

Orthodox Theology Challenged by Balkan and East European Ethnotheologies

Pantelis Kalaitzidis

Introduction

Ethnotheology or “national Orthodoxy,” i.e., the understanding and definition of the church in ethnic and national terms, is a centuries-old problem of the Orthodox Church, the main and most serious challenge the latter has faced since the fall of Byzantium in 1453. It is a challenge that annihilates its eucharistic and ecclesiological self-awareness, as well as its unity and mission in the world, as became evident just before the convening of the Holy and Great Council of Crete in 2016 and more recently on the occasion of the Ukrainian autocephaly granted by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople with the “Tomos” of 5 January 2019.

Previous to these recent developments, the Pan-Orthodox Council of Constantinople (with the exception of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Patriarchate of Moscow), clearly condemned ethnophyletism in 1872 by characterizing it as “heresy” and a distortion of the authentic Christian faith and the Orthodox tradition. The reason for this conciliar condemnation was the establishment, based on ethnicity, of a separate Bulgarian

* Sincere thanks are due to Prof. Dr. Hans-Peter Grosshans, Director of the Institute for Ecumenical Theology and Professor at the Faculty of Protestant Theology, Münster University, Germany, for the hospitality he provided at the Institute and its library, which enabled me to finalize this paper. I would also like to warmly thank my colleagues at the Volos Academy Dr. Nikolaos Kouremenos, Dr. Ioannis Kaminis, and Mrs. Anna-Theodora Valsamou, MTh, for their insightful comments, remarks and suggestions in a previous version of this paper. I am also grateful to Dr. Nikolaos Asproulis, Deputy Director of the Volos Academy for Theological Studies, and Lecturer at the Hellenic Open University, for his gracious editing of the English of my text. I am happy to extend my thanks to Rev. Philoktimon Stamopoulos-Samaras, BA, and Mrs. Valila Giannoutaki, MTh, MA, Staff members of the Volos Academy, for facilitating my access to library material.

The present paper benefits from my previous publications, “Church and Nation in Eschatological Perspective,” *The Wheel*, issue 17–18 (2019), 52–61; “La relation de l’Église à la culture et la dialectique de l’eschatologie et de l’histoire,” *Istina* 55 (2010), 7–25; “Orthodoxy and Hellenism in Contemporary Greece,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 54, nos 3–4 (2010), 365–420; and *Ἑλληνικότητα καὶ Ἀντιδυτικισμὸς στὴ “Θεολογία τοῦ ’60”* [Greekness and Anti-Westernism in the “Theology of 1960s”], PhD Dissertation (Thessaloniki: Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, School of Theology, 2008).

Exarchate within the canonical territory of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and therefore the theological justification of a tendency inherent in Eastern Orthodoxy. But while the conciliar condemnation was supposed to stop or at least delay the expansion of ethnophyletism among the Orthodox, it was exactly the opposite that happened: i.e., the emergence and multiplication of national autocephalous churches, with the initiative and the support of the respective newly created nation states and this time with the forced approval and official recognition of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. After the proclamation of the autocephaly of the Church of Greece in 1833, recognized by Constantinople in 1850, the Orthodox Church of Serbia obtained its autocephaly in 1879, the Orthodox Church of Romania in 1885, the Orthodox Church of Albania in 1937, while the Orthodox Church of Bulgaria asked for forgiveness and obtained its recognition by Constantinople as an autocephalous church in 1946. The last to obtain autocephalous status from the Ecumenical Patriarchate was the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (January 2019). The emergence of the Orthodox diaspora in the Western Europe and the Americas, as a result of the dramatic events and political changes at the beginning of the 20th century, and the creation of the multiple nationally based jurisdictions, confirmed the national fragmentation and balkanization of Orthodoxy, creating a situation that annuls the principles of Orthodox ecclesiology, and the unity of the church.

In this paper, I will not enter into the historical details of this complex historical and ecclesiological problem. Rather, I will attempt to explore what lies under the surface and to offer a reflection on and theological critique of the strong ties between ethnicity and religion, nation state and Orthodoxy, or even Orthodoxy and ethnocultural identity. I will examine “ties and shackles”¹ that characterize the Orthodox world as a whole, with the possible exception of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople², and the Greek Orthodox

1 Cf. the special issue of the leading Greek theological journal *Synaxi* with the same title: “Church and Nation: Ties and Shackles” issue 79 (2001), and with papers by Father Antonios Pinakoulas, Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Vasilis Filias, Father Vasileios Thermos, Athanasios N. Papatthanasiou, Dimitris Arkadas, and a round table discussion that includes Christos Yannaras, Stavros Zoumboulakis, Paschalis Kitromilides, Nikos Kokosalakis, Antonis Manitakis, and Panos Nikolopoulos.

2 Cf. Paschalis M. Kitromilides, “The End of Empire: Greece’s Asia Minor Catastrophe and the Ecumenical Patriarchate,” *Δελτίο Κέντρου Μικρασιατικών Σπουδών* [Bulletin of the Centre for Asia Minor Studies] 17 (2011), 29–42: “From the point of view of the substantive history of the Christian Church, the most significant development in the life of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the period following the Asia Minor Catastrophe and the expulsion of the largest number of its Orthodox flock from Turkey was the development of a model of a non-national Church in its jurisdiction: the communities dependent on it in Turkey and the diaspora were held

Patriarchate of Antioch in Syria and Lebanon³, with all this confirming the existence of ethnotheology and an ethnocentric understanding of the ecclesial event.

From Eschatology to Ethnotheology

Any discussion on eschatology points directly to the question of the identity and the nature of the Church – what is the church first and foremost. Moreover, it introduces the element of expectation, along with a future-oriented perspective⁴ and the rejuvenating breeze of the Spirit that are of decisive importance for the life and theology of the church, even though they are missing today. “Without eschatology,” the late Father John Meyendorff argues, “traditionalism

together by a common faith and by the shared consciousness of belonging to the Orthodox tradition, not by national loyalties, as it has been as a rule the case in the national Orthodox Churches, whose attitudes and behaviour have contributed to the unfortunate and spiritually indefensible identification of Orthodoxy with nationalism.” Cf. also Metropolitan Ioannis of Pergamon (John D. Zizioulas), “The Ecumenical Patriarchate and its Relations with the other Orthodox Churches,” in P. Kitromilides and T. Veremis (eds.), *The Orthodox Church in a Changing World* (Athens: Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy and Centre for Asia Minor Studies, 1998), 155–64, here 157, 160: “In the nationalistic fever of that time all the Balkan states started doing the same, and in this way autocephaly and autonomy became matters of national identity. Nationalism became an almost integral part of Orthodoxy and the consequences of that are still with us and are felt particularly in our time. [...] The way the Ecumenical Patriarchate tried to avoid being absorbed by the spirit of nationalism was by dissociating itself from the aims of the Greek nationalism of that time.” Under the present circumstances, the role of the Ecumenical Patriarchate is really unique and, indeed, vital for Orthodox unity, the connection between the local and the universal church, and with regard to the perspective of a postnational Orthodoxy, provided, of course, that the actions and words of its representatives – particularly in the “diaspora” – give priority to the universal rather than the Greek, and that secular national or racial Hellenism will recede in favor of Christian Hellenism, the Hellenism of the Gospel, the Councils, the Fathers, and worship.

3 Cf. Assaad Elias Kattan, “Beyond Nationalism? The Case of the Orthodox Church of Antioch,” *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 57, nos 3–4 (2013), 353–60. If religious nationalism did not find fertile ground to develop in the Church of Antioch, communitarianism remains one of the major problems of the Christian communities in that region.

4 A major reference for the discussion on the normativity of the future and the eschatological hermeneutics remains the work by Reimund Bieringer and Mary Elsbernd (eds.), *Normativity of the Future: Reading Biblical and Other Authoritative Texts in an Eschatological Perspective* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010). Especially for the Orthodox, cf. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, “Eschatology and Future-oriented Hermeneutics in Contemporary Orthodox Theology: The Case of Metropolitan John D. Zizioulas,” in Reimund Bieringer, Peter De Mey, Ma. Marilou S. Ibita, and Didier Polleffeyt (eds.), *The Spirit, Hermeneutics, and Dialogues* (Leuven: Peeters, 2019), 155–180.

is turned only to the past: it is nothing but archaeology, antiquarianism, conservatism, reaction, refusal of history, escapism. Authentic Christian traditionalism remembers and maintains the past not because it is past, but because it is the only way to meet the future, to become ready for it.⁵ The movement to “return to Orthodox tradition,” however – in the way it has prevailed and been understood – has warped Tradition into traditionalism and has turned the quest to “return to the Fathers” into an objectification and fossilization of the Fathers.⁶ It was a certain theology, however, that turned Tradition into traditionalism and taught us to associate the identity of the church with the past and the struggles of the nation. It passed onto us an Orthodoxy that is permanently out of step with its time and with history. Lacking a productive, creative relationship with the past and the present of history, tradition has become identified with conservatism. Thus steeped in a yearning for Byzantium (for the Greeks, or – for other Orthodox peoples – for any other empire, monarchy, or “Christian” nation state), we are trapped inside a view of the church as a guardian and guarantor of national continuity and cultural identity, being often unable to articulate any serious theological reflection with regard to the issue of church and nation as well as a theological critique or deconstruction of the “sacred” national narrative or story.

As the late African-American Orthodox intellectual Albert J. Raboteau, Professor of American Religious History at Princeton University, has rightly observed in commenting on the dialectical tension of the biblical “in the world but not of the world”:

In the world, but not of the world. These words capture the antinomical relationship of the Church to human society and culture. On the one hand, the incarnational character of the Church establishes her in history, in this particular time and place and culture [in every nation I would add from my side, with regard to the topic of the present paper]. On the other, the sacramental character of the Church transcends time and space [and nation, I would add], making present another world, the kingdom of God, which is both here and now and yet still to come. Throughout the history of Christianity, the temptation to relax this antinomy has led Christians to represent the Church as an ethereal transcendent mystery unrelated and antithetical to human society and culture. Or, alternatively, it has prompted Christians to so identify the Church with a particular society, culture, or ethnicity as to turn Christianity into a religious ideology.⁷

5 John Meyendorff, “Does Christian Tradition Have a Future?” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 26 (1982), 141.

6 See on this issue Pantelis Kalaitzidis, “From the ‘Return to the Fathers’ to the Need for a Modern Orthodox Theology,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 54, nos 3–4 (2010), 5–36.

7 Albert J. Raboteau, “American Salvation: The Place of Christianity in Public Life,” *Boston Review* (April/May 2005). See also idem, “In the World, Not of the World, For the Sake of the

According to the above quotation (which is reminiscent of the *Epistle to Diognetus*⁸ and of what I have elsewhere characterized as a “unique eschatological anarchism”⁹), and also the most authoritative voices of modern Orthodox theology,¹⁰ the church is not an atemporal and ahistorical reality but the icon – in time – of the community of the eschaton, the revelation of the truth of the Triune God inside history, the continual experience of the mystery of the Incarnation and the Divine Economy, the call to participation in the divine life. Theology is not coextensive with history and cannot be identified with history, but neither can it function in a vacuum, outside of history, nor, more importantly, can it keep ignoring the teachings of history. Without this process of an unconfused osmosis and assumption of the world and of history, without this gesture of dialogue, of moving toward the world and “witnessing” to it, neither the church nor theology can exist, nor can God’s revelation, since the church does not exist for itself but for the world and for the sake of the world: “for the life of the world” (cf. Jn 6:51).

World: Orthodoxy and American Culture,” *Orthodoxy in America Lecture Series* (4 April 2006), Fordham University, available online at: <https://www.fordham.edu/download/downloads/id/15011/Raboteau2006.pdf> (accessed 25 March 2022).

- 8 Cf. *The Epistle to Diognetus*, especially ch. 5:1–10, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. J. B. Lightfoot, J. R. Harmer, and M. W. Holmes (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1992), 541.
- 9 Pantelis Kalaitzidis, “Church and Nation in Eschatological Perspective,” 53–5. By “a unique eschatological anarchism,” I meant an eschatologically inspired estrangement from every kind of natural bond (such as language, customs, culture, marriage, family, homeland, ethnicity, and law), and which in my opinion explains why Christian writers did not deal with questions of ethnicity and race until relatively recently.
- 10 Cf. the works of Father Georges Florovsky, Father Alexander Schmemmann, Father John Meyendorff, Olivier Clément, Savas Agourides, Nikos Nissiotis, Metropolitan John D. Zizioulas. Cf. also the review papers by Marios Begzos, “L’eschatologie dans l’orthodoxie du XX^e siècle,” in Jean-Louis Leuba (ed.), *Temps et Eschatologie: Données bibliques et problématiques contemporaines*, Académie Internationale des Sciences Religieuses (Paris: Cerf, 1994), 311–28; Georgios Vlantis, “In Erwartung des künftigen Äons: Aspekte orthodoxer Eschatologie,” *Ökumenische Rundschau* 56 (2007), 170–82. The debt of Orthodox theology to German Protestantism, and more precisely Johannes Weiss, on the issue of the rediscovery of eschatology is clearly acknowledged by the most prominent Orthodox theologian in our time, Metropolitan John D. Zizioulas (Ecumenical Patriarchate), in his study “Déplacement de la perspective eschatologique,” in Giuseppe Alberigo, Jean-Pierre Jossua, Daniele Menozzi, Nikos A. Nissiotis, Giuseppe Ruggieri, Gustave Thils et Jean D. Zizioulas (eds.), *La chrétienté en débat: Histoire, formes et problèmes actuels. Colloque de Bologne, 11–15 mai 1983* (Paris: Cerf, 1984), 89–99; reprinted in Métropolitain Jean (Zizioulas) de Pergame, *L’Eglise et ses institutions: Textes réunis par l’Archimandrite Grigorios Papathomas et Hyacinthe Destivelle, O.P.* (Paris: Cerf, 2011), 459–73.

The main argument of this contribution is that at the root of all the problems and difficulties Orthodoxy faces today, including that of ecclesiastical nationalism and the pending encounter with modernity, lies the inversion of the paradoxical and antinomic relationship between eschatology and history or the oblivion of the biblical “in the world, but not of the world, for the sake of the world.” Orthodoxy is usually (and especially in the theological analyses of the second half of the 20th century) described as defined by the eschatological vision of the church. Nevertheless, a more attentive approach to the topic will reveal that, without completely losing its eschatological identity and orientation, Orthodoxy is to a large extent shaped by history and more precisely by the historical experiences and wounds of its peoples, especially by the fall of Byzantium in 1453 and the four or even five centuries of Ottoman occupation. This is evidenced particularly in its social conservatism and even anachronism as well as in the phenomena of ecclesiastical culturalism and nationalism that have marked the Orthodox world for centuries.¹¹

In fact, and based on serious theological and historical arguments, it seems that ecclesiastical nationalism is probably the most serious problem facing the Orthodox Church since the fall of Byzantium (1453). The latter represents a decisive historical event that led to a period of introversion for Orthodoxy as well as to the understanding of the Gospel and the ecclesial event in national terms. Following the Turkish conquest, the Orthodox peoples of the Balkans and Eastern Europe – who, according to Dimitri Obolensky’s excellent analysis, participated in the “Byzantine Commonwealth”¹² – maintained throughout the Ottoman occupation a community of people with common roots, common values, and a common orientation, a phenomenon that has been described by the Romanian historian Nikolai Iorga as “Byzance après Byzance” in his seminal book of the same name (1935).¹³ Thus, the end of Byzantium and the period of Ottoman domination formed the basis for a common history among all the Orthodox peoples (Russia being the only exception). This common history of the Orthodox people of the Balkans and Eastern Europe was marked by a) the

11 Cf. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, “The Eschatological Understanding of Tradition in Contemporary Orthodox Theology and its Relevance for Today’s Issues,” in Colby Dickinson (ed.), *The Shaping of Tradition: Context and Normativity* (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 297–312, especially 309–12.

12 Cf. the book of the same name by Dimitri Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe 500–1453* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000).

13 Nikolai Iorga, *Byzantium after Byzantium*, trans. Laura Treptow (Oxford: Centre for Romanian Studies, 2000). The attempt to provide a consistent explanation about the way Iorga combined his ideas about Byzantine continuity and ecumenicity with populist and anti-Semitic ideas and with his political involvement with the Romanian nationalistic far-right parties and governments is beyond the scope and purpose of this paper.

millet (nations) system, which was constituted on a religious (not national) basis and fostered coexistence and cultural and religious variety within the Ottoman world, leading to the creation of an Ottoman *oikoumene*; and b) the leading role of the Church in secular, civil or ethnic affairs (*ethnarchia*). In other words, it was characterized by the assumption – mainly taken by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople – of political responsibility for and representation of all Orthodox people, of all *Romioi* or Romans (and not only of the Greeks) before the Sultan. Steven Runciman described the brightest moments of this difficult venture in his classic work, *The Great Church in Captivity*.¹⁴ But the great Russian theologian of the diaspora Father Alexander Schmemmann recorded, among other things, the pitfalls of this venture in his book *The Historical Road of Eastern Orthodoxy*¹⁵, pitfalls that were connected mainly with decisions by the Ecumenical Patriarchate that were biased in favor of the Greeks and against the Slavs.¹⁶

In this phase, the Church, as the only Christian institution to survive the Ottoman conquest and to later become a *sui generis* institution of the Ottoman Empire, took on the responsibility of filling the political void, assuming the duty of preserving the language, the tradition, and the Christian collective identity of the Orthodox people, and rescuing them from Islamization and from becoming Turkish. It is perhaps the first time that the Church was forced in such a clear and obvious manner to be involved in issues foreign to its nature and purpose, such as the preservation of a race (*genos*), a language, and a religious-cultural identity. It did so because its people, its flock, and its very existence were in danger of becoming extinct.

This common Byzantine past and the then common Ottoman present nurtured the feeling of a common culture among the Orthodox people, a sense of religious *belonging* within a shared identity. Its particular local ethnic variations did not yet constitute national identities but comprised a religious and cultural unity, with their common Orthodox faith as the main point of reference. The Orthodox peoples' shared history, however, was gradually

14 Steven Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

15 Alexander Schmemmann, *The Historical Road of Eastern Orthodoxy*, trans. by L. W. Kesich (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1977), 271–91.

16 For a more up-to-date and balanced discussion of this complex picture, cf. Tom Papademetriou, *Render unto the Sultan: Power, Authority, and the Greek Orthodox Church in the Early Ottoman Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Paschalis M. Kitromilides, *Religion and Politics in the Orthodox World: The Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Challenges of Modernity* (London/New York: Routledge, 2019); Christian Gastgeber, Ekaterini Mitsiou, Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, and Vratislav Zervan (eds.), *A Companion to the Patriarchate of Constantinople* (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

altered in the 18th century and especially the 19th through the influence of the European Enlightenment and the rise of nationalism that this engendered. The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople was strongly opposed to this nationalism, but in the end, at the turn of the 20th century and because of the national struggles and antagonisms in Macedonia, it was also converted to Greek nationalism/irredentism and to the Greek Great Idea. This national splintering and definitive divorce of the Orthodox people of the Balkans was made final with the dominance of the principle of nationalities, the growth of competitive national narratives/mythologies, the creation of nation states, the separation of the respective national churches from the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and the state-supported declarations of their autocephaly. This turned them into departments of the state and organs for the formation and building of national identity and the spread of the respective ideology. The epitaph for the idea of the Christian *oikoumene* was written when armed combat broke out between Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bulgaria in the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913 over rival claims concerning Macedonia and especially with the Asia Minor Catastrophe (1922) and the compulsory population exchange (1923–24) between Greece and Turkey, which meant the end of the unique Eastern version of multiculturalism and multi-ethnicism and its replacement by the principle of ethnically “pure” states.

Typical examples of ecclesiastical nationalism are the instrumentalization of Orthodoxy for the sake of the nation states in the identity formation process, the gradual articulation of the theory of the “new chosen people of God” in its various versions (Greek, Russian, Romanian, Serbian, Bulgarian, etc.) as well as both the idea and the reality of the national churches. In the end, the latter suggests the inability to think of the Orthodox Church, its mission and witness to the world apart from the national perspective and the individual national history or narrative. As a result of this substitution of the ecclesial criterion by the national, and the “replacement of the history of salvation with the history of national revival,”¹⁷ the Orthodox Church has for decades experienced a profound division between the different national churches, as typically depicted

17 Cf. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, “The Temptation of Judas: Church and National Identities,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 47 (2002), 357–79. The original Greek publication (“Ο πειρασμός του Ιούδα. Από την ιστορία της θείας οικονομίας στην ιστορία της έθνικής παλιγγενεσίας,” *Synaxi*, issue 79 (2001), 51–65) and the title of its French translation (“La tentation de Judas. Église, nation et identités: De l’histoire de l’économie divine à l’histoire de la renaissance nationale,” *Contacts*, issue 197 (2002), 24–48) make clear reference to this replacement.

on the occasion of the Holy and Great Council of Crete in 2016¹⁸, while it is called to confront an extremely problematic ecclesiological conception that understands the Orthodox Church as a mere “confederation of autocephalous national churches.”¹⁹ All these phenomena legitimized those who wonder to what extent religious nationalism and the nationalization of the church are inherent to the Orthodox tradition.²⁰

As has been rightly pointed out, however, this identification between church and nation and the ensuing “national” role of the church constitutes a “novelty,” a modern phenomenon for the Orthodox Church, which has for many centuries been the Church of the multinational Byzantine and then Ottoman Empire. But the national role of the Church and the dialectics of tradition and innovation are much more complex issues, given that change and innovation have not always led to a genuine renewal of ecclesial life.²¹ It should be noted that, in general, until the time of the Turkish conquest (the 15th to the 19th or in

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- 18 See Pantelis Kalaitzidis, “The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church between Synodal Inertia and Great Expectations: Achievements and Pending Issues,” in Herman Teule and Joseph Verheyden (eds.), *Eastern and Oriental Christianity in the Diaspora* (Leuven: Peeters, 2020), 77–153, especially 104–10. Father Cyril Hovorun (“Ethnophyletism, Phyletism, and the Pan-Orthodox Council,” *The Wheel*, issue 12 (2018), 62–7), adopted a more positive and optimistic approach as regards the issue of nationalism and the Holy and Great Council.
- 19 For a theological discussion of this crucial issue, see Jean Meyendorff, “Régionalisme ecclésiastique, structures de communion ou couverture de séparatisme?” in Giuseppe Alberigo (ed.), *Les Églises après Vatican II: Dynamisme et prospective. Actes du Colloque international de Bologne – 1980* (Paris: Beauschesne, 1981), 329–45; Grigorios Papatomas, “Face au concept d’Église nationale: La réponse canonique orthodoxe: l’Église autocéphale,” *L’année canonique* 45 (2003), 149–70, and reprinted in Grigorios D. Papatomas, *Essais de Droit canonique orthodoxe* (Firenze: Università degli Studi di Firenze/Facoltà di Scienze Politiche “Cesare Alfieri,” 2005), 51–76. On the connection of autocephaly with nationalism from a religious studies perspective, see the paper by Pedro Ramet, “Autocephaly and National Identity,” in idem (ed), *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Durham/ London: Duke University Press, 1988), 1–19, and the recent volume by Marie-Hélène Blanchet, Frédéric Gabriel, and Laurent Tatarenko (eds.), *Autocéphalies: L’exercice de l’indépendance dans les Églises slaves orientales (IX^e–XXI^e siècle)* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 2021).
- 20 See, e.g., Vasilios N. Makrides, “Why Are Orthodox Churches Particularly Prone to Nationalization and Even to Nationalism?” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 57, nos. 3–4 (2013), 325–52.
- 21 For the complex issues of change and innovation with regard to the Orthodox theology and tradition, cf. 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); Sebastian Rimestad and Vasilios Makrides (eds.), *Coping with Change: Orthodox Christian Dynamics between Tradition, Innovation, and Realpolitik* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2020).

some cases the 20th century), at the end of which the first signs of this national role can be observed, the Orthodox Church – despite or perhaps, because of, its ties to imperial power – ignored the so-called “national logic,” both in its ecclesiological structure and in its theological self-consciousness. Taking on this new role, however, and being involved in shaping particular ethno-cultural identities, the Orthodox Church not only seems to be facing serious problems in affirming its catholicity, ecumenicity and ecclesial unity, slipping from a baptismal/Eucharistic into an ethnocultural community.²² It also seems to have abandoned in practice the foundation and geographical criterion of its ecclesiology, that is, the principle of the local and not the national church.²³

Through a long and complex historical process, especially after the creation of the modern “Orthodox” states, mainly during the 19th century, the Orthodox Church in the Balkans and in the East finally espoused the respective national ideologies and the particular national narratives. At the same time, because of an intense historical anachronism, traditional Balkan historiography attributed to Orthodoxy a significant role in the emergence and building of Balkan nations.²⁴ The final nationalization and national fragmentation and Balkanization of Orthodoxy was made possible through the replacement of a religious “imagined community,”²⁵ i.e., the Orthodox Church, by a series of competing or even mutually exclusive “imagined communities,” i.e., national states and their national narratives and identities.²⁶ Following a relevant

22 Cf. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, “Baptismal and Ethnocultural Community: A Case Study of Greek Orthodoxy,” in Michael L. Budde (ed.), *Beyond the Borders of Baptism: Catholicity, Allegiances, and Lived Identities* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Publishing Company, 2016), 141–67.

23 Cf. the papers by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware of Diokleia, “Neither Jew nor Greek: Catholicity and Ethnicity” and Metropolitan John Zizioulas of Pergamon, “Primacy and Nationalism,” both published in *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 57:3–4 (2013), respectively 235–46 and 451–59.

24 See, e.g., Paschalis Kitromilides, “Enlightenment, nationalism, the Nation State and their Impact on the Orthodox World,” *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 57, nos. 3–4 (2013), 271–80; idem, *Religion and Politics in the Orthodox World: The Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Challenges of Modernity* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2019).

25 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London/New York: Verso, 2006; the original version of this seminal book was published in 1983). The adjective “imagined” used in the title of the book refers not to an imaginary and non-existent community, but to a cultural and political construction and the natural symbolic vocation of individuals to imagine themselves as members of a community that transcends them.

26 Paschalis M. Kitromilides, “‘Imagined Communities’ and the Origins of the National Question in the Balkans,” *European History Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (1989), 149–92, especially 177–85; reprinted in Paschalis M. Kitromilides, *Enlightenment, Nationalism, Orthodoxy: Studies in the Culture and Political Thoughts of South-Eastern Europe* (Aldershot: Variorum/Ashgate, 1994); idem, “The Ecumenical Patriarchate,” in Lucian N. Leustean (ed.), *Orthodox*

remark, these henceforth nation state-oriented imagined communities tried to reinterpret their common Byzantine heritage through the national Balkan historiographies (Greek, Bulgarian, Serbian, Albanian, Romanian, Turkish, and Russian) and to appropriate that heritage for themselves and for the sake of the respective national constructed ideologies.²⁷

The Dilemma Between the Ethno-cultural and the Theological Criterion

We, the Orthodox (mainly of the traditionally “Orthodox” countries) have been identified so much with the individual national churches and local traditions, we have combined Orthodoxy so much with the individual national narratives, and linked faith so closely with traditions and habits that we have largely lost the awareness of catholicity, ecumenicity, and universality and thus reduced Orthodoxy to the realm of custom, ancestral heritage, and ethnocultural identity. We have so emphasized the dimension of faith that is passed down from generation to generation and embraces entire collectivities such as peoples and nations, we have become so addicted to spiritual self-sufficiency and self-justification, to the stereotypes of race and nation, in praising our forebears and what we have inherited from them that we have forgotten the element of innovation and personal choice that Christianity initially brought. Meanwhile, we remain unaware of how scornfully the great theologians and Church Fathers, such as St. Gregory of Nyssa, spoke in their writings about praising the achievements and virtues of one’s ancestors.²⁸ They did so to such

Christianity and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Southeastern Europe (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 14–33. Cf. Lucian N. Leustean, “Orthodox Christianity and Nationalism: An Introduction,” in idem (ed.), *Orthodox Christianity and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Southeastern Europe*, 1–13; Dimitris Stamatopoulos, *Τὸ Βυζάντιο μετὰ τὸ ἔθνος. Τὸ πρόβλημα τῆς συνέχειας στὶς βαλκανικὲς ιστοριογραφίαις* (Athens: Alexandria Publications, 2009). Especially for the history of the adoption of the national ideology by the Church of Greece, cf. Charles A. Frazee, *The Orthodox Church and Independent Greece (1821–1852)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); Ioannis Petrou, *Ἐκκλησία καὶ πολιτικὴ στὴν Ἑλλάδα, 1750–1909* [Church and Politics in Greece 1750–1909] (Thessaloniki: Kyriakidis, 1992), especially 141ff.; Antonis Manitakis, *Οἱ σχέσεις τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μὲ τὸ κράτος. Ἐθνος στὴ σκιά τῶν ταυτοτήτων* [The Relationship Between the Church and the Nation State in the Wake of the Identity Card Conflict] (Athens: Nefeli, 2000), 21–56.

27 Stamatopoulos, *Τὸ Βυζάντιο μετὰ τὸ ἔθνος. Τὸ πρόβλημα τῆς συνέχειας στὶς βαλκανικὲς ιστοριογραφίαις*; forthcoming in English translation as *Byzantium after the Nation: The Problem of Continuity in Balkan Historiographies* (Central European University Press, 2022).

28 Cf., e.g., Gregory of Nyssa, *De Vita Gregorii Thaumaturgi*, PG 46, 896 C.

an extent that a fundamental criticism of the opponents of Christianity in the first centuries (e.g., Celsus, Porphyry) was that Christianity abolished ancestral customs and traditions.²⁹ We are still so fascinated and trapped in the pre-modern medieval or romantic communitarian model that we seem to have forgotten that acceptance of the Gospel message and inclusion in the ecclesial body cannot be understood on the basis of collectivities of any sort, such as those of a people, a nation, a language, a culture, etc., but only on the basis of an absolute personal act, free of every kind of biological, cultural, and ethnic predestination.

That is why the radically new thing the ecclesial way of life brings about is the personal call made by God through Jesus Christ for an encounter and relationship with him, as well as the answer to this call, which is also personal. There is a plethora of New Testament narratives that are not only purely personal events and choices³⁰ – not mediated by any kind of group or community or any religious, national, linguistic, cultural, or class collectivities – but quite frequently are also directed *against* particular communities or violate borders and limits set by them, but without these choices also leading to a private religiosity or an individual version of faith and salvation.³¹

We, the Orthodox have been so much identified with Byzantium, its culture and civilization that the fall of the empire in 1453 seems to have caused an incurable trauma. From this date onward we have behaved like orphans. We find it very difficult to move beyond this historical trauma. It has been incredibly difficult to find our way outside the framework of the empire and the monarchy by divine right. We yearn nostalgically and unceasingly for this now lost premodern form of political organization, in the place of which the

29 Cf. the remarks by Athanasios N. Papathanasiou, “Μεταμοντέρνα ἀναβίωση τῆς πολυθεΐας ἐν ὀνόματι τῆς χριστιανικῆς ἐμμονῆς στὴν πίστη τῶν πατέρων. Μία ἀντίφραση τῆς σύγχρονης ἐκκλησιαστικῆς μας πραγματικότητος” [The Postmodern Revival of Polytheism in the Name of Christian Adherence to the Faith of the Fathers and Ancestors: A Paradox in Our Modern Ecclesiastical Situation], *Πάντα τα Ἐθνη/Panta ta Ethni (All Nations)*, issue 108 (2008), 3–7, especially 6.

30 Examples are the calling of the twelve (Mt 4:18–22, 10:1–4; Mk 1:16–20, 3:13–19; Lk 5:1–11; 6:12–16), followed by a similar invitation addressed by Jesus to others (Mk 10:21; Lk 9:59–62); Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1–19, cf. Acts 22:6–16, 26:12–18); the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25–37); Jesus’ encounters with Zacchaeus (Lk 19: 1–10); the pagan Canaanite woman (Mt 15:21–28; Mk 7:24–30); the Roman centurion (Mt 8:5–13; Lk 7:1–10; Jn 4:43–54) or even the Samaritan Woman at Jacob’s well (Jn 4:4–42).

31 For a more extensive analysis, see Pantelis Kalaitzidis, *Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ Νεωτερικότητα. Προλεγόμενα* (Athens: Indiktos Publications, 2007), 64–7; English edition (forthcoming): *Orthodoxy and Modernity: Introducing a Constructive Encounter* (Paderbon: Brill/Schöningh, 2022).

Great Powers granted us the Balkan monarchies in the 19th century, to which we hastened to ascribe a metaphysical dimension and messianic expectations. But we had previously exchanged the kingdom of God and its journey toward the eschaton with the earthly kingdom and its establishment within history; the spirit of the desert with the ideal of the empire;³² the contest of faith and its witness to the new life in Christ for all kinds of “Christian” civilizations, all kinds of “Christian” kingdoms, all kinds of “Christian” societies that were nothing but Christian versions of the agrarian or traditional society. And while we have almost identified the Orthodox faith with our customs and habits and with our cultural heritage, we stubbornly deny the peoples we evangelize the opportunity to incarnate the truth of the Gospel in the language and the symbols of their own culture. We thus oppose the needed inculturation of Orthodoxy in the Global South and the imperative and urgent deculturation in the case of the traditional “Orthodox” peoples. In other words, we refuse the unavoidable re-ordering of priorities vis-à-vis theological and cultural criteria and the required new balance between the local and the universal, the particular and the catholic.³³

The Enlightenment and modernity marked the end of religiously organized societies but not necessarily the end of the quest for the true God or the thirst for genuine spiritual life. The presence of God, however, is no longer imposed on the whole of society nor is it an element of the social order and social organization. Belief in God is no longer considered a given but something to be sought and found. Therefore, it is no longer possible to continue talking about sacred societies or empires, about Christian societies, about Christianitas, Chrétienté, Christendom, Christentum. There is a general sense that we have not yet recovered from this trauma, from this loss of the homogenous “Christian” society. Suffice it to think here how fascinating all forms of premodern social and civilizational organization still are to many Orthodox Christians throughout the Balkans, Central and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, but also to the so-called “diaspora” communities (monarchism/pro-royalism, denial of human rights and political liberalism, yearning for communitarian, holistic

32 Cf. Georges Florovsky, “Antinomies of Christian History: Empire and Desert,” in *Christianity and Culture*, vol. 2 in the *Collected Works of Georges Florovsky* (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1974), 67–100.

33 Cf. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, “La relation de l’Église à la culture et la dialectique de l’eschatologie et de l’histoire,” *Istina* 55 (2010), 7–25; idem, “New Wine into Old Wineskins? Orthodox Theology of Mission Facing the Challenges of a Global World,” in Atola Longumer, Po Ho Huang, and Uta Andrée (eds.), *Theological Education and Theology of Life: Transformative Christian Leadership in the 21st Century. A Festschrift for Dietrich Werner* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2016), 119–47.

political and cultural models, etc.). That is why the yearning for the empire has replaced the yearning for the eschaton and the journey to the kingdom of God. In this vein, we, the Orthodox, are referring complacently – if we do not boast about it – to Byzantinism, Hellenicity and Greek uniqueness, Holy Russia, and the “Third Rome” or the Slavophile movement, the Serbian people “as a servant of God,” the Antiochian uniqueness and Arabhood, the Latinness of Romanian Orthodoxy, and many other ethnotheological narratives, inventions and “constructions.”³⁴ It is obvious that the vast majority of the Orthodox have exchanged the ecclesial sense of “belonging” for an ethnocultural or communitarian one while identifying the structures and authoritarian patterns of a patriarchal society with the golden age of the church and “Christian” civilization. That is why we among other things, continue to oppose modernity or human rights as well as any attempt to improve the position of women in the Church.³⁵

Contemporary Examples of Ethnotheology

In the attempt to free Orthodox faith from its identification with nation, culture, and ethnocultural identity, in this urgent call for deculturation, our generation may feel rather alone and orphaned. This is so because wherever we look around the Orthodox world, we see a constant slide from the theological and ecclesial to the cultural and ethnotheological, a problematic mixture of theology and ethnocentric discourse, theology and “Great Idea” (either territorial/national or cultural), theology and the defense of the nation, cultural or national identity, the spiritual tradition and ethnoreligious/ethnocultural pride. Let me give just a few typical examples of this.

Father Dumitru Staniloae

The great Romanian patristic scholar and dogmatic theologian, Father Dumitru Staniloae, who contributed so much to the neo-patristic and philocalic revival

34 Cf. Kalaitzidis, “La relation de l’Église à la culture et la dialectique de l’eschatologie et de l’histoire”; idem, “Holy Lands and Sacred Nations,” *Concilium: International Review of Theology*, issue 2015/1, 115–123.

35 See Pantelis Kalaitzidis, “La sfida della parità di genere: Il ruolo della donna nell’Ortodossia,” *Nel mondo ma non del mondo: sfide e tentazioni della chiesa nel mondo contemporaneo*, traduzione, cura, prefazione di Luigi d’Ayala (Comunità di Bose, Magnano, Italy: Edizioni Qiqajon, 2016), 179–97. Cf. Pantelis Kalaitzidis and Nikos Ntontos (eds.), *Φύλο και Θρησκεία. Ἡ θέση τῆς γυναίκας στὴν Ἐκκλησία* [Gender and Religion: The Place of Women in the Church] (Athens: Indiktos Publications, 2004).

of Orthodox theology in the 20th century, could not avoid – mainly in the early phase of his work but not only in this – the theological idealization and exaltation of the Romanian patriotism and greatness, of agrarian and patriarchal society, while his anti-Semitic references in his early writings as well as his laudatory comments on the persecution of Jews in pro-Nazi Romania and even on the “important work” done by Hitler himself are indeed shocking. In the words of this Romanian theologian: “All countries should understand that it is in their own interest and in the interest of world peace not to transform themselves into instruments of International Jewry but to begin by mutual agreements to clear the air of a germ that fosters continuous strife between peoples.”³⁶

Furthermore Father Staniloae believes not only that the human person cannot exist outside of the nation in which he/she was born and raised but also that he/she cannot be saved without it: “The individual is saved at the same time as the nation. Nations are undiminished entities. They are the last specific units of humanity. From them the individual emerges and lives through them.” For this Romanian theologian, the church is the basic component of the nation and vice versa. Romanianism is synonymous with Orthodoxy and vice versa.³⁷

The struggle for the increase of the nation along the lines of Christian virtues is nothing but the struggle for the glorification of God in the creation. And when we emphasize the Orthodox element in the Romanian character, we show one more reason for the necessity for our nation to continue to follow the Orthodox line, if it does not want to fall from Romanianism and, in general, from a superior situation to an inferior one. This would not only be a fall in the natural order but also a sin against God that would not remain unpunished.³⁸

All these elements created a nationalist rhetoric of self-admiration, especially since the Romanian people occupied a unique position between the West and

36 Cf. “Necesitatea soluționării problemei evreiești” [The Need to Solve the Jewish Problem], *Telegraful Român* issue 3 (10 January 1938), 1–2. The quote comes from the unsigned editorial of this particular issue of which Staniloae was the editor-in-chief. It is known that no issue of this magazine was printed without the prior approval of its editor-in-chief, i.e., Father Staniloae. This policy of the periodical under question was confirmed by Staniloae’s daughter, Lidia, in her father’s biography. Cf. Roland Clark, “Nationalism, Ethnotheology, and Mysticism in Interwar Romania,” *The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies*, No. 2002, (University of Pittsburgh, 2009), 6.

37 Staniloae, “Orthodoxie și Națiune,” 20.

38 Dumitru Staniloae, “Iarăși Ortodoxie și Româanism” [Again Orthodoxy and Romanianism], in Dumitru Stăniloae, *Ortodoxie și Româanism* (Bucharest: Basilica, 2014), 85. Cf. Anna Theodora Valsamou, *Πολιτική Θεολογία και Ἐθνο-θεολογία στὸν π. Δημήτριο Στανιλοάε* [Political Theology and Ethnotheology in Father Dumitru Staniloae] (Patras: Hellenic Open University, 2019), 45.

the East and witnessed to a distinctive ability to creatively combine characteristics from both cultures.

In our spirituality, we unite Latin lucidity or confidence in the rational understanding of reality typical of the West with the sense of the inscrutable mystery of existence typical of the peoples of Eastern Europe. But, as Latins, we bring to the mystery of things and people a light that is stronger than that of the Slavic peoples, a light that does not limit but defines and is proper to the peoples of the West.

And Stalinoae concludes that, because of the above features, the Romanian people have the most refined spirituality in the world: "In this respect we are closer to primal Christian spirituality that is still present in the spirituality of the Greek people, although with a lesser sentimental experience of this light than in Romanian spirituality."³⁹

Furthermore, what is considered to be a deadly sin for the person, such as pride, automatically turns into virtue if it refers to the national community, as Berdiaev had observed.⁴⁰ Driven by his personal beliefs but also to explain and justify the extreme nationalism of his time⁴¹ (most of the Romanian intellectuals in the 1930s belonged to or were sympathetic to the ultra-nationalistic, fascist, anti-Semitic, and pro-Nazi movement of the Iron Guard or the Legion of the Archangel Michael),⁴² Staniloae understood the nation as a spiritual

39 Dumitru Staniloae, "De ce suntem Ortodocși" [Why are we Orthodox?], in Dumitru Staniloae, *Reflecții despre Spiritualitatea poporului român* (Bucharest: Basilica, 2018), 477.

40 Cătălin Bogdan, "Omorul serafic (III) Cazul Stăniloae," *Revista 22*; <https://revista22.ro/cultura/omorul-serafic-iii-cine-este-aproapele-meu> (accessed 18 March 2022).

41 Leon Volovici, *Nationalist Ideology and Antisemitism: The Case of Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930s*, trans. by Charles Kormos (Oxford/New York: Pergamon Press, 1991), 14–5.

42 See Cosmin Florian Porcar, "Philosophy in Totalitarianism: Constantin Noica and the 'Păltinis School,'" *Journal for Communication and Culture* 1, no. 1 (2011), 90–96; Mircea Platon, "The Iron Guard and the 'Modern State': Iron Guard Leaders Vasile Marin and Ion I. Moța, and the 'New European Order,'" *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies* 1 (2012), 65–90; Keith Hitchens, "Interwar Southeastern Europe Confronts the West. The New Generation: Cioran, Yanev, Popovic," in Costică Brădățan (ed.), *Philosophy, Society and the Cunning of History in Eastern Europe* (Oxford/New York: Routledge, 2012), 8–25; Radu Ioanid, "The Sacralised Politics of the Romanian Iron Guard," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 5, no. 3 (2004), 419–53. For further research on the relationship between the Iron Guard and Romanian Orthodoxy, cf. Radu Ioanid, *The Sword and the Archangel: Fascist Ideology in Romania*, trans. by Peter Heinegg (New York: East European Monographs, 1990); Valentin Săndulescu, "Sacralised Politics in Action: The February 1937 Burial of the Romanian Legionary Leaders Ion Mața and Vasile Marin," in *Clerical Fascism in Interwar Europe*, ed. Matthew Feldman, Marius Turda, and Tudor Georgescu (Oxford/New York: Routledge, 2008), 47–58; Ionut Biliuță, *The Archangel's Consecrated Servants: An Inquiry in the Relationship between the Romanian Orthodox*

entity, through which humans can be saved. He believed in fact that humans are saved only through their national community and not individually: “Man exists only in a national form, with a national coloration. [...] It is not possible to extract the defining individual or national characteristics from an individual or a nation and leave the pure human element behind. To do so would mean the very destruction of the human element.”⁴³

Staniloae’s political theology seeks to defend the absolute identification between the national and the ecclesial:

And the thread that runs through the essence of a nation’s history, that keeps it true to its very being, is its tradition, whatever is essential, good and characteristic. And the first institution that represents the continuity of tradition in the life of a nation is the Church. In the present practices and beliefs of the Church, we find again the very content of the soul life of our nation from each of the previous centuries.⁴⁴

By no means does he relativize or question the ethnocultural bond. On the contrary, by taking this bond as a given, he ascribes an eschatological dimension and ontological substance to it. Nation and ethnicity are not viewed as stages of the fallen human condition but as manifestations of the divine will, possibly even a prelapsarian human condition. Staniloae argues that to the extent that Adam belonged to a nation, humanity in its eschatological state will retain its national particularities.

In Revelation it has been said: not as individuals, but “nations will walk in the light of the city of Lamb,” while it is not individual persons who will enter through the doors of the city but “the glory and honour of the nations” (Rev 21:24–25), that is, each nation will bring its own spirituality through the Christian faith, thanks to the special gifts it has received from God.⁴⁵

Church and the Iron Guard (1930–1941) (PhD Diss., Budapest: Central European University, 2013); Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth: Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2015).

- 43 Dumitru Staniloae, “Scurtă interpretare teologică a națiunii” [Short Theological Interpretation of the Nation], in Staniloae, *Ortodoxie și Româanism*, 42.
- 44 Dumitru Staniloae, “Partidele politice și Biserica” [The Political Parties and the Church], in Dumitru Staniloae, *Cultură și Duhovnicie*, vol. 3 (Bucharest: Basilica, 2012), 635.
- 45 Dumitru Staniloae, “Unitatea spirituală a neamului nostru și libertatea” [The Spiritual Unity of our Nation and Liberty], *Națiune și Creștinism*, preface by Constantin Schifirneț (Bucharest: Editura Elion, 2004), 281.

The nation is a mandatory and constituent element for the formation of the ecclesial body, while the relationship between church and history definitely passes through the national collectivity.

Staniloae's collectivistic and ethnocentric understanding of the church did not remain without effect but pervades almost the whole of Romanian theology, with few exceptions. For example, the Romanian Metropolitan of Transylvania Antonie Plamadeala (1926–2005), expressed similar views at the Second International Conference of Orthodox Theology, in Athens (1976) and radicalized the former's ethnotheology, leading thus to the substitution of the local character of the church by a national character and to the interpretation of the relevant canons of the church, such as the well-known 34th "Apostolic" Canon.⁴⁶ Following Metropolitan Antonie Plamadeala and the way he interprets this canon:

At the heart of the Byzantine Empire, the Church in its hierarchical-sacerdotal and canonical administrative organization took the national element and context into consideration. The 34th Apostolic Canon is the expression of this reality, affirming in this way the ecclesiastical organization's relationship to the national element. [...] The analysis of this canon reveals that it expresses and establishes through the organization of the Church the following principles: a) the national principle, b) the principle of autocephaly. [...] The view that the word "nation" at the end of the canon does not express the idea of a people or nation but rather the idea of a piece of land or a population is completely ridiculous. This is nothing other than an attempt to obfuscate the issue so that the national principle is not recognized as a criterion for the organization of autocephalous Churches.⁴⁷

Among other things, these positions also represent an anachronistic reading of history. The Byzantine Empire, even if it was marked by the (eschatological) temptation of creating the ideal of the kingdom of God on earth, was a multi-ethnic empire and knew nothing of the principle of nationalities or the phenomenon of ecclesiastical nationalism. And while, of course, the church may have been guilty of other historical sins during that period, it did not

46 "The bishops of every nation must acknowledge him who is first among them and account him as their head, and do nothing of consequence without his consent; but each may do those things only which concern his own parish, and the country places which belong to it. But neither let him (who is the first) do anything without the consent of all; for so there will be unanimity, and God will be glorified through the Lord in the Holy Spirit." English translation from the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series II, vol. 14, ed. by P. Schaff and H. Wace (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1885), 596.

47 Évêque Antonie Plamadeala, "Catholicité et Ethnicité," in Savas Chr. Agouridès, *Deuxième Congrès de Théologie Orthodoxe à Athènes, 19–29 Août 1976* (Athens, 1978), 490–500, here 495–97.

adopt the national principle in its canonical organization but rather the local, thus remaining faithful to the Ignatian view of the local church as the catholic church.

In 1939, however, Staniloae argued that “An a-national sentiment does not exist.”⁴⁸ For him, nations are not only ontologically given but also have the potential to shape individuals in the image of God. According to his ethno-theological account, Father Staniloae was absolutely convinced that if the Romanian state would be structured on the principles of Orthodoxy and Romanianism, then it would not only fulfil its eschatological mission but would also be the only nation that could offer the world a model of salvation (the nationalist-Christian).⁴⁹

Father John S. Romanides

After his important theological publications of the late 1950s and 1960s (the most important of which was his doctoral dissertation defended at the University of Athens, *The Ancestral Sin* (1957),⁵⁰ and a series of papers on doctrinal and ecclesiological/ecumenical issues), the great Greek-American theologian Rev. John S. Romanides came up with the theory of Romanity. This offered a very typical example of Greek Orthodox triumphalism (and anti-Westernism) and a peculiar case of “Greek Orthodoxy” and “Hellenic Christianity” (without even using the terms Greek or Hellenic). With the appearance of Romanides’ book

48 Staniloae, “Ortodoxie și Națiune,” 20.

49 For further discussion on Staniloae’s ethnotheology see also Mihail Neamtu, “Between the Gospel and the Nation: Dumitru Stăniloae’s Ethno-Theology,” *Archæus* 10 (2006), 9–46; Biliuță, *The Archangel’s Consecrated Servants*; Valsamou, *Πολιτική Θεολογία και Έθνο-θεολογία στὸν π. Δημήτριο Στανιλόε*; Roland Clark, “Nationalist and Trinitarian Visions of the Church in the Theology of Dumitru Staniloae,” *Studii Teologice: Revista Facultăților de Teologie din Patriarhia Română*, series A III-A, 9.2 (2013), 207–27; Olivier Gillet, *Religion et nationalisme. L’idéologie de l’Église orthodoxe roumaine sous le régime communiste* (Brussels: Université libre de Bruxelles, 1997); Volovici, *Nationalist Ideology and Antisemitism*. A defence of Staniloae’s position has been undertaken by Metropolitan Irineu Popa and Marian G. Simion, “Nationalism and Orthodoxy in Father Dumitru Staniloae’s Thinking,” in Semegnish Asfaw, Alexios Chehadeh, and Marian G. Simion (eds.), *Just Peace: Orthodox Perspectives* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012), 13–23; Mircea Cristian Pricop, “The Contribution of Rev. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Staniloae and Rev. Prof. Dr. Ilie Moldovan to the Identification of the First European Christians,” in Iulian Boldea, Cornel Sigmirean, Dumitru-Mircea Buda (eds.), *Literature as Mediator: Intersecting Discourses and Dialogues in a Multicultural World* (Târgu Mureș: Arhipelag XXI Press, 2018), 206–12.

50 John S. Romanides, *Τὸ προπατορικὸν ἀμάρτημα* (Athens, 1957). English translation: *The Ancestral Sin*, trans. by George Gabriel (Ridgewood NJ: Zephyr Publications, 1998, and reprinted with additions in 2002 and 2008).

Romanity in 1975,⁵¹ his work marked a dramatic shift from theology to cultural criticism, historiography and ethnology, and to forms of neo-Romantic and neo-nationalist ideology. Romanides' theory now moved in an undifferentiated national-religious, historical-theological, theological-cultural and theological-political milieu. It is thus grounded not in the well-known distinction between Greek (Orthodox) East versus Latin (Roman Catholic) West but in the abysmal rivalry between the Greek-speaking and the Latin-speaking Romanity on the one hand and heretical "Frankism" on the other.⁵² This radical distinction and divide was thenceforth played against the backdrop of a seamlessly fabricated theological-cultural and theological-political ideology. In this understanding, the West is wholly demonized and held responsible for all the misfortunes of the Orthodox, both theological and historical/national. Here, Frankism is portrayed as the scene of endless conspiracies aimed at the extermination of Romanity. In fact, Romanides' hermeneutics formed the necessary alibi for a conspiratorial, non-self-critical, historical interpretation of the sufferings and adventures of Romanity, attributing them all to Western machinations.

In this spirit, Romanides adds a new prologue to his 1989 second Greek edition of his *Ancestral Sin*,⁵³ where, in a frenzied tone strongly reminiscent of conspiracy theories, he accuses the "Franks" of conniving against Romiosyne and Orthodoxy. The opening lines of this prologue are highly enlightening as to his ulterior motive of incorporating a historical-political manifesto in the body of an otherwise theological work.

The present study dates from a time when efforts were made to isolate heterodox influences on Orthodox theology, and digressions from patristic tradition were all too evident. Nowadays, we are in a position to account for the political and theological circles that launched heterodox initiatives for the annihilation of Romiosyne and the Westernization of Orthodoxy.

51 John S. Romanides, *Ρωμησύνη, Ρωμανία, Ρούμελη* [*Romiosyne, Romanity, Roumele*] (Thessaloniki: Pourmaras, 1975); third edition updated, with the addition of an extra chapter (Thessaloniki: Pourmaras, 2002). Romanides' project was later supplemented by a historical/theological essay published as *Francs, Romans, Feudalism, and Doctrine: An Interplay Between Theology and Society* (Brookline MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1981) that offers a panoramic overview of his theological-political ideas.

52 It should be noted here that Romanides' "Romanity" does not include the Orthodox Slavs who, in his writings are almost always conspiring together with the Franks against the "Romans."

53 John S. Romanides, *Τὸ προπατορικὸν ἀμάρτημα*, 2nd ed. with a new Preface (Athens: Domos, 1989).

Elaborating somewhat on his reference to these “political circles,” Romanides further stipulates: “Back when this work was written, no one yet realized that foreign think tanks had designed not only the annihilation of Romiosyne but the distortion of Orthodoxy as well, according to Western principles. Today, research leads curiously to Napoleon and his associates as the chief architect of this policy.”⁵⁴ Napoleon is further accused of aiming at more than merely seizing authority by playing the revolutionary. In Romanides’ view, Napoleon sought as a Frank to undercut the force of the French Revolution of 1789, which, according to Romanides, was nothing but an uprising of “the enslaved Gallo-Romans against the Franks, France’s nobility.” Or, as he indicates a few lines later, “the majority of Frank officers abandoned the revolution, which developed into a war of Romans versus the Franks.” For their part, “the French revolutionaries of 1789 were proud of their lineage from Rome and the Peloponnese.”⁵⁵

Even purely theological texts, such as Gregory Palamas’ *In Defense of the Holy Hesychasts*, published by Romanides in a series of patristic works characteristically called “Roman or Romioi Church Fathers,” would be read through this self-same and indivisible ethno-religious, historico-theological, and theological-political perspective, as is evident in its introduction.⁵⁶ In its earliest pages, Korais (a Greek scholar of the Enlightenment) is already chided as responsible for the transformation of Romiosyne into “Hellenism,” effected through trading hesychasm (the very heart of the nation) for metaphysical and social philosophy.⁵⁷ In the same vein, his introduction ends with a fierce assault on Europeans, Russians and so-called “Latin Greeks” or “neo-Franco Greeks” (sic),

54 Romanides, *Τὸ προπατορικὸν ἀμάρτημα*, 2nd ed., xv. The English translation of this important theological work by Romanides, although published and republished many years after the publication of the second edition of the Greek original, did not include this new preface. In his “Introduction,” the translator notes the following: “In 1989 a second Greek edition was published, and he wrote [sc. Romanides] a second preface for it. I have not included the 1989 Author’s Preface here because it discussed issues largely as they related to Western European political and intellectual efforts to reshape the national and ecclesiastical ethos of Greece in the turbulent 19th century.” See George Gabriel “Introduction,” in Romanides, *The Ancestral Sin* (Ridgewood, NJ: Zephyr Publications, 2008), 11–12.

55 Romanides, *Τὸ προπατορικὸν ἀμάρτημα*, 2nd ed., xx.

56 See John S. Romanides, “Εἰσαγωγή εἰς τὴν Θεολογίαν καὶ τὴν πνευματικότητα τῆς Ρωμαιοσύνης ἔναντι τῆς Φραγκοσύνης” [Introduction to the Theology and Spirituality of Romiosyne over and against Frankism], in John S. Romanides and Despoina Kontostergiou, *Ρωμαῖοι ἢ Ρωμηοὶ Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας: Γρηγορίου Παλαμά Ἔργα I. Ὑπὲρ τῶν Ἰερῶς ἠσυχάζοντων. Τριάς Α΄* [Romans or Romioi Fathers of the Church: The Works of Gregory Palamas I: In Defense of the Holy Hesychasts. Triads I] (Thessaloniki: Pournaras, 1984), 11–33, 49–194.

57 Romanides, “Εἰσαγωγή εἰς τὴν Θεολογίαν καὶ τὴν πνευματικότητα τῆς Ρωμαιοσύνης ἔναντι τῆς Φραγκοσύνης,” 13.

who are held responsible for the destruction of Romiosyne and the undoing of its spiritual context. The introduction then closes with a call addressed to all genuine Romans to reclaim their leadership and unfetter Romiosyne from its alien spiritual bonds.⁵⁸

The above historical-theological hermeneutic (Greek-speaking and Latin-speaking Romans versus heretical Frankish invaders, Romanity versus the Franks), combined with the “three stages” theory (purification, enlightenment, glorification/theosis), hailed by Romanides as the distinctive hallmark of Orthodoxy – i.e., what sets it apart from all other religions and traditions⁵⁹ – will henceforth assume dominance in Romanides’ scholarship. It will color and undergird all of his remaining texts, regardless of topic (ecclesiological, dogmatic, or ecumenical, the relationship between faith and culture, national issues and territorial and national disputes with Greece’s neighbors, or even the relationship between religion and Orthodoxy and science and Orthodoxy). The unbridgeable rivalry between Romanity and the Franks, the rancorous common struggle of Greek and Latin speaking Romanity against the Frankish usurpers of Rome’s throne and the Teutonic distorters of the true spiritual experience (purification, enlightenment, glorification/theosis), was bound to be Romanides’ permanent theme after the 1970s, his hermeneutical key for understanding and explaining all kinds of problems, concerns, and challenges (theological, ecclesiological, etc.).

During the 1980s, 1990s, and partly even during the 2000s, Romanides’ theology strongly influenced the Greek theological and wider ecclesiastical landscape. It has had a decisive impact on the thought not only of bishops, priests, and especially monks but also lay theologians and numerous religious groups as well, inasmuch as it furnished a convenient and comforting conspiratorial explanation for the historical woes of Orthodoxy and the Romiosyne. As an explanation, of course, it is devoid of the slightest traces of repentance and self-criticism, for blame is always placed upon others: the heretics, the Franco-Latins, the Pope, Westerners, Napoleon Bonaparte, the Slavs, etc.

58 Romanides, “Εἰσαγωγή εἰς τὴν Θεολογίαν καὶ τὴν πνευματικότητα τῆς Ρωμαιοσύνης ἔναντι τῆς Φραγκοσύνης,” 189.

59 John S. Romanides, *Πατερική Θεολογία* [Patristic Theology], Foreword by Fr. George Metallinos, edited with notes by Monk Damascene of the Holy Mountain (Thessaloniki: Parakatathiki Publications, 2004), 30: “But Orthodoxy is not a *religion*. Orthodoxy is not a religion like all the other religions. Orthodoxy is distinguished by one unique characteristic, which is not found in the other religions. This is its anthropological and therapeutic aspect. It is on this point that it differs. Orthodoxy is a therapeutic course that treats the human person.”

Small wonder, then, that Romanides' theology has won such a large and widespread following among conservative circles in the church as well as on the far-right: he flattered the repressed frustrations, prejudices, and psychological complexes of the historically defeated modern Greeks, with the effect of cultivating theological self-sufficiency, cultural introversion, aggressiveness, and an intemperate sense of superiority. His theories on the Romiosyne have never been resisted or challenged by a robust counter-theology, nor has his book (and other related publications) been subjected to serious critical commentary in the forty-seven years after its first appearance.⁶⁰ What interests us here, with regard to Romanides' texts and teaching, is the total demonizing of the West, the chiliastic conflation of Orthodoxy and spirituality with Romanity/Romiosyne, and last but not least, the reductive geographical identification of all those graced with the vision of God and the uncreated light with the so-called citizens of Romanity/Romiosyne! In the characteristic words of Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos and St. Vlassios, one of Father John Romanides' most faithful followers, "Father Romanides had devoted himself entirely to the cause of Romiosyne, which to him was the quintessence of all genuine spirituality, the kind that frees us from self-love, material lust, and every other expression of fallen humankind."⁶¹

Outside the territory of Romanity, Greek-speaking or Latin-speaking, there does not seem to be – for Father Romanides – either repentance and spiritual struggle, holiness, *theosis/theoptia*, nor salvation, as all the above seem to be limited or connected to a specific cultural and geographical domain. Bearing in mind the definition of Romanity and Roman given by Romanides himself (the citizen of the Roman Empire, incorrectly called Byzantium), we can conclude that holiness, *theosis*, and genuine Orthodoxy is ultimately identified for the Greek-American theologian with a particular empire (the Roman), and its culture, its territory, and its citizens. Orthodox peoples who formed no part of this empire, by chance or choice, such as the Slavs, are either ignored by Romanides or openly denounced as collaborators with the Franks and traitors

60 For pertinent criticisms, see André de Halleux, "Une vision orthodoxe grecque de la romanité," *Revue Théologique de Louvain* 15 (1984), 54–66; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI/Edinburgh: Eerdmans and T&T Clark, 1998), 511–5. For a sympathetic appraisal of Romanides' work in English language cf. Andrew Sopko, *Prophet of Roman Orthodoxy: The Theology of John Romanides* (Dewdney BC: Synaxis Press: The Canadian Orthodox Publishing House, 1998).

61 Father George Metallinos, *Πρωτοπρεσβύτερος Ἰωάννης Σ. Ρωμανίδης. Ὁ "προφήτης τῆς Ρωμηοσύνης" προσωπογραφούμενος μέσα ἀπὸ ἀγνωστα ἢ λίγο γνωστά κείμενα* [Protopresbyter John S. Romanides: The "Prophet of Romanity": A Profile through Unknown or Little Known Texts] (Athens: Armos, 2003), 67.

of Romiosyne. It is certainly no accident that, as far as I know, Romanides nowhere makes references to Slavic and especially Russian saints or ascetics. Thus, in its dual version, as a state and as a culture, as a citizenship and as a spiritual path to holiness and *theosis*, Romanity is described in Romanides' work in terms of spiritual and cultural authenticity and supremacy.

Christos Yannaras

Another very influential Greek theologian, philosopher, and columnist, Christos Yannaras was the most characteristic representative of the Greek generation of the 1960s. He contributed so much through his work to the renewal of Orthodox theology in Greece and the wider Orthodox world. Yannaras came to support and systematize – as a sort of a metaphysical axiom – the theory of an unbroken continuity of Hellenism, not in the field of history but in that of thought and culture. Yannaras' unbroken continuity, which illustrates in the most characteristic way, the cultural hermeneutics of Florovsky's "Christian Hellenism," clearly differs from the racial one and focuses specifically on the dialogical/communal and apophatic version of truth from Heraclitus through St. Gregory Palamas and in his theory of the survival of an enduring cultural Greekness. In his view, this Greekness transcends historical, political, and religious divisions and maintains certain unique characteristics unchanged over time. Yannaras' hermeneutic first debuted, in its original form, in his early works at the beginning of the 1970s whereas, after 1979–80,⁶² there's hardly a single work by Yannaras that does not derive from or add further support to his theory of an unbroken continuity of Hellenic culture from classical antiquity to the present. According to Yannaras, the truth is never exhausted in its formulation, just as the cognizance of prepositional truth cannot be completely identified with its non-verbal, original version. Thus, Yannaras developed his thesis of "the Greek identification of the truth with the *common logos*, in other words with a social version of the truth," a Heraclitian identification of being in truth with being in communion. Without this identification, Yannaras claims, "it is simply impossible to make any sense of the Greek way of life from the

62 In 1980–1981, Yannaras published his two-volume work in Greek: *Σχεδιάσμα Είσαγωγής στη Φιλοσοφία* [An Outline of an Introduction to Philosophy] (Athens: Domos Publications), in which he developed his view of this issue. It was then translated into French under the characteristic title: *Philosophie sans rupture*, trans. André Borrély (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1986). The title of the English translation focuses not on the issue of continuity between ancient Greek and Christian thought but on the discontinuity between Hellenic (ancient pre-Christian and Christian alike), and Western thought: *The Schism in Philosophy: The Hellenic Perspective and its Western Reversal*, trans. Norman Russell (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2015).

5th century BC to the 15th century AD.”⁶³ It thus follows that the suggested epistemological continuity, premised on the concept of truth, common to both pre-Christian and Christian Hellenism, as an event of interpersonal participation and communion, would now serve as a point of contact and a platform for the encounter of Hellenism and Christianity, chiefly through the grand theological synthesis of the Greek Fathers.⁶⁴

For Yannaras, this version of the truth constitutes the very crux of the cultural identity of Hellenism, inasmuch as “yet ... the moderately formed Greek, with at least some philosophical and theological education, suspects or knows that it is a peculiarity of his culture to be defined in particular by the apophatic interpretation of truth – from the time of Heraclitus to that of Gregory Palamas.”⁶⁵ It is actually this definition of truth, above all else, that “determines every other difference between the two traditions or cultures,”⁶⁶ i.e., the Greek and Western respectively.

Elsewhere, Yannaras reiterates his standard position that what sets the Greek tradition apart from the West is the former’s consistent preservation, again from Heraclitus to Gregory Palamas, of apophatic epistemology. He sees this divergence as instrumental in the ecclesiastical schism between East and West and no less responsible for the “religious” distortion of the church:

Had the Greek intelligentsia been more resistant to [sweeping slogans], they would have discovered more kinship with the heretical founders of modernity. For what radically sets Greece (ancient and medieval alike) apart from the West is its consistent commitment to apophaticism, as evidenced in the tradition from Heraclitus to Gregory Palamas. The search for “meaning” in the Greek tradition, i.e., the ontological concern, was never trapped in dogmas or in different authoritarian forms *a priori*. The Greek intelligentsia learned at long last that Christianity was once split into two because the Greek Church consciousness and experience refused to walk with the then-barbaric West on the way to a “religious” distortion of the ecclesial event and its submission to doctrines and infallible authorities.⁶⁷

63 Christos Yannaras, “Μυστήρας: Ἀπὸ τὸν βυζαντινὸ στὸν Νέο Ἑλληνισμό” [Mystras: From Byzantine to Modern Hellenism], *Κριτικές Παρεμβάσεις* [Critical Approaches], 2nd expanded ed. (Athens: Domos, 1987), 45. Cf. idem, *Elements of Faith: An Introduction to Orthodox Theology*, trans. K. Schram (London/New York: T & T Clark, 1991), 153–4.

64 Cf. Cyril Hovorun, *Political Orthodoxies: The Unorthodoxies of the Church Coerced* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 2018), 168–70.

65 Christos Yannaras, *On the Absence and Unknowability of God: Heidegger and the Areopagite*, edited and with an Introduction by Andrew Louth, trans. by Haralambos Ventis (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 17.

66 Yannaras, *On the Absence and Unknowability of God: Heidegger and the Areopagite*, 15.

67 Christos Yannaras, *Ἡ κατάρρευση τοῦ πολιτικοῦ συστήματος στὴν Ἑλλάδα σήμερα* [The Collapse of the Political System in Greece Today] (Thessaloniki: Ianos, 2008), 240.

Yannaras' theory of the unbroken continuity of Greek thought and culture from Heraclitus to Gregory Palamas would soon be complemented by a more historical and "political" – and at the same time more fixed – dimension: one that not only likes to constantly discover the Greeks' enduring apophatic attitude vis-à-vis the issue of truth but also sees an enduring civility and a sense of nobility in the Greeks, as well as their destiny as an aristocratic people, to live in leisure, i.e., to be free from the savage need to earn a living and to focus instead on producing culture: to philosophize, to exercise virtue, and to cultivate the art of politics. They thus leave manual labor (which is identical to the subjection to need) to other people, who are like sheep in their need for production. For the latter, the highest goal of salvation has become intertwined with the idea of work and faithfulness, *Labor et Fides* – as Yannaras himself characteristically writes in his book *Undefined Greece*,⁶⁸ in which he records experiences, events, and discussions from his encounters with Greeks in the Diaspora in Australia, Canada, and the U.S.

This constant preoccupation with the theme of the inherent gentleness and nobility of the aristocratic Greeks, this theological and cultural fomentation and justification of the quest for excellence and superiority that inevitably takes place at the expense of others, and this continual reference to faith almost exclusively in terms of culture and, indeed, in a way that often seems to exclude some from this faith because they are not culturally mature appear to be consistent features of the thought and work of Yannaras. Thus, his later works are distinguished by, among other things, a disengagement from theology as such in favor of or because of philosophy and especially culture/identity. Yannaras refers consistently in these later works even to worship and to the Divine Liturgy in terms not only of the nobility, gentleness, and culture of the Greeks but also of the leading role played by Orthodox worship in the living cultural witness to Hellenism throughout the Greek diaspora in America and the modern world in general.⁶⁹

From this perspective, "Greek Orthodox liturgy" seems, according to Yannaras, to be the most important or rather the only, bulwark against the imminent destruction, dissolution, and collapse of the "little Greek state": ancient Greek drama continues every week in thousands of churches and communities of Greeks around the world, recapitulating the historical development of the Greek language. All the discussion about Orthodox worship, and especially the Divine Liturgy, as a foretaste of and participation in the

68 Christos Yannaras, *Άόριστη Ελλάδα. Κοντσέρτο για δύο αποδημίες* [Undefined Greece: Concerto for Two Migrations] (Athens: Domos, 1994), 58; cf. 59, 120–1.

69 Yannaras, *Άόριστη Ελλάδα*, 28–31.

eschatological kingdom and all that this entails in theological and ecclesiastical terms does not appear to interest Yannaras here. The Divine Liturgy is not seen in terms of participating in the eschatological banquet of the coming Lord, which constitutes the Body of Christ and the people of God. Rather, what matters in the passage under discussion is the cultural dimension of worship, the expression through liturgy of Greekness and the spirit of resistance the latter preserves. For this reason, this understanding of the Divine Liturgy concerns every Greek – regardless of faith and regardless of his spiritual struggle and the existential leap of faith that this presupposes. In the words of Yannaras himself:

Imagine if in every neighborhood of a Greek city, in every village, in every Greek community of the diaspora, we were to stage an ancient Greek tragedy every week. We would consider it a tangible, dynamic presence and witness to Hellenicity. We would have assured the survival of the language, as well as the ethos and way of life that Hellenism carries with it, even if the little Greek state were to be destroyed.

And we ordinary and unimportant citizens have something even more significant in our hands: a living, weekly act of the people that continues ancient Greek dramaturgy. It recapitulates the historical evolution of our language and our cultural contribution in dazzling poetry, revelatory painting, and engrossing melody. We have the Greek Orthodox liturgy – every week in thousands of churches, throughout the world, wherever there is a Greek community.

I will be so bold as to say that it does not matter whether someone “believes” or not, whether someone is “religious” or not. The tangible expression of Greekness that is the liturgy is our living and active culture and must be preserved at all costs. It is up to every Greek to save it.

We must preserve the cultural dynamic of the Greek Orthodox liturgy, and we must all enlist in the service of cleansing it from “religionization,” which is foreign to it. Specifically, this is what I propose: That we establish groups toward this end in every city, every neighborhood, and every village and community.⁷⁰

This unprecedented instrumentalization of Orthodoxy’s liturgical tradition is not content with simply buttressing claims of unbroken Greek continuity, as is evident in many of Yannaras’ texts.⁷¹ In his thinking, Orthodox worship

70 Christos Yannaras, *Ἑλληνότροπος πολιτική. Ἐξ ἀντιθέτου κριτήρια καὶ προτάσεις* [*Politics in the Greek Mode: Criteria and Proposals from an Opposite Point of View*] (Athens: Ikaros, 1996), 175–6.

71 For a representative example, see this characteristic piece from Yannaras’ column in the widely read Athenian newspaper *Kathimerini* (9 September 2001): “Three and a half thousand years of rich Greek culture are on display in the living worship of the Orthodox

is inextricably tied to the search for identity and reflection on Greek uniqueness. Orthodox worship, then, comes to be understood in some of Yannaras' works in a cultural rather than a theological way and less in an eschatological way. It is conceived of as the most, if not only, defining characteristic of Greeks today, and thus represents that expression, that aspect of life, by which the Greek people still manage to be culturally distinct from the dominant globalizing Western model.⁷² Even in his autobiographical work *On Himself*, Yannaras was not able to avoid a reference to or tangent about Orthodox worship as a distinctive mark of the Greeks' nobility, gentleness, and culture or about the liturgical act as fidelity to and confirmation of the cultural superiority of the Orthodox and the Greeks over all others.⁷³

In such a reading and understanding of worship, it is of little importance that this wonderful "we" is not national/racial but cultural. It matters little that the divisive role of ethnophyletism is undertaken by cultural or ecumenical/universal Hellenism since it is diametrically opposed to the liturgical "we" that highlights the church as a spiritual homeland for all people in one spiritual race and since it contradicts the very core of the Gospel, the consciousness of the Orthodox Divine Liturgy as a work of every single believer everywhere throughout the world.

But Yannaras' theory of the unbroken continuity of Greek thought from Heraclitus to Gregory Palamas is inconceivable without his understanding of the relationship between church and culture, between truth and cultural context, as it has taken shape over the last few years. In fact, in his writings,⁷⁴ the pivotal role the cultural criterion plays in Yannaras' thought leads him to make the catholicity of each local church (and the authentic manifestation thereof) dependent on the conditions of its cultural milieu, with language regarded as the foremost criterion. For Yannaras, culture is a prerequisite for granting access to the ecclesial event and way of life. Small wonder, then, that Yannaras

Church: There we have the continuity of ancient Greek politics, the 'assembly [ecclesia] of the people [*dimos*]' as the gathering [*ecclesia*] of the faithful. There we have the continuation of tragedy, drama that functions as revelation. There we have the historical continuity of the language, from Homer to Gerasimos Mikragiannanitis, at every Vespers and Matins service. There we have the unbroken continuity of poetry, the continuity of music, and painting, from Fayyum to Theophilus."

72 Christos Yannaras, *Πολιτιστική Διπλωματία. Προθεωρία ελληνικού σχεδιασμού* [Cultural Diplomacy: A Theory of Greek Planning] (Athens: Ikaros, 2003), 158–9. In the same vein, see Yannaras, *Αντιστάσεις στην αλλοτρίωση. Έπικαιρη κριτική σχοινοβασία* [Resistance to Alienation: A Vital Critical Balancing Act] (Athens: Ikaros, 1997), 236.

73 Christos Yannaras, *Τά καθ' ἑαυτὸν* [*On Himself*] (Athens: Ikaros, 1995), 184–5; cf. 186.

74 In regard to this point, see his very important paper: "Ἐκκλησία καὶ πολιτισμός" [Church and Culture], *Synaxi* 88 (2003), 11–17.

has increasingly supported the view that one cannot be fully Orthodox if one does not participate in the ultimate synthesis of Hellenism and Christianity that was produced by the great Greek Fathers of the 4th century AD, if one is not familiar with the unprecedented achievements of ancient Greek philosophy and semantics, or if one is not conversant in the language of Greek ontology that contributed so much to the formulation of Christian doctrine.

This remarkable and unique position of Christian Hellenism makes it part and parcel or “flesh of theology’s flesh,” the diachronic (and henceforth obligatory) historical-cultural flesh of the church. It is this to such a degree, in fact, that even today, according to Yannaras, the church must formulate and preach the truth of the Gospel of salvation in every place and time in Greek cultural and philosophical terms. In the same way, Yannaras routinely attributes the limited – and, in his view, problematic – assimilation of Christianity by the so-called “barbaric tribes” that conquered Rome in the 5th century AD to their cultural and intellectual retardation. Even today, he thinks that the people of mission, such as Africans and Asians, have to become acquainted with Greek cultural and philosophical achievements in order to become fully Orthodox.⁷⁵ Hellenism is thus elevated to the status of a crucial and indispensable prerequisite for the manifestation of the true, catholic church, just as “Jewishness” was deemed the necessary medium for the Incarnation of Christ, God’s manifestation in the flesh. In this way, Hellenism is assigned a special role in Yannaras’ thought in the Divine economy of salvation.

Indeed, a particular and crucial aspect of Yannaras’ Helleno-Christian theology, which was manifest already fairly early (1977)⁷⁶ but became more prominent over time throughout his later work, especially in his texts after 1990,⁷⁷ not only raises the idea of the diachronic unity and continuity of the individual phases of Hellenism’s cultural development. It also hints at a theory in which Greekness, as the historical flesh that presented Hellenism as the full expression of Orthodoxy gives us the right to speak about Hellenism’s unique (and not incidental) role in the plan of the Divine economy, a role analogous to that of the Incarnation of God through the Jews, which, for a believer, is also not coincidental. More precisely, ecclesiastical catholicity for Yannaras is connected not only to ecclesial and theological presuppositions but also to

75 Yannaras, “Εκκλησία και πολιτισμός,” 13–14, 15, 17.

76 Christos Yannaras, *Άλήθεια και ένότητα τής Έκκλησίας* [Truth and the Unity of the Church] (Athens: Grigoris, 1977), 273ff.; French translation (by Jean-Louis Palieme): *Vérité et unité de l’Eglise* (Grez-Doiceau: éd. Axios, 1989), 162ff.; idem, *Νεοελληνική ταυτότητα* [Modern Greek Identity] (Athens: Grigoris, 1978), 8–9.

77 Particularly in his articles “Εκκλησία και πολιτισμός” and “Nation, People, Church” (see below).

cultural ones. This is why, in addition to the fundamental characteristics of the catholicity of the church (such as the centrality of the Eucharist and the bishop to the constitution of the ecclesial body), Yannaras also adds a basic component of his theology and his theory/philosophy of culture in general, stating that the authentic manifestation of every local church's catholicity is connected directly to its cultural/historical flesh, to its native language, and the expression of its living, native culture. This is such a critical parameter for Yannaras, such an absolute necessity, that he goes so far as to claim that

if we underestimate or misunderstand the local language, the expression of its living, native culture (defined geographically and temporally), we remove its enhypostatic reality from the ecclesial mode of existence. We change it into a mental conception and moralistic deontology, into abstract “beliefs” and expedient canonical “principles.” Without the flesh of culture, the Church becomes an “ism”: Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, or “Orthodoxism” – different ideological versions of rationalistic metaphysics and utilitarian ethics, all with ambitions of universalism, i.e., geographical “catholicity.”⁷⁸

Yannaras goes further, however, highlighting the Christological concomitant of this theological/ecclesiological position, emphasizing not simply the historicity and reality of the Incarnation but –not incidentally, as we will see shortly– also ethnicity, the particular language and cultural background of the Incarnate One:

the Causal Principle of any being, inaccessible to the mind and senses, assumed the flesh of biological individuality, the flesh of a rational subject of a particular background and a particular historical place. He assumed ethnicity and language and, with that, the inherent worldview of the time in order to deify this assumption.⁷⁹

Given this, he concludes that:

since then, every time the Christological prototype of existence is realized in each particular eucharistic community, it too has its specific historical “flesh” – national, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural. The Gospel of the Church is not an ideological premise that we adopt as a “superstructure” to the practice of our lives, a practice that varies according to our local customs and culture. The Gospel is

78 Yannaras, “Εκκλησία και πολιτισμός,” 12.

79 Yannaras, “Εκκλησία και πολιτισμός,” 11. The same idea is present in a more concise form, in his article “Nation, People, Church,” originally published in 1994, and translated by Elisabeth Theokritoff, in: *Synaxis: An Anthology of the Most Significant Orthodox Theology in Greece Appearing in the Journal Synaxi from 1982 to 2002*, vol. III (Montreal: Alexander Press, 2006), 98.

embodied in the practice of life, and only when it is incarnate does it become a *mode of being*.⁸⁰

It is quite obvious here that Yannaras makes no reference to – or simply ignores – the eschatological Christ, the coming Lord of glory who will unite all previous differences and overturn, through the Cross, every type of division and fragmentation (such as those based on sex, race, ethnicity, language, culture, social class, and background). Rather, he is content to highlight and, in fact, considers the cultural aspects of the historical Christ, which in this case can be summarized as Jewishness, as absolutely essential for every place and age. Obviously, the goal of this pivotal theological choice is its applicability by analogy to Greekness (which, of course, is the historical flesh of the Church), i.e., to a vital and irreplaceable part of tangible catholicity and authentic church life.

The eschatological deficit in Yannaras' corpus also explains his emphasis on culture. His work has a blatantly protological orientation, with a strong yearning for origins in the form of a call to return to roots and tradition. Theologically, this tendency translates into a view of the Eucharist as a manifestation in the present of God's eschatological promises, with little or no emphasis on the Church's intrinsically eschatological nature. It is in the name of culture, then, that the (unwaveringly premodern) classical Greek and Byzantine past is justified and extolled up to and including the Greek Orthodox communities from the period of Ottoman occupation. These communities in particular are lauded as the embodiment of authentic social life, as the ideal social setting for the emergence of true personhood, on account of their being grounded in the true ecclesial way of life.⁸¹ Contemporary Greece and Europe, by contrast, are perceived as areas of decline and estrangement (from a glorious past), while the future is viewed with pessimism.

The espousal of a supposedly seamless cultural continuity running throughout the entire history of Hellenism has resulted in a gradual redirection of Yannaras' work from a theological to a cultural emphasis and the adoption of a hardened anti-Westernism with pronounced cultural underpinnings.⁸² It is precisely the implementation of this cultural criterion that causes Yannaras to blur the lines between theology and philosophy, a move that, in turn, allows

80 Yannaras, "Nation, People, Church," 98.

81 See, for example, Christos Yannaras, *The Freedom of Morality*, trans. Elizabeth Briere (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 220–3.

82 Cf. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, "The Image of the West in Contemporary Greek Theology," in George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou (eds), *Orthodox Constructions of the West* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 142–160.

him to visualize Hellenism in terms of an unbreakable intellectual and cultural unity over the entire course of its history.

The above examples of ethnotheology are surprising, and even awkward for their ethno-religious or cultural proud and the sense of greatness/“Great Idea,” for the glorification respectively of the Romanian, Roman (Byzantine) or Hellenic people and culture as well as for the aggressive anti-Westernism (and also anti-Semitism, in Staniloae’s case), and the praise of Orthodox isolationism. Nevertheless, the three of them remained on the level of a self-sufficient, self-justifying discourse, and a romantic self-exaltation rhetoric and were not actively involved in any kind of violent or aggressive acts, in wars and crimes. Unfortunately, this was not the case with the following examples which are involved in violent acts, while supporting aggressive ideologies.

*Metropolitan of Montenegro Amfilohije Radovic and Bishop of
Herzegovina Atanasije Jevtic*

Ethnotheology seems to be strongly rooted in contemporary Serbian Orthodox theology, finding sound expression in the persons of Metropolitan Amfilohije Radovic and Bishop Atanasije Jevtic (but not limited only to them, although we cannot classify the whole of contemporary Serbian theology under the heading of ethnotheology). Previously, the great figures of modern Serbian Orthodoxy, Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic and Father Justin Popovic (both of them now recognized as saints by the Serbian Orthodox Church), developed the idea of the “Serbian people as servant of God,”⁸³ or of “[t]he mystery and spiritual meaning of the battle in Kosovo,”⁸⁴ consolidating thus a messianic self-consciousness,

83 Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich, *The Serbian People as a Servant of God*, trans. Rt Rev. Theodore Mika and Very Rev. Stevan Scott (Grayslake IL: The Serbian Orthodox Metropolitane of New Gracanica, Diocese of America and Canada, 1999).

84 Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich and Archimandrite Justin Popovic (select writings of), *The Mystery and Meaning of the Battle of Kosovo*, trans. in honor of the 600th Anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo by Rt Rev. Todor Mika and Very Rev. Stevan Scott (Grayslake IL: The Serbian Orthodox Metropolitane of New Gracanica, Diocese of America and Canada, 1999). Cf. Thomas Bremer, “The Attitude of the Serbian Orthodox Church towards Europe,” in Jonathan Sutton and William Peter Van Den Bercken (eds.), *Orthodox Christianity and Contemporary Europe: Selected Papers of the International Conference held at the University of Leeds, England, in June 2001* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 423–30; Julia Anna Lis, *Antwestliche Diskurse in der serbischen und griechischen Orthodoxie: Zur Konstruktion des “Westens” bei Nikolaj Velimirović, Justin Popović, Christos Yannaras und John S. Romanides* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2019). In contrast, see the defence of the two Serbian theologians (now recognized as saints by the Serbian Orthodox Church) undertaken by Vladimir Cvetković in his “The Reception of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the 21st-Century German Academia,” in Mikonja Knežević (ed.), in collaboration with Rade Kisić and Dušan Krcunović, *Philosophos – Philotheos – Philoponos: Studies and Essays as Charisteria*

and a theory of victimization among the Serbian people. In doing so, both authors are well within the prevailing (at the time) understanding and application of the tradition of saintsavaism, which as a theological orientation appears in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in the 1930s. The movement took its name from the founder of the Serbian Church, St. Sava, a fact that emphasizes the national character of Serbian Orthodoxy as opposed to the catholic character of the Orthodox Church.⁸⁵ Saintsavaism was nominally rooted in and particularly promoted by Popovic's views on it as a holistic philosophy of life.⁸⁶ This philosophy placed the primacy of the Divine over the human at its center and – because of its very strong exclusivist soteriology, ecclesiology, and theology of virtues – was criticized to promote and expand antimodernist ideas, religious intolerance, and ethnoreligious nationalism and even to have affinities with totalitarian ideologies such as National Socialism.⁸⁷ The debate

in Honor of Professor Bogoljub Šijaković on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday (Belgrade and Podgorica: Gnomon Center for the Humanities Matica srpska – Društvo članova u Crnoj Gori, 2021), 993–1004, who opposes Julia Anna Lis' and my own analysis (on Yannaras and Romanides, and their relation to Serbian theology).

- 85 Cf. also on this Christos Mylonas, *Serbian Orthodox Fundamentals: The Quest for an Eternal Identity* (Budapest/New York: Central European University Press, 2003), 52: "Saint-Savism (Svetosavlje) as a primordial given factor of Serb culture constitutes the principled and fundamental expression of the love of and the life in Orthodoxy, in accordance with the national traditions. It is 'the soul [which] kept its memory alive [...]' when the body succumbed to the Turks" to partly paraphrase Ivo Banac's account of the relationship between the Nemanjic Kingdom and the Serbian Church, or rather the foundations of heavenly Serbia. In the case of the former, Orthodoxy's transcending nature and spirituality connotes – in an ironic manner, when considering the destruction of St. Sava's remains by the Turks – my primary hypothesis, which has identified Orthodoxy as the sacralisation of the Serbian identity."
- 86 See Justin Popovic, *Pravoslavna Crkva i ekumenizam; Svetosavlje kao filozofija života* [The Orthodox Church and Ecumenism – Saintsavaism as a Philosophy of Life], ed. Atanasije Jevtic (Belgrade: Manastir Celijski; Naslednici Oca Justina, 2001).
- 87 Cf., e.g., Maria Falina, "Svetosavlje a Case Study in the Nationalization of Religion," *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Religions und Kulturgeschichte* 101 (2007), 505–27; Neven Vukic, "Saintsavaism(s) and Nationalism: An Overview of the Development of the Serbian Orthodox Phenomenon of Saintsavaism, with a Special Focus on the Contribution of Justin Popovic (1894–1979)," *Exchange: Journal of Contemporary Christianities in Context* 50 (2021), 77–98; idem, *Engaging the Religious Other: Studies in Orthodox-Muslim Dialogue*, PhD Dissertation (Leuven: KU Leuven Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, 2021), 87–91; Branimir Anzulovic, *Heavenly Serbia: From Myth to Genocide* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), especially 23–31; Lis, *Antiwestliche Diskurse in der serbischen und griechischen Orthodoxie*, 225–36. A more sympathetic approach to Popovic's saintsavaism is proposed by Bogdan Lubardić, "Revolt against the Modern World': Theology and the Political in the Thought of Justin Popović," in Kristina Stoeckl, Ingeborg Gabriel, and Aristotle Papanikolaou (eds.), *Political Theologies in Orthodox Christianity: Common*

concerning this last point (saintsavaism and National Socialism) focuses on a speech by Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic delivered in Belgrade in 1935 called “The Nationalism of Saint Sava.” In this speech he not only establishes a connection between Saint Sava and Adolf Hitler but also praised Hitler for doing what the founder of the Serbian Orthodox Church did in the 13th century:

One must render homage to the present German leader who, as a simple craftsman and man of the people, realized that nationalism without religion is an anomaly, a cold and insecure mechanism. Thus, in the twentieth century he arrived at Saint Sava’s idea and as a layman undertook the most important task in his nation that befits a saint, genius, and hero.⁸⁸

Taking into account Velimirovic’s later biography and his detention in the Dachau Nazi concentration camp during WWII, many would agree with Neven Vukic’s opinion that, at worst, the above unfortunate quotation was “an error in judgement on the part of Velimirovic, with regards to the character of the German dictator.”⁸⁹

The cases of the distinguished late Serbian hierarchs and eminent theologians of the Belgrade Faculty of Theology (both died of COVID during the academic year 2020–21, refusing to practise social distancing), the former Bishop of Zahumije and Herzegovina Atanasije Jevtic, and Metropolitan Amfilohije Radovic of Montenegro and the Littoral, should be listed among the examples of ethnotheology in Orthodoxy. Both developed an ethnotheological discourse, tolerating – if not encouraging and blessing – violent acts, war crimes, or even crimes against humanity while both were criticized as being among those who energetically opposed peace plans during the Yugoslav wars.⁹⁰ Both bishops were among the most influential hierarchs of the Serbian Orthodox Church with great influence not only within church related milieus but also among politicians, journalists, intellectuals, university professors, and the wider society of Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the context of the dramatic conditions of the breakup of the former Yugoslavia, these hierarchs increasingly slipped away from theology into ethnotheology and “patriotic

Challenges and Divergent Positions (London: Bloomsbury/T&T Clark, 2017), 207–28, here 215–9.

88 See Nikolai Velimirovic, *Nacionalizam svetoga Save* (Belgrade: Association of the Serbian Orthodox Clergy of the Belgrade–Karlovci Eparchy, 1935), 27–8, quoted in Anzulovic, *Heavenly Serbia*, 30.

89 Vukic, *Engaging the Religious Other: Studies in Orthodox-Muslim Dialogue*, 88–9.

90 See for example Radmila Radic, “The Church and the ‘Serbian Question,’” in Nebojsa Popov and Drinka Gojkovic (eds), *The Road to War in Serbia: Trauma and Catharsis* (Budapest/New York: Central European University Press, 2000), 247–73, here 269.

theology” in their post-1992⁹¹ texts, discourses, sermons, and public interventions. Time and space do not suffice to record, analyze, and discuss all the relevant sources and evidence related to these two well-known Serbian hierarchs. In addition, the linguistic barrier is a major problem for people who do not speak the Serbian language but want to get a well-informed understanding of the tragic events that took place in the former Yugoslavia and the way hierarchs, theologians, and the Orthodox in general reacted to them. But many of us – especially in Greece, where the two late bishops felt at home, having a wide audience, and were allowed to express themselves during lectures and round tables in a free and confident way – were left with the impression that these great ecclesiastical and theological personalities were won over by the defense of the Serbian national cause and that theology had taken a back seat.

Thus, to limit myself to just a few elements, in a 1990 interview with the Belgrade weekly NIN Metropolitan Amfilohije Radovic maintained that “Milosevic and other leading politicians in Serbia should be commended for understanding the vital interests of the Serb people at this moment. [...] If they continue as they have started, the results will be very impressive.”⁹² In addition, as reported in Neven Vukic’s doctoral dissertation (1995), the convicted war criminal, Vojislav Seselj, an extremely controversial figure, was awarded a medal for his role in the Kosovo War, for his service to the justice of God against the inhumane justice of the International Criminal Tribunal exercised against the former Yugoslavia in The Hague (The Netherlands). In addition, he

91 In some cases, these phenomena could be found even before 1992, as these bishops, and others too, were among those who enflamed Serbians about the Kosovo issue, and presented Kosovo as the “Serbian Jerusalem,” and enthusiastically praised Milosevic’s relevant speech in June 1989. Metropolitan Amfilohije Radovic, for example, will state in an interview to the foreign press that, “between 1987 and 1989, as it was so clear during the jubilee of the Kosovo Battle (sc. in 1989), Serbia has demonstrated a national unity, unseen probably since 1914.” See the bishop’s statement to the BBC evening radio news (4 August 1989), *Religion, Politics, Society* (17 August 1989), as quoted by Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States* (Oxford/ New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 143. On this, see Marko Živković, “Stories Serbs Tell Themselves: Discourses on Identity and Destiny in Serbia since the Mid-1980’s,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 44, no. 4 (1997), 22–29, especially 24. Cf. Srdjan Vrcan, “A Christian Confession Possessed by Nationalistic Paroxysm: The Case of Serbian Orthodoxy,” *Religion* 25 (1995), 357–70, especially 359, 363–6. The Serbian Orthodox reply to all these critiques, and the interpretation of the relevant historical events can be found in the volume, *The Christian Heritage of Kosovo and Metohija: The Historical and Spiritual Heartland of the Serbian People* (Los Angeles CA: Sebastian Press, 2015).

92 *Naša Borba*, 8 April 1998, quoted by Perica, *Balkan Idols*, 143.

called on Vojislav Seselj to continue his chivalric work of defending the soul and face of the Serbian people.⁹³

In addition, Metropolitan Amfilohije Radovic, took it upon himself to organize a conference in Cetinje, Montenegro, in 1996 in the wake of the end of the Bosnian War, and looming war crimes proceedings, on the relation between Orthodox Christianity and war. At this conference, he did not fail to include the leader of the Bosnian Serbs of that time, Radovan Karadzic, among the invited speakers. Karadzic is now a convicted war criminal, who has been found guilty of the charge of genocide and of other crimes committed during the war in Bosnia (1992–995), and who had already been indicted at that time by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague (Netherlands) for his direct responsibility in the Srebrenica Genocide.⁹⁴ The proceedings of that conference were published later that same year by the publishing house of the Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral with the blessing of Metropolitan Amfilohije as *The Lamb of God and the Beast from the Abyss*.⁹⁵

This volume contains contributions by Radovan Karadzic, scholars and a number of clerics, especially from Montenegro. It seeks primarily to justify the Serbian war in Bosnia and provide for a general “philosophical” opposition to the anti-war literature published in Yugoslavia.⁹⁶

As to the connection of Karadzic and his ethnoreligious project to the Serbian Church, according to Radmila Radic,

The leader of the Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Radovan Karadzic, confirmed at the beginning of 1994 that the relationship between the church and the state was excellent, stating that, “Our clergy are present at all our deliberations and in the decision making processes; the voice of the church is respected as the voice of highest authority.” Karadzic also added that everything he achieved in life he

93 Vukic, *Engaging the Religious Other*, 103, n. 293, from whom I borrow most of the information in the present section.

94 Vukic, *Engaging the Religious Other*, 103–4.

95 See the collective volume *Jagnje Bozije i Zvijer iz Bezdana* [The Lamb of God and the Beast from the Abyss], ed. Rados M. Mladenovic and (Hierodeacon) Jovan Culibrk (now Bishop of Pakrac and Slavonia) (Cetinje: Svetigora 1996), and Vukic, *Engaging the Religious Other*, 103–4.

96 Florian Bieber, “Montenegrin Politics since the Disintegration of Yugoslavia,” accessible at <https://web.archive.org/web/20100703005659/http://www.policy.hu/bieber/Publications/bieber.pdf/> (accessed 19 March 2022). Bieber refers also to Stjepan Gredelj, “Klerikalizam, etnofiletizam, antiokumenizam I (ne)tolerancija,” *Sociologija* 41. no. 2 (April–June 1999), 157–8.

owed to religion and the church and that whatever he did, he did “with God in mind.”⁹⁷

In his turn the former Bishop of Herzegovina Atanasije Jevtic, who also contributed to the aforementioned conference in Cetinje, and to its Proceedings, went so far as to argue that: “war is intrinsic to the whole of creation (even angels warred against each other), that is simply the way of the world.” Apparently, he was under a strong emotional shock provoked by aggressions of the rival side of the Yugoslavian wars (Bosnian Croats, the allies of Muslims in the civil war, destroyed his cathedral church of the Holy Trinity in Mostar, in 1992). According to Bishop Atanasije Jevtic, the Serbs fought a valiant and heroic war, a defensive war that was conducted as self-defence against probable genocide at the hands of the Croats and Muslims. Here, he was referring to the war crimes committed by the Nazi-collaborationist government of Ustashe of the so-called “Independent State of Croatia,” a puppet state of the Axis Powers, which had implemented its own racial laws and ran its own death camps. Atanasije Jevtic was even opposed to the peace that was established in Bosnia with the Dayton Accords (1995), and defended this view theologically by asserting that “any war is better than a peace that separates one from God.”⁹⁸

Neven Vukic attempts to recount and frame the wider context in his doctoral dissertation. He writes:

Similar sentiments on the preference for war rather than the “wrong kind of peace,” had been expressed [...], in the official journal of the Serbian Church, *Pravoslavlje*, by Archpriest Bozidar Mijac. In addition to elaborating on the preference for a “good war” over a “bad and godless peace,” the author apparently argues for the presence of not only “just” and “unjust” individuals in wars but also for that of “just” and “unjust” nations. Moreover, the enemies of the Serbian forces in the wars are likened to the apocalyptic beasts and the forces of chaos described in the Book of Revelation.⁹⁹

97 Radic, “The Church and the ‘Serbian Question,’” 268. Cf. Vukic, *Engaging the Religious Other*, 102–3.

98 See Atanasije Jevtic, “Najgori od svih mogućih ratova,” in the volume *Jagnje Bozije i Zvijer iz Bezdana*, 69–76, quoted in Vukic, *Engaging the Religious Other*, 104, from whom I am borrowing this information.

99 See Bozidar Mijac, “Mir, da, ali kakav?” [Peace, Yes, but What Kind?], *Pravoslavlje* 600 (15 March 1992), 5, quoted by Vukic, *Engaging the Religious Other*, 104. We should note that there were, however, Orthodox theologians like the hieromonk (now Bishop) Ignatije Midic, who condemned the war as a means to achieve “higher aims, either defensive or aggressive” and who thought the war an unacceptable and unjustifiable means from the human point of view, let alone the church perspective.” See Radic, “The Church and the ‘Serbian Question,’” 264–5. A self-critical approach to a range of difficult issues with regard to the Serbian Orthodox Church is also provided by the writings of the the late

Before closing this section with examples from Serbian ethnotheology or “patriotic theology” or even “war theology,” it should be noted that both hierarchs at the beginning of their theological journey seemed to follow a different path. In commenting on the religious nationalism and ethnophyletism in a very dense, penetrating, and theologically promising paper published in Greek in 1971, Metropolitan Amfilohije raised the pertinent question of the role played by Ottoman domination and the Qur’an (with its conflation of religion and nation) in the emergence and shape of religious nationalism in Orthodoxy.¹⁰⁰ In the same work,¹⁰¹ this distinguished Serbian clergyman and theologian, alluding to the related formulations of the 1872 Synod of Constantinople’s dogmatic “decree,” connects the phenomenon of ethnophyletism, which annuls the catholicity and universality of the church, to the resurgence of a particular “Jewish temptation.” This temptation lies in the priority of physical realities and the worship of ancestors and relatives according to the flesh, in the overvaluation of the “religion of the ancestors” and the “national god” over and against the universal call to salvation and ecumenicity.¹⁰² On the other side, Bishop Atanasije Jevtic, then an hieromonk preparing his PhD dissertation at Athens University, was the first to translate and introduce to the Greek public the work of Father Justin Popovic and especially his now illustrious collection of articles, *Ἄνθρωπος καὶ Θεάνθρωπος* [Man and the God-Man], which was published in Greek in 1969, and then in different languages. One of the famous quotations of this book deals exactly with the issue of the church-nation relationship, summarizing the foregoing patristic tradition in Popovic’s theological language:

The Church is ecumenical, catholic, God-human, ageless, and it is therefore a blasphemy – an unpardonable blasphemy against Christ and against the Holy Ghost – to turn the Church into a national institution, to narrow her down to

Father Radovan Bigović, *The Orthodox Church in the 21st Century* (Belgrade: Foundation Konrad Adenauer / Christian Cultural Center, 2013); idem, *My Brother’s Keeper: Human Dignity, Freedom and Rights from the Perspective of the Orthodox Church* (Alhambra CA: Sebastian Press, 2013). See also, Vukašin Miličević, “Religion and National/Ethnic Identity in the Western Balkans: Serbian Orthodox Context,” in *Balkan Contextual Theology: An Introduction*, ed. Stipe Odak and Zoran Grozdanov (London: Routledge, 2022), 30–44.

100 Hieromonk Amfilohije Radovic, “Ἡ καθολικότης τῆς Ὀρθοδοξίας: Σομπόρνοστ ἢ ὁ βυθὸς τῆς ἀλογίας” [The Catholicity of Orthodoxy: Sobornost or the Height of Absurdity], in the volume edited by Elias Mastroyannopoulos, *Μαρτυρία Ὀρθοδοξίας* [Orthodox Witness] (Athens: Hestia, 1971), 9–39, here 38.

101 Radovic, “Ἡ καθολικότης τῆς Ὀρθοδοξίας,” 36–8.

102 For the manifestations of this view in the current ecclesiastical climate, cf. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, “The Temptation of Judas: Church and National Identities,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 47 (2002), 357–79.

petty, transient, time-bound aspirations and ways of doing things. Her purpose is beyond nationality, ecumenical, all-embracing: to unite all men in Christ, all without exception to nation or race or social strata. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus," (Gal. 3:28), because "Christ is all, and in all." The means and methods of this all-human God-human union of all in Christ have been provided by the Church, through the holy sacraments and in her God-human works (ascetic exertions, virtues). And so it is: in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist the ways of Christ and the means of uniting all people are composed and defined and integrated. Through this mystery, man is made organically one with Christ and with all the faithful.¹⁰³

Even under the tragic and very difficult circumstances, defined by the war and the persecution, it is difficult to reconcile what was said at the beginning of the 1970s with what was done during the 1990s. I have consciously avoided generalizing the discussion on the complex issue of the attitude and responsibilities of the Serbian Orthodox Church during the wars and ethnic conflicts of the 1990s in former Yugoslavia, as such a discussion is neither easy nor can it be conducted without certain presuppositions (such as knowledge of the language and free access to the relevant sources). It is clear that further research should be done in this area, while self-criticism and the healing of memories and the reconciliation process (like the one undertaken in 2012–2013 by the Serbian Orthodox Bishop Grigorije of Herzegovina [now Serbian Bishop in Germany] and the Catholic Bishop of Dubrovnik in Croatia ([now Archbishop Coadjutor of the Archdiocese of Rijeka], Mate Uzinic), is greatly needed.¹⁰⁴

Russkii Mir ("Russian World")

In fact, the recent Russian invasion of and war in Ukraine brought the notorious theory of *Russkii Mir* (Russian World),¹⁰⁵ to the forefront again. This is a

103 Justin Popovich, "The Inward Mission of Our Church," in *Orthodox Faith and Life in Christ*, trans. Asterios Gerostergios (Belmont MA: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 2005), pp. 23–4. The same essay is also included in a newer version in Archimandrite Justin Popovich, *Man and the God-Man* (Alhambra CA: Sebastian Press, 2008).

104 On this, see also Vjekoslav Perica, "Religion in the Balkan Wars," in *Oxford Handbooks Online*; <https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935420.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199935420-e-37?print=pdf/> (accessed 20 March 2022). For the discussion on Orthodoxy and democracy in Serbian Orthodoxy see the paper by Branko Seculić, "Eyes Wide Shut: Discussion about Orthodoxy and Democracy in Serbian Theology and Thought," in the present volume.

105 The presentation and analysis of the *Russkii Mir* is based mainly on the following: Nicholas Denysenko, "Fractured Orthodoxy in Ukraine and Politics: The Impact of Patriarch Kyrill's 'Russian World,'" *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 54.1–2 (2013), 33–68; Sergei Chapnin, "A Church of Empire: Why the Russian Church Chose to

new “theopolitical ideology [...] which is supposed to unite at least East-Slavic Orthodoxy (if not other Orthodox Churches) and their host countries against the perceived threats of ‘Western’ globalization”¹⁰⁶ and which is considered to provide the ideological basis, and the theological justification of the aggression. Yet we cannot appreciate this “Russian World” ideology without connecting it to the “Third Rome” theory, which henceforth forms part of the *Russkii Mir* and the Russian “Great Idea” that is actively promoted – at least since 2009 and the accession of Patriarch Kyrill to the patriarchal see of Moscow – by church and state in Russia.

As it widely regarded by scholars, the monk Filofei of Pskov (d. ca 1542) sent a letter (1515) to the Grand Duke Vasily III of Moscow (1479–1533) in which for the first time he called him to the high office of Emperor (Tsar) of the Third and Final Rome. According to this monk, the first two Romes had failed to their mission as a result of a combination of corruption and heresy (for instance, Constantinople had capitulated to the First Rome at the Council of Florence). Since then, however, and until the coming of the Kingdom of God, it appears that all Christian kingdoms “have merged into one”: “Two Romes have fallen. The third stands [firm]. And there will not be a fourth. No one will replace your Christian tsardom.”¹⁰⁷

Taking advantage of the “Third Rome” idea and extending it further, now in view of the challenges posed by globalization and within the post-Soviet,

Bless Empire,” *First Things* (November 2015); Brandon Gallaher, “The Pure Signifier of Power: Remembering, Repeating and Working through the Significance of the Papacy and Pope Francis for Eastern Orthodoxy,” in Jan De Volder (ed.), *The Geopolitics of Pope Francis* (Leuven: Peeters, 2019), 169–98; Moritz Pieper, “*Russkiy Mir*: The Geopolitics of Russian Compatriots Abroad,” *Geopolitics* 25, no. 3 (2020), 756–79. It takes also advantage from the recent international “Declaration” by Orthodox theologians on the “Russian World” teaching (see <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2022/03/13/a-declaration-on-the-russian-world-russkii-mir-teaching/#more-10842/> and <https://www.polymerwsvolos.org/2022/03/13/a-declaration-on-the-russian-world-russkii-mir-teaching/> (accessed 19 March 2022)). Cf. further in the present contribution for more details on this, and the article by the Lebanese Orthodox public intellectual Antoine Courban, “Les nations sacralisées des terres saintes,” <https://icibeyrouth.com/monde/50702/> (accessed 21 March 2022). I also consulted the Address by Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev) of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Department of External Church Relations in the Moscow Patriarchate, and *de facto* number two of the Russian Orthodox Church. The Address was given at the conference on “Russia-Ukraine-Belarus: A Common Civilizational Space?” held at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland, 1 June 2019. Without using the term “Russian World,” the text of the Address perfectly reflects this idea and defends the political project that sustains it. See <https://mospat.ru/en/news/46324/> and <https://orthodoxie.com/en/conference-in-fribourg-russia-ukraine-belarus-a-common-civilizational-space/> (accessed 23 March 2022).

106 Denysenko, “Fractured Orthodoxy in Ukraine and Politics,” 33.

107 See Gallaher, “The Pure Signifier of Power,” 190.

post-communist context, President Putin and Patriarch Kyrill developed the idea and the ideology of the “Russian World” in numerous discourses and church-state initiatives. Kyrill delivered two speeches at the Assembly of the Foundation of “Russian World” in 2009–2010, articulating his vision and defining the preservation and sustainability of the endangered Russian culture in the context of globalization as the priority.¹⁰⁸ By appealing to spirituality and the ecumenical character of Orthodoxy, Kyrill outlined “bold objectives (sc. in his speeches), including (sc. the) assertion that only a strong *Russian World* will be able “to become a ‘strong subject of global international politics, stronger than all political alliances.’” Deacon Nicholas Denysenko commented as follows, “Kyrill’s teaching seeks to galvanize and solidify the unity of the people of Rus’ through the ministries proposed by the Moscow Patriarchate, which would hypothetically result in an alliance founded upon Orthodox spirituality, stronger than worldly political alliances.”¹⁰⁹ In sum, “Russian World” is more a political/“imperial” and ethnocultural project than an ecclesial or theological one, an ideological manifesto, as became evident from the long quotation by Sergei Chapnin who worked with the Moscow Patriarchate for years¹¹⁰ and understands from inside the “logic” behind the support provided by the Russian Church to the “Russian World” teaching:

The Church has taken on a complex ideological significance over the last decade, not least because of the rise of the concept of *Russkiy Mir*, or “Russian World.” This way of speaking presumes a fraternal coexistence of the Slavic peoples – Russian, Ukrainian, Belarussian – in a single “Orthodox Civilization.” It is a powerful archetype. It is an image of unity that appeals to Russians, because it gives them a sense of a larger destiny and supports the imperial vision that increasingly characterizes Russian politics. The currency of “Russian World” within the Church today indicates that Orthodoxy is becoming a political religion. That the Church has come to mirror the state in its rhetoric and animating vision is hardly surprising. [...] In these cultural circumstances, people in high places in both the government and Church see that, with an imperial outlook of her own, Orthodoxy might be able to fill the vacuum left by the defunct Communist Party in the system of post-Soviet administration. This potential has been clear even to those functionaries who keep their distance from the Church. The need for a political religion was formulated by state authorities around 2010 – something that coincided with the election of Kyrill, a Russian World enthusiast, to

108 Denysenko, “Fractured Orthodoxy in Ukraine and Politics,” 41–42.

109 Denysenko, “Fractured Orthodoxy in Ukraine and Politics,” 42–43.

110 Before becoming an independent Russian Orthodox columnist, Sergei Chapnin served as editor-in-chief of the periodical *Dary*, and as the former editor of the official organ of the Russian Orthodox Church, *Zhurnal Moskovskoi Patriarkhii*, and deputy editor-in-chief at the Publishing House of the Moscow Patriarchate.

the Patriarchal See of Moscow. It is in one sense natural that church leaders such as Kyrill would wish to promote a Russian World that transcends the political boundaries of present-day Russia. Orthodox believers are united theologically even if they live in different countries, and many are formally united under the authority of the Patriarch of Moscow. Church leaders are certainly right to further this unity, expanding and deepening our friendship in Christ across geographical borders. But as critics point out, speaking of a Russian World serves the state more than it serves the Church. It mobilizes religion, especially the esteem of the Slavic peoples for the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia, for political purposes. Its primary effect will surely be not church unity, but rather the strengthening of Russian influence in Ukraine and Belarus.¹¹¹

This more political, ideological, and ethnocultural than ecclesial or theological character of the project of the “Russian World” clearly appears from the following long and significant quotation from Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev:

Russia, Ukraine and Belarus constitute one spiritual space framed by the Russian Orthodox Church. This space was formed over a thousand years, during which national borders appeared, disappeared and were moved many times, but spiritual commonality remained intact despite numerous external efforts aimed at shattering this unity. [...]

As far back as the 10th century, the diptychs of the Church of Constantinople first mention the Metropolia of Rus'. Initially the title of its head had no additional naming of a city, but was just τῆς Ῥωσίας, that is “of Rus.” When Prince Vladimir Svyatoslavovich and after him the whole Rus' embraced Christianity, Orthodoxy became the main spiritual and moral pivot for all the East Slavic ethnic groups that soon appeared in these territories. That moment marked the outset of the history of “Holy Rus” – a historical phenomenon which owed its existence to the powerful unifying role of the Russian Church in the vast territories of the Great, Little and White Rus' and in other territories which at different times were in the sphere of its influence.

[...] [I]t was the Church of Constantinople that defended the unity of the Russian Metropolia in the 12th century. Patriarch Luke Chrysoberges added a word “all” to the old title of Metropolitan of Kiev – τῆς πάσης Ῥωσίας (“of All Rus'”) – in order to emphasize the indivisibility of the Russian Church.

[...] Signs of crisis in the life of the Soviet Union were constantly increasing in the late 1980s. [...] On 17 March 1991, the all-Union referendum, the only one in the history of the USSR, was conducted on whether to preserve the united state or not. The majority of citizens of the Soviet Union voted in favor of its preservation. However, on 8 December 1991, leaders of the three USSR Republics – Ukraine,

111 Sergei Chapnin, “A Church of Empire: Why the Russian Church chose to Bless Empire,” *First Things* (November 2015).

Byelorussia and the Russian Federation – signed the so-called “Belovezha Accords” which established the Commonwealth of Independent States. What is the Church’s attitude towards these centrifugal processes? On the one hand, the fall of the atheist regime was welcomed, for it marked the end of years of persecution and discrimination against believers, of uprooting from people’s consciousness any reminder of Christ, Gospel, Church. [...]

On the other hand, the disintegration of the united state and establishment on its basis of a whole number of independent countries with their own views on future development caused numerous divisions that affected not only territories, but also people, their families. [...]

Such a dramatic situation was caused, according to His Holiness Patriarch Kyrill of Moscow and All Russia, by, among other things, “the decay of national consciousness, national pride, by the inability to comprehend history in all its complexity and to realize an immense importance of historical commonality of people for their material and spiritual prosperity.”

By God’s mercy the disintegration of the Soviet Union did not bring about the disintegration of our Church, which now, just like hundreds of years ago, carries out its mission in the lands of its historical presence.

The unity of the Russian Church is the most important aspect of spiritual and cultural commonality of the Slavic nations in the post-Soviet countries – of the Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians. Disregard for this historical fact and, moreover, attempts to shatter this unity, as well as interference of authorities and politicians in church affairs with the view of gaining momentary benefits are a crime against this and future generations.

[...] We believe that the one Church is the strong Church. Its strength lies not in the secular attributes of power, welfare or might, but in its ability to exert spiritual and moral influence on human souls, on the attitude to those near and those far off, and even on the relations between nations and people on the global level.

We pursue the upholding of Gospel values in the life of European society because Orthodox people in many countries of pastoral responsibility of our Church live in Europe. Their faith, spiritual ideals, culture and traditions bring an important contribution to the European Christian heritage. Therefore, we bear our part of responsibility for civilizational space of the European continent.

We cannot stay indifferent to the attempts to destroy the traditions of the family, to erode the notion of Christian marriage and the God-commanded foundations of relations between man and woman, and to abortions and euthanasia that devalue human life.

At all international forums, including the European ones in the first place, we bear witness to the Gospel truth. This witness, as well as acts of mercy and peacemaking serve the reinforcing of the Christian roots of Europe and foundations of its civilization.

As to the question put in the title of our conference, I would like to underscore that Russia, Ukraine and Belarus are one spiritual space. We contest neither national self-identification of the three Slavic nations, nor the boundaries of the independent states, but we will continue our struggle for the preservation of the unity of the Russian Orthodox Church which assures spiritual unity of all Orthodox believers living within its space irrespective of their national and ethnic belonging. Simple words of the holy elder Lavrenty of Chernigov “Russia, Ukraine, Belarus – all these are Holy Rus” remain topical and resound in the hearts of millions of people.¹¹²

The whole “Russian World” idea and the way it has been implemented meet the main criteria of ethnotheology, i.e., the pre-eminence of the political and national element over the ecclesial, the uniqueness of Russia as a Christian civilization, and the understanding of faith in terms of culture, civilization, and ancestral heritage, as well as the inversion of the paradoxical and anti-nomic relationship between eschatology and history, or the oblivion of the biblical “in the world, but not of the world, for the sake of the world.” Thus, according to the “Russian World” teaching, there is a transnational Russian sphere or civilization or *ecumene* (another translation for the word *mir*) or peace (an alternative translation for *mir* along the lines of the *Pax Romana*), called Holy Russia or Holy Rus’ (to make a clear reference to the connection of all “Russian” peoples to the Baptism of Rus’) that includes Russia, Ukraine and Belarus (and sometimes Moldova and Kazakhstan) as well as ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking people throughout the world. It thus introduces an ecclesiological conception that understands the church on the ethnocultural identity of its members (“phyletism”). It holds that this “Russian World” is bonded together by a common spiritual center (Kyiv as the “mother of all Rus”), a common political center (Moscow), a common language (Russian), a common church (the Russian Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate), and a common Patriarch (the Patriarch of Moscow) who works in “symphony” with a common president/national leader (Putin) to govern this *Russian World*, as well as upholding a common distinctive spirituality, morality, and culture.¹¹³ Thus, Patriarch Kyrill is supposed to work

112 Address by Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev) of Volokolamsk, given at the conference on “Russia-Ukraine-Belarus: A Common Civilizational Space?” held at the University of Fribourg, in Switzerland, 1 June 2019. See <https://mospat.ru/en/news/46324/> and <https://orthodoxie.com/en/conference-in-fribourg-russia-ukraine-belarus-a-common-civilizational-space/> (accessed 23 March 2022).

113 See “Declaration”; Gallaher, “The Pure Signifier of Power,” 191–2, 193; Courban, “Les nations sacralisées des terres saintes.”

in “symphony” with the common national leader (Putin) in order to consolidate morally, culturally, and spiritually this space of civilization distinct from all others. Thus, there is an indisputable continuity between the soil, ethnic identity, belonging to the same people, the same church, and subjection to the same power.¹¹⁴

With all these ideological characteristics, it becomes clear that a central place in the “Russian World” is occupied “not by a nation but an imagined civilization. In this regard, the Russian world is one of those ‘imagined communities’ described by Benedict Anderson. As an ideology, the Russian word does not reflect an empirical reality but resides in and captivates the imagination of a people.”¹¹⁵

In addition, and as a logical consequence, on the occasion of Patriarch Kyrill’s meeting with Pope Francis in Havana in 2016, he described himself in his remarks to the press as the Patriarch of “All Russia,” meaning, in his own view, the “historical [i.e., greater] Russia.” If that is the case, then and as soon as the Moscow Patriarchate and its leader constitute the canonical Church of historical Russia and the bearer of its eternal Orthodox values, and it is Patriarch Kyrill, rather than the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople (regarded in this light as the Second Rome), who is the only legitimate leader of the Orthodox worldwide.¹¹⁶ Or to put it in other words, with reference to the conflict between the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Moscow Patriarchate, “Kyrill’s mobilization of a trans- and multi-national *Russian World* consolidated through the Moscow Patriarchate serves as a sober reminder that in practice, global Orthodoxy has two competing ‘ecumenical patriarchates’ in Constantinople and Moscow.”¹¹⁷

Commenting on the close and supposed indissoluble ties between all these parts and components of the notorious “Russian World” and highlighting their implications for the 2014 Donbas war and the annexation of Crimea (as well as for the current Russian invasion of Ukraine, I would add), Deacon Brandon Gallaher explains that following this “ethnophyletist ideology,” the division “of Russia from Ukraine is quite unnatural (hence the present spiritual and political crisis of the Russian Federation and the Moscow Patriarchate given its clash with Ukraine).” And he concludes, by criticizing the 2016 Havana Joint Declaration between Patriarch Kyrill and Pope Francis, that “the break between the two nations, the Joint Declaration claims, is not due to any

114 Courban, “Les nations sacralisées des terres saintes.”

115 Hovorun, *Political Orthodoxies*, 183.

116 Gallaher, “The Pure Signifier of Power,” 191–2.

117 Denysenko, “Fractured Orthodoxy in Ukraine and Politics,” 65.

external Russian aggression but fratricidal ‘hostility in Ukraine’ (§26: nothing is said about the annexation of Crimea in 2014 or the proxy war in Donbass in Eastern Ukraine).”¹¹⁸

Furthermore, and in light of the recent aggression and tragic developments, the place and role of the city of Kyiv and Ukraine in general in this theopolitical image is of crucial importance if we want to understand the ethnocultural character of the ideology of the “Russian World” but also recent events related to the Russian invasion of and war in Ukraine. Deacon Nicholas Denysenko remarks as follows:

Kyrill [...] identifies the city of Kyiv and contemporary Ukraine as key agents on the *Russian World* strategy, equal to Moscow in the propagation of his *Russian World*. Kyrill refers to Kyiv as the “mother of Rus’ cities” [...] that is now poised to become “one of the most important political and public centers of the Russian World.” The role of Kyiv and Ukraine is to vivify the ideal of ecumenical Orthodoxy by contributing to the development of Rus’ civilization. Kyrill clearly establishes the active agency of Kyiv and Ukraine in building the *Russian World* as opposed to being “locked in its nationalist cell.” Kyrill envisions Ukraine’s role by presenting a contradistinction between embracing all people through a *Russian World* and choosing isolation in nationalism through Orthodox ecclesiological vocabulary, as Ukraine is to “preserve Holy Orthodoxy and manifest in its life its all-peoples or ecumenical character – to be a home for many people.”¹¹⁹

Thus, according to the 2016 Havana Joint Declaration, the “Russian world” is regarded as an exemplary, holistic and providential Christian civilization that has experienced an “unprecedented renewal of Christian faith” after a long period under the communist atheist regime (§14). The Orthodox heritage and experience of the “first millennium of Christianity” (§4) ascribes to the Russian world a unique position of uninterrupted Christian witness in our modern world, which is characterized by the bold secularization of Western Europe. To the degree that Russia remains the last genuine Orthodox Christian civilization, it is a sort of God-inspired imperative to fight terrorism (§11), to protect Christian victims of violence in the Middle East and North Africa (§§8–11), and to support and cultivate peace, bring justice, and do everything one can to avoid a “new world war” (§11).¹²⁰

The “Russian world” ideology appears then to be a form of civilizational nationalism with a clearly Messianic character that includes a full-scale

118 Gallaher, “The Pure Signifier of Power,” 193.

119 Denysenko, “Fractured Orthodoxy in Ukraine and Politics,” 44–5.

120 Gallaher, “The Pure Signifier of Power,” 192.

critique of human rights as well as active collaboration with the far-right.¹²¹ In accordance with this, only Russia and its Church can claim to be the guardian of the traditional Christian identity of the Christian East as well as of Europe, and only it can lead a confused West back to its senses with its teaching of the “Russian world.” That is why many in the Moscow Patriarchate see the West “as corrupt and having fallen away from the truths of its own original Christian identity. This corruption, some in the Moscow Patriarchate contend, can be seen in Western attacks on traditional Christianity and morality through its pervasive secularist and liberal humanist agenda,” promoting feminism, gender theory, homosexual rights in gay parades, globalization, and Christianophobia.¹²²

Over and against the West and those Orthodox who have fallen into schism and error (such as Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and other local Orthodox churches that support him) stands the Moscow Patriarchate, along with Vladimir Putin, as the true defenders of Orthodox teaching, which they view in terms of traditional morality, a rigorist and inflexible understanding of tradition, and veneration of Holy Russia.¹²³

It is hard not to see in all these actions and talks the influence and reasoning of the Russian philosopher and ideologist Alexander Dugin who serves as personal advisor of President Putin. Over against the failure of the three dominant political theories of the 20th century, i.e., capitalism, communism, and fascism, Dugin suggests inventing a fourth theory rooted in traditional spiritualities in order to face the future in a victorious way. So, according to this Russian thinker who is very close to Putin’s system of power, one has to guard against Western postmodernity, by force of arms, to preserve unconditionally the geopolitical sovereignty of the Eurasian continental powers: Russia, China, Iran, India, guarantors of the freedom of the people of the world. The very core of this Eurasian ideal is none other than *Russkii Mir*. Moscow is therefore, in Dugin’s view, the pivot of this continental fellowship/collectivity. Against this morbid West and all those who support it stands the Third Rome, a fortress of inflexible tradition, that of the Holy Russia and its people, guardian of an Orthodox truth that will determine “the salvation of every man,” according to the homily of Patriarch Kyrill at the cathedral church of Christ the Savior, in the Kremlin on Sunday 6 March 2022.¹²⁴

121 Gallaher, “The Pure Signifier of Power,” 191; Kristina Stoeckl, *The Russian Orthodox Church and Human Rights* (Oxford/New York: Routledge, 2014).

122 Gallaher, “The Pure Signifier of Power,” 173–4.

123 See “Declaration.”

124 Courban, “Les nations sacralisées des terres saintes.”

The war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in the name of the Orthodox tradition during the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine did not remain theologically unaddressed. The barbarian acts justified theologically by Patriarch Kyrill (in his sermon of March 6, 2022, the Sunday of Forgiveness, the last Sunday before the beginning of the Great Lent in the Orthodox calendar) on the basis of the “Russian World” teaching (both the Patriarch and President Putin routinely justify the invasion of Ukraine on the basis of bringing it back into the fold of the “Russian world”), the Anti-Western rhetoric, and the appealing to the “metaphysical meaning of the war,” provoked strong reactions and emotion both among the Orthodox and Christians of other traditions, as well as religious and secular people. Far from condemning Russian aggression against Ukraine, the Russian Orthodox Church constantly repeats Kremlin propaganda about the invasion of Ukraine as a “special military operation” aimed at “de-nazistification,” and the protection of the break-away Donbas region of Ukraine against Ukrainian aggression and Western ideas, such as gay rights. All these concerns led a group of pioneering Eastern Orthodox Christian scholars around the world to unite with one voice in a sound “Declaration on the ‘Russian World’ (*Russkii mir*) Teaching” that denounces the religious ideology driving Vladimir Putin’s invasion and repudiating the Russian Patriarch’s support of the war in Ukraine. As noted in a relevant press release, over against this ideology, Orthodox scholars uphold the original teachings of Jesus in the New Testament and the writings of the church fathers. Among other things, the “Declaration” affirms:

That the church should not subject itself to the state or become an agent of the state for the promotion of geopolitical goals dictated by personal ambition or the assertion of superiority of one group over another, such as Russians over Ukrainians.

That love is the core of the Christian message and that engaging in war is the ultimate failure of Jesus’ commandment of love.

That Christians are called to be peacemakers, not warmongers, and to stand up for justice and to condemn injustice.

The “Declaration” of the Orthodox theologians did not fail to call to mind that “the principle of the ethnic organization of the Church was condemned at the Council of Constantinople in 1872” and that “the false teaching of ethno-phyletism is the basis for the ‘Russian world’ ideology.” It also notes that “if we hold such false principles as valid, then the Orthodox Church ceases to be the Church of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Apostles, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, the Ecumenical Councils, and the Fathers of the Church.”

To date (6 April 2022), the “Declaration” has had over 130,000 views on different websites and social media; it has been published into 19 languages (English, Russian, Ukrainian, Greek, French, Italian, Romanian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Georgian, Arabic, Dutch, German, Finnish, Croatian, Estonian, Hungarian, Japanese, Polish), and has been signed by more than 1,300 individuals (bishops, priests, theologians, scholars, and ordinary faithful; the number of signatories rises every day) from all over the world (Russia itself included), from the north and the south, from the East and the West, from Europe and the Americas. Drawing on elements and schemata from two historic ecclesial texts, the “Synodikon of Orthodoxy” (843 AD), and the “Barmen Declaration” (1934), the “Declaration” of Orthodox theologians was prompt to express “universal Christian values” and has been signed not only by Orthodox but also by Christians of other traditions as the latter recognized it contained universal Christian truths.¹²⁵

Perhaps the most severe and radical critique of the “Russian World” comes from an Orthodox public intellectual from Lebanon, a place where traditionally – but especially since the Syrian war – the politico-religious influence of Russia has been strongly felt. It is not merely a condemnation but rather a warning against and in-depth analysis of the risks encountered by the prevalence of this ideology:

There is clearly a kind of messianism attested in this discourse on the “Russian World” and Russianness. Such an impulse has been running throughout the whole of Christian history for two thousand years. To realize the eschatological hope here below by means of a political project is not a new utopia. This hope is no longer that of the coming kingdom, that of the end of time. The kingdom is already here, realized in advance by the State of the Good, that of a sacred nation from a holy land. In such a view, there is no room for transcendence. Everything is immanence. How much blood has been spilled out in the name of the State of Good by a chosen people since biblical times. [...] In the East and in the West, this utopia has never ceased to agitate minds. It is expressed in several forms, but its main characteristic is a homogenization of the chosen group to which every individual is subjected. The ideology of the Russian World is at the heart of Dugin’s Fourth Political Theory. Basically, behind all these considerations, we find the good old communist utopia of Marxism-Leninism that has not yet been eliminated from Russia. The vision of Dugin, Putin and Patriarch Kyrill is a Soviet communism with a thin veneer of purely formal Byzantine Orthodoxy, with no substance other than will and power politics.¹²⁶

125 The full English original text of the “Declaration” can be found on these websites: <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2022/03/13/a-declaration-on-the-russian-world-russkii-mir-teaching/#more-10842/> and <https://www.polymerwsvolos.org/2022/03/13/a-declaration-on-the-russian-world-russkii-mir-teaching/> (accessed 27 March 2022).

126 Courban, “Les nations sacralisées des terres saintes.”

Here and Now or Immanence and Christian Delocalization

Having described in some detail certain trends tending toward various versions of ethnotheology, one can clearly see that anti-Westernism is regarded as the common denominator and an implied or subconscious perception that truth is fully realized within the confines of history and culture, a tendency to consider culture, history, and even the state (the “Christian” one) as the locus (*topos*) of the realization of truth and authenticity. In other words, there is a peculiar sense of immanence, a “sacred” and “theoptic” but at the same time intra-historic perspective that goes so far as to identify truth and authenticity with specific given historical forms, with cultures or civilizations labeled “Holy,” “Christian” or indeed “Orthodox,” such as Byzantium, Romiosyne, Holy Russia, the medieval Christian kingdom of Serbia, etc. This peculiar sense of immanence leaves no room for the eschatological outlook and expectation, for the utopian character (from the Greek *οὐτοπία, οὐ-τόπος, utopia*, no land, no locus) of Christian preaching about the kingdom of God. In other words, it makes no room for the anticipation and vision of another world, for the dialectics between the present and the future – the “already” and the “not yet,” the lasting city and the city to come – nor to the ultimately migratory character of Christian existence,¹²⁷ or to the reality of the “in part” and “in a mirror, dimly” which defines our present experience (cf. 1 Cor 13:9–12).

Trapped in this peculiar, secularized eschatology, we remain virtually unaware of the radical changes that the broader New Testament perspective has introduced, such as the overcoming of exclusivity, radical “delocalization,” and a radical cancellation of geographical borders – ideas that come into direct conflict with the identification of truth with a particular land, a particular historical form, or a particular state and people. In this perspective, there is no place for theories about a “chosen people” or a “promised land” – there is no room, in other words, for any “sacred” geography or topography, for any kind of idolization of religion and nation, for a paganism of the land or the homeland, for “God-bearing” people, or for the various forms of collective conceit, such as nationalism, whether it be secular or ecclesiastical, ethnic or cultural.

The most reliable historical and theological/liturgical references¹²⁸ inform us that the concept of “holy places” only started in the time of Constantine and

127 Cf. Heb 13:14: “For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.”

128 Bernard Flusin, “Religious Life, Christians and the Mundane – Monasticism,” in the volume: Cécile Morrisson (ed.), *Le Monde byzantin*, vol 1: *L’Empire romain d’Orient, 330–641* (Paris: PUF, 2004), 228, which also includes a rich bibliography; Gregory of Nyssa, *Letter 2: On Pilgrimages to Jerusalem*, PG 46, 1009C, 1012D, 1015C–1016A. (English translation by

that it was unknown and foreign to early Christianity. Given that, we can easily imagine what a tragic misunderstanding of the Christian faith and the spiritual life resulted from this association – or even worse, identification – with a land, an empire, with a governmental and historical form, with a special culture and civilization. From this perspective, this identification forms a peculiar cultural theology or ethnotheology.

Historical Orthodoxy's connection with a particular place and culture, or with a particular nation, appears to be the most serious – but unfortunately not the only – obstacle in Orthodoxy's attempt to adapt to the new conditions of globalization that so frightens the Orthodox. It is worth mentioning here the analysis provided by the French professor Olivier Roy,¹²⁹ a specialist in political Islam and religious phenomena. According to Roy, with globalization – with satellite TV, the internet and virtual networks – religions that are overly connected or identified with a particular place or culture, such as Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, have greater difficulty adapting. Conversely, religious traditions that are noted for their mobility, their disconnection from any particular culture and from being entrapped by narrow geographical limits, such as Evangelical Protestantism and Salafi Islam, move with greater ease and have greater “success” in the “free” religious market. The implications here are obvious and alarming, especially for the Orthodox and for those who insist on identifying religion with ethno-cultural identity.

In Place of a Conclusion

The above remarks make me think that the time has come to pose some painful questions about our ecclesial self-awareness. For example, if we believe that the church images and prepares the coming Kingdom of God, a new world of love, justice, reconciliation, and communion with God and fellow human beings, then we should accept that all people potentially belong to the church: Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, men and women, thus overcoming all kinds of divisions (race, sex, religion, culture, social class, hierarchy and office) in

William Moore and Henry Austin Wilson, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd series, vol. 5, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1892], 42–3.); Father Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, trans. by Asheleigh E. Moorehouse (Crestwood NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 116; idem, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 20.

129 See Olivier Roy, *Sainte Ignorance: Le Temps de la Religion sans Culture* (Paris: Seuil, 2008); English edition: *Holy Ignorance. When Religion and Culture Part Ways*, trans. Ros Schwartz (London: Hurst & Company, 2010).

Christ, to recall St. Paul's relevant quotations (Gal 3:27–28; Col 3:10–11). If we consider the church to be a spiritual *genos*, a spiritual homeland, with its truth lying beyond and above the earthly nations and earthly homelands, then for Christians there is only one homeland, the spiritual homeland of every person longing for God, according to Gregory of Nazianzus.¹³⁰ In critical and extremely difficult moments (e.g., Turkish occupation), the Orthodox Church in the Balkans and the East emptied itself in a *kenotic* mood, deviated from its main mission and undertook the role of saving a *genos*/an ethnos, its language, existence, and political representation. But it is a completely different reality today in which the (secular) state and the wider historical context by no means resemble the centuries of the Ottoman rule.

In the context of a multinational, pluralistic, postmodern society, Orthodoxy seems to be exhausting the theological and spiritual richness of its patristic and eucharistic tradition in a rhetoric of "identities," and in an outdated religious phyletism and tribalism that goes in the opposite direction of the ethos and practice inspired by the Gospel. The theocratic dreams of some lay and especially Orthodox monastics as well as the insistence of many Orthodox countries to understand Orthodoxy as merely a part of their ethnocultural identity and heritage undermines any serious attempt by Orthodoxy to finally meet the challenges posed by the modern world, thus condemning it to traditionalism, fundamentalism, social conservatism, and anachronism.

But theocracy, ethnotheology, and neo-nationalism, which are nothing more than secularized forms of eschatology, constitute the permanent historical temptation of Orthodoxy and cannot by any means continue to be the political proposal of the Orthodox Church in the 21st century. It is time to close the parenthesis that began in 1453 with the fall of Constantinople and for the Church to return to its fundamental mission, which is the witness to the Gospel and the transformation of the world and humanity. To the thirst of today's persons for life, the church can and must respond with its own proposal of life, with its own "words of eternal life" (Jn 6:68), and not by constantly invoking its contribution to the historical battles of the nation. That is why the adoption of an ecumenical ecclesial discourse, free from constant references to the nation and the forms of the Constantine era, is not merely a demand for authenticity and fidelity to the Orthodox tradition; it is at the same time an absolutely necessary and urgent prerequisite for our Church to enter the century we live in and not find refuge in bygone eras.

130 Gregory of Nazianzus, *Against the Arians, and Concerning Himself* (Oration 33), PG 36, col. 229; idem, *Oration 24*, PG 35, col. 1188; idem, *Panegyric on His Brother St. Caesarius* (Oration 7), PG 35, col. 785.