

History of the Idea of Democracy in Modern Greek Orthodox Theology

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Introduction

Orthodox theology has always been acquainted with democratic practices such as representation, voting, and the principle of majority rule. This familiarity is a product of the long history of the Orthodox Church institutions formed during the Roman period and is marked by the role of church councils' at a local and universal level. Bishops became a part of the Byzantine state apparatus during the late Byzantine period, however, and they were invested with political authority at the local and municipal levels. During the post-Byzantine period, the Greek Orthodox clergy (along with the Armenian or Syrian Church) acted as the representative of all Christian subjects of the Ottoman Sublime Porte, where the notions of accountability or rotation in office, as well as the role of assemblies, appeared for the first time. This participation explains why Orthodox theology is compatible with the institutions of a modern republic. Nevertheless, contextualizing Orthodox Christianity within the general framework of contemporary democracy, such as the equality of all people, human rights, freedom of conscience, freedom of speech, and, above all, respecting minorities, is quite a different thing. It is crucial that we investigate this position, especially after 1990 and the events of the Yugoslav crisis as well as Samuel Huntington's thesis about "civilization" – a notion instrumentalized to mark the line between "the West and the rest." According to Huntington, an essential feature of the "West" is Christianity in its Western forms: "The Reformation and Counter-Reformation and the division of Western Christendom into a Protestant North and a Catholic South are also distinctive features of Western history, totally absent from Eastern Orthodoxy."¹ This notion of "West" is further characterized by the separation of spiritual and temporal authority, the rule of law, social pluralism, representative bodies, and individualism. Non-Western

¹ Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster 1996), 70.

civilizations, including the “Orthodox” or “Byzantine,” do not fit into this notion even if they have developed some of the aforementioned ideas.²

Nevertheless, we are going to modify this simplistic picture. The encounter of the Orthodox Church in the Greek-speaking areas with the ideas of modern democracy has already appeared before the Greek Revolution during the so-called movement of the Modern Greek (or Neohellenic) Enlightenment, which sought to restore the thought of the European Enlightenment to its birthplace in Greece.³ This affected in a positive way specific views of the Orthodox theological discourse. We can trace some hints of this influence in different genres of ecclesiastical literature, such as the “Ecclesiastical History” by the archbishop of Athens Meletios Mitros (1661–1714), written between 1710 and 1714 but edited posthumously in 1784. In his introductory remarks, Mitros defines the term *basileia* as lawful kingship in contrast to tyranny. Seeking to present the history of the Orthodox Church in its Byzantine political past, he argues that, although Romans did not adopt the title *rex* for their emperor, they aspired to maintain the monarchy, which was considered very useful in military terms. Hence, they devised other names such as *augustus* and *imperator*, which mean practically the same and were translated [by the Byzantines] as *basileus* in Greek.⁴ He adds that Greek chronographers never used this title to designate rulers outside Constantinople, as they used the term *reges* for other European kings. He further explains that *rex* refers to the lawful ruler. All of this clearly shows that, for Meletios, the old “Christian” (that is, Orthodox) empire was a) a kingdom subject to law, and b) a member of a larger community of other European lawful kingdoms, heirs to the Roman democratic legacy.⁵ Another example is the *Handbook of Canon Law* by the Metropolitan of Campania (today Verroia in Northern Greece), Theophilos Papaphilou, written

2 In the case of the separation of the spiritual and secular realm, Huntington notes: “God and Caesar, Church and state, spiritual authority and temporal authority, have been a prevailing dualism in Western culture. Only in Hindu civilization were religion and politics also so distinctly separated. In Islam, God is Caesar; in China and Japan, Caesar is God; in Orthodoxy, God is Caesar’s junior partner.” As far as the rule of law is concerned: “The tradition of the rule of law laid the basis for constitutionalism and the protection of human rights, including property rights, against the exercise of arbitrary power. In most other civilizations, the law was a much less important factor in shaping thought and behavior” Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations*, 70–2.

3 For an excellent introduction to this phenomenon, see Paschalis M. Kitromilides, *Enlightenment and Revolution: The Making of Modern Greece* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

4 Meletios of Athens, *Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Ἱστορία* [Ecclesiastical History], v. 1 (Vienna, 1783), Introduction 13, 5, p. 55–6.

5 Meletios of Athens, *Ecclesiastike Istoría*, 56–7.

around 1780. This work's Introduction provides a lengthy argument about the rule of law as a feature of an organized society like classical Greece and Rome.⁶ These are examples that are positively related to the Enlightenment's intellectual trends and the emergence of the modern Hobbesian state.

It is well known that the newly created Greek state following the revolution of 1821 was established essentially at the height of the restoration of the monarchy. The legacy of the French Revolution and the ideal of self-determination remained, however, in the circle of the most eminent advocate of the Neohellenic Enlightenment, Adamantios Korais (1748–1833), and the circle around the journal *Hermês Logios* (Hermes the Scholar) published in Vienna from 1811 to 1821. The director of the journal, the archimandrite Theoklitos Farmakidis (1784–1860), claimed autocephaly for the Church for the Greek territory that had rebelled, without the consent of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. We tend to consider the reasons for this proclamation to be ecclesiastico-political in nature, namely, as an effort to launch a process that would turn the Greek ecclesiastical hierarchy away from its canonical subjugation to its traditional source, the Patriarchate, and facilitate their independence from the Western colonial powers. Theoklitos justifies this unilateral proclamation, however, by using the notion of natural law and the law of self-determination as leading to the creation of a new state. In a similar way, a local church could proclaim its independence without needing any approval of a higher authority:

The Greek nation having declared its political autonomy and independency before God and men through its glorious revolution it manifested simultaneously that, according to its right, its Church should also be autocephalous and independent, as it will be proved elsewhere.⁷

The cause of this holy struggle was not only the political but also the ecclesiastical autonomy and independence. In everything that the Greek nation accomplished it did not need any permission or consent by anybody as it did not need any permission for its political autonomy and independence.

As we all know, the Autocephaly was granted officially by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1850 (with the so-called “Tomos of Autocephaly”). Farmakidis criticized this Tomos vehemently as surrendering the natural rights of the

6 For an attempt to demonstrate this, see Dimitrios Moschos, “The Churches of the East and the Enlightenment,” in *Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theology 1600–1800*, ed. Ulrich L. Lehner, Richard Muller and A. G. Roeber (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 499–516.

7 Theoklitos Farmakidis, *Ἀπολογία* [Apology] (Athens: Aggelidès, 1840), 14.

Greek Church. He was criticized in turn on the ground that his negative attitude against the Tomos “crushes and takes apart the cornerstone of the Great Idea,” opposing the new constitution and the nation’s sacred mission and goal. Farmakidis did not deny the Church’s unity (here the Church of Greece and the Patriarchate), but he understood it in a democratic way. He defines the nation in a purely political way: “When we refer to the Greek Nation we use this term according to national decisions, meaning the Greeks who waged the Revolution, not the whole Greek race, nor all Orthodox who believe in Christ and live and inhabit within the limits of the *Ottoman State*.”⁸ This definition shows an in-depth understanding of the nation by a clergyman in a purely political way, far removed from any mystical, metaphysical, or emotional/romantic interpretation. In that case, it provides an excellent example of contextualizing ecclesiastical institutions in a political democracy, an idea that was developed during the French Revolution.

National Romanticism and Democracy as Elements of Greek Identity

It is worth noting a crucial evolution in the realm of ideas throughout the continental European area, leading to a more idealistic or mystical interpretation of the idea of the nation. In Greece, national identity was concretized in the unifying historiographical program of the Professor of History at the University of Athens, Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos (1815–1891), in his *Historia tou hellênikou ethnous* [“History of the Greek Nation”] that was completed in 1874. This became the historical manifesto of Greek national identity. In the eyes of National Romanticism, the modern Greek nation is marked by the uninterrupted continuity of all Greek-speaking people in a time-space continuum that originates in antiquity and continues through the Middle Ages/Byzantium up to the present day. This basic thesis redefines the until then dominant classicist idea that conceived the Greek nation basically as people that originated in the classical and Hellenistic cities being conquered by the Romans, living for centuries under Roman, “Byzantine,” and Ottoman yokes and being liberated only after the Revolution and rebirth (“*paligenesia*”) of 1821. Following the 1860s, the national romantic “extension” of the nation through the Middle Ages forced

8 See the references and the relevant discussion in Georgios D. Metallinos, “Επακριβώσεις στην ιδεολογική ταυτότητα του Θεόκλητου Φαρμακίδη” [Clarifications in the ideological identity of Theoklitos Farmakidis], in *Ελληνισμός Μετέωρος* [Pending Hellenism] (Athens: Apostoliki Diakonia, 1999), 168–83.

Orthodox theology to re-forged Orthodox Christianity's identity through some sort of synthesis rather than through the contrast between Christianity and Hellenism (interpreted in this way as a perennial entity). A synthesis between Christianity and the respective indigenous national identity was not uncommon in most European nations of the 19th century and was not restricted only to those who belong in their majority to the Orthodox Church.

In this context, the democratic Greek tradition of equality and freedom is located in the synthesis with Christianity and is being interpreted as a particular characteristic of Orthodox Christianity in contrast to an alleged monarchical papal tradition and Asian despotism. On the Turkish-occupied island of Chios, Metropolitan Gregory "Byzantios" (Pavlidis, 1860–1877) delivered a speech in 1866 on the occasion of the well-established (also in the context of the synthesis of Christianity and Hellenism) feast of the Three Hierarchs who were proclaimed in the free Greek state as patron saints of education.⁹ Gregory points out that the basic principles of ancient Greek democracy, as opposed to either the autocracy and tyranny of the Asian states or the anarchy and individualism of Western peoples (i.e., the Protestant nations), are the sovereignty of the people, which allows every citizen to hold a public office¹⁰, equality before the law¹¹, freedom and equal rights of speech¹², equality in voting (*isop-sêphia*), accountability of the office holders¹³ and the attribution of the highest and irrevocable power to the public assembly (*Ecclêsia tou Dêμου*). These same elements, he argues, characterize the Orthodox Church: the offices are open to all, all Christians are equal regardless of their origin or social class, and free citizens of the spiritual Kingdom of God. Every Christian is free to speak and express his opinion on matters of faith like every official in the Church, regardless of his position.¹⁴

The national romantic "restoration" of Hellenism (and its democratic spirit) resulted in Orthodox theology viewing the attempts at the modernization of

9 See Effi Gazi, *Ο Δεύτερος Βίος τῶν Τριῶν Ἱεραρχῶν: Μία γενεαλογία τοῦ "Ἑλληνοχριστιανικοῦ Πολιτισμοῦ"* [The Second Life of the Three Hierarchs: A Genealogy of the "Helleno-Christian Civilisation"] (Athens: Nefele, 2004).

10 Gregorios Chiou, *Τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν Πνεῦμα: Ἦτοι Σχέσις τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ πρὸς τὴν Ὀρθοδοξίαν* [The Hellenic Spirit or The Relation of Hellenism to Orthodoxy in Greece] (Chios: Prokidis 1869), 5; cf. Aristotle, *Polit.* IV, 2 and VI, a, 10: "Χαρακτήρες τῆς ἑλληνικῆς πολιτείας εἰσὶν οἱ ἐξῆς α, κυριαρχία τοῦ λαοῦ, τουτέστι τὸ δύνασθαι, κατ' Ἀριστοτέλη, πάντα πολίτην ἔχοντα τὰ ἀρμόδια προσόντα ἄρχειν πᾶσαν ἀρχήν."

11 Chiou, "β, ἰσονομία, τουτέστιν ἴση ἀπονομή τοῦ δικαίου καθοριζόμενη ὑπὸ τοῦ νόμου."

12 Chiou, "γ, ἰσηγορία, ἧτοι ἔκφρασις τῆς ἀτομικῆς γνώμης καὶ ἐλευθέρᾳ συζήτησις (ἐπὶ τῇ βάσει τῶν πατρῶων νόμων καὶ παραδόσεων)."

13 Chiou, "ὕπευθυνον τῶν ἐν τέλει."

14 Chiou, *Τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν Πνεῦμα: Ἦτοι Σχέσις τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ πρὸς τὴν Ὀρθοδοξίαν* 11–12, 20–21.

the Greek state mostly favorably, but it was not very actively involved. There were occasional voices from theologians from time to time against the dominance of the state over the Church (which was a legacy of Josephinism), but not equally insistent on the formation of a democratic political ethos on a practical level, e.g., against corruption in the Church hierarchy. A turn can be detected after the dissolution of the 19th-century religious uprisings founded on a romantic/mystical basis among instigators in the Peloponnese such as the monks and preachers Christophoros Papoulakos (1770–1861) and Cosmas Flamiatos (1786–1852) and his “Philorthodoxos Etaireia” (Society of Friends of Orthodoxy) in the 1840s. Apostolos Makrakis (1831–1905), a younger associate of Flamiatos, constitutes a pivotal case in that turn: he gradually distanced himself from the old enthusiastic communal opposition to the modernization of society based on Western models and shifted toward preaching ethics and the regeneration of the Greek Orthodox Church. His sermons were eschatological calls in favor of Christian Socialism.¹⁵ He participated in the modern democratic state, running for Parliament but without success (1875). He was eventually condemned by the Synod and marginalized. Consequently, his younger followers abandoned any political attempt within the framework of parliamentary democracy. They committed themselves to the regeneration of the rapidly urbanized Greek population founding the religious organization, the Zoe [“Life”] Brotherhood in 1907, which aspired to encourage a more conscious moral Christian life and was involved in catechetical work. Others of his followers founded the society and the review *Anaplasis* with a similar purpose (1886).

An important exception to politically radicalized Christians who fought for a redistributive land policy was the Eptanisioides Rizospastai (Ionian Radicals) movement, which emerged as a political party in the autonomous Ionian “state” (i.e., the British Protectorate of the Ionian Islands) struggling for justice and peace based on Orthodox tradition. Marinos Antipas was a member of this party, and he also played a prominent role in the rural uprisings in Thessaly at the beginning of the 20th century during the so-called “agricultural issue” (the distribution of the land of the great estates of Central Greece to the landless serfs). This phenomenon is not, however, related to academic theology or official ecclesiastical discourse.

Modernization movements proliferated after 1909. The Cretan politician Eleftherios Venizelos played a prominent role in leading the modernization wave and became the architect of the alliance with other Balkan states against

15 See Effi Gazi, “Revisiting Religion and Nationalism in 19th-Century Greece,” *The Making of Modern Greece*, ed. David Ricks and Roderick Beaton (London: Routledge, 2019), 95–106.

the Ottoman empire that was in decline. This alliance allowed the territorial expansion of the Greek state in the Balkan wars of 1912–1913. Venizelos had also adopted a high-risk policy (and territorial gains) endorsing the participation of Greece in the First World War on the side of Entente despite the opposition of King Constantine (who had no constitutional authority to interfere in politics but still had kinship relations with the German Kaiser). This political shift led the Greek nation to a long and bitter division. This great division did not leave the Church unaffected. Several bishops supported Venizelos, but they were not enough to establish a critical series of reforms in the Church and theology that would positively and critically address the demands for a democratic society. The majority in the Church hierarchy continued to believe that the entire Greek nation adhered to their own ideas. This belief was directly related to the national romanticism and the tradition of the nation leadership (*Ethnarchia*). Many bishops were responsible for leading and representing the Greek population in the Christian dioceses that were located in the Ottoman Empire. Many of them were also committed to the Greek national cause; they managed to confront the Ottoman administration and developed brilliant political tactics. Nevertheless, it was a typical reaction for laypeople and clerics to side with the King.¹⁶ They regarded kingship as a perennial institution vital to the solidarity of the nation.

From the Culmination of National Romanticism until the End of the Great Pseudo-messianic Political Visions

The end of the First World War turned the tables. The dissolution of the empires, the prevalence of secular regimes in the newly established USSR and the successor-state of the Ottoman Empire, the Kemalist Turkish Republic, as well as the expulsion or extermination of Greeks (and other Christians) from Turkey, which marked the end of the Great Idea, were accompanied in the interwar period by the rise of the pseudo-messianisms of the fascist and Nazi regimes in Western Europe. In Greece, under the repeated coups d'état and the consolidation of the fascist regime by Ioannis Metaxas (4 August 1936), some hierarchs and theologians began to sympathize with the civil democracy notions that could be a solution to the political issue.

¹⁶ For more on this period, see Andreas Nanakis, “Venizelos and Church-State Relations,” in *Eleftherios Venizelos: The Trials of Statesmanship*, ed. Paschalis M. Kitromilides (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 346–73.

At a time when most Christians were attacking the atheistic communist system of the USSR, the theologian and later Professor of Ecclesiastical History at the Theological Faculty of the Athens University, Gerasimos Konidaris (1905–1987), became acquainted with National Socialism during his studies in Germany and refuted it, demonstrating that the Gospel transcends racial differences. Konidaris' critical remarks are clear and insightful. They are also based in his vivid personal experience of dramatic events, such as the attack by the Nazi Youth against the Jewish Professor of Law, Martin Wolff (1872–1953), during his lecture at Humboldt University (June 1933). Moreover, he witnessed the celebration of liturgy in the churches of German Christians (*Deutsche Christen*) after they had won the elections of 1933 for the ecclesiastical councils – this group was a device constructed by Adolf Hitler to control the newly established structural unification of the Evangelical Church in Germany. He managed it by having his puppet, Ludwig Müller, elected as *Reichsbischof*.¹⁷ What is most impressive, however, is that Konidaris goes beyond the usual moralistic Christian criticism of Nazism that targeted mainly its pagan elements or its radical nationalism. Konidaris proceeds from a significant theoretical reflection on the relationship between Christianity and modern politics in which his Eastern Orthodox identity also plays a distinct role. He agrees that the Church should not be identified with a specific state form like monarchy or democracy, but, on the other hand, he points out that parliamentary democracy and the legal admissibility of political opposition (and at the same time the existence of minority rights) is much closer to the standards of the Christian Church concerning how a society should operate because it grants more freedom to the individual as well to the state.¹⁸ He published his reflections during 1933 and 1934 in a series of articles in the *Anaplasis* review and later (1937) reprinted them in a separate book.

The aforementioned review, *Anaplasis* (literally “Regeneration”), inspired a profound intervention in the political situation of the church in Greece towards a moral reform of the Church. The former editor-in-chief of *Anaplasis*, Michael Galanos (1868–1948)¹⁹, envisioned a more active role for Christians in the Greek political scene in a more progressive direction and had also been elected

17 The events broadly called “Kirchenkampf”; see Thomas Martin Schneider, *Reichsbischof Ludwig Müller: Eine Untersuchung zu Leben, Werk and Persönlichkeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993).

18 Gerasimos Konidaris, *Ἡ ἐθνικιστικὴ Γερμανία ἐκκλησιαστικῶς. Προτεσταντισμός, Παπικὴ Ἐκκλησία. Κείμενα Νόμων* [Nationalist Germany from an Ecclesiastical Point of View: Protestantism – Papal Church – Texts of Laws] (Athens: 1934–1937), 54.

19 P. Marketos, l. “Anaplasis,” in *Egkyklopaideia tou Ellenikou Typou* 1784–1974 [Encyclopedia of the Greek Press 1784–1974], vol. 1, ed. Loukia Droulia and Gioula Koutsopanagou

to the Greek parliament in 1910. Konidaris dedicated his book to Metropolitan Ezekiel of Thessaliois (Stroumbos 1874–1953) and Metropolitan Damaskinos of Corinth (Papandreou 1891–1949), who was a renowned adherent of Venizelos. Damaskinos became Archbishop of Athens and All Greece in 1941 during the time of the Nazi occupation following the deposition of his rival Chrysanthos, who favored the dictator Ioannis Metaxas.²⁰ The Nazis believed that they could avoid the intransigent nationalistic attitude of Chrysanthos by reinstating Damaskinos, thinking that he would be friendlier towards them. Nevertheless, during the Nazi Occupation (1941–1944), Archbishop Damaskinos skillfully used the classical patriotic/national romantic church policy (a legacy of many generations of bishops acting as representatives of the Christian Orthodox subjects in the Ottoman Empire) and espoused balancing tactics necessary for the joint action of mutually hostile resistance groups against the Nazis, specifically the communist and the pro-English nationalist guerillas, as well as pre-war conservative politicians. He saved many Jews in Athens and served in the interim period after the liberation from Nazi occupation as Regent until the King of Greece returned from England.

But all these political progressive circles could not remove the theological and ecclesiastical discourse from the national patriotic context that prevailed during the Resistance and the subsequent Civil War, when significant contesting messianic visions of national grandeur or social emancipation were active. The idea of social justice and colonial emancipation, which motivated the resistance of the left, was eventually effectively compromised by the pro-West conservative politicians backed initially by the British and, after 1949, the USA. Under these circumstances, a reasonable conceptual framework for the idea of a typical liberal democracy was not only ineffective (because of the lack of a major, stable middle class in mainly agrarian Greek society) but also morally condemned, since the new victorious Western allies used Nazi collaborators in the post-Civil War Greek state to ensure its adherence to the West and NATO. This so-called post-Civil War state, which used the possibility of a communist insurrection as a pretext, empowered the court-martial to determine the guilt

(Athens: National Hellenic Research Foundation, 2008), 197–99. Galanos presented himself as a “Christian of liberal principles.”

20 As Damaskinos was considered a “democrat,” Metaxas manipulated the election of Chrysanthos in 1938. Konidaris later stated that “the democratic sentiment of Damaskinos was well known”; see Polykarpos Karamouzis, *Κράτος, εκκλησία και εθνική ιδεολογία στη νεώτερη Ελλάδα: κλήρος, θεολόγοι και θρησκευτικές οργανώσεις στο μεσοπόλεμο* [State, Church and national ideology in modern Greece: clerics, theologians, and religious organizations in the Interwar], PhD diss. (Athens: Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, 2004), 382.

of political crimes, conducted censorship, and even sent into exile those who were suspected of adhering to the radical left or having leftist ideas. Many bishops of the Greek Church (apart from two of them who supported the National Liberation Front during the Occupation) sided with the official Greek state.

After the Civil War: Anticommunism and the Attempts at a Christian Democracy

In view of this background, one can better understand the awkward effort to form a Greek type of middle-class “Christian democracy” movement under the guidance of a Christian Professor of Commercial Law in Athens, i.e., Alexandros Tsirintanis (1903–1971). His name was associated with the catechetical movement Zoe, which was an old organization founded around 1907 at the end of the above-mentioned circle of messianic ideas and was aspiring to the renaissance of theology and ecclesiastical discourse.²¹ Zoe was used as a primary ideological weapon against communism.²² Yet that movement did not manage to create a robust theological argument supporting the idea of liberal democracy in its own right and not as a defense against communism. Tsirintanis understood this failure and distanced himself from it, issuing manifestos such as the *Declaration of Christian Scientists* (1946)²³ signed by scientists and scholars and showing the need for a social revival through law, morality and social justice. Later (1950), Tsirintanis published the declaration *Toward a Christian Civilization* signed by him and articles in his review *Sizêtêsis* (“Discussion” or “Common Quest”) until the establishment of the dictatorship in 1967. His works are characterized by an appeal to moral restoration, the rule of law and solidarity as the main political goals that go along with an utterly reactionary catechism and a condemnation of the loose lifestyle of the young generation of his time. In that way, a sincere and comprehensive encounter of Orthodox Christianity with the values of democracy on the political field was not able to be developed.

Nevertheless, there were theologians, members of those “organizations,” that considered the Orthodox Church compatible with liberal democracy. One

21 See also Stanley Harakas, “Alexander Tsirintanis on the Present Age,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 2 (1956) 75–82.

22 See more on this in Vasilios N. Makrides, “Orthodoxy in the Service of Anticommunism: The Religious Organization Zoë during the Greek Civil War,” in Philip Carabott and Thanasis D. Sfikas (eds) *The Greek Civil War: Essays on a Conflict of Exceptionalism and Silences* (Aldershot: Routledge, 2004), 159–73.

23 Declaration of the Christian Union of Scientists, Athens 1946.

of them was Hamilcas Alivisatos (1887–1969), who reasserted in 1964 the old thesis that the Orthodox Church is inherently democratic, something that also appears in the equality of its members.²⁴

Strangely enough, the far-right Regime of the Colonels (1967–1974) has led many people to be disappointed and disillusioned by the right-wing nationalist messianism. This messianism culminated in senseless propaganda about the national grandeur of a “regenerated” Greece consisting of “Greek Christians,” using slogans such as “Hellas of Greek Christians.” This pattern served as a pretext for the ecclesiastical anticommunism and conservative puritan discourse that justified the lack of civil rights and democratic freedom. This changed quickly after the Turkish invasion of Cyprus (1974), however. The pretext for this invasion was given by the Greek military regime, proving that the anticommunist nationalist rhetoric and the suppression of democracy were treacherous and devastating for the national interest. It also revealed the failure of the Church hierarchy (despite significant exceptions) to address the quest for democracy, freedom of speech, social justice and similar demands that had been formed in the meantime by progressive liberal (and not only communist) political forces in the country since the 1960s.

At the same time, the most creative, free and fertile current of critical thinking in theology emerged paradoxically from the Zoe Organization and its members who started to write in the review *Synoro* [“Frontier”]. This review formed the famous current of the so-called “Theology of the 1960s,” which endeavored to address comprehensively significant issues such as Christianity and politics, the social question, etc. This group was influenced by an older cultural movement that had emerged in Greek literature during the 1930s (the so-called “generation of the 1930s”) that focused on a creative rediscovery of the Greek folk tradition, Greek language, etc. The contributors to *Synoro* understood the relation between Greek culture, Orthodox theology and social and political theory in a non-triumphalist and certainly more progressive and self-critical way. While *Synoro* deliberately suspended its publication on the day of the coup d’état on 21 April 1967, one cannot describe the theology of the 1960s as “political.” Nevertheless, it is important to remember that the key parameters of *Synoro* stem from Christian anthropology and the Christian belief in the fall of human nature. This fall explains social evil and the need for salvation by the

24 Hamilcas Alivisatos, “Ο Δημοκρατικός χαρακτήρ τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας” [The Democratic Character of the Orthodox Church], *Πρακτικά τῆς Ἀκαδημίας Ἀθηνῶν* [Proceedings of the Academy of Athens] 14.5.1964 (Athens: 1964), 213–8. I am indebted to my associate of the Volos Academy for Theological Studies, Dr. Nikos Kouremenos, for drawing my attention to this work.

entire society through Jesus Christ. These basic teachings are considered in the light of contemporary issues and theories such as Marxist philosophy and economy, the state's role in the life of the Christians, etc.²⁵ This theological current also included Christos Yannaras, doctor in philosophy and theology and Professor of Philosophy at Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences 1982–2002). In his book *Kephalaiia politikês theologias* (“Chapters of Political Theology”), one can note the central axes of his thought, which are related to the notion of democracy. These are: a) democracy in Greece is imposed from without and results in the alienation of Greek people from their collective self-identity, which is integrated with Orthodox Christianity; and b) the essence of politics resides in the revelation of the existential truthfulness of the human being as a person (i.e., in an ontological relation to the Other) and not to a rational accommodation of individual interests.²⁶ Later, during the period of *Metapolitefsi*²⁷, he claimed in his work *Ὁρθός Λόγος και κοινωνική πρακτική* (Rationalism and Social Practice), that Being should be connected existentially both with the critical function of reason as well as freedom. This connection forms a “critical ontology.” According to Yannaras, this relation was affirmed by the young Karl Marx and Jacques Lacan. Then he tried to give a rough sketch of his idea of this connection in which rationality functions apophatically (i.e., without posing limits to existing truth and confining it to reason) and real existence means “shared existence” (*koinonein*). Therefore, politics is redefined through forms of immediate democracy, autogestion and other possibilities that show that Otherness can constitute and not dismantle an ontologically truthful *polis*.²⁸

25 For further remarks on the whole theological generation of the 1960s, see Dimitrios Moschos, “Theology and Politics in Contemporary Greece: A Missed Opportunity for the Greek Theology of the 1960s,” *The Ecumenical Review* 70, no. 2 (July 2018): 309–21.

26 Christos Yannaras, *Κεφάλαια Πολιτικής Θεολογίας* [Chapters on Political Theology] (Athens: Papazisis, 1976).

27 In modern Greek, the technical term “*Μεταπολίτευση*” (*Metapolitefsi* means the transition from one political situation to another) denotes a unique moment in the modern political history of the Greek state. It is the fundamental transition from the “quasi-democracy” of the post-Civil War state, which was under the political control of the West and paralyzed because of the suspension of civil rights, to a modern, Western democratic state. It occurred in July 1974 with the fall of the dictatorship and the ratification of a new constitution in 1975.

28 There is ample literature on the political implications of Yannaras’ thought. See Jonathan Cole, “The Commune-centric Political Theology of Christos Yannaras in Conversation with Oliver O’Donovan,” *Mustard Seeds in the Public Square: Between and Beyond Theology, Philosophy, and Society*, ed. Sotiris Mitralaxis (Wilmington DE: Vernon Press, 2017), 61–92; Dionysios Skliris, “Aristotelian Marxism, Critical Metaphysics: The Political Theology of Christos Yannaras,” *Political Theology* 20, no. 4 (2019): 331–48.

Before the 1970s, a minor political movement that emerged in the 1950s is worth noting: “Christian Democracy” (*Christianikê Dêmokratia*), which recalls Christian democratic parties in Italy, Germany, and Belgium. Like many others, its goal was to draw a middle line between capitalism and communism by proclaiming a social Gospel. The most crucial difference with the project of a bourgeois Christian Democrat like Tsirintanis’ was the utterly radical attack on the post-Civil War political establishment, accompanied by the view that capitalism and communism are two sides of the same coin, projections of the inhuman, unchristian condition defined as materialism. Consequently, the founder and leader of *Christianikê Dimokratia*, Nikos Psaroudakis (1917–2006), a schoolteacher and lawyer (but not an academically trained theologian), and his rather few associates, spoke out openly against the dictatorship after 1967. Psaroudakês defended human rights and democratic freedom from a Christian social perspective. He and the party’s newspaper were persecuted and censored while Psaroudakis was imprisoned and sent to exile. Despite the bold and sometimes naive messianic elements (proclaiming to build a pure Christian society of equality and justice for all) of the movement, Nikos Psaroudakis, with books such as *Tò χριστιανικό πολιτικό маниφέστο* (The Christian Political Manifesto) (Athens, 1947), *Ἡ ἐπανάστασις τῆς ἀγάπης: Λύσις τοῦ κοινωνικοῦ προβλήματος ὑπὸ τὸ φῶς τῆς χριστιανικῆς κοινωνιολογίας* (The Revolution of Love: The Solution of the Social Problem under the Light of Christian Sociology) (Athens, 1959) or the collection of articles against the dictatorship *Νὰ πέσει ἡ τυραννία* (Down with Tyranny) (edited by him, published later in Athens, 1978) and many others, formed the first comprehensive effort of Christians to reform not only individual ethics (as was the case with organizations like Zoe) but also the political situation. Although many theoretical issues such as the role of the capitalist economy or the place of minorities are treated with relative oversimplification, one should give credit to *Christianikê Dimokratia* because of its combatant attitude demanding political freedom, equality, solidarity, and similar democratic values. But the movement often declared that civil democracy is insufficient for establishing a just and moral society. Although it had won a small percentage in all free elections after 1974, the movement influenced many theologians after the 1970s who were committed to politically progressive actions in trade unions and youth work. There was a student movement of the party called the “Christian Socialist Student Movement,” and it later (after 1980) hosted a fertile encounter with representatives of the theology of the 1960s. Among other things, the party’s publishing activity presented translations of important works in liberation theology, introducing them to the Greek public.

After the Metapolitefsi of 1974

In 1974 there was a cataclysmic political change, which led to the reform of the Greek Republic. The new constitution marked the transition to a modern democratic state with the separation of powers and the establishment of the rule of law, guaranteeing democratic rights to all and the subsequent admittance of Greece to the European Union (1981). These developments rendered obsolete not only the remnants of national romanticism (the central platform of the old conservative nationalism) but also the Orthodox Church's role. The Orthodox Church had to face new challenges, nevertheless every change brings positive and negative effects. The legal framework of the relations between the Church and state has changed substantially according to the constitutional revision of 1975. Consequently, the Orthodox Church regained its freedom at last and was liberated from the nationalistic fetters of the 19th century, i.e., the dominance of the state. It was indeed a positive experience.

On the other hand, the Church considered a series of state laws encouraging secular modernization as an attack on the Church: the new family law that corrected aspects of discrimination against women, the decriminalization of adultery, the legal recognition of civil marriage, the development of religious education at schools that was escaping from the institutional control of the Church Synod. Following the 1990s, it is worth noting the elimination of the mandatory indication of religious affiliation on public documents, including identity cards, because it was contrary to the law on the protection of data and was also imposed as a measure against discrimination. All these acts were signs that the vital core of the *raison d'être* of modern Greece and the Greek Republic was something different from the romantically fabricated alias of "Christian-Hellenic" identity (which tacitly excluded other religions and national minorities from the possibility of belonging to the national identity). Greece was being transformed into a "political nation" consisting of citizens who follow the rule of law in accordance with the legal right of self-determination that was put forward by the Greek Revolution and the building of a modern democratic state. It can be said that Orthodox Greece had fulfilled its role at last in constructing the ideology of modern Greece and now the main challenge for it is to assume and develop a new role in this secular environment.

During the same period, on the grassroots level, ecclesiastical rhetoric and theology interact with the anti-colonial, anti-Western political rhetoric of the *Metapolitefsi*, where a belated reception took place of ideological debates that occurred during the 1960s in the rest of the world. In these debates, Marxism

in a free, unofficial (non-Soviet) form had a key role, i.e., the quest for the “young Marx,” and economic theories that analyzed the relations between the metropolis and the periphery, the Frankfurt school, etc., along with the socialist experiments of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Arab world, the emergence of the political understanding of psychoanalysis and ecology and many more currents that redefined the concept of progressive thinking and activism especially after the protests of 1968. Greek society encountered this widespread anti-colonial sentiment through heated political debates about socialism and the course of the newly established democracy in the country. Marxism (as Neomarxism) and socialism were the focus of many Orthodox theologians in this context.

As a product of this situation, the so-called Christian-Marxist dialogue (1983–1987) encouraged many Orthodox theologians to take seriously the social problem (which many of them approached in a mere humanistic and moral way) on the one hand and the East as a cultural periphery that had to articulate its emancipated discourse against the western metropolis on the other. The theology of the 1960s contributed significantly to this since it reinterpreted the history and the achievements of Eastern Orthodox theology in order to respond to the dead end of Western rationalism. Nevertheless, this encounter with the theories of 1968 made the restoration of civil democracy and its principles irrelevant and outdated for theology. A typical example of a historian influenced by theologians of the 1960s generation with a strongly anti-Western/anti-colonial approach to modern Greek history was a priest committed to the Church’s democratization, Georgios Metallinos (1940–2019), Professor of Intellectual Trends in the East after the 15th Century at the Theological Faculty of the University of Athens. In his work, he showed a great affinity with Marxist ideas and a Gospel-based approach to social problems as a shared basis.²⁹

Standing more in the theological margins of the 1960s, the professor of New Testament at the Theological Faculty of Athens, Ioannis Panagopoulos (1938–1997), published a small book in 1982, *Δημοκρατία και Έλληνική Όρθοδοξία* (Democracy and Greek Orthodoxy), that can be considered as an attempt at dialogue with the Orthodox spirit. It was a time of the alleged war between the Panhellenic Socialist Movement, which had governed Greece since 1981,

29 Unlike Christos Yannaras, he stated that “the fact that Marxist philosophy recognizes the omnipotence of science cannot be considered contrary to Orthodox spirituality in advance because this spirituality is also scientific and practical. Like positive science, Orthodox spirituality relies on a specific method, practice, and experimentation.” Georgios Metallinos, *Εισαγωγική πρόσβαση στην όρθόδοξη πνευματικότητα* [Introduction to Orthodox Spirituality], *Semadía* 9 (February 1984): 20.

and the Church hierarchy because of the aforementioned modernization of family laws and measures. The war escalated later because the government attempted to gain control over ecclesiastical property. Basing himself on the eschatological dimension of Christian discourse, Panagopoulos demonstrated the compatibility between democracy and Orthodoxy as well as the gap that separates them:

The ultimate purpose of civil democracy is to transform the people (*demos*) into a society of free and responsible community, characterized by justice, equality, freedom, peace, happiness, as Aristotle wanted. According to the teaching of the Church, the ultimate destiny of the world and all creation is to be developed and be a ripe fruit of God's kingdom. There is no radical contrast between these two objectives, as many want to believe, but only qualitative differences.³⁰

Parallel to this central thesis, however, Panagopoulos reduces Orthodoxy culturally to Hellenism, as was the general trend that time.³¹

Apart from theoretical reflections, there were also practical initiatives such as the formation of collective bodies that, although they had no specific task in promoting the relationship between democracy and Orthodox theology, they introduced demands into the public sphere that connected various aspects of the theoretical democratic framework with theology, such as dialogue, human rights, respect for the environment and the life of the Orthodox Church. In that sense, the example of the Orthodox Academy of Crete, which was founded during the time of the dictatorship (1968), and the establishment of the Theological Association of Northern Greece (1979) are very interesting, as well as of "Theological League" (1984), which later began to publish (1992) the theological journal *Kath' odon* ("In statu viae"). The Academy aimed to cultivate "the spirit of dialogue between Orthodoxy and other denominations and religions and more generally between faith, science, and culture." It has also tried to support dialogue through conferences and other activities. Apart from this attempt, other initiatives focused on introducing current political and social issues such as human rights, ecology, discrimination, etc., following the theological quest of the 1960s, thus bringing a new dynamic into the encounter between Orthodox theology and democracy.

During the 1990s, following the sudden collapse of the communist regimes and the rise of the global market power, the spectacular defeat of the Marxist

30 Ioannis Panagopoulos, *Δημοκρατία και Έλληνική Όρθοδοξία* [Democracy and Greek Orthodoxy] (Athens: Stefanos Vasilopoulos), 198.

31 Panagopoulos, *Δημοκρατία*, 61–85, where Panagopoulos speaks about the "dynamic relationship between Hellenism and Orthodoxy," "the debt of Hellenism to Orthodoxy" and vice versa, etc.

ideological hegemony left a vacuum in the anti-colonial camp. This vacuum was once again filled by culturally ethnocentric collectivism fueled by populist traditionalist rhetoric combined with isolationist elements – what we now call “ethnopolitism.”

This development greatly affected the Greek intellectual landscape. Key ideas and motifs of the theology of the 1960s (the essence of the Church as the people of God, the rediscovered meaning of tradition, the philosophical importance of the *via negativa* for the knowledge of God, the criticism of Western rationalism, etc.) that had inspired a whole generation of lay theologians, clerics, and monks, evolved into a catalyst of shallow anti-Western fundamentalism, isolationism and delusions of national and cultural grandeur. As the old ghosts of ethnic conflicts reappeared in the Balkans, the Church of Greece addressed the uneasy Greek public using these ideas that recalled the perennial cultural war of the “West” against the Orthodox “East.” In that war (with nationalistic connotations), the model of Western civil democracy was held responsible for the political destabilization in the Balkans and the dismantling of the former Yugoslavia, the demonization of the new Russia, the alleged support of Muslims against Christians and the Uniate (Greek Catholic) ecclesiastical communities against the territorial rights of the Eastern Orthodox Churches in Eastern Europe. This tendency culminated with the Archbishop of Athens, Christodoulos Paraskevaïdis (1939–2008, archbishop 2001–2008). Despite moments of creative openness to modernity (the delegation of the Church of Greece to the EU, ecumenical initiatives, the visit by Pope John Paul II in 2001, the translation of parts of the liturgy into contemporary Greek, etc.), he often clashed with the Greek government on legal and administrative measures that would mark a further separation of the Church from the state. By continually stressing the Church’s position as the “soul” of the nation in a purely neo-romantic sense, Christodoulos marked a whole era of Church rhetoric.³² In 1998, Savas Agourides (1921–2009), Professor Emeritus of New Testament at the University of Athens, wrote a book on human rights that pictures the different ways that civil democracy was received in the divergent paths of the theological landscape after the 1960s.³³ Agourides was also known for his progressive political activity as a member of the Greek Peace

32 Some interesting remarks about the period of Archbishop Christodoulos see in Evangelos Karagiannis, *Die Kirche von Griechenland und die Herausforderung der offenen Zukunft*, in *Grenzüberschreitungen. Traditionen und Identitäten in Südosteuropa. Festschrift für Gabriella Schubert*, ed. W. Dahmen, P. Himstedt-Vaid and G. Ressel (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008), 262–84.

33 Savas Agourides, *Τὰ ἀνθρώπινα δικαιώματα στὸ Δυτικὸ Κόσμο* [Human Rights in the Western World] (Athens: Filistor, 1998).

Movement and among other things as a member of the Greek section of the Minority Rights Group International. According to him, human rights are an essential achievement of humanity that is based on the notion of tolerance that emerged due to the religious wars in early modernity. In the same year, 1998, Christos Yannaras published his book with the significant title *Ἡ ἀπανθρώπια τοῦ δικαιώματος* (The Inhumanity of Rights).³⁴ Yannaras attacked the ideology of “human rights-ism,” which regards the accommodation of individual interests in an individualistic segmentation of the classical *polis* as a logical consequence of the understanding of politics. This segmentation is the legacy of the rise of individualism in the anthropological model of modernity.

Some other collective efforts initiated a substantial practical intervention related to the openness of modern society in an attempt to understand its modern framework: the theological journal *Synaxi* (founded in 1982 by another prominent representative of the theology of the 1960s, Panayiotis Nellas 1936–1986) has up to now published many articles on different aspects of the Orthodox tradition and its relation to modernity, politics being one of them. Another one is our host here, the Volos Academy for Theological Studies (founded in 2000), which organizes panels, seminars, and conferences on Orthodox Christianity and democracy in countries belonging to the Orthodox East.

The work of such initiatives sets a pivotal example in a time when democracy is being eroded because of the usurpation of the popular will through economic power with examples such as the outsourcing of state authority to private enterprises (like banks), an action assisted by the political status quo in many countries, the uncontrolled power of the EU Commission that seems to set capital above the unity and the prosperity of its members and the European peoples, the capability of the international financing mechanisms to impose their conditions for lending money, the corruption of governing elites, and the like. All this undermines the real meaning of society with the result that democracy as a set of political principles and liberties becomes less and less convincing. Given that neo-isolationism in the form of anti-globalization movements is on the rise, what it is developing is a kind of populism/ethno-populism and irrationalism in the form of mistrust of scientists and scholars (who became dependent on private donors and patrons). This kind of neo-despotism in opposition to the corrupt parliamentary institutions prevails in

34 Christos Yannaras, *The Inhumanity of Right*, trans. Norman Russell (Cambridge: James Clark, 2021). One can also consult Christos Yannaras, “Human Rights and the Orthodox Church” in *The Orthodox Churches in a Pluralistic World: An Ecumenical Conversation*, ed. Emmanuel Clapsis (Geneva: WCC Publications), 83–9.

many countries, while democratic rights and the achievements of the two previous centuries are seriously at stake. These phenomena became more dangerous after the third phase (i.e., after 1974 and 1990) of large migration flows (immigrants and refugees). These migration flows are caused by the destabilization of the Middle East and the overthrow of authoritarian (yet secular and non-religious) regimes in many Middle Eastern countries, as well as the subsequent chaos, the widening of the economic gap in the periphery and climate change.

The fragility of democracy as a system of values was evident in Greece after 2012 when the disapproval of the mainstream ruling parties and the state's factual bankruptcy was unleashed under the guise of a neo-Nazi party ("Chrysi Avgi"). The fact that many ecclesiastical persons (clerics and monks, some of them in Mount Athos) initially encouraged the "Chrysi Avgi" (Golden Dawn) party in word and in deed was enough to understand that there were hidden paths connecting the isolationist, hysterical and sectarian defense of Orthodoxy on the one hand and secular populism and irrationalism on the other.³⁵

Conclusion

If we sum up the historical trajectory of the idea of democracy in Orthodox theology in Greece, we recognize the known stereotype that Orthodox theology is completely pre-modern, hierarchical, Neoplatonist, etc. Therefore, by definition, it should be contrary to the concept of democracy, the rule of law, and so forth, as Samuel Huntington claimed. But the history of ideas has evolved differently. The concept of democracy was infiltrated by the metaphysical interpretation of Hellenism applied from the point of view of the national romanticism in the 19th century. It became a means of national consolidation precisely because it was regarded as an inherent characteristic of the "Hellenic spirit" that also fertilized and characterized Eastern Orthodoxy over against Catholicism and Protestantism. On the other hand, the absence of a social basis and a robust middle class in the newborn Greek state or the other Balkan and Eastern European nations adhering to Eastern Orthodoxy can be noted that could launch a process of democratization in order to unify the nation

35 More about the criticism against ultra-right tendencies in the Church see in Stavros Zoumboulakis, *Χρυσή Αυγή και Έκκλησία* [Golden Dawn and the Church] (Athens: Polis, 2013).

by controlling the means of production – something that has happened in the West.

It is now time for Orthodox theology to reflect more intensively on the concept of democracy. That should not be done on national romantic grounds, as if we still live in the 19th century, but through commitment to the indispensable values that promote a global shared and peaceful way of life as well as protect minorities, human life and the natural environment against any injustice and discrimination.

There have been significant contributions in that direction, inspired by a broader relevant discussion in the global Orthodoxy and expressed in texts originated by the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Examples of such texts are the inspired speech of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in Germany, on 24 April 2017, pleading for the importance of human rights, which he referred to as a “gift from God,”³⁶ or one of the official documents of the Panorthodox Council of Crete in 2016, in which the Orthodox Church proclaims its commitment to peace and the paving of “the way to justice, fraternity, true freedom, and mutual love among all children of the one heavenly Father as well as between all peoples who make up the one human family.”³⁷ Such a turn can provide a refocus on democracy and breathe new life into the dry bones of European declarations, ascribing spiritual value to a shared vision of a less brutal and more just society, beyond the usual poor normative and moralistic rhetoric. Moreover, if Eastern Orthodoxy desires to be heard and taken seriously in the modern world, this theological reflection must consider seriously and in a critical way the significance of democracy in the Orthodox Church itself.

36 See “Rede Seiner Allheiligkeit, des Ökumenischen Patriarchs Bartholomäus,” Ökumenischer Rat der Kirchen, <https://www.oikoumene.org/de/resources/documents/address-of-his-all-holiness-ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew> (accessed 5 February 2021).

37 Official Documents of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church: The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today’s World, <https://www.holycouncil.org/official-documents> (accessed 5 February 2021).