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Contents

Understanding Secularity in Orthodox Christian Contexts: An Ominous Threat or a Creative Challenge for the Church? [1]

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Abstract:

The study aims to analyse the specific relations between Christianity and secularity (especially in Europe), a key topic of interest and debate for various Christian and non-Christian actors, both in the past and at present, making clear distinctions between historical and current developments within Western Latin and Eastern Orthodox Christianity.

Keywords:

Secularity, Christianity, modernity, Church – state relationship, East, West

Introduction

It is well-known that the issue of secularity (understood in a neutral sense) in its various articulations and manifestations has attracted enormous scholarly attention over the last centuries until today, generating huge quantities of literature from diverse and at times interdisciplinary perspectives. Despite the great diversity of opinions on secularity, certain important conceptual changes have taken place in the last decades that should be succinctly mentioned here. First, linear and

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deterministic secularization theories predicting the unavoidable downfall of religion have largely been abandoned, while greater emphasis has been put on more balanced approaches aimed at capturing both religious and secular dynamics and their multiple interactions; second, the development of secularity on the European continent ("Euro-secularity") has come to be considered as a special case that is not directly applicable to the rest of world, not even to Western cultures beyond Europe (cf. the case of the USA); third, within the current flexible postmodern setting, the peaceful, constructive and productive coexistence of religious and secular options has been officially encouraged and supported, not least by political actors and institutions (*cf.* the related policies within the European Union); fourth, stronger attention is given nowadays to various forms of secularities beyond the West and its traditional normative claims about how to define the "religious" and the "secular", a development that has significantly enhanced the comparative agenda on this topic and revealed the richness of non-Western secularities together with their multiple consequences (From the rich literature on these points, see: Berger 1999; Pollack 2003; Taylor 2007; Joas and Wiegandt 2007; Burchardt and Wohlrab-Sahr and Middell 2015).

Aside from all of this, the specific relations between Christianity and secularity (especially in Europe) have also been a key topic of interest and debate for various Christian and non-Christian actors, both in the past and at present. This is because secularity has often been perceived as a serious threat to the Christian Church and its established status in modern times, either in the form of the secularization process or of ideologically based and religiously inimical secularism, promoted by state or other actors. As a result, this has triggered (in the past, but also today) systematic Christian reactions intended to halt the growing attractiveness and impact of the secular option. However, there have also been Christian actors who have attempted to consider secularity in more constructive ways, namely as a creative challenge for the church and its message today, thus asking for a new approach to this catalytic development. Thus, from the outset, we can observe the enormous variety of Christian positions and stances towards secularity that need closer examination and assessment. In fact,

we are witnessing today a constant negotiation of processes of secularity and religious revival, which is typical of the current more plural, open and flexible situation.

What is however quite important is to keep in mind the fundamental heterogeneity of European secularities by paying enhanced attention to the diverse religious landscape of Europe and making the necessary distinctions between historical and current developments within Western Latin and Eastern Orthodox Christianity. There are significant differences between these traditions with regard to secularity and important long-term consequences for church orientations and strategies, theological discourses and lived religion. The fact, for example, that no Reformation has ever taken place in the Orthodox East accounts for such differences (See Makrides 2004, 318-336), given that this momentous change in Western Europe triggered, even if unintentionally, the rise of the secular alternative, which later had a sweeping impact there. It is thus crucial to look at the different developmental courses of Eastern and Western Christianity across history in relation to secularity; at how West European modes of secularity have impacted Orthodox cultures in Eastern and South Eastern Europe in modern times and how they were adapted and reshaped according to local traditions and conditions; and at the ways Orthodox Christian migrant communities in Western settings have coped with questions of secularity (See Makrides 2015, 59-75).

Secularity in Eastern and Western Christianity: Commonalities and Differences

In order to better capture the broader context of our topic, it is necessary to take a look first at the issue of *world-relatedness* (understood in a neutral sense and not negatively as worldliness, which is equated to secularization) articulated in Eastern and Western Christianity across time; namely, to explore their respective views on the appropriate attitude towards worldly affairs – political, social, cultural, economic or otherwise. Indeed, the Christian Church was forced from the very beginning to formulate a specific attitude towards the world (αἰών, *saeculum*), in which Christian actors had necessarily to live and operate,

since the central Christian belief in and notion of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ implied a very close connection between the divine, the human and the world. In the ancient Graeco-Roman setting, the prevailing related distinction was between the "sacred" and the "profane". This does not correspond exactly to the modern divide between the religious and the secular, which is more tense and polarizing by far. In general terms, the Christian world-relatedness was underscored by continuous tension generated by the dialectic between transcendence and immanence from an eschatological perspective. Christians had to live in this world, yet they were not of this world (John 17, 15-16). However, in the course of Christianity's formal recognition, gradual establishment and legalization in the Roman Empire after the fourth century, divergent attitudes and orientations towards the world started to be articulated in East and West, although in both parts interest in worldly affairs and related engagement remained quite prominent. These approaches varied enough, including, on the one hand, world-affirmation, world-activism and world-control, and on the other hand, world-negation, world-rejection and world-escapism.

In the Orthodox East, the attitude of the church towards worldly affairs was basically highlighted by the specific structuring of church-state relations according to the model of *symphonia* (symphony, harmony) in the East Roman (Byzantine) Empire. Accordingly, care for the worldly affairs was considered to be the primary obligation of the state and political leaders, not of the church and its representatives, who were expected to focus more on divine things. Even so, both realms, the *imperium* and the *sacerdotium*, although distinct, were not differentiated. In other words, they were conceived as being bound inextricably together due to their common divine origin, while their representatives were regarded as God-ordained stewards and curators (6th Novella of Emperor Justinian I in 535). Complementarity and reciprocity between these two realms remained a normative ideal in the Orthodox East, even in modern times. Due to the existence of a strong central imperial structure throughout the long history of Byzantium (330-1453), the church did not feel the need to address worldly issues independently of the state and

develop its own autonomous social agenda. No doubt, it did care for the world and intended to contribute from its own perspective, but it acted always as an auxiliary to the state, which in any event was also supposed to support the church in various ways. Needless to say, the church did not ask for or acquire any political power on its own, a development that was basically impossible under the premises of the *symphonia* model. It becomes obvious that in this particular system of operation the religious and the profane realms were closely intertwined aiming at the thorough transformation of society according to Christian principles.

Because of different socio-historical developments, the above model was not realizable in the Latin West, where another tradition of the church's connection to the world developed, once more underscored by the articulation of specific church-state relations. These were not perceived there in a symphonic way, as in the East, but rather in tenacious tension and duality, especially under the influence of the Augustinian model of the "two cities/states" (*civitates duae*), whose opposition would be overcome only eschatologically. Furthermore, the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 left the Church of Rome without a stable political ally and support. This resulted in major developments that fundamentally shaped its future course. First, the church reaffirmed and strengthened its older tradition (e.g., as evident in the thought and actions of Ambrose, Bishop of Milan) of remaining essentially independent from political power and intervention. Second, the church claimed its own superiority over political power on the grounds of its divine origin and redeeming power. This claim was eloquently manifested in the so-called *Doctrina Gelasiana* concerning the "two swords"/"two powers" of Pope Gelasius I (492-496). Moreover, this document exhibited a clear world-affirming attitude, given that the world was regarded as a domain to be influenced or controlled by the church. Third, in subsequent centuries, the church thus allied itself with the Carolingians and acquired political power for itself, which led to the foundation of the Papal States, a group of territories in central Italy run by the Popes from 754 until 1870. Through further internal restructuring (e.g., the Gregorian Reforms in the 11th century), the church also managed to deal more efficiently and

autonomously with worldly affairs, despite opposition from various contenders, both political and religious ones – the latter fearing thereby an enhanced secularization of the church. All this also explains the somewhat "special position" of Western Europe with regard to the process of the functional differentiation of society against the background of sharp conflicts between the Emperor and the Pope, fueled by the Roman Catholic Church's claims to universal leadership and absolute and exclusive religious authority and truth. Nowhere else has a religious institution asserted claims to truth and loyalty to such an extent, which is why processes of functional differentiation developed so extensively in the specific area of Latin Christianity. All this attests to a specific form of church world-relatedness articulated and established in the West, namely an affirmative immersion of the church in worldly affairs, that was absent in the Orthodox East.

The repercussions of these different degrees of world-relatedness, which should not be confused with modern notions of secularity, can be observed at many levels and on numerous occasions throughout the Middle Ages. To mention but a few examples: In the Orthodox East, more holistic, harmonious and complementary models of relations between church and world predominated. Church and politics were considered to stem from the same divine source, namely God, and, despite their different jurisdictions, had a common goal. Even if there were different sorts of conflicts, this was a model of complementarity, unity, cooperation, unanimity and reciprocity between the church and the world, which left its mark in the Orthodox East throughout the centuries. The ideal was the overcoming of divisions and conflicts and the greater integration of society. The symphonic model in the Orthodox East did not allow differentiation to occur in the first place. There were actors (e.g., clerics and monks), who intended to secure more autonomy for the church and initiated various church-state conflicts (e.g., in the context of the Iconoclastic Controversy, 7th-8th centuries), but this did not lead to any substantial social and functional differentiation in the long run. This characteristic spirit is still evident today in various Orthodox contexts: for

instance, in the discourse of the Russian Orthodox Church on civil and political rights.

In the Latin West, on the contrary, tension, opposition, confrontation and conflict between the church and the outside world clearly predominated, at least as long as this world did not accept the church's supremacy or did not follow the church's principles. In addition, the church did try to control the world and subsequently acquired numerous mundane elements for itself. Various telling examples illustrate these differences between East and West: First, the Investiture Controversy between Popes and German Emperors (11th–12th centuries), of which a comparable episode is altogether absent in the history of Byzantium. The Orthodox Church never had the institutional autonomy of the Western one, as it was always bound to central political authority and remained largely dependent on it. Attempts to distinguish areas of competence between a religious and non-religious sphere were instrumental in paving the way for the institutional differentiation and (binary) distinction between a religious and a worldly realm, which later on acquired a normative dimension in the West European secularization process towards the creation of modern statehood (that is, secularity as a prerequisite for state legitimacy). The later role of the Reformation with its strong world-affirming attitude cannot be neglected in this whole process. Second, theology in the East remained mostly otherworldly and apophatic, putting emphasis on experience, ascetic practices, mysticism, orthopraxy, revelation and the idea of mystery. In contrast, in the West there was progressive rationalization and "scientification" of theology in the context of the church's control of higher institutions of learning, which rendered theology much more worldly. This is evident in attempts to demonstrate the compatibility of Divine Revelation with human reason. Third, Orthodox monasticism retained a strong outerworldly and otherworldly orientation, both geographically and symbolically, while Western monasticism, especially after the foundation of numerous, functionally differentiated orders, acquired a strong worldly presence and influence. After all, many of these orders were used to corroborate papal supremacy in society in trans-regional terms and to enable the global

expansion of Roman Catholicism (e.g., consider the role of the Jesuits). Finally, in sacred paintings we also observe a transition from the otherworldliness of Byzantine icons to more naturalistic motifs and representations in the West from the late Middle Ages onwards, in particular with the introduction of linear perspective, coupled with an emphasis on the creative and innovative contribution of the individual artist. All in all, it can be argued that the Western church's world-relatedness slowly and gradually paved the way for a more radical worldliness as an early secularization, whose signs are already observable in the late Middle Ages, as for example, in the world-affirming culture of the Renaissance.

The Protestant Reformation was, in its plurality and diversity, a further development with catalytic consequences for the history of Western Christianity and modern Europe. Aside from its broad cultural significance in the Weberian frame of interpretation, Protestantism also signified, with its intense world-affirming attitude and outlook, an essential advance in the progressing worldliness of Western Christianity. It first reacted against traditional Christian dualities, such as that between the church and the world, by merging the Augustinian "two cities" and transferring spiritual elements into the secular realm, which Max Weber aptly described as "inner-worldly asceticism". It thus turned against the duality between laity and clergy and the concomitant clericalism of the church by extending priesthood to all believers. Furthermore, it gave priority to an interpretation of the Christian tradition in terms of its various immanent and world-related aspects. These included the affirmation and valorization of: a common, ordinary life on earth in distinction to a higher, transcendent life in heaven; the significance of a God-ordained daily, worldly profession for the individual believer; responsibility for society and the deployment of welfare activities towards other people, yet with humility for the glory of God; earthly success, efficiency and material gain as indications of election and future salvation; anti-ritualism, disenchantment and critique against tradition; the rationalization of individual lifestyle and conduct, coupled with moral rigorism and sobriety; the conscious acceptance of law, social norms and

codes; self-discipline and an inner sense of duty; the potential for self-realization without supernatural mediation; the innovative re-examination of Christian heritage through the help of mundane disciplines; the separation of church and state and the acceptance of the principle of territoriality with concomitant state control of the church; the transformation of theology into a form of anthropology and the formulation of theological discourses in accordance with the surrounding world. Consequently, Christian life came to be regarded as a specific manner of living in this world, which is why Protestantism has been conceived of as representing a "worldly piety".

As the world was de-clericalized of Roman Catholic elements, it was, in turn, ontologically upgraded and qualitatively elevated in the Protestant context. The Divine was no longer restricted to specific sacred areas, but permeated the entire mundane environment, a fact that often led to a multi-faceted salvation activism among Protestants. In the course of its modern development, Protestantism often appeared to be excessively worldly by postulating a social ethic and by secularizing itself even further, yet keeping a religious external frame of reference. In the wake of Friedrich Schleiermacher's further promotion of the connection between Christianity/religion and society/culture in the 19th century, the world acquired in Protestant thought a strong inner legitimacy that subsequently remained central to any church ministry. Thus, the church community was basically transformed into a congregation of socially active and responsible citizens. One may consider here the long tradition of the Evangelical (i.e., Lutheran) vicarage/parsonage in Germany and its great societal repercussions. No doubt, in the Protestant case too, a boundary between the church and the world did exist, but it remained always porous and penetrable, given that the church continuously exhibited a strong social character and commitment. As a result, there were rarely signs of church exclusivity towards the world. It is no wonder that modern currents of "Cultural Protestantism", de-mythologization, God-is-dead theology and contextual theology stem from this broader, world-related Protestant context. However, these radical developments did not remain unchallenged within Protestantism. Characteristically

enough, fundamentalist protest movements did arise initially out of various Protestant milieus in the USA as a reaction against the extreme worldliness of liberal and secular Protestant Christianity.

The rise of the Protestant Reformation coincided with the beginning of the modern age in Western Europe and went hand in hand with the growing secularization process there in the context of modernity. In general terms, modernity is characterized by a wholesale attempt to ontologically upgrade the earthly world vis-à-vis the transcendent reality or an eternal world to come (e.g., through the thorough critique of medieval metaphysics). This is a pervasive element and common denominator of many developments in the West, from the Enlightenment to socialist and Marxist ideologies. It has been argued that this modern immanentism is basically a secular transformation and radicalization of earlier Christian eschatology and world-relatedness. Modern secular agents were mostly critical of the Roman Catholic establishment and tried to abolish or weaken it in various ways, a process successful in the long run. The anticlericalism of the French Revolution or the *Kulturkampf* in Germany attest to this. It is also worth mentioning that in the context of West European modernity secularity did not remain solely an ideal or social strategy. Rather, there were attempts to render obsolete and finally replace completely conventional religions (e.g., Christianity) through a purely secular and immanent system with a religious-like structure (dogmas, rituals etc.). In many cases, there was here an institutionalization of an anti-religious and especially anti-Christian secularism that prophesized the end of religions. The "Positivist Church" of Auguste Comte, centered on the "Religion of Humanity", in the 19th century, and the so-called "Political Religions" in the 20th century (e.g., Marxism-Leninism in the Soviet Union) are telling examples. Interestingly enough, numerous questions arise from such cases regarding the borders between the religious and the secular. This is because they usually have a clear secular character and agenda, given that in their self-understanding such movements intend to avoid any relation to conventional religions. But, at the same time, they exhibit various "quasi-religious aspects" of their own, a development that led various scholars to call them "secular

religions". Despite these long-standing tensions and conflicts, modernity did also exhibit various trends to transform Christianity in a more positive sense according to its own goals and coordinates; for example, to render it truly earthly and mundane by emphasizing its social usefulness and by neutralizing, marginalizing or neglecting its otherworldly aspects.

Western Christianity as a whole, especially Roman Catholicism, but also mainstream Protestantism in Europe, was seriously challenged by the advent of modernity and the consequences of secularity and especially the ideology of secularism. The encounter with modernity as a whole led to numerous problems for these churches, including loss of their power, influence and authority in society, coupled with the process of wide de-Christianization of the masses (especially in the 19th century). They were also affected on an institutional level, given the stronger separation between church and state and the secular or religiously neutral character of the latter. This multifaceted process impacted individual religiosity as well, which could no longer be controlled by church structures and institutional mechanisms, thus allowing for the development of alternative trajectories and forms of bricolage among Christian believers. No doubt, Western Christianity voiced its strong reaction against these radical changes and sometimes initiated a wholesale counterattack on modernity (particularly the Roman Catholic Church in the 19th century with its anti-modernist agenda and encyclicals). Yet, this long process forced Western Christianity to explore new patterns of accommodation with modernity and new ways of articulating its own traditional world-relatedness. In general terms, such a process has been easier for Protestants, who, as already mentioned, have always emphasized the earthly aspects of Christianity and thus could re-formulate and accordingly legitimize their social presence (e.g., through the support of modern human rights). European Protestantism has appeared thus to be more compatible with the agenda of modernity in the long run. This compatibility is evident, for example, in the fact that a Protestant pastor Joachim Gauck became President of the Federal Republic of Germany (2012-2017). In other words, it shows that a modern state with a tradition of separation from the Christian Churches had no fear of elevating such a

pastor to the highest political office in the country. It is also not accidental that European Protestantism lacks the strong fundamentalist currents that characterize the American religious landscape.

By contrast, the transition to modernity was far more difficult for Roman Catholics and their powerful church institution, which reacted vehemently against changes that threatened to upend the coordinates of their entire establishment. A breakthrough was enabled solely after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), out of which another Roman Catholic Church finally emerged, much more open to the exigencies of the modern world. The role of the current Pope Francis is a telling example of this. Even so, there are local Catholicisms that deviate from this pattern of development for various reasons (*cf*. Polish Catholicism and its anti-modernist course in post-communist times). More important for our topic is the fact that Roman Catholicism was thereby able to rework further its own traditional world-relatedness and world-affirming stance in the context of modernity and as a response to its challenges. Among other things, it systematically developed its own political theology and state theory from the 17th century onwards and its own social doctrine since the 19th century. In the end, both Roman Catholics and Protestants managed to accept, in their own way respectively, the fundamental legitimacy of a secular socio-political order with which they could coexist, communicate and cooperate, even if they disagreed with it on many issues. It is thus, today, no surprise to find various Protestant, but also Roman Catholic, "theologies of secularity" articulated in a constructive way that does not intend to castigate secularity in general as decadent and a threat from a Christian point of view. Hence, we are talking here about a crucial accommodation process that Western Christianity (especially in Europe) underwent with regard to the surrounding secular order in modern times. In turn, these inner-Christian structural changes have rendered many contemporary secular actors and thinkers in the context of late modernity/postmodernity much more open, positive and tolerant towards Western Christianity. In the so-called "post-secular age", all actors in society, both secular and religious, are called upon to contribute to its future articulation and integration. All this happens, naturally, as

long as certain sensitive limits are not violated; for example, the primacy of the secular or religiously neutral state to run the affairs within its own territory.

Let us now turn our attention to the Orthodox Christian East, which never fully experienced the aforementioned radical developments in modern times and had only a partial and fragmented encounter with them. No doubt, the Orthodox world has been heavily influenced by Western modernity (often identified with "Westernization") over the last four centuries, yet the results of this process are still rather limited, incomplete, controversial and ambivalent. Modernity was in most cases regarded as an exogenous phenomenon, intrinsically connected with the "fallen West", its theological deviations and alienation from Orthodox authenticity. This is why the majority of Orthodox have shown and continue to show a negative attitude and aversion towards the basic accomplishments of Western modernity; for example, individual human rights (see Makrides 2020a, 13-39). They also try to offer their alternative and allegedly better solutions to the impasses of Western modernity; for example, by replacing the dualistic natural/supernatural distinction and bifurcation by the more holistic – in their opinion – Patristic pair of created/uncreated religion; or by supporting Orthodox apophatic theology as a panacea to the various impasses of Western Christianity. Hence, one key difference between East and West remains that the former has still not fully endorsed and accepted the legitimacy of the modern age. Many Orthodox still think today in pre-modern terms and promote a related discourse; for instance, by neglecting or ignoring modern Hermeneutics, by relying heavily on the pre-modern Patristic heritage or by idealizing the social conditions in Orthodox contexts (e.g., forms of communal social organization) before the advent of the modern age (See Makrides 2012, 248-285).

Nevertheless, despite such anti-modern trends, immediate decisions and actions of Orthodox actors, at least at the official institutional level, are underlined by more pragmatic concerns and *Realpolitik*. Aside from this, there have been isolated cases of a more fruitful encounter between Orthodox Christianity and modernity, both in

the past and recently. For instance, the Orthodox Theological Faculty at Czernowitz during the Habsburg Monarchy (1875-1918), where theology was taught by Orthodox Romanian theologians in German, is a case in point (See Turczynski 1967, 166-195). These theologians were open to connecting their Orthodox tradition with modern Western exigencies and discourse, and it was a successful, albeit short-lived, experiment to integrate Orthodox theology into a Western setting (*Cf*. also Moga 2019, 73-85). The same can be argued for Russian academic theology from the late 19th century until 1917, which was quite open to Western (basically Protestant) theological developments and tried to profit from them in a constructive way. There was thus a current within Russian Orthodox theology at that time, which has been termed "Cultural Orthodoxy" (parallel to well-known "Cultural Protestantism" in Germany) (See Wasmuth 2008, 45-62).

What then was the attitude of Orthodox Christianity towards modern secularity? In general terms, the Orthodox majority considered it highly problematic, if not explicitly condemnable and unacceptable. This is because secularity was basically identified (in negative terms as secularization and secularism) with a specific Western development; namely, with the progressive alienation of humankind from the will of God due to the Western deviation from the right faith. It is furthermore important in this context to consider the influence of Western forms of secularity upon the Orthodox world on various levels, a process that has started since the dawn of the early modern age and continues up to this day, mostly in moderate forms, because we generally lack cases of a radical secularism. In fact, Western secularity as a part of the broader project of Western modernity had a formative impact on the Orthodox East and triggered many tensions, conflicts and changes. In many ways, the new independent states in Eastern and South Eastern Europe were run by secular elites and were thus forced to accept the Western differentiation between the religious and the secular as the basis of modern statehood and modernization, despite strong criticism on the part of the local Orthodox Churches. Further developments, such as the adhesion of various predominantly Orthodox countries to the European

Union, enhanced this adjustment process and supported the greater religious neutrality of the state. Nevertheless, due to the lingering of old traditions and especially the "symphonic model", the new states (e.g., Greece, Bulgaria) retained an "Orthodox" coloring in the public sphere, which clearly deviates from Western standards. Such cases are considered to represent a "symphonic secularity", namely a combination of old religious traditions with new secular orientations (See Ghodsee 2009, 227-252). In another case, in the Soviet Union there was a secular totalitarian Marxist-Leninist political establishment, which, aside from its own "religious" features, suppressed the Orthodox Church and other religions and left its imprint upon the Eastern Orthodox world throughout the 20th century. All this became evident in the post-communist era, when religions and especially the Orthodox Church were rehabilitated there. In many respects, the current negative evaluation of Western secularity by the current Russian Orthodox Church owes much to the previous communist experience, as it tries to renegotiate the boundaries between the religious and the secular to its benefit (See Rousselet 2013).

Current Developments in the Orthodox Evaluation of Secularity

The above remarks show that various secularization processes had a significant impact upon Orthodox societies and countries in modern times. Yet, due to Orthodox and other reactions and the overall specificities of Orthodox societies, such processes were mitigated by various factors and their results were ambiguous. Political and other elites usually opted for secular changes, perhaps stronger at the beginning (e.g., during the Bavarian rule in Greece, 1833-1862), yet more moderate and constrained in subsequent periods. In any event, these developments were not fully in line with Western secularity. There is a church-state separation in Orthodox contexts, yet not in a Western sense, given that the "Orthodox coloring" of the state still exists, both in official and unofficial terms. A good example of such a case is Greece, the first predominantly Orthodox country to join the EU in 1981. There has been a moderate secularization process after 1974 in the country, without however neutralizing the enormous symbolic significance of Orthodxy in

society, culture and politics. In fact, the religious-secular divide plays a role in this context, as the period of Archbishop Christodoulos (1998-2008) and the serious conflict over the personal ID cards reform with the Greek state in 2000 has shown (See Karagiannis 2009, 133-167).

However, Orthodox countries exhibit their own particularities, and this pertains to several post-communist countries (for instance, Romania (See Dungaciu 2006, 241-259), but especially Russia). No doubt, the communist period had a catalytic impact upon the Orthodox world and specifically upon the Russian Orthodox Church, which drew many conclusions out of this situation, including with regard to secularization. It is understandable then that a church that had experienced such systematic persecution and great losses under communism has tried afterwards to regain its power and influence, reestablish itself in the public sphere and reorganize itself accordingly. This is, in fact, what happened after 1989-1991 with the Russian Church, whose development until today is an impressive one. Secularity seems thus to be a topic that this church, because of its own previous negative experience from it, categorically rejects since it identifies it mostly with militant atheism (See Laitila 2012, 52-57). Hence, the ROC cannot draw similar conclusions from this encounter with secularity, as the Western Churches have historically done it, even if the forms of secularity in East and West are far from identical. As already mentioned, challenged by modern secularism, Western Christian thought has systematically tried over the last centuries to build subtle bridges and continuities linking the earthly world with the transcendent one, more or less successfully. Russian Orthodox thought lacks this long tradition in such a form and intensity, which also applies to the Orthodox world in general. No doubt, there are exceptions, especially if one considers the legacies of such seminal figures as Nikolai Berdyaev and Sergei Bulgakov (the "Paris School"), despite the reactions of the "Neo-Patristic School" of Georges Florovsky (See Gerogiorgakis 2012, 336-348; Lytvynenko 2014, 223-234). There are also other liberal and open Orthodox voices in post-Soviet times. But they clearly do not represent the mainstream today. Exactly this difference explains why clashes between Orthodox and secular actors are extremely strong and

tense in post-Soviet Russia. The Russian Orthodox milieu has simply a different attitude towards secularity than the Christian West. In the West, such intense conflicts took place already in the 19th or early 20th century, while nowadays the potential Christian reactions are much more "civilized", sophisticated, measured and controlled. By contrast, the Russian Orthodox have had another experience with secularity in the past; hence, they could not develop analogous strategies to deal with the secular in more rational, sober and pragmatic ways, a fact that explains the aforementioned "culture wars" (See Agadjanian 2014).

With all its power and influence, the Russian Church even attempts today to create an international traditionalist front (including conservative Western Christians and Islam) to oppose the enhanced (even if moderate) secularization of Europe through support for "traditional values" and rejection of liberalism (See Alfeyev 2006; Kyrill 2009). The same is attempted domestically with the support of the state, even though the latter considers itself in the "Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations" of 1997 to be a "secular state" (*svetskoe gosudarstvo*). As such, post-Soviet Russia offers a good testing ground for a theory of "de-secularization" (See Karpov 2010, 232-270). In the "Bases of the Social Concept" of 2000 (See Hoppe-Kondrikova and van Kessel and van der Zweerde 2013, 199-214; Elsner 2020, 213-234) and in the Document on modern human rights of 2008 (See Makrides and Wasmuth and Kube 2016), which represent a quite belated Orthodox attempt to deal theologically with the world, the ROC appears to be clearly oriented towards the world, yet in a special, non-Western sense that reveals a defensive attitude and skepticism towards the world as the consequence of the Fall. First, it formally acknowledges the unavoidable presence of an international secular order and establishment, in which the church *nolens volens* has to live and act. Yet, at the same time, it voices its open dissatisfaction with and reaction against this situation, which is considered to be detrimental to the realization of the will of God on earth, and it considers liberal secular democracies and liberal ideals as the immediate source of such a fault. It also craves a pre-modern, romantic condition, in which the will of God was realized, even forcibly, in society – namely a

state of affairs, which followed quite different rules and orientations than modern secular ones. All this results in attitudes of self-insulation and self-isolation (a minority complex) and less active intervention to change the world. This phenomenon constitutes an "acceptance-cum-rejection" of modernity and secularity (See Agadjanian 2008), which is far from consenting to the full legitimacy of a secular sphere. All this takes place more at the level of rhetoric, theory and basic orientations, than at the level of pragmatic decisions and practical strategies, but it still generates a new "culture war" between Orthodox and secular actors, since the latter are afraid of the growing clericalization of society (in education, art, politics, armed forces etc.) (See Stoeckl and Uzlaner 2020).

There is, however, another possibility emerging within the current Orthodox world, which argues in a different direction and which is mainly represented by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and specifically the policies of Patriarch Bartholomew (since 1991). There have also been recent developments of broader significance within the Orthodox Christian world, such as the convocation of the Pan-Orthodox Council in 2016 on the island of Crete. Among other things, issues regarding the presence of the Orthodox Church in the modern world were discussed there, where it was clearly stated that such issues will be considered in more detail and systematically in the years to come (See Makrides 2017, 18-32). This a promising sign for the stronger future engagement of Orthodox Christians in world affairs at an official level. This happened in 2020 with the publication of an Orthodox "social ethos" in the official document "For the Life of the World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church" (See Hart and Chryssavgis 2020). It is an innovative Orthodox attempt to consider the world and the secular realm in more affirming and constructive ways and to overcome tension with them, expressed by the aforementioned Russian Orthodox documents (See Makrides 2020b, 387-413; Schon 2021).

Aside from this, there is a new international generation of Orthodox Christian scholars who are trying to revive the Orthodox social presence and contribute in a fresh way to debates about international social issues, not least in a constructive and mutually fruitful dialogue with Western

Christianity on the issue of secularity, often combined with attempts to develop a specifically "Orthodox theology of secularity" (See Gallaher 2017, 135-149, esp. 146-149; Papanikolaou 2021). They try to dispassionately evaluate the secular transformation of the modern age and self-critically recognize the need of the Orthodox world to catch up with modernity as a whole. This process is not equated with an idealization of Western modernity and its necessary copying by the Orthodox. It basically expresses the awareness that the Orthodox world should move forward and reflect more constructively on the conditions of the modern world including the secular establishment and the unavoidable social and cultural differentiation within modern liberal democracies. In fact, it is possible to place such reformist and open-minded ideas within the broader discursive field of "multiple modernities" (See Eisenstadt 2000, 1-29), as they show that the Orthodox world can find in the future its own particular way to modernity. All these are prominent signs of a new Orthodox orientation towards the world and the secular, which promises to be a fruitful one in the years to come. Given that Western Christians have also started to reflect critically on their own traditions of secularity and realize more and more the challenge and the danger of growing worldliness for the church (*cf*. Pope Benedict XVI's appeal in 2011 for the necessary "*Entweltlichung*" of the church, namely its necessary distance from the world/worldly things (See Erbacher 2012)), the opportunities to enter into a dialogue with Orthodox Christians appear to be very pressing and timely.

The aforementioned differences between Eastern Orthodox and Western Latin Christianity concerning attitudes towards the world and secularity are indicative of their divergent trajectories in the past and at present, which can only be reconstructed and explained historically. Even so, the Orthodox positions should not necessarily be considered as a drawback or a deficit that should be remedied. It all depends on one's own particular point of view. For the numerous converts from Western to Orthodox Christianity, the latter represents a less secularized Christian tradition, a fact that thereby renders it more authentic and thus more appealing and attractive. In actual fact, the worldliness of Western

Christianity (especially the extreme version of Protestantism) also had its price. By embracing the mainstream values of the secular and liberal world, many Protestant Churches lost their specificity and distinctive character to a large extent. To become too worldly is like a double-edged sword for a church, a fact that causes numerous identity and other problems. These and other cases and considerations lead many Orthodox theologians and thinkers to support and promote their less secularized Christian tradition. It is thus no wonder that they enter into dialogue with Western Christians who are critical of the wider influence upon and impasses of "secular reason" in Western Christianity during the modern age; for example, with the Anglo-Catholic movement of "Radical Orthodoxy" (See Pabst and Schneider 2009), which is critical of Western secular modernity and its impact on Christian theology (See Grosse and Seubert 2017). However, in such anti-modernist contexts, one may also observe a particular parochial self-aggrandizement of the Orthodox who think that they possess solutions to all Western deadlocks. Given also that certain traditional Orthodox features (e.g., apophaticism) fit well into the postmodern intellectual context, which questions, among other things, the absolute secularization dogmas of the Western academy and world, this was often evaluated as an additional strengthening of the Orthodox arguments. Yet, the whole issue is much more complex, and both sides, East and West, keep facing their own, different problems and challenges in the current global environment.

Will Orthodox Christianity come to a more fruitful encounter with modern secularity? Although predictions are always uncertain, we may argue that there is enough evidence for such a development. This is, however, a quite long-term process, which may be interrupted by various opposing forces. If we consider how long it took the Roman Catholic Church to come to terms with modern secularity, then it would be absurd to expect that this will take place automatically in the Orthodox case (See Makrides 2019, 103-127. See also Moga 2020). After all, the Orthodox were never an integral part of the program of Western modernity, which they have mostly perceived as threatening their own religious and cultural identity. Seen from this perspective, Orthodox reactions against and

problems with modern secularity are perfectly understandable considering the specific Orthodox history and experience. Thus, one cannot expect that the current Russian Orthodox Church will fully accept the legitimacy of modern secularity bearing in mind how much it suffered previously from Soviet secularity. By taking the particular coordinates of the Orthodox world into serious consideration, one may thus better capture the background of its developmental contours in modern times and evaluate it more adequately. We are talking here about the enhanced dissemination of a new Orthodox perspective on the modern secular world, which, despite its marginality and limitations, grows steadily in significance and may act in the future as a catalyst for a change of orientations and for enabling an Orthodox modernity. This will not be a copy of Western Christian examples and cases, but will reflect the specificities of the Orthodox religious system and culture in coming to terms with the challenges of modernity and secularity.

Notes

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