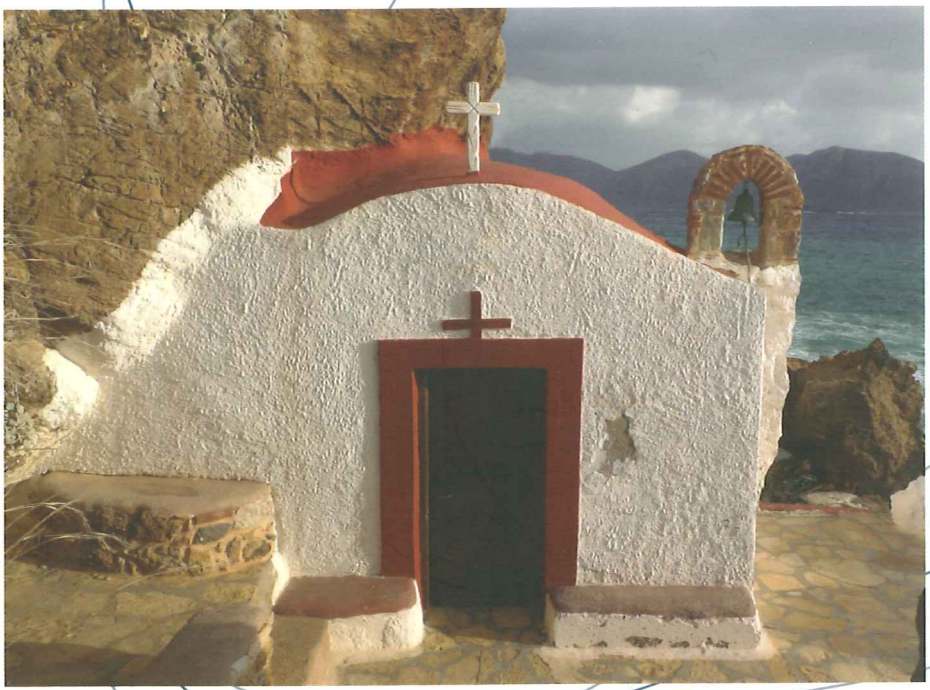

Elisabeth-Alexandra Diamantopoulou
Louis-Léon Christians (eds.)

Orthodox Christianity and Human Rights in Europe

A Dialogue Between Theological Paradigms and Socio-Legal Pragmatics

PETER LANG

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Individual versus Collective Rights: the Theological Foundation of Human Rights

An Eastern Orthodox View[1]

Pantelis KALAITZIDIS

Human rights marked a very significant political and broader cultural step toward a more human and fairer world. Well over half a century after the Universal Declaration, which "unites people and humanity around certain principles of universal recognition," human rights are still at the center of the political discussion and the debate of ideas. Despite widespread disagreement over their content and universality, mainly by non-Western cultures and traditions, human rights can serve as a humanitarian core for our globalized culture. In his China lectures, Jürgen Habermas stated some years ago, that, "human rights are a creative response to the problems facing China, as had been the case with Europe." Now that the global market brings us so close, "we need common rules," and that is how "human rights [...] are offered," Habermas concluded.[2]

Nevertheless, as is well known, human rights are inextricably bound with modernity and the Enlightenment, that is, with a movement that

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1 Paper presented at the International Conference "Orthodoxy and Human Rights," organized by the Chaire de droit des religions de l'Université catholique de Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, April 26-27, 2013. The same paper was presented in a shorter version at the International Consultation: "Churches Together for Human Rights," organized by the "Church and Society Commission" of the Council of European Churches (CEC/CSC), in cooperation with the Finnish Ecumenical Council, the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Finland, and the Finnish Orthodox Church, Sofia Orthodox Cultural Center, Helsinki, March 7-8, 2013.

2 J. Habermas, "Das geht ans Eingemachte," *Der Spiegel*, 30-4-2001, p. 148-149, p. 149. Quoted in Konstantinos Delikostantis, "Orthodoxy and Human Rights," in P. Kalaitzidis and Nikos Ntontos (eds.), *Orthodoxy and Modernity*, Volos Academy for Theological Studies (Athens: Indiktos, 2007), p. 181-182 [in Greek].

sets the process of emancipation from religious rules and ecclesiastical authorities. Now, if Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, after centuries of struggles and hesitations, have finally come to terms with this new reality, and have decided to deal with modernity in a dialogical and dialectical way, Eastern Orthodoxy, for what are chiefly historical reasons, is still on the way there. In fact, the Orthodox world did not organically participate in the phenomenon of modernity. It did not experience the Renaissance, the Reformation or the Counter-Reformation, religious wars or the Enlightenment, the French or the industrial revolution, the emergence of the subject, of human rights or the religiously neutral national state. What has been recognized as a central interest of modernity seems to have remained alien to Orthodoxy, which still functions innocently of modernity, a tendency that many believe accounts for its difficulty in communicating with the contemporary (post-)modern world.[3] I consider the question – or, to be more precise, the problem – of Orthodoxy and human rights as a part of the broader historical abeyance between Orthodoxy and Modernity, Orthodoxy and the Enlightenment, and consequently I will herein formulate my ideas and thesis in light of this statement.

There is no doubt that, following a forceful impetus from the spirit of the Enlightenment, the demand for respect for human rights (which forms the core of the modern paradigm) was clearly formulated in modernity; significant milestones in its progress were the American Bill of Rights (1776) and the French Declaration of the Rights of the Individual and the Citizen (1789); this progress has continued to be consolidated and broadened ever since, reaching an apex in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations General Assembly (1948).[4]

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[3] P. Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy and Modernity: An Introduction*, Volos Academy for Theological Studies (Athens: Indiktos, 2007) [in Greek; English translation (by Elizabeth Theokritoff) forthcoming by St Vladimir's Seminary Press].

[4] As it is reported (J. S. Nurser, *For All People and All Nations: The Ecumenical Church and Human Rights* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005), 43f., 159, No. 58; cf. M. A. Glendon, *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (New York: Random House, 2001)), one of the members of the drafting committee which prepared the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations General Assembly (1948), was an Orthodox academic and statesman from Lebanon, a "theologically informed" philosophy professor, named Charles Malik. Cf. A. Kireopoulos, "Seeking Justice and Promoting Human Rights: Orthodox Theological Imperatives or Afterthoughts?", in M. J. Pereira (ed.), *Philanthropy and Social Compassion in Eastern Orthodox Tradition:*

1. Are Human Rights Incompatible with Orthodoxy?

A pervasive reserve, not to say rejection, seems to characterize the attitude of many Orthodox hierarchs, thinkers and theologians towards human rights, indeed to such a degree that there is now a firm conviction in Western circles that Orthodoxy is incompatible with the modern world and the achievements of modernity, with democracy, human rights and political liberalism. The culture of human rights does indeed seem to form a challenge to which historical and contemporary Orthodoxy, and indeed Orthodox theology itself, have not always been able to respond positively. It must be confessed that (principally in the case of the so-called "Orthodox countries" and local Orthodox Churches) such a culture tends to be absent both on the level of theory and also, principally, that of historical praxis; at the same time, Orthodox theology has frequently sought to defend this deficiency or to invest it with theological and philosophical meaning. At the basis of the philosophy of rights, a sizeable trend in Orthodox theology perceives nothing more than the idolization of individualism/subjectivism and a glorification of the individual, which it contrasts with the supposedly communitarian culture of Orthodoxy. This kind of theology sees nothing more than a rebellion against the divine order and its substitution by a purely humanist order on earth, in all resulting in the fragmentation of communitarian life.

Indeed, prominent Orthodox theologians with significant influence in Greece and the wider Orthodox world, such as the Greek theologian and philosopher Christos Yannaras, go so far as to talk about the "inhumanity of rights,"[5] about a logic of "rights" according to which the claims of the individual become so central and there is the threat of altering our anthropology and lapsing into a form of human psychology that is deficient in relationality and communication. The Orthodox detractors of the rights language argue, following Yannaras' lead which "is in some ways paradigmatic for the Orthodox criticism of Human Rights,"[6] that the whole "paradigm" of modernity was grounded on an egocentric

Papers of the Sophia Institute Academic Conference, New York, Dec. 2009 (New York: Theotokos Press, 2010), p. 229-230.

5 See his book of the same title in Greek language, *The Inhumanity of Rights* (Athens: Domos, 1998). This radical rejection of human rights has to be encapsulated to Yannaras' overall refusal of modernity.

6 K. Stoeckl, "The 'We' in Normative Political Philosophical Debates: The Position of Christos Yannaras on Human Rights," in Alfons Brüning and Evert van der Zweerde (eds.), *Orthodox Christianity and Human Rights* (Leuven: Peeters, 2012): p. 187.

perspective, inherently linked with a non-relational, autonomous, individualistic understanding of the human person.[7]

These and other similar Orthodox arguments forthrightly denouncing human rights, appear to do justice to the critical voices formulated of those Western intellectuals or scholars, such as political scientist Samuel Huntington[8] or psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva,[9] who maintain that in the Orthodox tradition the individual is doomed to remain underdeveloped; this, because the very structure of Eastern Christianity is hopelessly collectivist and subordinates the individual to collectivities such as the nation or the community, while Orthodox societies as a whole are incompatible with pluralism, democracy, and human rights.[10] As the Greek American political scientist Adamantia Pollis unequivocally states,

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7 Besides Yannaras' critic and rejection of human rights cf. also, V. Guroian, "Human Rights and Modern Western Faith: An Orthodox Christian Assessment," *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 26 (1998): p. 241-247; Métropolite Cyrille de Smolensk et de Kalliningrad (sc. actual Patriach Cyril), *L'Evangile et la liberté. Les valeurs de la Tradition dans la société laïque*, Précédé d'un entretien avec le Frère Hyacinthe Destivelle et le Hiéromoine Alexandre (Siniakov), traduction du russe et notes Hyacinthe Destivelle et Alexandre Siniakov (Paris: Cerf, 2006), esp. p. 177-200; B. H. Alfeyev, *Orthodox Witness Today* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2006): p. 216-251. See also the official document of the Russian Orthodox Church dealing with these issues: "The Russian Orthodox Church's Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom and Rights," accessible through http://mospat.ru/en/documents/dignity-freedom-rights/ For an analysis, interpretation and critic of this document, see K. Stoeckl, *The Russian Orthodox Church and Human Rights* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), esp. p. 69-90. See also, A. Agadjanian, "Liberal Individual and Christian Culture: Russian Orthodox Teaching on Human Rights in Social Theory Perspective," *Religion, State, and Society*, 38 (2010): 97-113; A. Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), p. 93-94, p. 127-129.

8 Cf. S. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (Summer 1993): 22-49; *id.*, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

9 See for example her article, "Le poids mystérieux de l'orthodoxie," *Le Monde*, 18/19 avril 1999.

10 Cf. the critical remarks by A. N. Papathanasiou, "An Orphan or a Bride? The Human Self, Collective Identities and Conversion: An Orthodox Approach," in A. E. Kattan, F. Georgi (eds.), *Thinking Modernity: Towards a Reconfiguration of the Relationship Between Orthodox Theology and Modern Culture* (St John of Damascus Institute of Theology, University of Balamand-Center for Religious Studies, University of Münster, Tripoli, Lebanon-Münster, 2010), 133ff.

> "individual human rights cannot be derived from Orthodox theology. The entire complex of civil and political rights – freedom of religion, freedom of speech and press, freedom of association, and due process of law, among others – cannot be grounded in Orthodoxy, they stem from a radically different worldview."[11]

The same type of Orthodox negativism toward human rights gives often the impression of a philosophical and cultural affinity between Orthodoxy and Islam,[12] contributing to an image of an anti-Western Orthodoxy, far from the European standards.

For example, in the "Russian Orthodox Church's Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom and Rights" (which is in fact a document focusing on human dignity and dominated by the concepts of sin and evil), we can read that:

"At the same time, human rights protection is often used as a plea to realize ideas which in essence radically disagree with Christian teaching. Christians have found themselves in a situation where public and social structures can force and often have already forced them to think and act contrary to God's commandments, thus obstructing their way towards the most important goal in human life, which is deliverance from sin and finding salvation." (Introduction)

"The weakness of the human rights institution lies in the fact that (?) while defending the freedom (αὐτεξούσιον) of choice, it tends to increasingly ignore the moral dimension of life and the freedom from sin (ἐλευθερία). The social system should be guided by both freedoms, harmonizing their exercise in the public sphere. One of these freedoms cannot be defended while the other is neglected. Free adherence to goodness and the truth is impossible without the freedom of choice, just as a free choice loses it value and meaning if it is made in favour of evil." (II.2)

"A society should establish mechanisms restoring harmony between human dignity and freedom. In social life, the concept of human rights and morality can and must serve this purpose. At the same time these

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[11] A. Pollis, "Eastern Orthodoxy and Human Rights," *Human Rights Quarterly*, 15 (1993): p. 353.

[12] For a more detailed analysis on this see P. Kalaitzidis, "Orthodox Christianity and Islam: From Modernity to Globalization, From Fundamentalism to Multiculturalism and to the Ethics of Peace," in S. Asfaw-Alexios, C.-M. Gh. Simion (eds.), *Just Peace: Orthodox Perspectives* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012), p. 201-221.

two notions are bound up at least by the fact that morality, that is, the ideas of sin and virtue, always precede law, which has actually arisen from these ideas. That is why any erosion of morality will ultimately lead to the erosion of legality.

"It is necessary to give a clear definition to Christian values with which human rights should be harmonized." (III.1)

"Not a divine institution, human rights should not come into inflict with the Divine Revelation. For most of Christendom the category of doctrinal and moral tradition is no less important than the idea of individual freedom and the individual should reconcile his freedom with it. For many people in various parts of the world it is not so much secularized standards of human rights as the creed and traditions that have the ultimate authority in their social life and inter-personal relations." (III.2)

"It is inadmissible to introduce in the area of human rights the norms that obliterate or altogether cancel both the Gospel and natural morality. The Church sees a great danger in the legislative and public support given to various vices, such as sexual lechery and perversions, the worship of profit and violence. It is equally inadmissible to elevate to a norm such immoral and inhumane actions towards the human being as abortion, euthanasia, use of human embryos in medicine, experiments changing a person's nature and the like.

"Unfortunately, society has seen the emergence of legislative norms and political practices which not only allow of such actions but also create preconditions for them by imposing them through the mass media, education and healthcare systems, advertising, commerce and services. Moreover, believers, who consider such things to be sinful, are forced to accept sin as admissible or are subjected to discrimination and persecution." (III.3)

"The acknowledgment of individual rights should be balanced with the assertion of people's responsibility before one another. The extremes of individualism and collectivism cannot promote a harmonious order in a society's life. They lead to degradation of the personality, moral and legal nihilism, growing crime, civil inaction and people's mutual alienation.

"The spiritual experience of the Church however has shown that the tension between private and public interests can be overcome only if human rights and freedoms are harmonized with moral values and, most

importantly, only if the life of the individual and society is invigorated by love. It is love that removes all the contradictions between the individual and those around him, making him capable of enjoying his freedom fully while taking care of his neighbors and homeland.

"Some civilizations ought not to impose their own way of life on other civilizations under the pretext of human rights protection. The human rights activity should not be put at the service of interests of particular countries. The struggle for human rights becomes fruitful only if it contributes to the spiritual and material welfare of both the individual and society." (III.4)

"From the point of view of the Orthodox Church the political and legal institution of human rights can promote the good goals of protecting human dignity and contribute to the spiritual and ethical development of the personality. To make it possible the implementation of human rights should not come into conflict with God-established moral norms and traditional morality based on them. One's human rights cannot be set against the values and interests of one's homeland, community and family. The exercise of human rights should not be used to justify any encroachment on religious holy symbols things, cultural values and the identity of a nation. Human rights cannot be used as a pretext for inflicting irretrievable damage on nature." (III.5)

2. The positive sense and the possible limits of Human Rights

In recent years, however, there has also been an upsurge of positive approaches to the issue of rights from an Orthodox viewpoint, expressed chiefly in the writings of Frathers Stanley Harakas,[13] and John A. McGuckin,[14] Professors Konstantinos Delikostantis,[15] Marios

[13] S. Harakas, "Human Rights: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 19 (1982): p. 13-24.

[14] J. A. McGuckin, "The Issue of Human Rights in Byzantium and the Orthodox Christian Tradition," in J. Witte Jr., Frank S. Alexander (eds.), *Christianity and Human Rights: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 173-189.

[15] K. Delikostantis, *Human Rights: Western Ideology or Ecumenical Ethos?* (Kyriakidis: Thessaloniki, 1995) [in Greek].

Begzos,[16] Savvas Agourides,[17] Antonios Kireopoulos,[18] and Aristotle Papanikolaou,[19] as well as Archbishop Anastasios (Yannoulatos) of Tirana and All Albania.[20] In addition, the only official Orthodox document we have up to day relating to our discussion, the 1986 declaration on justice and human rights by the Third Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference, does refer to human rights in a positive way, stating among other things that

> "Orthodox Christians experience divine condescension every day and fight against every form of fanaticism and bigotry that divides human beings and peoples. Since we continuously declare the incarnation of God and the deification of humanity, we defend human rights for every human being and every people. Since we live with the divine gift of freedom through Christ's work of redemption, we are able to reveal to the fullest the universal value that freedom has for every human being and every people."[21]

Professor Konstantinos Delikostantis, from his side, does indeed accept, to some extent, the legitimacy of the reservations shared by non-Westerners, versus human rights, as expressing Western individualism. But he does not neglect to critique the shallow and misguided "anti-individualistic" position of a certain "Orthodoxism." In concluding, he adds the following corrective point:

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16 M. Begzos, "Human Rights and Interreligious Dialogue," *Third International Symposium on Orthodoxy and Islam. Tehran, 17th-19th September 1994* (Tehran, 1995), p. 7-11.

17 S. Agourides, *Human rights in the Western world: A historical and social quest. Theology-Philosophy*, [in Greek] (Athens: Philistor, 1998).

18 A. Kireopoulos, "Seeking Justice and Promoting Human Rights: Orthodox Theological Imperatives or Afterthoughts?", in M. J. Pereira (ed.), *Philanthropy and Social Compassion in Eastern Orthodox Tradition: Papers of the Sophia Institute Academic Conference, New York, Dec. 2009* (New York: Theotokos Press, 2010), p. 224-247.

19 Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, esp. p. 87-130.

20 A. Anastasios (Yannoulatos), *Facing the World: Orthodox Christian Essays on Global Concerns*, transl. by Pavlos Gottfried (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), esp. chap. 2, p. 49-78: Orthodoxy and Human Rights: On the universal declaration of human rights and the Greek Orthodox tradition.

21 See *Episkepsis*, No. 17 (1986), issue 369, December 15, 1986. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew from his side, in his book entitled *Encountering the Mystery: Understanding Orthodox Christianity Today* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 126, maintains that, "human rights, then, must be understood in a way that conforms to the right-eousness of God; in Greek, both 'humans rights' and 'divine commandments' are implied in the same word, namely *dikaiomata*. Human freedom and rights are ultimately informed by divine justice, truth, and love."

> "With every attempt at an Orthodox view of human rights, it is always the case that an exclusively negative assessment reveals unseen prejudices and an inability to understand the real ethos and the deeper meaning of human rights. Because the freedom that they promise, despite its innate focus on the individual and the subjectivist tendencies that go with it, is not individual arbitrariness and obsession with individual rights, but above all responsibility and commitment to shared freedom and peace. Furthermore, human rights presuppose the communal dimension of human existence, our relationship with and obligations towards others, the recognition that my rights are limited by the rights of others. In consequence, the answer to the Western notion of freedom, which should not of course be identified with its negative manifestations, cannot be anti-modernism or anti-Westernism. The answer is critical dialogue, which means openness and at the same time faithfulness to the core of our traditions. [...] The Orthodox intervention may prove to be a catalyst in the progress of human rights, because human rights are something open and constantly evolving. The Orthodox theological grounding and interpretation of human rights opens up the horizon of a social dimension to human freedom. [...] In this way, one-sided individualistic or communal interpretations of rights are averted, a new dynamic is developed for understanding, respecting and promoting rights, and new possibilities are revealed somewhere between 'individual' rights and an anti-Western rejection of human rights in the name of an extreme "communitarianism." Human rights are given their place in a supremely philanthropic and ecumenical tradition which has reconciled freedom and love, individual and society, which has united peoples and cultures and honored the human person."[22]

Metropolitan John D. Zizioulas of Pergamon on his side, while he criticized the individualistic understanding and practice of human life, initiated by Western Christianity and Western Philosophy, and highlighted the main axes of the theology of personhood as a proper response to the dead ends of individualism, he did not ultimately reject human rights, but gave a positive sign, and value to the person-centered perspective of rights versus the individual-centered one, i.e., the perspective in which the right is practiced in accordance or in relation to other persons, and not *in absentia* or against other persons.[23]

We should note here that even Yannaras' writings, there include more careful and measured statements concerning human rights, such

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[22] K. Delikostantis, *Human Rights*, p. 75-76, p. 80-82.

[23] Metropolitan of Pergamon J. D. Zizioulas, "Law and Personhood in Orthodox Theology," in *id.*, *The One and the Many: Studies on God, Man, the Church, and the World Today*, edited by Fr. G. Edwards (Alhambra, CA: Sebastian Press, 2010), p. 402-413.

as when he notes that "the priority of communion of relationships – a socially-centered anthropology as the basis for the meaning of politics – is not in theory antithetical to the principle of defending individual rights."[24] Still more clearly, in a more recent expression of his views, Christos Yannaras[25] distinguishes, along with many negative elements, some positive features of human rights, although still without repudiating the anti-modern and anti-Western core of his thought or the fundamental characteristics of his approach to human rights. As in his book *The Inhumanity of Rights*,[26] he continues to regard rights as a pre-political achievement, since according to him the liberal discourse affirming individual rights does not chiefly aim at the attainment of the *polis*, the formation of vital social relationships, concerned as it is rather, with the individual and an iron-clad protection of individual independence:

> "the greater (a society of persons, the revealing of personal uniqueness, otherness and freedom through social relationships) does not invalidate or destroy the lesser (the legal, institutional and uniform protection of every individual from the arbitrariness of power). The Orthodox acknowledge that the historical existence of such experiences as the Western Middle Ages makes the protection of individual rights a major success and a precious achievement.
>
> "Nevertheless, it would be doing violence to historical memory and critical thought if, simultaneously, we did not recognize that, compared to the ancient Greek *city* [*polis*] and the Byzantine (and post-Byzantine) *community*, the protection of individual rights is a *pre-political* achievement. It is an indisputable achievement, but an achievement of societies that have not yet attained (perhaps not even understood) the primordial and fundamental meaning of politics: politics as a common struggle for life "in truth," a politics constituted around the axis of ontology (and not self-interested objectives)."[27]

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24 Yannaras, *The inhumanity of rights*, p. 188.

25 Yannaras, "Human Rights and the Orthodox Church," in Emmanuel Clapsis (ed.), *The Orthodox Churches in a Pluralistic World: An Ecumenical Conversation* (Geneva/ Brookline, MA: WCC Publications/Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2004), p. 83-89.

26 Yannaras, *The Inhumanity of Rights*, 45ff.

27 Chr. Yannaras Yannaras, "Human rights and the Orthodox Church," 88 (translation adapted). As Kristina Stoeckl ("The 'We' in Normative Political Philosophical Debates: The Position of Christos Yannaras on Human Rights," 191, No. 12) comments on this crucial position of Yannaras: "What Yannaras completely leaves out of the picture is that children, women, foreigners, and slaves were excluded from the ancient Greek rights-space. They were not bearers of any rights at all. This is an important point of criticism and discussion that cannot be followed up here but should be considered."

Despite this quite more positive understanding of human rights, Yannaras does not abandon his usual way of approaching history, which is integral part of his anti-Westernism. For him, what justifies the institutional and uniform protection (provided by human rights) of every individual from the arbitrariness of power, is not traumatic historical experiences of the pre-modern, pre-Enlightenment societies in East and West alike, but only "the historical existence of such experiences as the Western Middle Ages."[28]

What ultimately seems therefore problematic for, but also for numerous Orthodox hierarchs and church intellectuals, is the pre-eminence of individuality and subjectivity implied in human rights, which contradict the communal or even communitarian character of Orthodox Church and tradition. These scholars would have not a problem with what we would call "communal rights," or even "cultural rights," but still remain very reluctant to accept and to integrate in their thought human rights because the latter are connected to and defined by individualism. Against the "individual rights" of the individualistic, secularized West, they oppose the "communal rights" of the Orthodox communitarian East. In this perspective, subjectivity and individualism represent the most serious obstacles not only for an Orthodox reception of human rights, but also for the encounter between Orthodoxy and modernity, Orthodoxy and the tradition of the Enlightenment. End of the day, however, how incompatible is Orthodoxy and its ecclesial vision with the rise of the subject and even with individuality? And how communitarian is the ecclesial ethos and theological self-understanding of Eastern Orthodoxy? And why should we be forced to consider as self-evident the identification between "communal" and "communitarian"? In the remaining part of my presentation, I will attempt to offer some initial answers and evidences to these crucial questions.

[28] According to the remark by Alfons Brüning ("'Freedom' vs. 'Morality' – On Orthodox Anti-Westernism and Human Rights," in A. Brüning, E. van der Zweerde (eds.), *Orthodox Christianity and Human Rights* (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), p. 8-9), the frequent anti-Western reasoning of Greek and Russian theologians usually operates with long established stereotypes, which in nowadays prefers to hold a discourse on essentially different "civilizations" or even on rival "civilizations."

3. The individual subject and the social dimension of Christianity

As is well known, religion in traditional societies has always been a supra-individual, inter-personal, communal, collective, and social phenomenon. Orthodoxy, in particular, entails a profoundly social dimension, since its identity, its very being, is identified with the notions of "body" and "communion," with the eschatological and Eucharistic community of the faithful. As the great twentieth-century Orthodox theologian, Fr. Georges Florovsky characteristically remarks, following on this point the ancient patristic tradition, Eastern and Western alike, in its entirety,

> "Christianity from the beginning existed as a corporate reality, as a community. To be Christian meant just to belong to the community. Nobody could be Christian by himself, as an isolated individual, but only together with 'the brethren,' in a 'togetherness' with them. *Unus Christianus nullus Christianus* [one Christian – no Christian]. Personal conviction or even a rule of life still do not make one a Christian. Christian existence presumes and implies an incorporation, a membership in the community. This must be qualified at once: in the *Apostolic* community."[29]

It was precisely this consciousness of charismatic co-belonging, this social, communal and "corporate" character of Christian existence, which was indicated by the choice of the Greek political term *ecclesia* (a term already used in the Septuagint Old Testament text to translate the Hebrew *qahal*) as the word by which the first Christians defined their own identity. This is why Christianity, according again to Florovsky, "is fundamentally a social religion [...] Christianity is not primarily a doctrine or a discipline that individuals might adopt for their personal use and guidance. Christianity is exactly a community, i.e., the Church. [...] The whole fabric of Christian existence is social and corporate. All Christian sacraments are intrinsically 'social sacraments,' i.e., sacraments of incorporation. Christian worship is also a corporate worship, '*publica et communis oratio*' in the phrase of St Cyprian. To build up the Church of Christ means, therefore, to build up a new society and, by implication, to rebuild human society on a new basis. [...] The early Church was not

[29] Florovsky, "The Church: Her Nature and Task," Georges Florovsky, *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View*, Collected Works Vol. I (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1972), p. 59.

just a voluntary association for 'religious' purposes. It was rather the New Society, even the New Humanity, a *polis* or *politeuma*, the true City of God, in the process of construction.[30]

This insistence on the communal structure and social nature of the church, however, is not characteristic exclusively of Orthodox or traditional theologians. Even Western and indeed Protestant theologians, such as the German Lutheran pastor and martyr of the struggle against Nazism Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), who in his time was the theologian perhaps most orientated towards modernity, are distinguished by the same sensitivity. In his doctoral thesis *Sanctorum Communio*, completed in 1927 but published three years later, Bonhoeffer attempts precisely to prove in the context of a doctrinal study, with the aid of the social sciences, the empirical structure and the particular social nature of the church.[31]

It is obvious from the forgoing that in this perspective, the church is not a private but rather a social or public matter, and upon first reading, this seems incompatible with the fundamental agenda and priorities of modernity. This alleged incompatibility is the cornerstone shaping the stereotypically negative view toward religion by those intellectuals who declare themselves faithful to the principles of modernity. That, in turn, provokes the defensive reflexes of Orthodox theologians and intellectuals; for, such an individualistic and private version of faith and religion as enshrined by modernity, is not only a challenge to the social character of the church, but also runs directly counter to the priorities and presuppositions of the theology of the person, of the relational ontology of personhood. The latter, which makes no sense apart from the questions raised by modernity, represents perhaps the most original and bold synthesis of modern Orthodox theology: originating in Russian religious philosophy and émigré theology, especially as represented by Berdyaev, Bulgakov, and Lossky, the theology of personhood culminates in the thought of the contemporary Greek theologians Christos Yannaras and Metropolitan of Pergamon John D. Zizoulas, placing the answers

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30 Florovsky, "The social problem in the Eastern Orthodox Church," Georges Florovsky, *Christianity and Culture*, Collected Works Vol. II (Belmont MA: Nordland, 1974), p. 131-132. For a more detailed analysis of this argument, and its consequences in the political domain, cf. P. Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy and Political Theology*, "Doxa & Praxis: Exploring Orthodox Theology" series (Geneva: WCC Publications), 2012, p. 116-119.

31 D. Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, translated by R. Krauss and N. Lukens (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998).

given by Greek patristic theology into a fruitful dialogue focusing on the ontological question with the exploits of contemporary Western European philosophy (particularly phenomenology and existentialism). Concurrently, it makes the notion of the person (in which individuality is joined with sociality) into a basic ontological and theological category.[32]

In this context, we may make the following brief observations in relation to our topic:

a) It is commonly accepted by all Orthodox theologians, of all trends and schools, of all sensitivities and tendencies, that "the Orthodox Church is preeminently communal: grounded in a Trinitarian conception of God, whose perichoretic relationship definitively characterizes its oneness of being; composed of countless members who together make up the one body of Christ; gathered in Eucharistic fellowship to partake of divine life as only, holy catholic and apostolic community."[33] But does subscribing to this classic Orthodox communal understanding of the church founded in Trinitarian theology also, or necessary, means to subscribe to the many stereotypes that are usually attributed to this communal understanding and which are holding as granted the radical opposition and incompatibility between individual and communal? "Does such an emphasis on community preclude any consideration of individuals – *as* individuals – who compose the Church and society? Does the Orthodox theology of personhood, rooted in the creation of human beings in the image and the likeness of God and transformed by the experience of the divine-human person of Jesus Christ, say something to this situation?", as Antonios Kireopoulos, the Associate General Secretary of the Faith and Order and Interfaith Relations Commission of the National Council of Churches in the USA, fairly asks[34] challenging thus a whole set of Orthodox or Western established ideas?

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[32] For an initial introduction to the extensive and important question of the theology of the personhood, we would direct the non-specialist reader to the following classic studies: J. D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion. Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985); *id.*, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: T & T Clark, 2006); Chr. Yannaras, *Person and Eros*, transl. by N. Russell (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2007).

[33] A. Kireopoulos, "Seeking Justice and Promoting Human Rights: Orthodox Theological Imperatives or Afterthoughts?", in M. J. Pereira (ed.), *Philanthropy and Social Compassion in Eastern Orthodox Tradition: Papers of the Sophia Institute Academic Conference, New York, Dec. 2009* (New York: Theotokos Press, 2010), 235.

[34] A. Kireopoulos, "Seeking Justice and Promoting Human Rights," p. 235.

b) This connection and positive consideration between communal and individual, Orthodoxy/Byzantium and Enlightenment, and therefore between the Orthodox tradition, and the theology of personhood and human rights, is clearly supported by Fr. John A. McGuckin, a distinguished patristic and byzantinist scholar, and a priest of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the U.S. Unlike Yannaras and other Orthodox intellectuals who introduced and implemented a radical distinction and dichotomy between the above mentioned elements, McGuckin considers that there is a close link between theological principles articulated by the theologians of the early church and the Enlightenment theories that succeeded them.[35] As McGuckin himself maintains, "After the Christological councils, Orthodoxy brought to the European mind the understanding that personhood was vested with divine potency. This applied directly in the case of the divine personhood of Christ (now incarnate among humanity). But it also referred to the human person, as a potentiality of grace (what the Orthodox tradition described as deification by grace). It was, therefore, Orthodox philosophical theology that historically brought the very terms of "person" and "individual" from the margins of irrelevance to the central stage of anthropological philosophy. [...] It is this theological stance underpinning all Orthodox theology, the deification of the human race by the grace of divine incarnation within it, which is the root of how Christian-inspired philosophers of a later age could declare: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident,' and go on to the cite the inalienable dignity of human person as one of the 'self-evident' things they took as axiomatic."[36]

This "pro-European" understanding of the spiritual and cultural heritage of Byzantium, far from any defensive and identity-based consideration, allows him even to see the connection rather than the disconnection between Byzantium and the West, as well as the emergence in the Eastern Christian civilization – especially in the Canon law – of the idea of the individual and of the subject, and the warning signs of human rights. In the words of Fr. McGuckin himself,

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[35] See McGuckin, "The Issue of Human Rights in Byzantium and the Orthodox Christian Tradition," *op. cit.*; Cf. Kireopoulos, "Seeking Justice and Promoting Human Rights," p. 237.

[36] McGuckin, "The Issue of Human Rights in Byzantium and the Orthodox Christian Tradition," p. 179. Cf. Kireopoulos, "Seeking Justice and Promoting Human Rights," p. 237.

> "They manifest [sc. the canons of the Orthodox Church] on every page a code of governance that protects, defends, and orders the Orthodox Christian community. [...] These canons are [...] regarded by all the Orthodox as a fundamental part of what is called the 'Holy Tradition' of the Church. [...] This development and flourishing of Canon Law in the East [...] is a major rebuttal of the idea that Orthodoxy is not concerned with the rights of the individual, or that Orthodoxy can hardly conceive of the concept of the individual as such, only the collective. It is equally a defense of the fundamental Orthodox understanding that rights of persons cannot be separated from duties and responsibilities."[37]

c) Furthermore, the characteristic of defining oneself in individual rather than communal terms is usually connected with the rise of the subject and of individuality, which has taken place *par excellence* during modern times and is hence regarded as an integral part of modernity. Indeed, one of the most significant upheavals – if not *the* most significant – that came with modernity was the emergence of the subject and the individual. For perhaps the first time in history, the individual acquires value and existence in his or her own right and his/her own autonomy. For the first time, the individual acquires such significance and importance that he is placed above the community and the organized group, above the ties and institutions of his/her culture or heritage. How alien are the above characteristics to the appearance and structure of primitive Christianity, no less than to the radical innovations it promised and to a degree effected in the framework of ecclesial communities: i.e., to the de-sacralization of Caesar and civil authority; the release of the human being from religious subordination and submission to the city, the state or the sacralized civil authority and biological subordination to the tribe, the patriarchal family, the clan and the family group; to the new emphasis given by the Gospel on the unrepeatable uniqueness and value of the human person, etc.? What else was ultimately the early Christian struggle for the "right" to conversion, if not the "right" of individuals to free themselves from their ancestors' religious beliefs, or from their community tradition, as prerequisites for adopting Christian faith?[38] And what else is nowadays the struggle of many Christians living in Muslim

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[37] McGuckin, "The Issue of Human Rights in Byzantium and the Orthodox Christian Tradition," p. 178-179. Cf. *id.*, *The Ascent of Christian Law: Patristic and Byzantine Formulations of a New Civilization* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2012).

[38] See on the relationship of self to conversion the interesting analysis by A. N. Papathanasiou, "An Orphan or a Bride? The Human Self, Collective Identities and Conversion: An Orthodox Approach," *op. cit.*

countries (who in a large majority are supporting human rights and the secular character of the state) that seek to abolish the laws on blasphemy (laws imposing the death penalty for every Muslim who would convert to another religion, including Christianity), if not the "right" of autonomous selves seeking to be free to decide their individual trajectory, which is different or even contrary to their tradition or community?

d) Much support to my argument could be provided from the analysis of the phenomenon of spiritual autobiography, as it is exemplified by Augustine in the Latin West, but especially by Gregory of Nazianzus in the Greek East.[39] In fact, the *Confessions* of St Augustine (Books X and XI), depict their author's turbulent life and his anguished search for the truth which will lead to his religious conversion. The *Confessions* are regarded as essentially the first text in the history of Western thought to highlight and enshrine individual subjective speech; they lay the foundation for the narrative 'I', and have had a profound influence on the spiritual and cultural history of the West. The *Confessions* effect a shift of interest from the field of history to the realm of the inner human being, to the searching that takes place within the individual's own psychology and consciousness. This shift is helped enormously by the workings of the narrative which presupposes inner wanderings in the deepest recesses of the self, as well as by the internalized-psychological understanding of time and memory that Augustine develops in Books X and XI of the *Confessions*, giving us the measure of his contribution not only to the appearance of modern literature but also to the formation of the culture of modernity.[40]

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[39] In this part of my paper (III, d, e, f), I lean on the analyses I offered in P. Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy and Modernity: An Introduction*, Volos Academy for Theological Studies (Athens: Indiktos, 2007) [in Greek; English translation (by Elizabeth Theokritoff) forthcoming by St. Vladimir's Seminary Press]. I thank St. Vladimir's Seminary Press for the permission to use here material from the English version of that book.

[40] Out of an extensive bibliography on the subject, see for example: J.-Cl. Fredouille, "Les Confessions d'Augustin. Autobiographie au présent," in Marie-Françoise Baslez, Philippe Hoffmann et Laurent Pernot (ed.), *L'invention de l'autobiographie d'Hésiode à Saint Augustin* (Paris: Presses de l'Ecole normale supérieure, 1993), 167-178; Br. L. Horne, "Person as Confession: Augustine of Hippo," in Chr. Schwöbel and C. E. Gunton (eds.), *Persons, Divine and Human* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 66-67, 69-73; C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 127-142. Objections to the autobiographical interpretation of Augustine's *Confessions* have been voiced by P. Courcelle, *Les Confessions de S. Augustin dans la tradition littéraire. Antécédents et postérité* (Paris, 1963); *id.*, *Recherches sur les Confessions de S. Augustin* (Paris, 1968);

It is less well known, however, that elements of the question of subjectivity and individuality are to be found also in the autobiographical poems of Gregory of Nazianzus (who was earlier than Augustine), principally in his long autobiographical poem *On his own life* (Historical Poems, XI). This Cappadocian hierarch and saint is one of the very few Fathers to have been dignified with the title of "theologian" in the tradition of the Eastern Church; and in this work, as in other, shorter autobiographical poems or epigrams, after and perhaps because of his resignation from the throne of Constantinople (in 381 AD), he converses with himself and addresses himself to God seeking consolation and peace. But he also dares to speak in the first person about his life and recount his life story in strict chronological order, from his childhood and his studies to his service as bishop and archbishop, not omitting even the most inward and personal feelings connected with the inner conflicts and contradictions that he experienced, his sorrows and disappointments, his mental pain and his complaints about friends and colleagues. In addition, he does not hesitate to castigate the attitude of the clergy of his day in terms that today would probably be described as anti-clerical. Gregory's autobiographical writing may not possess to the full the characteristics that would make him a precursor of modern literary writing or of self-aware modern man; and although the tradition of autobiography to which Gregory contributed continued in the Byzantine East, it does not seem ever again to have attained or surpassed the important milestone represented by his work, particularly his autobiographical poems.[41] Yet the case of Gregory cannot easily be ignored; nor is it without importance for the questions discussed in this paper, particularly as regards the way in which questions of subjectivity and individuality fit into Orthodox theology.[42] So while in Orthodox theological circles there is usually an

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and, following Courcelle's line, P. Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, nouvelle édition revue et augmentée (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002), p. 258-259.

41 For an overview of autobiography in Byzantium, see the study by M. Hinterberger, *Autobiographische Traditionen in Byzanz* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1999).

42 On autobiography in Gregory of Nazianzus see G. Misch, *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity*, v. II (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1973), p. 600-624; C. Jungck, *Gregor von Nazianz. De vita sua* (Heidelberg, 1974); R. Benin, *Une autobiographie romantique au IVe s.: le poème II, I, 1, de Grégoire de Nazianze*, unpublished PhD thesis (Montpelier, 1988); J. Bernardi, "Trois autobiographies de S. Grégoire de Nazianze," in M.-F. Baslez, Ph. Hoffmann, L. Pernot (ed.), *L'invention de l'autobiographie d'Hésiode à Saint Augustin* (Paris: Presses de l'Ecole normale supérieure, 1993), 155-165; P. L. Gilbert, *Person and Nature in the Theological Poems*

emphasis on the decisive contribution of Greek patristic thought to the theology and ontology of the personhood, it is often forgotten or overlooked how much Christianity, Western and Eastern, has contributed to the emergence of the subject and its emancipation (in an eschatological and theological perspective) from the bonds of the city or state, the group, tribe, family etc., as evidenced *inter alia* in the phenomenon of spiritual autobiography. This spiritual autobiography, as we have said, was formed through writing in the first person and exploration of the psychological self; and it is no accident that it appears chiefly in the early Christian centuries, and indeed, among others, in the persons of two distinguished theologians, Gregory of Nazianzus in the East and Augustine in the West.

e) It is ensued from the above that the concept of subject and its emergence are instrumental both for human rights and the dilemma individual *versus* communal. Although the emergence of the subject gives rise to the emergence of the individual (which is contained within it), the subject, as a broader notion and reality, cannot be identified with the individual; the emergence of the subject could perfectly well give rise also to a heightened emphasis on the person (which is also contained within it) since it is a precondition and a *sine qua non* for that emphasis. For without the subject, neither individual nor indeed person can exist. And much more to the point, without the subject there can be no relationship with God or our fellow humans. According to St. Basil and St. Gregory of Nyssa, indeed, the human being must first be formed into a rational being by overcoming the passions, and then relationship with God and one's fellow man follows. In this perspective, we might consider the ancient injunction "Know thyself" and the broader practice of "attention to oneself," which originate from classical, Hellenistic and Roman philosophy and were incorporated into Christian spirituality and tradition and later crystallized in that context, through the movement of radical self-transformation and self-transcendence that is called *eros*, and the arduous and persistent spiritual work that is called *ascesis*. In the

of S. Gregory of Nazianzus, PhD thesis (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 1994), p. 1-16; Grégoire de Nazianze, *Le dit de sa vie*, traduit, présenté et annoté par Al. Lukinovich, mis en vers libres par Cl. Martignay, introduction de Th. Spidlik (Genève: ed. Ad Solem, 1997); Fr. Gautier, *La retraite et le sacerdoce chez Grégoire de Nazianze* (Tournhout: Brepols, 2002); Stelios Ramfos, *The Yearning for the One: Chapters in the Inner Life of the Greeks*, translated by N. Russell (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2011), p. 111-118; P. Kalaitzidis, "Theology and Literature: The Case of Nicolae Steinhardt," *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, p. 69.1-2 (2017).

patristic perspective outlined above, "knowing oneself" and "attention to oneself" will not only be essential in making the subject capable of receiving, appropriating and communing in the truth, but will also shape the history of subjectivity, ultimately leading in the long term to the emergence of the subject.[43] The elements and practices just mentioned do not mean that the subject is closed in on itself, but are a precondition for a true opening to the o(O)ther; while the slow and laborious emergence of the subject, which reaches its climax in the modern era, creates not only a sphere in which the group or herd spirit is transcended, but also the prospect of actualizing a theology or ontology of the personhood in a way that is authentic (and not merely superficial). This fine distinction, which we consider may turn out to be decisive for the hoped-for dialogue between Orthodoxy and modernity, and for a positive assessment and reception of human rights on behalf of the Orthodox, often seems to escape many Orthodox theologians who are concerned with the person and the theology of personhood. The result is that it has become traditional in recent decades to dismiss not only the individual but also the subject, while those same circles would also probably consider problematic any reference to psychology or psychoanalysis, to the psychological self and psychological identity.[44]

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[43] See e.g. St. Basil, *On "look to yourself,"* PG 31: 197-217; Gregory of Nyssa, *On virginity* IV-VI, XIII, Sources Chrétiennes (SC), 119, 302-348, 422-430=PG 46, 337A-352A, 376A-377B; *id.*, *On the Life of Moses*, SC 1, 43=PG 44, 337C-337D; *id.*, *On the Song of Songs* IV, Jaeger, 6, 123; *id.*, *On the Beaititudes* V, PG 44, 1272A. Cf. Pierre Courcelle, *Connais-toi toi-même. De Socrate à saint Bernard*, Vol. I (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1974), esp. the chapter "D'Origène aux Cappadociens," p. 97-111; Pierre Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, esp. the chapter "Exercices spirituels antiques et 'philosophie chrétienne'," 75-98, esp. 81-92; M. Foucault, *L'herméneutique du sujet. Cours au Collège de France (1981-1982)*, édition établie sous la direction de Fr. Ewald et Al. Fontana, par Fr. Gross (Paris: Hautes Études/Gallimard/Seuil, 2001), p. 11-20. P. Hadot, "Un dialogue interrompu avec Michel Foucault. Convergences et divergences," in *id.*, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, 304-311, esp. 309-311, sets out his own approach and interpretation, different from Foucault's, of the issues relating to subjectivity and the emergence of the self. On this whole question cf. also P. Adnès, "Garde du cœur," in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* Vol. 6, p. 100-108.

[44] See further S. Ramfos, *'Like the Lightning of the Last Days', Chronicle of a New Year* (Athens: Indiktos, 1996), p. 191-248; *id.*, *The Yearning for the One: Chapters in the Inner Life of the Greeks*, translated by N. Russell (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2011); N. Loudovikos, *Psychoanalysis and Orthodox Theology* (Athens: Armos, 2003) [all in Greek]; E. Clapsis, "Ambivalence, Subjectivity and Spiritual Life," in Emmanuel Clapsis (ed.), *Violence and Christian Spirituality* (Geneva/Brookline, MA: World Council of Churches Publications/Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2006), p. 255-267. Also the papers (in Greek) by V. Thermos, "Theology, Modernity and 'Sciences'

f) It may be that the emergence of the genre of spiritual autobiography during the first Christian centuries is inherently bound up with the dimension of inwardness and cultivation of the inner man, of the "digging within oneself" etc., which the Christian calling and message introduced (which is not to detract from the communal structure and social dimension of Christianity). Indeed, here it is worth noting that the personal reception and acceptance of the gospel message and most certainly one's entry into the church body cannot be understood on the basis of collectives such as a people, nation, language, culture etc., but only on the basis of an absolutely personal act, free from any sort of biological, cultural or ethnic determinism. Thus, the radically new element introduced by the ecclesial way of life is the personal calling addressed to us by God through Jesus Christ, a call to evangelization, to an encounter and relationship with him, as well as the response to this calling, which is equally personal. Hence, God's calling and revelation address the person but at the same time they also create a community (as it became clear from the number of the twelve disciples of Jesus, who symbolically represented the twelve tribes of Israel); Christ's message is foundational for the person as well as for the community of the faithful. It is probably unnecessary to emphasize that "personal" does not mean simply "individual," but nor does it mean collective; that personal calling and the response to that calling do not establish either individualism or collectivism, but the ecclesial communion of persons, the communion of saints. In this manner, the New Testament transcends the Old Testament pattern, where God's calling and his agreement-covenant with his people Israel, while not ignoring the personal element, could not be understood apart from the notion of the nation or the peculiar people, apart from the relationship with the land of the fathers. The New Testament seems to ignore this perspective. We may take a few examples from the Gospels and Acts such as the calling of the twelve,[45] followed by a similar

of the Psyche'," and K. Agoras, "Sacramental Christo-logy, Cultural Modernity and Eschatological Gospel," in Kalaitzidis-Ntontos, *Orthodoxy and Modernity*, p. 263-291, p. 293-322 respectively. Cf. I. Papayiannopoulos, "Person and Subject. Notes for an Eschatological Anthropology," in P. Kalaitzidis, A. N. Papathanasiou, Th. Ambatzidis (eds.), *Turmoil in Post*-war Theology. The 'Theology of the 60s' (Athens: Indiktos, 2009), 119-164 [in Greek]. On the issue of subjectivity and individualism cf. also C. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 25-29, p. 55-69.

[45] See Mt 4:18-22, 10:1-4; Mk 1:16-20, 3:13-19; Lk 5:1-1; 6:12-16.

invitation addressed by Jesus to others,[46] Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus,[47] the parable of the Good Samaritan,[48] Jesus' encounters with Zacchaeus,[49] the pagan Canaanite woman,[50] the Roman centurion[51] or even the Samaritan Woman at Jacob's well.[52] These are absolutely personal events and choices not mediated by any form of corporate entities or communities, by religious, ethnic, linguistic, cultural or class collectives. And furthermore, these personal choices very often run counter to or against the specific communities that people belong to, just as they violate the framework and boundaries laid down by those communities; interestingly, however, such acts of autonomy do not lead to a private religiosity or an individual version of faith and salvation.

4. Conclusions and future perspectives

I have attempted, then, to point out and highlight, albeit in an incomplete and unsystematic way, some scattered pieces of evidence for an affirmation of the subject, and even of the individual/personal element, on behalf of the Orthodox tradition. This is precisely the material that, in our view, Orthodox theology is nowadays charged with the duty to study and discuss in depth.

Greek American Orthodox theologian Aristotle Papanikolaou, in his informed and well-argued attempt to show that this particular understanding of personhood is not inimical to the notion of human rights, is highlighting the important contribution of the theology of personhood to this end.

> "After centuries of neglect, Christian theologians renewed their attention to the doctrine of the Trinity in the latter half of the twentieth century. This revival of interest in the Trinity was not restricted simply to an understanding of God: perhaps for the first time in the history of Christian thought, Christian theologians were claiming that the affirmation that God is Trinity has radical implications for theological anthropology, in other words, for thinking about what it means to be human. Christian thinkers, of course, had always linked the understanding of being human to the being of God,

[46] Cf. Mk 10:21; Lk 9:59-62.
[47] See Acts 9:1-19. Cf. Acts 22:6-16, 26:12-18.
[48] Lk 10:25-37.
[49] Lk 19: 1-10.
[50] Mt 15:21-28; Mk 7:24-30.
[51] Mt 8:5-13; Lk 7:1-10; Jn 4:43-54.
[52] Jn 4:4-42.

> but only in the twentieth century was the more explicit claim made that since God's being is persons in communion, then human 'personhood' must be defined in terms of relationality and communion. In other words, humans are truly persons when they image the loving, perichoretic communion of the persons of the Trinity. [...] Such an understanding of personhood emerges from what constitutes the core of the Orthodox tradition – the affirmation of divine-human communion. Unlike contemporary Protestant and Roman Catholic theologies, there is a remarkable consensus among Orthodox theologians that the very starting point of theology is the affirmation of divine-human communion. There is no disagreement on this point, but rather on the implications of this central axiom for thinking about God, Christ, theological anthropology, ecclesiology, and epistemology."[53]

We have to confess that this remarkable theology of personhood not only very often remained socially inert (especially regarding a series of issues related to aspects of the modernist phenomenon but also to its ecclesial self-understanding) but, in addition, was understood – even by its initiators, mainly Christos Yannaras – as opposed to modernity, and particularly to human rights. There is an urgent need to overcome this misfortunate and tragic misunderstanding. In the words of Fr. John A. McGuckin,

> "The extremely pressing agenda is for the Orthodox world, and especially its most visible leaders, to reflect much more on the profundities of the deep Orthodox tradition of human rights philosophy, and not to dismiss the language simply as an alien concept from the West. There is a great need for Orthodoxy to clarify and repristinate its ancient deep traditions. It will find there beautiful things: things that put it squarely on the side of the liberation of humanity from oppressive forces. For the church is the servant of the kenotic Christ who came to set the world free, not to enslave it."[54]

It is therefore hoped that the new generation of Orthodox theologians, taking into account insights and contributions provided by human and social sciences,[55] will be able to re-interpret and further develop in new directions the theology of personhood, which despite representing a

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[53] Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, p. 98-99, p. 100.

[54] McGuckin, "The Issue of Human Rights in Byzantium and the Orthodox Christian Tradition," p. 188.

[55] See for instance H. Joas, *The Sacredness of the Person: A New Genealogy of Human Rights* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013). In this work, the internationally renowned sociologist and social theorist traces back the origin of the idea of human rights and the universal value of human dignity not only to secular sources and the French Enlightenment, but also to Christian tradition, and

radically anti-individualistic way forward for the church, faith, life and man, nevertheless makes no sense apart from the questions raised by modernity and its overarching agenda, since in essence those are what it is trying to confront.[56] The challenge today for the theology of the personhood and for Orthodox theology in general, after the first bold and very significant steps taken in the 1970s and 1980s, is to take up the anthropological consequences of its pioneering theological formulations about person and otherness, and to link the above-mentioned theological premises with the on-going discussion about the emergence of the subject and its significance for the formation of modernity and late or post-modernity and the autonomous self. Insofar as the theology of the personhood unites the individual and the social/communal, it may further contribute to the achievement of the sought synthesis of Orthodoxy with modernity/post-modernity, and to the correction of the excesses of both individualism and communitarianism.

especially to the process of "sacralization" of every human being, i.e., to the increasing significance and sacred character the human person aquires with Christianity.

[56] This idea is explored in more detail in Th. Ambatzidis, "Theology of Personhood and Modern Individuality," in Kalaitzidis, Ntontos (eds.), *Orthodoxy and Modernity* (Athens: Indiktos Publications, 2007), p. 211-262 [in Greek].