Secularity and Christianity: Comparing Orthodox with Western Perspectives[*]

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INTRODUCTION

Talking about the religious and the secular nowadays, whether in a scholarly way or not, hardly occasions any surprise. There has been a long-standing, massive, and widespread interest in this topic from numerous viewpoints that has led to many related research projects and a huge bibliography that is perhaps impossible to survey in its entirety. Although opinions diverge largely as regards the phenomenon itself and the related concepts, it is useful to keep from the outset certain points in mind—partly connected to changes in perspectives that took place over the last decades. First, the term "secularity" is understood here in a rather neutral sense as a mere indication of a respective condition, whereas the term "secularism" points to a related ideology and the term "secularization" to a concomitant process—the latter two often having negative connotations.[1] Second, the premodern variation between "sacred" and "profane" is not fully identical with the modern religious-secular divide, which

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is more tense, binary, and polarizing. In the former case, it is more about an important, yet plain distinction, whereas in the latter about a strong and at times polemical differentiation. Third, linear and deterministic secularization theories predicting the unavoidable downfall of religion have largely been abandoned, whereas greater emphasis is being put on more balanced approaches to both religious and secular dynamics and their multiple interactions.[2] Fourth, the development of secularity on the European continent 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 USA).[3] Fifth, within the current flexible postmodern setting, the peaceful, constructive, and productive coexistence of religious and secular options has been officially encouraged and supported,[4] not least by political actors and institutions (cf. related policies within the European Union).[5] Sixth, stronger attention is given nowadays to multiple forms of secularities beyond the West and its traditionally 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.[6] Seventh, it is equally important to pay attention to the heterogeneity of European secularities as such pertaining to the diverse religious landscape of the continent. This is quite crucial for making the necessary distinctions between Western Latin and Eastern Orthodox Christianity with regard to secularity, which have been virtually ignored in many publications on the topic, either by using the inclusive term "Europe" while focusing solely or exclusively on its Western part,[7] or by theorizing about Christianity and secularity while neglecting Orthodox Christianity altogether.[8] The fact, for example, that no Reformation has ever taken place in the Orthodox East accounts for such differences,[9] given that this momentous change in Western Europe triggered, even if

unintentionally,[10] the modern 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 Southeastern 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 diverse Western settings have coped with questions of secularity. Finally, eighth, 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 a secularization process or the ideology of secularism, promoted and imposed by state or other actors. As a result, this has triggered (in the past, but also today) rigorous Christian reactions and polemics. However, there have also been Christian actors who considered secularity in more constructive ways, namely as a creative challenge for the Church and its message nowadays, thus asking for a new approach to this catalytic development. Hence, there is an enormous variety of Christian stances towards secularity[11] that need a differentiated 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.

All in all, the case of Orthodox Christianity in its various local contexts is in many respects *sui generis* in relation to secularity and may be used as a testing ground for conceptualizing it from a comparative perspective. On the one hand, Orthodoxy is at once closer to the Latin Church due to the common Christian and other (e.g., Roman) historical backgrounds, yet quite different from it due to the gradual parting of ways between East and West, which became even deeper and pervasive from early modern times onwards. On the oth-

er hand, Orthodoxy shows some affinities with non-Western cultures (e.g., Islam) in its negative stance towards Western secularity, without belonging fully to the commonly understood non-Western world. The Orthodox case is, thus, something "in-between," a situation resulting in numerous particularities.[12] Last but not least, this also concerns Western colonial expansion and its multiple repercussions (including the rise of the secular realm and its clear delineation from the religious one), which, in the case of Eastern Orthodox cultures, should not be understood in literal historical terms, but rather as a form of "crypto-colonialism."[13] Western secularity was namely exported to the Orthodox East in modern times, yet out of different reasons has not been fully applied to it and its outcome was ambiguous. In any event, the overall Western pattern of socio-political development as a model to be emulated has had paradigmatic significance for numerous political, intellectual, and other élites there.

World-Relatedness, Worldliness, and Secularity in East and West: A Comparative Historical Overview

The Differentiation between Orthodox and Latin Christianity Before the Reformation

As far as the issue of the relations of the Christian Churches in East and West to secularity is concerned, it is essential to put and consider it on a wider canvas. It pertains namely to the overall relations of the Church to the world,[14] which can be subsumed under the term "world-relatedness." This should be understood in a rather neutral form as indicating the unavoidable fact that the Church exists in the world and is related to it in multiple ways. However, the world-relatedness of the Church should be distinguished from its "worldliness," which has mostly negative connotations and

is connected or even equated to secularization. Needless to say, there is a common Christian background regarding the appropriate attitudes towards the world (κόσμος, αἰών, saeculum) (Rom 12: 2; 1 Cor 1: 20-21, 2: 6-8; Eph 2: 2, 6: 12; 2 Tim 4: 10), which is intrinsically different from the Church and which Christian actors had to transform while keeping a necessary clear boundary to it. The fact that this world was conceived as the result of the Fall did not automatically lead to pessimism. On the contrary, the key belief in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ implied an optimistic attitude towards the world, which was now connected with God and the divine (John 16: 28). Furthermore, this entire context was dominated by the continuous tension generated by the dialectic between transcendence and immanence from an eschatological perspective. Christians lived in this world, yet they were not of this world (John 17: 1-26). They were foreigners and sojourners (ξένοι, πάροικοι, παρεπίδημοι) in this earthly world and transient life (Heb. 11: 13; 1 Pt 2: 11), expecting to earn eternal life in the world to come. Living in this world was not supposed to be an easy task for Christians. They were to face many trials and sorrows, yet they hoped to finally overcome this situation in the wake of Jesus Christ's related promise (John 16: 33). Although these perspectives often led to world-denying attitudes early on in Christian history, the Church, all in all, was inevitably forced to deal with numerous mundane affairs, ranging from social and political to economic and cultural. This was more so after the gradual legalization and establishment of Christianity in the course of the fourth century in the late Roman Empire. More importantly, the Christian attitudes towards and the concomitant engagement with the world did not remain the same in East and West. These approaches varied enough, including, on the one hand, world-negation, world-rejection, and world-escapism, and on the other hand, world-affirmation, world-activism, and world-control. It is about categories that

have been masterfully outlined in Max Weber's sociology of religion.

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* (συμφωνία, *consonantia*, literally meaning symphony and 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 priesthood (ἱερωσύνη, *sacerdotium*) and the empire (βασιλεία, *imperium*), 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 assist 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 there. These were not perceived in a symphonic way, as in the East, but rather in tenacious tension and duality. This took place especially under the influence of the Augustinian model, derived from *De civitate Dei*, about the "two cities/states" (*civitates duae*), whose intrinsic opposition would be overcome only eschatologically.[15] 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[16]) of remaining essentially independent from political power and intervention. Second, the Church claimed its own superior authority (*auctoritas*) over political power (*potestas*) 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," formulated by Pope Gelasius I (492-496) in his correspondence with the Byzantine Emperor Anastasios I (r. 491-518). Moreover, Gelasius exhibited a clear world-affirming attitude, given that the world was regarded as a domain to be influenced and controlled by the Church.[17] Third, in subsequent centuries, the Church allied itself with the Carolingians and acquired political power for itself (an "imperialization" of the Church[18]), which finally 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 Papal Institution 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 worldliness and secular-
ization of the Church. The development of Scholastic theol-
ogy also provided a philosophical-theological background
for the revaluation of this world.[19] All this attests to a specific
form of world-relatedness articulated, theorized, and estab-
lished in the Latin West, namely an affirmative immersion of
the Church in and control of worldly affairs.

Furthermore, this situation can also explain the somewhat
"special position" of Latin Western Europe with regard to
the process of functional differentiation of medieval society.
In fact, this happened against the background of the sharp
conflicts between the emperors and the popes, fueled by the
Roman Catholic Church's claims to universal leadership and
absolute and exclusive religious authority and truth (cf. the
Investiture Controversy between popes and German em-
perors, 11th–12th centuries[20]). Nowhere else has a religious
institution asserted claims to truth and loyalty to such an ex-
tent. This perhaps explains why the attempts to distinguish
areas of competence between a religious and non-religious
sphere were so instrumental and developed extensively in
the realm of Latin Christianity. Due to the constant struggles
for power, social protest movements, and reactions against
religious dominance, such differentiation processes finally
led beyond the simple distinction between the religious and
the profane realms and the articulation of their respective
areas of competence.[21] They also led to the emergence of
pre-modern notions of a secular realm that turned against
the religious one. We are thus talking about a further devel-
opment beyond a simple competition between ecclesiasti-
cal and political power and their jurisdictional claims in the
Gelasian sense, which included their enhanced binary sepa-
ration and opposition. This is why the Medieval Latin West
is historically so crucial for understanding the overall rise of
the secular option including its later normative forms (e.g.,
as a prerequisite for statehood and state legitimacy in early

modern Western Europe, *inter alia* under the influence of the Reformation and its strong world-affirming attitudes).

   However, the symphonic model in the Orthodox East did not allow for such a differentiation to occur in the first place. It is thus not accidental that the aforementioned Investiture Controversy of the High Middle Ages in the Latin West is altogether absent from the Orthodox East. The Orthodox Church never enjoyed the institutional autonomy of the Roman Catholic one, nor intended to acquire it in one way or another. After all, this was hardly possible, given that the Church was inextricably bound to Byzantine central imperial authority and remained deeply dependent on it. No doubt, there were various actors (e.g., from monastic milieus), who intended or strove to secure more autonomy from state control and initiated Church-state conflicts (e.g., during the Iconoclastic Controversy, 7th – 8th centuries). Yet, this did not lead to any crucial form of social and functional differentiation in the *longue durée*, at least in the way this has happened in the Latin West. The Byzantine Church also exhibited itself a whole range of mundane interests and activities.[22] Even if these were in many cases challenging, the worldliness of the Byzantine Church neither was as fundamental as in the Latin West nor led to the same consequences in the long run.

   Aside from socio-historical reasons, theological trajectories also account for these differences in world-relatedness between East and West, especially in the context of the fallenness of the human condition and creation. This is because Orthodox Christianity shares a more optimistic view of the creation and the consequences of original sin. The idea of salvation is connected here to the ideal of deification as a spiritual ascent to God and growing into divine likeness, away from the burden of sinful humanity and fallen creation. Based on the doctrine of God's Incarnation in the person of Jesus Christ, the main aim was to ascend from earthly materiality to heavenly spirituality towards a union with God.

This ideal has been exemplified by Orthodox monastics and their attempted distance from worldly things whatsoever in order to contemplate on and experience transcendent reality that is invisible by normal means. It is exactly this spiritualization of life in theological terms that led to world-denying attitudes, even in extreme forms, among the Orthodox across history. On the contrary, in Western theology—especially under the influence of Augustine—the Fall, its catalytic negative consequences and impairments, and the need for redemption (in rather legalistic terms) acquired a cardinal position. Hence, the control of the fallen world and the dominion of nature were regarded as part of a redemptive activity that, among other things, was supposed to alleviate the material, tangible consequences of original sin. Here it was less about spiritual perfection and ascent away from material things and more about the atonement for human sin and the satisfaction of divine justice through an active engagement with and control of the world. The rise of the "Scientific Revolution" in early modern times in Western Europe is, for example, closely connected to such world-affirming stances, postulating the rational exploration of the natural world created by God.[23]

The repercussions of these different degrees of world-relatedness can be observed at many levels and on numerous occasions throughout the Middle Ages. In the Orthodox East, more holistic, harmonious, and complementary models of relations between the Church and the world predominated. Church and politics were considered to stem from the same divine source, namely God, and, despite their distinct 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, not its institutional differentiation to occur. 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 in the Latin West did try to control the world and subsequently acquired numerous mundane elements for itself.

Various telling examples illustrate these differences between Eastern and Western world-relatedness: First, theology in the East remained mostly otherworldly and apophatic, putting emphasis on experience, ascetic practices, mysticism, orthopraxy, revelation, and the ineffability of the divine. By contrast, in the West there was progressive rationalization and scientification of theology (as a *sacra scientia*) in the context of the Church's influence on and control of higher institutions of learning, which finally rendered theology there much more worldly. This is evident, *inter alia*, in attempts to demonstrate the compatibility of Divine Revelation with human reason. Second, Orthodox monasticism retained a strong outer-worldly 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—consider the broad societal role of the Jesuits. Third, 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-related-

ness slowly and gradually paved the way for a more radi-
cal worldliness as an early secularization, whose signs are
already observable in the late Middle Ages; for example, in
the world-affirming culture of the Renaissance.

Did the Byzantines have a concept of the profane do-
main in various articulations? Basically, the answer is yes,
although the above domain should be considered in close
relationship with the religious one. What is important is to
avoid considering Byzantium as a purely and exclusively
"theocratic" political entity of Christian provenance, which
is more a misleading construct of Western historians after
the Enlightenment, who were also generally critical of the
Byzantine Empire and culture. In fact, Byzantine polity was
not solely Christian-based, but was connected to the long
and still influential Roman republican heritage in the con-
text of the complex relations between the republic, the em-
peror, the law, and the sovereignty of the people, where such
non-Christian elements came very often to the surface.[24]
Furthermore, despite the strong presence and influence of
the Church at all levels, there were many domains where
profane elements did exist; for example, in the realm of arts
or in education and learning, in which conflicts between re-
ligious and other forms of knowledge took place.[25] What is
important to remember here is that it was about a distinction,
not a polarizing differentiation, between the religious and
the profane domains.

From Reformation to Modernity:
The Specific Path of Western Christianity

Going chronologically a little further, the Protestant
Reformation was, in its plurality and diversity, a crucial
development with catalytic consequences for the history
of Western Christianity and modern Europe. Aside from
its broad cultural significance in the Weberian frame of in-

terpretation, Protestantism also signified, with its intense world-affirming attitude and outlook, an essential advance, albeit involuntarily, in the progressing worldliness and secularization 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 world. Max Weber's account of a Protestant "inner-worldly asceticism" (*innerweltliche Askese*) aptly describes this fundamental transition. Moreover, Protestantism turned against the duality between laity and clergy and the concomitant clericalism of the Church by extending priesthood to all believers. In general, 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 ("*weltlicher Beruf,*" according to Luther) 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 electedness 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 sources and heritage through the help of mundane disciplines (e.g., philology); the separation of Church and state and the acceptance of the principle of territoriality with concomitant state control of the Church; and the transformation of theology into a form of anthropology and the formulation of theological discourses in accordance with the surrounding worldly environment.

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 basically representing a "worldly piety" (*Weltfrömmigkeit*)[26] or a "sacred profanity" (*heilige Profanität*)[27].

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 in Germany and its great societal repercussions on many levels.[28] 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 theological currents, such as Cultural Protestantism (*Kulturprotestantismus*), de-mythologization, God-is-dead-theology, and contextual theology, stem from this broader Protestant world-affirming context. However, these radical developments did not remain unchallenged within Protestantism. Characteristically enough, fun-

damentalist protest movements did arise initially out of various Protestant milieus in the USA in early 20th century as a reaction against the extreme worldliness of liberal and secularly oriented Protestant Christianity (especially of German provenance), which was perceived as a serious threat to the very core of the Christian Revelation and message.[29]

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 overall 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 extensive 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 modern immanentism and conceptions of progress are all secularized versions of Jewish-Christian eschatological beliefs and world-relatedness.[30] Be that as it may, 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, the tradition of *laïcité* in France, and the "culture war" (*Kulturkampf*) between Germany under chancellor Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898) and the Roman Catholic Church during the period 1872-1878 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 (1798-1857), 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 these phenomena usually exhibit a clear secular character and agenda, given that in their self-understanding they intend to avoid any relation to conventional religions. But, at the same time, they display various "quasi-religious aspects" of their own, a development that led various scholars to call them "secular religions" too.[31] 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, was seriously challenged by the advent of modernity and the consequences of the ideology of secularism. The encounter with modernity 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 due to the pressing "Social Question"). Churches were also affected on the institutional level, given their stronger separation from the state, which had a clearer secular or religiously neutral character. 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 initi-

ated 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 mainstream Protestants, who, as already mentioned, had 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; cf. also the movement of "Social Gospel" in the USA and Canada in early 20th century, as well as the social legacy of Reinhold Niebuhr, 1892-1971[32]). In general, European Protestantism appeared 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, this case 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.

What was problematic in many respects, particularly in modern times, was the fact that this world-relatedness in Western Christianity has been often transformed into a worldliness, not least due to the ongoing process of secularization there. This transformation was either externally imposed by the state or a self-imposed process initiated by the Churches themselves, which thereby intended to address more effectively the many challenges of modernity (esp. after the Enlightenment and the French Revolution). Due to the intensification of the "Social Question" from the 19th century onwards, Western Churches have been particularly sensitive

to social issues and exhibited a related profile (through official social encyclicals, systematic social doctrine and ethic etc.) and strong social activism. Nevertheless, there was mounting critique (both from inside and outside) that the Church's discourse (especially in the liberal Protestant case) was basically transformed into a purely worldly one, thus turning the Gospel into a socio-ideological program of action. This worldliness had—so the main argument—detrimental effects on Western Christian identities and spiritual development in the context of diffused skepticism against religion. Among other things, it left a considerable vacuum, which was partly filled by the growing quest for alternative spiritualities (e.g., of East Asian provenance).

In this overall constellation, the issue of Church worldliness has often been raised within Western Christianity as a serious challenge to the very Christian mission in the world in the wake of the often excessive focus on social issues. It is thus not accidental that Pope Benedict XVI criticized this internal secularization of the Church in a speech in Freiburg im Breisgau (Germany) in 2011 and talked about a necessary "de-worldliness" or more broadly "distance from the world" (*Entweltlichung*) of the Church—an opinion that afterwards triggered numerous discussions.[33] The suggestion here for the Church to become less worldly was not meant to castigate the strong social engagement of Catholic actors and communities at many levels as an integral part of the Church's diakonia in the world. Rather, it was a reminder that the social engagement alone, no matter how strong, organized, and systematic, is not what constitutes Christianity and the Church as a whole, but represents solely a part of it. Thus, every opening to the world, no matter how thorough and intensive, creates tensions and even conflicts because it is regarded as a potential threat. In another case, eminent sociologist of religion Peter L. Berger has repeatedly warned Western Christian Churches of the danger of worldliness;

namely, that their growing vernacularization and ongoing adaptation to the secular exigencies could lead to the loss of their transcendent characteristics and their fundamental alterity. This is because the religious realm should ideally be distinct from that of everyday reality. It should make a difference and convey another, unusual sense; otherwise, it will become too commonplace, a development threatening its particular and unique identity. [34] A similar critique also concerns the enhanced "culturalization" of Christianity ("cultural Christians"), another form of worldliness, in which the Church is basically strongly related or even equated with the surrounding culture and hence loses its otherness and prophetic, critical voice in society.[35] All this takes place because Christian faith has become nowadays an option amidst a rich array of other possibilities. Hence, it has to be conveyed in an attractive, unusual, and persuasive way, yet this entire process entails dangers including the one of worldliness.

In general terms, 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. Even so, there are local Catholicisms that deviate from this pattern of development for various reasons (cf. the case of Polish Catholicism and its anti-modernist course in post-communist times). However, we generally find a quite positive view of the world coupled with its ontological affirmation, which results in a multifaceted social activism and world-affirming outlook. One might take into consideration the discourse of Pope Benedict XVI on modernity and secularity, who, aside from formulating his critique, was open to articulate a specific Catholic version of them.[36] The same can be observed with the overall

pro-modern course of the current Pope, Francis, which has generated various reactions so far.[37] In addition, several leading Roman Catholic theologians of the 20th century (e.g., Henri de Lubac, Karl Rahner, Yves Congar, Johann-Baptist Metz, John Murray) have expounded on more positive views of the world, which was ontologically affirmed through a partial marginalization of the negative consequences of the Fall. 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 started to develop its own distinct 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 the modern secular socio-political order with which they coexist, communicate, and cooperate, despite their disagreements with it on many issues. It is thus, today, no surprise to find various Protestant[38], but also Roman Catholic[39] "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 (e.g., Jürgen Habermas[40]) in the context of late modernity/postmodernity much more open, positive, and tolerant towards Western Christianity. In the so-called "post-secular age,"[41] all actors in society, both secular and religious, are thus 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 exclusively the affairs within its own territory. Not least, the above developments are also associated with the crisis of individual Christian believers in Western contexts, which are often described as "post-Christian." This is often expressed as an overt dissatisfaction with conventional religious goods in the search for novel forms of religiosity and spirituality.

The Encounter of Orthodox Christianity with Modern Secularity

If we turn now our attention to the Orthodox Christian East in modern times, we may observe a quite different situation in various forms and contexts. It is useful to begin with an "exception" from the long and specific tradition of Eastern Orthodox world-relatedness that needs closer examination and assessment. This pertains to the Southeastern European Orthodox world under Ottoman rule (15th – early 20th century), which experienced an unprecedented kind of a *sui generis* world-relatedness, completely different from the Byzantine past. This is because the leader of the Rum-Orthodox Millet, the Patriarch of Constantinople, had acquired during this long period extensive jurisdictions over the non-religious affairs of his flock. Nonetheless, this kind of world-relatedness was not similar to the one articulated in Latin Christianity, because it was basically due to the socio-political constellations in the Ottoman Empire with regard to the status of religious communities (the *Millet* system). It was thus regarded by the Orthodox Church as a temporary and contingent phase in its history, not as a permanent and normative one. Yet, when new social actors tried to introduce Enlightenment and French Revolution ideas into the Orthodox world from the late 18th century onwards and to limit the Church's social influence, the Patriarchate of Constantinople reacted against this secularization attempt,

even though the latter has never been a radical one.[42] In the course of the 19th century, moreover, the Church was forced to confine itself again to its principal religious duties once the modern nation-states were founded in Southeastern Europe and (secular) political élites took the lead. Furthermore, this Patriarchate also faced an internal secularization process in the second half of the 19th century in the wake of radical socio-political changes within the Ottoman Empire and in the wider Orthodox world.[43]

   If we look at the Slavic and especially Russian Orthodox world, another image partially emerges. In actual fact, the Orthodox Byzantine symphonic tradition did influence many Slavic peoples in the wake of their Christianization and left a strong legacy there, which endures to the present. Nevertheless, this was far from a uniform transfer process in the sense that it was underpinned by local premises and exigencies and was unavoidably modified and adapted accordingly. For instance, Church-state relations in Tsarist Russia did not reflect so much the Byzantine symphonic ideal, although the former did claim continuity with the Byzantine imperial tradition after the fall of Constantinople (1453). Here, there was an intra-Orthodox transfer that included both continuities with and departures from the past. Furthermore, the modernization and secularization program imposed by Tsar Peter I (r. 1682/1696-1725), which subjected the Church to state control following Western models of regulating ecclesiastical affairs, needs special mention here, as it constitutes a break from the Orthodox past. Under the influence of Archbishop Feofan Prokopovich (1681-1736), who was in favor of a Western model of Church-state relations, the Patriarchate was thus abolished in 1721 and replaced by a Holy Synod (having Protestant consistories as a model) under the control of a state-imposed lay inspector, a civil procurator, who was present in all its meetings and reported to the government.[44] Later ideals and holistic

models in the Russian tradition actually turned against such a Western-led modern differentiation and fragmentation process between the religious and the secular; for example, the *Sobornost* (conciliarity) of the lay theologian Aleksei Khomiakov (1804-1860), which was considered as characterizing Orthodox Christianity (in contrast to the "monarchic" Roman Catholic and the "democratic" Protestant Church tradition) with the aim of countering Western influences on Russian religious and intellectual life;[45] or the *Vse-edinstvo* (All-Unity) of the religious philosopher Vladimir S. Solov'ev (1853-1900) as part of his non-binary worldview and integrative vision.[46] These debates became even stronger throughout the 19th century, as various models and currents for Russia's future competed with one another (e.g., the Slavophiles vs. the Westerners), in which the issue of secularity of state and society was discussed controversially.[47]

Aside from this, the radical nationalization of the Orthodox world was also connected to a form of secularization and modernization in the context of various nation-building processes throughout Eastern and Southeastern Europe from the 19th century onwards, despite the fact that nationalism here was also related to the Church and exhibited many religious features, as "Orthodoxy" was often identified with the idea of nation and instrumentalized during such processes.[48] In fact, interestingly enough, the least controversial aspect of secularization in the Orthodox world was nationalism, given that nationalization became conducive to the societal upgrading of local Orthodox Churches in the long term. Even so, it did lead to the internal fragmentation of the Orthodox Church body through the creation of national and autocephalous Churches and their instrumentalization by secular actors (e.g., in the context of Panslavism in Tsarist Russia in the late 19th and early 20th century[49]). The Patriarchate of Constantinople was the Orthodox institution that suffered most from this radical transformation of the Orthodox world,

not only in the 19th century, but also later, even until today.[50]

Generally speaking, it is worth mentioning that in the above Orthodox contexts we generally lack radical cases of secularism, aside from isolated exceptions. Greek and Russian (but also other Orthodox) bearers of Enlightenment ideas went so far as to support solely deistic and not radical atheistic views, in all probability because their cultures also lacked the related much longer and strong background of Western secularity and especially the binary opposition between the religious and the secular. In the 20th century, however, things became different in many respects, both from the Orthodox past and the Western experience of secularity. It all has to do with the secularization process imposed by the various communist regimes in Eastern and Southeastern Europe, which included many countries with an Orthodox majority (e.g., Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia/Serbia). As is well known, this radical change started in 1917 with the Bolshevik Revolution and the forced gradual imposition of a massive secularization in the Soviet Union.[51] Many scholars still consider Marxism-Leninism methodologically as a kind of "religion," yet this was never the self-understanding of this regime. Although Soviet secularization exhibited many phases between 1917 and 1991, ranging from active religious persecution to "scientific atheism" and propaganda, the Soviet "plan to kill God"[52] was in fact the most systematic anti-religious campaign, both in depth and in breadth, in human history. Its aim was to create, through a new truly secular system and the institutionalization of secularism as an ideology, a full substantive and functional equivalent of traditional religions that would eventually render them obsolete and replace them completely. Nevertheless, the Soviets were forced to make compromises with the dominant Russian Orthodox Church, which they occasionally used for their ideological purposes and which of course did not disappear. The same holds true for other major and mi-

nor religions on Russian soil. Be that as it may, the main question here is whether there was an intrinsic relationship between Russian society and Soviet secularity in the first place. In fact, Marxism was a Western ideology that was applied to and realized for the first time in an Orthodox milieu, not in a Western society. This may not have been accidental, as before 1917 there was mounting critique in Tsarist Russia against and growing dissatisfaction with the Church among various societal strata for neglecting social problems and cleavages, despite its polished façade and good external image. In general, the issue of world-relatedness of the Orthodox Church has been a central one in Russian history.[53] No doubt, in various local contexts, the Orthodox Church exhibited a strong social involvement,[54] yet this was not enough to change its overall image as an institution linked to the Tsarist regime among the revolutionaries and the masses. Anti-religious and anti-Christian currents had proliferated among the Russian intelligentsia in the period prior to 1917, mostly under the influence of respective Western ideas and currents, despite the existence of innovative and reformist currents within Russian Orthodoxy too (e.g., in the context of the All-Russian Local Orthodox Council of 1917-1918).[55] In spite of the many institutional Church deficits and the imperfections of the clergy, Soviet secularization could not break the generally strong bond between Orthodoxy and the Russian people (e.g., in rural areas).[56] Even the term "anti-clericalism," widespread in Western intellectual and political milieus at the time, had entered in a very limited way into Russian vocabulary before 1917.[57]

In any event, this period of religious suppression left its imprint upon the former Eastern Bloc world due to the catalytic encounter with secularity. This became evident in the post-communist era, when religions and especially the Orthodox Churches were substantially rehabilitated there.[58] The numerous multifaceted entanglements between Russian

Orthodoxy and Russian politics are easy to observe.[59] In many respects, the current negative evaluation of Western secularity by the 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.[60] 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, re-establish 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, not only domestically, but also internationally. Secularity seems thus to be a topic that this Church, because of its own previous negative experience with it, categorically rejects since it identifies it mostly with militant atheism.[61] Hence, the Church cannot still draw similar conclusions from this encounter with secularity, as the Western Churches have historically done, 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 new subtle bridges and continuities linking the religious and the secular, a process successful to a large extent. Despite a related background, Russian Orthodox thought lacks this long tradition in such a form and intensity, which also applies to the Orthodox world in general. It is exactly this difference that explains why clashes between Orthodox and secular actors are extremely strong and tense in post-communist Russia. In the West, such intense conflicts took place already in the 19th and early 20th century, while nowadays the potential Christian reactions are much more civilized, sophisticated, measured, and constrained. 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 reason-

able, sober, and pragmatic ways, a fact that explains the various ongoing "culture wars"—consider the case of the exhibition "*Ostorozhno, religiya*" (Beware, Religion!) in Moscow in 2003 and the violent Orthodox reactions against it.[62]

More interestingly, with all its power and influence, the Russian Church even attempts today to create an international traditionalist front and unofficial alliance (including conservative Western Christians, both Roman Catholics and Protestants, and Islamic actors) to oppose the enhanced (even if moderate) secularization of Europe through the support for "traditional values" and the rejection of secularism and liberalism.[63] The same is attempted domestically with the aid 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" one (*svetskoe gosudarstvo*).[64] As such, post-Soviet Russia offers a good testing ground for a theory of "de-secularization."[65] In the "Bases of the Social Concept" of 2000[66] and in the Document on human dignity, freedom, and rights of 2008[67], which represent a quite belated Orthodox attempt to deal theologically with the modern world in a systematic way, the Russian Church appears to be clearly oriented towards this world, yet in a special, non-Western sense that reveals a related defensive and skeptical attitude.[68] It formally acknowledges the unavoidable presence of an international secular order and establishment, in which the Church *nolens volens* has to live, to act, and to proclaim its message. 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, while it considers liberal secular democracies and 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. In this way,

the qualitative difference between God, the Church, and the world remains strong, while the Church appears to be convinced of its own superiority over the world. Despite temporary, unavoidable, and pragmatic compromises, its final aim is the overcoming of secularity and the transformation of the world into a Church in light of the Kingdom of God—consider, for example, the related idea of "inchurchment/churching" (*votserkovlenie*) in Russian Orthodox thought.[69] All this, however, points to a rather defensive attitude of the Church vis-à-vis the secular world, which it fears and cannot tolerate in principle. This may result in attitudes of self-insulation and self-isolation (a minority complex) and less active engagement with the world. All in all, this phenomenon constitutes an "acceptance-cum-rejection" of modernity and secularity,[70] which is far from consenting to the legitimacy of a secular sphere. We should keep in mind that this argumentation takes place more at the level of rhetoric and basic orientations than at the level of pragmatic decisions and practical strategies when the Russian Church often shows another image. This notwithstanding, this situation 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.) and intend to limit the Church's influence.[71] Interestingly enough, this Russian Orthodox discourse on modernity and secularity differs essentially from the current discourse of the Roman Catholic Church on these issues, which tries to create various bridges to them in a constructive and positive way.[72] This may illustrate once more the East-West-differences on the present topic.

It is worth mentioning that such problems also appear *mutatis mutandis* in other predominantly Orthodox countries, which did not experience communism at all. Greece is a case in point, because it has faced serious secularizing measures since its creation as a modern state under Western influence.

Very characteristic are the periods of the Bavarian Roman Catholic King Otto (r. 1833-1862) and especially the Church reforms under the aegis of the German Protestant jurist Georg Ludwig von Maurer (1790-1872).[73] Although there were Orthodox clerics like Theoklitos Pharmakidis (1784-1860), who massively supported such reforms, their results have been mitigated in the long run by various local reactions and factors and were ambiguous. The wholesale support of Greek nationalism and irredentism by the Orthodox Church in the second half of the 19th century and afterwards may account for these constraints. In other words, secular developments here were not fully in line with Western ones. There is a formal Church-state separation in the country, yet not in a Western sense, given that the "Orthodox coloring" of the state still exists, both in official and unofficial terms. There has been a moderate secularization process after 1974 in the country and more substantially after it joined the European Economic Community (today's European Union) in 1981, without however neutralizing the enormous symbolic significance of Orthodoxy in society, culture, and politics. The religious-secular divide still continued to play a role in this context, as the period of Archbishop Christodoulos (1998-2008) and the serious conflict ("culture war") over the personal ID cards reform with the Greek state in 2000 demonstrated.[74] Aside from this, the period of current Archbishop Hieronymos II (since 2008) initiated a new era in the relations between the Orthodox Church and the secular realm in general, as he attempted to redefine their boundaries without resorting to such "culture wars."[75] In fact, it is possible to place such endeavors within the broader discursive field of "multiple modernities,"[76] showing that Greek Orthodoxy can find in the future its own particular way to modernity.

Seen as a whole, the influence of Western forms of secularity upon the Orthodox world on various levels, a process that started since the dawn of the early modern age and contin-

ues up to this day, presents numerous particularities. Western secularity as a part of the broader project of Western modernity generally had a formative impact on the Orthodox East and triggered many tensions, conflicts, and changes. We should not forget here that anti-Westernism is still a dominant feature of Orthodox argumentation, even if in different forms than in the past,[77] and that there are common patterns of thought and argumentation among the various Orthodox peoples (e.g., Greeks, Russians, Serbs[78]). In many ways, the new independent states in Eastern and Southeastern Europe were run by secular élites and were thus forced to accept the Western differentiation between the religious and the secular as the basis of modern statehood and modernization, despite occasional 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 diffused lingering of old traditions (especially of the "symphonic" one, which is by the way non-realizable today[79]), such states (e.g., Greece, Bulgaria) retained an "Orthodox coloring" of the public sphere, which clearly deviates from Western standards. Such cases are thus rightly considered to represent a kind of "symphonic secularity/secularism," namely a combination of old religious traditions with new secular orientations.[80] In any event, many Orthodox still conceptualize politics with categories drawn from Orthodox theology, history, and practice (e.g., the Trinitarian model of existence).[81] Regardless of whether or not these visions are realizable nowadays, this attests to the lingering of strong religious and otherworldly elements in their overall conceptual apparatus, which is not informed in the first place by widespread and established secular options.

The aforementioned cases show that Orthodox Christian

cultures today are not fully Western in terms of their secu-
larity, yet, at the same time, they cannot be entirely identi-
fied with non-Western cultures in this respect. For example,
they have not been colonized in the way Western coloniza-
tion usually took place. In many ways, as already hinted at,
they thus appear to be something "in-between" the West and
the non-Western world. However, they also share with the
latter many common elements vis-à-vis Western secularity,
which is perceived in most cases as a threat to their much-
cherished tradition. For instance, a comparative examination
of Orthodox and Islamic positions on Western secularity
(especially against ideological secularism) may reveal quite
interesting convergences.[82] All this is particularly evident in
the age of globalization, as religion often becomes a source
and marker of an allegedly authentic identity with refer-
ence to a romanticized pre-colonial past. On the other hand,
such reactions do not preclude *a priori* more constructive
Orthodox encounters and entanglements with Western secu-
larity, which are not mono-dimensional, but rather manifold
in their expressions and articulations. Such cultural contacts,
interferences, exchanges, and translations are vital for un-
derstanding the formation of multiple forms of secularities
beyond the Western pattern on a local level including in vari-
ous Orthodox settings.[83]

Bearing this in mind, it is not difficult to realize that the
Orthodox East has never fully experienced the aforemen-
tioned radical developments in the West and that it has had
only a partial and fragmented encounter with them. No doubt,
the Orthodox world has been heavily influenced by Western
modernity (a process often identified with "Westernization")
over the last four centuries, yet the results of this process are
still rather limited, incomplete, controversial, and ambiva-
lent.[84] Modernity was in most cases regarded as an exogenous
phenomenon, intrinsically connected with the "fallen West,"
its theological deviations, and its alienation from Orthodox

authenticity. This is why the majority of the Orthodox have shown and continue to show a negative attitude and aversion towards the basic accomplishments of Western modernity; for example, towards individual human rights.[85] They also try to offer their alternative and allegedly better solutions to the impasses of Western modernity; for example, by re-placing the dualistic natural/supernatural distinction and bi-furcation by the more holistic—in their opinion—Patristic pair of created/uncreated reality; or by supporting Orthodox apophatic theology as a panacea to the various deadlocks of Western Christianity. Hence, one key difference between East and West remains that the former has still not fully en-dorsed 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 contextual hermeneutics,[86] by relying heavily on the pre-modern sources (e.g., the Patristic heritage),[87] or by idealizing the social conditions in Orthodox contexts (e.g., forms of communal social organization) before the advent of the modern age.[88]

Nevertheless, despite such anti-modern trends, the imme-diate decisions and actions of Orthodox actors, at least at the official institutional level, are underlined by more pragmatic concerns and *Realpolitik*. Truth be told, there have been iso-lated cases of a more fruitful encounter between Orthodox Christianity and modernity, both in the past and recently. Hence, several Orthodox thinkers of the past have shown a world-affirming attitude in various forms coupled with the need to reform Orthodoxy's relationship with the modern world. For instance, the Orthodox Theological Faculty at Czernowitz during the Habsburg Monarchy (1875-1918), where theology was taught by Orthodox Romanian theolo-gians in German, is a case in point.[89] These theologians were open to connecting their Orthodox tradition with modern Western exigencies and discourses, and it was a successful,

albeit short-lived, experiment to integrate Orthodox theology into a Western setting.[90] 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).[91] Among the Russian Orthodox theological and intellectual diaspora in the West after 1917, which came into close contact with modern secularity, we can also locate various voices asking for a fresh Orthodox re-evaluation of the modern world and its significance for theological reflection. Interestingly enough, this was attempted, even if some figures of this diaspora were critical of many aspects of Western modernity. The most seminal and perhaps controversial figure was Father Sergii Bulgakov (1871-1944), who was by profession an economist and who attempted to formulate an Orthodox theology of engagement with the secular world[92]—*inter alia*, on the basis of his notion of Divine Wisdom and the concomitant theological system "Sophiology" as a way of bridging God and creation, transcendence and immanence.[93] In the religious philosophy of Nikolai Berdyaev (1874-1948), the elements of human freedom, potential, and action in the world were also especially emphasized.[94] Such socially oriented trends were, however, criticized by the "Neo-Patristic School," represented mainly by Father Georges Florovsky (1893-1979), which exhibited a strong anti-modern character and was sensitive to the danger of the potential worldliness of the Orthodox tradition.[95] Interestingly enough, attempts are undertaken today to consider both these distinct currents, despite their different standpoints, as positive responses to the West and the world broadly in an attempt to develop a future Orthodox vision of modernity and secularism tailored to the

Orthodox tradition and history without an outright condemnation of the West or an idealization of the East.[96] All this attests to a gradual change of perspectives and orientations among Orthodox thinkers, which at times was followed by a critique of the widespread Orthodox otherworldliness and retreat from the world. In fact, this was the research agenda of an Orthodox theologian and sociologist of religion Demosthenes Savramis (1925-1990), who was the first to systematically use Max Weber's categories to the study of Orthodoxy Christianity and its societal influence.[97]

Current Developments within Orthodox Christianity

Moving now to the more recent era, it is also interesting to witness a number of cases in which the tradition of reforming Orthodoxy was continued in fresh ways. This concerns various individual Orthodox clerics and thinkers (e.g., Father Aleksandr Men', 1935-1990, and Father Veniamin Novik, 1946-2010, in post-communist Russia) or other more organized endeavors (e.g., the Volos Academy for Theological Studies in Greece since 2000), which try to articulate a new Orthodox attitude and concomitant discourse vis-à-vis modernity and secularity.[98] No doubt, these voices do not constitute the majority in the contemporary Orthodox thought, which still has great problems with Western modernity and secularity, a phenomenon often reinforced by political, cultural, and other factors. But it becomes clear that there are Orthodox clerics, scholars, and thinkers who 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.

How then can the current attitude of Orthodox Christianity towards modern secularity be summarized? In general terms, the Orthodox majority considered and still considers it highly problematic, if not explicitly condemnable and unacceptable. This is because secularity is 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. As already mentioned, this is basically the starting point of the post-communist Russian Church in its "Social Concept." 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 more specifically by the policies of Patriarch Bartholomew (since 1991). Aside from points of criticism, he has systematically promoted a more positive and constructive Orthodox stance on modern secular developments; for example, on modern human rights and their potential constructive correlation with Orthodox Christianity.[99] This can also be observed in Bartholomew's broad ecological activities (also called "Green Patriarch") and the development of an Orthodox ecological theology.[100] It is about an interest in the natural world highly underscored by eschatological presuppositions and principles, which, however, at the same time attests to the active international engagement of the Orthodox Church in this world out of theological concerns.

There have also been recent developments of broader significance within the Orthodox 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 Church in the modern world were discussed there to a limited degree,[101] whereas it was clearly stated that such is-

sues would be considered in more detail and systematically in the years to come. This may be interpreted as indirect evidence that social issues were never an utmost priority for Orthodox Churches, among other things as a consequence of the notorious Orthodox otherworldliness.[102] Yet, both before the Council, but especially afterwards, there has been an increased need on the part of specific Orthodox Churches and actors to formulate an official Orthodox social teaching. This was also due to the fact that such previous attempts (especially the Russian Orthodox ones) had already generated various debates with Western Christian circles, whereas a more fruitful interaction between Orthodox and Western perspectives on this issue remained still a desideratum. This finally 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," approved by the Patriarchate of Constantinople.[103] Having a cosmopolitan character in line with traditional Orthodox ecumenicity, this document constitutes a welcome fresh attempt to consider the world and the secular realm in a more assertive and constructive way than the one followed by the aforementioned Russian Orthodox "Social Concept".[104]

In addition to these promising signs, there is also a new international generation of Orthodox Christian scholars of varied ethnic provenance, who are trying to revive the Orthodox social presence and contribute in a fresh way to debates about global and regional social issues, not least in a productive and mutually fruitful dialogue with Western Christianity on the issue of secularity. This is often combined with attempts to develop a specifically "Orthodox theology of secularity" in various articulations.[105] These are novel and dispassionate evaluations of the secular transformation of the modern age, which stress the need of the Orthodox world to move forward and come to terms critically and productively with modernity as a whole, thus potentially creating "mul-

tiple Orthodox modernities." This attests to a new emerging 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 the growing worldliness in their Churches, the opportunities to enter into a profitable 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, any Orthodox problems here should not necessarily be considered as deficits 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. These converts turn to Orthodox Christianity as a reaction to the growing worldliness and secularization of Western (mostly Protestant) Christianity.[106] In fact, Orthodox Christianity has in recent decades become particularly attractive to many Western Christians as a traditional branch of Christianity with a long historical depth that offers them something beyond the common, the conventional, and the ordinary. Such conversion cases display, however, quite diverse facets. In many cases, one may observe an Orthodox radicalization that comes close to rigorist/fundamentalist attitudes and orientations.[107] Converts to Orthodoxy may perceive themselves as the sole "true and genuine Orthodox" in a secular and fallen world, a fact that may render their opposition to secularity even stronger and decisive.

Bearing this in mind, it becomes clear that the worldliness

of Western Christianity (especially in some liberal Protestant versions and contexts) also has its price. By embracing the mainstream values of the secular and liberal world, many Protestant Churches in fact lost their specificity and distinctive character to a large extent. In this context, theology has often been transformed into an anthropology. 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,"[108] which is critical of Western secular modernity and its impact on Christian theology.[109] However, in such anti-modernist contexts, one may also at times 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 current postmodern intellectual context,[110] which questions—among other things—the previously absolute secularization dogmas of Western academia, this is 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. As was once observed, Western Christians may have lost their "heart" due to enhanced rationalization and worldliness, but the less secularized Orthodox sometimes have gone so far as to lose their "mind," especially because of their intense otherworldliness and spiritualization.[111]

What is, however, additionally needed for examining the

present topic is to take into consideration the various eth-
nic Orthodox diasporas beyond their historical heartlands.[112]
These diasporas are found today both in Western and non-
Western settings and are naturally exposed to multiple influ-
ences, not least in the context of Western modernity, secular-
ity, and globalization. This means that attitudes towards the
world and the secular may vary considerably within Orthodox
diasporic communities and their respective cultures, a fact
that may have an impact on the mother Churches as well.
Such issues are worth examining as the Orthodox world, in
its pluriformity, comes into closer contact with contemporary
global environment beyond the traditional East-West divide.
Orthodox Churches in the diaspora often provide documents
that are innovative in their attitude towards the world and
current trends, as the document of the "Orthodox Bishops'
Conference in Germany" of December 2017 to the youth
addressing sexual issues and diversity clearly shows.[113] In
many cases, such developments are often due to the overall
pluralistic context in which such Orthodox bodies and ac-
tors are forced to operate, which includes close interaction
with Roman Catholic and Protestant actors. However, the
above case represents solely one side of the coin. As already
mentioned, depending on the circumstances, a radicalization
in Orthodox diasporic contexts should also not be excluded,
which may then lead to a stronger insulation from and op-
position to what may be perceived as representing a secular
threat.

At this point, it is also necessary to reflect a little further
on a previously mentioned feature of Orthodox Christianity
that has generated numerous discussions, debates, and criti-
cisms, namely its strong other- and outer-worldly orienta-
tions and their repercussions, in history and at present. It
cannot be denied that this feature has shaped and still shapes
numerous Orthodox engagements with the world in a de-
cisive way.[114] The famous Protestant theologian Adolf von

Harnack (1851-1930) once compared Roman Catholicism and Orthodox Christianity from this point of view. In his opinion, Orthodox Christianity is and remains preeminently and exclusively a religious institution oriented towards the transcendent (*Jenseitigkeitsanstalt*). The Roman Catholic Church is also such an institution, but, at the same time, it tries to become the Kingdom of God on earth.[115] Harnack pointed thereby to the Roman Catholic need for worldly power, expansion, and dominance, a feature masterfully literalized by F. M. Dostoevsky in his legend about "The Grand Inquisitor" in the novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. This has exactly to do with the pervasive world-affirming attitude of Roman Catholicism, which is absent from the Orthodox world in such a form and which, among other things, relates to its basic acceptance of modern secularity. One may adduce further evidence showing this particular Orthodox predilection and its world-neglecting consequences; for example, that the Orthodox had for a long time no systematic social teaching or political theology, or that they showed no particular interest in the world-related, path-breaking documents of the Second Vatican Council.[116]

The remaining question is whether this fundamental Orthodox orientation in its diverse manifestations should be understood in a monistic or in a pluralistic way, given that nowadays it enjoys a wider popularity and attractiveness beyond the strict Orthodox domain.[117] Furthermore, such an orientation does not necessarily signify that the Orthodox Church is not immersed in worldly activities of all kinds, ranging from economic investments to the development of religious tourism. Even in the monastic community of Mount Athos, monks, despite living "outside the world," have numerous worldly preoccupations, ranging from ecological products to information technology. In fact, Mount Athos has witnessed in the last decades an unprecedented influx of funds from the European Union for the preservation

of its monastic heritage.[118] From a historical perspective, the conflict between the "Possessors" and the "Non-Possessors" in early 16th-century Russia should also be mentioned here, which revolved around the legitimacy whether accumulating wealth or practicing poverty belonged to the authentic Orthodox monastic experience. Regardless of its many facets and concomitant interpretations,[119] this conflict certainly attests to the worldly predilections of Orthodox monks. It is thus not accidental that there have been recently attempts to provide the rich mystical heritage of Orthodox Christianity with a social and political content.[120] Truth be told, this is not the first time that such a correlation between mysticism and social involvement in the Orthodox context has been made—the same has happened with regard to Byzantium.[121] In general, Orthodox otherworldliness was for a long time criticized and became largely misunderstood. Yet, in the current setting, there may be new possibilities to bridge it with enhanced social concerns and activities. After all, the spiritual ascent towards a union with God should not necessarily be connected to a neglect of society or its fundamental denial.

Interestingly enough, the above issue is also related to a current development and more specifically to the ongoing global Coronavirus pandemic. It is about an epidemiological crisis that showed, in many respects, that Christian Churches as institutions also play an important public role; for instance, regarding the implementation of public health policies, initiated by the state authorities and supported by the scientific community. This is because Churches/religions have an immense persuasive power, and religious beliefs are in a position to substantially influence people's orientations, convictions, and attitudes. However, the current crisis is also closely connected to questions about the "sacred" and the "profane" realms that are extremely complex and open to various interpretations, thus often generating public debates and even controversies, which is what happened in various

Orthodox contexts worldwide.[122] For example, the closure of places of worship and/or the attempted "modernization" of some religious rituals (e.g., the manner of partaking of Holy Communion) because of their risks in transmitting the virus (in strict medical scientific terms) has met with diverse reactions on the part of various Orthodox Churches, actors, and everyday believers. Whereas some Orthodox have pledged for adapting such rituals to the current needs and exigencies, others kept supporting the traditional ritual practice and were reluctant to give away the related main contours of the Christian doctrine with regard to notions of miracle, mystery, uncanny, extraordinary, otherworldly, transcendence, and the like. This crisis has also sparkled various other debates as well (e.g., regarding new forms of the Divine Liturgy and generally of worship and spirituality). It is thus obvious that the tantalizing issue of worldliness, imposed by the decisions of state actors and external institutions upon the Church, is deeply involved in all these discussions and fermentations. It also creates significant cleavages within the Church between rigorists/fundamentalists, traditionalists and modernizers/liberals concerning the appropriate range of the Church's opening towards the world.

Will Orthodox Christianity come to a more fruitful encounter with modern secularity in the future? 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, for instance, 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. 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. In fact, the Orthodox may profit a lot from the Catholic interaction

and experience with modernity and secularity.[123] 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 had previously suffered 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 and current times and evaluate them more adequately. We are also talking here about the enhanced dissemination of a new Orthodox perspective on the modern secular order, which, despite its marginality and limitations, grows steadily in significance and may act in the future as a catalyst for a wider change of orientations and for enabling a broader Orthodox modernity or multiple local modernities. This will not be a mere copy of Western Christian examples and cases, but will reflect the specificities of the Orthodox religious system and culture in seriously and essentially coming to terms with the challenges of the modern secular age and its latest post-secular variations.[124]

Concluding Remarks

The previous succinct historical account of the various ways in which the Christian Churches in East and West articulated their relations to the world and dealt with the issue of secularity reveals not only their different trajectories across history, but also poses the question about their potential constructive interaction. The question of secularity concerns the necessary borders that the Church has ideally to keep vis-à-vis the world as such and especially vis-à-vis the secular realm. In the Latin West, these borders, especially in modern times, gradually became for various reasons and due to spe-

cific socio-political conditions rather elastic and permeable. By contrast, the Orthodox East has struggled to keep these borders stricter, less porous, and less open. Historically, there have been two main possibilities in this context. At the one pole stands an activist and this-worldly oriented attitude suggesting that the Church should play a more active role in the world and in the contemporary secular frame towards solving various problems and transforming society according to Christian principles. At the other pole stands an inward-oriented and world-escapist attitude that downgrades social action on the grounds that the change of socio-political conditions should primarily and preferably result in a mystical and spiritual way through an existential metamorphosis of the human being. Historically, Christian Churches have oscillated between these two poles, with the Western leaning more towards the former pole, while the Orthodox orientated themselves more towards the latter. In fact, it is about diverging orientations that have led to considerable debates throughout Christian history and even until today. A standpoint midway between these two contrasting positions acknowledges both the significance of social engagement for the Christian Churches and the value of purely spiritual renewal and formation. After all, both positions have their own risks and dangers. On the one hand, the stronger immersion in worldly affairs and the resulting worldliness may transform the Christian message into a purely immanent category deprived of its metaphysics and otherworldly dimensions, which were always historically an integral part of the Christian tradition. On the other hand, the limited presence of the Church in society due to an enhanced emphasis on the inner self and otherworldly concerns may lead to its withdrawal from the world and its insulation, which is not in congruence with the overall role of the Church across time. Both extremes have been rightly criticized on many occasions, both in the past and at present, yet finding the right

and sound balance in the multifaceted relationship of the Church to the world is of pivotal importance especially in our global age under the increasing conditions of uncertainty provoked by various types of crises (e.g., social, financial, epidemiological, environmental, humanitarian) and their multiple repercussions. However, it is also a tough challenge and will certainly bother the Churches in both East and West in the years to come.

  More importantly, these different modes of thinking, orientations, and practical attitudes towards the world are not due to an alleged "essence" of the Christian Churches respectively in ontological terms, but should be largely attributed—among other things—to diverging socio-historical circumstances in East and West. As a result, they are temporal and contingent, thus prone to change and adaptation accordingly. Out of socio-historical reasons, the challenge of worldliness, for instance, has been greater within Western rather than within Orthodox Christianity, which in general kept the boundaries between the Church and the world more clearly delineated. All this has often been a source of misunderstandings and mutual criticism between Christians in East and West and created a serious cleavage between them. However, a mutual cross-fertilization between Churches in East and West on this matter cannot be excluded, so that a sound balance between mystical, spiritual life, and social engagement may be achieved. Orthodox perspectives may offer alternatives to the growing worldliness challenging Western Christianity, whereas the Orthodox may also profit from the long Western experience and engagement in social matters. It is not about the better or the worse way of dealing with the world and by consequence with secularity. Rather, it is about inevitable socio-historical developments articulated differently in East and West and underscored by divergent factors respectively. The aim of this article was to adequately capture the dissimilar background of these developments,

to assess their multiple consequences, and to explore pos-
sibilities of productive interaction between East and West.

In view of recent developments within the Orthodox world
in terms of formulating an official social teaching, it is thus
imperative that Christian Churches proceed to a more fruit-
ful dialogue and constructive exchange regarding this key
issue, from which all may benefit in the end, especially in
view of the spiritual needs in the 21ˢᵗ century. New possibili-
ties should be created for better and self-critical inter-Chris-
tian cross-fertilization on the issue of world-relatedness and
the relations to the secular realm, especially in view of the
looming worldliness of and within the Church. Here exact-
ly Orthodox Christian perspectives, perceived in a moder-
ate and reasonable way and without otherworldly extrava-
gances, may prove useful in many respects. They may offer
various alternatives by focusing on certain elements (e.g.,
spirituality, sacrality, otherness), which seem to have been
largely undervalued and neglected in the context of Western
Christian active and pervasive world-engagement and in the
surrounding broader secular environment. No doubt, we are
talking about an inter-Christian mutual exchange on this is-
sue broadly. But, given the fact that Orthodox perspectives
on the world have been so far inadequately taken into con-
sideration by the Western establishment, religious and oth-
erwise, there is a strong prerogative to rehabilitate them, es-
pecially in terms of developing social activism while simul-
taneously preserving the otherness of the Christian message
intact. Christian world-relatedness needs to be reconfigured
in light of the current secular or post-secular global environ-
ment, yet without losing the spiritual identity that functions
as a boundary between the Church and the world, the reli-
gious and the secular.

Aside from this inter-Christian challenge, there is also an
intra-Orthodox one, namely one pertaining to the Orthodox
world itself and the mutual relations between the various

Orthodox Churches. As already mentioned, there are so far—aside from other minor texts— two main official documents on Orthodox social teaching, one by the Russian Church of 2000, and the other by the Patriarchate of Constantinople of 2020. No doubt, this is a highly promising development in view of the neglect of this issue by the Orthodox over a long time. However, given the aforementioned differences in perspectives between these documents with regard to the Orthodox stance towards the world, things seem to be complicated. Despite common elements, traditions, and trajectories, the Orthodox still have to reach a broader agreement on this issue with the hope to formulate a social document of Pan-Orthodox acceptance and validity—of course, through the active participation and input of the other Orthodox Churches in this process. Unfortunately, due to ecclesiological, jurisdictional, and other problems in the wake of the Pan-Orthodox Council of 2016 and the Ukrainian Church crisis of 2018-2019, pan-Orthodox unity and cooperation have been put to a severe test. Instead of coming together, the various parts of the Orthodox world seem to be drifting apart with far-reaching repercussions. Nobody can predict with accuracy the future course of events, and the existing schism between the Patriarchates of Constantinople and Moscow will take time to heal. All this does not look promising towards achieving a greater pan-Orthodox consensus on social teaching either. In spite of these limitations and constraints, the dialogue between Churches in East and West and their hopefully productive interaction in matters of world-relatedness, worldliness, and secularity must be continued at any price. After all, it is about a most central issue in the history of Christianity diachronically, on which all Churches have plenty to say and to offer, based on their rich and diverse past and present experience.

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