

Erfurter Vorträge  
zur Kulturgeschichte  
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Faith, Economy, and Politics:  
Religious Tourism  
in Contemporary Greece



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# **Faith, Economy, and Politics:**

## **Religious Tourism in Contemporary Greece**

Efstathios Kessareas

### **1. Introduction**

Christian Churches have their own values, among which salvation holds the primary position.<sup>1</sup> This does not mean that the religious system of values is not influenced by secular ideologies and vice versa. Churches are not isolated islands within the social world. On the contrary, not only do they interact with various domains of the latter, but they also develop investing and other financial activities, which bestow on them considerable economic power and political influence. Tensions or even conflicts arise when these activities are seen as impediments to the spiritual mission of the church. Religious intellectuals (e.g., theologians, clerics) undertake the task of making the necessary ideological adaptations; for instance, they dress up these secular activities as religious ones or at least they present them as being in line with the core values of the church. This is not to say that religious actors deliberately deceive themselves and others in order to serve their own professional goals and the interests of the institutional church. As Pierre Bourdieu has emphatically pointed out, it is the objective and mental structure of

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<sup>1</sup> Max Weber has masterfully outlined the different types of salvation and their consequences for practical behavior in the world; see Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978, pp. 526ff. Pierre Bourdieu also demonstrated the link between symbolic ideas ('goods of salvation') and material interests; see Pierre Bourdieu, "Genesis and Structure of the Religious Field", *Comparative Social Research* 13 (1991) 1–44.

the religious field itself that (re)produces such attitudes as deeply embedded dispositions.<sup>2</sup>

The present paper explores these theoretical issues from the vantage point of religious tourism. As the latter combines the sacred and the secular, we can observe the strategies by which religious actors attempt to retain the primacy of the holy when they use methods and practices that are associated with the secular realm. Of course, the entanglement of religion and economy is not a new phenomenon. There is vast scholarship on the interactions among religion, economy, and politics.<sup>3</sup> In modern individualist societies, however, economy functions without the need for metaphysical ideals or moral justifications, as it serves exclusively this-worldly, utilitarian purposes.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, and somewhat in contradiction, “economy has, in certain respects, become the religion of the 21st century”.<sup>5</sup> But this is a much earlier phenomenon. We can, for instance, recall Émile Durkheim’s observations about the power of the industrial market and the “apotheosis of well-being” that resulted in a state of existence, in which “the doctrine of the most ruthless and swift progress has become an article of faith”.<sup>6</sup> Or we may recall Max Weber’s famous description of the “iron cage”, in which people are trapped by serving the logic of modern capitalism that is forced

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<sup>2</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, “The Economy of Symbolic Goods”, in idem, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998, pp. 92–123.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Tuomas Martikainen and François Gauthier (eds.), *Religion in the Neoliberal Age: Political Economy and Modes of Governance*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2013; François Gauthier and Tuomas Martikainen (eds.), *Religion in Consumer Society: Brands, Consumers and Markets*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2013; François Gauthier, Tuomas Martikainen, and Linda Woodhead, “Acknowledging a Global Shift: A Primer for Thinking about Religion in Consumer Societies”, *Implicit Religion* 16/3 (2013) 261–276; Rachel M. McCleary and Robert J. Barro, “Religion and Economy”, *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 20/2 (2006) 49–72; Rachel M. McCleary, “Salvation, Damnation, and Economic Incentives”, *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 22/1 (2007) 49–74; Jean-Paul Willaime, “Introduction: Religion and Economy in a Global World”, *Social Compass* 59/2 (2012) 141–145.

<sup>4</sup> See Louis Dumont, *From Mandeville to Marx: The Genesis and Triumph of Economic Ideology*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

<sup>5</sup> Willaime, “Introduction”, pp. 143–144.

<sup>6</sup> Émile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, London and New York: Routledge, 2005, pp. 216, 218.

upon them like a machine.<sup>7</sup> This situation makes the justification of financial and management practices of vital importance to religious organizations in order to retain an identity distinct from that of secular enterprises, and more importantly from the material spirit that drives the latter. To that aim, religious actors articulate a coherent public discourse that aims to reduce the contradiction between the financial activities of the institutional church and its moral teachings.

For the exploration of this issue, I shall use the Orthodox Church of Greece as a case study. The latter retains a ‘traditional’ image for various reasons, among them its strong adherence to traditional beliefs, its rich ritual practices, the otherworldly orientation of its spirituality, the adoration of the Byzantine era by religious actors, its self-understanding as the ‘ark’ of the nation, and its privileged relationship with the state. Such features, especially when they are ideologized as constitutive of an Orthodox ‘essence’, increase the degree of difficulty in the development of a constructive relationship with the secular world on the part of the Orthodox Church, because they are at odds with basic tenets of modernity such as church-state separation, civil society, multiculturalism, reflexivity, and immanence.<sup>8</sup> This by no means implies that the Orthodox Church is incompatible with the context of market economy and liberal democracy. Research has shown that Orthodox Churches develop considerable economic activity and that Orthodox beliefs are not *a priori* an impediment to entrepreneurial spirit.<sup>9</sup> As we will demonstrate in this paper, the Orthodox Church of Greece is rather active in the area of religious tourism, employing secular methods and practices with great

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<sup>7</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, London and New York: Routledge, 2005, pp. 123–124.

<sup>8</sup> Vasilios Makrides has systematically addressed this issue in his work. See, for instance, Vasilios N. Makrides, “Orthodox Christianity, Modernity and Postmodernity: Overview, Analysis and Assessment”, *Religion, State & Society* 40/3-4 (2012) 248–285; idem, “Orthodoxe Kirchen im öffentlichen Raum: Hintergrund, Probleme, Perspektiven”, *Ökumenische Rundschau* 62/3 (2013) 350–369.

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, Vasilios N. Makrides, “Orthodox Christianity and Economic Development: A Critical Overview”, *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 185/1 (2019) 23–43; Victor Roudometof, “The Economic Activities of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus”, *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 185/1 (2019) 107–124.

effectiveness.<sup>10</sup> Of course, not everyone welcomes this situation. For instance, Orthodox hardliners reject such an attitude as a submission of Orthodoxy to the dominant values of market economy that adulterates its core spiritual identity. Church officials attempt to allay such fears and anxieties by clothing their ‘modernist’ activities in the guise of religious vocabulary. At the same time, they ‘refresh’ traditional values by linking them to popular modern concepts. In this way, their public discourse can appeal not only to liberal religious actors but also to broader secular audiences.

A few remarks should be made concerning the selection of material and my methodological approach. I examined official statements, reports, press releases, conference speeches, papers, interviews, and other primary sources that were produced by the Special Synodical Committee of Pilgrimage Tours (Religious Tourism) (henceforth, the Committee) of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece between 2006 and 2021.<sup>11</sup> In order to trace ideological changes over the course of years, I also examined indicative primary sources after 1974, namely during the so-called *Metapolitefsi* period.<sup>12</sup> Methodologically, I adopted a multi-dimensional discourse analysis: first, I examined the content of each text, exploring common values and themes. Here, I paid particular attention to the fundamental categories of thought,<sup>13</sup> as well as to the symbolic vocabulary and framing strategies employed by religious agents as they disseminate ideas that best serve their aims.<sup>14</sup> Then, I associated these ideas with the institutional position of the agents

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<sup>10</sup> Seraïdari has also investigated the issue of religious tourism in Greece; see Katerina Seraïdari, “La valeur économique des lieux de culte grecs. Du pèlerinage au tourisme alternatif”, *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 185/1 (2019) 87–106. Seraïdari makes important observations, on which I further elaborate based on my own analysis of primary source material.

<sup>11</sup> These primary sources are available on the official website of the Synodical Committee for Pilgrimage Tours: <http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/tourism.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> The word means ‘regime change’ and refers to the period after the fall of the military dictatorship in 1974. There is no consensus about the exact end of the *Metapolitefsi*. For a recent assessment, see Manos Avgeridis, Efi Gazi, and Kostis Kornetis (eds.), *Μεταπολίτευση: Η Ελλάδα στο μεταίχμιο δύο αιώνων*, Athens: Themelio, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> See Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, New York: The Free Press, 1995, pp. 8–18.

<sup>14</sup> See Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment”, *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000) 611–639.

and with the broader historical conditions within which they act.<sup>15</sup> To support my main points, I shall extensively quote illustrative excerpts from primary sources.

The main body of the paper consists of four parts. In the first part, I explore the reasons behind the establishment of a Synodical Committee for religious tourism, also presenting its structure and activities. In the second part, I analyze conceptual schemes through which religious actors understand their involvement in religious tourism. We shall see that church officials employ not only religious language but also modern secular concepts from the immediate political context in order to legitimize their engagement in religious tourism. This shows that religion, rather than being a closed system of ideas and values, interacts with secular ideologies. In the third part, I demonstrate that, on the one hand, church officials deny or at least downgrade the economic dimension of their activity by dressing it up in the language of sacred duty. But, on the other hand, they do highlight the economic benefits of church's involvement in religious tourism. I shall explain how they attempt to overcome this apparent contradiction. In the fourth part, I make the argument that apart for the reinforcement of faith and the economic gains from religious tourism, the official church pursues a political objective, although this is not always explicitly stated. In conclusion, I restate my main points and discuss the limitations of what I term 'conservative modernization' policy of the church.

## **2. Contextualizing the Church's Involvement in Religious Tourism: 'Conservative Modernization'**

Greece has numerous sacred sites that attract pilgrims from all over the world. This makes religious tourism a very profitable business for all parties involved, be they the state, the church, private entrepreneurs or local communities. However, only in late 2001 did the church form a Special Synodical Committee for

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<sup>15</sup> See John B. Thompson, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.



religious tourism—“in order to bring out the religious, historical, and cultural treasure” of the country, as it was stated in the relevant decision of the Holy Synod.<sup>16</sup> Of course, it does not follow that before this date religious tourism was *terra incognita* for the numerous churches and monasteries of Greece. However, the formation of a Committee at the highest administrative level of the church signifies an important shift towards its greater involvement in this domain of economic activity. What are the main reasons behind this development?

One answer to the question lies in the socio-political and ecclesiastical context of that time. Modernization was the dominant ideology and the state’s financial policy during the years of the Costas Simitis’ premiership (1996–2004).<sup>17</sup> Structural economic reforms and large public infrastructure projects were implemented for the achievement of two core national aims: the admittance of the country to the Eurozone and the successful organization of the 2004 Olympic Games. Upper and middle socio-economic strata became strong advocates of this policy not only because of their pro-European mentality, but also because they sought economic rewards from such a development. But the ideology of modernization also gripped larger segments of society with the promise that the benefits of economic growth would spread to society as a whole. The ideas of ‘reform’ and ‘progress’ were heavily endowed with positive value and the Eurozone was promoted in public discourse as synonymous with financial benefits (e.g., job creation), political stability, and national security. The church—the primary institutional bearer of tradition in the country and historically associated with conservative politics—became the target of criticism, for ‘tradition’ was perceived as an obstacle to the European prospect of the country. The governmental decision to exclude religious affiliation from national identity

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<sup>16</sup> Quoted by Archbishop Ieronymos, “Χαιρετισμός Μακαριωτάτου Αρχιεπισκόπου Αθηνών και Πάσης Ελλάδος κ.κ. Ιερωνύμου στην Επιστημονική Ημερίδα της Τρίτης Δεκεμβρίου 2013”, December 3, 2013, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/imerida\\_03122013\\_arch.pdf](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/imerida_03122013_arch.pdf) (accessed on December 28, 2021).

<sup>17</sup> Simitis was elected in place of Andreas Papandreou when the latter resigned as Prime Minister due to health problems. As the new head of the PASOK party (Panhellenic Socialist Movement), Simitis won the general elections of 1996 and 2000.

cards in 2000 sparked a public controversy, which acquired the character of an ideological struggle between the forces of ‘tradition’ and ‘progress’. Intellectuals on both sides played a crucial role in the construction and dissemination of this ideological polarization, concealing the interests of each institution and the social forces that supported each side.<sup>18</sup>

Church officials could not ignore the demand for modernization at the time, not least because it had become the main national narrative that attracted the imagination of large parts of society. However, they could not accept any downgrading of ‘tradition’, because that would negatively affect the church’s established position of power. The election of Christodoulos as Archbishop of Athens and All Greece in 1998 was the church’s response to this situation. Christodoulos was a hierarch well known for his ultra-conservative positions on a variety of issues, for instance, on morality, church-state relations, and foreign policy. However, his charismatic personality and ability to deal with mass media attracted not only the church’s traditional clientele but also broader audiences, particularly the so-called ‘losers’ of the structural economic reforms and of globalization, who found in him a bearer of the political expression of their needs. As a result, Christodoulos became very popular, challenging the influence of the political parties. From the very beginning, he set the strengthening of the church’s influence in society and the dissemination of traditional values as the goals of his archbishopric, but also the modernization of the church’s administration, so that it would be able to respond to the great challenges of the new era.<sup>19</sup> In fact,

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<sup>18</sup> For further elaboration on this, see Efstathios Kessareas, *Εκκλησία, ιδεολογία και πολιτική στην Ελλάδα της Μεταπολίτευσης. Κοινωνιολογική προσέγγιση*, Athens: Papazisis, 2022.

<sup>19</sup> For instance, he urged “the return of all people to our traditional roots; ‘Christ and Greece’”, as well as “a spirit of renewal and modernization” within the church administration; see Archbishop Christodoulos, “Εισαγωγική ομιλία ενώπιον της Ιεράς Συνόδου”, October 6, 1998, available at [https://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/archbishop/christodoulos.asp?id=33&what\\_main=1&what\\_sub=3&lang=gr&archbishop\\_heading=%C5%EA%EA%EB%E7%F3%DF%E1](https://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/archbishop/christodoulos.asp?id=33&what_main=1&what_sub=3&lang=gr&archbishop_heading=%C5%EA%EA%EB%E7%F3%DF%E1) (accessed on December 26, 2021). He expressed the same views in his Enthronement Speech; see Archbishop Christodoulos, “Εισβατήριος λόγος”, May 9, 1998, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/archbishop/christodoulos.asp?id=12&what\\_main=1&what\\_sub=3&lang=gr&archbishop\\_heading=%C5%EA%EA%EB%E7%F3%DF%E1](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/archbishop/christodoulos.asp?id=12&what_main=1&what_sub=3&lang=gr&archbishop_heading=%C5%EA%EA%EB%E7%F3%DF%E1) (accessed on December 26, 2021).

Christodoulos combined conservative values with liberal economic and management practices, producing in the end an ideological hybrid, which I shall term ‘conservative modernization’: on ethical and social issues and on church-state relations, the church continued to keep a rather conservative stance, whereas on issues of economy, communication and technology it had no problem to introduce modern methods and practices.<sup>20</sup> Overall, as a response to the dominant modernization ideology of that period that downgraded the importance of the church, Christodoulos counter-promoted a version of modernization that would enable the church to secure its prominent place in society and in the state apparatus, and at the same time claim a role in the new European and global environment. It is within this broad context that the church opened in Brussels in 1998 the Representative Office of the Church of Greece to the European Union and formed many new Special Synodical Committees, such as those of Women’s Issues, Divine and Secular Dispensation and Ecology, Human Rights, Bioethics, Cultural Identity, and Religious Tourism, which is our interest here. In short, the church attempted to respond to the new challenges of the modern era (bioethics, human rights, etc.) and to actively participate in the environment of the European Union, from which it could gain a lot (e.g., funding opportunities). In the words of the then Archbishop Christodoulos:

We look forward to being close to the decision-making centers that interest us and at the same time to take advantage of European financial and social programs of the utmost importance, which will make our Church a stable and permanent factor of great social contribution to social cohesion.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Makrides uses the term “expressive interventionism” to describe the church’s active involvement in all aspects of public life during the tenure of Christodoulos; see Vasilios N. Makrides, “Scandals, Secret Agents and Corruption: The Orthodox Church of Greece during the 2005 Crisis – Its Relation to the State and Modernization”, in Victor Roudometof and Vasilios N. Makrides (eds.) *Orthodox Christianity in 21st Century Greece: The Role of Religion in Culture, Ethnicity and Politics*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2010, pp. 61–87.

<sup>21</sup> Archbishop Christodoulos “Εισαγωγική ομιλία ενώπιον της Ιεράς Συνόδου”.

But at the same time the formation of these Committees covered a pressing need for new career positions for the church's expanding staff. To understand the importance of this factor, it is important to pay close attention to structural changes that happened within the ecclesiastical field after 1974. More precisely, the number of well-educated priests who belong to the first salary group, on the basis that they hold university degrees, greatly increased: from 6 percent in 1971 and 9.35 percent in 1976 to 36.27 percent in 2010. Also of great significance is the increase of the number of the unmarried clergy, which almost doubled: from 8.83 percent in 1976 to 15.81 percent in 2010.<sup>22</sup> This category includes the influential stratum of archimandrites, the so-called "career clerics",<sup>23</sup> who aim at becoming bishops. My argument is that the numerous Committees function as a kind of 'safety valve', relieving the pressure produced by a strict hierarchical structure that offers limited high career positions. Archimandrites can devote themselves to these professional positions, establish public connections and, consequently, increase their chances of future election as bishops. These developments were in complete consonance with broader social changes of that period, such as the appearance of new, middle social strata characterized by high levels of education as a result of the broadening access to the educational system after 1974.

Of course, another significant factor for the formation of the Committee for Religious Tourism was the spectacular growth of the Greek tourism industry.<sup>24</sup> The church could get a share of the profits by promoting its own kind of tourism, but this could not happen effectively without adopting the logic and practices that characterize the field of tourism (e.g., economic calculation, investments,

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<sup>22</sup> I have drawn the data for the statistical analysis from the official record book of the church entitled 'Δίπτυχα της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος'. For further analysis, see my book Kessareas, *Εκκλησία, ιδεολογία και πολιτική στην Ελλάδα της Μεταπολίτευσης*.

<sup>23</sup> Stavros Zoumboulakis, "The Orthodox Church in Greece Today", in Anna Triandafyllidou, Ruby Gropas, and Hara Kouki (eds.) *The Greek Crisis and European Modernity*, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. 132–151, here 140.

<sup>24</sup> Relevant data are available at <https://www.worlddata.info/europe/greece/tourism.php> (accessed on January 20, 2022).

management). This becomes clear when looking at the internal structure and overall activities of the Committee, which consists of three hierarchs and eight laypersons. The latter must have “special knowledge and experience” on issues associated with the field of religious tourism, as it is stated in the Operating Regulation of the Committee (article 2).<sup>25</sup> In an era of secular expertise, the church takes full advantage of the special knowledge of secular actors (e.g., economists, lawyers, constitutional experts) in order to fulfil its objectives. The key positions of this Committee, namely that of the President (a hierarch) and the Secretary (an archimandrite), remain in the hands of the clergy. The role of the Secretary is extremely important—perhaps even more than that of the President—for he has extended responsibilities and duties, such as to organize the Committee, promote its work, and represent it before other organizations (see article 3). The steps that have been taken towards the development of religious tourism are most apparent when examining the situation in earlier decades. For instance, in 1978 the Secretary of the Synodical Committee for Divine Worship and Pastoral Work, Archimandrite Trivizas, made a number of proposals, such as the formation of a Church Office specialized in religious tourism, the publication of informative guidebooks for tourists, and the education of the priests.<sup>26</sup> What the above reveals is that the field of religious tourism still lacked central organization and professionalization. Despite initiatives taken by metropolises, the overall situation did not change much in the next years. It is worth mentioning that, in 1987, a theologian regrettably pointed out the lack of an organized plan for the

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<sup>25</sup> See “Κανονισμός αριθμ. 281/2015 ‘Περί συστάσεως και λειτουργίας του Συνοδικού Γραφείου Προσκυνηματικών Περιηγήσεων της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος’”, February 8, 2016, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/kanonismos\\_leitourgias.pdf](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/kanonismos_leitourgias.pdf) (accessed on December 12, 2021).

<sup>26</sup> See Timotheos Trivizas, “Προτάσεις για μία καθολική θεώρησης του Ποιμαντικού Έργου της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος έναντι του Τουρισμού”, June 1978, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/iounios78\\_trivizas.html](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/iounios78_trivizas.html) (accessed on January 1, 2022).

development of religious tourism, characterizing even the publication of a complete guidebook for all the sacred sites in Greece as a “wishful desire”.<sup>27</sup>

Today, the situation is quite different. The Committee organizes, promotes, and develops all forms of religious tourism “for the benefit and spiritual upbuilding” of the pilgrims, as is declared in the first article of the mission statement of the Committee.<sup>28</sup> To that aim, it undertakes a range of activities, developing close relationships with several public and private stakeholders who are involved in the field of religious tourism and of tourism in general. To mention some illustrative examples: it collaborates closely with the Greek Ministry of Tourism, for instance, by organizing common activities that aim at “increasing the tourist demand for pilgrimage tourism” from the country's most important tourist markets, as it is stated in the Protocol of Collaboration signed in 2013,<sup>29</sup> namely at a time when the country suffered a severe financial crisis. It organizes Panhellenic conferences on religious tourism<sup>30</sup> and, more importantly, participates under the umbrella of the Greek National Tourism Organization in international tourism exhibitions, as well as in European and international

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<sup>27</sup> Alexandros Stavropoulos “Θεραπευτικός Τουρισμός”, *Efimerios* 13 (1987) 272–273.

<sup>28</sup> See “Κανονισμός αριθμ. 281/2015”, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> See *Πρωτόκολλο Συνεργασίας στον Τομέα του Προσκυνηματικού Τουρισμού μεταξύ της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος και του Υπουργείου Τουρισμού*, January 15, 2013, pp. 1–4, here 2, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/mnimonio\\_paideias.pdf](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/mnimonio_paideias.pdf) (accessed on December 20, 2021).

<sup>30</sup> So far it has organized four conferences: the first in Zakynthos in 2009, the second in Pieria in 2016, the third in Pyrgos in 2018, and the fourth in Arta in 2019. See “Α΄ Πανελλήνιο Συνέδριο με θέμα ‘Τα Επτάνησα ως Πανορθόδοξοι Προσκυνηματικοί Προορισμοί’”, November 14–15, 2009, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/tourism\\_2009.htm](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/tourism_2009.htm) (accessed on December 15, 2021); “Β΄ Πανελλήνιο Συνέδριο Προσκυνηματικών Περιηγήσεων ‘Οι Προσκυνηματικές Περιηγήσεις ως μοχλός τουριστικής ανάπτυξης. Η περίπτωση της Πιερίας’”, November 25–26, 2016, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/tourism\\_2016.htm](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/tourism_2016.htm) (accessed on December 15, 2021); “Γ΄ Πανελλήνιο Συνέδριο Προσκυνηματικών Περιηγήσεων ‘Από την Αρχαία Ολυμπία στη Σύγχρονη Ηλεία’”, November 2–4, 2018, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/tourism\\_2018.htm](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/tourism_2018.htm) (accessed on December 15, 2021); “Δ΄ Πανελλήνιο Συνέδριο Προσκυνηματικών Περιηγήσεων με θέμα ‘Ηπειρος – προσέγγιση στα Θρησκευτικά Μνημεία και τον Πολιτισμό της. Νέοι δρόμοι στους μοναδικούς Προσκυνηματικούς Προορισμούς της’”, November 8–10, 2019, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/tourism\\_2019.htm](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/tourism_2019.htm) (accessed on December 15, 2021).

conferences like the one in Belgrade, which bore the characteristic title “Religious Tourism and Contemporary Tourism Market”.<sup>31</sup> It cannot go unmentioned that the Committee develops international collaborations with states<sup>32</sup> and with other Christian Churches, many of which have long experience in the field of religious tourism, like the Roman Catholic Church,<sup>33</sup> and the Orthodox Church of Russia.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, it participates in influential fora of tourism,<sup>35</sup> collaborates with travel

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<sup>31</sup> See “Συμμετοχή της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος σε Διεθνές Συνέδριο Τουρισμού στο Βελιγράδι”, June 7–9, 2017, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt\\_09062017\\_1.html](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt_09062017_1.html) (accessed on December 20, 2021). Two other conferences in which the Committee participated are those in Cyprus in 2006 and in Toulouse in 2013, see “1ο Διεθνές Συνέδριο Θρησκευτικού Τουρισμού”, October 19–21, 2006, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/tourism\\_2006.htm](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/tourism_2006.htm) (accessed on December 20, 2021); “Πανευρωπαϊκό Συνέδριο ‘Crossroads of Europe – Σταυροδρόμια της Ευρώπης’”, May 15–18, 2013, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt\\_19052013.html](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt_19052013.html) (accessed on December 20, 2021).

<sup>32</sup> For instance, with Jordan and Israel, see “Συνάντηση Συνεργασίας στα Γραφεία της Ιεράς Συνόδου των Μελών της Διοικούσης Επιτροπής του Συνοδικού Γραφείου Προσκυνηματικών Περιηγήσεων της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος με εκπροσώπους του Ιορδανικού Οργανισμού Τουρισμού”, September 30, 2019, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt\\_30092019\\_1.html](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt_30092019_1.html) (accessed on December 15, 2021); “Συνεργασία του Συνοδικού Γραφείου Προσκυνηματικών Περιηγήσεων με το Τουριστικό Τμήμα της Πρεσβείας του Ισραήλ”, April 17, 2019, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt\\_17042019\\_1.html](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt_17042019_1.html) (accessed on December 15, 2021); “Συνεργασία της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος με το Υπουργείο Τουρισμού του Ισραήλ”, March 3, 2017, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt\\_03032017\\_1.html](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt_03032017_1.html) (accessed on December 15, 2021).

<sup>33</sup> See “Συνεργασία της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος με το Βατικανό για τα θέματα των Προσκυνηματικών Περιηγήσεων”, February 21, 2014, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt\\_21022014.html](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt_21022014.html) (accessed on December 10, 2021).

<sup>34</sup> See “Σύμφωνο Συνεργασίας μεταξύ της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος και της Εκκλησίας της Ρωσίας για θέματα Προσκυνηματικών Περιηγήσεων”, October 2012, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/symfono\\_gr.pdf](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/symfono_gr.pdf) (accessed on December 12, 2021). It has also signed Protocols of Collaboration with the Orthodox Churches of Cyprus and Serbia, see “Υπογραφή ‘Συμφώνου Συνεργασίας’ της Εκκλησίας της Κύπρου και της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος για θέματα ανάπτυξης και προβολής των Προσκυνηματικών Περιηγήσεων”, November 3, 2014, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt\\_03112014.html](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt_03112014.html) (accessed on December 12, 2021); “Σύμφωνο Συνεργασίας μεταξύ της Εκκλησίας της Σερβίας και της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος για θέματα Θρησκευτικού Τουρισμού”, March 1, 2014, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt\\_01032014.html](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt_01032014.html) (accessed on December 12, 2021).

<sup>35</sup> For instance, in the Greek-Russian Forum of Tourism, in which “high-level executives of the Russian Government and about 150 tourism entrepreneurs from the two countries participated”, as the author of the press release felt the need to highlight, see “Η συμμετοχή του Συνοδικού Γραφείου Προσκυνηματικών Περιηγήσεων της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος στο Α΄ Ελληνο-Ρωσικό Τουριστικό Forum”, May 12, 2016, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt\\_12052016\\_1.html](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt_12052016_1.html) (accessed on December 15, 2021).

agencies and with private entrepreneurs of tourism marketing,<sup>36</sup> and establishes connections with government officials and with other members of the Greek parliament.<sup>37</sup> It promotes its sacred spaces via the Internet,<sup>38</sup> publishes multi-language informative guidebooks (e.g., “The Footsteps of Saint Paul”),<sup>39</sup> and generally promotes its activities through domestic and international mass media.<sup>40</sup> Also of significance is that it actively searches for funding opportunities through the so-called ESPA Programs of Structural EU Funds<sup>41</sup> and other EU funded Programs for the fields of tourism and culture<sup>42</sup> or through programs for the tourist development of the Greek regions.<sup>43</sup> Access to funding is crucial to finance its

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<sup>36</sup> See “Συνάντηση συνεργασίας με τον επιχειρηματία-ιδιοκτήτη της MIC GROUP κ. Νότη Μαρτάκη”, January 21, 2021, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt\\_21012021.pdf](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt_21012021.pdf) (accessed on December 15, 2021).

<sup>37</sup> It is worth mentioning that members of the Committee participated in the Permanent Committee of the Regions of the Greek Parliament, see “Συμμετοχή του Συνοδικού Γραφείου Προσκυν. Περιηγήσεων στην Ειδική Μόνιμη Επιτροπή Περιφερειών της Βουλής των Ελλήνων”, April 27, 2017, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt\\_27042017\\_1.html](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt_27042017_1.html) (accessed on December 20, 2021).

<sup>38</sup> Apart from its own website, it collaborates with the website [monastiria.gr](http://www.monastiria.gr), which is also a collaborator of the Greek National Tourism Organization, see “Προβολή των μοναστηριών της Ελλάδος στην ιστοσελίδα [monastiria.gr](http://www.monastiria.gr)”, October 15, 2014, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt\\_15102014.html](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt_15102014.html) (accessed on December 20, 2021).

<sup>39</sup> See Spiridon Katramados, “Η δημιουργία και οι δραστηριότητες του Συνοδικού Γραφείου Προσκυνηματικών Περιηγήσεων της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος”, November 2009, available at <http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/a2.pdf> (accessed on November 17, 2021).

<sup>40</sup> For instance, the members of the Committee gave interviews to Greece’s state-owned broadcaster ERT, to *Global Media-CNN* and to *McCabe Pilgrimages*, see “Προσκυνηματικός Τουρισμός π. Σπυρίδων Κατραμάδος”, April 2018, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TsJFv1TP1pI> (accessed on November 12, 2021); “Συμμετοχή της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος στη Διεθνή Έκθεση Τουρισμού WTM-London 2014”, November 3–6, 2014, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt\\_05112014.html](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt_05112014.html) (accessed on December 15, 2021).

<sup>41</sup> See “Συνεργασία της Κοινής Επιτροπής Προωθήσεως των Προσκυνηματικών Περιηγήσεων της Εκκλησίας στην Ελλάδα με την ηγεσία του Υπουργείου Τουρισμού”, February 18, 2020, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt\\_18022020.html](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt_18022020.html) (accessed on December 20, 2021).

<sup>42</sup> See “Ενημέρωση του Υπουργού Τουρισμού κ. Χάρη Θεοχάρη από τον Γραμματέα του Συνοδικού Γραφείου Προσκυνηματικών Περιηγήσεων της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος”, July 29, 2019, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt\\_29072019\\_1.html](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt_29072019_1.html) (accessed on December 5, 2021).

<sup>43</sup> See “Έναρξη συνεργασίας της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος με την περιφέρεια Αττικής σε θέματα Προσκυνηματικών Περιηγήσεων”, November 15, 2017, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt\\_15112017\\_1.html](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt_15112017_1.html) (accessed on December 5, 2021).



projects in religious tourism. A characteristic example is the Interstate European Program ‘INTERREG V-A Greece-Cyprus 2014–2020’ aiming at the preservation and promotion of the religious and cultural heritage of Greece and Cyprus (e.g., through the digitization of sacred spaces), a project of total budget 2.200.000€, as it stated in the press release.<sup>44</sup> Overall, therefore, we observe a significant trend towards professionalization, institutionalization and bureaucratization of the field.

### **3. Conceptual Schemes: From Moral Danger to Green Development**

The restoration of democracy in 1974 and the accession of the country to the European Economic Community (today’s European Union) in 1981 provided fertile ground for the development of tourism. However, there were people who were not satisfied with the huge increase in tourists to the country, fearing that the foreign tourists—bearers of other religious and cultural traditions—would adulterate the Orthodox identity of Greek society. It is indicative that in 1978, namely at a time when Greece, under the leadership of Konstantinos Karamanlis, had already begun official negotiations to join the European Economic Community,<sup>45</sup> the Secretary of the Synodical Committee for Divine Worship and Pastoral Work, Archimandrite Trivizas, felt the need to stress that the church should not deny tourism.<sup>46</sup> The fact that he chose to begin his proposals

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<sup>44</sup> See “Συμμετοχή της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος, για πρώτη φορά, σε Ευρωπαϊκό Διακρατικό Πρόγραμμα – Συνάντηση Συνεργασίας των Αδελφών Εκκλησιών Ελλάδος και Κύπρου”, November 14, 2017, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt\\_14112017\\_1.html](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt_14112017_1.html) (accessed on November 16, 2021). See also “Συμμετοχή του Συνοδικού Γραφείου στην εναρκτήρια συνάντηση στη Κύπρο για το διακρατικό Ευρωπαϊκό Πρόγραμμα ‘INTERREG V-A ΕΛΛΑΔΑ–ΚΥΠΡΟΣ 2014–2020’”, February 21, 2019, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt\\_21022019\\_1.html](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dt_21022019_1.html) (accessed on December 20, 2021).

<sup>45</sup> The Treaty of Accession was signed one year later, in 1979. Greece was officially admitted in 1981, when the PASOK party ruled.

<sup>46</sup> Trivizas, “Προτάσεις για μία καθολική θεώρησις”.

concerning the relation between the church and tourism with this statement shows that there must have been opposition or at least negative attitudes towards tourism within the religious sphere. This hypothesis is supported by two other speeches made most probably at the same event by the president of the Crime Prevention Organization and a former president of the Greek National Tourism Organization.<sup>47</sup> Although “beneficial tourism” that brings economic growth and communication was recognized and accepted, the focus of these speeches remained on the condemnation of the “bad” form of tourism, which cultivates “moral corruption and decay”, “spreads atheism and blunts our morals”, harms the “traditions, mores and customs of our people”, “our spiritual heritage”, and “national physiognomy”. In short, this kind of tourism was perceived as a moral danger to the Orthodox foundations of Greek society. We could say that this skeptical attitude towards tourism was a natural outcome of an ethnoreligious ideology that highlighted the extraordinary character of an allegedly homogeneous Greek Orthodox civilization that must be protected from foreign influences.

This defensive way of thinking, although it never disappeared, became outdated and difficult to maintain in public discourse, since it did not correspond to reality. In the 1980’s, Greece had already been transformed into a “great hotel” for the tourists, as a theologian of that time observed.<sup>48</sup> The question was not anymore whether the church should deny tourism but how it would effectively promote its values to foreign visitors. The concept of “hospitality” was ideal for this purpose, for, on the one hand, it justified the welcome of tourists and, on the other hand, it cultivated sentiments of national pride and exceptionality. This

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<sup>47</sup> Both speeches are available at the official website of the Committee under the section “Church and Tourism, Athens June 1978” ([http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/tourism\\_2006.htm](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/tourism_2006.htm)), see Georgios Daskalakis, “Προτάσεις για την θεώρηση του Τουρισμού εξ απόψεως Πολιτείας”, June 1978, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/iounios78\\_daskalakis.html](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/iounios78_daskalakis.html) (accessed on January 1, 2022); Georgios Nikodotis, “Προτάσεις για την θεώρηση του Τουρισμού εξ απόψεως εγκληματικότητας”, June 1978, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/iounios78\\_nikodotis.html](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/iounios78_nikodotis.html) (accessed on January 1, 2022).

<sup>48</sup> Alexandros Stavropoulos, “Φιλοξενία”, *Efimerios*, 1/15 August, 15–16 (1984) 184–185.

result was achieved because hospitality was depicted both as a diachronic “way of life” of the Greek people inherited from their ancient ancestors and also as a mode of existence so much grounded in Christianity that it has become the “essence of the Eastern Christian way of life”.<sup>49</sup> The ancient Greek god of hospitality, Zeus Xenios, Abraham’s hospitality, Jesus’ words about welcoming the strangers, and the attitude of Christian saints, were all deployed to this end. The same essentialist perception of hospitality can be found in contemporary religious discourse: “Since ancient times, the concept of hospitality has nested in the psychic condition of the Greek [people]”, stressed Metropolitan of Lefkas and Ithaca Theophilos in his speech on religious tourism.<sup>50</sup> However, today the concept of hospitality is also connected to popular modern concepts such as “tolerance”, “alterity” and “otherness”,<sup>51</sup> as in this typical passage:

The pilgrimage tours of the Christian Church give the opportunity, on the one hand, to the host to show his love, respect and tolerance towards the alterity of the Other, whoever he is, and on the other hand, to the guest to learn to communicate with his fellow people and with God, respecting the religious faith, the mores and customs of the holy land that he visits, enjoying the hospitality of Christ.<sup>52</sup>

Another concept that has been promoted since the 1980’s is that of “therapeutic tourism”.<sup>53</sup> It is commonly argued that a visit to sacred places provides spiritual

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>50</sup> Theophilos, Metropolitan of Lefkas and Ithaca, “Η ίδρυση και οι στόχοι του Συνοδικού Γραφείου Προσκυνηματικών Περιηγήσεων της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος”, December 3, 2013, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/imerida\\_03122013\\_lefkados.pdf](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/imerida_03122013_lefkados.pdf) (accessed on November 17, 2021).

<sup>51</sup> See, for instance, Chrysostomos, Metropolitan of Dodoni, “Χαιρετισμός του Σεβ. Μητροπολίτου Δωδώνης κ.κ. Χρυσοστόμου”, November 25, 2016 available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/katerini\\_dodonis.pdf](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/katerini_dodonis.pdf) (accessed on November 17, 2021).

<sup>52</sup> Chrysostomos, Metropolitan of Dodoni, “Χαιρετισμός του Σεβ. Μητροπολίτου Δωδώνης κ.κ. Χρυσοστόμου στη PHILOXENIA 2013”, November 22–24, 2013, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dodonis\\_xeretismos.pdf](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dodonis_xeretismos.pdf) (accessed on November 17, 2021), pp. 1–2.

<sup>53</sup> See Alexandros Stavropoulos, “Θεραπευτικός Τουρισμός”, *Efimerios*, 1/15 September, 13 (1987) 272–273; idem, “Ταξιδεύοντας σε δρόμους ποιμαντικής διακονίας”, *Efimerios*, 1/15

treatment, from which the body benefits too. This is also because, the argument continues, one finds in such places elders (the so-called γέροντες, *gerontes*), who provide spiritual guidance.<sup>54</sup> The fact that a university project of that time aimed at establishing a “spiritual geography” comprised of such sacred places and of spiritual elders is particularly revealing.<sup>55</sup> The usage of medical vocabulary disconnects this type of tourism from the profane realm of business, as we shall see in more detail in the next section. No doubt, the issue of sickness and healing has a special place in Orthodox theology.<sup>56</sup> For instance, the church is often depicted as a spiritual hospital. But the emphasis on spiritual treatment in the 1980s was part of a general trend towards Orthodox spirituality, which resulted in a revival of monasteries and in the great popularity of spiritual elders, who were considered to be mediators between the mundane and otherworldly spheres of life. It is not accidental that the proponents of the so-called “Neo-Orthodox” current of thought at that time searched the monastic, and particularly mystical, tradition of Orthodoxy for an alternative third road of social organization beyond Soviet communism and Western capitalism, both seen as stemming from individualism and utilitarianism.<sup>57</sup>

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September, 13 (1991) 272–273; idem, “Τόποι, άνθρωποι, βιβλία...σε δρόμους ποιμαντικής διακονίας”, *Efimerios*, 1/15 April, 6 (1988) 112–114.

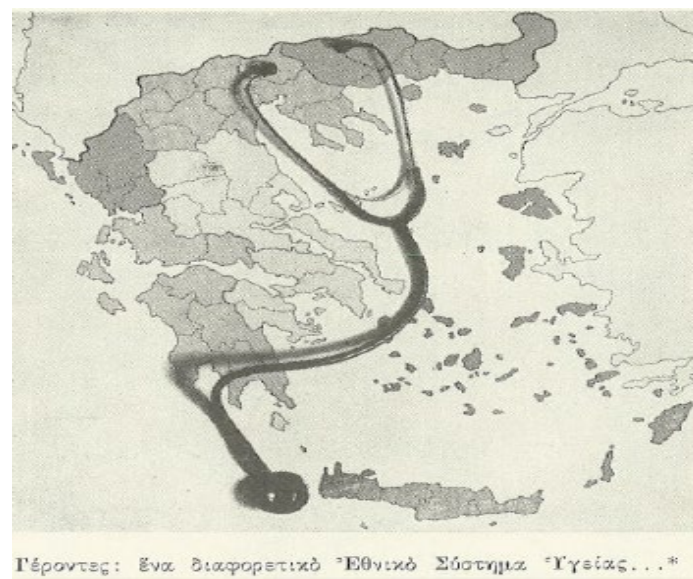
<sup>54</sup> On the so-called phenomenon of elderism, see Efstathios Kessareas, “Geistliche Väter und ihre Idolisierung im orthodoxen Christentum”, *Religion & Gesellschaft in Ost und West* 50/11 (2022) 3–5.

<sup>55</sup> Alexandros Stavropoulos, “Πανεπιστήμιο και Ζωή. Έρευνα Πνευματικής Γεωγραφίας”, *Efimerios*, 1 March, 5 (1985) 56–58.

<sup>56</sup> See Jean-Claude Larchet, *The Theology of Illness*, Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002.

<sup>57</sup> For more details concerning “Neo-Orthodoxy”, see Kessareas, *Εκκλησία, ιδεολογία και πολιτική*; idem, “Orthodox Theological Currents in Modern Greece after 1974: Ongoing Tensions between Reform and Conservatism”, *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 33/2 (2015) 241–268; Vasilios N. Makrides, “Byzantium in Contemporary Greece: The Neo-Orthodox Current of Ideas”, in David Ricks and Paul Magdalino (eds.) *Byzantium and the Modern Greek Identity*, London: Ashgate Publishing, 1998, pp. 141–153; Sotiris Mitralaxis, “A Luscious Anarchism in All of This’: Revisiting the 1980s and 1990s Greek ‘Neo-Orthodox’ Current of Ideas”, *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 37 /2 (2019) 295–326.

The image below with the caption “*Spiritual Elders [gerontes]: A different National Healthcare System*” from the ecclesiastical journal *Efimerios*<sup>58</sup> illustrates how religious intellectuals incorporated the public agenda of their immediate context (i.e., the creation of a National Healthcare System) into their promotion of the activity of “therapeutic tourism”. The implication is that the *gerontes* constitute a valuable *national* asset in maintaining the health of the people; although they withdraw from the world, giving the impression that they act for their individual salvation, they are actually connected with each other and with the whole nation, forming a *system* of mystical but always active sources of spiritual health. The headset of the stethoscope lies on Mount Athos,<sup>59</sup> the center of Orthodox monasticism, where the Athonite elders as spiritual doctors hear the national heart, diagnose the disease, and offer the appropriate spiritual remedy:



The concept of “therapeutic tourism” continues to remain popular within the ecclesiastical field. The only difference is that today religious actors make also

<sup>58</sup> See Stavropoulos “Πανεπιστήμιο και Ζωή”, 57. As it is stated there, the image was taken from the cover page of the book by Eirini Anaplioti-Vazaiou, *Παγκόσμιες αποδοχές στην Υγεία και εθνικά συστήματα*. Athens, 1983.

<sup>59</sup> I am grateful to Vasilios N. Makrides for having drawn my attention to this important detail, when I presented an earlier version of this paper at the University of Erfurt on 29 January, 2022, in the context of the “Graduate Colloquium on the Cultural History of Orthodox Christianity”.

references to the postmodern era. For instance, Archimandrite Katramados, who is the Secretary of the Committee, has stated that religious tourism is an “essential therapeutic intervention into the psychical devaluation of the contemporary postmodern human being”.<sup>60</sup> This is because, as he puts it, sacred spaces “provide a proposal of quality of life [that] opens the horizon of eternity [...] particularly during these days of confusion, and financial and moral crisis”.<sup>61</sup>

Church officials, therefore, marry religious ideas with popular modern concepts in their attempt to justify the church’s involvement in religious tourism. The way they use the concept of globalization is particularly revealing. Briefly, the process of globalization is seen as part of God’s plan for the establishment of his kingdom on earth, which would be a global community of peace and cooperation. Religious tourism is believed to make a significant contribution towards this aim. It is worth quoting at length the following passage, which clearly shows the fusion of religious and secular ideas:

It is a fact that the great mobility of modernity contributes to the conciliation between people and works for the transition of humankind to the stage of supranationality, in the age of Ecumenism and Globalization. In other words, the contemporary great mobility and communication refer to the Plan of God for the creation of a global community. The problems of all peoples now transcend the [national] borders and oblige them to international and global cooperation [...] Seen in this light, the mobility and communication of peoples is like a coal lit by God, setting in motion the locomotive of humankind in order to lead humans into the global society. Of course, this community will not be the Kingdom of Heaven. The ‘new Jerusalem’ is certainly not a reality of this world. The global community will be the Kingdom of God on earth for the establishment of which Christians have been praying since the time of our Lord Jesus. The global community is the great period of human history of which the Apocalypse speaks [...] We are certainly on the brink of the global community despite the blasts that the devil makes on the bridges of the historical course of humankind in relation to the common coexistence of people on earth. This global effort will be completed with the establishment of the global community of people [...] God’s pre-

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<sup>60</sup> Katramados, “Η δημιουργία και οι δραστηριότητες του Συνοδικού Γραφείου”, p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> “Συμμετοχή της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος σε Διεθνές Συνέδριο Τουρισμού στο Βελιγράδι”.

eternal plan for the global society of humans will surely come true. Our Church as the Body of Christ, the Holy Scripture, our Faith, our traditions and the many and varied ‘signs of the times’ assure us of this great future reality. In this great reality, healthy tourism, the visits of our fellow human beings and the pilgrimage tours...cannot but strengthen the eternal plan of the Pentecost of God for his people.<sup>62</sup>

“Green development” is another concept that has gained popularity in the last decades, not least because of the global climate crisis. It has been also a central political motto mainly—but not exclusively—of the PASOK political party. Church officials also employ this idea and value in their discourses in order to highlight the natural environment of the monasteries, organic products, and the “ecological way of living” of the monks in general.<sup>63</sup> The following excerpt from a speech of Metropolitan Ignatios of Dimitrias is illustrative:

Our pilgrimage destinations function today as treatment spaces [θεραπευτήρια] of Art and Culture [...] The formulation of an ecological consciousness [...] the promotion of the so-called ‘green development’, about which we talk so much in our days, can well be promoted through the Pilgrimages Tours [...] [through] the cultivation of every kind of organic products in a traditional way that safeguards their quality and proposes the genuine and the authentic in the agricultural products in contrast to the abundance of low quality even of genetically-modified products that massively flood the Greek market.<sup>64</sup>

The great interest of the Synod in the monastic organic products can be also seen in a questionnaire sent to metropolises in order to collect detailed information from them about the sacred places and tourist activities that take place in their

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<sup>62</sup> Spiridon Katramados “Τουρισμός και Χριστιανική Μαρτυρία”, *Ekklisia: Episimon Deltion tis Ekklisias tis Ellados* 8 (2008) 616–622.

<sup>63</sup> See Timotheos, Metropolitan of Thessaliotis and Fanariofersala, “Θρησκευτικός Τουρισμός – Προσκυνηματικές Περιηγήσεις”, November 5–6, 2021, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/thessal\\_pindou.pdf](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/thessal_pindou.pdf) (accessed on December 12, 2021).

<sup>64</sup> Ignatios, Metropolitan of Dimitrias, “Σκοποί και προοπτικές της λειτουργίας του Συνοδικού Γραφείου Προσκυνηματικών περιηγήσεων”, November 16, 2010, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/ignatios\\_16112010.pdf](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/ignatios_16112010.pdf) (accessed on November 17, 2021), pp. 9–11.

area of jurisdiction. It is noteworthy that one section in this questionnaire concerns certified organic monastic products.<sup>65</sup>

To sum up: in their attempt to demonstrate the positive value of religious tourism, religious actors employ not only religious concepts (e.g., “ark of salvation”,<sup>66</sup> “sacredness”,<sup>67</sup> “Christian hospitality”,<sup>68</sup> “spiritual therapy”<sup>69</sup>), but also popular modes of expression, such as “flexibility”, “sustainability”,<sup>70</sup> “psychophysical well-being”,<sup>71</sup> “progress”,<sup>72</sup> “way of life”,<sup>73</sup> “alterity of the Other”,<sup>74</sup> “virtual tours” and “green development”.<sup>75</sup> These examples show that the religious system of values is open to influences from secular ideologies. Church

<sup>65</sup> The questionnaire and the relevant Encyclical are available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/erotimata\\_mones\\_11\\_2014.pdf](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/erotimata_mones_11_2014.pdf); [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/egyklioi.asp?id=1918&what\\_sub=egyklioi](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/egyklioi.asp?id=1918&what_sub=egyklioi); <http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/egyklioi/2615.pdf>.

<sup>66</sup> Vartholomaios Siarlis, “Το Ιερό Προσκύνημα στην Πάτμο. Προβληματισμοί – Προτάσεις”, November 2, 2018, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/c\\_synedrio\\_siarlis.pdf](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/c_synedrio_siarlis.pdf) (accessed on November 16, 2021), p. 17.

<sup>67</sup> See, for instance, Archbishop Ieronymos, “Μήνυμα του Μακαριωτάτου Αρχιεπισκόπου Αθηνών και Πάσης Ελλάδος κ.κ Ιερωνύμου εις Συνέδριον της Περιφέρειας Κεντρικής Μακεδονίας Θεσσαλονίκη”, November 12, 2017, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/archbishop/repository/ieronimos\\_112017.pdf](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/archbishop/repository/ieronimos_112017.pdf) (accessed on November 16, 2021), p. 2.

<sup>68</sup> See, for instance, Chrysostomos, Metropolitan of Dodoni, “Χαιρετισμός”, 4; idem, “Χαιρετισμός... στη PHILOXENIA”, pp. 1, 2.

<sup>69</sup> See, for instance, “Σύμφωνο Συνεργασίας μεταξύ της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος και της Εκκλησίας της Ρωσίας”, 2; *Πρωτόκολλο Συνεργασίας στον Τομέα του Προσκυνηματικού Τουρισμού*, p. 1.

<sup>70</sup> See, for instance, Archbishop Ieronymos, “Μήνυμα του Μακαριωτάτου Αρχιεπισκόπου Αθηνών και Πάσης Ελλάδος κ.κ Ιερωνύμου”, May 2021, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/archbishop\\_forum\\_26052021.pdf](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/archbishop_forum_26052021.pdf) (accessed on November 16, 2021), p. 3; Kyrillos, Metropolitan of Rhodes, “Θρησκευτικές Περιηγήσεις στα Δωδεκάνησα. Προβληματισμοί και Προοπτικές”, 2018, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/c\\_synedrio\\_rodou.pdf](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/c_synedrio_rodou.pdf) (accessed on November 5, 2021), p. 6.

<sup>71</sup> See, for instance, *Πρωτόκολλο Συνεργασίας στον Τομέα του Προσκυνηματικού Τουρισμού*, p. 1.

<sup>72</sup> See Georgios Stavros Kourtis, “Πορίσματα Γ΄ Πανελλήνιου Συνεδρίου”, November 4, 2018, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/c\\_synedrio\\_porismata.pdf](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/c_synedrio_porismata.pdf) (accessed on November 11, 2021), p. 2.

<sup>73</sup> See “Συμμετοχή του Συνοδικού Γραφείου Προσκυν. Περιηγήσεων...της Βουλής των Ελλήνων”.

<sup>74</sup> See Chrysostomos, Metropolitan of Dodoni, “Χαιρετισμός”, 4; idem, “Χαιρετισμός... στη PHILOXENIA 2013”, pp. 1, 2.

<sup>75</sup> See Timotheos, Metropolitan of Thessalotis and Fanariofersala, “Θρησκευτικός Τουρισμός”, 5, 6; Ignatios, Metropolitan of Dimitrias, “Σκοποί και προοπτικές της λειτουργίας του Συνοδικού Γραφείου”, p. 10.



executives utilize such ideas and values to fulfil the aims of the institutional church in the field of religious tourism.

#### **4. Setting a Boundary Between the Sacred (Church) and the Profane (Market)**

Religious tourism is a profitable business. If one sets aside the religious setting, the church's economic, management, and promotions practices can hardly be distinguished from those of secular enterprises. What is sociologically interesting is how the church justifies its engagement in this business activity. This task is of crucial importance, for the church is expected to serve God and not money.

A common strategy adopted by religious organizations is the denial of their economic interests through the use of euphemisms, as Bourdieu has pointed out.<sup>76</sup> The renaming of the Committee from *Religious Tourism* into *Pilgrimage Tours* in 2006 is a case in point.<sup>77</sup> The adjective 'religious' is not considered enough to mark the difference between religious tourism and the broader tourism industry, for the former remains a type of the second, and thus it carries market connotations. Why is that a problem? As Bourdieu put it, "the market is the place of calculation or even diabolical ruse, the diabolical transgression of the sacred".<sup>78</sup> But 'Pilgrimage Tours' is a name that detaches church's activity from the 'profane' realm of tourism, transfiguring it into a spiritual, 'sacred' activity. The following examples demonstrate the effort clerics devote to differentiating their activity in religious tourism from tourism industry. "You know, we use the term 'pilgrimage tours' more and not so much the secular word 'religious tourism'", Archimandrite Katramados, the Secretary of the Committee, clarified in an interview.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, Metropolitan Theophilos of Lefkas praised both the church

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<sup>76</sup> See Bourdieu "The Economy of Symbolic Goods".

<sup>77</sup> I have drawn this information from Katramados "Η δημιουργία και οι δραστηριότητες του Συνοδικού Γραφείου", p. 9.

<sup>78</sup> Bourdieu, "The Economy of Symbolic Goods", p. 105.

<sup>79</sup> See Anna Ziggiridou, "Απαντήσεις σε ερωτήματα περί του Θρησκευτικού Τουρισμού από

and the state for using the “more appropriate term” of pilgrimage, stating that “the term [religious] ‘tourism’ should not be confused with the content that has been taken from businesses”.<sup>80</sup> Archbishop Ieronymos further elaborated this point, arguing that the church “safeguards its Holy Monuments, Monasteries and Pilgrimages from so-called ‘Religious Tourism’, which is characterized by a spirit of worldliness”.<sup>81</sup> For the Archbishop, religious tourism is “exclusively driven by the financial and commercial criterion and, since it is devoid of religious faith, it adulterates the religious character of the sacred pilgrimages, downgrading them merely into sights of cultural, and perhaps of religious interest”.<sup>82</sup> For Metropolitan Timotheos “pilgrimage tours lie at the polar opposite of the model of ‘easy’ mass tourism”, because instead of providing “sun and sea” they connect the pilgrim with the “sacred space” and with “our religious heritage and Orthodox tradition”.<sup>83</sup> The same point was also made by the President of the Committee, Metropolitan Chrysostomos, who highlighted the difference between tourism and pilgrimage (“tourism is one thing and pilgrimage is another”), reassuring the faithful that the church proposes a “tourism-pilgrimage that goes far beyond the pleasure and entertainment of the external things of this world”<sup>84</sup> and that the church’s involvement in religious tourism “does not have any relation with the

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τον Πανοσιολογιώτατο Αρχιμ. κ. Σπυρίδωνα Κατραμάδο, Γραμματέα του Συνοδικού Γραφείου της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος”, January 2018, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/apantiseis\\_23042018.pdf](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/apantiseis_23042018.pdf) (accessed on November 4, 2021), p. 9.

<sup>80</sup> Theophilos, Metropolitan of Lefkas, “Η ίδρυση και οι στόχοι του Συνοδικού Γραφείου”, pp. 3, 4.

<sup>81</sup> Archbishop Ieronymos, “Μήνυμα του Μακαριωτάτου...Κεντρικής Μακεδονίας”, p. 2.

<sup>82</sup> Archbishop Ieronymos, “Μήνυμα του Μακαριωτάτου Αρχιεπισκόπου Αθηνών και Πάσης Ελλάδος κ.κ. Ιερωνύμου εις το Β΄ Πανελλήνιο Συνέδριο Προσκυνηματικών Περιηγήσεων”, November 25–26, 2016, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/katerini\\_archiepiskopos.pdf](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/katerini_archiepiskopos.pdf) (accessed on November 16, 2021), p. 3.

<sup>83</sup> Timotheos, Metropolitan of Thessaliotis, “Θρησκευτικός Τουρισμός”, pp. 1–2.

<sup>84</sup> Chrysostomos, Metropolitan of Dodoni, “Χαιρετισμός του Σεβ. Μητροπολίτου Δωδώνης κ.κ. Χρυσοστόμου στη Διάσκεψη για τον Προσκυνηματικό Τουρισμό στο πλαίσιο του αφιερωματικού έτους 2016 ως έτους Ελλάδος-Ρωσίας”, May 20, 2016, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dodonis\\_20052016.pdf](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/dodonis_20052016.pdf) (accessed on November 17, 2021), p. 3.

work of tourism agencies and businesses”.<sup>85</sup> Church executives thus systematically attempt to set a clear boundary between the church and the market, so as to avoid any accusation that they are doing business. Metropolitan Chrysostomos emphatically denies such an accusation: “We have no such intentions; neither do we serve specific business and other interests nor [do we have] any financial benefit”.<sup>86</sup>

In sum, the church officials construct and promote a bipolar opposition between two perceptions of the fundamental category of the person. On the one hand, there are the “tourists” who travel for pleasure and rest. These *individuals* belong to the profane world of “mass tourism”, for they are motivated by a desire to cover human passions and superficial needs created by the contemporary consumerist culture. At the other pole, there are the “pilgrims” who visit sacred spaces for spiritual reasons, for instance, because they want to draw closer to God. As opposed to the tourists who become alienated from themselves as they pursue material pleasures, pilgrims (the argument goes) are *persons*, for they develop a genuine communication with God, the fellow pilgrims and with their self. It will be sufficient to quote two examples. In his interviews and public speeches, Metropolitan Chrysostomos promoted the distinction between “pleasure” (αναψυχή) and “soul” (ψυχή): the tourism industry provides only pleasure, whereas the pilgrimage tours organized by the church help the travelers to reconnect with their soul.<sup>87</sup> Metropolitan Timotheos made the same point emphatically too, as he juxtaposed “touristic trips of recreation and rest, where the hedonistic and consumerist element prevails” against pilgrimage tours, which offer an “inner journey”.<sup>88</sup> It is argued that “traveler-pilgrims” take this journey

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<sup>85</sup> See “Σύμφωνο Συνεργασίας μεταξύ της Εκκλησίας της Σερβίας και της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος”.

<sup>86</sup> See “Συνέντευξη του Σεβ. Μητροπολίτου Δωδώνης κ.κ. Χρυσοστόμου στην εφημερίδα ‘ΕΘΝΙΚΟΣ ΚΗΡΥΞ’ Αμερικής”, May 7, 2018, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/kyrix\\_07052018.html](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/kyrix_07052018.html) (accessed on November 4, 2021).

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. It is worth mentioning that the simultaneous usage of the Greek words “αναψυχή” and “ψυχή” creates a kind of word play.

<sup>88</sup> Timotheos, Metropolitan of Thessaliotis “Θρησκευτικός Τουρισμός”, p. 2.

in order to “search for meaning and find a deep, authentic personal connection with the sacred space”.<sup>89</sup> The emphasis on meaning is an excellent choice to promote the usefulness of religious tourism, since modern people often suffer from existential anxiety, while religion is a provider *par excellence* of an all-encompassing meaning for the world and for the place of people in it.<sup>90</sup> The following statement by an archimandrite is an illustrative example of the promotion of religious tourism in terms of ‘meaning building’:

Religious and pilgrimage tourism [...] will help the contemporary person to realize that, in his necessary and vitally important holidays, the desideratum is to find and not to try to escape his self [...], to find the grace of the saints with the prayers of the monks and with his reconnection with the sacramental life [...] to give meaning [...] to this world [...].<sup>91</sup>

The church’s involvement in religious tourism is inscribed in a language of both religious and national duty. For instance, church officials stress that they feel “great responsibility” to protect the ecclesiastical and cultural heritage of the country: “we have the duty to safeguard the holy and sacred things of our *genos* (γένος)<sup>92</sup> from counterfeits, adulterations, and secularizations”.<sup>93</sup> In such a setting, they depict themselves not as businessmen who “preserve or sell tourism products”, but as “servants” (διάκονοι) of a holy duty: “We are not guardians of museums but ministers of the mystery of the Holy Epiphany.”<sup>94</sup> The opposition

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> For the significant contribution of religion to the endless process of building a meaningful world, see Peter L. Berger *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, New York: Anchor Books, 1967. For the role of religion in the legitimization of established social positions, see Bourdieu “Genesis and Structure of the Religious Field”, p. 16.

<sup>91</sup> Siarlis, “Το Ιερό Προσκύνημα στην Πάτμο”, pp. 14–15.

<sup>92</sup> The ambiguous term of *genos* describes people of common descent and a broader kin group (e.g., Christians), who share the same religious and cultural values beyond linguistic and other differences. The notion in religious discourses can also denote a diachronic ethno-national identity.

<sup>93</sup> Spiridon Katramados, “Εισήγηση Αρχιμ. Σπυρίδωνος Κατραμάδου. Θέμα ‘Απολογισμός δράσεων 2010–2016 του Συνοδικού Γραφείου Προσκυνηματικών Περιηγήσεων της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος””, November 26, 2016, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/katerini\\_katramados.pdf](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/katerini_katramados.pdf) (accessed on November 16, 2021), p. 2.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

that is constructed and promoted can be schematically drawn as shown in the following Table 1:

<b>PROFANE</b>	<b>SACRED</b>
Economy, money	Faith, God
Mass tourism	Religious tourism/Pilgrimage tours
Tourist	Pilgrim
Interests, struggle	Love, personal relations
Pleasure, hedonism, consumerism	Existential meaning, self, psyche
<b>Business: profit</b>	<b>Church: diakonia</b>

Yet, in practice the distinction is not always kept, something that causes annoyance to the clerics:

One cannot hide one's irritation when one realizes that an age-old holy institution of the Church like 'pilgrimage' is perceived only as a 'tourism product', as 'merchandise', as one of the various financial factors that is expected to contribute to the development and prosperity of a land. And of course one is annoyed to see that those who are involved in tourism are unable to distinguish the fundamental difference between 'tourism' and 'pilgrimage'.<sup>95</sup>

The fear is that the introduction of the commercial spirit within the ecclesiastical sphere will destroy the "absolute heterogeneity"<sup>96</sup> between the sacred and the profane in favor of the second realm. This is why religious actors criticize the "package offers", which are advertised as 'pilgrimage', but in reality they are 'excursions'.<sup>97</sup> The "commercialization of faith" and the "lack of theological

<sup>95</sup> Georgios Tsetsis, "Η ειδοποιός διαφορά μεταξύ Προσκυνημάτων και 'Θρησκευτικού Τουρισμού'", November 14, 2009, available at <http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/a4.pdf> (accessed on November 17, 2021), p. 9.

<sup>96</sup> Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p. 36.

<sup>97</sup> Tsetsis, "Η ειδοποιός διαφορά", p. 12.

and ecclesiastical ethos [φρόνημα]” are perceived in religious terms, namely as “temptations” that must be avoided.<sup>98</sup>

It is not by chance that economy is absent from the list of the core aims of the church in religious tourism. These aims are the reinforcement of faith, the promotion of the historical and cultural identity of the country, and the development of an ecological consciousness.<sup>99</sup> As one might expect, the first place is occupied by faith, for it differentiates the church from secular organizations that are active in religious tourism, too. Faith is also closely connected with history and culture, because all together are considered to shape the specific identity of Greece. Ecology is a more modern concept. As we have already shown, religious actors employ such popular concepts in order to support the value of religious tourism and justify their engagement in this activity.

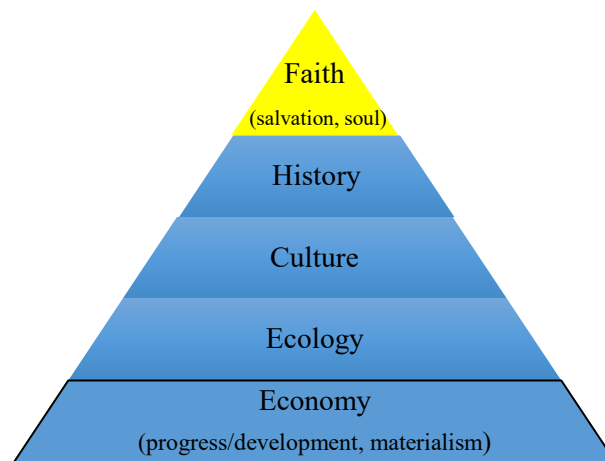
However, one notes a clear contradiction in the public discourse of church executives: on the one hand, they express disdain for the commercial spirit, denying the profit motive or at least downgrading the economic dimension of their activities in religious tourism. On the other hand, they employ economic vocabulary and speak like entrepreneurs, who aim at new or special markets in religious tourism, search for funding opportunities, and participate in large EU-funded projects. Therefore, the Table 1 mentioned above should be corrected as follows:

<b>PROFANE</b>	<b>SACRED</b>
Business, profit	Faith, God
Tourism	Pilgrimage
<b>Church</b>	

<sup>98</sup> Katramados, “Εισήγηση”, p. 5.

<sup>99</sup> See Ziggiridou, “Απαντήσεις σε ερωτήματα”, p. 12; Chrysostomos, Metropolitan of Dodoni, “Χαιρετισμός του Σεβ. Μητροπολίτου Δωδώνης κ.κ. Χρυσοστόμου”, November 2, 2018, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/c\\_synedrio\\_noe\\_dodonis.pdf](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/c_synedrio_noe_dodonis.pdf) (accessed on November 4, 2021), p. 4.

Thus, in fact, the church lies between the sacred and the profane, for it is a religious organization that provides the goods of salvation but at the same time it is an economic enterprise that has significant investment and other financial activities. As Bourdieu succinctly put it, the church has “a sort of double consciousness”,<sup>100</sup> “two truths: economic truth and religious truth, which denies the former”.<sup>101</sup> But in the eyes of church officials there is no contradiction, for they have previously established and accepted the priority of the religious values. Although economy is the dominant category of the modern era, they invert the hierarchy of values placing at top faith:



Having disseminated the belief that their engagement in religious tourism serves sacred purposes (e.g., reinforcement of faith, identity preservation) and therefore that they are not motivated by economic interests (profit), they have no problem in stressing the positive contribution of their activities, not only to the economy of the local communities but also to the national economy in general. As we shall see in the next section, in so doing they also pursue a political aim.

<sup>100</sup> Bourdieu, “The Economy of Symbolic Goods”, p. 113.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 114. According to Bourdieu (ibid., p. 115), the “religious enterprise is an enterprise with an economic dimension which cannot admit to so being and which functions in a sort of permanent negation of its economic dimension”.

## 5. The Church as the Most Important Pillar of the Nation-State

The debt crisis that broke out in Greece in 2009 shattered all domains of social life—the economic, the political, the ideological, and so on. The austerity measures implemented by the Greek administrations had such a negative impact on levels of poverty and inequality that society became polarized between those who accepted austerity policies as a condition for bailout funds that would secure the position of the country in the Eurozone on the one hand, and the supporters of an alternative, national economic policy, even if that could lead to the so-called Grexit, on the other hand. Despite the fact that the church was also affected by the measures, it nevertheless offered crucial support and legitimacy to the political and economic elites, who had every interest in having Greece continue to be a member of the Eurozone, as I have shown elsewhere.<sup>102</sup> It is significant for the specific purposes of this paper to see how church officials justified their engagement in religious tourism within the context of the financial crisis.

Discourses by religious actors on the crucial role of religious tourism in the overcoming of the multifaceted Greek crisis abound. It is sufficient to quote a few indicative examples. Archbishop Ieronymos presented the church's involvement in religious tourism as a fighting stance against the widespread decay of the country, so as to help the latter regain its “Greekness”, the creative “spirit” of the “Greek Race”.<sup>103</sup> For the Secretary of the Committee, Archimandrite Katramados, pilgrimage tours “can, to the extent possible, contribute to the overcoming of the

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<sup>102</sup> See Efstathios Kessareas, “The Orthodox Church of Greece and Civic Activism in the Context of the Financial Crisis”, in Rupert Graf Strachwitz (ed.), *Religious Communities and Civil Society in Europe. Analyses and Perspectives on a Complex Interplay*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019, pp. 61–118. Another case in point concerns the so-called religious fundamentalists. Although they interpreted the austerity measures as a tool for the ‘de-Orthodoxization’ of the country, even these hardliners finally propped up the existing political system, fearing that the Left (their most infernal evil) would come into power, see Efstathios Kessareas, “The Greek Debt Crisis as Theodicy: Religious Fundamentalism and Socio-political Conservatism”, *The Sociological Review* 66/1 (2018) 122–137.

<sup>103</sup> Archbishop Ieronymos, “Μήνυμα του Μακαριωτάτου Αρχιεπισκόπου Αθηνών και Πάσης Ελλάδος κ.κ Ιερωνύμου εις το Γ΄ Πανελλήνιον Συνέδριον Προσκυνηματικών Περιηγήσεων”, November 2, 2018, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/c\\_synedrio\\_noe\\_ieronimos.pdf](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/c_synedrio_noe_ieronimos.pdf) (accessed on November 5, 2021), pp. 4, 5.



financial crisis”.<sup>104</sup> Religious tourism is depicted “as a lever to reinforce the economy and develop the country”, for it contributes to the “extension of the tourism season to twelve months [every year]”.<sup>105</sup> It is worth mentioning that the second Panhellenic conference on religious tourism organized by the church in 2016 was entitled “Pilgrimage Tours as a Lever for Tourism Development”.<sup>106</sup> It is argued that the conferences and other activities of the church in religious tourism are of “national and religious importance”, for they can create “conditions for expanding the sources of economic development” of the country,<sup>107</sup> leading the latter to “progress”.<sup>108</sup> For this reason, the church is positioned “at the forefront of this national joint effort”,<sup>109</sup> depicted as an important “helper” to the state.<sup>110</sup> Besides, it is argued that pilgrimage tours continue to attract tourists during the crisis period, which is vital for a country whose “heavy industry” is only tourism.<sup>111</sup> State officials also promote such positions: for instance, for the General Secretary of Tourism, Anastasios Liaskos, Greece can become “an epicenter on the global map of religious tourism”,<sup>112</sup> for the latter constitutes “a comparative advantage” for the country.<sup>113</sup>

Such public discourse seeks to legitimize the church’s involvement in the field of religious tourism, as we have already mentioned in the previous section. It is true that religious tourism contributes to the economy of a country, something

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<sup>104</sup> See “Συμμετοχή της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος σε Διεθνές Συνέδριο Τουρισμού στο Βελιγράδι”.

<sup>105</sup> See “Συμμετοχή του Συνοδικού Γραφείου...της Βουλής των Ελλήνων”.

<sup>106</sup> See “Β’ Πανελλήνιο Συνέδριο Προσκυνηματικών Περιηγήσεων”.

<sup>107</sup> Kourtis, “Πορίσματα Γ’ Πανελλήνιου Συνεδρίου”, p. 5.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>110</sup> See “Σύμφωνο Συνεργασίας μεταξύ της Εκκλησίας της Σερβίας”. See also Theophilos, Metropolitan of Lefkas, “Η ίδρυση και οι στόχοι του Συνοδικού Γραφείου”, p. 7.

<sup>111</sup> Archbishop Ieronimos, “Χαιρετισμός Μακαριωτάτου...Ημερίδα της Τρίτης Δεκεμβρίου 2013”, p. 1.

<sup>112</sup> Anastasios Liaskos, “Χαιρετισμός Γενικού Γραμματέα Τουρισμού κ. Αναστασίου Λιάσκου στην Επιστημονική Ημερίδα για ‘Το έργο του Συνοδικού Γραφείου Προσκυνηματικών Περιηγήσεων της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος κατά τη 12χρονη λειτουργία του και οι προσεχείς δράσεις του’”, December 3, 2013, available at [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/imerida\\_03122013\\_gramtour.pdf](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/tourism/imerida_03122013_gramtour.pdf) (accessed on November 17, 2021), p. 4.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

that becomes even more important in conditions of severe economic crisis. This is not a matter of wonder. However, I wish to argue that church officials used religious tourism as a legitimizing basis for securing the prominent position and role of the church in the state apparatus. This is why, when they speak about religious tourism, they employ a vocabulary associated with the nation and the state. As is well known, the state is legitimate as long as it provides conditions of economic prosperity and peaceful coexistence to its citizens. The financial crisis severely undermined these conditions. The church took the opportunity to present itself as the necessary institution that provides both valuable social cohesion due to its diachronic national role *and* possibilities for economic development due to its activities in religious tourism. Put another way, the church is promoted as the strongest institutional agent, one that the state *needs* in order to overcome a multifaceted crisis that threatens the foundations of society (economy and politics). Thus, in contrast to those who downgrade the national importance of the church and wish to place it in the area of civil society, church officials adopt a discursive strategy that places the church next to the state, with both being seen as fundamental pillars that sustain Greek society.

Such religious discourses have a typically ‘*megalo-ideatic*’ tone, for instance a strong sense of uniqueness, mission, and attachment to the fatherland. The latter is always seen to exist as inseparable from Orthodox Christianity. Greece becomes the holy center of the world that offers immediate and direct access to the divine realm. According to Archbishop Ieronymos:

Greece in its entirety is a vast temple, a masterpiece museum, a house that provides hospitality, an evocative landscape. In this land, the senses calm down, the spirit comes to life, the heart beats, the soul sees, looks intently, perceives, considers. From Greece, heaven is visible; from Greece, you can see the redemptive presence of God in our world.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Archbishop Ieronymos, “Μήνυμα...εις το Γ’ Πανελλήνιον Συνέδριον Προσκυνηματικών Περιηγήσεων”, p. 4.

Metropolitan Chrysostomos, in an interview in the Greek-American newspaper *The National Herald*, used the military phrase “reserves for the homeland” to highlight the strategic role of the Committee, in which he is president.<sup>115</sup> The Secretary of the Committee, Archimandrite Katramados, underlined that tourists visiting Greece come into contact with the Orthodox faith and way of life, stating that “now is the time for Orthodoxy, now is the time for the Church of Greece” to disseminate its spirit to foreign people.<sup>116</sup> The latter can even convert to or at least become true admirers of Greek Orthodoxy and of Hellenism:

I believe that Greece can become in its entirety a center of missionary life and communion through its touristic domain too. Orthodoxy is the culture of our soul. Pilgrimage tourism [...] can contribute to the overcoming of the financial crisis to the extent possible. It mainly provides to modern people a proposal of life, which is based upon the true values of the Christian spirit: faith, love, solidarity, and hope [...] Those who belong to other Christian denominations [ετερόδοξοι] and religions [αλλόθρησκοι] admire and are moved by what they see in the sacred spaces of our homeland. How many [of them] have become pro-Orthodox and Philhellenes. How many come and come again. Behold our responsibility!<sup>117</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

The Orthodox Church of Greece through its Synodical Committee of Pilgrimage Tours is actively engaged in the field of religious tourism. In so doing, it adopts secular practices and economic vocabulary from the business world (e.g., markets, funding programs and projects, promotional strategies, public relations), which are at odds with the image of a ‘traditional’ church characterized by a mystically imbued sacrality and otherworldly spirituality. To overcome this contradiction and establish legitimacy, the ecclesiastical hierarchy emphatically differentiates religious tourism from the profane tourism industry, depicting the first serving the

<sup>115</sup> See “Συνέντευξη...στην εφημερίδα ‘ΕΘΝΙΚΟΣ ΚΗΡΥΞ’ Αμερικής”.

<sup>116</sup> Katramados, “Τουρισμός και Χριστιανική Μαρτυρία”, p. 620.

<sup>117</sup> Katramados, “Εισήγηση”, p. 8.

spiritual mission of the church. Crucial in this strategy is the use of euphemisms (e.g., ‘pilgrimage tours’ instead of ‘religious tourism’) and the association of economic terms and other modern popular concepts (e.g., green development, psychological well-being) with core religious categories of thought (e.g., salvation, soul).

Having promoted the priority of faith, religious actors believe that the institutional church is immune to the negative effects of the tourism market (e.g., worldliness, commercialization of faith). When reality proves the very opposite, such behaviors are disdained as “temptations”. However, such temptations are by no means exceptions. It is the adopted policy of ‘conservative modernization’ itself that generates such contradictions. Business practices and other methods from the secular world are not neutral ‘tools’, but closely intertwined with pragmatic and individualistic values, which are opposed to the ‘traditional’ ones that the church presents itself to safeguard. Thus, when the church adopts such practices, it opens itself to the values that support these methods. Of course, there is no problem with that. The problem arises when it is hidden behind euphemisms and other language games, which reproduce and deepen the state of misrecognition, to use Bourdieu’s term.<sup>118</sup>

Such an open acknowledgment would pose a risk to the privileged position of the church. But what is of primary concern to the ecclesiastical hierarchy is the perpetuation of the prominent position of the church in the state apparatus and of its role as ‘ark’ of the nation. Religious tourism becomes an ideal means to that end. The implication is that the state can lean on the church to get out of a multifaceted crisis, since the church is a diachronic provider of social cohesion and, due to its activities in religious tourism, a significant contributor to the national economy. Thus, the church is seen not as one among many other organizations that are active in the area of civil society, but as the vital ‘soul’ of the nation-state that can revive its ‘body’, which is traumatized by the financial

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<sup>118</sup> See Bourdieu, “The Economy of Symbolic Goods”.

crisis. But this presupposes that the 'state-body' will respect its beloved 'soul-church'. Without this unity, society itself is considered to be in deadly peril.

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