' (Athanasios Parios 1802). Athanasios addressed the Western influence among the Orthodox population of the Ottoman Empire in a treatise, which he titled *On the true philosophy, or the rejection of the unreasonable zeal of the philosophers coming from Europe, as well as on the anti-philosophy [afilosofia] of those who unwisely offer it to our nation*. He, thus, envisaged two sources of 'filozofia'; firstly, the West; and secondly those Greeks who studied in the West, and brought the ideas they encountered there back home with them.

Athanasios sought primarily to argue against thinkers such as Adamantios Koraïs (d. 1833), who was the leader of the intellectual group of Greek enthusiasts of the Enlightenment. Koraïs is mostly known as a political thinker advocating for the idea of *Metakinosis*, that is the reimporting of classical civilization from Europe back to Greece. At the same time, he was also a theologian, who penned several less known theological treatises. Thus, he can be seen as a major founding figure in the modern Orthodox political theology.

Therefore, in Greece, Orthodox political theology clearly evolved into two distinct tracks, one of them rejecting any Western influences, the other one seeking to accommodate them in the Eastern Christian environment. The antagonism between these two attitudes resembles similar early Christian disputes regarding the pagan Graeco-Roman legacy. It

has become a leitmotif in the ongoing culture wars within modern Orthodoxy. From its very beginning, modern Orthodox theology was dichotomized over attitudes to the West and continues to be so.

3.3 ‘Westerners’ and ‘Slavophiles’ in Russia

A couple of decades after the debates between Athanasios Parios and Adamantios Koraïs, similar dichotomization marked political theology in Russia. The disputes between the ‘Westerners’ and ‘Slavophiles’ could be seen as a culture war of sorts. The former were Russian intellectuals who considered Russia to be a part of the European civilization. However, in contrast to the Greek ‘Westerners’, these Russian ‘Westerners’ were more secular thinkers, without significant theological interests. Still, in their political thinking, they sometimes made references to religion.

This describes well a towering figure of Russian ‘Westernism’, Pyotr Chaadayev (d. 1856). He envisaged the role of the Church as ‘to give the world a Christian civilization’ (Chaadayev 1991: 242). However, he saw the West as embodying this civilization to a greater extent than Russia did. His opponents, who became known as the ‘Slavophiles’, held the opposite viewpoint: the West was departing from God, while Russia was responsible for implementing the Christian principles in social and political life in the fullest and most orthodox way. This thesis became one of the pillars of the Slavophile political theology. Notable thinkers in this tradition include Alexey Khomiakov, Ivan Kireevsky, Konstantin Aksakov, Ivan Aksakov, Yuri Samarin, Konstantin Leontiev, and Fyodor Dostoyevsky. The latter explained the Russian civilizational exceptionalism envisaged by the Slavophiles, in his *A Writer’s Diary*:

> To become a true Russian will mean exactly bringing the final reconciliation to the European contradictions; indicating a way out for the European anguish through his Russian soul, which is all-human and all-reconciling; embracing in it with brotherly love all our brothers; and in the end, perhaps, uttering the final word of the great total harmony, of the brotherly final concord of all tribes in accordance with the Gospel’s law of Christ! (Dostoyevsky 2000: 458)

An important part of the Slavophile political agenda was the programme of social changes. This programme was not favoured by the Czarist government of that time, even though it was drafted on the basis of the Orthodox principles. The most famous Slavophile concept, sobornost, which can be rendered as ‘conciliarity’, was to a significant extent social. Developed in the framework of ecclesiology, it implied reforming Russian society as based on communitarianism. Even though the Slavophiles were supporters of the Russian monarchy, their political and social agenda implied some republicanism.

While the Slavophiles tried to theologically define the historical mission of the Russian civilization, other Orthodox peoples in this period built independent nations. The idea of nationhood, borrowed from the secular nomenclature of the Enlightenment, became appropriated by most Orthodox churches and their theologians in the nineteenth century, regardless of their attitude to the Enlightenment. Since then, national ideology has become crucial in the development of the Orthodox political theology. The category of nation turned to the pillar of the latter. Another pillar of modern Orthodox political theology is the category of the West. This theology was both inspired by, and contributed towards the construction of, the categories of nation and the West (see Demacopoulos and Papanikolaou 2013).

4 Orthodox political theology before the Second World War

4.1 Liberal political theologies

A new phase in the evolution of the Orthodox political theology was initiated by Vladimir Solovyov (d. 1900). While building on the Slavophile ideas, he tried to overcome their limitations. His political theology features a universalism that goes beyond the Orthodox particularisms embodied in the concepts of nation, geographical location, or even confession – it is truly ecumenical. The church's mission, for Solovyov, is to 'serve as the foundation of the positive unity of all peoples' (Solovyov 1948: 58). In addition to the traditional topics of the nineteenth century's Orthodox political theology, such as nationhood and the East-West divide, Solovyov focused on the category of freedom and its implications in socio-political life. He emphasized two aspects of Christian freedom: 'in relation to the external power of the State' and 'the independence of individuals in matters of religion' (Solovyov 1948: 59).

Nikolay Berdyaev (d. 1948) made freedom the main reference point of his political theology. For him, it was the most basic category in any religious, social, and political life. He called it Ungrund, meaning 'the primal pre-existential freedom' (Berdyaev 1939: 34). Religion makes freedom an unreducible metaphysical factor, probably the most important one in transforming societies. Berdyaev counterposed metaphysical/theological categories against the ideological ones. He urged Christians to avoid 'idolizing' ideological structures, whether conservative or liberal. He suggested an 'apophatic negative sociology', which implies avoiding 'authoritarianism, monarchy, nationalism, family property' on the one hand, and 'revolutionary democratic socialist sanctities', on the other (Berdyaev 1944: 18).

Fr Sergiy Bulgakov (d. 1944) advanced further the freedom-based Orthodox political theology. He applied the category of freedom to an individual, a social class, and the church. He advocated for the freedom of the church from both the state and the corporate interests of the clerical class within it. He believed that Christian politics should seek 'the

emancipation of all humanity, universal freedom, for which there can be no distinction among nationalities, religions, or denominations' (Bulgakov 1990: 149). He insisted that the poor and labour classes in Russia should receive more freedom and be treated more justly, arguing that it is Christian duty to be on the side of the oppressed and against exploitation. As a former Marxist and professor of political economy, who later converted to 'Christian socialism' and eventually was ordained a priest, Bulgakov had a solid theoretical and practical background to develop a mature political theology, which continues to our days and inspires such thinkers as Aristotle Papanikolaou (see Papanikolaou 2012).

Bulgakov served as a secretary of the council of the Russian Orthodox Church convened in Moscow from August 1917 until September 1918. This council became possible following the Russian Revolution in February 1917, which transformed the imperial monarchy into a republic. Some republican values underpinned the programme of aggiornamento (updating) adopted by the council. Such a programme was needed because the empire, which traditionally backed the church, had collapsed. The church was now on its own and had to learn to navigate in the new socio-political situation. In this situation, the Russian church, at its council, postulated its 'rights of self-definition and self-control in the matters of church legislation, management and judgement' (article 2 from the Russian Orthodox Church Council's definition on 2 December 1917, in *Sobraniye Opredeleniy i Postanovleniy* [*Collection of Definitions and Resolutions*], 1918). The council confirmed that the church does not have a preference for a particular type of political regime, whether monarchy or republic. It also acknowledged the needs of the society as a reality distinct from the state.

In the meantime, the Ottoman Empire, which had been the archrivalry of the Russian Empire under the Romanov dynasty, also collapsed. The Patriarchate of Constantinople, like the Russian church, enjoyed its own period of liberation. It embarked on a programme of emancipation similar to the one promulgated by the Russian Orthodox Church council. This programme was conceived and executed by figures such as Patriarch Meletios Metaxakis (d. 1935). There were also synodal documents that supported Constantinople's own aggiornamento, such as the Encyclical letter of the Church of Constantinople addressing all churches and published in 1920 (The Ecumenical Patriarchate 1959). It proposed a bold programme of ecumenical engagement.

In sum, the Orthodox political theology in this period was shaped by the collapse of the empires, the liberation of the churches from state control, and the discovery of society as a partner instead of the state. The proponents of such theology refocused their attention from the issues pertinent to the church-state relations to the broader topics of freedom, human rights, pluralism, and secularism. This sort of political theology can be identified as 'of the 1920s'. This does not mean that it was confined to this decade, but it reflected its spirit of emancipation.

4.2 Conservative political theologies

There was a reaction to this emancipatory spirit of the 1920s that culminated during the next decade. A corresponding Orthodox political theology embodied this reaction and can be identified as ‘the theology of the 1930s’. This reactionary theology had more moderate and more radical variants. The former has become known as ‘neo-patristic synthesis’, propounded by Fr Georges Florovsky (d. 1979). His political theology was reactionary to a more liberal theology of Fr Sergiy Bulgakov and his confederates. In contrast to the latter, Florovsky tilted from the dialogue with modernity to the dialogue with an imagined past.

Although demonstratively apolitical, Florovsky’s ‘neo-patristic synthesis’ in a paradoxical way was underpinned by a distinct political theology. This synthesis became a theological camouflage for the moderate anti-Western and conservative ideology. Appeals to the authority of the church fathers became a banner of the subtle political theology tilting towards ideological conservatism. This theology suggested a new Orthodox identity for the millions of emigrants fleeing to the West after the collapse of the Ottoman, Russian, and Austro-Hungarian empires, where most of the Orthodox population had been concentrated. In addition to a new religious identity, this theological attempt led to forming a new political identity, which was conservative, traditionalist, and anti-Western. This identity was adopted by many Orthodox Christians in the post-imperial twentieth century.

Florovsky’s political theology was underpinned by the Eurasian ideology, or Eurasianism (even though he denounced it at the later stage). This ideology was inaugurated in the collection of essays published in 1921, with the characteristic title *Exodus to the East* (in Russian, *Исход к Востоку*; Savitski 1921). Prominent Russian conservative thinkers in emigration contributed to it, including Florovsky. Eurasianism propagated the idea that Russia belonged neither solely in Europe nor in Asia, hence it stood alone as a unique geopolitical entity. Eurasianists resonated with the Slavophile idea of the Russian civilizational exceptionalism, an idea which was decidedly anti-Western and often anti-liberal. A prominent Eurasianist who also had significant theological interests, Ivan Il’in (d. 1954), criticized both republicanism and traditional czarist monarchy. He suggested a third way for Russia, in the form of enlightened dictatorship. He stressed that such dictatorship should be ‘national, patriotic, but not at all totalitarian; [it should be] instead authoritarian, i.e., educating and revitalizing’ (Il’in 2008: 74). Il’in’s fascination about ‘authoritarianism’ made him endorse, even if cautiously, fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany. In his article ‘On Fascism’, while recognizing the shortcomings of the fascist ideology, Il’in stated that this ideology ‘was correct, because it stemmed from the healthy national-patriotic feeling. No people can sustain its existence or create its culture without it’ (Il’in 2008: 109).

4.3 Fascist political theologies

Fascist ideology became popular among a significant number of Orthodox theologians during the 1930s. Some of these theologians developed a distinct political theology with fascism as a basis. The resulting theology echoed similar ideas circulating in other confessional environments of that time, including the *Politische Theologie* of Carl Schmitt (1922).

Particularly prolific was the pro-fascist political theology developed in interwar Romania. In contrast to Italy, where fascism instrumentalized the church while keeping a considerable distance from it, the Romanian fascist regime wholeheartedly embraced the church, with decided reciprocity. A *symphonia* between the fascist state and the Orthodox church in Romania became embodied in the one-party dictatorial 'National Legionary State' (Statul Na#ional Legionar). In line with Il'in, his Romanian contemporary professor of theology Nichifor Crainic (d. 1972), criticized republicanism and endorsed one-person rule as more correspondent to the divine order and the traditions of the Romanian people. He envisaged the ideal of an 'ethnocratic state'. In contrast to the democratic state, which 'is based on the number of population, without racial or religious distinction', the ideal Romanian state, according to Crainic, 'is the Romanian soil and people. […] Its principal factors are: soil, blood, soul, and faith' (Crainic 1938: 283). These factors can be seen as a formula for mainstream Orthodox political theology during the 1930s.

4.4 Nikolaj Velimirović and oscillations of political theologies

One may conclude that the Orthodox political theology during the twentieth century oscillated in coherence with the dominant political ideologies. A prominent Serbian theologian, Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović (d. 1956), exemplifies such an oscillation. When he was younger, in the 1910s–1920s, he many times expressed his fascination with democracy. For example, in the 'Sermon on Freedom' (1918) he argued that Christianity and democracy constitute two pillars on which a modern nation should be built (Velimirović 1976: 289 [volume 4]). In the 1930s, when the ideological tide changed, Nikolaj in turn shifted towards the ideas of anti-Westernism, nationalism, and anti-liberalism. He aligned himself with the idea of Serbian ethnic exceptionalism, based on a strict Orthodoxy. Instead of democracy, he began praising theocracy, which he called Teodulija, meaning literally 'slavery to God' (Velimirović 2003). Although Nikolaj occasionally criticized some 'excesses' of fascism and Nazism, he went as far as to 'commend the current German leader', Adolf Hitler (Velimirović 1935: 28).

Such commendations of Nazis did not help Nikolaj to avoid detention in monasteries and the German concentration camps, from which he was liberated by the US troops in the end of the war. He emigrated to the United States, where he again changed his political rhetoric. As in his younger years, he once again praised democracy as the best medicine

against tyranny (Velimirović 1976: 36 [volume 12]). In a sense, he opened the doors to the post-war Orthodox political theology.

5 Post-war political theologies

5.1 Political theologies of the 1960s

Much of the Orthodox political theology of the 1960s demonstrated a strong inclination towards emancipation, openness to the liberating trends in contemporary society, and the appropriation of the agenda of social justice. It can be called ‘the theology of aggiornamento’. The post-war political theology took over and advanced the theological tendencies that had started to gain currency in the 1920s. It can be identified as ‘the theology of the 1960s’ – not because it existed only in this period, but because it reflected the emancipatory spirit of the decade. This theology continues to inspire many modern Orthodox thinkers who address various socio-political issues. It is also coherent with similar emancipatory agendas in Western political theologies, even though it never went as far in promoting such agendas as liberation or queer theologies did in other Christian traditions.

Western political theology in the post-war period was framed by the tragedies of the Second World War. Most Orthodox peoples in the East also suffered from this war. Additionally, some of these peoples experienced other tragedies: genocides in Turkey, Stalin’s purges in the USSR, as well as famine, mostly in Ukraine, known as Holodomor. However, in contrast to Western theologians, who produced political ‘theology after Auschwitz’, Orthodox theologians failed to produce political theologies ‘after genocides’, ‘after Gulag’ or ‘after Holodomor’. Such theological (and not just historical) reflections are still pending on the agenda of the Orthodox theologians. The Russian war against Ukraine, which is underpinned by the Orthodox political theology in the spirit of the 1930s, has created a new momentum for a new anti-totalitarian Orthodox political theology in the spirit of the 1960s.

Greece has become the epicentre of the post-war Orthodox political theology due to several political circumstances. It was the only Orthodox country with significant theological culture that, in the situation of the Cold War, aligned with the West. However fragile it was, the Greek democracy in the post-war period was the only case of a relatively liberal political environment for the Orthodox people. Most other Orthodox peoples found themselves behind ‘the iron curtain’, confined in the Communist bloc. The bloc’s state-enforced atheistic ideology and oppression of the church led to the dramatic impoverishment of theology. As a result, political theology could develop there freely.

In the meantime, the generation of émigré Russian theologians who had advanced the emancipatory theology ‘of the 1920s’, died during the 1940s. Nevertheless, the

institution they created and contributed to, the St Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris, became an incubator for a new generation of Orthodox political theologians. Most prominent Greek political theologians of the present day are related to the 'Paris school' of the St Sergius Institute. These theologians have rethought the traditional symphonic ideals, as well as illiberal ideologies, including the ones that dominated in the 1930s.

A towering representative of this theological trend was the professor at the Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki, Savvas Agouridis (d. 2009). He was a proponent of aggiornamento in the Orthodox church (see Agouridis 1999). His political theology, among other topics, emphasized the value of human rights. He criticized Orthodox theology for indifference to this idea. For him, such indifference was a part of 'the Political Orthodoxy of the Byzantines' (Agouridis 1998: 157). Agouridis' own political theology aimed at overcoming this kind of Orthodoxy.

5.2 Byzantinism in support of dictatorships

In contrast to him, many other theologians before and after the Second World War entertained the idea of the revival of Byzantium under the modern socio-political circumstances. Most dictatorships in the Orthodox countries during the twentieth century presented themselves as incarnations of the Byzantine civilization. This secured widespread support for themselves among the Orthodox Christians. Monasteries, including the ones on Mount Athos (the most important centre of Eastern Orthodox monasticism), were particularly keen in offering such support. For example, a leading spiritual figure during the second half of the twentieth century, Theoklitos the Athonite (d. 2006), praised the leader of the dictatorial regime during 1967–1974, Stylianos Pattakos, for mentioning that Greeks 'have God as our ally'. For Theoklitos, this language expresses 'the Helleno-Christian Spirit. […] It also renews memories about the foundations and living experience of our Byzantium' (in Papathemelis 1974: 6).

A Greek-American theologian John Romanides (d. 2001) tried to substantiate modern Byzantinism more systematically. He developed a theory that the modern Greek identity is reductionist. He argued that the true identity of the modern Orthodox Greeks should be 'Roman'. He elaborated on this identity in his writings on 'Romanness' (*Romiosyni*). Romanides was right that this was the basic identity in Byzantium. However, based on this identity, he built his own version of the Greek civilization exceptionalism (see Romanides 1981). His political theology that stems from this theory features a strong anti-Westernism and clings to conservative ideology. No surprise, therefore, that Romanides participated in the political movements that tried to restore the junta after its fall in Greece in 1974 (see Papathemelis 1974: 104).

Figures like Theoklitos and Romanides supported dictatorships out of a romantic belief that they were the incarnations of the spirit of Byzantium. Other theologians look at the

Orthodox dictators as protectors of the ‘traditional’ conservative mores in society. Their political theology is often pietistic. Such theologians were associated primarily with the so-called ‘brotherhoods’ – lay organizations aiming at re-evangelizing the people. Despite their focus on mission, these organizations usually did not miss an opportunity to engage in political activities, almost exclusively on the conservative or dictatorial side. When ideological conservatism in Greece took the form of dictatorship, the ‘brotherhoods’ did not hesitate to extend their helping hand.

The oldest brotherhood in Greece was organized in 1911 under the name of *Zoí* (this Greek word means life). Until 1938, it was a religious movement without any clear political agenda. In 1938, the *Zoí* began collaborating with the theological circles that had been formed around the periodical *Aktines* and promoted a conservative socio-political agenda. In the period of the Nazi occupation of Greece, this movement carried out a vision of a new Greece, which would be based on national values and Christian culture. After the Greek civil war that followed the Second World War, this movement appeared among a few political forces capable of counterweighting the ideological left wing. Political engagement of *Zoí* and its departure from its initial missionary goal caused a crisis that led to the splitting of the brotherhood to two parts: *Zoí* and *Sotír* (this Greek word means Saviour). *Sotír* was more liberal, but still kept to the ideological right.

The role of the brotherhoods in the Greek church and society declined after the fall of the dictatorship in 1974, but a considerable group of thinkers sprang from them. This group still dominates the scene of the modern Greek political theology. Some of them did not break up with the brotherhoods, while others did. The most famous among the latter is Christos Yannaras. In his younger years, he grew to the senior ranks in the *Zoí*, but later left the brotherhood in anger at what it had become. He has accused the brotherhoods of totalitarian methods and hidden ideological agendas that supported dictatorial tendencies in the Greek society (see Yannaras 2011).

5.3 Christos Yannaras

Despite being considered by many the most remarkable modern political theologian in Greece, Yannaras denies that he is a theologian and that an authentic Orthodox political theology can exist at all. His political ideas are spread throughout multiple articles and books, whose volume is impressive. However, there is only one book explicitly dedicated to political theology: *The Chapters of Political Theology* (Yannaras 1983). This is not a monograph, but a selection of his columns in the Greek newspaper *To Vima* that followed the fall of the Greek dictatorship. The rejection of dictatorship underpins this volume and his other writings relevant to political theology.

Outright anti-Westernism constitutes another key topic of Yannaras’ political theology. He condemns political theology as a Western device, which he believes to be completely alien

to the Orthodox tradition. An authentic political theology, for him, should utter prophetic voice, which the Western theology, in his judgement, has lost (Yannaras 1983: 14). The latter has been reduced to the agenda of the Marxist and neo-Marxist left (Yannaras 1983: 9). It has become nothing more but a 'surrogate of the disguised neo-leftism, which is neither politics nor theology' (Yannaras 1983: 119).

Yannaras represents a tendency in Orthodox political theology during the second half of the twentieth century to camouflage itself under the guises of demonstratively apolitical theological constructions. Probably the painful experience of the theology aligning with the totalitarian ideologies in the interwar period made theologians like Yannaras resistant to 'political' theologies, at least in name. However, theologians continued thinking along the same ideological lines. As a result, they produced what can be called 'quasi-political theologies'; ostensibly apolitical doctrines that feature implicit ideological agendas.

5.4 Russian political theology in diaspora

Some ostensibly apolitical political theologies were developed by the Russian theologians in diaspora. While the generation of Nikolai Berdyaev and Fr Sergiy Bulgakov openly professed political theology, the theologians who opposed and succeeded them, demonstratively abstained from producing overt theopolitical doctrines. One of them was Fr Georges Florovsky who produced 'neo-patristic synthesis', as mentioned earlier. Florovsky conceived this project in the interwar period, after he denounced Eurasianism, and continued promoting it after the Second World War. Before the war his synthesis was intended as an alternative to the fascism-inspired political theologies, and after the war it evolved into a moderate substitution of the right-wing ideologies.

Fr Alexander Schmemann (d. 1983) did something similar with the liberal ideology. He promoted a theological project, which appeared to be apolitical. It has been branded as 'eucharistic ecclesiology' and promoted liturgical revival, more lay participation in the life of the church, and rethinking the phenomenon of the church as such. At the same time, 'eucharistic ecclesiology' could not conceal an implicit ideological agenda. In contrast to the 'neo-patristic synthesis', it was liberal. It concurred with the liberating momentum of the 'eucharistic theology' in the West, especially in the Catholic Church, where it inspired the Vatican II.

'Eucharistic ecclesiology' is one of the most authentic expressions of the Orthodox political theology 'of the 1960s'. The latter, as was mentioned, sought to be apolitical; made references to tradition, even though interpreted it broadly and creatively; featured light anti-clericalism; sometimes engaged with left-wing ideologies, including Marxism; detested the totalitarian ideologies of the previous decades; and evolved as an antithesis to 'the theology of the 1930s'.

5.5 Theology of exceptionalism and its critique

From its early stages, the theology 'of the 1960s' was not a single doctrine, but featured many trends, sometimes incompatible with one another. The two most noticeable are the trends of civilizational exceptionalism and inclusivity. The former sprung from anti-Westernism. Among the Orthodox cultures, civilizational exceptionalism prioritizes only one: either Greek, Russian, Romanian, or other. In contrast to this, the inclusivist trend acknowledges as equal all Orthodox cultures, without designating any of them as exceptional. It usually rebukes anti-Westernism and is quite ecumenical.

Christos Yannaras is not only the most important political theologian 'of the 1960s', but also the leader of the civilizational exceptionalism trend, or more succinctly, the exclusivist group. He believes that the traditional Hellenic civilization, which had its most perfect incarnation in Byzantium, exercised the best sort of political theology, even though it should not be called 'political theology'. He counterposes it to both the Western and neo-Hellenic societies. The latter suffers from mimicking Western patterns. Yannaras summarizes his political theology (which he does not identify as such) as 'a personal – internal rediscovery of Hellenism' (Yannaras 1983: 30). It would be incorrect to identify his admiration of Hellenism with nationalism. He condemns nationalism as a Western device (Yannaras 1983: 40). Most ideas and practices that malfunction in modern Greek society, Yannaras ascribes to the corrupting influence of the West. For example, the Greek junta was nothing else but a 'fruit of Europe' (Yannaras 1983: 33).

In exempting Hellenic civilization among others, Yannaras converges with contemporary theologians from right-wing backgrounds, such as Panagiotis Christou, Fr Theodore Zisis, and others. Pantelis Kalaitzidis identifies them as belonging to the 'neo-Orthodox movement' (Kalaitzidis 2012: 33). This movement enhances Orthodoxy as identity, camouflages its conservative ideological preferences by references to patristics, and is quite anti-ecumenical.

Several Greek theologians have criticized the Greek civilization exceptionalism. One of them, Savvas Agouridis, wrote:

> Many of our compatriots, justify the unjustifiable, adopted […] the theory that we, the Greeks by birth, […] have in our DNA innate the rights of tolerance. Such a statement is a psychological and social illusion, […] which preserves all the bad things that exist. (Agouridis 1998: 159)

Pantelis Kalaitzidis criticizes Greek civilization exceptionalism more systematically. His critique addresses what he calls 'ethno-theology' (Kalaitzidis 2012: 72). He stresses a

need for eschatology to overcome the present theopolitical schemes that go back to the Byzantine theocracy (Kalaitzidis 2012: 65). Kalaitzides diagnoses these schemes as incompatible with the original Orthodox tradition. To escape from the trap of exceptionalism and nationalism, the Orthodox churches need to look not to their past, but the future, primarily the eschatological future. This will help them to be more relevant in the public square and promote the 'Cross-centered ethos of Christ' with more persuasiveness. This will urge the churches to protest social and institutional evils, including the violation of human dignity and freedom, as well as abuses of the 'other' and 'foreigner' (Kalaitzidis 2012: 84).

5.6 'Russian world' and its critics

The Russian Orthodox Church has developed its own version of civilizational exceptionalism, which it branded as the 'Russian world'. Originally secular and liberal, this concept was appropriated by the Russian political theologians in the late 2000s and redesigned as conservative and religiously motivated. It is a complex ideological construct, which combines many heterogeneous elements. One of them is nationalism. However, this is not the nation-based nationalism common in most Orthodox churches. The nationalism of the 'Russian world' is supranational. It can be called 'civilizational nationalism', as it promotes the 'Russian civilization' as superior to other nations and civilizations.

Another element of the 'Russian world' theology is the so-called 'traditional values'. According to the doctrine of the 'Russian world', the Russian civilization has a special mission from God to protect these values against the assumed moral corruption coming from the West. A former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev (2008–2012) explained this eloquently on his social media: 'We listen to the words of the Creator in our hearts and obey them. These words give us a sacred purpose. The goal is to stop the supreme lord of hell, whatever name he uses: Satan, Lucifer, or Iblis' (Medvedev 2022).

In some interpretations, the 'Russian world' is presented as a dualistic doctrine. Such interpretations render the imagined West-East divide in ontological terms. From this perspective, 'Holy Russia' embodies the cosmic goodness, which the cosmic evil, embodied in the 'godless West', tries to destroy. Patriarch of Moscow, Kirill Gundyaev, explicitly stated this in one of his sermons, with reference to the war in Ukraine: 'There is a struggle between goodness and cosmic evil' (Gundyaev 2022). Patriarch Kirill is one of the main designers of the ideology of the 'Russian world'. For him, 'the Russian world is a civilizational and not political notion. […] It is a spiritual, cultural, and values-based dimension of the human personality'. This 'system of values' makes 'Russia different from other countries' (Gundyaev 2014).

There are also critics of the 'Russian world' concept within and outside the Russian church (see Hovorun 2016). While some apologists of this doctrine present it as having Byzantine

roots (see Posadskiy 2016), it seems to be closer to the political theologies of the 1930s that were linked to fascist ideologies. After the war in Ukraine escalated in February 2022, the awareness about the ‘Russian world’ doctrine became stronger among the Orthodox political theologians. On 13 March 2022, which was the Sunday of Orthodoxy in the Orthodox church, a group of Orthodox theologians published *A Declaration on the “Russian World” (Russkii Mir) Teaching*, which denounced this teaching as ‘a form of Orthodox ethno-phyletist religious fundamentalism, totalitarian in character’. From the perspective of the declaration’s authors, this doctrine is a ‘heresy’, which ‘is devastating and dividing the Church’ (Orthodox Christian Studies Center (Fordham University) 2022).

6 Discussing liberal democracy

During the 2010s, Orthodox political theology became less camouflaged and more overt in addressing various political issues. One of them was the attitude to liberal democracy. Since their formation in Byzantium, the Eastern Christian traditions have endorsed *symphonia* with single-ruler political regimes, whether monarchy or junta. However, when liberal democracy began dominating the political scene during the second half of the twentieth century, Orthodox political theology became divided.

6.1 Advocates for liberal democracy

Some of the political theologians have embraced liberal democracy and argue that it is compatible with the Orthodox theological principles, even though it was not a part of the Orthodox collective memories. Such appreciation became particularly apparent after the fall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of the Soviet bloc. A new generation of the Russian political theologians advocate for it, including Veniamin Novik (d. 2010), Alexander Kyrlezhev, Sergei Chapnin, and others. In the Greek-speaking world, political theologians of the same generation offered even more substantial arguments in support of liberal democracy.

Aristotle Papanikolaou is a protagonist of this line of arguing. He rebukes as a stereotype the idea that ‘Orthodoxy simply cannot produce the culture conducive to liberal democratic forms of state’ (Papanikolaou 2012: 6). He suggests as a theological justification of the liberal social model the concepts of Eucharist and personhood. He constructs his political theology on the basis of the ‘divine-human communion’. In this point, his thought is close to that of Vladimir Solovyov, whom he analyses in detail. Papanikolaou also tries to engage the concepts of *theosis* (deification) and *askesis* (asceticism) as offering a particularly Orthodox perspective on political theology.

Papanikolaou criticizes the anti-Western identity of the modern Orthodox church, which impedes many of its members to view liberal democracy as a Western construct. He believes that such identity is false – it reflects more the postcolonial mentality than

Orthodoxy: ‘Orthodox equivocation and, at times, rejection of Western democratic liberalism seems guided by this postcolonial understanding of Orthodoxy as on the other side of the West’ (Papanikolaou 2012: 11).

Thanasis Papathanasiou – an editor-in-chief for many years of the influential Greek periodical *Synaxi* (English: ‘gathering’) which is focused on the issues of political theology – has also published a book on political theology, titled *The Break with Zero: Snapshots of the Political Theology* (Papathanasiou 2015). His ambition is to construct an Orthodox version of liberation theology. He insists that love, solidarity, and social justice should comprise the spine of the church life (Papathanasiou 2015: 189). Papathanasiou distinguishes between two types of political theologians: those who advocate for theocracy and those who consider it blasphemy (Papathanasiou 2015: 64). By the former, he means proponents of *symphonia* and right-wing ideologies. Papathanasiou leans towards the political left wing. Thus, together with neo-Nazism and fundamentalism, he criticizes capitalism and neoliberalism. He rejects any ‘metaphysical legalisation of plutocracy’ (Papathanasiou 2015: 32). At the same time, he is reasonably critical of the political agenda of the left. For instance, he believes that left-wing politics can easily slip into totalitarianism, when it abandons freedom (Papathanasiou 2015: 145).

6.2 Christian anarchism

A Serbian theologian Davor Džalto criticizes capitalism, nationalism, and liberal democracy. The latter, for him, is incompatible with Christian eschatology, as is any other political regime. In contrast to political theologies appreciating liberal democracy, he has developed his own theopolitical doctrine, which he has branded as ‘Christian anarchism’. Džalto argues that it is ‘the best way in which an Orthodox Christian approach to the political sphere can be conceptually expressed’; it is ‘the only consistent expression of Orthodox political theology’ (Džalto 2021: 11). In the coming kingdom of God, there will be no mechanisms of domination and oppression, which are inevitable even in the best political systems of the present age.

Džalto argues that eschatological Christian anarchism should not be confused with the modern anarchist ideology. One of the differences between them is attitude to religion: political anarchism is usually non- or even anti-religious. Even more importantly, this anarchism promulgates a political programme with hope that it would substitute the current political systems and would eventually make humankind happy. Džalto believes that such a hope is utopian, because ‘a profound tension between, on the one side, Christian faith and the Church, and, on the other side, the sphere of the political’ (Džalto 2021: 2), cannot be eliminated in any political model, even seemingly the Christian ones.

6.3 Critique of liberal democracy from the right

Some modern political theologians criticize liberal democracy from a right-wing standpoint. Most of them are Russian, such as Aleksandr Shchipkov. During the 1970s–1980s, he was an anti-Soviet dissident and advocate for religious freedom. He has described the basic principles of the group of his confederates in that time as ‘Christianity, freedom, anti-Communism’ (Shchipkov 1998). As a member of the Christian underground, he was prosecuted by the Soviet regime. After the collapse of the Communist regime, during the 1990s, Shchipkov elaborated on the ideas of ‘Christian democracy’. He has systematized his findings in the thesis ‘Christian-democratic movements in post-Soviet Russia’ (2000).

In the 2000s, Shchipkov evolved into a proponent of Putin’s regime in Russia. He became a part of the political establishment, as an advisor to the speakers of the upper and later of the lower chambers of the Russian parliament. He also functioned in the capacity of the main speaker of the Moscow Patriarchate on the issues pertinent to the relations between the church, state, and society. His political theology can be considered as the most official one of the Russian Orthodox Church during the later period of Kirill Gundyaev’s tenure as the patriarch of Moscow. Shchipkov expressed Patriarch Kirill’s own theopolitical standpoint. Among its main features is the criticism of liberalism in different forms, including liberal democracy and religious freedom (Shchipkov 2015). Shchipkov advocated for such freedom for the Russian Orthodox Church but not for other religious groups in Russia. He believed that the political regime of Vladimir Putin has secured optimal conditions for the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian society (Shchipkov 2022). He harshly criticized those who criticized this regime.

7 Social doctrines

As in the case of Aleksandr Shchipkov, Kirill Gundyaev has also experienced dramatic changes in his theopolitical views, sometimes to the point of a complete reversal. Before he was elected the patriarch in 2009, he was considered one of the most open-minded hierarchs of the Russian church and an informal leader of its liberal wing. In this capacity, he can be seen as the father of the post-Soviet Russian political theology. This theology evolved synchronically with the post-Soviet ideologies in Russia, and often influenced them.

7.1 *The Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church*

A more liberal spirit of the Russian society during the 1990s was reflected in a package of social documents titled *The Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church*. It was initiated by Kirill Gundyaev, then metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, and adopted in 2000 by the Council of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church. At that time, the *Basis* was the most advanced social doctrine that any Orthodox church ever adopted.

It addressed a wide variety of issues – from bioethics to the attitude to political regimes. Although the *Basis* did not explicitly endorse liberal democracy, it implicitly accepted it along with other regimes. The document criticized, also implicitly, the idea that monarchy is preferable to democracy:

> Contemporary democracies, including those monarchic in form, do not seek the divine sanction of power. They represent the form of government in secular society that presupposes the right of every able-bodied citizen to express his will through elections. (*The Basis* 2000: ch. 3, para. 7)

Moreover, the Russian social doctrine in its 2000 edition envisaged a possibility for the church to disobey the state: 'If the authority forces Orthodox believers to apostatise from Christ and His Church and to commit sinful and spiritually harmful actions, the Church should refuse to obey the state' (*The Basis* 2000: III 5). This was a bold statement impossible in the following decade.

During the 2000s, as the political regime led by President Vladimir Putin became more autocratic, the social doctrine of the Russian Orthodox Church also evolved in the direction towards right-wing ideologies. In some points, it began resembling the Orthodox political theologies of 'the 1930s'. This evolution was marked by *The Russian Orthodox Church's Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom and Rights* adopted in 2008 at the Council of Bishops of the Moscow Patriarchate. This document was again initiated by (then) Metropolitan Kirill and formally included in *The Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church*.

However, the spirit of this document was different from the documents of 2000. Instead of accepting liberal democracy, it advocated for 'sovereign democracy', which was a euphemism for the emerging autocratic regime of Vladimir Putin. It implicitly criticized liberal democracy by explicitly criticizing one of its foundations – the concept of human rights. The ambition of the *Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom and Rights* is to supplement or even substitute the concept of rights with the concept of dignity. The document explained what dignity meant to it:

> In the Eastern Christian tradition the notion of 'dignity' has first of all a moral meaning. […] Considering the state of human nature darkened by sin, it is important that things dignified and undignified should be clearly distinguished in the life of a person. (Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church 2008: I 2)

In other words, not the idea of universal rights as applicable to any human being, but the idea of dignity contingent on the moral status of a person, has been suggested as the basis of treating humanity.

Even before the Catholic Church adopted the new policies of aggiornamento at the Second Vatican Council, the Orthodox Church began elaborating on their own aggiornamento, which nevertheless correlated with the Catholic one. The delegates of the local Orthodox churches discussed a new Orthodox social doctrine in the framework of the process of preparation for the Panorthodox council. The process was formally inaugurated in 1961 and continued until 2016, when the so-called 'Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church' was convened in Crete.

However, the council did not bring results that the churches had anticipated since the 1960s. First, not all churches participated in it, including the Russian Orthodox Church. Second, the council failed to produce a social doctrine. By 2016, many local Orthodox churches, also on the official level, demonstrated a tendency to ideological conservatism and even fundamentalism. This tendency was reflected in the 2008 *Russian Orthodox Church's Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom and Rights*. They refused to subscribe to a more liberal social doctrine that the Panorthodox council was supposed to adopt.

7.2 *For the Life of the World*

Given such an impasse, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which had organized the Panorthodox council, decided to produce its own social doctrine. Such a decision was taken by the Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew, soon after the Council of Crete, in 2017. It was drafted mostly by American Orthodox political theologians and then, in 2019, approved by the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The document, titled *For the Life of the World: Towards a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church*, effectively expresses a political theology which was supposed to be promulgated by the Panorthodox council. It is close to the theopolitical views of Patriarch Bartholomew and in most points converge with *The Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church* of 2000.

The *For the Life of the World* (2019) document concludes the evolution of the Orthodox political theology during the long twentieth century. The line that this document upholds, started with the deliberations by Vladimir Solovyov, was significantly advanced by Fr Sergiy Bulgakov, and received full endorsement by the post-war generation of political theologians who contributed to the emancipatory 'theology of the 1960s'. At the same time, the social doctrine of the Ecumenical Patriarchate avoided some pitfalls of this theology, such as civilizational exceptionalism. This doctrine stands firmly against the totalitarian tendencies in the modern Orthodox political theology amalgamated in 'the theology of the 1930s'. It has clearly condemned 'the most insidious ideologies of national, religious,

and even racial identity in general, and of anti-Semitic movements in particular' (Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America 2019: 57). It has also radically departed from the idea of *symphonia* with the state or a political regime, which goes back to the Byzantine era:

> Today, […] the principle of symphonia can continue to guide the Church in her attempts to work with governments toward the common good and to struggle against injustice. It cannot, however, be invoked as a justification for the imposition of religious orthodoxy on society at large, or for promotion of the Church as a political power. (Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America 2019: 14)

The document contains the most comprehensive programme of aggiornamento for the Orthodox Church in the modern world and the most progressive amalgamation of Orthodox political theologies.

Attributions

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