

The Issue of Dominance: Religious Identity, Individualism and the Paradigm of Religious Pluralism in a Democratic Society*

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Introduction

The main question of this paper is the relationship between religion and democracy, or to put it in a wider context the relationship between theology of politics and politics of theology. How these two realities can or cannot coexist, cooperate and accept each other in total? Does secularism threaten the values of Christianity? Is it compatible and acceptable for an individual to be a religious person with political views nowadays? Finally, does the Church have the right to claim an open space in the public discourse of the liberal and democratic society or not?

In the times of the Christian empire the project of the Church was to establish its status ecumenically, expanding its canonical, administrative and governing power to the geographical borders of the empire by baptizing new members. At the same time these new members of the Church were citizens – subjects of the empire. The spiritual world conquered the current, material, world. “God’s power” had prevailed over the cosmic power through the alliance between the Christian Church and the Christian emperor. It was an absolute triumph of Christianity.

* This essay is the revised text of a lecture that has been presented in the International Theological Conference organized by St Andrew’s Biblical Theological Institute & Monastery of Bose titled: “Religious Values in a Democratic Society”, which took place in Magnano, Italy (19-22 September 2023).

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After the Enlightenment, the Reformation of the Protestantism, the French Revolution and the Age of Reason, the social and political balance shifted¹. The defenders of secularism claim that without it there is no democracy, while secularism is the result of energetic liberalism. Religious hetero-geneity actually leads the state to implement a neutral policy on religions. In our age some people have abandoned God, not because they have chosen another god, but because they prefer no God at all². They have trusted in human reason and abilities, virtues and common ethics, instead of faith. Others have chosen to believe without belonging to a specific religious structure³. So, they have not abandoned their faith in God, but their faith in the Church organization.

Also, some philosophers, theologians, sociologists try to give to the Bible a political orientation and meaning. They believe that the Bible has revolutionary ethics and morality; this means that Church must be engaged in the social struggles for solidarity, justice and peace, and be active in projects which fight against political oppression, racism, sexism, war and any kind of discrimination⁴.

Secularization and Religion

Humanity has witnessed throughout history many wars justified in the name of God. For that reason, it was believed that a world without God would be a peaceful world. As a consequence, religious beliefs were excluded from law, governance, politics and education⁵. According to the values of secularism, there must be a sufficient and clear separation between state and religion in order for individuals to set themselves free from

1. Ivana Noble, "Re-imagining Religious Belonging – Ecumenical Responses to Changing Religiosity in Europe", in: Ivana Noble, Ulrike Link-Wieczorek, P. De Mey (eds.), *Reimagining Religious Belonging*, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, Leipzig 2011, p. 21.

2. St. Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West*, Blackwell, Oxford 2002, p. 46.

3. Grace Davie, *Religion in Modern Europe*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2000, p. 48.

4. Chr. Yannaras, "A note on Political Theology", *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 27, 1 (1983), pp. 53-54.

5. D. Marquand & R. L. Nettle (eds.), *Θρησκεία και δημοκρατία*, Greek transl. F. Terzakis, Alexandria Publications, Athens 2003, p. 18.

any metaphysical or supernatural prejudice in order to live the experience of *nothingness*. The modern world more and more knocks down the fundamental stones of the Christian culture, while the term of *secularism* was describing at least in the beginning the transfer of religious institutions or properties to the public ownership. Moreover, the “departure” of God from society has created a wider spectrum of thought and tolerance, characteristic elements of liberalism and of the pluralistic democracy.

The democratic society is threatened by religion each time religious structures seek to impose their doctrines and discipleship on non-members using violent or other non-democratic means. These fundamental religious communities enjoy a kind of immediate and universal certainty about both God and world, and this certainty turns them against the rest of the society. They refuse to accept a certain *de facto* existence of different religious traditions⁶.

In this framework, the functioning of interfaith dialogue and the prevalence of the principle of tolerance and peace must prevail as *life values*. Additionally, mutual recognition and non-interference should be the basic principles of a democratic and liberal state and due to the existence of many different religions state should be secular, in the sense of neutrality in matters of faith⁷.

However, religious identity, which was forgotten years ago, tends to be projected with increasing intensity today. Controversies that seemed to be a thing of the past return to the present. Religious identity no longer defines a nation as a whole, but a community within a nation. A liberal tolerance of religions is therefore established a fact that some religious far-right organizations seek to exploit, in the context of freedom of opinion. The criterion now becomes the right to choose, and not the traditional faith. Individuals are increasingly free to choose their lifestyles, deviating from traditional collective norms, since the *age of ideology* has been replaced by the *age of identity*.

One could argue that the principle of *open society* is the key point for a peaceful coexistence of religious and non religious people. *Theology of hospitality*, as a pre-theological event, can lead Christianity today to the

6. *Op. cit.*, p. 31.

7. H. Kamen, *The Rise of Toleration*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London 1967, p. 89.

new reality. How secular societies deal with religiosity and the revival of the sacred is an important issue.

Secularization is mainly based on the fact that religion has become an affair of the individual and has ceased to determine the dynamics of the whole⁸. Individuals have become self-defined and not defined by the principles of the religious community in which they were born and raised. Religion lost its traditional social and public function and as a result it was limited to the sphere of the individual, who has the absolute freedom of choice. Secularization offered a new method of interpreting postmodernism producing a different culture where the person based on his will and reason can choose by himself what to do about religion. Technology and Science worked together against religion rejecting doctrines, due to their will to determine humans' destiny and nature⁹.

Societas civilis spoke about the tolerance of religious differences within the context of civilized society as an antidote to religious fanaticism and absolutism. This is how the problem of dominance appeared: who will dominate society: religion or secular power? Secular means being open to reason and to dialogue, being open to willingness to compromise, being free from the intransigence created by ecclesial doctrines. Furthermore, secularization requires the separation of church and state and the limitation of organized religion and religious discourse in the political sphere¹⁰. Citizens are called to emancipate themselves from ecclesiastical dictates and worship according to their conscience and their personal morality. In other words, secularization is identified with the struggle for freedom of expression and tolerance of differences (political and religious).

It is a fact that we are experiencing the confrontation between the "truth of religion" and the "truth of secularism". Each side claims possession of the truth. One attempted solution might be to maximize freedom, equality and mutual respect between believers (regardless of religion) and non-believers. In practice, such religious freedom presupposes an open and

8. D. Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization*, Blackwell, Oxford 1978, p. 21.

9. Chr. Arvanitis, *Θρησκεία και πολιτικός φιλελευθερισμός*, Harmos Publications, Athens 2019, pp. 112-113.

10. D. Marquand & R. L. Nettle (eds.), *Θρησκεία και δημοκρατία, op.cit.*, p. 36.

tolerant political society, where extremes and violence are avoided so that everyone can freely enjoy life. According to some philosophers and theologians, religious freedom presupposes *religious indifference*, peaceful competition and courtesy in relation to the religious beliefs of others¹¹.

Religious Identity, Individualism and Theology of Hospitality

One of the strongest assets of religion today is its historical memory, its timeless culture, and its ability to provide *identity* to the modern people. Religions connect human life with a wider world. Identity is not something general and abstract; it is not simply a matter of the intellect. It is associated with the participation of people in a community where they live together with other members. Through religious identity, a specific pattern of life is created in accordance with the beliefs of the community in which the believer participates.

A bond is formed between identity and individuality, but an individuality that gains meaning through participation in the community. As, for example, it happened with Protestantism, where individualism means not individual isolation, but coordinated departure, organized deviation and group integration into a new community, whose characteristics differ from the old community from which it left¹².

Individualism was therefore identified with the element of confession, resulting in the foundation of confessional communities. This is how the so-called confessional identities were formed as a sign of collective faith. Within this context, the principles, emblems, values and teaching of the religious community must be accepted by the members as a condition of recognition of their identity and their partnership in the community.

Thus, gradually an antithesis was formed between the *religious habit* (as a way of life of a religious community) and the *confessional tradition*. Modern people living today in a pluralistic environment have forced the official church to change its religious habit, while at the same time being

11. D. Marquand & R. L. Nettler (eds.), *Θρησκεία και δημοκρατία*, *op.cit.*, p. 45.

12. D. Marquand & R. L. Nettler (eds.), *Θρησκεία και δημοκρατία*, *op.cit.*, p. 200.

indifferent or even completely ignorant of the traditional teaching of the Church to which they belong. Therefore, quite often religious individuality comes into conflict with religious identity¹³.

In a time where identities are constantly changing due to general change, no religion and no Church can remain unaffected by its encounter with other religions and traditions. Dialogue, reconciliation, and peace-building process between religious communities are signs of the modern pluralistic society. It is precisely at this point that the so-called *theology of hospitality* can contribute, which is identified with the sacrifice of the incarnated Logos in favor of human nature. Additionally, this kind of doing charismatic theology will help Church to develop a serious dialogue with other social partners in the public sphere. So, Church will secure a place and a role in the public discourse. This hospitality should not be limited within the lines of Christian community, but should also extend beyond Church's borders. Hospitality is not only associated with the provision of material goods, but primarily with service and love¹⁴.

Theology of hospitality and *religious pluralism* both seek to identify common points between different cultures and religions, with the ultimate goal of harmonious coexistence and cooperation. Diversity in itself is not an obstacle to social development, but on the contrary leads through synthesis to the development and promotion of ecumenical culture and to a new conception of the ethics of human relationships. Just as in a society no human being can live autonomously and in isolation, so more broadly no culture can progress and evolve without being challenged by another heterogeneous culture. The others who make up the religious otherness become our partners, that is, those with whom we coexist and interact¹⁵. Thus, the Church, not accepting the culture of selfishness, arrogant power, and greed, produces a potentially eschatological culture of peace and dialogue.

13. R. J. Campiche, «Dillution ou recomposition? Confession en Suisse», in: Grace Davie et Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Identités religieuses en Europe*, La Découverte, Paris 1996, p. 65.

14. Fr. Aug. Bairactaris, *Θεολογία και θρησκευτικός πλουραλισμός σὲ ἕναν σύγχρονο κόσμο*, Stamoulis Publications, Thessaloniki 2015, pp. 167-173.

15. Chrysostomos Konstantinidis (Metr. of Ephesus), «Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ Θρησκευτικὴ Ἑτερότητα», in: P. Kalaitzidis and N. Ntontos (eds.), *Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ Νεωτερικότητα*, Indiktos Publications, Athens 2007, pp. 168-169.

It is necessary to understand that the purpose of religious pluralism and the theology of hospitality are not so much to understand the content of the other religion as the environment in which they were developed¹⁶. It is a continuous process of transformation in which various tools are used such as the local language, local symbols, local culture etc. The connecting link between these two (i.e. theology of hospitality and religious pluralism) is the good of peace developing in a democratic environment of justice¹⁷. Peace, justice and democracy must be perceived through a dimension of capacity and extroversion, because it requires not only the element of tolerance, but also creativity. Cooperation between different elements cannot be established by itself, as it needs the operation of a connecting link, and this is nothing but the affirmation of the mystery of life and death, where all human beings are equal¹⁸.

In New Testament, the patient, the oppressed, the poor, the immigrant and the foreigner play a dominant role in the biblical narratives. All of them are chosen by Christ not because they are poor or because of their social status, but because of their good will and sincerity to see the truth in the face of Jesus. Christ was in solidarity with all people without discrimination. So, today's Christian is called to act in the model of Christ, acting in the name of love, justice and peace. He must abandon the mentality of power and begin to act as the servant of all and a seeker of truth. Truth is not something general, abstract and theoretical, but is created through the friction of divine things with historical reality.

Thus, the Christian identity is called from something closed and confessional to become something open and ecumenical. Therefore, our acceptance of the other person is a sign of our own hospitality. In addition, we must bear in mind that just as we host someone else, we may also happen to be hosted by others in unfamiliar surroundings. Hospitality

16. Al. Schmemmann, "The Task of Orthodox Theology Today", in: *Church, World, Mission: Reflections on Orthodoxy in the West*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, N.Y. 1979, p. 117.

17. Emm. Clapsis, "The Challenge of Contextual Theologies", in: *Orthodoxy in Discussion – Orthodox Ecumenical Engagements*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline, Mass 2000, p. 165.

18. Fr. Aug. Bairactaris, *Θεολογία καὶ θρησκευτικὸς πλουραλισμός...*, op.cit., p. 110.

is therefore connected not to tolerance, but to the acceptance of the other in a state of “*ontological hospitality of human nature in our being*”¹⁹.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate pointed out the values of peace, tolerance, mutual acceptance and cooperation through international conferences which organized and cosponsored with the Appeal of Conscience Foundation (1994, 2005). They built upon the Bern Declaration (1992) which stated emphatically that “*a crime committed in the name of religion is a crime against religion*”²⁰. In that context they declared that they stand against those who violate the human life and pursue policies in defiance of moral values. It is impossible to justify actions in any armed conflict in the name of God. Also, they emphasized the imperative of freedom of choice of religion and freedom of conscience of every minority. As religious leaders they must heal the painful memories of the past, to support without reservation all interreligious dialogues for peace, justice and human rights encouraging all members to become partners in sincere and open dialogue with each other²¹.

The Christian Identity as a Challenge to the National Churches

Another element that affects the formation of religious identity is the interconnection of the concept of nation with the different local religious faiths. After the dissolution of empires and the establishment of national states, there was an identification of nation with Christian identity at least in the study case of Western Europe and Balkans. For instance, being a Greek citizen means that one should also be member of the Orthodox Church in Greece. Of course, the Greek constitution protects the freedom of religion offering to all citizens the free choice of religion, but at the same time it emphasizes that the Greek Orthodox Church is the dominant one

19. Fr. Aug. Bairactaris, *Θεολογία και θρησκευτικός πλουραλισμός...*, *op.cit.*, p. 188.

20. Fr. Aug. Bairactaris, *Θεολογία και θρησκευτικός πλουραλισμός...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 185, 189.

21. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, *Συνάντηση με το μυστήριο – Μία σύγχρονη ανάγνωση της Όρθοδοξίας*, transl. Polyxeni Tsaliki-Kiosoglou, Akritas Publications, Athens 2011, pp. 220-222. See also, Fr. Aug. Bairactaris, *Θεολογία και θρησκευτικός πλουραλισμός...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 190-194.

and this situation defines also the public education and school training accordingly.

The central idea of the French revolution was “*every nation is a state; every state is a nation*”. However, the situation becomes complicated when a region is inhabited by populations with different national consciousness, different language and religion, resulting in the formation of ethnic and religious minorities. Then the issue of national self-determination arises, and as a result each community comes into conflict with the other community claiming the same geographical area. Within this context nationalism and ethnocentrism develop while the Church is instrumentalized for the sake of the state’s benefit. For example, in Greece at the end of the 19th century and due to the prevailing political situation, an ethno-religious ideology was implemented, where the Greek nation was sanctified and the Orthodox Church of Greece was nationalized by gaining *de facto* its ecclesiastical autocephaly from the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1833²².

Thus, the question is: Is the national element in the formation of the identity a stumbling block which prevents the peaceful coexistence of different ethnic groups or religious communities within the same country? Is there a sacred subordination of the state to religion, or the contrary is there a religious allegiance to state? The issues concerning the relationship between state and religion forced Churches, especially in Europe, to think about their own identity and place in the public life. Indeed, most of the Protestant and all Orthodox Churches are connected historically to certain nation-states and as such these Churches feel committed to their nation through historical and cultural bonds of unity²³.

What is the relation of the Church as a Body of believers and members of Jesus’ Body to the rest of the nation? How the Universal Church of Christ (Una Sancta) is related to the fact that Christians become members of it through membership of national, local, Church where actually they were born and grown up? How can Churches react to nationalism or against

22. Chr. Arvanitis, *Θρησκεία, Ιδεολογία, Πολιτισμός στη σύγχρονη εποχή*, Epikentro Publications, Thessaloniki 2020, pp. 63-73.

23. E. van der Borcht, “Uniting Europe as a Challenge to the Future of National Churches”, in: T. and Ivana Noble, M. E. Brinkman and J. Hilberath (eds.), *Charting Churches in a Changing Europe: Charta Oecumenica and the Process of Ecumenical Encounter*, Rodopi, Amsterdam – New York 2006, p. 105.

totalitarian, authoritarian and race-based states when they do not have political thesis or political responsibility about their own members²⁴? What happens when divine status is given to nation, when other nations are disrespected and when religions are considered subordinated to secular or political power or less important than the dominant religion in the national and social life²⁵?

But who and why claims an ethno-political identity excluding different approaches? It is usually claimed by those who feel insecure and afraid of a multicultural society. We must understand as religious communities and as a human society that our otherness and dissimilarity affirm our human identity²⁶. We are in a transitional phase, where the value of “difference” tends to replace the value of “homogeneity” and the principle of “multiculturalism” that of “monoculturalism”²⁷.

For these reasons it is necessary in the post-corpus Christianum era Churches and religious communities as a whole to have certain positions and statements regarding the relationship between Church and state, the place of the Church and its function in society, the education, the economic order, the meaning of Kingdom of God on earth, and the understanding of human nature and its sexuality. Otherwise, a total crisis of an extreme nationalistic or racist policy takes place revealing the darkest sides of human nature, and unfortunately war and violence, justified in the name of God, destroy every spirituality, sanctity of life, justice and love. However, it is obvious the lack of the One Church of Christ as a supra-national religious fellowship to act over and beyond the political, economic and ethnic interests and policies that actually divide human life.

Our experience is that Churches are part of the divisions and religious wars in Europe. East and West, Orthodoxy versus Catholicism and Protestantism, and Catholicism against Protestantism developed different

24. J. H. Oldham, *Church, Community and State: A World Issue*, New York and London 1935, p. 29.

25. A. Houtepen, “A God without Frontiers: Ecumenism and Criticism of Nationalism”, *Exchange* 22, 3 (1993), pp. 235-249. See here, pp. 246-247.

26. Chr. Arvanitis, *Θρησκεία και πολιτικός φιλελευθερισμός*, *op.cit.*, p. 185.

27. K. Tsoukalas, *Η επινόηση της έτερότητας: «Ταυτότητες» και «διαφορές» στην εποχή της παγκοσμιοποίησης*, Kastaniotis Publications, Athens 2010, p. 17.

cultures and different systems of theology, philosophy and law which have influenced their relative Churches²⁸. For instance, European Churches became cultural factors named as the “Catholic Italy”, the “Lutheran Scandinavia”, the “Orthodox Balkans” etc. characterized by a specific mentality, spirituality and ethics²⁹. So, the problem is not geographical but deeply theological and political. In other words, religious divisions are linked to national and political identity of people/nations. Therefore, Churches must resist any kind of attempt to be manipulated for ethnic or nationalist purposes. They must commit themselves to act against nationalism or oppression of other national or religious minorities by promoting non-violent solutions and by protecting human rights³⁰.

Therefore, the existing relationship between faith –ecclesiology and ethnicity– state needs a re-evaluation and a renewed self-understanding of the Church especially from an Orthodox perspective. The most important element regarding the renewal of society and the place of the Church in the state is that in Christ there is no Jew, nor Greek³¹. Churches of all confessions and traditions must have a clear “no” to nationalism and a strong “yes” to the ecumenical unity and integration in Spirit becoming one people in Christ through faith and baptism. However, Christians must have the ability *to serve life and people in general and not only those with whom they share the same identity*.

Consequently, the issue of formation of the modern identity challenges Churches to re-evaluate their relationship to nation, people and state. Therefore, the main question is how a local Church can be adapted to local culture without losing its ecumenical vocation and ability to dialogue and accept Christians from different confessional families, believers from other religions, and people of good will.

28. E. van der Borght, “Uniting Europe as a Challenge to the Future of National Churches”, op. cit., p. 119.

29. R. Frieling, “Our Common Responsibility in Europe”, in: V. Iontita and Sarah Numico (eds.), *Charta Oecumenica: A Text, a Process and a Dream of the Churches in Europe*, WWC Publications, Geneva 2003, p. 63.

30. A. D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism*, Routledge, London and New York 1998, pp. 170-198.

31. *Gal.* 2, 28.

The Vision of the Church Unity and the Renewal of Society

It is a fact that Christians live in a world which is torn up due to hunger, war, pain, suffering and violation of human rights, discrimination based on race or gender, and oppression of humans and exploitation of natural sources. However, Churches must give their life-giving perspective of the gospel being workers of justice, peace and reconciliation. Nevertheless, Churches because of their different cultural and theological background sometimes disagree about the identity and boundaries of the Church, and mainly about the ways that Churches should involve in social controversial questions³².

Nevertheless, all Christians realize that the Church as Body of Christ transcends time and space working for the reconciliation of the whole of creation. In that framework the Church is understood as a bearer of God's mission bringing salvation to the world and renewal to society. The term *renewal* is linked to healing and transcending the diverse limitations and divisions of the world. This renewal actually is a dynamic process which passes through the reconciliation³³. So, the Church has a double task: the *unity* between Christians theologically speaking (nature of the Church) and the *renewal* of society based upon peace, justice and healing socially speaking (mission of the Church)³⁴. The Church lives in the world and lives for the world. These two tasks are indissolubly interrelated; they are two sides of the same coin.

In short, there is an integral relationship between a church being renewed into unity along the road of penitence, mutual forgiveness, and humble waiting upon the Spirit, and the renewal of a true community of humankind... There has to be a dialogue between the Christian mind and heart, formed by the apostolic faith and life down the ages, and the present and coming world situation – a dialogue which is influential in each direction, not changing the apostolic faith but adding new and richer meaning to its terms³⁵.

32. A Faith and Order Study Document, *Church and World – The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community*, [Faith and Order Paper No. 151], WCC Publications, Geneva 1990, p. 2.

33. *Op.cit.*, p. 4.

34. *Op.cit.*, p. 3.

35. J. A. Baker, "The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community",

The Sermon on the Mount probably is the best biblical text which defines the essence of God's kingdom. In the beatitudes Jesus promised the kingdom to those who are in need, that is to say to the poor, hungry, weeping, hated³⁶ and to those who mourn and they are thirsty for righteousness, to the peacemakers, and to those who are merciful and pure in heart³⁷. It is clear that in this kind of kingdom political power and secular dominance have no place, since "whoever would be first among you, must be servant of all"³⁸. Also, Jesus says "repent and believe in the gospel"³⁹. This sort of repentance is linked to forgiveness, and each time Jesus forgives at the same He renews persons and communities in the sake of the renewal of their life. This is actually Church's mission; to empty herself of its divine glory taking the form of a suffering servant in order to renew the world⁴⁰.

Democracy and the Public Role of the Church

"For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of eating or drinking, but of justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"⁴¹. This statement is extremely important because it lays the foundations of social renewal and proves that ecclesiology is not only connected with sacramentology and theology at the doctrinal level, but also with the question of the democratic development of society. That is, it defines justice, peace and solidarity as pillars of social cohesion from the beginning. If there is no justice, peace cannot be guaranteed, because the oppressed often use violent means of asserting justice and meritocracy that have been denied to them as conditions of life.

in: Th. Best (ed.), *Faith and Renewal – Reports and Documents of the Commission on Faith and Order Stavanger 1985*, [Faith and Order Paper No.131], World Council of Churches, Geneva 1986, p. 173.

36. *Luke* 6, 20-23.

37. *Matth.* 5, 3-12.

38. *Mark* 10, 42-44.

39. *Mark* 1, 15.

40. A Faith and Order Study Document, op.cit., p. 13.

41. *Rom.* 14, 17.

While secularism seeks to shrink the influence of religion in the public sphere by rejecting the absoluteness of its doctrines, other trends in thought argue that Christianity is particularly necessary for the smooth functioning of society, especially when religious institutions and religious movements act as living reminders of the importance of solidarity among marginalized and hurting people. A democratic regime must establish a functioning condition of life; that is, religious people should receive a guarantee of their freedom to worship without persecution, and on the other hand, non-religious people should have the right to live without religious intolerance and theological disagreements and confrontations within the sphere of the public and political life of the state. Religious freedom as a principle is superior to tolerance, because it demands from society non-action against those who oppose it. It is not democratic for Christians to define and decide for non-Christians what to want, how to live and what to think. In other words, the citizens of a democratic state must accept the different religious preferences of others. Thus, religious freedom is associated with religious indifference, while constitutional enshrining, mutual recognition and non-interference in each other's internal affairs is perhaps the best guide to coexistence in modern society.

Only the democratic state is the bearer of rights, the foundation of legitimacy and the expression of the will of the people. All other agencies and unions are assigned by the state. Thus, even religions are parts and individual institutions within society protected by the constitution. Religions and churches in particular, must accept the diversity of ideas, as in this way they also ensure their own administrative freedom. The Christian primacy has for centuries been replaced by the legislative-state primacy. That is, the law based on the principle of tolerance protects everyone.

Furthermore, it is important to underline that religion by definition is not something private, but on the contrary, it is communal and, in that sense, it is public; though a *public* distinct from that of the *state*. Especially Christianity can be truly experienced only through participation of the believers in the life of community. The Church in other words has the right to participate in the public discourse as long as it respects and protects human rights, religious freedom and tolerance of difference.

Moreover, the Church must abandon the kind of language used in the past and also any kind of theocratic power or authority exercised to other religious communities or social groups⁴².

Concluding Remarks

Finally, two things need to be clearly understood:

1) First, tolerance, critical discourse and scientific thinking do not diminish people's faith, but instead strengthen it.

2) Secondly, religious freedom is not something superficial, external and imposed by the state on Christianity, but an essential life condition of the Christian spirit. Christian faith is based not on imposition and interference, but on freedom and free will of human nature. That is why Christian local communities were established through mission and daily witness of the crucified Christ. In other words, peoples' participation in Church's life was not something compulsory, but voluntary based on free will.

Therefore, a democratic and prudent state interferes with religion affairs only when it is necessary to protect the common rights of people. In this context, the function of interfaith and multicultural dialogue acts as a point of communication between religions, and as a method that removes ignorance, prejudice and suspicion about the identity of the other. The purpose of the religious pluralism is not the prevalence of uniformity, but the honest exchange of opinions and experiences on issues of ecumenical interest⁴³. The truth lies in the uniqueness of the gifts of persons and emerges through the dynamics of the relationship, not through imposition.

Democracy and Christianity are called to remove the syndrome of *exclusivity* whose "fruits" are fanaticism, intransigence and fundamentalism distorting religion from an agent of peace and love into an occasion for persecution and war. So, the question is not which culture, which religion

42. P. Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy & Political Theology*, WCC Publications, Geneva 2012, pp. 81-86.

43. U. Hans, "Towards an Ethical Code of Conduct for Religious Conversions", *Current Dialogue* 50 (2008), pp. 6-19.

or which Church is “correct” in the globalized environment, but which puts forward practical solutions to the impasse of today’s relationship between people in matters of faith and politics⁴⁴.

44. D. Marquand & R. L. Nettle (eds.), *Θρησκεία και δημοκρατία*, *op.cit.*, p. 223.