

Orthodox Christianity between Modernity and Postmodernity: A Critical Overview of a Multifaceted Topic

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Orthodoxy and Modernity: A Differentiated Assessment

To understand the particular relations of Orthodoxy with Modernity, it is absolutely necessary to consider the latter's historical origins, linked to Western Europe (and the West in general) from the 16th century onwards, as well as the many radical changes that occurred within this context, such as the Scientific Revolution, colonialism, the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, the various processes of democratization and the Industrial Revolution. Of course, today, in our globalized era, efforts are being made to understand Modernity (as well as many other developments) in its global connections and dimensions; hence the talk about "global" or "multiple modernities"² beyond the original Western European model, which no longer makes claims of being unique and absolute. Besides, these expansions have also been associated with developments in the wider Orthodox world, such as those in post-communist Russia³. Despite these welcome and

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1. M. Featherstone – Sc. Lash – R. Robertson (eds.), *Global Modernities*, Sage, London 1997.

2. Shm. N. Eisenstadt, *Comparative Civilizations and Multiple Modernities*, vol. 1-2, Brill, Leiden – Boston 2003.

3. Kristina Stoeckl, "European Integration and Russian Orthodoxy: Two Multiple Modernities Perspectives", *European Journal of Social Theory* 14, 2 (2011), pp. 217-233.

legitimate developments related to the meaning and understanding of Modernity, we cannot ignore or overlook its aforementioned Western historical origins; it should not be forgotten that for most of the time modernization was identified with Westernization, a fact that changed only in the last few decades within the context of Postmodernity and Postcolonial Studies⁴.

Apart from the above, it is precisely this historical connection of Modernity with Western Europe and the West in general that can actually explain the problems that Orthodoxy has been facing with it, mainly because of its endemic anti-Westernism and its overall criticism of modern Western developments. Undoubtedly, these problems are initially linked to the schism between the two Churches, which was also connected to the prevailing alienation of the two worlds, the Orthodox East and the Latin West, which was not limited to religion but extended to many other levels. From the Orthodox point of view, subsequent developments in Western Europe (including Modernity) were in fact an inevitable continuation of the “Latin deviation” from the Orthodox “authentic” faith and tradition. More particularly, the main characteristics of Western modernity, such as endo-cosmicity, secularization, the rise of religious indifference and atheism, individualization, liberalization, rationalization, social differentiation, the separation between Church and State, world-theoretical pluralism, and religious tolerance, were seen as convincingly demonstrating the Western world’s apostasy from God and the truth of the Christian Revelation. These effects of Modernity left their indelible mark on many levels – individuals, society, culture, politics, economics and many fields of knowledge, including theological science.

Still, what was the relationship between Modernity and Western Christianity in general? Based on the preceding observations, one would initially conclude that this relationship was mainly conflictual. This is largely correct and is corroborated by a wealth of relevant evidence. However, from a broader perspective, the relationship seems to be more

4. D. Lal, “Does Modernization Require Westernization?”, *The Independent Review* 5, 1 (2000), pp. 5-24.

of a two-way street, because it presents many “paradoxes” and needs to be examined in a more nuanced way. On the one hand, Protestantism emerged in parallel with Modernity and was largely associated with it in a creative manner, given the fact that the Reformation as a whole was of enormous cultural significance. Moreover, the confessionalization process in Western Christianity was closely linked to the emergence of modern state structures. In addition to that, there were many great modern thinkers in many fields, who were influenced –indirectly or directly- by Protestantism: John Locke, Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schleiermacher and Ernst Troeltsch. Max Weber’s main contribution was to show that Modernity as such, despite its anti-Christian and anti-religious tendencies, had Christian and especially Protestant origins, a fact that had been overlooked and completely forgotten in the course of time.

In view of the above, it is no coincidence that Protestantism in general was considered to be largely compatible with modernity, as, for example, has been shown by the influential currents of “*Liberale Theologie*” (“*Liberal Theology*”) and “*Kulturprotestantismus*” (“*Cultural Protestantism*”) in the 19th and early 20th century in Germany. However, the above evidence does not give the full picture of these relations, since there were also opposing trends. The well-known phenomenon of “Fundamentalism” first appeared in the U.S.A., essentially as a reaction to the liberal tendencies within Protestantism, which were perceived as endangering the very foundations of the Christian faith, while Karl Barth’s “*Dialectical Theology*” was a sophisticated theological response to liberal Protestant tendencies, marked by strong anti-modernist tendencies. Finally, the movement of “*Radical Orthodoxy*” that appeared in the 1990s, mainly among Anglican theologians, turned specifically against Western secularism as Modernity’s normative narrative, to which Christianity was wrongly forced to adapt.

Yet, the Roman Catholic Church was the one that came under enormous pressure, suffered great losses and was forced to make various concessions and compromises in the face of Modernity. It was a truly difficult association for many centuries, both regarding the particular institution –the Roman Catholic Church– the theological scholarship,

and the ordinary believers. In fact, Roman Catholicism has been the main target of sharp criticism and attacks by several modern thinkers, movements (e.g. the French Revolution) and states (e.g. the *Kulturkampf* in Bismarck's Germany) as a fundamental part and reflection of an "old world" which had to be radically and decisively transformed. Obviously, Roman Catholicism strongly opposed these processes and tried to either stop or control them. Let us mention here Pope Pius IX's anti-modernist encyclical *Quanta cura*, published in 1864, together with Modernity's *Syllabus errorum*, as well as the anti-modernist controversy in the early 20th century concerning the control of certain Roman Catholic theologians' opinions (e.g., of Alfred Loisy), who expressed "progressive" views concerning the Bible and other subjects. However, these reactions could not inhibit Modernity's dynamism and its wider impact, especially within Roman Catholicism itself. These long-lasting fermentations and conflicts finally led to a liturgical compromise with Modernity, which occurred after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). This represented a milestone in the development of the Roman Catholic Church and led to the acceptance of Modernity's basic social choices (e.g. by accepting modern human rights and religious freedom) and theological science (e.g. by accepting the historical-critical method). In its essence, it was the emergence of a new Roman Catholic Church, more creatively interwoven with the various challenges of Modernity and formulating its own relative strategy. Of course, thereafter, we can also observe differences in the way the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church have dealt with Modernity. For example, Pope Benedict XVI showed an ambivalent attitude towards it in comparison to the current Pope Francis, whose positions seem to be more compatible with the modern spirit⁵. Undoubtedly, such readjustments that have been observed from the second half of the 20th century onwards were also possible within the context of the Postmodernity's rise, which we will discuss it below.

5. The recent decision in December 2023 regarding the Church's blessing of same-sex couples is absolutely indicative of the changes that continue to occur in the Roman Catholic world, which in previous eras would have been unthinkable; see "Dichiarazione Fiducia supplicans sul senso pastorale delle benedizioni", <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2023/12/18/0901/01963.html#en> [14.01.2024].

Let us now turn our attention specifically to Orthodoxy's encounter with Modernity and its consequences, a subject which has so far been discussed in various contexts⁶. Due to historical and other factors as well as the endemic Orthodox anti-Westernism, this encounter has been mainly problematic and conflicting. This situation is fully understandable in the overall historical and social context of Orthodoxy, which of course should not be criticized for this event. In any case, the result was that Orthodoxy's relationship with modernity remained largely partial, incomplete, fragmentary and unfinished. It is no accident, therefore, that the Orthodox narrative in general is still today largely based on a pre-modern framework of reference. This can characteristically be seen in the normative –and therefore binding– position that tradition and the past hold in Orthodoxy to this day in relation to the present and the future, which are considered *a priori* and by definition inferior and subordinate to them. We are dealing here with Orthodox traditionalism in its various manifestations⁷, the influence of which historically remained not only within the religious sphere, but have extended to other secular ones and have acted as an obstacle to attempted changes and reforms⁸. Another case is evident from the acceptance or rejection of the legitimacy of a secular sphere in society and the desire to return to a pre-modern modus vivendi in which Orthodoxy completely –or largely–

6. See, among others, P. Kalaitzidis, N. Ntontos (eds.), *Ορθοδοξία και Νεωτερικότητα*, Indiktos Publications, Athens 2007; V. N. Makrides, „Orthodoxes Christentum und Moderne – Inkompatibilität oder langfristige Anpassung?“, *Una Sancta* 66, 1 (2011), pp. 15-30; V. N. Makrides, “Orthodox Christianity, Modernity and Postmodernity: Overview, Analysis and Assessment”, *Religion, State & Society* 40, 3-4 (2012), pp. 248-285; St. Giagkazoglou, *Θεολογία και Νεωτερικότητα. Δοκίμια για τη συνάντηση της Ορθόδοξης θεολογίας με τὸν σύγχρονο κόσμο*, Harmos Publications, Athens 2023; P. Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy and Modernity: Introducing a Constructive Encounter*, Brill, Schöningh, Paderborn (In Print, 2024).

7. V. N. Makrides, “Orthodox Christianity, Change, Innovation: Contradictions in Terms?”, in: Trine Stauning Willert – Lina Molokotos-Liederman (eds.), *Innovation in the Orthodox Christian Tradition? The Question of Change in Greek Orthodox Thought and Practice*, Ashgate, Farnham 2012, pp. 19-50.

8. V. N. Makrides, “Orthodoxy Matters: Why Has a Scientific Revolution not Taken Place in the Greek East? The Role of Orthodox Christian Traditionalism”, in: K. Tampakis – H. Ventis (eds.), *Orthodox Christianity and Modern Science: Past, Present and Future*, Brepols, Turnhout 2022, pp. 15-44.

controlled and determined social trends. In this context, the process of secularization, which decisively marked Western modernity, is negatively judged from an Orthodox point of view⁹. This process was historically linked to the ontological upgrading of secularity and the affirmation of the earthly world in itself, in contrast to the transcendental and extra-worldly tendencies that Orthodoxy has always emphasized. Such anti-modernist tendencies are mainly expressed by the Russian Orthodox Church in the post-communist era¹⁰, which are clearly visible in its criticism officially stated in 2008 of modern individual human rights and their secular character¹¹. As it was mentioned above, these peculiarities of Orthodoxy can be interpreted historically and understood in its own historical-political context of development and in the respective parameters. Besides, Islam has faced *mutatis mutandis* similar problems with Western modernity, something that has often led to reciprocal approaches between Orthodox and Islamic agents with an anti-Western bias¹².

Still, on the basis of those remarks, can Orthodoxy be considered anti-modern and unreformable, or categorically or intrinsically incompatible with Modernity? The answer to these questions must be in the negative, even though Orthodoxy has been criticized in the past and more recently, especially by Western powers, for being an obstacle and impediment to social, intellectual, economic and other development. This criticism was formulated by Western Christian circles, who, based on their own experiences, considered Orthodoxy rigid, petrified, completely traditionalist and non-evolving¹³, while at the same time there have been many non-religious Western agents that propounded similar criticism¹⁴,

9. V. N. Makrides, "Secularity and Christianity: Comparing Orthodox with Western Perspectives", *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 63, 3-4 [2018 (2021)], pp. 49-107.

10. Alicja Curanović, "Russia's Mission in the World: The Perspective of the Russian Orthodox Church", *Problems of Post-Communism* 66, 4 (2019), pp. 253-267.

11. V. N. Makrides – Jennifer Wasmuth – St. Kube (eds.), *Christentum und Menschenrechte in Europa. Perspektiven und Debatten in Ost und West*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt/Main 2016.

12. An. Sharp, *Orthodox Christians and Islam in the Postmodern Age*, ἐκδ. Brill, Leiden 2012.

13. L. Wolff, *The Enlightenment and the Orthodox World*, transl. (Greek) Maria-Christina Chatzioannou, Section of Neohellenic Research / National Hellenic Research Foundation Publications, Athens 2001.

14. Sabrina P. Ramet, "The way we were – and should be again? European Orthodox

considering Orthodoxy as culturally backward, especially in countries torn between pro-Western and anti-Western trends and currents¹⁵. Indeed, the predominantly Orthodox countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, as well as those in the Christian East, generally fall into this category and have more or less faced related problems. This means that a similar criticism of Orthodoxy has also been made “from within”, i.e. by politicians, intellectuals and other actors within the Orthodox cultures themselves, for whom the West has constantly been a model of development and modernization. There are, of course, other specific situations in which Orthodoxy has been subjected to similar criticism. For example, this was done systematically for ideological reasons by the communist regimes in many countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe within the context of their general anti-religious warfare during the 20th century.

All these cases, in which Orthodoxy appeared as incompatible with Modernity, were reinforced by the fact that various Orthodox agents, both official and unofficial, were sharply critical of the West and its negative effects, in many cases from an anti-modern point of view. Here again we are dealing with the multifaceted Orthodox anti-Westernism, which takes a variety of forms and applies to different situations. For example, many Orthodox agents criticized the effects of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution on the Orthodox sphere in the 18th and 19th centuries, since these modern developments were perceived as directly threatening the Orthodox tradition and its uninterrupted continuity. Also, the alleged distorting Western influences on Orthodox theology, especially during Modern Times, have been particularly severely criticized by prominent Orthodox theologians (e.g. Georges Florovsky, Christos Giannaras) with the aim of discovering another Orthodoxy – forgotten but traditional, genuine and untainted by the West. Moreover, the revival of anti-modernist tendencies in the Orthodox post-communist

Churches and the ‘idyllic past’, in: T. A. Byrnes – P. H. Katzenstein (eds.), *Religion in an Expanding Europe*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006, pp. 148-175; Sabrina P. Ramet (ed.), *Orthodox Churches and Politics in Southeastern Europe: Nationalism, Conservativism, and Intolerance*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2019.

15. S. P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon & Schuster, New York 1996.

environment shows their resilience. The Moscow Patriarchate plays a primary role here by defending the “traditional values” and the anti-Western ideology of the most authentic “Russian world” in contrast to the corrupt, fallen and faltering Western one. In this context, various anti-modern and anti-Western alliances have been attempted (e.g. with Islamic circles), and “culture wars” have been conducted, with the goal of demonstrating the important differences between East and West¹⁶. It is no coincidence that Patriarch Kirill of Moscow described Russia’s war with Ukraine (and by extension with the West) in 2022 as a “metaphysical war”, meaning that it is a war aiming to defend different principles, values and traditions¹⁷. In other cases, there are contacts between Orthodox and anti-Western agents coming from the West itself, who criticize various aspects of its modern development (e.g. with the aforementioned “Radical Orthodoxy” movement¹⁸). Finally, the increasing phenomena of ecclesiastical censorship and control within the Orthodox theological sphere in the post-communist era (e.g. in Russia, Serbia, Romania) reveal a rather introverted Orthodoxy that fears theological liberal openings and tries to distance itself from any external influences, especially those coming from the modern West.

In the evaluation process of the above views, it should be emphasized from the outset that Orthodoxy should in no way be considered as the main factor of social backwardness and underdevelopment in these countries and in the respective cultural groups. The possible relevant effects are related to a number of other factors, which contributed to these developments and in which Orthodoxy may –depending on the

16. Kristina Stoeckl – Dm. Uzlaner (eds.), *Postsecular Conflicts: Debating Tradition in Russia and the United States*, Innsbruck University Press, Innsbruck 2020; Kristina Stoeckl – Dm. Uzlaner, *The Moralist International: Russia in the Global Culture Wars*, Fordham University Press, New York 2022.

17. An. Krawchuk, “Narrating the war theologically: does Russian Orthodoxy have a future in Ukraine?”, *Canadian Slavonic Papers/Revue Canadienne des Slavistes* 64, 2-3 (2022), pp. 173-189.

18. J. Milbank, “Pavel Florensky and the Future of Thought”, *Вестник Свято-Филаретовского института* 48 (2023), pp. 31-50; N. K. Syundyukov, “Булгаков и Милбанк: к критике секулярного разума”, *Вестник Свято-Филаретовского института* 48 (2023), pp. 75-98.

circumstances and the historical and political parameters— have played a role, albeit a secondary and usually not decisive one¹⁹. During the last decades –especially within the post-modern context— there has been exercised a strong critique of these earlier views that considered Orthodoxy as the root cause of the various deficiencies in Orthodox environments –in contrast, for example, to the perceived progressive and Modernity-compatible Protestantism²⁰. It should also be remembered that Orthodox critique and resistance to modernity appear mainly at the level of rhetoric and the widespread relevant narrative. On a practical and institutional level, the Orthodox Churches and official bodies have no particular problem in coming to terms with Modernity’s imperatives (e.g. in relation to a more secular and neutral religious state) or in exhibiting pro-modernist tendencies and choices (e.g., regarding the economic sector)²¹. Majority Orthodox countries certainly have many peculiarities in those areas, since the respective Orthodox Churches still enjoy various special “privileges”, which differentiate them from the Church-State relations prevailing in most Western countries. However, this is not a contradiction, but can easily be interpreted in terms of the theory of “multiple modernities”, which are not necessarily bound by the relevant Western tradition. The acceptance of modern nationalism by Orthodoxy and its massive nationalization from the 19th century until the present day should be understood –at least to some extend– within this context. This indeed presents a paradox, that it is incompatible with the long ecumenical tradition of Orthodoxy. Nevertheless, this fact –beyond any further evaluations– is proof that Orthodoxy was associated with Modernity and incorporated various elements of it for various reasons, regardless of their various effects²².

19. V. N. Makrides, “Orthodox Christianity, Rationalization, Modernization: A Re-assessment”, in: V. Roudometof – Al. Agadjanian – J. Pankhurst (eds.), *Eastern Orthodoxy in a Global Age: Tradition Faces the Twenty-first Century*, AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek 2005, pp. 179-209.

20. Chr. Hann, *Eastern Christianity and Western Social Theory*, University of Erfurt, Erfurt 2011.

21. V. N. Makrides, “Orthodox Christianity and Economic Development: A Critical Overview”, *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 185 (2019), pp. 23-43.

22. V. N. Makrides, “The Search for an Orthodox Christian Identity: Orthodoxy, Nation, and Ecumenism Between 19th and 20th Century”, in: L. Ferracci (ed.), *A History of the*

Apart from this, we should also not forget the fact that Orthodoxy has historically had its own creative and critical encounters with Modernity, even if they were personal, isolated and fragmentary efforts made by some members of the Orthodox clergy and laity. The general climate remained undoubtedly negative and critical of Modernity, but these efforts should not be ignored or underestimated, because they reveal another aspect of Orthodoxy's historical encounter with it. For example, the Enlightenment has been judged negatively by the majority of the Orthodox people²³, yet there have been cases of an "Orthodox Enlightenment", i.e. Orthodoxy's selective association with the new developments. The case of the scholar Archbishop Eugenios Voulgaris (1716-1806) is typical in this respect, if one considers, for example, his ideas on religious tolerance and freedom, or on the relationship between faith and reason²⁴. Again, in different times and contexts, we can identify various examples of a critical dialogue between certain local Orthodox traditions and Modernity, such as the Russian²⁵, Greek²⁶ and Romanian²⁷ ones. In this respect, we should emphasize Russian Orthodoxy's multifaceted contribution to the whole issue in different forms and at various levels, which left its indelible mark to the overall relationship of Orthodoxy with Modernity and stood out visibly from the limited contributions of other local Orthodoxies.

Desire for Christian Unity: Ecumenism in the Churches (19th-21st Century), vol. 1: Dawn of Ecumenism, Brill, Leiden – Boston 2021, pp. 110-131.

23. V. N. Makrides, „Orthodoxes Christentum und westeuropäische Aufklärung: Ein unvollendetes Projekt?“, *Ökumenische Rundschau* 57 (2008), pp. 303-318.

24. V. N. Makrides, „Verureinigung der Orthodoxie oder Prozesse der Inter-konfessionalität? Der Fall Evgenios Voulgaris im 18. Jahrhundert“, in: Christina Alexiou – D. Haas (eds.), *Westliche Konfessionskirchen und orthodoxes Christentum als Thema der Interkonfessionalitätsforschung*, ἐκδ. V&R unipress, Göttingen 2024, pp. 157-185.

25. Regina Elsner, *The Russian Orthodox Church and Modernity: A Historical and Theological Investigation into Eastern Christianity between Unity and Plurality*, ibidem Press, Stuttgart 2021.

26. P. Kalaitzidis, "New Trends in Greek Orthodox Theology: Challenges in the Movement Towards a Genuine Renewal and Christian Unity", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 67, 2 (2014), pp. 127-164.

27. I. Moga, „Orthodoxe Theologie begegnet Moderne. Die Czernowitzer akademische Theologie um das Jahr 1900“, *Orthodoxes Forum* 35 (2021), pp. 125-139.

This is a long evolutionary path; it began with the religious philosophy of Slavophiles and other thinkers in the second half of the 19th century, continued with the academic theology until 1917²⁸ and culminated in the Russian theological and philosophical diaspora in the West until the mid-20th century²⁹. For example, Sergij Bulgakov's "Sophiology", apart from its ecclesiastical condemnation, is an attempt to articulate a specifically Orthodox narrative regarding Modernity³⁰. Of course, in this context there have also been anti-modernist tendencies and criticisms³¹, but there is no doubt that this was a particularly fruitful period of encounter between Orthodoxy and Modernity, which left its mark and influenced many other Orthodox cultures and thinkers. Nevertheless, it is sad to note, as it is mentioned above, that the official Russian Orthodoxy in the post-communist period has chosen an anti-modernist path in contrast to the rich tradition of the recent Russian past.

What is most interesting, though, is that the developments that occurred in the Orthodox world after the seismic changes of the late 20th century are characterized by great diversity, and in many cases exhibit a willingness for a more substantial and creative dialogue with Modernity. Initially, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople under Patriarch Bartholomew (since 1991)³² had attempted to make such an opening to the contemporary globalized environment through various actions (e.g. inter-religious, ecological, orthodoxy and especially with the Pan-orthodox Council of 2016, in which –among others– related issues were

28. Jennifer Wasmuth, „'Kulturorthodoxie': Zu einem konzeptionellen Neuansatz in der russischen orthodoxen Theologie an der Wende vom 19. zum 20. Jahrhundert“, *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 119 (2008), pp. 45-62.

29. Kristina Stoeckl, *Community after Totalitarianism: The Russian Orthodox Intellectual Tradition and the Philosophical Discourse of Political Modernity*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt/Main 2008.

30. M. Plested, *Wisdom in Christian Tradition: The Patristic Roots of Modern Russian Sophiology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2022.

31. Kristina Stöckl, "Modernity and its Critique in Twentieth Century Russian Orthodox Thought", *Studies in East European Thought* 58, 4 (2006), pp. 243-269.

32. I. N. Grigoriadis, "The Ecumenical Patriarchate as a Global Actor: Between the End of the Cold War and the Ukrainian Ecclesiastical Crisis", *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 13, 3 (2022), pp. 345-358.

discussed³³) and to maintain dialogue with Modernity in a different context than the past ones (e.g., in relation to modern human rights)³⁴.

At the same time, we could observe the emergence within Orthodoxy of many new trends, as well as institutionalized efforts, for a new and systematic dialogue with Modernity, accompanied by self-critical tendencies and the desire from its side to learn, benefit and overcome its older polarities (e.g. its fruitless anti-Westernism). These developments not only affect the traditional cradles of the Orthodox world, where such efforts have been institutionalized (e.g. the Academy of Theological Studies of Volos), but they also concern the Orthodox diaspora in the West, where similar efforts have been observed over the last decades, such as Fordham University's "Orthodox Christian Studies Center" and the "International Orthodox Theological Association" (IOTA). This marks the emergence, development and spread of new forms of Orthodox thinking by a new theological generation of scholars who was formed and educated in Western environments. They attempt to bring significant changes in the contemporary Orthodox narrative, including the evaluation of Modernity. The new official text on the social ethos of the Orthodox Church (2020) under the auspices of the Ecumenical Patriarchate is indicative of these new trends within Orthodoxy, while its differences with the Russian Orthodox Church's social teachings (2000) are obvious³⁵. To be more precise, we see here the emergence of a new phenomenon: an "Orthodox cosmopolitanism"; it wants to reshape Orthodoxy, offering to it greater extroversion and voice, and making it more influential on an international level³⁶. Furthermore, there is close

33. V. N. Makrides, „Zwischen Tradition und Erneuerung. Das Panorthodoxe Konzil 2016 angesichts der modernen Welt“, *Catholica. Vierteljahresschrift für ökumenische Theologie* 71, 1 (2017), pp. 18-32; Vasilios N. Makrides – Sebastian Rimestad (eds.), *The Pan-Orthodox Council of 2016 – A New Era for the Orthodox Church? Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, Peter Lang, Berlin 2021.

34. Ökumenischer Patriarch Bartholomaios I., „Orthodoxie und Menschenrechte“, *Evangelische Verantwortung* 9-10 (2017), pp. 3-8.

35. V. N. Makrides, «Le nouveau document social de l'Église orthodoxe. Son orientation, son élaboration, son contexte et son importance», *Istina* 65, 4 (2020), pp. 387-413; D. Schon, *Berufen zur Verwandlung der Welt. Die Orthodoxe Kirche in sozialer und ethischer Verantwortung*, Friedrich Pustet, Regensburg 2021.

36. B. N. Makrides, «Ο ὀναδυόμενος Ὀρθόδοξος κοσμοπολιτισμός: Τὸ νέο ἐπίσημο

cooperation between all these new actors in the traditional Orthodox cradles and the Orthodox diaspora; so far, there have been many significant results. Undoubtedly, this does not mean that the relationship between Orthodoxy and Modernity has completely changed, given the fact that anti-modern tendencies clearly still prevail in the Orthodox space. Evidently, though, Orthodoxy, despite its alleged immobility and its supposed ossification, is evolving and changing, and developments in the future may surprise, especially in its relationship with Modernity as a whole.

Orthodoxy and Postmodernity: A Creative Opportunity or a Serious Challenge?

Let us now briefly examine the relationship between Orthodoxy and Postmodernity, a current that appeared from the 1960s onwards, although its origins are clearly older. To begin with, some conceptual clarifications are necessary regarding the schemes used and the developmental stages of the periods under consideration. For example, there is the widespread schema: “Pre-modernity – Modernity – Postmodernity”, which is used in the present study. At the same time, there is another schema: “Pre-modernity – Early Modernity – Late Second Modernity”, which is essentially identical in relation to the reference periods to the previous one, but which connotes the last two stages somewhat differently. In other words, the most important here is the possible continuities or discontinuities between these various evolutionary stages. More specifically, the question is whether Postmodernity constitutes an essential break with Modernity or the latter’s differentiated and improved continuation. The Postmodernity thesis’s adherents, especially the most radical ones, support the first view, while those who espouse the Late Modernity one support the second. Indeed, despite the important

κείμενο για τὸ κοινωνικὸ θῆσος τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης Ἐκκλησίας καὶ ἡ σημασία του», *Σύναξη/ Syntaxis* 162 (2022), pp. 75-81; B. N. Makrides, «Ὁρθόδοξος Χριστιανικὸς Κοσμοπολιτισμός: Ἡ ἀνάδυση ἐνὸς νέου φαινομένου στὸν Ὁρθόδοξο κόσμο καὶ ἡ σημασία του», *Ἀχιλλίου Πόλις/Achilliou Polis* 9 (2023), pp. 447-482.

differences between them, Postmodernity does not represent Modernity's complete reversal or the end as a whole, but its correction and expansion in certain important respects. Moreover, many modern elements and developments are valid and remain active within the postmodern context. This is also something that the Postmodernity's moderate adherents accept; we've adopted this use of the term "Postmodernity" in this article.

The qualities that differentiate Postmodernity from Modernity (and this is also applies to the religious phenomenon) are many and varied. Among other things, criticisms have been made about Modernity's absoluteness and optimistic causality related to a continuous course of linear progress, as well as its claims of correctness and objectivity, elements which were mainly associated with the Enlightenment movement. The same goes for the certainties promoted by Modernity with regard to knowledge of man and the world on the basis of its "grand narratives" for a comprehensive understanding of reality. On the contrary, Postmodernity tried to highlight the ambiguities, equivocations and contradictions of man's limited cognitive abilities and capacities, which could not make claims of complete and absolute truth. For example, by deconstructing language itself, Jacques Derrida tried to show the inherent limitations of this basic human instrument, through which human beings have attempted in the past to describe and understand reality in all its aspects. Michel Foucault attempted to exhibit the special interests, the specific choices and the structures of power and authority lying behind the promotion of various "objective" forms of knowledge, a process that is anything but innocent, impartial and value – free. Moreover, particular criticism was levelled at rationalism and the rationalization process during Modernity, developments which were perceived as significantly limiting the more holistic and broader possibilities of human knowledge.

On the contrary, Postmodernity also "legitimized" other unconventional and not strictly rational processes and forms of knowledge acquisition (e.g. ritual, visual means, experience, empathy) with the aim of a multileveled, integrated and more comprehensive approach to reality. In this context, particular emphasis has been given on the diversity, tolerance, alterity, specificity, fluidity and relativity of the situations

under observation, as well as on the fragmented and heterogeneous fields of knowledge, which they nevertheless might be “connected” in non-obvious ways; again, this emphasized the need for a different and more comprehensive approach. At the same time, emphasis has been placed on the multiplicity of perspectives and interpretations, aiming at a creative ambiguity and overcoming an absolute and one-dimensional interpretative reductionism. This could include elements inherited from the pre-modern tradition, which were not regarded as wholesale obsolete and useless, but were appropriately understood in the post-modern context.

So, it is no coincidence that in Postmodernity many relevant issues are approached without strict specifications, but with a playful and often ironic mood, which seeks highlighting the fact that the absolute and complete grasp of reality is unattainable and utopian. Thus, Postmodernity is distinguished by an epistemological humility, emphasizing the limited human possibilities, precisely because man himself is a part of the world he simultaneously attempts to understand it, and criticizing René Descartes’s dualism and his basic distinction between subject (*res cogitans*) and object (*res extensa*) – the basis of modern epistemology. In contrast, Postmodernity aims at building a new holistic epistemology, which will transcend any distinctions in the various fields of knowledge and reveal the existing and imperceptible connections between them.

In general terms, Postmodernity has also been fundamentally critical of the multifaceted fragmentation of Modernity’s developmental model, which, due to its rigid rationality, had significantly limited the human personality and its various manifestations. As far as this aspect is concerned, Postmodernity has been associated with another multifaceted and in many ways parallel current, that of Post-Colonial Studies and the latter’s critique of Eurocentrism. In other words, Modernity’s claims regarding the universal power of its views and achievements were perceived as a kind of totalitarianism, imposed on other states and cultures in the context of Western European colonialism, which should be systematically and critically deconstructed. In this context, the modernization process on a local level was clearly distinguished from the generalized category of uncritical westernization, while the

aforementioned model of “multiple modernities” has also been proposed, replacing the supposedly unique Western modernity. Finally, it can also be surmised from the above that within the Postmodern context we can observe a radical change in the attitude towards religions in general and towards various key choices of Modernity (e.g. secularism), which had adopted a pronouncedly negative stance toward religions and especially Christianity. On the contrary, Postmodernity, with its more holistic, all-inclusive orientation, upgraded the role of religion and spirituality as perfectly normal expressions of human nature and society, while at the same time it supported the opposite trends, such as de-secularization and post-secularity. Certainly, post-modern context’s spectrum is extremely broad, including a variety of diverse and heterogeneous religious and secular trends. After all, the acceptance of diversity and tolerance represent a basic postmodern ideal, given the fact that the pluralism regarding the different worldviews and the peaceful and creative coexistence of such different trends should define a modern society the main purpose of which is to achieving integration and becoming prosperous.

Yet, what does all this mean for Orthodoxy? Despite the problems it historically faced with Modernity, it also displays an interesting “proximity” to Postmodernity on several levels. This is due –among other things– to the fact that Orthodoxy is significantly different from Western Christianity, with which initially Modernity, but also later Postmodernity, came into contact and critical confrontation. In this sense, Orthodoxy has certain “advantages” in relation to Western Christianity, which can be seen in the ways it is related to Postmodernity and in their various “common” points. These –among others– concern the discovery of the value and significance of the past and tradition, the balancing between intraworldly and transcendental attitudes, the relativization of positivist and rationalist models of knowledge, the epistemological humility in all fields (from the use of language to world perception) together with the recognition of human limitations, inadequacies and imperfections, the overcoming of logocentrism and the acceptance of the Other, alternative, unconventional and not entirely rational means and forms of knowledge and communication (e.g. mysticism, meditation,

ascetic practices, experience, spirituality, the discovery of the inner self), the importance of spiritual fatherhood, guidance, obedience and discipline, as well as the overcoming of the (extreme) rationalization of the religious phenomenon. These characteristics have always been theologically emphasized within Orthodoxy: man's "kenosis" and "createdness" in relation to his shortcomings; "apophaticism", not only in relation to the relativization of human language, but as a more general life attitude beyond certainties, absolutes and objectifications. Such terms are also frequently used by postmodern thinkers (e.g. *apophaticism* by Jacques Derrida, who uses the *Corpus Areopagiticum*³⁷), something that highlights the various affinities with Orthodox Patristic views and positions. The most characteristic common feature between the two is the fact that Orthodoxy emphasizes mystery, puzzles, infinity, symbols, the miraculous, the unknown and the avoidance of definitive answers – in theological matters and in many others. In this way, he had succeeded in staying away from the extremes of narrow Western rationalism, which had profoundly influenced Western theology (e.g. with the logical and theoretically highly developed "proofs" of God's existence, which were heavily criticized in Modern times)³⁸.

This "proximity" between Orthodoxy and Postmodernity is unquestionably very interesting, but it should not be misinterpreted or overestimated, because their origins and intentions are in fact very different and do not converge. When Derrida, for example, refers to apophaticism and related works of the Greek Church Fathers, he does not of course have at his starting point and corresponding goal a theological approach; he is exclusively interested in the deconstruction of human

37. Ivana Noble, "Apophatic Elements in Derrida's Deconstruction", in: P. Pokorný – J. Roskovec (eds.), *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Exegesis*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2002, pp. 83-93.

38. G. Kocijančič, "He Who Is and Being: On the Postmodern Relevance of Eastern Christian Apophaticism", in: R. F. Taft, S.J. (ed.), *The Christian East. Its Institutions and its Thought. A Critical Reflection, Papers of the International Scholarly [sic] Congress for the 75th Anniversary of the Pontifical Oriental Institute, (Rome, 30 May-5 June 1993)*, Pontificio Istituto orientale, Rome 1996, pp. 631-649; Ar. Papanikolaou, "Orthodoxy, Postmodernity, and Ecumenism: The Difference that Divine-Human Communion Makes", *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 42, 4 (2007), pp. 527-546; N. Mouzelis, "Self and Self-Other Reflexivity: The Apophatic Dimension", *European Journal of Social Theory* 13, 2 (2010), pp. 271-284.

language in itself within the context of his own post-modernist project. Therefore, the Orthodox apophatic tradition has for him only historical significance. His attitude is essentially nihilistic, characterized by a lack of meaning – in complete contrast to Orthodox theology. In any case, relativism is a general characteristic of Postmodernity as he fulminates against Modernity's absolute and binding “grand narratives”. On the contrary, Orthodoxy has its own relative narrative of ascribing meaning and projects it accordingly without substantial compromises. It has evidently adapted it –to some extent– to the contemporary diversified and globalized environment, but it has by no means abandoned it; thus, it is clearly distinguishable from Postmodernity.

Apart from this, Postmodernity intensely relativizes all kinds of religions, ideologies, political systems, etc., essentially operating on the basis of the principle that “anything goes”. Thus, it neither favors nor promotes any particular choice and perspective; it emphasizes the necessity of the peaceful and creative coexistence of all diverse and different agents and persons. These are evolutionary processes toward the transition from closed to more pluralistic and multicultural societies, by simultaneously accepting diversity in a competitive and globalized environment. It is therefore not by chance that in this context a particular “expressive individualism” is promoted as a way of life (especially combined with the recent communication and networking electronic and digital media), which appears also at the level of subjective religiosity that goes beyond any religious institutions, establishments and control mechanisms³⁹. Therefore, in Postmodernity, the pluralism of views, choices and ways of life is based on a fundamental relativism which governs all of its aspects. Thus, the question here is whether all these qualities fit in with Orthodoxy's basic orientations or whether at least some common ground can be found. Of course, Orthodoxy itself supports relativism (e.g., the human language as a means of apophatically describing God) and avoids giving definitive answers to many theological and other issues, which gives it great flexibility and adaptability. Yet, here we are dealing with a different kind of relativity, since it does not affect the

39. Ch. Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 2002.

religious truth claims that Orthodoxy simultaneously raises, regardless of whether it is able to adapt them to some extent to the contemporary pluralistic context.

What is most interesting in this regard is that from the beginning of the 21st century until today, these postmodern developments, despite their initial positive signs and their various contributions, started leading into various reactions and in many cases to the exact opposite situations. Initially, the widespread lack of general and coherent meaning, the projected pluralism and the nihilism and relativism resulted from it have often led to the return of absolute and binding opinions, choices and directions, which claim and demand absolute correctness and truth and which enjoy great influence and popularity. This outcome is not unrelated to the rise in recent years of authoritarian and non-liberal political figures and leaders who promise to work against Postmodernity's pervasive influence on traditional values and visions. On the top of that, the rapid development and global spread of new digital communication and networking media have greatly reinforced various fears, polarizations, conspiracy theories and irrational tendencies, especially through the unhampered and rapid dissemination of fabricated and false news, which spread misinformation to large swathes of the world population. The emerging future developments with their still unforeseeable consequences, such as artificial intelligence (AI), further exacerbate these concerns and lead to the search for all kinds of solutions, including some that are completely imaginary and unrealistic. What we can observe here is essentially a continuation of the many "humiliations" (Kränkungen) of human narcissism, which Sigmund Freud originally pointed out and successfully commented on them⁴⁰. Apart from the humiliation on the cosmological, biological and psychoanalytical level, many others have subsequently occurred⁴¹, and the emerging age of smart machines, intangible reality and the digital age foreshadow new upcoming humiliations of humans and their

40. S. Freud, „Eine Schwierigkeit der Psychoanalyse“, *Imago. Zeitschrift für Anwendung der Psychoanalyse auf die Geisteswissenschaften* 5 (1917), pp. 1-7.

41. G. Vollmer, „Die vierte bis siebte Kränkung des Menschen – Gehirn, Evolution und Menschenbild“, *Philosophia Naturalis* 29 (1992), pp. 118-134.

supposed uniqueness, which will certainly trigger even greater reactions.

Nevertheless, perhaps the greatest irony of the Postmodernity is that it is largely driven by situations against which it had reacted in the first place. Here it is about the ambiguities that characterize both Modernity and Postmodernity and reveal their inherent limitations. While in its early phase Postmodernity was characterized by open-mindedness, flexibility, tolerance and adaptability, its strong relativistic character subsequently led on to more radical and authoritarian tendencies, claiming absolute correctness while attacking and excluding any different point of view. We are referring here to a new form of totalitarianism, which is imposed sweepingly and without distinction and limits by political correctness, rightism, the culture of awakening or awakened consciousness (woke culture) and the cancellation culture. These are revolutionary developments, which include various reactions and protests, from a radical racial or cultural egalitarianism and relative integration to aggressive activism for environmental protection, social justice and against all forms of oppression, inequality and discrimination. The problem with these developments is that they forcefully and *a priori* invalidate any dissenters and consequently erode basic universal values, such as freedom of speech and academic freedom. Diversity, which is so strongly promoted by Postmodernity, is accepted and applied here very selectively, since in many cases there can be observed intolerance of different views and a systematic effort to discredit and eventually silence different voices that are considered dangerous. What is most characteristic in this regard is that these efforts are not only limited to the present but they are also expanded to the past, which is anachronistically stigmatized and criminalized on the basis of modern criteria, perceived as absolutely infallible and timeless points of reference.

All the above show that Postmodernity has its own flaws and limitations, and its future evolution is still unknown and uncertain. In any case, this confirms our previous assessment that its proximity –mostly apparent– to Orthodoxy in some respects should not be overemphasized, because they are in fact dissimilar things, which have deeper and in many respects insurmountable differences. Still, what Orthodoxy must avoid at all cost in this situation is, on the one hand, its disconnection from

general developments through its increased introversion and, on the other hand, its reactionary and aggressive attitude towards recent postmodern developments. As far as both the relative and the absolute phase of Postmodernity is concerned, there is a danger of the Orthodoxy's radicalization and its relative response, as the phenomena of the wider Orthodox rigorism and especially Fundamentalism, which are endemic in the history of Orthodoxy as a whole, clearly demonstrate⁴². Such tendencies are already observed in the present-day context, including many Western converts to Orthodoxy, who discover in this context the certainties they would like to regain and had already lost in the Postmodern era. In such cases, Orthodoxy is presented as a very attractive Christian tradition, offering to many people solutions to the relativistic postmodern dilemmas and deadlocks. Yet, the ultimate question is whether this is the only and most appropriate way for Orthodoxy to interact with postmodern developments, especially if one takes into account its aforementioned shortcomings in relation to Modernity. Possibly a more open Orthodoxy towards all these developments, which would interact with them critically as well as creatively, would be the best response and attitude towards a constantly changing environment.

Concluding Remarks

This brief presentation and evaluation of the relations between Orthodoxy and Modernity has highlighted, on the one hand, the former's peculiarities and, on the other hand, the various ambiguities of the whole issue in its many individual aspects. In addition to that, it is not only that Orthodoxy is facing various problems in this respect, which are largely understandable in the light of its own particular historical development and experience. This is also the case with many Christian Churches and other religions, as well as with various secular bodies and institutions.

42. V. N. Makrides, "Orthodox Christian Rigorism: Attempting to Delineate a Multifaceted Phenomenon", *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society* 2, 2 (2016), pp. 216-252; D. Džalto – G. E. Demacopoulos (eds.), *Orthodoxy and Fundamentalism: Contemporary Perspectives*, Lexington Books, Lanham 2022.

Therefore, the various criticisms that have repeatedly been made in the past against Orthodoxy, as being pre-modern and incompatible with modernity, should be radically revised. Again, Orthodoxy is not structurally or intrinsically incompatible with Modernity, as it has been argued in the postmodern context. Like any other religion, Orthodoxy is constantly evolving at its own pace and in the process reveals various other aspects of itself, which were not considered possible in the past.

As for the various imperfections, shortcomings and ambiguities of Modernity and Postmodernity are concerned, these mainly are related to their very structure and evolution; therefore, they are not elements or cases that could possibly be proved beneficial to Orthodoxy. The last observation is related to a widespread tendency for the Orthodoxy to be presented as a panacea for the various problems of the world in general, which it can solve or overcome in their entirety on the basis of its superior Christian tradition. This attitude is obviously problematic, because it expresses an uncritical Orthodox self-sufficiency, complacency and overconfidence, which are usually accompanied by triumphalism about Orthodoxy's incomparable value and a "messianic syndrome" that it is the only or, at least, most reliable "savior of the world". This can be seen in the increasing number of converts to Orthodoxy in the Anglo-Saxon world, which are often associated with a sharp critique of Western modernity and its consequences (e.g. secularization and abandonment of traditional values)⁴³. But the same is also true for the conversions to Islam which are even more numerous, from the moment that it is perceived as a medium for the Western Modernity's deadlocks to be solved and overcome.

As a result, such reasoning on a comparative level is not necessarily going to lead to any advantages of Orthodoxy in comparison with other religions in the contemporary highly competitive globalized environment. On the other hand, the aforementioned conversions to Orthodoxy in Western Europe and North America –especially from the wider Protestant sphere– are interesting because they are often associated with radical anti-modernist tendencies. In other words, they demonstrate the

43. Chr. Stroop, "Bad Ecumenism: The American Culture Wars and Russia's Hard Right Turn", *The Wheel* 6 (2016), pp. 20-24.

attractiveness on an international level of a non-modern and traditional Orthodoxy among individuals who are abandoning supposedly modern Protestantism for a more conservative religious direction. This fact alone shows the relativity of the categories used in this context. For example, being a modernist does not necessarily mean that this is the absolute best situation or that one enjoys more privileges and advantages.

But the most important thing is that Orthodoxy must first and foremost – and more systematically – reflect upon its own “imperfections”, before attempting to give any answers to modern and postmodern dilemmas. For example, it must first deal creatively and comprehensively with Modernity’s enormous multifaceted legacy and then examine the possibilities of contributing on its own in this area. Still, it is widely known from many examples that Orthodoxy’s encounter with Modernity remained for many reasons fragmentary, occasional and incomplete, with the result that Orthodoxy still remains at many levels in a pre-modern frame of reference. Moreover, Orthodoxy tries to offer answers and solutions to various modern dilemmas, deadlocks and problems based on a pre-modern logic such as the Greek Church Fathers’ apophaticism as a medium of overcoming the “demythologization” (“Entmythologisierung”) theory of the Protestant theologian Rudolf Bultmann. Such romantic regression or return to an idealized pre-modern past as a supposed solution to contemporary problems does not constitute any contribution of Orthodoxy to contemporary debates and disputes on the issues in question, nor does it demonstrate its dynamism and relevance. Moreover, the utopian character of such efforts is often criticized, as they essentially function only hypothetically and imaginarily.

Thus, one is unlikely to expect that the present separation between Church and State in the liberal Western-style democracies will be overturned in various forms through a return to some updated form of the historical “agreement” between the two sources of power in Byzantium⁴⁴. Various changes in the future are certainly not excluded, but it is sufficiently unlikely that we are going to witness revivals of

44. C. Hovorun, “Is the Byzantine ‘Symphony’ Possible in Our Days?”, *Journal of Church and State* 59, 2 (2016), pp. 280-296.

idealized pre-modern situations. Orthodoxy also needs to systematically study Western Christianity's experiences with Modernity in order to benefit and properly form its own critical attitude. In particular, its engagement with Roman Catholicism and how it has managed to finally overcome its enormous problems with Modernity and develop a more creative relationship with it can be particularly useful for Orthodoxy⁴⁵. In any case, Orthodoxy must still overcome the sterile anti-Westernism of the past and consider any Western developments (including Modernity) as creative challenges for reflection, so that it can formulate its own evaluations, attitudes and directions. Besides, Roman Catholicism has also benefited in the long run, but in a critical way, from the Protestantism's relative experience in these matters to formulate its own attitudes. Finally, Orthodoxy should avoid overestimating its possible and on the whole striking convergences with Postmodernism, since there exist many other major differences between them, which have taken on even more radical dimensions in recent years with unforeseeable consequences.

To conclude: the contemporary situation shows that there are both problems and possibilities for Orthodoxy's creative interaction with modernity and postmodernity to occur. This naturally also applies to other religions and cultural groups, which for various reasons have not been historically associated with these movements and the radical changes associated with them. Yet, this is now unavoidable in our globalized world, given the fact that it is completely impossible to hermetically seal a religious or any other tradition from external influences. In particular, Orthodoxy must overcome its traditional introversion and engage in a critical yet creative dialogue with both Modernity and Postmodernity. This would involve –among other things– not only the presentation of a responsible Orthodox testimony, but also a willingness on its behalf to learn, to gain new experiences and to broaden its horizons in relation to non-Orthodox and in many cases secular agents, many of whom

45. V. N. Makrides, „Der konstruktive Umgang mit der Moderne – oder was die Orthodoxie vom Katholizismus zu lernen vermag“, in: D. Schon (ed.), *Identität und Authentizität von Kirchen im „globalen Dorf“: Annäherung von Ost und West durch gemeinsame Ziele?*, Friedrich Pustet, Regensburg, 2019, pp. 103-127.

may be critical of religions in general. In any case, the acceptance of diversity and pluralism is a basic precondition for the peaceful coexistence, positive interaction and possible cooperation between all these heterogeneous actors. In this context, the importance of a “humble” and non-triumphalist Orthodox testimony, as Bishop Kallistos Ware of Diokleia had characteristically emphasized⁴⁶, is considered appropriate and necessary for the Orthodoxy’s fruitful dialogue with both Modernity and Postmodernity.

46. “Image and Likeness: An Interview with Bishop Kallistos Ware” (by J. Morgan), *Parabola* 10, 1 (1985), pp. 62-71.