

# Theology and Politics in Contemporary Greece

## *A Missed Opportunity for the Greek Theology of the 1960s*

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### Abstract

*This article examines the interaction between theology and politics in the case of the “theology of the 1960s,” a theological renewal movement that emerged in Greece in the 1960s, accompanied by the call for a “return to the Fathers.” The first part of the paper seeks to describe the position of the theology of the 1960s toward politics, while the second considered the position of politics after 1974 toward the theology of the 1960s. It concludes that there was a partial instrumentalization of the theology of the 1960s for tactical political ends. This was a missed opportunity leading to politics becoming devoid of all spiritual content, while theology lost its feedback from social experience and its penetration into society. The article concludes by making several suggestions for the tasks that lie ahead, including the need to cultivate a critical history of the political intervention and the social role of Orthodox theology, and to expand the issues that concern Orthodox theology, such as anthropology or cosmology, to embrace questions of the role of the meaning of history and progressive change in human society.*

### Keywords

*Orthodoxy, Greek theology, theology and politics, Christos Yannaras, theology and philosophy*

The 1960s were famous globally for their political turmoil and controversies over political visions, which led, among other things, to the events in Paris in May 1968.<sup>1</sup> This turmoil marked the culmination of the turbulence created by the trajectories of great social collectivist visions from the beginning of the 20th century, in particular Marxism. In modern Greece this turmoil was seen in various ways: the internal clash between Marxists and bourgeois intellectuals, and an authoritarian political system dependent on foreign powers in the 1930s, then the Nazi occupation and the (mainly communist) resistance, the civil war (1945–1949), the so-called post-civil war state, which was democratic only in name, and the overt dictatorship in the years 1967 to 1974.

In this constant struggle between authoritarian structures and progressive ideological currents, the role of religion – and especially of Orthodox Christianity – in the form of church structures, church politics, and theology was very important. In Greece, the 1960s saw the emergence of what has been called the “theology of the 1960s,” a theological renewal movement accompanied by the call for a “return to the Fathers.” It is therefore interesting in the case of the theology of the 1960s to examine this interaction between theology and politics. On top of this, these two areas are interdependent. Theology has its uses for political ideology; and theology, for its part, is mediated through mechanisms that deal with the public space, which therefore provide it with critical feedback. Speaking of a “missed opportunity” may imply the sort of teleology which to a historian should be completely foreign, since there are always new opportunities and new constellations within human history. In this article, the phrase is therefore used to describe the particular historical situation in the 1970s and 1980s in Greece, rather than an enduring misfortune. This paper has three parts: first, I describe the position of the theology of the 1960s toward politics; second, I consider the position of Greek politics after 1974 toward the theology of the 1960s; and third, I try to articulate some conclusions and suggestions.

## The Position of the Theology of the 1960s with Regard to Politics

Despite the inevitable implications of Christian theology for politics generally, we realize that the representatives of the theology of the 1960s did not aspire to adopt a certain attitude or to express a particular opinion toward the political theory of their times when they raised the great theological issues such as person and existence, law and love, grace. Thus the diversity of (often only intermittent) political commitment and efforts

<sup>1</sup> This is an edited version of the English version of a paper given at a conference organized in Paris in April 2010 by the Theological Academy of Volos (Greece), and the Institut de Théologie Orthodoxe Saint-Serge and the Centre Iстина, Paris. A French translation was published in *Contacts: Revue française de l'Orthodoxie* 259/260 (July/December 2017), 499–516.

to deal with political issues were secondary concerns. On the one hand, with his insightful articles in the daily press, Christos Yannaras adopted a critical position toward many important political matters (such as the relation of the church to the state, or the problem of education) before and after the dictatorship. On the other hand, one pivotal personality in the 1960s contributed to the turn to patristic theology, organizing a team of scholars and editing important patristic texts in Thessaloniki. This was Panayiotis Chrestou (1917–1996), who was for a time minister of education (and religion) of the Ioannidis regime (a second sub-period of the dictatorship in the period 1973–1974) and who tried to restrain the power of the para-ecclesiastical brotherhood through collaborating with the regime to a certain extent.

After the fall of the dictatorship (the “turn around”: in Greek, *Metapolitefsis*), Savvas Agouridis opted for the path of promoting convergence and dialogue between Orthodox theology and movements of the left. He became a member of the established and well-known left-wing peace organization EEDYE (the Greek Committee for International Détente and Peace) and a member of the association for friendship between Greece and the German Democratic Republic. He also wrote articles in *Argi* (“Dawn”), a significant left-wing newspaper and the voice of the so-called Communist Party of the Interior or KKE-esoterikou (which split from the Greek Communist Party, advocated breaking with the Soviet socialist model, and instead offered support for Eurocommunism). On the other hand, John Romanidis stood for congress in the Greek parliamentary elections of 1977 for a small nationalist party (the Ethniki Parataxis).

This is not the first time that one notes within modern Orthodox theology both a certain acknowledgement of the politics of modernity, on the one hand, and a distance from it, on the other. In fact, similar phenomena were also seen outside Greece in the work and activity of persons who nurtured the theology of the 1960s. In the middle of the 20th century, one can see in the works of Sergii Bulgakov and Nikolai Berdiayev evidence of an open attitude to dialogue and an effort to respond to the challenge of Marxism.<sup>2</sup> Berdiayev even tried initially to adapt to the new circumstances in the Soviet Union after the October Revolution. On the other hand, there is the well-known case of Basil Krivoshein (later Archbishop of Brussels in the Russian Orthodox Church). While he was at Mount Athos during the war and the German occupation, along with other monks he invited the Nazi occupation forces to invade Athos (and for which he was convicted by a Greek court of law in Thessaloniki in 1947), believing that in this way

<sup>2</sup> See for example the works of N. Berdiayev, *The Fate of Man in the Modern World*, originally published in 1936 (see Nicholas Berdyaev, *The Fate of Man in the Modern World* [Ann Arbor, Mich.: The University of Michigan Press, 1961], and *Christianisme et réalité sociale* [Paris: Ed. Je Sers, 1934]).

communist resistance groups would be kept from the Mount.<sup>3</sup> The fact that a prominent theologian and a scholar who dealt with Byzantine spiritual writings (such as Symeon the Younger Theologian) was actually convicted for collaborating with Nazis demonstrates how much Orthodox theology may lack criteria for action in the specific political situation in the era of modernity. This lacuna or discomfort with regard to political action can also be seen in the case of many persons of the generation of the 1960s; this remark is a mere description of facts and not an accusation of any kind.

If we roughly sketch out the broad philosophical and ideological currents of the 20th century, the following three currents emerge: the broad current of metaphysics in history, the existentialist current, and the neo-positivist current.

The first current includes the heirs of Hegelian dialectics, the various schools of Marxist thought (Leninism, Eurocommunism, and so on) and philosophical thought (Georg Lukacs, the Frankfurt School, and so on), as well as the collectivist visions around pseudo-subjects of history such as state or race, represented by National Socialism and fascism. This current seeks to juxtapose metaphysics with action in history, or to attribute a metaphysical meaning to history. The second current includes the well-known existentialist philosophers with whose work the Greek theologians of the 1960s tried to deal. The third includes groups and schools of thought that revived the positivist thinking of the 19th century, attempting to purge it of dogmatic generalizations and underlining its limits. Although it came from continental Europe (Vienna, France), this current soon became a mark of Anglo-Saxon cultural heritage. It includes the circle of Vienna, structuralism, analytical philosophy, and those tendencies exploring the structures and codes of absolute meaning of existence and history.

After the First World War and up to the 1980s, it was the first current that prevailed in the movements for critical action, changing political structures, and progressive thinking. It was the main language for communication between various political and socio-economical fora, and even in the arts. Even different religions or spiritual trends could communicate through envisaging the change of society and adopting a politically progressive or even Marxist vocabulary.

Despite the prevalence of this current of historicizing metaphysics, and despite the fact that this current posed very important questions that also concern theology (such as the meaning of history, the nature of human beings in historical action, or changes in

<sup>3</sup> He was convicted in August 1947 by the Special Court of Law for Collaborators “for collaboration with the enemy in a disgraceful manner for a Greek citizen (συνεργασία μετά του εχθρού κατά τρόπον ανάξιον Έλληνοσ πολίτου. . .)” (Verdict 394/26.9.47 and 168/27.9.47 of Special Court according to Constitutional Act 6/1945). G. Karayiannis, *Η Εκκλησία από την κατοχή στον εμφύλιο* [The Church from the Occupation to Civil War in Greece] (Athens: 2001), 263–64, 281.

society), the generation of the 1960s was only occasionally and not systematically concerned with this current, at least when we compare the interest of these theologians for the great names of existentialist philosophy.<sup>4</sup> We do not find similar occupation with, for example, Hegelian dialectics, the early Marx, Georg Lukacs, or the Frankfurt School. The encounter of Olivier Clement with the movement of May 1968 in France was very soon translated into Greek from his essays and articles under the title “Theology after the Death of God” in the publications in which the theology of the 1960s was exemplified, such as the journal *Synoro*.

Certain issues of *Synoro* deal with Orthodoxy and Marxism, as well as Orthodoxy and politics,<sup>5</sup> and attempt to deal with these questions theologically. Although the majority of these texts consist of translations of foreign contributions, this effort points to several key topics regarding the relationship between theology and Marxism. The article by the Roman Catholic theologian Jean Daniélou on “Marxist and Sacramental History” offers a contrast to the Marxist view of history, instead presenting history as a narrative of the “great achievements of God” and as salvation history that lies outside of historic teleology.<sup>6</sup> The article by Sergii Bulgakov on “Orthodoxy and Economic Life” contends that all economic systems contain important features for human society and that the Orthodox Church should stand for the one that best secures personal freedom (from physical poverty and social slavery) in each given situation.<sup>7</sup> Kaiti Chiotelli (a female voice of the generation of the 1960s) shows through her examination of texts of liturgical life the concern of the church for material problems.<sup>8</sup> A fundamental article by Savvas Agouridis in 1964 on “Marxist Anthropology from a Christian Perspective” pointed to the similarities but also differences between the two anthropologies.<sup>9</sup> Two years later, the discussion about politics once again included an article by Bulgakov, this time on “Orthodoxy and the State,”<sup>10</sup> as well as a text by Vladimir Soloviev on “Orthodox Christology and Social Problems,”<sup>11</sup> and Berdiayev on “The Religious Messianism of Russian Communism.”<sup>12</sup> This latter text claimed that the nihilistic-ori-

<sup>4</sup> See for example the work of Christos Yannaras (*On the Absence and Unknowability of God: Heidegger and the Areopagite*), John Zizioulas (*Being as Communion*), or Nikos Nissiotis (*Existentialism and Christian Faith*).

<sup>5</sup> See issue 31 (Autumn 1964) and issue 40 (Winter 1966/67) respectively.

<sup>6</sup> Jean Daniélou, “Marxist and Sacramental History,” *Synoro* 40 (1966/67), 145–52.

<sup>7</sup> Sergii Bulgakov, “Orthodoxy and Economic Life,” *Synoro* 40 (1966/67), 153–61.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 162–71.

<sup>9</sup> Kaiti Chiotelli, “Marxist Anthropology from a Christian Perspective,” *Synoro* 40 (1966/67), 133–44.

<sup>10</sup> Sergii Bulgakov, “Orthodoxy and the State,” *Synoro* 40 (1966/67), 280–85.

<sup>11</sup> Vladimir Soloviev, “Orthodox Christology and Social Problems,” *Synoro* 40 (1966/67), 274–79.

<sup>12</sup> N. Berdiaeff, “The Religious Messianism of Russian Communism,” *Synoro* 40 (1966/67), 268–73.

entated eschatological spirit of the Russian soul led to a sort of reversal that produced the nihilistic-oriented atheist revolution. This issue also includes a text by Philip Sherrard and John Campbell on “The historical rise of the modern Greek state.” This set out the main perspective for the historical approach of the theology of the 1960s, namely the distinctiveness of the East and the deformation of its political institutions by the West.<sup>13</sup> Finally, there is a text by Panagiotis Nellas, in which the issue of “politics” is seen through the main theological aspects of Nellas’ thought, namely the patristic theology of the “garments of skin,” to which politics and other elements of human civilization belong, and the eschatological witness and eucharistic action of the church into the world (and hence also into the phenomenon of politics).<sup>14</sup>

In 1976 Christos Yannaras collected the newspaper articles that he had published in the main Greek newspapers in an edited book, under the title *Chapters of Political Theology*.<sup>15</sup> Both in the preface, as well as in the way he classified his own texts, one detects the two main components of his way of thinking, which consist of a continuation of the spirit of the discussions in *Synoro*. First, the “political” problem of Greece is the cutting itself off from its own Orthodox popular self-consciousness. And second, the essence of politics must be the revelation of the existential truth of the human being understood as a person and not the rational setting of individual interests. The main model for this kind of “politics” is the Holy Trinity, and its image is the church.

All these contributions contain many important elements and constitute a first attempt at dialogue with the political currents of the time, in a style that characterized all the attempts of this sort, namely in the form of projects such as public panels, publications, or seminars along the lines of “Orthodoxy and . . .” (such as Orthodoxy and Ecology, Orthodoxy and Socialism, Orthodoxy and Peace, and so on). The most theological elements, like those of Nellas and Bulgakov, consist in a sort of reflection upon the ancient corpus of political philosophy, into which Christian theories on political power were already implanted in Greek-Roman antiquity, particularly Stoicism. The political philosophy of Stoa focused on the seminal reason penetrating organized society, on natural law and the importance of *consensus omnium* as a criterion of truth and similar ideas. These concepts gave philosophical support to the idea that normal political and

<sup>13</sup> Philip Sherrard and John Campbell, “The Historical Rise of the Modern Greek State,” *Synoro* 40 (1966/67), 250–67.

<sup>14</sup> Panagiotis Nellas, “Three Biblical Presuppositions for the Approach of the Issue of Politics,” *Synoro* 40 (1966/67), 286–302. An extended form of this essay was later published in 1971 (during the time of the junta!) in the collective work *Testimony of Orthodoxy 1971*, edited by Fr Elias Mastrogiannopoulos (Athens: 1971), 155–86.

<sup>15</sup> Christos Yannaras, *Κεφάλαια πολιτικής θεολογίας* [Chapters of political theology] (Athens: 1976).

social life, peace, and effective governance have a somewhat sacred dimension. They are a form of a universal harmony and therefore of divine nature.

This is the final point of a long evolution in elaborating and promoting the understanding of political power as a phenomenon of sacred revelation. Christianity based on biblical thinking and on Christocentric eschatology did not abolish but essentially renewed this idea. It put it in a dynamic perspective using the notion of the eschatological end and the judgment of social relations and historical action by the sole saviour of human history, Jesus Christ. Given this presupposition, one can interpret various teachings in the New Testament about this relationship, such as “For there is no authority except from God” (Rom. 13). Political power, as well as the settled society generally, is sacred not through itself, but only when embedded in the prospect of the end of history with the second coming of Messiah. The aim of political power and social activity is to inaugurate this end, which is the judgment of the world and salvation by the son of man, as manifested and experienced in the gospel. Nellas thus turned our attention to this approach from the side of Christianity, and this turn is a valuable asset in participating in a dialogue with modern liberal political philosophy today, with its notions of freedom, human rights, accountability, equality, and so on. These values of the modern political philosophy of the Enlightenment find their equivalent in the Roman Republic and the philosophy of Stoicism, of which they are an elaboration.

The other contributions in *Synoro* consider politics from the viewpoint of the search for the spiritual or cultural identity of modern Greece and the critique of the West. This discussion nevertheless explores the phenomenon of politics in general, but does not elucidate the “reason” (the basis or criterion) of the political change or progressive politics and its meaning, a matter over which much ink and sometimes blood was spilt during the 20th century.

Apart from the discussion of Marxism by Savvas Agouridis, who started to consider the problem of the anthropological notions in relation to Marxism and the Bible and indirectly addressed the problem of metaphysics, we have to reach the 1980s (that is, considerably later than the 1960s) to find any other discussion on this issue. In 1983, Christos Yannaras distanced himself from political theology and the Marxist categories, claiming that according to Orthodox theology, politics

which serve social utility and the rational regulation of rights and desires, or the relations between work and capital, has nothing to do with theology. It is *a priori* submitted to individual demands and their conventional limitations – i.e., to the necessary alienation of men transformed into impersonal social entities or neutralized objects destined only for economic and cultural development.

Politics can be considered as a chapter of theology – a true political theology – when it takes upon itself serving man according to his nature and his truth.<sup>16</sup>

This can happen only through the church and its image, which is “an icon of the Trinity, a communion of persons and city of saints.”<sup>17</sup>

In 1984, Yannaras published his book *Right Reason and Social Practice*.<sup>18</sup> In it, he discusses the history of domination in society as a product of metaphysical dogmatics and, in the final analysis, of rationalism. He considers the efforts to liberate humankind through critical theory, in the form of the perspective of the Frankfurt School and Karl Popper. Yannaras concludes that the ontological view of existence must be accompanied by the use of the critical faculty and freedom so as to create a “critical ontology.” He describes the efforts toward this association in Western culture, focusing on the notion of “relation” in the work of the early Marx and Lacan. He asserts that the response of human existence to its ontological authenticity consists in a moment of changing society according to early Marx – that is, through communism. After these remarks, Yannaras sketches his own viewpoint of the apophatic function of reason, where being true as being in communion will eventually reorient politics in the direction of *autogestion* (self-management), of direct democracy, and so on. That apophatic function demonstrates “otherness” as a constituting and not abolishing factor of an ontologically genuine “polis,” in the same way that art promotes both individuality (“otherness”) and at the same time leads to community.<sup>19</sup>

This was, as far as I am aware, the last example at this level of the theology of the 1960s confronting politics. In 1989 and the years that followed, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Marxism lost its political relevance, at least at the level of ideas and at a symbolic level. The paradigm of interpreting political function underwent radical changes, and in some ways has remained quite opaque ever since (the so-called

<sup>16</sup> Christos Yannaras, “A Note on Political Theology,” trans. St P. Tschlis, *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 27:1 (1983), 53–56.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Christos Yannaras, *Ορθός λόγος και κοινωνική πρακτική* [Right Reason and Social Practice] (Athens: 1984).

<sup>19</sup> In recent years, Yannaras' political thought has attracted more attention in the writings of Pantelis Kalaitzidis (see, for example, his book *Orthodoxy and Political Theology* [Athens/Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012]); Jonathan Cole “Personhood, Relational Ontology, and the Trinitarian Politics of Eastern Orthodox Thinker Christos Yannaras,” *Political Theology* (2017), 1–15; and Cole's paper on “The problematic of Greek identity and Christos Yannaras' Quest for a Politics of Authentic Existence” at the conference *Polis, Ontology, Ecclesial Event: Engaging with Christos Yannaras' Thought*, held at the University of Cambridge, 27–28 March 2017, and others. Our contribution here does not intend to focus on the political thinking of Yannaras until today; we try only to pose certain of his works of political theory in the context of the theology of the 1960s. The evolution of Yannaras' thought as a whole is certainly a broader issue.



paradigm crisis). The legacy of the theology of 1960s as it currently exists is in part a reaction to this chaotic situation in political theory, contributing to discussion on issues that came up after 1989, such as emergent nationalisms in Eastern Europe, civil rights in traditional societies, and so on. For example, the Theological Union (*Theologikos Syndesmos*) founded in 1984 in northern Greece, and later the review *Kath' Odon* from 1992, tried to promote a renewed discussion on issues such as global ethics, civil rights, and ecology. These efforts, to some extent, were spiritual descendants of the theology of the 1960s. From that perspective, the controversy over human rights between Christos Yannaras and Savvas Agouridis is especially interesting:<sup>20</sup> the former claims that a society based on human rights as a sole criterion of genuine existence results in the dismantling of society, leading to an “inhuman” society; the latter, on the other hand, considers human rights the legal heir of biblical social thinking and the framework for a more progressive and a better society. This debate notwithstanding, a fundamental discussion on the ontological and anthropological dimension of social change in history is still to take place.

### The Position of Politics with Regard to the Theology of the 1960s

Although we think we have left Marxism behind, politics itself has never been left behind; there is a certain timeliness in the old slogan “*tout est politique.*” (“everything is political”). No general theory (including theology) is able to be mediated and become active without political channels – and I do not mean by this the necessary public relations, but also a bigger network of political functions on many levels.

From the 1960s to the 1980s, there was a painful and difficult disintegration of the post–civil war state in Greece. After many years of poverty, restrictions of press and human rights, and dependency on US and European financial aid, Greece experienced a superficial liberalization in the middle of the 1960s, which was followed by a “Greek-Christian” nationalist dictatorship accompanied by a stronger financial dependency on the US. The political earthquake of the Cyprus invasion (1974), which led to the downfall of the junta, and the impact of the oil crisis after 1977 paved the way for a broad anti-Western movement, which was not principally and altogether politically progressive, as one might think given its anti-colonialist and radical rhetoric.

In any event, in this exciting time, the teaching and the structures of the Orthodox Church in Greece could not but be instrumentalized by both sides to offer theoretical support to different political visions. This was already the case during the civil war,

<sup>20</sup> S. Agouridis, *Τα ανθρώπινα δικαιώματα στο Δυτικό κόσμο* [Human Rights in the Western World] (Athens: 1998); and Chr. Yannaras, *Η απανθρωπία του δικαιώματος* [The Inhuman Character of Human Rights] (Athens: 1998).

when Christianity became used as part of an anti-communist campaign throughout Europe. In Greece, there was an interesting aspect of this use in the tension between the para-ecclesiastical brotherhoods (mainly Zoi) and the hierarchy of the Church of Greece.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, politics had an impact upon theology after the 1960s, which became obvious after the fall of the junta in 1974.

The apophatic theology, the neopatristic synthesis, the theology of the icon, and the notion of person were used by various political factions to create their own ideological profile. Left-wing and right-wing movements alike, pro-European and anti-Western tendencies, used the theology of the 1960s in different ways, and many theologians participated in political groups or entered into discussion with them. It is almost impossible to cover all aspects within the framework of a short article; I can but provide some examples of characteristic polarization in northern Greece between conservative and progressive theologians, each of which emerged from the womb of the theology of the 1960s, without being entirely identical to it.

This tension grew out of the conflict between the “Theological Union” (politically progressive at that time) and the group around P. Chrestou in the 1980s. At the same time, the review *Epopteia* and its editor Panayiotis Dracopoulos made efforts to construct a forum for a pro-European centre-right orientated theology of individual freedom. In the review and the publishing house that was directed by Dracopoulos (Imago), one finds both texts of the Greek church fathers or ascetical writers (such as *The Climax* of John Sinaites) along with texts of lobbyists for the policies of Ronald Reagan, such as Norman Podhoretz. On the other hand, one could see the way in which the theology of the 1960s penetrated small groups of activists in the universities. This was the case with the student political group the Young Christian Socialists, the youth movement of the small party of Christianiki Demokratia (Christian Democracy) in the universities, as well as other independent small left-wing groups. Another example was the dialogue between Christians and Marxists and the outcry this led to among journalists and intellectuals, who coined the term “neo-Orthodox” to describe this convergence between theologians, the priests or monks from Mount Athos, and left-wing writers and artists from 1983 to 1985.

Nevertheless, the discussion from the side of the main representatives of the theology of the 1960s did not continue, and in some cases the political aspects were played down and even ignored. One psychological explanation for is that these representatives, such as Yannaras or Nellas, wished to distance themselves from the (reactionary) political role of the brotherhoods before the dictatorship, since they wanted to make a complete break with their own

<sup>21</sup> See a broader description of this tension in D. Moschos, “Ideologische Wandlungen in der Kirche Griechenlands während des Kampfes zwischen Kommunisten und Antikommunisten (1945-1974),” in *Kommunismus im Rückblick: Ökumenische Perspektiven aus Ost und West (1989–2009)*, ed. Ingeborg Gabriel and Cornelia Bystricky (Ostfildern: 2010), 311–25.

past within these brotherhoods. Political involvement would thus have meant a sort of return to past nightmares. In 1984 Yannaras (the same year as the publication of *Right Reason and Social Practice*) gave an interview to the journal *Simadia*, which was produced by the group the Young Christian Socialists, mentioned above.<sup>22</sup> In the interview, Yannaras attacks the activity of the student union groups – which he considered a mere product of manipulation by political parties in Greece to prove their own “political toothpaste,” as he called it.

This activity in the university, however, provided the mechanism to popularize this theology in its practical effects. One of these effects was the flourishing of the monastic life in Mount Athos. Between 1982 and 1990, many students organized panels and other activities in form of festivals or public discussions, where important church figures such as abbots from Mount Athos (Vasilios Gontikakis and the monk Symeon from the Gregoriou Monastery), significant theologians close to the theology of the 1960s, or priests from abroad like Athanasios Jevtic or even Olivier Clement, were invited to talk to huge crowds. Herbert Marcuse in the US in the 1960s and later Antonio Negri in Italy in the 1980s tried to place the student movement at the centre of a political discussion, showing that the students could build an essential part of the modern front for a radical change in society – and that in fact they held a leading role in it. Nevertheless, in Greece the occasional student uprisings were seen as merely trade-unionist movements or an aspect of a certain social folklore.

Of course it is true that the student movement in the 1980s was largely running out of steam when compared to the legendary anti-junta student riot of 1973. But that does not mean that there could not have been a discussion on a theological level. Some possible issues could have been, for example, the ontological meaning of class consciousness, the meaning of the social struggle for the realization of human existence, and the sort and degree of importance one should ascribe to so-called marginal groups in a process of social change. These theoretical discussions were missing. During the stages of the dialogue between Christians and Marxists, one can see from the side of Christians only elementary theological positions for the importance of the life of the Trinity in a society of justice and solidarity, or the importance of the ascetical life for contemporary society and economy.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> “What is left and right today in Greek University? These are mere commercial brand names which launch products for psychological consumption. They advertise their products fervently and they spend huge amounts of money in student elections to spread better their political toothpaste” (Interview with Chr. Yannaras, *Simadia* 8 [November 1983], 32).

<sup>23</sup> Contrary to criticism against the “scientific socialism” of Christos Yannaras in his *Right Reason and Social Practice*, we read in a text from the days of Christian–Marxist dialogue that “the fact that the omnipotence of science is acknowledged by the Marxist philosophy is not opposed to Christian Spirituality, because the latter is also scientific and positive. Like positive sciences, it is based on a measuring instrument and a specific method, the action and the experiment” (G. Metallinos, “Introduction to Orthodox Spirituality,” *Simadia* 9 [February 1984], 20). The affinity with the approach of J. Romanidis regarding theology as a positive science is obvious.

The main participants in the dialogue from the side of Marxism were exceptional personalities, such as Kostas Zouraris and the late Kostis Moskof. They tried to test the social reflexes of Orthodox theology in order to bring about a sort of common front or simply because they saw Orthodox Christianity as an element of popular belief, and they approved of it as such.

## A Missed Opportunity?

A consequence of what we have described so far is to have neglected the deepening and further elaboration of issues of social change on an anthropological level, at least in the sophisticated way that this discussion was undertaken with, say, Heidegger. The result was the partial instrumentalization of the theology of the 1960s for tactical political ends and the dispersion of theologians into various political efforts. Of course that was, to some extent, inevitable, but it damaged not only theology but also politics. Politics became devoid of all spiritual content, while theology lost its feedback from social experience and its penetration into society.

An example of the latter consequence – theology losing its feedback from social experience – was the endless discussion about the content of religious education in public schools in Greece, which was unable to overcome or reconcile theological opinions opposed to each other, precisely because any political discussion has been pushed into the subconscious. Politics functioned only through clientelism, and the discussion with theology took place only under the table – never in a transparent way, and freed from feelings of guilt. More serious, however, is the first consequence – politics becoming devoid of spiritual content – which contributed to the looting of aspects of the theology of the 1960s by political rhetoric, which after 1990 and in new circumstances was developed into a vehicle of blistering anti-Western sentiments and a turn to national-romantic approaches to history. Politics and theology “agreed” at the level of the lowest common denominator, or rather the worst common denominator: the persecution of the “other,” of those “different.”

Yet history continues to be open, and we should consider the positive aspects. It is clear to all of us that the theology of the 1960s was extremely fruitful. Against the landscape of postmodernity, the relationship between theology and politics in many situations globally is imperiled by, on the one hand, the excesses of theocracy, which is the authoritative regulation of common life by religious power, and, on the other, from the excess of mysticism, which reduces the impact of religious experience to the mere private sphere.

In Greece there has been a certain criticism about the social commitment of Orthodox theology from the side of a socio-political tendency, which focuses on the importance of human rights and the civic society. The main accusation is that Orthodox theology contributes to holding back modern Greek society: miring it in traditionalism, obsolete political structures, and nationalism.<sup>24</sup> This critique turned into open conflict during the ministry of the late Archbishop of Athens and All Greece, Christodoulos Paraskevaïdis. It is true that in many cases, elements of the theology of the 1960s (such as the back-to-the-roots slogan) were used in a broader isolationist, traditionalist, and nationalist discourse. To disentangle the main features of the theology of the 1960s from this discourse, we should consider the following tasks:

First, we should cultivate a critical history of the political intervention and the social role of Orthodox theology and the action of the church in the countries chiefly affected by them (such as those of the old Byzantine Commonwealth). This historical review should be undertaken without nationalist or romantic prejudice and in dialogue with the values of modernity. It should avoid declaring the utopian escape to pre-modern (Orthodox) social structures as a serious social model, worthy of being discussed.

Second, the issues that concern Orthodox theology, such as anthropology or cosmology, should be widened to embrace questions of the role of the meaning of history and progressive change in human society. This discussion must go far beyond Yannaras' fundamental work, *Right Reason and Social Practice* – especially in the present context, where the global financial crisis calls for the need to rethink political economy and its goals. In this aspect, the “theology of personhood” should serve as a basis for a new understanding of anthropology, incorporating political action and not evading it.

Third, we should act critically against the possibility that theology could be transformed into an ideology of a secularized and authoritarian Christianity. This would be a revival of the dogmatic metaphysics that inaugurated theocracy in the Middle Ages and was so strongly condemned by the theology of the 1960s.

<sup>24</sup> D. Moschos, Η νεοδιαφωτιστική κριτική απέναντι σε κοινωνικές αναφορές της Ορθόδοξης σκέψης [The Criticism of Neo-Enlightenment against Social Aspects of Orthodox Thinking (in Greek)], *Synaxi* 73 (January–March 2000), 24–39.

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