

New trends in Greek Orthodox theology: challenges in the movement towards a genuine renewal and Christian unity¹

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Abstract

Theology in Greece today is the outcome of a long and complex historical process in which many different, and even contradictory, trends and theological proclivities have converged and continue to converge, thereby defining its shape and agenda. The present article tries to provide, in four sections, both a descriptive and critical account of this complex and fascinating history.

Among these trends, a decisive role is attributed in the first section of the paper to the so-called 'generation of the 1960s' (including among others pre-eminent Greek theologians such as Metropolitan of Pergamon John D. Zizioulas, Christos Yannaras, Nikos Nissiotis, Fr John Romanides, Panagiotis Nellas), a Greek theological movement for renewal inspired mainly by the theology of the Russian diaspora and the call to 'return to the Fathers', which was instrumental in shaping contemporary Orthodox theology both in Greece and outside the Greek-speaking world.

In the second section are given the reactions to and criticism of the 'theology of 1960s'. There were strong disputes and rejection on the one hand by conservative Greek academic and ecclesiastical circles, and on the other hand from the opposite progressive side (mainly the professors of the Theology School of Thessaloniki University during the 1990s), which accused this theological movement of conservatism and anti-Westernism.

The emergence of the agenda initiated by the new theological generation (of 2000) is discussed in the main and longer (third) section. This new theological agenda and its principal characteristics come from points of disagreement with the theologians of the generation of the 1960s, and from a renewed and more inclusive understanding of Orthodox theology which goes beyond the *problématique*, the language and the agenda of the 1960s. Among the topics raised and discussed by the new trends of Greek theology are: the rediscovery

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of eschatology and its dynamic interpretation, ecclesiological issues, such as the centrality of the episcopal office, and the critique of the dominant place of monasticism in the life of the church, the movement of liturgical renewal, the revalorisation of mission, the rediscovery of ethics and the dilemma of ethics versus ontology, the renewed interest in political theology, the overcoming of anti-Westernism and of the West–East divide as a central interpretative key, a more constructive relationship between Orthodoxy and modernity, the critical approach of the ‘return to the Fathers’ movement, the reconsideration of the devaluation of biblical studies, the emergence of an Orthodox feminist theology and the debate on women’s ordination, the radical critique of religious nationalism, and the devolution into Byzantinism and ecclesiastical culturalism.

In the fourth section the article names the settings and institutions that are hosting the new theological trends in Greek Orthodoxy, mainly mentioning the leading Greek Orthodox theological quarterly *Synaxi*, the official scholarly journal of the Church of Greece, *Theologia*, the Biblical Foundation of Artos Zoes and its *Bulletin of Biblical Studies* and, finally, the Volos Academy for Theological Studies. An overall group vision and *esprit de corps* which could integrate the individual efforts and provide an identity, clearly missing from the above-mentioned picture, are demanded from the two theological schools of Athens and Thessaloniki.

The article concludes by briefly reviewing the conservative and fundamentalist reactions towards this new theological agenda, and by highlighting the urgent need for contemporary Greek theology to face the new, dynamic and particularly challenging global context, and to continue to reflect and to act towards Christian unity, as well as move to reconciliation between Christian East and West, Eastern and Western Europe.

Keywords: Anti-Westernism, eucharist/eschatology, Orthodox feminist theology, Orthodox renewal, political theology, religious nationalism, revalorisation of mission, ‘theology of the 1960s’.

The ‘theology of the 1960s’

This theological trend, instrumental in shaping contemporary Orthodox theology, not only in Greece but also outside the Greek-speaking world, includes distinguished Greek theologians such as Metropolitan of Pergamon John Zizioulas, Christos Yannaras, Fr John Romanides, Nikos Nissiotis, Panayiotis Nellas, George Mantzarides, Nikos Matsoukas, Fr Vasileios Gondikakis among others, and produced admirable syntheses such as those of the theology of the person and eucharistic ecclesiology. It also, for the first time after centuries of isolationism and introversion, came into contact, through the ecumenical dialogue, with contemporary Western theology and the crucial challenges that the (post)modern world poses to Orthodoxy.

When we turn to the prehistory of the ‘Generation of the 1960s’, we see that, after the last flourishing of Byzantine theology in the form of Palamism, followed by the antithesis between the pro-unionists and anti-unionists, or the Thomists and anti-Thomists, Greek theology entered a phase of almost total Westernisation during the Ottoman Occupation. This was followed by a period of dry academic scholasticism in the century after Greece’s liberation (i.e. after the 1830s), and included a strong pietistic and moralistic trend imported from Europe and exemplified in Protestant-inspired Christian fellowships such as Zoe.

Throughout this whole period, Greek theology – and Orthodox theology in general – even at its best, simply defined itself over and against the poles of Latin scholasticism/Roman Catholic conservatism and German liberal Protestantism, without, however, any reference to the Orthodox theological self-consciousness, i.e. to its eucharistic and ecclesiological foundations, relying instead on a confessional understanding of the Orthodox faith. Furthermore, theology was conceived of as a rational exercise, independent not only from personal or ecclesial experience, but also from vital existential questions. As a result, within the Greek milieu, theology suffered social marginalisation and academic isolation. Christos Yannaras aptly describes this very significant development when he writes:

For intellectuals of European sensibility, even in its Westernized form, theology seemed old-fashioned and dogmatic. And lay piety, rooted in the living experience of Orthodox tradition, found imported German theology totally alien. It was partly the university theologians’ fault. From the start they isolated themselves by cultivating a hermetic academic specialization, which interested neither intellectuals nor the Greek Church. . . . Greek academic theologians tended to evade real problems. Their theological works were written mainly to demonstrate technical skill in presenting neutral and uncontroversial themes in an ‘objective’ manner. The writers’ prime motive was to establish professional competence. It sufficed to treat important aspects of the Church’s doctrine by presenting an annotated, thematically arranged catalogue of relevant passages, with long footnotes drawn from foreign secondary literature. Avoiding engagement with difficult problems helped secure an academic career. To engage with real problems and debate spiritual issues requires a broad culture rarely seen in Greek academic theologians.²

² Christos Yannaras, *Orthodoxy and the West: Hellenic Self-Identity in the Modern Age*, trans. Peter Chamberas and Norman Russell (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2006), pp. 197–8.

Even if some of these characteristics are still on display in contemporary Greek theology – especially those related to the social marginalisation and academic isolation of theology – we have to note that things started to change in Greece, albeit timidly, with the First Congress of Orthodox Schools of Theology held in Athens, in 1936, and its legendary call to ‘return to the Fathers’. This makeover gained momentum with the ‘theology of the 1960s’, when the movement to ‘return to the Fathers’ and to ‘return to Tradition’ became the dominant theological ‘paradigm’ in Greece. In fact, with the exception of biblical studies (an underdeveloped and rather marginalised discipline in Greek Orthodox circles), this movement has dominated Greek theology ever since. Influenced by the theology of the Russian diaspora, Greek Orthodox theology after the 1960s rediscovered its Orthodox identity and tradition, re-immersing itself in the patristic and ascetic literature, and dedicated itself to casting off the yoke of all Western influences, a move which has come to be known, after Florovsky’s call to ‘return to the Fathers’, as liberation from ‘Orthodoxy’s Babylonian captivity’. The now famous ‘return to the Fathers’ was initially championed by the vast majority of the theologians of the 1960s (Nissiotis, Zizioulas, Koutroumbis, Yannaras, Romanides, Mantzarides, Nellas, Matsoukas, Gontikakis among others), and in the process ended up – despite resistance from the hierarchy and some monastic circles – becoming a common topos, indeed an Archimedean point for the theological schools, the church, the average homily, and ecclesiastical and theological writing. However, the radical changes introduced by the ‘theology of the 1960s’ went unnoticed. Today, the ‘return to the Fathers’ is the most characteristic feature of the ‘theology of the 1960s’, the common denominator which unifies and gives common identity to the often contradictory trends and personalities of this movement.

The so-called ‘theological generation of the 1960s’ has largely shaped the agenda and form of contemporary Greek theology, as well as the latter’s image of the West, even today. The issues which have come to the forefront in the theological discussion since the 1960s are (according to different theologians of this movement): the eucharist and eucharistic ecclesiology; the ontological character of the Orthodox ethos and the freedom of morality; eros as image, mimesis and path to the life of the Trinity; the non-legalistic understanding of original sin and the therapeutic function and dimension of the spiritual life; therapeutic and eucharistic ecclesiology; Christian personalism and the theology of person; eschatological ontology and the ontology of the person; communion and otherness; theology and ecology; apophaticism and mystical theology; ‘Christocentric anthropology’ and ‘Theocentric humanism’; Christianity and Hellenism; and, finally, theology and history. Clearly, this theological agenda and language, despite its great

variety and internal contradictions, is far from the dry academic or pietistic theology in vogue before the 'theology of the 1960s'.

But as a reaction to Orthodox theology's 'Babylonian Captivity' to the spirit, methods, and language of Western scholastic and academic theology, even this theological movement (for the most part) could not avoid falling into the temptations of anti-Westernism and the construction of a fictional 'West'. Despite Florovsky's intention when he coined the phrase, one of the inevitable consequences of this movement to 'return to the Fathers' was the reification of the East–West polarisation and the development of an anti-Western, anti-ecumenical sentiment.³ This theological anti-Westernism, along with recent and past historical traumas and as-of-yet unhealed memories, seriously affected efforts, in the Greek milieu, towards ecumenical understanding and Christian unity. Very often this theological trend presented a distorted and caricatured image of the Christian West, an 'imagined West', which does not correspond to the real West, with its variety and complexity of trends, streams, ideas, and ecclesial and theological realities. This deformed, reductive and simplistic image of the West, propagated by many theologians of the 1960s, was instrumental in shaping the way in which today's Greek theologians and clerics perceive and represent Christianity in the West. In fact, with the exception of the late professors Savas Agourides (1921–2009) and Nikos Nissiotis (1924–1986), and Metropolitan John Zizioulas of Pergamon (b. 1931), the majority of the Greek theologians of the 1960s, most notably Christos Yannaras (b. 1935) and Fr John Romanides (1927–2001), made the divide between Orthodoxy and West a focal point of their theological syntheses, contributing to a greater or lesser degree to the cultivation and buttressing of Greek anti-Westernism.⁴

The leading figures of the theology of the 1960s reacted against academic scholasticism and the Western mindset in general, and this, coupled with the agonising search for the authentic Orthodox identity (free of the Western constraints imposed upon it during its 'Babylonian Captivity'), resulted not only in this generation's theology becoming detached from academic theology, but also in its inability to participate in the global theological dialogue. With the exception of theologians such as Agourides, Nissiotis, Zizioulas and Matsoukas (early in his career), the 'theology of the 1960s'

³ See Pantelis Kalaitzidis, 'From the "Return to the Fathers" to the Need for a Modern Orthodox Theology', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 54 (2010), pp. 5–36, especially pp. 19–23.

⁴ Cf. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, 'The Image of the West in Contemporary Greek Theology', in George Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou (eds), *Orthodox Constructions of the West* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), pp. 142–60.

showed no interest in joining the ongoing worldwide theological discussion, concerned as it was, rather, with its own agenda, which consisted of returning to the Orthodox tradition and the patristic legacy in order to find indigenous responses to the challenges coming from Europe. In this respect, the 'theology of the 1960s' is double-edged: extroverted and refreshing, yet at the same time 'apologetic', anti-Western and introverted.

Reactions to the 'theology of the 1960s': the 'school' of Thessaloniki

The theological agenda and language introduced by the 'theology of the 1960s' was not immediately accepted in Greek academic and ecclesiastical circles, and really only assumed its place during the 1980s, mainly through the popularisation of the ideas and writings of the lay theologian and philosopher Christos Yannaras and the so-called 'Neo-Orthodox movement' (an informal movement composed, on the one hand, of theologians who were inspired by patristic theology and the theology of the Russian diaspora and, on the other hand, of Marxist and neo-Marxist intellectuals who were interested in Orthodoxy and Greece's spiritual and cultural tradition). Until that point, the majority of the pioneers of the 'theology of the 1960s' had known only harsh criticism and even rejection from the Greek ecclesiastical and academic establishment, and were very often forced to emigrate as a sort of exile. Yannaras saw his doctoral thesis refused by the Faculty of Theology of Athens University and was never accepted as a Professor of Theology, either in Athens or Thessaloniki (he was actually elected Professor of Philosophy in 1984 at the Panteion University of Political Sciences of Athens); John Zizioulas had to emigrate in 1967, first to Switzerland, to work with the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC, and then to Great Britain, where he taught Systematic and Dogmatic Theology at the University of Edinburgh and then at the University of Glasgow. He did not return to Greece until 1984 when, parallel to his teaching as permanent Visiting Professor at King's College London, he was called to teach in Thessaloniki (because the newly created School of Pastoral Theology needed a tenured Professor of Dogmatics!). Nissiotis was elected Professor of Philosophy of Religion at Athens University but in fact was only partly accepted in Greece and preferred to spend most of his time serving the WCC in various distinguished positions (Deputy General Secretary and Moderator of Faith and Order). Panayiotis Nellas, the founder of the most distinguished Greek theological journal, *Synaxi*, editor of patristic texts, and initiator of a genuine approach to patristic anthropology, was twice refused a position as Assistant Professor of the School of Theology in Thessaloniki and died suddenly in 1986 without ever being accepted by the theological faculties in Greece. The list could go on.

All this happened, perhaps, because the Greek establishment perceived the 'theology of the 1960s' as a progressive and even subversive theological trend. But criticism of the 'theology of the 1960s' also came from the opposite side, which accused this theological movement of conservatism, a spirit of introversion and anti-Westernism. On this point, special mention should be made of the late Professor Savas Agourides, a pioneer in rejuvenating biblical studies in Greece, who never showed any interest in the so-called East–West divide, even though he himself had been actively involved in the early phases of what has come to be known as the 'theology of the 1960s'. His theology is not in any way coloured by the alleged antithesis between East and West, nor did he subscribe to the idea that this rift could in any way become the hermeneutical key for addressing important issues, either old or new. On the contrary, Agourides castigated the mounting anti-Westernism and Hellenocentrism which so rapidly began to infest Greek theology, pointing out the non-theological – primarily cultural and historical – roots of Greek anti-Westernism, which date back to the Fourth Crusade and the conquest of Constantinople by the Franks (1204). At the same time, Agourides noted the anti-modern character of Greek theological anti-Westernism, which denies the fundamental achievements of Western modernity, such as human rights, respect for pluralism and diversity, the academic study of and approach to holy texts, the separation of church and state, etc. In contrast to the trend which eventually prevailed in contemporary Greek theology, Agourides saw in the West the beginnings of all sorts of liberation movements for the individual, as well as scientific progress, and new theological trends. For this reason, he had no problem whatsoever with entering into a productive dialogue with them, even translating and presenting to the Greek public the pre-eminent works of Western theology – particularly those related to biblical studies – as well as borrowing forms and ideas, methods and hermeneutical/theological frameworks, adopting sometimes (primarily in the second period of his work, post-1974) the classic Western historiography and interpretation of issues such as the relationship between patristic thought and Neoplatonism, hesychasm, monasticism, etc.

During the same period another model of Orthodox theology and of the relationship with the West, different from the 'theology of the 1960s', was proposed and practised by the Orthodox Academy of Crete and its General Director, Dr Alexandros Papaderos, who was an influential figure in Greek theology and church life mainly in the 1970s and the 1980s. Successfully transferring and adapting to the Greek Orthodox context the model of post-war German lay academies, Dr Papaderos, without openly criticising or challenging the dominant themes of the 'theology of the 1960s' – namely, the return to tradition, eucharistic ecclesiology, the theology of

the person, mystical theology and monastic revival – put his emphasis on Orthodoxy’s social engagement, and the Christian gospel’s implications in the social context. Under his direction, the Orthodox Academy of Crete served as one of the pre-eminent places for ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and meetings.

The thenceforth dominant theological ‘paradigm’ and anti-Westernism of the generation of the 1960s was partly overcome by the generation of the 1980s, especially the professors of the School of Theology of Thessaloniki University. There figures such as Petros Vassiliadis, Ioannis Petrou, Miltiadis Konstantinou, along with the more senior professors, Nikos Zacharopoulos and George Tsananas, offered an alternative vision – particularly through the journal *Kath’ Odon* (En Route), which they edited for ten years, 1992–2001 – without, however, openly criticising the generation of the 1960s, apart from Professor Marios Begzos, from the School of Theology of Athens University.⁵ Since the beginning of the 1990s, the professors from Thessaloniki in particular have made important ecumenical initiatives and displayed an awareness of the issue of Christian unity which was, until then, unknown in the Greek milieu. As a school, but also by establishing the Society for Ecumenical Studies and Inter-Orthodox Cooperation, in which Metropolitan of Pergamon John Zizioulas, then professor in the Faculty of Thessaloniki, was also involved, the theologians from the chief city of northern Greece, in direct contrast with the conservative tendencies of their colleagues at the School of Pastoral Theology of the same university, organised ecumenical seminars and conferences, promoting understanding and cooperation between theologians from different Christian traditions. Of particular note, among the many significant initiatives they undertook, was the 1992 international symposium in Thessaloniki, which was held by the School of Theology in conjunction with the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey, on the ‘role of Orthodox theology in the ecumenical movement/dialogue between “classical” and “contextual” theology’.⁶ To my knowledge, this marked the first Orthodox approach, however timid, to the issue of contextual theology, eighteen years before the 2010 Volos conference on ‘Neo-Patristic Synthesis or Post-Patristic Theology: Can Orthodox Theology Be Contextual?’

The theological journal *Kath’ Odon* is a characteristic example of the renewal movement which took place in Thessaloniki’s School of Theology during

⁵ Cf. his book *The Future of the Past: Critical Introduction to the Theology of Orthodoxy* (Athens: Armos Publications, 1993) [in Greek].

⁶ The papers of the symposium were published in the journal *Kath’ Odon* 4 (Jan.–April 1993), in Greek, while a French-language report appeared in *Service Orthodoxe de Presse* 173 (Dec. 1992), p. 7.

the 1990s. Published at the initiative of the Theological League (Theologikos Syndesmos) – an informal group of progressive professors at the Thessaloniki School of Theology, most of whom were disciples of Professor Savas Agourides – the journal aimed not only to counterbalance the anti-Western and pro-monastic orientation of the so-called Neo-Orthodox movement, but to highlight the importance of a genuine Christian social engagement, and to promote Christian unity as well as ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. The titles and themes of the issues of the journal during its ten years of life are indicative: ‘Orthodoxy Facing Contemporary Challenges’; ‘Universality and Nationalism’; ‘Christianity and Islam’; ‘Gospel and Culture’; ‘Oriental Christians’; ‘Western Christians’; ‘Global Economy’; ‘Feminist Theology’; ‘Reconciliation and the Second European Ecumenical Assembly’; ‘Doing Theology Today’; ‘Ecumenical Vision and the Future of Ecumenism’; ‘Church and State’; ‘The Challenge of Multiculturalism’; and ‘Religious Education in the Curriculum Today’. The same or similar themes were the centre of interest for the Theological League which, in its effort to foster this ‘new’ theological agenda, organised a series of meetings, roundtables and conferences, and published volumes of conference proceedings.

To linger a bit more on the role of Thessaloniki, we have to note that during the 1960s and 1970s, and even the 1980s, the city came to be well known as a patristic centre, and especially as a centre related to studies on St Gregory Palamas, due to its Theological Faculty, but also to the Patriarchal Institute for Patristic Studies at the city’s Vlatadon Monastery. The late professors of the Theological Faculty, Panayiotis Chrestou, Nikos Matsoukas and Demetrios Tsamis, as well as Professors George Mantzarides, Vassilios Pseutogkas and Theodore Zissis, contributed in their own fields of specialisation to the renewal of patristic thought. This increased interest in patristic studies and the revalorisation of patristic thought was supported also by other theological specialisations of the Theological Faculty, such as dogmatics (with the late professors Fr John Romanides and Nikos Matsoukas), ethics and sociology of Christianity (with professor George Mantzarides), ecclesiastical history (with the late professor Ioannis Anastasiou), liturgics (with the late professor Ioannis Fountoulis), canon law (with the professor Metropolitan Panteleimon Rodopoulos), and New Testament (with Professor Ioannis Karavidopoulos, and the late professor Vassilis Stoyiannos, as well as the writings bearing the name of Stergios Sakkos). This focus on patristics was also instrumental in the development of the next generation of Thessaloniki’s professors, such as George Martzelos and Chrysostomos Stamoulis. The most remarkable scholarly fruit of this patristic renewal in Thessaloniki may be the publication of the six-volume *Writings of Saint Gregory Palamas*, edited by Professor Chrestou (1962–96), who also published a ten-volume *Greek Patrology* (in Greek,

1976–98), and a four-volume series of *Patristic Essays* (in Greek, 1973–8). Parallel to this scholarly activity, he was also, for many years, the general editor of a popular series of patristic translations into Modern Greek.

But the problem with this patristic turn in Thessaloniki was that, besides failing to reach the same scholarly quality and theological depth of similar foreign initiatives (such as the *Ressourcement* movement in France and the series ‘Sources Chrétiennes’ or the German series ‘*Patristische Texte und Studien*’), it was also unable, to a large extent, to address contemporary issues in the light of patristic thought, and to make the latter relevant to existential and social concerns. Patristic studies in Thessaloniki, and Greece in general, tended to remain on a purely academic level, dealing almost exclusively with questions of patristic literature and philology, and thus missing the right balance between scholarship and relevance or popularisation.⁷ Another reason for the progressive decline of patristic studies in Thessaloniki may be found in the political affiliation of the pioneer of patristic studies, the late Professor Panayiotis Chrestou, with the far right and the dictatorial regime of 1967–74. In any case, today we can no longer speak about Thessaloniki as a distinguished centre of patristic studies. For reasons we cannot go into here, things changed dramatically in the last twenty years in both the Faculty of Theology and the Patriarchal Institute for Patristic Studies.

The emergence of the new theological generation: a new theological agenda

Today, a new theological generation, nourished by the spirit of the generation of the 1960s and the call to ‘return to the Fathers’, but at the same time critical of this generation, and also more ready to dialogue with the new social and cultural realities, and more aware of the need for an authentic and honest encounter with the Christian West, is called to face the new challenges of globalisation, multicultural societies and religious otherness in a rapidly changing Europe. This new theological generation, inasmuch as it

⁷ It is noteworthy that a significant exception to this general rule was the patristic series *Epi tas Pigas* (*On the Sources*), edited by the lay theologian Panayiotis Nellas, founder of the journal *Synaxi*, and published by *Apostoliki Diakonia*, the official publishing house of the Church of Greece. From 1973–82, there were 5 vols in this series with texts by Maximus the Confessor, Nicholas Cabasilas, John of Damascus and Cyril of Jerusalem, with introductions, translations, and comments by Fr Dimitru Staniloae, Fr Athanasius Yevtic (now former Bishop of Zahumlje and Herzegovina), Georgios Patronos, Panayiotis Nellas, Ignatios Sakalis, Eleftherios Mainas, N. D. Triantafyllopoulos, Kaiti Chiotelli, and Dimitris Stathopoulos.

is neither homogeneous nor monolithic, does not always and on every topic depart from its teachers and predecessors of the generation of the 1960s, especially Yannaras and Zizioulas. While it continues, to some extent, the theological agenda, language, terminology and *problématique* of the 1960s, it also differs on many other points, thus establishing a progressive yet timid disagreement in its own theological agenda and perspective. In regard to the 'theology of the 1960s', the new generation of Greek theologians represents a mixture of continuity and discontinuity, of tradition and renewal. The points of disagreement with the previous theological generation, and the new issues and concerns introduced in the theological discussion, could be summarised in the following themes (which are not understood in the same way by all the newer theologians):

The rediscovery of eschatology and its dynamic interpretation

One of the major developments which took place at the end of the 1990s, but which has become more prominent since 2000, is the return of eschatology to the centre of Greek theological thought. Under the influence and the impetus of theologians such as Fr Georges Florovsky, Fr Alexander Schmemmann, and Metropolitan John Zizioulas of Pergamon, as well as Savas Agourides, Nikos Nissiotis and Petros Vassiliadis – and, through them, in turn, modern and contemporary Western (especially Protestant) theologians – the Greek theologians of the new generation came to realise the centrality of the preaching of the Kingdom of God and of eschatology in the biblical perspective as well as in patristic thought, and its importance for theological renewal and a genuine ecclesial life.

Perhaps the most important element in this rediscovery of eschatology has to do with the realisation that the fullness and identity of the church are to be found less in the past – in traditional and fixed historical, cultural and institutional forms – than in the eschaton. It is to be found in the future of the Kingdom of God, in the renewed and transfigured world for which Christians pray and work, and which has already begun to shed its light on the present and history and influence them. This means, to put it another way, that the church is on its way to the Kingdom (and is not identified with the Kingdom), that it is in progress, in *statu viae*; and that the life of the church is (or, at least, should be) characterised by a dynamic process of becoming, by a continuous transformative movement. It also means – and this is of particular importance for our discussion – that the church as an eschatological and eucharistic community orientated towards the future does not draw its substance primarily from what it is, or from what has been handed down to it in the past by way of structure or institution, but

first and foremost from that which will take place at the eschaton.⁸ This also means that the church is progressively becoming the Kingdom of God, whereas by contrast identifying the church with the Kingdom of God not only objectivises the latter, but in addition turns the church into a fossilised institution, static in form; into a structure and an established institution of this age, a composite closed system which gives absolute significance to the past at the expense of the future, and at the expense of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

In this perspective it was understood that eschatology is not so much connected with questions about the afterlife or with the final chapter of dogmatics, as with an attitude which pervades the church and its theology and gives them meaning, something related to the coming of the eschaton in the present, to the proleptic foretaste 'even now' of the life of the age to come and an active expectation of the Kingdom of God which is coming. Or, to put it better, eschatology has to do with the eschatological understanding of history, the opening of an eschatological path through history which makes the expectation active rather than passive; it becomes a transformative expectation, rather than a matter of living in a world of our own or fleeing from the world. Consequently, eschatology has its place not only in worship and prayer, but also on the level of action; it prompts courageous decisions and choices in relation to the world, culture and history.⁹

My impression is that this understanding of eschatology was instrumental in setting the new theological agenda, but also in shaping the form, orientation and personality of the new Greek theological generation as a whole. The crucial questions to be raised here are: (a) to what extent this eschatological expectation can be felt in the life of the ecclesial body; in other words, if it can contribute to the defeat or at least awareness of the ultra-conservative Greek ecclesiastical reality, or if it is just a charming theological theory and a matter for theological discussion; and (b) to what extent eschatological theology has any effect on the broader social and political sphere, as well as that of culture and everyday life.

⁸ As is well known, this last point is developed especially in the theology of Metropolitan John D. Zizioulas of Pergamon.

⁹ There are many articles, and even some books, representing this theological trend in Greece today, but the work which recapitulates and crystallises the rediscovery of eschatology seems to be the collective volume, Pantelis Kalaitzidis (ed.), *The Church and Eschatology*, Volos Academy's 2000–1 winter programme (Athens: Kastaniotis, 2003) [in Greek; English trans. forthcoming by WCC Publications], with papers by Metropolitan John Zizioulas of Pergamon, Petros Vassiliadis, Nikos Matsoukas, Stavros Yangazoglou, Athanassios N. Papatthanassiou, Dimitris Moschos and others.

Ecclesiological issues

In recent years, there have been two major developments in regard to the ecclesiological theses of the pioneers of the 1960s: (i) the place of the bishop in the making and life of the church; and (ii) the place and role of monastics in the church, including a reappraisal of Athonite monasticism in the renewal of church life. Behind both developments is the search for a new balance between the charismatic and institutional aspects of church life, as well as between tradition and renewal.

- i. Some theologians of the new generation, essentially former disciples of Metropolitan John Zizioulas, started inquiring, directly or indirectly, about the validity of their teacher's hermeneutical scheme regarding the centrality of the episcopal office. In accounting for the progressive development of the place of the bishop, they posit that we also have to consider sociological and historical motives and not only theological ones related to the celebration of the eucharist or to the eschatological understanding of church unity. They also criticise Zizioulas for offering a one-sided interpretation of the relevant texts which focuses almost exclusively on the pre-eminent place of the bishop (whom, they argue, Zizioulas sees in the role of God the Father, thereby devaluing the other two Persons of the Trinity), and furthermore for advancing a kind of clericalism and institutionalisation of church life. The crucial problem here seems to be the close association between ecclesial authority and power. The crux, then, of this *problématique* is not only the search for the right balance between the bishop, the college of the presbyters and the laity, but also for more fidelity to the tradition of the church and to the relevant patristic texts in regard to the relationship between the bishop and the local church (the one and the many), and the bishop and the whole eucharistic body. What is at stake, in fact, behind this explicit or implicit critique of Metropolitan John Zizioulas' ecclesiological vision, is the relationship between the bishop's authority and the conciliar tradition, as well as the search for conciliarity at all levels of church life.¹⁰

¹⁰ See e.g. Nikolaos Loudovikos, 'Eikon and Mimesis: Eucharistic Ecclesiology and the Ecclesial Ontology of Dialogical Reciprocity', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 11 (2011), pp. 123–36; cf. idem, *An Apophatic Ecclesiology of Consubstantiality: The Primitive Church in Today's World* (Athens: Armos Publications, 2002) [in Greek; English trans. forthcoming by St Vladimir's Seminary Press]; idem, 'Christian Life and Institutional Church', in Douglas Knight (ed.), *The Theology of John Zizioulas. Personhood and the Church* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 125–32; Demetrios Bathrellos, 'Church, Eucharist, Bishop: The Early Church in the Ecclesiology of John Zizioulas', in Douglas Knight (ed.), *The Theology of John Zizioulas. Personhood and the Church*, pp. 133–45; idem,

- ii. The second point of divergence with some theologians of the 1960s (mainly Romanides, but also to some extent indirectly Yannaras, Nellas and Mantzarides), comes from the opposite side and aims to criticise the dominant place occupied by monasticism and ascetic practices in the life of the church, at the expense of the eucharist and the traditional hierarchical constitution of the church, its unity and its eucharistic ecclesiology. In fact, most of the theologians of the 1960s, with the exception of Nissiotis, Agourides and Zizioulas, praised monasticism and placed their hopes for the renewal of the church in the monastic renewal, especially the one which took place on Mount Athos. The books and writings of Yannaras and Romanides, and many of the issues of *Synaxi* from the early period under Nellas, for example, are full of such a statements, hailing the Athonite renaissance of the 1970s and the 1980s as the most significant ecclesial event of modern times! Here, the critics point out that the overemphasis on monasticism annuls, in practice, church unity, and that the exaggerated role of the charismatic elders who place themselves above the ecclesial community and its conciliar expressions is simply the flip side of the temptation of clericalism and institutionalism.¹¹

Of course, one cannot ignore the extraordinarily long and rich spiritual tradition of Mount Athos, its unique ascetic, neptic and hermitic experience of leaving the world and the worldly spirit in order for one to devote oneself entirely to the divine eros and the Jesus prayer. However, it is noteworthy that in recent years there is a growing gap and mistrust between the theological movements for renewal in Greece and the prevailing tendencies in Athonite monasticism. The latter often accuses the former of theological minimalism and the betrayal of Orthodoxy; in addition, Athonite monasticism today is often characterised not only by its strong anti-Western and anti-ecumenical sentiments, but also

'Conciliarity in the Framework of the Diocese', *Theologia* 80/2 (2009), pp. 173–200 [in Greek]; idem, 'The Pontifical Divine Liturgy and the Demand of Synodality', *Synaxi* 127 (2014), pp. 8–28 [in Greek]. Unfortunately Georges Skaltsas has not yet published his paper on 'Theological Disputes Concerning the Episcopal Ministry in the Early Centuries: Conflicting Ecclesiological Viewpoints of the "Theology of the 60s"', presented at the Volos 2005 conference on Turmoil in Post-War Theology: The 'Theology of the 60s', organised by the Volos Academy for Theological Studies and the journal *Synaxi*.

¹¹ See e.g. Stavros Yangazoglou, 'Eucharistic Ecclesiology and Monastic Spirituality: The Issue of Gerontism', in Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Athanasios N. Papatransiou and Theophilos Abatzidis (eds), *Turmoil in Post-War Theology: The 'Theology of the 60s'* (Athens: Indiktos, 2009), pp. 547–631 [in Greek]. Cf. Fr Lambros Kamperidis, 'Esoterism of Mystical Life and Spirituality', in *Synaxis Eucharistias: Festschrift Volume for Elder Aimilianos of Simonopetra* (Athens: Indiktos Publications, 2003), pp. 529–53 [in Greek].

by its tendency to patronise the ecclesial body, and to engage in a worldly fundamentalist activism, which aims to defend the values of 'country, religion and family' – a defence which goes so far as to pontificate on the Schengen treaty, bar codes and the number 666, the reference to religion on identity cards, the proposed 'citizen's card' to be issued by the Hellenic Republic for all Greek citizens as a sign of the Anti-Christ, the demand for censorship of obscene art, the status of religion classes in the Greek public education system – all at the expense of genuine ascetic and neptic monastic life. This worldly fundamentalist activism often seems to be all about power and church politics. In this regard, a small number of Athonite monasteries are suspected of overly engaging in economic and political interests, both in Greece and abroad (mostly in Russia and the US), as was recently the case with Vatopedi Monastery. One gets the impression that nowadays many of the Athonite monks seek to be considered as the ultimate authority and the genuine voice of Orthodoxy, believing that many local Orthodox churches have been diverted from the proper and authentic Orthodox path. The Athonites tend to create 'dependent' monasteries (officially or unofficially) throughout the Orthodox world (the most recent example being the seventeen Ephraimite monasteries founded in North America, which are unofficially dependent on Mount Athos' Philotheou Monastery), promoting the conception that the monastic – and especially the Athonite – model is the universal one for the spiritual life (and thereby effectively denigrating the life and work of the local parishes). There thus seems to exist an underlying idea of universal jurisdiction in collective form, exercised not just by one person, but by the charismatic elders of Mount Athos as a whole. According to this implicit ecclesiological idea, Mount Athos, in the name of authentic Orthodoxy (which is supposedly represented by these elders), has the right – or even the duty – to intervene in the life of the local Orthodox churches and spiritually to guide their members, even if it means ignoring the authority of the local churches and their particular traditions.

Liturgical renewal

One of the major theological developments which took place in Greece at the end of the 1990s and during the whole decade of 2000 was the renewed interest in liturgical theology, as well as the movement for liturgical renewal. Thanks to the pioneering and visionary work of the great liturgical scholar of the Orthodox diaspora, Fr Alexander Schmemmann, but also to the liturgical scholarship of the Greek Catholic liturgist Fr Robert Taft and to the Greek Orthodox liturgist Ioannis Fountoulis, Professor at Aristotle

University of Thessaloniki, liturgical experience as a self-consciousness and manifestation of the fullness and the catholicity of the ecclesial life gained momentum in the Greek milieu, especially after Archbishop Christodoulos' ascension to the throne of Athens (1998).¹² It was once again brought to the fore that liturgy (λειτουργία) originally meant the work or the offering of the entire people of God (λαῖτον+ἔργον) and that, while the liturgy is celebrated by the bishop or the priests, they do so *on behalf* of the people, with the people, and not *instead* of the people; that the liturgy is the catholic gathering of the ecclesial community – and not a private, sacramentalistic or ritualistic ceremony – during which the faithful experience a foretaste of the Kingdom to come, and transcend eschatologically, even if only for awhile, all kinds of divisions and fragmentations (racial, cultural, social, class, etc.). The focus then shifted to the issue of the participation of the entire church in the liturgy and the sacrament *par excellence* which constitutes and makes manifest the church – namely, the eucharist – and the subsequent question of liturgical translations. Here, while the catalyst for this theological debate was the workshop organised by the leading theological journal *Synaxi* in February 1999, in Athens, on 'The Demand for Liturgical Renewal',¹³ the series of liturgical conferences organised by the Special Synodal Commission on Liturgical Renewal of the Orthodox Church of Greece, beginning during Christodoulos' reign and continuing to the present day, is of particular interest, and of hopeful – yet incomplete and timid – importance.¹⁴ Thus, liturgical theology and renewal, liturgical translations, as well as the issues of the eucharistic and eschatological nature of the church, the holistic interpretation of Orthodox liturgy, and its significance and relevance for

¹² Despite his conservative, and even pro-nationalistic and anti-modern agenda, the late Archbishop Christodoulos was open to, and even progressive on, a series of issues such as liturgical renewal, ecumenical dialogue, the role of women and the social modernisation of the church.

¹³ The material and the papers from this workshop (which focused on the eschatological understanding of liturgy, the issue of liturgical translations, the proposal for a new wedding service and the return to the non-monastic, asmatic *typikon*), as well as the discussions which followed, were published in issues 71 to 74 of *Synaxi* [in Greek].

¹⁴ Some of the issues raised and discussed during these conferences were: the holy baptism, the sacrament of the divine eucharist, the demand for liturgical renewal in the Orthodox Church, the sacrament of marriage in the Orthodox Church, celebrating the gospel: the holy scripture in Orthodox worship, the sacrament of ordination, liturgical arts, etc. The Synodal Commission on Liturgical Renewal has already organised fourteen similar conferences, and has published 11 vols of conference proceedings [in Greek].

society and culture, are now integral parts of the theological debate in Greece today.¹⁵

The revalorisation of mission: mission as a co-constitutive element of the making of the church

Many of the theologians of the 1960s, probably because of their previous involvement (and subsequent disenchantment) with pietistic and activist religious fellowships such as Zoe, showed an animosity and hostility towards any kind of missionary activism and organised collective effort. Christian mission was one of the victims of this prejudice but, thanks to the work of the Inter-Orthodox Mission Center Porefthendes (Go ye), as well as of Archbishop Anastasios of Albania (b. 1929),¹⁶ Elias Voulgarakis (1927–99)¹⁷ and Petros Vassiliadis (b. 1945),¹⁸ we began to realise the problematic legacy of the ‘theology of the 1960s’ in the last few years, by finally accepting what was self-evident, that mission is the implementation and continuation of

¹⁵ See particularly, among the many bibliographical references on the issues raised above, Petros Vassiliadis, *Lex Orandi: Liturgical Theology and Liturgical Renewal* (Athens: Indiktos Publications, 2005) [in Greek]; idem, ‘La Rinascita Liturgica e la Chiesa Greca’, in Sabino Chialà e Lisa Cremachi (eds), *Nicola Cabasilas e la Divina Liturgia: Atti del XIV Convegno Ecumenico Internazionale di Spiritualità Ortodossa, Sessione Bizantina, Bose 14–16 Settembre 2006* (Comunità di Bose, Magnano: Ed. Qiqajon, 2007), pp. 253–82; Stephanos Alexopoulos, ‘Did the Work of Fr. Alexander Schmemmann Influence Modern Greek Theological Thought? A Preliminary Assessment’, *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, 53 (2009), pp. 273–99; Dimitrios Tzerpos, ‘Towards a Renewal of our Ecclesial Worship’, in *Ecclesia*, 76: 12 (1999), pp. 270 ff. [in Greek]; idem, *Liturgical Renewal: Essays of Liturgical Education of Clergy and Laity* (Athens: ed. Tenos, 2001), pp. 11–29 [in Greek].

¹⁶ See Archbishop Anastasios (Yannoulatos) of Albania, *Mission in Christ’s Way* (Brookline, MA, and Geneva: Holy Cross Orthodox Press and WCC Publications, 2010).

¹⁷ See Elias Voulgarakis, *Mission: Paths and Structures* (Athens: Armos, 1989) [in Greek]; idem, *Christianity and the World: In Search of a Contemporary Christian Discourse* (Athens: Armos, 1993) [in Greek]; idem, ‘Orthodox Mission’, in Karl Müller, Theo Sundermeier, Stephen B. Bevans and Richard H. Bliese (eds), *Dictionary of Mission: Theology, History, Perspectives* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), pp. 334–8.

¹⁸ See Petros Vassiliadis, *Eucharist and Witness: Orthodox Perspectives on Unity and Mission of the Church* (Geneva and Boston, MA: WCC and Holy Cross Press, 1998); idem, ‘Eschatology and the Mission of the Church: An Homage to Dumitru Stăniloae’, in Constantin Coman (ed.), *Anuarul Facultății de Teologie ‘Patriarhul Justinian’, Lucrările Congresului ‘Dumitru Stăniloae’* (Bucharest: Editura Universității București, IV, 2004), pp. 123–35; idem, ‘Reconciliation as a Pneumatological Mission Paradigm: Some Preliminary Reflections by an Orthodox’, *International Review of Mission* 94 (2005), pp. 30–42; idem, ‘The Missionary Implications of St. Paul’s Eucharistic Inclusiveness’, in Nicolae Moșoiu (ed.), *The Relevance of Reverend Professor Ion Bria’s Work for Contemporary Society and for the Life of the Church. New Directions in the Research of Church Doctrine, Mission, and Unity*, (Sibiu: Editura Universității Lucian Blaga, 2010), pp. 123–34.

Christ's command in history, to 'go . . . and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (Matt 28:19). To borrow the analysis of Dr Haralambos Ventis:

This was an important turning-point for Orthodox theology, to this day still being in the grip of a liturgical introversion, which sees the celebration of the Eucharist as its principal, if not exclusive task, at the expense of parallel activities, such as preaching the Gospel to the world (an exercise often frowned upon as smacking of 'Protestantism'). On this note, we are deeply indebted to the theological acumen of Athanasios N. Papathanasiou, *Synaxi*'s current editor-in-chief, for his persistent indication that mission is no less constitutive of the Church than the Eucharist is, a move that doubtlessly adds an important corrective to the presumed 'monism' of Zizioulas' Eucharistic ecclesiology.¹⁹

This revalorisation of mission in today's Greek context is accompanied by the gradual awareness that one of the major reasons for the Orthodox inertia regarding mission is to be found in contemporary Orthodox churches' close relationship with the national idea and national narrative. In the words of Stavros Zoumboulakis, former director of the oldest and most respected Greek literary journal, *Nea Hestia*, and President of the Biblical Foundation Artos Zoes:

Orthodox Christianity today does not have any mission, primarily because it has been crushed by national ideas and has dedicated itself to every kind of national struggle. National claims have absorbed all its energies and nothing has been left for the spread of the Gospel. Not only has the nationalistic ideology, which all the Orthodox Churches have espoused, brought them into conflict among themselves; it has also hindered

¹⁹ Haralambos Ventis, 'Faltering Steps and Hopeful Perspectives in the Trajectory of Contemporary Greek Theology after the 60s', unpublished paper (courtesy of the author) presented at the Paris 2010 international conference, *The Renewal of Contemporary Greek Theology: From the Generation of the 60s to the Challenges of Today*, organised by the Volos Academy for Theological Studies, in cooperation with the Ecumenical Centre Istina, the Institute of Orthodox Theology St Sergius (Paris), and the French journal for Orthodoxy, *Contacts*. On the revalorisation of mission, and on mission as a co-constitutive element of the making of the church, see also Athanasios N. Papathanasiou, 'The Church as Mission. Fr. Alexander Schmemmann's Liturgical Theology Revisited', *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 60 (2010), pp. 6–41; idem, 'Journey to the Centre of Gravity: Christian Mission One Century After Edinburgh 1910', in Todd M. Johnson, Rodney L. Petersen, Gina A. Bellofatto and Travis L. Myers (eds), 2010 *Boston: The Changing Contours of World Mission and Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), pp. 67–83.

any permanent and co-ordinated Orthodox missionary collaboration (of the sort which the Protestants have broadly achieved). Moreover, it has distorted the very evangelic nature of their missionary enterprise, wherever and however faintly this is attested, and has often turned that enterprise into little more than exporting nationalism.

Orthodox Christians have not been mission-conscious. They are willing to respond to any national call, even the most outrageous, but do not have ears to hear the command of the risen Christ: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you”, perhaps because they do not have faith in His assurance: “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28: 19–20). We believe that the command to engage in missionary witness is relevant only to the history of the early Church, not to its present condition each time. We are more moved by the national anthem or the flag than by the Cross of Christ and His Gospel. [. . .] Today, when Christianity is collapsing in Europe and is moving elsewhere, the shrinking of Orthodoxy to the geographical bounds of the European continent will, sooner or later (probably sooner than later, when the dynamic of re-evangelizing the former Communist countries is exhausted), result in a historic decay.²⁰

The rediscovery of ethics and the dilemma of ethics versus ontology

One of the main concerns of the theology of the 1960s, exemplified chiefly by Yannaras, and then partly followed by Zizioulas, was the radical differentiation and emancipation of the Orthodox ethos from a legalistic morality, i.e. the association of ethos with ontology and of morality with constraint and formalism. Yannaras spoke and wrote about the ‘freedom of morality’,²¹ while Zizioulas opined that ontology and ethics were mutually exclusive.²² As a result, Orthodox theology and Christian life became alien to any moral or ethical consideration, so much so that it was rendered socially

²⁰ ‘The Orthodox Churches and the Geographical Redistribution of Christianity’, in Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Thomas FitzGerald, Cyril Hovorun, Aikaterini Pekridou, Nikolaos Asproulis, Dietrich Werner, Guy Liagre (eds), *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism: Resources for Theological Education – ‘That they all may be one’ (John 17:21)*, Regnum Studies in Global Christianity (Volos/Geneva/Oxford: Volos Academy Publications/WWC Publications/Regnum Books International, 2014), pp. 829–30.

²¹ See Christos Yannaras, *The Freedom of Morality*, trans. Elisabeth Briere (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984).

²² See John D. Zizioulas, ‘Ontology and Ethics’, *Frear*, 3 (2013), pp. 275–86 [in Greek]. Cf. idem, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London and New

inactive and indifferent, thus forgetting the main evangelical injunction, which is the love of neighbour. The consequent ontologisation of the Christian faith trapped the latter in the field of metaphysics and contributed decisively in obliterating the biblical perspective in Orthodoxy today. Those critics of this theological attempt to remove morality from Christianity (mostly Stavros Zoumboulakis) interpreted this turn as a reaction to the events of May 1968, and called for the theological rediscovery of ethics, which stands at the centre of philosophical thought today, as well as for an Orthodox theology more faithful to Christ's moral commandments than to metaphysical projects or cultural requirements.²³

The renewed interest in political theology

Some of the theologians of the 1960s have tended to identify 'political theology' with secularism, and have viewed this theological trend as a 'synthetic neo-leftism which is neither politics nor theology, which seems to bear the brunt of western Christianity's historical inferiority complex and to serve as a psychological over-compensation for it'.²⁴ In contrast to this negative attitude, a renewed interest in 'political theology' is manifest among the Greek theologians of the younger generation. These theologians are criticising contemporary Orthodoxy for not providing an adequate public witness of its eucharistic and eschatological self-consciousness, and of the implications of the Gospel commandments for social justice and solidarity with the poor, the marginalised and the victims of history. At the same time, they have strived to shape an Orthodox approach to political and liberation theology, based mainly on the eschatological understanding of the church and its eucharistic constitution, as well as on biblical texts and the patristic tradition, and the works and major contributions of contemporary Eastern Orthodox theologians, especially those of the diaspora.²⁵

York: T&T Clark, 2006), pp. 55–62. Cf. also, Konstantin Sigov, 'Das Problem des Bruchs zwischen Ontologie und Ethik in den Werken des Metropoliten Johannes Zizioulas und Emmanuel Lévinas', *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie*, 52 (2005), pp. 550–67.

²³ The centrepiece in this debate has been Stavros Zoumboulakis' paper, 'The "Frontier" (Synora) and Christos Yannaras: The Theological Argument for the Removal of Morality from Christianity', in Kalaitzidis et al., *Turmoil in Postwar Theology*, pp. 315–26 [in Greek].

²⁴ Yannaras, *Freedom of Morality*, pp. 199–200. Cf. idem, 'A Note on Political Theology', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 27 (1983), pp. 53–4.

²⁵ Regarding political theology in the contemporary Greek Orthodox scene, see Dimitrios Moschos, 'Orthodox Christianity as an Aspect of Modern Greek Political Culture: Critical Remarks', *Greek Review of Political Science (Hellenike Epitheoresi Politikes Episimisis)* 4 (1994), pp. 129–38; idem, 'Theology and Politics: The Lost Opportunity of the Generation of the Greek Theologians of the 60s', in Kalaitzidis et al., *Turmoil in Postwar Theology*,

The progressive overcoming of anti-westernism and of the East–West divide as a central hermeneutical key

As I have already noted, anti-Westernism and the emphasis on the East–West divide were instrumental in shaping the agenda of the ‘theology of the 1960s’. In recent years, the anti-Westernism of eminent representatives of the 1960s has begun to be viewed as a ‘construction’, and as an identity formation process which owes more to historical and cultural needs rather than theological criteria, while the hermeneutical use of the East–West divide is now openly contested and considered an ideological rather than an academic or theological interpretation. To borrow the analysis made by Stavros Zoumboulakis on the occasion of his presentation of some of the Volos Academy’s work:

The Volos Academy is completely exempt from any theological anti-Westernism. In the past few decades in Greece, we have been experiencing an utterly ridiculous phenomenon. Western Christianity is roundly condemned as a corruption of Christianity and as a heresy, essentially beginning, according to many Orthodox theologians, even before the Schism, with Augustine, whose great failing was that he did not know Greek! Towering figures of Christian and European culture, such as Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Meister Eckart, and Luther, are simply brushed aside by theologians who have obviously never read even a single line of their works and who are completely ignorant of the vast literature

pp. 683–94; Athanasios N. Papathanasiou, ‘A Politicized Ecclesiastical Space’, in the collection of his articles: *Itinerancy and Referentiality: Critical Approaches to Theological Events* (Athens: Armos Publications, 1998), pp. 121–38 [in Greek]; idem, *Social Justice and Orthodox Theology* (Athens: Akritas Publications, 2001) [in Greek]; idem, ‘Liberation Perspectives in Patristic Thought. An Orthodox Approach’, in *Academic Yearbook of the Graduated Program ‘Studies in Orthodox Theology’* (Patras: Faculty of Human Sciences, Hellenic Open University, 2011), vol. 2, pp. 419–38; Dimitris Arkadas, ‘Power and the Church: Political Aspects of Eschatological Ecclesiology’, *Synaxi* 79 (2001), pp. 89–97 [in Greek]; Vassilis Adrachtas, ‘The Political Dimension of Eschatology’, in Kalaitzidis (ed.), *The Church and Eschatology*, pp. 251–62 [in Greek; English trans. forthcoming]; Petros Vassiliadis, ‘Orthodox Christianity [and Politics]’, in Jacob Neusner (ed.), *God’s Rule: The Politics of World Religion* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2003), pp. 185–205; Haralambos Ventis, ‘Political Constructivism and Ontology: John Rawls’ Freestanding Political Conception versus Liberal and Religious Comprehensive Doctrines’, *The Reductive Veil: Post-Kantian Non-Representationalism versus Apophatic Realism* (Katerini: Epektasis Publications, 2005), pp. 119–187; Pantelis Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy and Political Theology*, in the *Doxa and Praxis: Exploring Orthodox Theology Series* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012); Pantelis Kalaitzidis (ed.), *Biblical Liberation Theology, Patristic Theology, and the Ambivalences of Modernity in Orthodox and Ecumenical Perspective* (Athens: Indiktos Publications, 2012) [in Greek].

dedicated to them. I called this phenomenon ridiculous, but actually it is downright arrogant. Such an attitude is totally foreign to the Volos Academy. The texts of the great ecclesiastical writers and teachers of the Catholic and Protestant West, as well as of its contemporary theologians, are there for us to read and study and to be used to discuss the major recurring themes of the Christian tradition. Instead, we approach them as if we were the guardians of Orthodoxy (who appointed us, anyway?), scouring their pages for dogmatic errors.²⁶

Towards a more constructive relationship between Orthodoxy and modernity

Orthodox Christian theology seems to operate only within traditional contexts, borrowing its forms and representations from the agrarian society with which its liturgical symbolism is connected, as are the rhetorical examples used in preaching, the structure of church administration, and especially the established ideas about the relationship between the sacred and the secular, religion and politics, the church and society. Orthodox Christianity has great difficulty accepting the vested rights which come with modernity and their consequences in the religious, social and cultural fields, inasmuch as the Orthodox in general long for the organisational schemes and structures of the glorious past (the Byzantine/imperial in particular), musing about a return to pre-modernity.

The 'theology of the 1960s' never raised this crucial question, never contested or questioned this pre-modern framework. And while it was speaking about the church and its theology's dialogue with the modern world, it remained pre-modern or even anti-modern on many points (for example, human rights²⁷). The position of many theologians of the 1960s on a series of issues, basically involving aspects of the modernist phenomenon, has often left their otherwise remarkable theology in abeyance and socially inert. Such issues include human rights, the secularisation of politics and institutions, the de-sacralisation of politics and ethnicity, the overturning of established social hierarchies in the name of a fairer society, the affirmation of love and corporeality and the spiritual function of sexuality, the role of women, social and cultural anachronisms, and so forth. This

²⁶ Stavros Zoumboulakis, *Christians in the Public Sphere: Christian Faith or Cultural Identity?* (Athens: Hestia, 2010), pp. 96–7 [in Greek]. See also my article, 'The Image of the West', pp. 142–60.

²⁷ See e.g. Yannaras' work, *The Inhuman Character of Human Rights* (Athens: Domos Publications, 1998) [in Greek]; idem, 'Human Rights and the Orthodox Church', in Emmanuel Clapsis (ed.), *The Orthodox Churches in a Pluralistic World: An Ecumenical Conversation* (Geneva and Brookline, MA: WCC Publications and Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2004), pp. 83–9.

hindered finally both the word of God in its incarnation and revelation within each particular social and cultural context, and the development, within Orthodox theology, of hermeneutics, biblical and historical research, systematic theology, anthropological and feminist studies, and liberation, political and ecumenical theology. Even the legendary ‘return to the Fathers’, as it was understood and applied by several Greek Orthodox theologians, served equally as a bulwark against modernity and the challenges it posed. Theology has contributed in its own way to making the entire Orthodox ecclesial life a prisoner to pre-modern structures and practices and to a conservative mentality, just when some of the most renowned Orthodox theologians (for example, Christos Yannaras) are dreaming of a direct leap into post-modernity. The crucial question raised here, then, is: *Has theology dared to incarnate Christ within the new cultural and social realities, which are still defined in many ways by modernity itself, or has it chosen the security and the comfort of ‘tradition’ and ‘Byzantinism’?*

In any case, modernity and post-modernity (or late modernity) and the framework they define constitute the broader historical, social and cultural environment within which the Orthodox Church is called to live and carry out its mission; it is here that it is called upon time and time again to incarnate the Christian truth about God, the world and humanity.²⁸

*The ‘return to the fathers’: its interpretations and implications*²⁹

Some of the theologians of the new generation (very few, to be honest) recently started to criticise the uncritical way in which the theologians of the 1960s subscribed to the famous ‘return to the Fathers’. In fact, the way in

²⁸ Cf. for the above issues Pantelis Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy and Modernity: An Introduction* (Athens: Indiktos Publications, 2007) [in Greek; English trans. Elizabeth Theokritoff, in the Twenty-First-Century Greek Theologians series (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, awaiting publication)]; idem, ‘Ist das orthodoxe Christentum in der Vormoderne stehengeblieben? Das Bedürfnis nach einer neuen Inkarnation des Wortes und das eschatologische Verständnis der Tradition und des Verhältnisses zwischen Kirche und Welt’, in F. Uhl, S. Melchardt, and A. R. Boelderl (eds), *Die Tradition einer Zukunft: Perspektiven der Religionsphilosophie* (Berlin: Parerga V., 2011), pp. 141–76. Cf. Pantelis Kalaitzidis and Nikos Ntontos (eds), *Orthodox Christianity and Modernity*, Volos Academy’s winter programme 2001–2 (Athens: Indiktos Publications, 2007) [in Greek]; Assaad Elias Kattan and Fadi Georgi (eds), *Thinking Modernity: Towards a Reconfiguration of the Relationship between Orthodox Theology and Modern Culture* (Tripoli, Lebanon, and Münster: St John of Damascus Institute of Theology, University of Balamand-Centre for Religious Studies, University of Münster, 2010).

²⁹ For this section of the present text see also my ‘From the “Return to the Fathers” to the Need for a Modern Orthodox Theology’, *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 54 (2010), pp. 5–36.

which the famous ‘return to the Fathers’ was understood and practised led, in some cases, to a ‘fundamentalism of tradition’ or to a ‘fundamentalism of the Fathers’, which prevented Orthodoxy from being part of the modern world, and discouraged it from displaying its creative gifts and strengths. As already noted, in the First Orthodox Theological Conference, which was held in Athens in 1936, Fr Georges Florovsky, perhaps the greatest Eastern Orthodox theologian of the twentieth century and modern Orthodoxy’s most important ecumenical figure, proclaimed Orthodox theology’s need to ‘return to the Fathers’ and to be released from its ‘Babylonian Captivity’ to Western theology in terms of its language, its presuppositions, and its thinking.³⁰ His call was quickly adopted and shared by many theologians of the Russian diaspora, while he also gathered fervent supporters in traditionally Orthodox countries such as Serbia, Romania and Greece. Thus, the theological movement of the ‘return to the Fathers’ became the hallmark of and the dominant ‘paradigm’ for Orthodox theology for the better part of the twentieth century, and for many its primary task, to such a degree that this celebrated ‘return to the Fathers’ and the effort to ‘de-westernise’ Orthodox theology overshadowed all other theological questions and other Orthodox theological trends, as well as all the challenges the modern world had posed – and continues to pose – to Orthodox theology.

The twentieth century was, therefore, a time of renewal for Orthodox theology, but was also – precisely because of the way in which this ‘return to the Fathers’ was perceived and because of the corresponding programme to ‘de-westernise’ Orthodox theology – a time of introversion, conservatism and of a static or fundamentalist understanding of the concept of tradition, which very often came to be equated with traditionalism.

Indeed, the particularly defensive way of understanding Florovsky’s ‘return to the Fathers’ and the systematisation of his theory about ‘Christian Hellenism’, which considers the latter to be ‘the *eternal category* of Christian existence’, and ‘something more than a passing stage’ in the church, and which is integrally connected with Hellenism, patristics and catholicity, eventually helped consolidate the idea that we needed constantly to take refuge in the church’s past – and the fathers in particular in this case – so that we could be certain that we were within the limits of the truth. This version of the ‘return to the Fathers’, moreover, seems never to return to a focus

³⁰ The paper was originally presented in German at this conference: cf. Georges Florovsky, ‘Westliche Einflüsse in der russischen Theologie’, in Hamilcar S. Alivisatos (ed.), *Procès-Verbaux du Premier Congrès de Théologie Orthodoxe à Athènes, 29 novembre-6 décembre 1936* (Athens: Pirsos, 1939), pp. 212–31. The same text is also published in *Kyrios* 2/1 (Berlin, 1937).

on the future ‘together with the Fathers’ (as Florovsky himself advocated in both his writings and his talks), thus rendering Orthodox theology mute and uneasy in the face of the challenges of the modern world – and this was against the intentions of Florovsky himself, who always emphasised that the ‘return to the Fathers’ did not mean the repetition or imitation of the past, but the acquisition of the mind of the Fathers (*ad mentem patrum*) and the creative fulfilment of the future. Ultimately, the criticisms lodged by some of today’s Greek theologians converge to argue that the call to ‘return to the Fathers’, besides being the impetus behind the creation of a ‘patristic’ rhetoric and a ‘patristic’ narrative – which very often greatly differ from real patristic thought and historical patristic figures – did offer an identity with which Orthodox theologians could move through the terrible upheavals of the twentieth century and survive spiritually and intellectually, providing at the same time an easily digestible slogan and a sense of security and warmth amid a collapsing Christendom.

A critical reappraisal of the consequences of this ‘return to the Fathers’ and the subsequent overemphasis on patristic studies would notice, among other things: (i) the neglect and devaluation of biblical studies; (ii) an ahistorical approach to patristic theology and a subsequent exaltation of traditionalism; (iii) a tendency towards introversion and Orthodox theology’s near total absence from the major theological developments and trends of the twentieth century; (iv) the polarisation of East and West, and the cultivation and consolidation of an anti-Western and anti-ecumenical spirit; and (v) a weak theological response to the challenges posed by the modern world and, more generally, the unresolved theological issues still remaining in the relationship between Orthodoxy and modernity.

A critical reconsideration of the devaluation of biblical studies

More and more Greek theologians today are pointing out the fact that, within the Orthodox milieu, even before the ‘return to the Fathers’, biblical studies had already suffered neglect and devaluation, and the focus on patristic studies simply provided the theoretical justification for it. Within Greek Orthodoxy, biblical studies are viewed as ‘Protestant’, while patristic studies and the rediscovery of the Orthodox ascetic and neptic tradition are considered the truly ‘Orthodox’ subjects. In spite of the proliferation of patristic studies in the second half of the twentieth century, both in the Orthodox diaspora and in the traditionally Orthodox countries, and the subsequent strengthening of the characteristic theological features of Orthodox ‘identity’, the role of biblical studies in our theological bedrock was still an open question, such that, as is well known, we Orthodox

continue to underestimate or even be suspicious of biblical studies and biblical research, even to the point that we regard the reading and study of the Bible as a Protestant practice which is at odds with the Orthodox patristic and neptic ethos. Indeed, imitating the old 'Protestant' principle of the objective authority of the text, we often simply replace the authority of *sola scriptura* with the authority of the *consensus patrum*. Ultimately, in practice, the authority and the study of the patristic texts – the vast majority of which are essentially interpretative commentaries on the Bible – has acquired greater importance and gravitas than the biblical text itself. 'Scripture itself, moreover, has been demoted to a mere companion to patristic texts, in the midst of a widespread attitude that it is not so much a book to read privately but to be intoned rather in the liturgy.'³¹ Thus, today, critics of the overemphasis on patristic studies – which was accepted and justified by the theologians of the 1960s – focus on the fact that Orthodox theology overlooked the biblical foundations of the Christian faith, the indissoluble bond between the Bible and the eucharist, the Bible and the liturgy, ignoring the fact that all the great fathers were major interpreters of the scriptures, and that patristic theology is simultaneously *unconfused and indivisible* biblical theology, and that Orthodox tradition, as well as Orthodox theology, are patristic and biblical at the same time; in fact, they are patristic and Orthodox only to the extent that they are also biblical.³² Neglect and devaluation of biblical studies within the Orthodox milieu is becoming more and more a topic of lively debate and criticism among today's Greek theologians, while some hopeful signs of an Orthodox biblical revival can be observed in both the theological faculties of Thessaloniki and Athens, as well as among the Greek-American theologians in the US. In addition, private initiatives such as the ones undertaken by Artos Zoes (Bread of Life), or the Greek Biblical Society, are attempting respectively to bring the Bible into the Greek public sphere and discussion, or to translate and more widely disseminate the Bible among the Greek people.

Feminist theology and women's ordination

In Greece, in recent years, a lively theological discussion has developed on gender issues and more precisely on the place and the role of women in the

³¹ Ventis, 'Faltering Steps'.

³² For bibliographical documentation for this section, cf. Kalaitzidis, 'From the "Return to the Fathers"', p. 16, n. 20. See also Christos Karakolis, 'Patristic Tradition, Orthodox Theology and the Significance of the Bible within the Orthodox Church in Greece', paper presented at the international conference, The Present and Future of Biblical Studies in the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, organised by the Faculty of Catholic Theology of Central Italy, and the Volos Academy for Theological Studies, Florence, 6–7 June 2013 (under publication, courtesy of the author).

church. Many have concluded that, in light of the church's eschatological self-consciousness and a fresh interpretation of relevant biblical texts, the current marginalisation and devaluation of women, as well as of the laity in general, can no longer be accepted.³³ Thus, some of the new male and female theologians are wondering why the previous generation did not openly raise this question, even though it was instrumental in broaching the question of eros and sexuality in Christian theology and life. This new generation, and especially female theologians inspired both by Orthodox tradition but also feminist hermeneutics, has been challenging the sacralisation of gender stereotypes and a male-dominated anthropology (inherited by the patriarchal society, and often endorsed by Christian tradition and theology), which devalues the female person, demonises femininity and makes women 'second-class' believers in the church.³⁴ This trend among Greek theologians

³³ See e.g. the collective volume from the Volos Academy's 2002–3 series of public lectures, Pantelis Kalaitzidis and Nikos Ntontos (eds), *Gender and Religion: The Role of Women in the Church* (Athens: Indiktos Publications, 2004) [in Greek].

³⁴ See Evanthia Ch. Adamtziloglou, *Woman in the Epistles of St Paul: Hermeneutical Analysis of I Cor. 11:2–16* (Doctoral Dissertation), Academic Yearbook of the School of Theology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, annex 62 of vol. 29, 1989 [in Greek, with German summary]; eadem, 'Is Feminist Theology Possible in the Greek Orthodox Tradition?', *Yearbook of the European Society of Women in Theological Research (ESWTR)*, 4 (1996); Dimitra Koukoura, 'Women in Jesus's Earthly Life', in Kyriaki Karidoyannes FitzGerald (ed.), *Orthodox Women Speak: Discerning the 'Signs of the Times'* (Geneva and Brookline, MA: WCC Publications and Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1999), pp. 69–74; Eleni Kasselouri-Hatzivassiliadi, 'Women and Orthodox Spirituality', in Annete Esser, Anne Hunt Overzee and Susan Roll (eds), *Re-visioning our Sources* (Kampen: Pharos, 1997), pp. 76–85; eadem, 'Authority in Tradition: Reflections on Tradition and the Role of Women in the Orthodox Church', *Yearbook of the ESWTR* (2000), pp. 101–10; eadem, *Feminist Hermeneutics: The 'Gender Factor' in Modern Biblical Hermeneutics* (Thessaloniki: Pournaras, 2003) [in Greek, with English summary]; eadem, 'Women and the Proclamation of the Gospel in the NT', in Anatoly Alexeev, Christos Karakolis and Ulrich Luz (eds), *Einheit der Kirche im Neuen Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), pp. 103–20; eadem, 'Women in Orthodox Theological Education', in Dietrich Werner, David Esterline, Namsoon Kang and Joshua Raja (eds), *The Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2010), pp. 610–14; Christine Breaban, Sophie Deischa and Eleni Kasselouri-Hatzivassiliadi (eds), *Women's Voices and Visions for the Church: Reflections from Orthodox Women* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2006); Eleni Kasselouri-Hatzivassiliadi, Fulata Mbano Moyo, Aikaterini Pekridou (eds), *Many Women were also There . . . The Participation of Orthodox Women in the Ecumenical Movement: Past, Present, Future* (Geneva and Volos: WCC and Volos Academy Publications, 2011); Spyridoula Athanasopoulou-Kypriou and Eleni Kasselouri-Hatzivassiliadi, *There I Become . . . Gendered Theological Essays* (Athens: Armos Publications, 2012) [in Greek]; Spyridoula Athanasopoulou-Kypriou, 'The Reaction of the Greek Orthodox Theology to the Challenges of Feminist Theologies', in Yota Papageorgiou (ed.), *Gendering Transformations* (Rethymno: University

today even goes so far as openly to discuss – often disagreeing amongst themselves – the ‘new’ canonical practice of women’s ordination, which is a source of serious friction in the ecumenical relations between the Orthodox Church and the Old Catholic, Anglican and mainstream Protestant Churches. According to this new approach, which is not totally lacking grounds and arguments taken from distinguished Orthodox theologians, canonical matters in Orthodoxy have always been subject to revisions and reformations, insofar as they do not affect the fundamental doctrines of our faith, i.e. trinitarian or/and christological doctrines. In recent times, the Orthodox have tried to respond to the challenges posed by the feminist movement and feminist theologies on many occasions, particularly at the Rhodes Consultation in 1988, which mainly focused on the elaboration of arguments against women’s ordination.³⁵ Despite the generally negative Orthodox attitude towards the ordination of women, in more recent years the opinion has gained ground (even among distinguished Orthodox hierarchs and theologians, such as John D. Zizioulas (Metropolitan of Pergamon), Metropolitan of Diokleia Kallistos Ware, the late Metropolitan of Sourouzh (Great Britain) Anthony Bloom, the late French Orthodox female theologian Elisabeth Behr-Sigel and Greek lay theologians such as the late Professor Nikos Matsoukas and Dr Konstantinos Yokarinis) that, apart from the criterion of ‘tradition’, there seems to be no other serious theological reason or argument against the ordination of women.³⁶

of Crete, 2007), pp. 10–18; eadem, ‘The Problem of Inclusive Religious Language as a Condition of Women’s Becoming Divine: A Critical Approach’, *Studies in Religion – Sacred/Profane* 6/7 (Sept. 2005), pp. 137–47; Katerina Karkala-Zorba, ‘Women and the Church: A Greek-Orthodox Perspective’, *Concilium* 42/3 (2006), pp. 36–45.

³⁵ Gennadios Limouris (ed.), *The Place of the Woman in the Orthodox Church and the Question of the Ordination of Women: Inter-Orthodox Symposium, Rhodes, Greece 30 October–7 November 1988* (Katerini: Tertios Publications, 1992).

³⁶ See as examples the following publications: Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, ‘L’ordination des femmes: un problème œcuménique. Développements récents dans la sphère de l’Eglise orthodoxe’, *Contacts* 150 (1990), pp. 101–27; Elisabeth Behr-Sigel and Kallistos Ware, *The Ordination of Women in the Orthodox Church* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2000); Anthony Bloom, ‘Preface to the French Edition’, in Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church*, trans. Steven Bigham (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1999), p. xiv; Konstantinos Yokarinis, *The Priesthood of Women in the Framework of the Ecumenical Movement* (Katerini: Epiktasis Publications, 1995) [in Greek]; idem, *The Genderedness or the Genderlessness of the Incarnated Christ* (Athens: Armos Publications, 2011) [in Greek]; Nikos Matsoukas, ‘Women’s Priesthood as a Theological and Ecumenical Problem’, in Tamara Grdzeldze (ed.), *One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic: Ecumenical Reflections on the Church* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2005), pp. 218–23. See also John Zizioulas, ‘Comments on the Study Paper of the Faith and Order Commission on “The Meaning of Ordination”’, *Study Encounter* 4 (1968), p. 193.

A radical critique of religious nationalism and Hellenocentrism

Religious nationalism seems to be the most serious ecclesiological and theological problem facing the Orthodox Church since the fall of Byzantium (1453) and the period of introversion which began with this crucial historic event. Specific but very significant aspects of this problem are the identification between church and nation, church and ethno-cultural identity, church and national ideology, church and state, and, consequently, the concept – but also the reality – of national churches, i.e. the impossibility of considering the Orthodox Church and its mission and witness in the world independently of the national vision and particular national idea or narrative. By being involved in the formation of the particular ethno-cultural identities, the Orthodox Church faces serious difficulties in confirming its sense of catholicity, universality and church unity, and abandons the basis and the criterion of its ecclesiology, which was always determined by the principle of a local – and not national – church. Many of the theologians of the 1960s in the early period of their work were particularly critical towards Greek ecclesiastical nationalism and provincialism, seeking pan-Orthodox unity and the ecumenical mind of Orthodoxy. But, for various reasons, they gradually slid from theological concerns to the field of cultural critique, regressing to pro-nationalistic and Hellenocentric ideas, which claim the Greeks to be the new chosen people of God, praising the uniqueness and the metaphysical meaning of the mission of cultural or ecumenical Hellenism and *Romiosyne*.³⁷ On this point, the works of Christos Yannaras, Fr John Romanides and Fr Vasileios Gondikakis are quite indicative.³⁸

According to many of the Greek theologians of the new generation, today, in the context of a multinational pluralistic post-modern society, Orthodoxy is exhausting the theological and spiritual resources of its patristic and eucharistic tradition on the rhetoric of ‘identities’ and a dated religious tribalism, impeding any serious attempt to face the challenges that the contemporary world poses to Orthodoxy, and condemning the latter to continue to be trapped in traditionalism, fundamentalism, social anachronism (or even reactionism), pre-modernity and the authoritarian structures of patriarchal society. Theocracy and neo-nationalism, which are presumably nothing more than secularised forms of eschatology, constitute

³⁷ The community of Roman Orthodox faithful which draws its origin from the Christian Roman Empire of the East (Byzantium).

³⁸ Cf. my critique of the Hellenocentric, and even nationalistic degeneration of Yannaras, Romanides, and Gondikakis, in Pantelis Kalaitzidis, ‘Orthodoxy and Hellenism in Contemporary Greece’, *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 54 (2010), especially pp. 393–412.

the permanent historical temptation of Orthodoxy and they cannot continue to be the Orthodox Church's political vision.³⁹

*The devolution into Byzantinism and ecclesiastical culturalism*⁴⁰

One of the hallmarks of many of the theologians of the 1960s was the close association between Orthodoxy and Hellenism, the relationship between Orthodoxy and Greek culture, heritage and customs and, generally speaking, the understanding of Orthodoxy in terms of culture and identity. This is a more general – and not just a Greek – phenomenon, in which Orthodoxy has become so identified with local traditions, customs and national narratives that it seems to have lost awareness of catholicity and universality, and to have been reduced to the realm of custom, ancestral heritage and ethno-cultural identity, reordering the priorities vis-à-vis the theological and cultural criteria in favour of the latter. Orthodoxy identified so much with Byzantium and its culture that the fall of the empire in 1453 seems to have left an incurable wound. From that date onwards the Orthodox have behaved like orphans. We have had the greatest difficulty moving beyond this historical trauma. It has been incredibly difficult for us to find our way outside the framework of empire and monarchy by divine right. We perpetually yearn for this now lost pre-modern form of political organisation, in place of which, in the nineteenth century, the Great Powers granted us the Balkan monarchies, to which we quickly attributed a metaphysical dimension and messianic expectations. But as we are reminded by Stavros Zoumboulakis:

³⁹ See the issue on 'Church and Nation: Ties and Shackles', *Synaxi* 79 (2001). Cf. Pantelis Kalaitzidis and Nikos Asproulis, 'Greek Religious Nationalism Facing the Challenges of Evangelization, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation', in Semegnish Asfaw, Alexios Chehadeh, and Marian Gh. Simion (eds), *Just Peace: Orthodox Perspectives* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012), pp. 68–89. For an overall assessment of the critics of the 'Helleno-Orthodox' vision addressed by the new theological generation in Greece, see Trine Stauning Willert, 'A New Role for Religion in Greece? Theologians Challenging the Ethno-Religious Understanding of Orthodoxy and Greekness', in Trine Stauning Willert and Lina Molokotos Liederman (eds), *Innovation in the Orthodox Christian Tradition? The Question of Change in Greek Orthodox Thought and Practice* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 183–205.

⁴⁰ On this section of the present article, see Pantelis Kalaitzidis, 'La relation de l'Eglise à la culture et la dialectique de l'eschatologie et de l'histoire', *Istina* 55 (2010), pp. 7–25. Cf. Trine Stauning Willert, 'Cultural Religion or Religious Purism: Discourses on Orthodoxy, Authenticity and National Identity in Greece', in Catharina Randvere, Krzysztof Stala, and Trine Stauning Willert (eds), *Rethinking the Space for Religion: New Actors in Central and Southeast Europe on Religion, Authenticity and Belonging* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2012), pp. 70–94.

The condemnation of the West as the adulteration and corruption of Christianity by the majority of the theologians of the 1960s is juxtaposed with the exaltation of Byzantium as the pure, absolute, and eternal expression of Christianity. Byzantium and, subsequently, 'Byzantium after Byzantium,' i.e. the period of Ottoman Occupation, embody, both historically and culturally, the fullness of Christian truth. All this rhetoric about Byzantium, of course, bears absolutely no relation to actual Byzantium, to the Byzantium of history, but rather simply reflects the Byzantium of modern Greek Orthodox ideology – in other words, pure nostalgia.⁴¹

Settings and institutions hosting new theological trends in Greek Orthodoxy

In this last part of the article, let us now look at the settings and institutions which are playing host to these new theological trends in Greek Orthodoxy, beginning in the 1990s but becoming more visible since 2000. I will then move on to some concluding remarks, paying special attention to obstacles preventing the deepening of Christian unity and mutual understanding.

- i. I must first mention the theological quarterly *Synaxi*, founded in 1982 by the late theologian Panayiotis Nellas (directed, from Nellas' untimely death in 1986 to 1997, by the poet and author Sotiris Gounelas), and published for thirty-two years now without interruption, which has cultivated a spirit of discipleship of the Orthodox tradition, while also leading a serious effort to renew theology and church life. *Synaxis* is now in its 129th issue, and since 1998, when Dr Athanasios N. Papathanasiou was appointed as editor-in-chief, it has entered a new period of flowering, characterised by the right balance between high theological quality and cutting-edge issues. The topics discussed in recent years in the pages of *Synaxi* are indicative: 'The Issue of Liturgical Language'; 'Bioethics'; 'Liturgical Renewal'; 'Theology and Literature'; 'Church and Globalisation'; 'Church and State'; 'From Babel to Pentecost: Unity and Diversity'; 'Human Sexuality'; 'Mission in the Time of Globalisation'; 'Church and Nation: Ties and Shackles'; 'Exile and Immigration'; 'Violence, Religion, and Multiculturalism'; 'Post-Christian Europe'; 'Economic Crisis'; 'Hell and Eternity'; 'The Church in the Public Sphere'; and 'Christians and Nazism', among others. In parallel to this editorial activity, *Synaxi* has been organising conferences, seminars, roundtables and public events, contributing thus to Orthodox

⁴¹ Zoumboulakis, *Christians in the Public Sphere*, p. 97.

renewal. Although in recent years it has lost a part of its monastic audience because of the latter's conservative turn, *Synaxi* remains an independent and progressive theological voice within Greek Orthodoxy, respected by both ecclesiastical and secular figures, clerics and lay people, Greek Orthodox and Orthodox of other ethnic or national origins.⁴²

- ii. A remarkable change has taken place within the official scholarly journal of the Church of Greece, *Theologia*, since 2009, when Dr Stavros Yangazoglou, a specialist on St Gregory Palamas, was appointed as its director by the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece. Founded in 1923, *Theologia* was among the very few Greek theological journals known and read outside the country. But it was also well known for its dry academic style, which lacked any connection to contemporary issues. Things changed radically with Dr Yangazoglou at the helm. Without losing scholarly quality, *Theologia* has tried to connect with global theological trends by opening its pages to information and reviews derived from journals and conferences all around the world, while at the same time becoming more open to lively theological discussion dealing with contemporary issues such as 'The Synodical Institution'; 'Eucharist and the Church'; 'Issues of Pastoral Theology'; 'Fr Georges Florovsky'; 'Preaching in the Church'; 'Alexandros Papadiamantis'; 'St. Gregory Palamas'; 'A Theological Take on the Economic Crisis', etc. It aims also to promote theological scholarship by organising theological workshops and seminars, highlighting the need for Greek theology to overcome its isolationism and provincialism.
- iii. Another source for theological and ecclesial renewal in Greece has been the biblical foundation Artos Zoes. This private and independent institution became aware, thanks to its former president, Professor Savas Agourides, of the problems arising from the devaluation of biblical studies in the Orthodox milieu and tried actively to contribute to a biblical renewal. Under the direction of Agourides, it founded the *Bulletin of Biblical Studies (Deltion Biblikon Meleton)* – to this day, one of the few Orthodox biblical journals worldwide – which it has continued to publish for the last forty years. In addition, in the 1980s, at the initiative again of Professor Agourides, Artos Zoes started translating and publishing classic works of biblical scholarship and on primitive Christianity, such as the works of Johannes Weiss, Albert Schweitzer, Eduard Lohse, Oscar Cullmann,

⁴² An English-language selection of some of the best articles which have appeared in *Synaxi* was made available by Alexander Press. See *Synaxi: An Anthology of the Most Significant Orthodox Theology in Greece Appearing in the Journal Σύναξη* from 1982 to 2002 (Montreal: Alexander Press, 2006), vols 1–3.

Jean Daniélou, Walter Zimmerli, Joachim Jeremias, Gerhard Ebeling, Gerd Theissen, Etienne Trocmé, etc. More recently, along with the works of Greek biblical scholars, it has also published work by distinguished Western theologians and scholars such as Rudolf Bultmann, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Jürgen Moltmann, Paul Ricœur, Peter Brown, Gustavo Gutiérrez and Karl Barth. Since 2007, under the leadership of its new president, Stavros Zoumboulakis, Artos Zoes has become very active in its effort to make the Bible, biblical studies and biblical thought an integral part of the general education and public discussion in Greece, without neglecting its traditional activities (translations, publications, etc.). To this end, Artos Zoes began organising conferences which aimed to put biblical thought at the centre of intellectual and academic discussion, bringing together theologians, philosophers and social scientists, and discussing issues such as ‘The Messianic Idea and its Transformations through the Centuries: From the Old Testament to the Political Messianisms of the Twentieth Century’, ‘The God of the Philosophers and the God of the Bible’, ‘The Return of Ethics: Old and New Questions’, etc. Parallel to this, Artos Zoes has been organising seminars on Christian Syriac literature (with Professor Sebastian Brock of Oxford University), classes on ancient Semitic and Oriental languages (with Assistant Professor Emmanuel Papoutsakis, of Princeton University), as well as roundtable events on ‘Rethinking Preaching in the Church’, ‘The Word of the Gospel in Post-Christian Societies’, ‘Pagan Neo-nazism and Christian Orthodoxy’, etc.

- iv. To complete this list of institutions promoting the new theological trends in Greek Orthodoxy, I now have to mention the academy of which I am the director, the Volos Academy for Theological Studies. Our Academy, a church-related institution, functions as an open forum for thought and dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the broader scholarly community of intellectuals worldwide. In its effort to foster interdisciplinary and inter-religious understanding, the Volos Academy has been organising a series of studies, international seminars, conferences, roundtables and publications, addressing topics such as: ‘Church and Eschatology’, ‘Orthodoxy and Modernity’, ‘Islam and Fundamentalism – Orthodox Christianity and Globalization’, ‘Christian Presence and Witness in Palestine and the Middle East Today’, ‘Gender and Religion – The Role of Women in the Church’, ‘Theology and Literature’, ‘Biblical Liberation Theology, Patristic Theology, and the Ambivalences of Modernity in Orthodox and Ecumenical Perspective’, ‘Orthodoxy and Multiculturalism’, ‘Lay Participation in Ecclesiastical Life’, ‘Turmoil in Post-war Theology: the “Theology of the 1960s”’, ‘Church and State’,

'Orthodox Christianity and Islam – Islam in Europe', 'Wittgenstein and Apophatic Theology', 'Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Peace', 'Eucharist, Church, and the World', 'The Participation of Orthodox Women in the Ecumenical Movement: Past, Present, and Future', 'Neo-Patristic Synthesis or Post-Patristic Theology: Can Orthodox Theology Be Contextual?', 'Patristics and the Concept of Tradition', 'The Place of Religion in the Public Sphere', 'Issues of Renewal and Reform in Orthodoxy', 'Ecclesiology and Nationalism in Post-modern Era', 'The Present and Future of Biblical Studies in the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches', 'Orthodox Mission in the Far East' and more.

In order to meet this objective, the Volos Academy has collaborated with numerous other institutions (mainly faculties and theological institutes, ecumenical organisations and a number of journals, academic periodicals and publication houses), jointly addressing problems and challenges of our time, in a spirit of respect for each other's differences. As a result of this scholarly activity, the Metropolis of Demetrias and the city of Volos have become an international meeting place for encounter and dialogue.

The Volos Academy for Theological Studies, in cooperation with the Holy Metropolis of Demetrias, has established an online digital Orthodox theological library (www.imdlibrary.gr), with free access to books, scholarly reviews and periodicals, collected works, monographs and theological essays, and also links to other online digital libraries and websites. Abstracts of all this material are available in Greek, English and very soon in French. The Volos Academy also participates in the Global Digital Theological Library (GlobTheoLib: www.globethics.net/gtl), which aims to use new digital models to exchange information in order to contribute to the efficient transmission and exchange of theological knowledge, overcoming local barriers and physical difficulties which limit theological communication between North and South, East and West. The Global Online Theological Library provides registered users with free access to the full texts of hundreds of thousands (to date: 600,000) articles, theses and dissertations, and other publications related to theology and the ecumenical movement, including various languages.

It is clear that what are missing from this picture are the Schools of Theology of the Universities of both Athens and Thessaloniki. Actually to the short list above I should add the names of some professors from the Theological Schools of Athens and Thessaloniki. It is not that these Theological Schools are not doing notable things today, or that they lack major professors who have contributed decisively to the advancement of theological education and the renewal of Greek theology. What is lacking,

however, is an overall group vision and *esprit de corps* which could synthesise and integrate the individual efforts, providing an identity and physiognomy for each Theological School. For that reason, it is difficult to speak in a general article such as this about the new theological trends and revitalising work being developed in these Theological Schools. I could mention some individual professors and teachers, as well as some important conferences and seminars which have taken place there, but this would, on the one hand, lead us down an endless road of casuistry (since we are dealing with nearly 130 faculty members), and we would also expose ourselves to complaints and misunderstandings from all sides. Otherwise, the Theological Schools in Greece continue to provide theological education to thousands of students, often coming from abroad, preparing people for service in the church and education. They actively participate in many exchange programmes, such as Erasmus, while awarding a fair number of master's and doctoral degrees annually. Their professors publish a great deal, but these works are often intended only for internal consumption and rarely draw the interest of a broader readership or an international audience. They cultivate their field but are unable to dialogue with contemporary problems. More specifically, the vast majority seem reluctant to understand and interpret, theologically, the challenges of the modern world. Overall, these two schools suffer from a spirit of introspection and introversion, and from a lack of substantial dialogue with the secular intelligentsia and the global theological community. Thus, it is not merely by chance that they have not yet managed to publish a journal with an international readership, or to organise a large, truly international conference, on a timely theological topic. Just as it is also not simply by chance that the heads of the new, revitalised theological institutions mentioned above remain (and, probably, will continue to remain) outside the Greek theological schools. These schools' roles and contributions to theological renewal in Greece require a separate study, one which greatly exceeds the limits of this article.

In lieu of a conclusion

It is clear from the analysis above that my article does not seek to present all the theological streams and tendencies in Greece today.⁴³ It merely aims at making the new and renewing trends in Greek Orthodox theology better

⁴³ On this issue, one can consult the well-documented article by Athanasios N. Papanthasiou, 'Some Key Themes and Figures in Greek Theological Thought', in Mary B. Cunningham and Elizabeth Theokritoff (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 218–31, especially pp. 220–8. Cf. Christos Yannaras, *Orthodoxy and the West*, especially

known to a wider audience, analysing the key themes and their theological agenda. I have also sought to emphasise their ecumenical dimension and their importance for a genuine encounter between the Christian East and West. I cannot, however, conclude my article without briefly speaking about 'the other side of the coin': the reactions of the fundamentalists and zealots, who have a foothold in the Holy Synod and the Faculties of Theology and who, in recent years, have made anti-ecumenism and anti-Westernism their rallying cry, as well as their opposition to globalisation and Europe, any form of theological dialogue and renewal (considered a betrayal of the faith of the forefathers), any measure aimed at the social modernisation of Greek society (such as the removal of religion from identity cards or the potential, benign separation of church and state), the further strengthening of human rights and the rights of immigrants, etc. These movements' ideology is simply a reproduction of classical Greek religious nationalism, and the continuation and transformation of a very powerful anti-Western sentiment which continues to flourish in ecclesiastical circles and Greek society in general.

These same fundamentalist movements now denounce almost everyone as traitors and ecumenists: His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, His Beatitude Archbishop of Athens and all Greece Hieronymus II, and many other hierarchs and clerics of the Church of Greece, His Beatitude Archbishop of Tirana and Albania Anastasios, prominent theologians such as Metropolitan of Pergamon John Zizioulas, Christos Yannaras, and other university professors. Among the most characteristic representatives of this movement are well-known clerics and professors at the Theological Faculties of Athens and Thessaloniki, the leaders of the mutated religious organisations, the well-known ultra-conservative press *Orthodoxos Typos*, pro-zealot religious blogs and websites, and monasteries on Mount Athos and elsewhere in Greece, among others. These groups' preferred topic is always anti-ecumenism, and their latest idea is the notorious Confession of Faith, an extreme anti-ecumenical statement which seeks to rule out Orthodoxy's dialogue with other Christian traditions, and which wants to make its presence felt with a mass collection of signatures. Although so far few bishops from the Church of Greece have signed this document, it should be noted that its influence among zealots and monastic circles has been considerable, and the collection of signatures has now expanded outside Greece, first to Cyprus and then to the populous Greek diaspora in Europe, America and Australia, as well as to traditionally Orthodox countries such as Russia, Romania,

pp. 193–308; Petros Vassiliadis, 'Greek Theology in the Making: Trends and Facts in the 80's – Vision for the 90's', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 35 (1991), pp. 33–52.

Serbia, Bulgaria, etc.⁴⁴ These groups' most recent fight is against the so-called 'betrayal of the Fathers', referring to the 2010 Volos international conference on 'Neo-Patristic Synthesis and Post-Patristic Theology', which was understood and interpreted by these extremist groups as a rejection of the spirit of the Fathers.

Although the above movements represent the 'far right' of the Greek Church – and even of the Greek political spectrum – it is not uncommon to see people from the extreme left coming to share almost the same ideals and attitudes, i.e. nationalism and anti-Westernism, anti-ecumenism, a Hellenocentric understanding of the history and theology of the Orthodox Church, a refusal to look at social modernisation, human rights or economic immigrants' right to stay in Greece. These people joined Orthodoxy in different ways, but mostly through their participation in the Neo-Orthodox movement of the 1980s,⁴⁵ or after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the so-called 'Socialist regimes' and the subsequent geopolitical turbulence, when the frustration provoked by the breakdown of Marxist or anti-imperialist ideology led them to replace the latter with an 'Orthodox' ideology. In most cases, these people feel simply culturally 'Orthodox' (the call to faith is another matter), and consider the Orthodox Church in Greece the last bastion in the struggle to preserve Greek identity, the most important bulwark against globalisation and cultural homogenisation. It is interesting to note that all these people and their ideals, better known as the 'national left', have been welcomed in the fundamentalist circles of the Greek Church. They also enjoyed, because of their 'national' agenda, generous hospitality during the tenure of the late Archbishop Christodoulos, being given a platform through all kinds of official church organs (radio, journals and newspapers, meetings).⁴⁶

This paradoxical alliance of the religious and secular far right with the extreme left, as well as with the anti-Western and anti-European element, gained even more momentum with the recent economic crisis which has impoverished and exasperated an important part of the Greek population, and it presents Europe as responsible for this critical situation.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Cf. Kalaitzidis, 'Orthodoxy and Hellenism', pp. 412–14.

⁴⁵ For an initial assessment of the 'Neo-Orthodox Movement' in Greece in the 1980s see Olivier Clément, 'Orthodox Reflections on "Liberation Theology"', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 29 (1985), pp. 63–72, especially pp. 69–71, and 'Le mouvement "Néo-orthodoxe" en Grèce', Special issue of the French Orthodox Journal *Contacts* 128 (1984), pp. 331–58.

⁴⁶ Kalaitzidis, 'Orthodoxy and Hellenism', pp. 414–16.

⁴⁷ For a critical assessment of this trend, cf. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, 'L'Orthodoxie grecque face aux défis de la crise économique, de la pauvreté et de la mondialisation: du

In the midst of these difficult circumstances, contemporary Greek theology is called to face the new, very dynamic and particularly challenging global context, and not only to address new questions and problems, but also to consider them in a completely new way, without the security and certainty provided by the framework of the so-called ‘tradition’.

In this particularly crucial moment, and in regard to what we have seen in the previous sections of this article, the question for me personally is not Orthodoxy *or* the West, Orthodoxy *or* Europe, but Orthodoxy *and* the West, Orthodoxy *and* Europe. Europe is our path and our way, our present and future. To recall Metropolitan John Zizioulas’ aphorism, ‘today’s reality for Greece is Europe. Hellenism must be recast into its basic constituent elements, without losing its Greekness, as it moves into this new reality of Europe.’⁴⁸ On our way towards Christian unity, very often historical and cultural reasons are equally or even more important than doctrinal and theological ones, just as they were in the Great Schism and the tragic separation of Christians. With the current crisis, political and cultural reasons should not increase the gap between Greece and the West, or between Greece and Europe. I hope we now appreciate how important it is for Greece to remain in the core of the European Union and within Europe, and how crucial it is for Europe itself to remain for all of us, both Western and Eastern, our common home and our common destiny!

conservatisme politico-social à la nouvelle version du discours “révolutionnaire” et anti-impérialiste’, in Christine Mengès-Le Pape (ed.), *Face à une économie sans foi ni loi: les religions et le droit* (Toulouse: Presses de l’Université Toulouse 1 Capitole, 2012), pp. 625–40; idem, ‘Populistische Diskurse in der Orthodoxen Kirche von Griechenland’, *Religion and Gesellschaft in Ost und West* 6 (2013), pp. 14–18. See also Gerasimos Makris and Dimitris Bekridakis, ‘The Greek Orthodox Church and the Economic Crisis since 2009’, *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 13 (2013), pp. 111–32. For a comprehensive approach to the problem of the economic crisis from a Greek Orthodox perspective, see the special issues ‘A Theological Take on the Economic Crisis’, of the scholarly journal of the Church of Greece, *Theologia*, 83/2 (April–June 2012), and 83/4 (Oct.–Dec. 2012) [in Greek].

⁴⁸ John D. Zizioulas, ‘The European Spirit and Greek Orthodoxy’, *Eythyni* 163 (1985), pp. 332–3 [in Greek].