

## ***Theology Old and New in Modern Greece***

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Guest Lecture

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Note: Appropriate references for this lecture may be found in my book *Modern Orthodox Theology: 'Behold I Make All Things New'* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2019). 521 p. Overview @ <http://academia.utoronto.edu/PaulLadouceur>

### **Introduction**

There are more theologians per square kilometre in Greece than anywhere else in the world. This makes it quite a challenge to speak about theology in modern Greece. My talk today focuses mainly on the three dominant types or modes of Greek theology in modern times.

I will refer to *the first type of theology as "academic theology,"* because it is primarily the theology of the "classroom," as some refer to it. It is characteristic of formal theological education, patterned largely on Western models, in both the Catholic and the Protestant theological traditions. This theology is heavily influenced by the scholastic theological tradition, inherited from the Middle Ages in Western Europe.

The *second type of theology was that of the Greek religious brotherhoods or fraternities,* especially the most important fraternity, called Zoe (life). The brotherhoods were strongly influenced by the Protestant spiritual tendency or movement known as pietism.

I call *the third type of theology "neopatristic theology,"* by which Orthodox theology is inspired both by the theological method of the ancient Fathers of the Church, especially the early Greek Fathers, and by the actual content of their theology. I will also discuss certain theological developments outside the "academy," and what is erroneously referred to as "*post-patristic theology*" in the contemporary Greek theological scene.

### **1. Academic Theology in Greece**

Prior to the 1960s, theology in Greece was dominated by the same type of academic theology that prevailed in Russia before the 1917 Revolution, using the same formalistic approaches to theology based on Western theological models, especially scholasticism. Aristotelian philosophy, medieval scholasticism and the humanistic spirit of the Renaissance in Western Europe began to make inroads in Byzantine society and learning even prior to the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Greek higher education was forbidden in the Ottoman Empire and

Greeks wishing to do advanced studies were obliged to study in the West, which further increased Western influence on Greek theology.

*Vikentios Damodos* (1700-1752) wrote the first Greek manual of dogmatic theology in 1730, based on the *Dogmatica theologica* of the French Jesuit Denys Petau (1583-1652). This set the tone for other similar works in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The basic structure, topics, methodology and even in some cases, dogmas, were based on or even copied from Western manuals of dogmatic theology, along the same lines as those produced in Russia in the nineteenth century.

*Eugenius Bulgaris (Voulgaris)* (1716-1806) was the most illustrious Greek theologian of the eighteenth century. After studies in theology, philosophy and European languages in Padua, in 1753 he was asked by the Patriarch of Constantinople, Cyril V, to establish an academy on Mount Athos, with the objective of raising the educational level of the monks. The Athonite Academy or *Athoniada* was situated at Vatopedi Monastery and attracted many students, but Bulgaris was forced to resign in 1759. Bulgaris, who translated Locke and Voltaire, was open to the ideas of the Enlightenment and he sought to promote an intellectual renaissance in Greek thought based on the Orthodox tradition, but bolstered by the Greek classics and also the new ideas of the Enlightenment.

Greek independence in 1833 reinforced the cleavage between school theology and the church and faithful. The Faculty of Theology of the University of Athens was founded in 1837 and that of Thessalonica a century later, in 1941, but the inspiration was the same. From the beginning, schools of theology were copied from Protestant German models, isolated from the life of the church and the faith of the people; theology was an academic subject like any other. But for much of the nineteenth century the staff of the Athens Faculty of Theology consisted of only one or two professors, with a handful of students, so its actual impact on the church in Greece was limited.

*Saint Nectarius of Aegina* (Anastasius Kephalas, 1846-1920) studied at the Athens Faculty of Theology from 1882 to 1885. Despite the scholastic inspiration of the theology taught at the Faculty, Nectarius made good use of his theological training throughout his life, especially in his sermons and numerous books and pamphlets. Nectarius was fully grounded in the life of the church, and from 1894 to 1908 he headed the Rizarios Ecclesiastical School in Athens, established in 1844 for training priests.

The dominant figure in Greek theology for most of the twentieth century was *Christos Androustos* (1869-1935), who taught at the University of Athens from 1912 until 1935. His *Dogmatics of the Eastern Orthodox Church* (1907) which set the tone for Greek theology for a good part of the twentieth century. Androustos sets out to provide a strong philosophical basis

for theology, using Orthodox dogmas “as sources and norms for speculation while using human reason to strengthen the defined dogmas” (Maloney, 197). Despite his good intentions, Androutsos, like his predecessors in Greece and elsewhere, was nonetheless inspired by a rational rather than a mystical and liturgical approach to theology, and he follows the typical scholastic structure of treatises of dogmatic theology, examining successively God, creation, providence, the world, humanity, original sin, salvation, the Incarnation, Christ, grace, the sacraments and eschatology. His *Dogmatics* had a powerful impact on theological education in Greece for well over half a century, and was, as Christos Yannaras (b. 1935) reluctantly admits, “considered in Greece as the authentic formulation of Orthodox dogmatic teaching” (Yannaras, *Orthodoxy and the West*).

Yannaras sees Androutsos’s *Dogmatics* as prime example of the “Western captivity” of Greek theology: “His *Dogmatics* is typical: the culmination of the unconscious process of the Westernization of Greek scholars that had begun in the fourteenth century... On every page scholasticism masquerades as ‘Orthodox’ dogmatics.” Non-Orthodox aspects of Androutsos’s theology include the experiential inaccessibility of dogma, which is subject only to rational clarification; emphasis on the divine essence rather than the divine Persons; absence of the distinction between the divine essence and divine energies; and acceptance of the juridical notion of salvation, based on St Anselm of Canterbury.

The other major representative of Greek academic theology in the twentieth century was *Panayiotis Trembelas* (1886-1977). His literary output was enormous, covering most aspects of theology, including dogmatics, biblical commentaries and studies, apologetics, liturgy, homiletics, catechetics and canon law, as well as philosophy. He was one of the founders of the Zoe Brotherhood of Theologians in 1907 and was closely associated with Zoe until 1960.

Among Trembelas’s publications his three-volume *Dogmatics*, published in 1959-1961, stands out as the last great monument of Greek academic theology. The major change from Androutsos’s *Dogmatics* is that Trembelas introduces an anthology of patristic references to buttress the essentially unchanged rationalistic, scholastic structure and exposition of Orthodox dogmas as found in Androutsos’s work a half century earlier. While certainly monumental, Trembelas’s *Dogmatica* is neither inspired nor inspiring. For Kallistos Ware, the treatise represents “a faithful picture of the kind of theology taught over the past half century in Greek universities”, it is “outstanding of its type,” “exhaustive and highly methodical,” but it requires “several emphatic reservations” because of the “the style of theology that it represents” (Ware, Review of Trembelas, *Dogmatique*). Ware criticises the book on these points in particular: the *Dogmatica* is a “very *self-confident* book... magisterial in tone, monolithic and even ‘triumphalist’”; it is focussed almost entirely on Greek theologians and hence is “a somewhat

*provincial* book”; it is fundamentally a Western approach to theology “the *method* is definitely occidental (order and treatment of subjects, much of the terminology and categories, bear unmistakably the stamp of the West”; it is out-of-date, even with respect to Western theologians: “The West on which he has drawn is that of the past rather than the present” – there is no mention of twentieth-century Catholic or non-Greek Orthodox theologians; the book is descriptive rather than analytical, containing “long and fascinating *catena* of patristic quotations... We are told what the Fathers *said*; but at times we are still left asking ‘What exactly did they *mean*?’”; and finally, the book is “*academic* and *scholastic* rather than liturgical and mystical,” “a theology of the lecture hall and examination schools rather than a theology of mystery, adoration and divine glory.” Ware cites in particular the inadequate treatment of the apophatic approach to theology, the essence-energies distinction in God, the connection between the church and the Eucharist, and the absence of eucharistic ecclesiology and the dogmatic implications of the hesychast controversy.

Trembelas ignores both the Russian religious renaissance and emerging neopatristic theology, which had already taken flight in Western Europe and North America by the late 1950s. In comparison with the seventeenth century Orthodox confessions of faith, there is in Trembelas’s *Dogmatica* a partial recuperation of the Orthodox tradition in key doctrines, even if he presents these in an essentially scholastic framework and largely in the form of patristic references. In comparison with Vladimir Lossky, for example, and indeed neopatristic theology in general, Trembelas lacks above all a clear grasp of the interrelation of apophatism in theology, the divine energies and theosis. Although he mentions these doctrines, especially in their historic context, they remain disconnected and marginal to his own theology.

Christos Yannaras considers Trembelas’s *Dogmatica* as a manifestation of both the scholasticism of academic theology and the pietism of the Greek religious fraternities: “Trembelas’s stature is sadly diminished by his entrapment in a Western theological outlook... His vast output is steeped in pietistic moralism, accompanied by rationalistic apologetic... For Trembelas, Orthodoxy was simply moral purity of life and the emotional convictions which sustained it, and every page he wrote proves it” (Yannaras, *Orthodoxy and the West*).

Academic theology was rapidly outflanked by the emergence of neopatristic theology in Greece during the 1960s.

## 2. Greek Religious Movements

The religious history of modern Greece has been strongly marked by religious movements, especially the Zoe ("Life") Brotherhood of Theologians. Zoe and its predecessors in the nineteenth century were created in response to the difficult conditions of the Church of Greece after the liberation of Greece from the Ottoman Empire. Under the Turks, the church was tolerated but just barely: only worship was permitted, religious education and the teaching of Greek language and culture were discouraged, heavy taxes were imposed on Christians and conversion to Islam was encouraged. Church life was reduced to a minimum and consisted primarily of the sacraments. In many villages, the priesthood became hereditary and little distinguished the priest from other poor and uneducated villagers.

Religious movements in Greece thus arose in the context of the profound needs of the Greek people for effective teaching of the faith and the fulfilment of spiritual needs. The weakness of the Orthodox Church of Greece until well into the twentieth century prevented it from implementing a true home missionary program. Zoe was founded by Archimandrite *Eusebius Matthopoulos* (1845-1929). From 1884 to 1900 Matthopoulos undertook itinerant missionary work in Greece based on Scripture and the liturgical life, creating small groups for mutual assistance and spiritual support. He became convinced of the need for a more formal structure than an itinerant preacher could provide. In 1907 he brought together theologians and theology students in the Zoe Brotherhood of Theologians. The objectives of Zoe were both the spiritual growth of its members and the renewal of spiritual life in Greece, based on an active presence throughout the country.

Matthopoulos directed Zoe until 1927 and the movement was a reflection of his ideas and personality. His book *The Destiny of Man*, first published in 1913, became the essential reference manual, spiritual guide and programme of Zoe over the years. After the Bible, it was the most popular religious book in Greece for many decades, with sixteen editions to 1987.

Matthopoulos and his followers employed Western missionary and evangelisation methods, emphasising personal piety and morality above all, centred on the "imitation of Christ," notion more typical of Western than Orthodox spirituality, which speaks rather of union with Christ and deification (theosis). "The destiny of man," writes Matthopoulos, "consists in the imitation of Christ and in the enjoyment in God of eternal glory and beatitude for the glorification of the supreme and good God." As Basil Jioultsis summarises Zoe's theological and spiritual perspectives: "Morality took precedence over dogma, so that individual morality and piety came to be overemphasized and apparently dependent upon known Western conceptions of piety (moral introspection, natural theology, religion of the emotions, religious civilization)."

Zoe, imitated by later movements, adopted some aspects of traditional monasticism and for this reason the religious fraternities are sometimes called "monastic brotherhoods." Zoe founded its call for spiritual renewal in three areas: Bible study, preaching and participation in the sacraments. Zoe organized Sunday schools, Bible study groups and summer camps for students and maintained an extensive publication programme. Until the end of the World War II, preaching was Zoe's main activity but with the emergence of a large middle class in Greece and a higher level of education, Zoe gave more importance to the written word. Zoe and its affiliates published numerous editions of the Bible, Bible commentaries, books of spirituality, and magazines and publications for children youth and adults. The books of Matthopoulos and his equally charismatic successor, Archimandrite *Seraphim Papacostas* (1892-1954), who headed Zoe from 1927 to 1954, enjoyed enormous success.

Zoe sparked a broad religious renewal at a time when the Greek Church was weak; parish clergy and even bishops were often poorly educated and ill prepared for teaching the faith. The rapid urbanization of Greece, especially after the Second World War, also initially favoured Zoe, which concentrated its efforts in urban areas. Although the church never condemned Zoe or other fraternities, relations between the church and Zoe were strained in many dioceses, in part because representatives of Zoe were responsible to their superiors in Athens rather than to local bishops.

In the late 1950's internal dissention erupted between more conservative Zoe leaders seeking to maintain the brotherhood's traditional approach and activities, and more progressive members who saw a need for Zoe to adapt itself to changing conditions in Greek society and Greek theology. In 1960 about a third of the members of Zoe, the "old guard," formed a new fraternity called Sotir (Saviour).

Assessments of observers of the Greek religious movements are far from unanimous. Some praise the movements, others are severely critical, some are more nuanced, acknowledging the services that Zoe rendered to Greek Orthodoxy, while pointing to its mistakes and weaknesses. Until the crisis of 1958-1960, criticisms of Zoe were rather limited, but during the crisis several younger members left the brotherhood and became formidable critics. Criticism covers a wide range of aspects, most fundamentally that the religious movements were based on Western models, rather than being grounded in Orthodox tradition. Because they operated largely independently of the Church of Greece, they are sometimes called "para-ecclesial" or even "extra-ecclesial" organizations. The brotherhoods are also accused of political and social conservatism, a charge which included a close association between the brotherhoods and the detested "colonels' regime" which ruled Greece from 1967 to 1974. Several members of the junta had close personal ties with Zoe and Sotir.

The most articulate and vocal critic of the religious movements has been Christos Yannaras. In his youth and as a young adult, Yannaras was deeply involved with Zoe, but he broke with the movement in 1964, prior to departing for studies initially Germany, then in France, since Paris remained a leading centre of neopatristic theology, even if many leading figures had moved to the United States. Yannaras and other critics see the theology and spirituality of the religious movements as heavily inspired by Western pietism, incompatible with Orthodoxy. Yannaras considers pietism "the great heresy of our age," which transposes salvation from participation in the Body of Christ, the church, to the fulfilment of personal religious duties (including participation in the sacraments, which thus become acts of personal piety), a scrupulous morality, and the imitation of the "virtues" of Christ. The church becomes an assembly of those who are individually justified, to complement and support personal piety, not the place and the means of salvation.

The theology of Greek religious movements reflects many aspects of Western, especially Protestant, theology in support of morality and individual piety: the primacy of the Bible over the teaching of the church and patristic tradition; a juridical doctrine of salvation; deification (theosis), to the extent that it is retained, is seen as a "character development" rather than participation in divine life; a legalistic view of the transmission of original sin; the denial of the distinction between divine essence and divine energies; the rejection of the neptic tradition and hesychastic spirituality; an anti-monastic attitude (even if the movements borrowed some traditional monastic elements); autonomy of the laity in the church and over-emphasis of the universal priesthood of the laity; and the replacement of icons by religious works of the Renaissance and traditional Orthodox Church music by Western hymns and music in religious activities outside the liturgy itself. One scholar even refers to Zoe as an "Orthodox Reformation" (Maczewski, *Dei Zoi-Bewegung Griechenlands*).

Despite the personal adherence of its members to the Church of Greece, formally the fraternities were not structures of the Church of Greece, nor were they truly monastic in the traditional sense. In effect, the religious brotherhoods resemble more Roman Catholic religious communities with social and educational vocations than Orthodox monastic communities.

### **3. The Theology of the '60s**

In the first half of the twentieth century, theology in Greece was caught between academic theology patterned after scholasticism, represented by Androutsos and Trembelas and others, and the moralistic and pietist-inspired theology of the Zoe Brotherhood and its imitators. Yannaras, for one, considers that much of Greek theology as late as 1992 continued to suffer from the formalism typical of the manuals of dogmatic theology, the absence of dialogue and criticism, and confusion or an absence of criteria and principles. The result was a blind clinging

to the formulas of the past represented by Androutsos and Trembelas, and a rejection of any innovation in the name of safeguarding traditional Orthodoxy:

Any new formulation, any new development of dogma beyond the presently accepted norms in Greece is judged to be suspect and dangerous, even before it has been seriously considered. There are Greek academic theologians for whom the whole theological movement of the Orthodox Russians of the diaspora is suspect, at times even unacceptable, simply because it involves something new for Greece. A few years ago, Professor Constantine Mouratidis, a theologian of the faculty of theology of Athens, wrote that apophatism, since in itself it signifies a negation, is inadmissible for Orthodox theology! (Yannaras, "Theology in Present-Day Greece").

Yannaras invokes Florovsky, familiar with Greek theology from his visits to Greece, who observed that Greek theologians were not touched by the fundamentally Greek dimension of Orthodox theology in the Hellenism of dogmas, worship and icons.

By the mid-1950s, light was beginning to shine on the rather gloomy scene of Greek theology. The Russian theologians in exile provided the initial stimulus for a renewal of Greek theology initiated in the late 1950s and the 1960s – Florovsky's call for a neopatristic synthesis did not fall on deaf ears in Greece. In 1971 Christos Yannaras could write:

One can sense the beginning of a renewal... Withal, there are indications of new tendencies and trends that give us great reason to hope – first of all, in the academic realm. True, they are generally under the influence of the theological circles of the Russian diaspora in Europe and America. The return to the apophatic and mystical theology of the Eastern tradition, the so-called neo-palamite theology, the theology of icons and of the Orthodox liturgy and finally the dialogue between this theology with the spirit and problematics of the contemporary Western world are at last beginning to have a serious impact in Greece. The school of the Russian diaspora has made possible an orderly advance beyond the scholastic and rationalistic spirit of Greek academicism, without the risk of theological acrobatics.

A younger generation of Greek theologians, many of whom completed their higher education abroad, was reaching maturity in the late 1950s and early 1960s. They were exposed to the thinking of Russian theologians and familiar with the ideas of the neopatristic synthesis, as well as with trends in Catholic theology, especially the *théologie nouvelle* movement, which also involved a return to patristic inspiration for theology, and in philosophy, especially existentialism. The publication of the theses and early writings of the younger theologians punctuated the early 1960s, challenging the well-entrenched academic theology of Androutsos, Trembelas and Karmiris. The chief architects of the neopatristic renaissance of Greek theology were *Savas Agouridis*, *George Mantzarides*, *Panayiotis Nellas*, *Nikos Nissiotis*, *John Romanides*, *Christos Yannaras* and *John Zizioulas*.

A key event which symbolically marked the beginning of the new trend in Greek theology was the publication in 1957 of the doctoral thesis of Fr *John Romanides* (1927-2001), *The Ancestral Sin*, despite strong objections by Panagiotis Trembelas of the Athens Faculty of Theology. Romanides and Trembelas engaged in heated written exchanges over Romanides's thesis, primarily over the status and creditability of the theologians of the Russian diaspora which Romanides invokes in support of his patristic approach to original sin.

Romanides's theology is predicated on a historiography which sees an irreconcilable rift between the Christian East, considered the true successor to the Christianised Roman Empire, and a Western Christianity usurped by the converted barbarian tribes, especially the Franks and the Goths, who sought to dominate the Orthodox East, in part through the papacy, and to supplant their erroneous theology for that of the Greek Fathers. Romanides's influence has been considerable, but aspects of his theology, especially as derived from his theory of the *romiosyne* ("romanity") of Orthodoxy, posited in opposition to the *francosyne* of Western Christianity, remains controversial.

Also controversial is Romanides's attribution of the source of the West's deviation from (Greek) patristic Christianity to Augustine. For Romanides, the West's key theological errors can be traced back to Augustine: the doctrines of original sin and the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son. These doctrines in turn lead to the rejection the essence-energies distinction in God and hence also theosis, and the substitution in their stead of philosophical notions of the divine essence to develop theological discourse about God, the Trinity, relations between God and creation, grace, predestination and salvation.

Romanides's book *The Ancestral Sin* is wide-ranging treatment of major themes in patristic theology such as creation, the divine energies and anthropology and is marked by "a fairly strident anti-westernism" (Louth, *Modern Orthodox Thinkers*), including attacks on Western notions such as the Filioque, Anselm's juridical soteriology and the medieval idea of *analogia entis*, by which aspects of creation (*entis*) are held to reflect (*analogia*) divine characteristics. In this context, the restoration of the apophatic tradition and Palamite theology to their just places in Orthodox theology was a major aspect of theological renaissance in Greece.

A sign of change in the academic environment, at least at the Faculty of Theology in Thessalonica, was a symposium held in Thessalonica in 1959 to mark the sixth centenary of the death of St. Gregory Palamas, to which were invited many international scholars, including Georges Florovsky, who was awarded an honorary doctorate of theology. The move to restore Palamism in Greek theology was bolstered by the publication of a critical edition of *The Writings of St. Gregory Palamas* (1960-1996), and a translation of Palamas into modern Greek, under the direction of *Panayiotis Chrestou* (1917-1996) of the University of Thessalonica. The

publication of the first volume of the writings of Palamas was followed in 1963 by a study of the theology of Gregory Palamas on theosis, the doctoral dissertation, under Chrestou's direction, of George Mantzaridis (b. 1935), who became one of the leading theologians of the new generation.

In 1964 Vladimir Lossky's *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* appeared in Greek translation. This quickly became a theological best-seller and set the tone for the development of neopatristic theology in Greece, as it had done earlier in Russian exile circles and in the English-speaking world. Christos Yannaras and others were strongly influenced by Lossky's book, especially in the development of Greek thinking on apophatism and the theology of the human person.

And in 1965 Nikos Nissiotis (1925-1986) published two books, *Prolegomena to Theological Epistemology* and *The Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology*. Nissiotis was deeply involved in ecumenism, as an Orthodox observer at the Second Vatican Council and from 1966 to 1974 as director of the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, Switzerland, the educational arm of the World Council of Churches.

Also in 1965 was the publication of the doctoral dissertation of John Zizioulas (b. 1931), *The Unity of the Church in the Holy Eucharist and the Bishop during the First Three Centuries*, which marked a refinement in eucharistic ecclesiology first elaborated by Nicholas Afanasiev. Between 1960 and 1964 Zizioulas studied under Georges Florovsky at Harvard University. Met. John Zizioulas has been a major Orthodox figure in ecumenical circles, especially in the World Council of Churches, where he worked in the Secretariat, and in the Orthodox-Catholic theological dialogue, which he co-chaired with a senior representative of the Catholic Church, retiring in 2016.

In 1969 Panayiotis Nellas (1936-1986), who taught in an Athenian secondary school, published his first study on Nicholas Cabasilas, followed by a more detailed monograph in 1974. The main thrust of Nellas's theology is that the destiny of human beings, must be seen, not from the moral outlook of Zoe, but from the perspective of patristic anthropology, as a reaching forth to eternity in God – that is, as theosis, and hence the title of his major work, *Deification in Christ*, published in 1979.

#### **4. Beyond the Academy**

Parallel with the ferment in Greek academic circles in the 1960s were several developments outside academia also moving towards a return to patristic theological foundations. A key figure in non-academic circles was Demetrios Koutroubis (1921-1983), who had become a Roman Catholic, entered the Jesuit Order and had studied in Western Europe, especially at the

important Jesuit centre in Lyons, France. After teaching at a Catholic university in Lebanon, he returned to the Orthodox Church and to Greece in 1954 and played a major though discreet role in promoting patristic-based theology. Koutroubis wrote very little himself and his influence was largely personal, through his discussions with younger theologians and a wide range of Greek and foreign religious figures in what he called the “theological seminar,” conducted in his own house. He was instrumental in making the thinking of the contemporary Russian theologians known in Greece, thanks in part to his friendship with Archimandrite *Elias Mastroyannopoulos*, the leader of the Zoe movement from 1959 until 1965.

In 1962, Zoe published an innovative book under the title *Theology – Truth and Life*, edited by Koutroubis. The book was original in Greek theology because it contained translations of writings of leading Russian neopatristic theology theologians (Florovsky, Lossky, Schmemmann and Meyendorff), and the Serb Justin Popovitch, as well as three essays by young Greek theologians, two from Zoe and Nikos Nissiotis. This marked the first time that writings of leading representatives of neopatristic theology were available to a wide public in Greece and it was a forward-looking attempt on the part of the Zoe leadership to build bridges to the emerging neopatristic renaissance at home and abroad. The theological approach of the essays by the Greek theologians in this volume is a far cry from the *Dogmatica* of Androutsos and Trembelas and marked an important patristic overture on the part of the Zoe leadership.

In 1963 Zoe published two other anthologies prepared by Koutroubis, one on the liturgy and eucharistic theology, with studies by Mastroyannopoulos, Alexander Schmemmann and Olivier Clément, and the other, entitled *Monasticism and the Modern World*, on early Christian ascetic spirituality.

Zoe had extensive connections with the worshipping church and the lives of the faithful that neither the academic theologians nor the handful of emerging neopatristic theologians possessed. The book *Theology – Truth and Life* was a sort of Greek neopatristic manifesto which could have played the same role as Florovsky’s addresses at the conference of Orthodox theologians in 1936 and his *Ways of Russian Theology*. But the initiatives undertaken by Koutroubis and Mastroyannopoulos were short-circuited when Mastroyannopoulos was ousted as head of Zoe in 1965. Zoe returned to a narrow conservatism, and the Mastroyannopoulos years represented an aborted opportunity both to reform Zoe’s own theology and spirituality and to make theology more relevant to Greek religious life.

From 1964 to 1967, a group of former Zoe members close to Koutroubis and led by Christos Yannaras, published the journal *Synaro (Frontier)*, with thematic issues exploring the relevance of Orthodoxy to contemporary issues in art, society, politics, drawing on both Russian theologians and Greek thinkers and artists. *Synaro* closed in silent protest to the seizure of

power by the military junta. After the fall of the junta, Panayiotis Nellas, keenly intent to make Greek theology relevant to contemporary Greek society, promoted a new Greek theological journal in the early 1980s. The theological quarterly *Synaxi*, which Nellas launched in 1982, was a successor to *Synoro*. The very title of the journal was a mission statement: to bring together and to promote dialogue among the scattered theological and spiritual voices in Greek society. *Synaxi* quickly became a major focal point for the new theology in Greece, with articles on a wide range of theological and other issues, not only by academics, but also by artists, lay intellectuals, monks and non-Greeks.

After Nellas's untimely death at age 50 in 1986, *Sotiris Gounelas* (b. 1949) assumed responsibility for *Synaxi*, followed by *Athanasios Papathanassiou* (b. 1959) in 1997. Both successfully maintained a dynamic team of contributors, sustaining *Synaxi*'s importance as the leading Greek theological publication, generating "new approaches in modern Greek theological thinking," in part by making better known the thought of the Russian diaspora and by engaging a wider circle of intellectuals, including from Mount Athos, in the shaping of Greek theological reflection.

During this period *Christos Yannaras* emerged as one of the principal leaders of the new theology in Greece. Yannaras's intellectual scope is far-reaching and his literary corpus is enormous, with over 70 books and numerous essays and newspaper and magazine articles stretching over more than half a century. While his prime focus is on the philosophical aspects of Orthodoxy, as for the Russian religious philosophers of the early twentieth century, philosophy and theology blend into a sophisticated Orthodox intellectual discourse. As a philosopher, he is close to the existentialist school, and has been influenced by Martin Heidegger. In 1970, he was awarded a doctorate from the Sorbonne for a thesis in philosophy entitled "Metaphysics of the Body: A Study on John Climacus," but the University of Athens rejected the thesis because of its emphasis on Christian love as erotic. Also in 1970, Yannaras was awarded a doctorate in theology from the University of Thessalonica for a thesis on "The Ontological Content of the Theological Concept of the Person," subsequently published as *Person and Eros*.

Yannaras considers his critique of the foundations of modern Western culture as self-critique from within a globalised Western way of life which includes Greece, a society "radically and unhappily Westernised." "My critical stance towards the West is self-criticism," he writes in the preface to the English edition of his *Orthodoxy and the West*, "it refers to my wholly Western mode of life. I am a Western person searching for answers to the problems tormenting Western peoples today."

It is in this perspective that Yannaras is equally critical of aspects of modern Greece, especially the articulation of the Greek state and the Church of Greece in terms of Greek nationalism, summarised in his expression “Nationalism spells the demise of Hellenism.” Consistent with his critique of a narrow view of Hellenism, Yannaras warns against the injection of particularistic notions into the church:

The most important danger for the universal unity of the local Orthodox churches during the last centuries has been *nationalism* or *phyletism*. This is the substitution of the truth concerning the nature of the church – and this nature is the “new” mode of Trinitarian existence “in Christ,” – with the objective unity of a race or nation; a relativization of the divine-human common nature of the church for the sake of “individual” otherness (national or racial). (Yannaras, *Alitheia kai Enótita tis Ekklisías*).

Yannaras’s perspective is thus a universal or “catholic” Hellenism, which brings together the apophatic tradition of the Greek Fathers, the Palamite theology of the divine energies and the theology of the person developed in the thinkers of the Russian religious renaissance, especially, for Yannaras, in Vladimir Lossky. In this respect Yannaras’s Hellenism approximates that of Georges Florovsky. Yannaras’s critique of Western culture in a Hellenistic-Orthodox perspective is subtle and complex, but his excesses of language and rigid categorization can easily lead to a superficial dismissal of his thinking on a wide range of issues as a simple blend of “Greek nationalism, anti-Westernism, anti-modernism and Orthodoxy.” (Roudometof et al., eds., *Eastern Orthodoxy in a Global Age*).

Although Yannaras’s alternatives or cures for the problems of modernity are less well articulated than his diagnosis of its illnesses, his stature as modern Orthodox thinker can only increase as more of his writings are translated. A broad “reaching out” of Orthodox theologians in the 1980s to the wider Greek intellectual community became known as the “neo-Orthodox movement.” The origin of neo-Orthodoxy lay in a religious quest of certain intellectuals and literary and cultural figures on the political left, seeking to identify the basis for authentic Greek culture. This quest spawned a lively dialogue between Christian and Marxist intellectuals, but the term “neo-Orthodoxy” soon came to refer to a wide range of personalities and ideas, to the point that some despair of being able to define it meaningfully or to consider it as a “movement” at all.

Like the Russian Slavophiles of the mid-nineteenth century, those identified with the neo-Orthodox movement recognised the critical importance of Christianity and Byzantine culture in the formation of the Greek identity, and they turned to Greek Orthodoxy as the key to the definition of Greekness in the face of Western culture and values. Pantelis Kalaitzidis characterizes the principal features of the neo-Orthodox movement as “a return to tradition of

the Fathers, a return to the people, Greek uniqueness, and a radical critique and rejection of the West, the Enlightenment, modernity etc.” (Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy and Political Theology*).

The movement had some surprising facets, including Orthodox-Marxist/Communist dialogue, considerable interest in traditional monasticism and hesychastic spirituality among Greek intellectuals and students, and positive assessments of Orthodoxy by several popular cultural figures, such as the composer-singers *Mikis Theodorakis* (b. 1925). But as the neo-Orthodox trend turned more towards Greco-Orthodox nationalism, the secular intellectuals withdrew from the dialogue. Little united the disparate personalities lumped under the neo-Orthodox label other than recognition of the importance of the Orthodox-Byzantine tradition in the formation of modern Greece and a critique of the West articulated from different perspectives. After the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, the basis of the Christian-Marxist dialogue disintegrated and the Orthodox associated with this trend followed other paths, even if the neo-Orthodox label persisted in popular parlance.

## 5. Towards Post-Patristic Theology?

In this part of my talk, I focus mainly on those aspects of the Greek theological scene of the late twentieth century and early twenty-first centuries which have achieved a certain measure of international visibility, with an emphasis on younger theologians, at the risk of skewing the fullness of modern Greek theology considered from an internal perspective. Prominent representatives of the younger generation of Greek theologians in the early twenty-first century include:

*Fr Demetrios Bathrellos* (b. 1968), who teaches at the Hellenic Open University (Athens) and at the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies (Cambridge);

*Pantelis Kalaitzidis* (b. 1961), director of the Volos Academy for Theological Studies;

*Fr Nikolaos Loudovikos* (b. 1959), who teaches at the University Ecclesiastical Academy of Thessaloniki and at the Cambridge Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies; and

*Athanasios N. Papathanasiou* (b. 1959), editor of the journal *Synaxi* since 1997.

*Demetrios Bathrellos* is primarily a scholar of Byzantine theology, a specialist on Maximus the Confessor. *Nikolaos Loudovikos* has published works on Maximus the Confessor and ecclesiology, and has waded into the middle of contemporary Orthodox thought on personalism and ecclesiology. Initially a student of John Zizioulas, Loudovikos took his distance from Zizioulas and is now a formidable critic of his former teacher’s personalism and ecclesiology, and of the personalism of Christos Yannaras.

*Athanasios N. Papathanasiou* is a well-known figure in Greek theology and public circles as editor of *Synaxi*, instructor at the Hellenic Open University, and frequent participant in conferences and Greek social media. Papathansiou focuses on the engagement of Orthodoxy with modernity, especially Orthodox mission, social justice and political theology. He stresses scriptural, patristic and canonical texts which highlight the indissolubility of Christian faith and practice and social with economic justice, developing a liberation perspective along the lines of liberation theology in the Catholic Church. Papathanasiou espouses an Orthodox theology of liberation which calls on Orthodox to seek justice, solidarity and freedom in contemporary society. Papathanasiou advances an engaged faith which seeks to understand contemporary society from a Christian perspective and to participate actively in national and international social and political issues.

*Pantelis Kalaitzidis* is the head of the Volos Academy for Theological Studies. This is not a teaching institution, but rather a research centre with a broadly progressive agenda. It works closely with both Orthodox and non-Orthodox institutions in Europe and the United States. Pantelis Kalaitzidis has a high international visibility, thanks to the activities of the Volos Academy, and his numerous publications in Western Europe and North America. He is a determined critic of many aspects of neopatristic theology, especially a perceived anti-Westernism and its frequent fellow travellers: the exaltation of an idealized vision of the Byzantine Empire; religious nationalism; anti-ecumenism; the difficulty of neopatristic theology to engage meaningfully and constructively with modernity and contemporary social, political and ethical issues; concentration on patristic theology to the neglect of other fields such as Biblical studies; a strong focus on the hierarchical aspect of the church and the neglect of the royal priesthood of the faithful and the role of the laity, especially women, in the church.

The Volos Academy rapidly emerged in the new millennium as a dynamic feature in Greek theology and a major force in global Orthodox thought. A large part of the Academy's activities is centred on the organization of studies, conferences and colloquia, frequently in collaboration with academic institutions in Eastern Europe, Western Europe and the United States. The Volos Academy, operating outside the formal university structure but within the Church of Greece, has more freedom than a university faculty. Despite its high external visibility, Volos appears to have limited influence within Greece itself, in comparison with other theological actors, such as leading figures of the older generation, notably Christos Yannaras, the journals *Synaxi* and *Theologia*, younger theologians such as Nikolaos Loudovikos and Athanasios Papathansiou, and neo-traditionist figures such as Metropolitan *Hierotheos Vlachos*.

The tone of the Volos Academy was set by Kalaitzidis's doctoral thesis, entitled 'Hellenicity and Anti-Westernism in the Greek "Theology of the '60s"'. The thesis is an indictment of

hellenocentrism, the identification of Orthodoxy with the Greek nation and Greek culture, the nostalgic idealization of the Byzantine Empire and of Greek anti-Westernism. Kalaitzidis reads Yannaras's critique of Western thought and culture as systematic, structural and persistent, but he seems to overlook Yannaras's proclaimed perspective as a critic within Westernism itself, his universal rather than ethnic or national vision of Hellenism, and his engagement with issues of modernity in a number of books and other publications.

Kalaitzidis's study is an inverse image of Florovsky's *The Ways of Russian Theology* (1937) and of Yannaras's *Orthodoxy and the West* (1992). Just as Florovsky set out to identify and denounce Western influence in Russian thought, and Yannaras to point the finger at Western influences in Greek Orthodoxy, so Kalaitzidis sets out to identify and denounce anti-Westernism in modern Greek thought. Florovsky himself gets off rather lightly in Kalaitzidis's analysis, but for Kalaitzidis a simplified reading of Florovsky served to promote an unhealthy ethnically-based Christian Hellenism. In other writings, Kalaitzidis considers that neopatristic theology as a whole has been profoundly infected by the canker of anti-Westernism.

The positive side of the Kalaitzidis-Volos theological agenda focuses on the universalism of Orthodoxy, and engagement with modernism from a Orthodox perspective, instead of simplistic and vociferous (and largely futile) denunciations of modernity, ecumenism and religious pluralism, typical of neotraditionalist circles in Greece and elsewhere. The engagement with aspects of modernity is clear in themes addressed by the Volos Academy: Orthodox Christianity and modernity; theology and culture; religion in the public square; women and laity in the church; ecumenism; and multiculturalism or religious pluralism.

In 2001-2002, the Volos Academy hosted a lecture series on the theme "Orthodox Christianity and Modernity." In a lengthy introduction to the collected papers, Pantelis Kalaitzidis issues a clarion call for Orthodox engagement with modernity, especially central notions such as the emergence of the autonomous subject, the affirmation of rationality, human rights, the religiously neutral secular state and the separation of church and state (typically accompanied by the relegation of religion to the private sphere). This stance contrasts sharply with the rejection of modernity by many Orthodox theologians. He supports his argument by drawing a parallel between the encounter of Christianity with Hellenic culture in the early centuries of the church, which resulted in the adoption (and adaptation) of many notions of Greek philosophy into Christian theology, and the awaited encounter of Orthodoxy with modernism resulting from the Enlightenment in particular. Together with other Christian authors, Kalaitzidis argues that modernity has a Christian basis, which some refer to as "non-religious Christianity." He is nonetheless confident that Orthodoxy can engage in "a creative encounter and a serious theological dialogue with whatever challenges modernity poses," without losing its soul. The

book is a revisionist manifesto which sets forth the philosophical, theological and historical foundations for the engagement of Orthodoxy with modernity, especially in the public square.

The activities of the Volos Academy and the thinking of Pantelis Kalaitzidis are disturbing in the Greek context, in some ways reminiscent of the initial reaction to some “theology of the ‘60s” that Kalaitzidis criticizes. There is an anti-Volos reaction in neotraditionalist quarters of the Church of Greece and Greek universities. Taking a cue from Volos’s own *modus operandi*, Metropolitan Seraphim (Mentzelopoulos) of Piraeus (b. 1956) organised a symposium on 4 February 2012 with the polemical title “Patristic Theology and Post-Patristic Heresy.” The well-attended event was a generalised attack on a good part of modern Orthodox theology, except for John Romanides, Panayiotis Trembelas, and, to some extent, Georges Florovsky, and a few others. The symposium was stimulated largely by the 2010 Volos conference, with opposition to the very idea of “post-patristic theology” as the *leitmotif* and Romanides as the knight in shining armour who saves Orthodoxy from heretical theological revisionism.

## Conclusion

Great diversity characterized theology in Greece in the last decades of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. This theological multi-polarity includes at least six important modes of theology:

1. vestiges of academic theology, especially in the theological educational system;
2. the neopatristic approach to theology carried forward from the theology of the ‘60s, embodied notably by John Zizioulas;
3. the theological moralism of the still-active but less prominent religious brotherhoods;
4. theological conservatism or neo-traditionalism among certain academics, hierarchs, and monastic figures;
5. the “neo-Orthodoxy” of Christos Yannaras and others;
6. and revisionist critiques of neopatristic theology emerging from engagement with modernity and associated with the unfortunate expression “post-patristic theology.”

While some aspects of this theological fertility became familiar outside Greece, primarily through the translations of the works of major personalities such as Christos Yannaras, John Zizioulas, Hierotheos (Vlachos) of Nafpaktos (b. 1945) and younger figures such as Pantelis Kalaitzidis and Nikolaos Loudovikos, the works of many Greek theologians remain untranslated and little studied outside Greece. Even for such a prominent figure as Christos Yannaras, many of his numerous books are published only in Greek, not to speak of his voluminous other writings.

Neopatristic theology has come under fire from younger theologians, who feel that the practice of this approach to theology in Greece has become tainted with an unhealthy introspective spirit characterized by anti-Westernism, an undue exaltation of the Byzantine Empire, and an a priori rejection of modernity. These critiques coalesce around the polemical slogan “post-patristic theology.” The term post-patristic was no doubt a hastily-launched trial balloon which soon burst, making its advocates an easy target for accusations of betraying Orthodox tradition. This served to distract attention from the main trusts of the progressive theologians, especially the necessity of engaging the modern world beyond mere denunciation.

Despite the controversial idea of “post-patristic” theology, the ferment in Greek theology, reinforced by similar developments in Orthodox theology elsewhere, may nonetheless open new possibilities for Orthodox theology to overcome some of the weaknesses inherent in neopatristic theology. The current theological revisionism could also provide a framework for the now conventional neopatristic approach to recognise the origins of some of its key concepts in earlier theology, especially in the enduring aspects of Russian religious philosophy.

Patriarchal Orthodox Theological Academy of Toronto

“Theology Old and New in Modern Greece”

Guest Lecture

18 November 2019

Dr. Paul Ladouceur

Orthodox School of Theology at Trinity College

University of Toronto

Montreal Institute of Orthodox Theology

Université Laval

## Persons Mentioned

Vikentios Damodos (1700-1752)

Eugenius Bulgaris (Voulgaris) (1716-1806)

St Nectarius of Aegina (1846-1920)

Christos Yannaras (b. 1935)

Panayiotis Trembelas (1886-1977)

Met. Kallistos Ware (b. 1934)

Vladimir Lossky (1903-1958)

Fr Eusebius Matthopoulos (1845-1929)

Fr Seraphim Papacostas (1892-1954)

Constantine Mouratidis

Savas Agouridis (1921-2009)

George Mantzarides (b. 1935)

Panayiotis Nellas (1936-1986)

Nikos Nissiotis (1925-1986)

Fr John Romanides (1927-2000)

Met. John Zizioulas (b. 1931)

Fr John Romanides (1927-2001)

Panayiotis Chrestou (1917-1996)

Demetrios Koutroubis (1921-1983)

Archi. Elias Mastroyannopoulos (1919- ?)

Mikis Theodorakis (b. 1925)

Sotiris Gounelas (b. 1949)

Athanasios Papathanassiou (b. 1959)

Met. Seraphim (Mentzelopoulos) (b. 1956)

Met. Hierotheos Vlachos (b. 1945)

Fr Demetrios Bathrellos (b. 1968)

Pantelis Kalaitzidis (b. 1961)

Fr Nikolaos Loudovikos (b. 1959)

Athanasios N. Papathanassiou (b. 1959)