

## 4 New worlds and new churches

### The Orthodox Church(es) and the European Union

*Peter Petkoff*

#### **Introduction**

The Orthodox church(es) share a common commitment to the unity of dogma and spirituality. There is, however, no doctrinal formulation that comes close to a form of political theology at a pan-Orthodox level. This means that the Orthodox churches' attitude towards the European Union (EU) is driven by their ecclesial diversity and by complex inter-ecclesial relations. More fundamentally they share a fragmented and plural, theological objection to the very ideas of Europe and the West. This has been further complicated by the emergence of a substantial Orthodox diaspora from Eastern Europe, Russia, and the Middle East living across the breadth of the European continent. Consequently the ecclesial identity and self-perception of the autocephalous Orthodox churches is changing. These churches are becoming increasingly transnational and extra-territorial. With this, their perception of Europe and the West, as seen through the eyes of their diaspora communities, is altering from "threat" to "home" (Makrides and Uffelmann, 2003). The growing diaspora will not only impact the Christian demographics of Europe but will also transform the Eastern Churches' view of Europe and the EU (Leustean, 2009; 2011; 2013; 2014a; 2014b).

#### **The Orthodox world and the idea of Europe and the European Union**

The first challenge for the articulation of Orthodox theological terms of engagement with the EU, and with everything it represents, is to do with the very idea of Europe. The main point of reference for the Orthodox churches within and outside the EU is not Europe, but Christendom articulated visibly beyond Europe through the Pentarchy of the Ancient Patriarchates of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Jerusalem, and Antioch, albeit fractured by the split with Rome. The Schism of 1054 and the hardening of relations with Rome after the sack of Constantinople by the Fourth Crusade in 1204 has made the idea of Europe and the Latin West a threat, something which remained politically, theologically, and culturally outside of the Byzantine Orthodox Commonwealth (Kazdhan, 2001). Although this opposition has often been exaggerated, and ironically re-articulated through the use of theological forms developed by the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation, it represents a powerful current which has shaped Orthodox engagement with the West in multiple contexts.<sup>1</sup>

These anti-Western and anti-European trends are mirrored in similar discourses about the East in Western Europe. A pre-European Community discourse that shaped the agenda of European integration was Pius XII's Christmas address of 1949 that blessed the Christian Democratic movements: 'Christian West and diabolical East'. In the aftermath of World War

Two the Christian Democratic parties and their political discourse in predominantly Catholic countries dominated the early European integration discourse and thus the Orthodox churches did not have an opportunity to engage theologically with the idea of European integration at its inception. Greece joined in 1981, Cyprus in 1990, Bulgaria and Romania in 1995. Thus by 1995 there were four EU member states where Chalcedonian Eastern Orthodoxy was a majority religion. In all these countries at the time of accession the religious discourse equated Europe and the EU with something alien, hostile and different.

### **New worlds and new churches: Orthodox diasporas in the EU as a game changer**

With a massive Russian diaspora after the fall of the Berlin Wall, with EU enlargement and an exodus from the Middle East, Europe is gradually becoming home to 85 per cent of the Eastern Christians (Thomas and O'Mahony, 2014). The 'West' has become home to a multinational Orthodox diaspora, which is presenting new challenges to the Orthodox hierarchies and transforming their approaches to the EU and its institutions. All major Orthodox churches now have representatives actively engaged in dialogue with the EU institutions in Brussels. *De iure* territorial Orthodox churches within and beyond the EU, which operate within their own canonical soil, demarcated through a consensus with other Orthodox churches, exercise what could be described as a *de facto* extra-territorial ecclesiastical jurisdiction amongst their diaspora communities in Europe. As a continuation of the League of Nations regime all territorial autocephalous Orthodox churches have a complex network of dioceses and parishes all over the world reaching out to the 'national' diaspora communities and coexist with other Orthodox parishes, sometimes even under the same roof.<sup>2</sup> This is not unproblematic – in theory the Orthodox Church has condemned phyletism, or the idea of a national or ethnic church, as a heresy. In practice almost all autocephalous churches are seen as a rock of the nation. This is particularly visible in the post-Ottoman nation-states, but also in Russia and Ukraine.

At the same time another trend is emerging in a number of EU countries – pan-Orthodox, transnational multi-jurisdictional episcopal conferences formed by representatives of all Orthodox jurisdictions operating within a particular country are seeking to overcome old ethnic and jurisdictional divisions.<sup>3</sup> In addition the Patriarchates of Constantinople and Moscow, although technically outside of the EU, actively engage in the Orthodox discourse within the EU and shape it directly or indirectly through their engagement with the Orthodox diasporas under their control. A number of Orthodox churches belong to the Conference of European Churches (CEC), where they cooperate with Protestant churches in Europe and develop fairly sophisticated ways of lobbying in the EU. It might seem that after the experience of Orthodox diasporas in Europe and through a profound mark on the European intellectual tradition shaped by the extensive interaction between Orthodox theologians and philosophers and their Catholic and Protestant counterparts, the sense of the West, as a foreign threat, might have disappeared.<sup>4</sup> It is, however, not that simple.

### **Confrontations and conversations: the Orthodox churches and the European Union**

The Orthodox churches treat the EU as something outside of the church – something to pray for but not to engage with. Although all major Orthodox churches have representatives in Brussels,

the conversations stimulated by Article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty are not always irenic. The economic meltdown in Greece and Cyprus evoked a number of statements of Orthodox hierarchs that were not particularly EU-friendly. The bishops of the Church of Greece described the bailout terms and agreement as a “foreign occupation” (Makris, 2010). In a similar vein the Archbishop of Cyprus declared that an EU exit would be an obvious choice since the EU is clearly not going to last (Rettman, 2013; Elder, 2013).

At the same time the economic crisis has contributed *de facto* to a more active engagement of the Orthodox churches within the EU. Historically these churches have been heavily dependent on state support and there have been very few legal provisions for those churches to develop their own charitable networks. The pressure on the churches to provide greater support to unprecedentedly impoverished populations, and the absence of the state infrastructure and financial support through which to conduct their charitable work in the past, has prompted the churches in Greece and Cyprus to develop their own grassroots networks, some of which will inevitably rely on funding streams from the EU. While these networks are in a nascent stage we can expect to see more cooperation between the local Orthodox charitable organisations and EU institutions (Roudometof and Makrides, 2010).

Another focus of the Orthodox critique of contemporary Europe is the rise of relativism and militant secularism.<sup>5</sup> Churches within the EU see European integration as both a threat and an opportunity. Those churches not within the EU but wishing to have visibility and an impact within the EU institutions speak through their traditional allies among the Orthodox churches of the different member states. In the case of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) this message is rather complex and multi-layered. Firstly, its engagement with the European, and indeed other international institutions, remains deeply sceptical and driven by the desire to protect the legacy of a Christian European *Kulturkampf* from militant secularism and the challenges of relativism. In this respect the position of the ROC comes very close to that of the Holy See. A second aspect of the Russian Orthodox Church’s engagement with EU institutions is driven by a complex ecclesiastical foreign policy, which mimics and often parallels Russia’s state foreign policy (Curanovic, 2012). In this respect the ROC spearheads, through its allies within the EU, Russia’s policies towards Europe (Blagoev, 2014).

Furthermore, having developed its own social doctrine (unique within the world of the Orthodox churches) and its own ‘Orthodox Bill of Rights’ (Moscow Patriarchate, n.d.) the Moscow Patriarchate promotes some distinctly sceptical perspectives about existing human rights mechanisms and this includes the human rights culture of the EU. In this respect the Moscow Patriarchate’s positioning towards the EU has to be seen as a wider project which links up with Russia’s continuous attempts to reconceptualise international law as a sovereignty-driven rather than a rights protection-driven legal system. The ‘Orthodox Bill of Rights’ amplifies this argument and prepares the ground for the creation of an Orthodox *Kulturkampf* bound by different perceptions of international law and rights and driven by Orthodox culture.

What remains to be seen is how much traction these grand narratives would have amongst the other local Orthodox churches. After all, the Orthodox churches’ engagement with political communities has always been pragmatic and since the fall of Constantinople and the 1917 Russian Revolution, normally not theologically driven. Moreover, the churches’ engagement

with political communities continues to be shaped by their inter-ecclesial dynamics and tensions. For example, the increasing tensions between Moscow and Constantinople over the primacy of honour of the See of Constantinople and over its extra-territorial jurisdiction, tensions between Moscow and other local Orthodox churches (Ukraine, Romania, Estonia) and very close relations with others (Bulgaria, Serbia, Georgia, Antioch), in many ways shape pragmatic alliances between particular local Orthodox churches and political communities. Because of this dynamic and multi-layered picture we can only speak about multiple Orthodox Christian perspectives towards the EU. Some Orthodox churches (Romania, Estonia) are quite openly pro-EU in their public statements. Others (Bulgaria, Greece, Cyprus) connect in a pragmatic fashion with the EU, at the same time remaining very critical towards certain EU positions and policies. A number of Orthodox churches within and outside the EU (Georgia, Bulgaria, Serbia) have maintained their close ties with Moscow. This has largely determined their approach to the EU and the international community. In addition, the Russian state has declared itself a *de facto* protectorate of Orthodox Christians in the Middle East (Valente, 2013) and the Moscow Patriarchate has invested a lot in building alliances with the Orthodox churches of Jerusalem, Antioch (based in Syria) and Alexandria as well as with the Oriental non-Chalcedonian churches.

Thus we can only speak of multiple Orthodox approaches to the EU driven by different configurations of local Orthodox churches, shaped by concerns about the integrity of their canonical soil, defensiveness against interventions from other Orthodox and sometimes non-Orthodox churches as well as by their own specific needs. Their relationships with governments and international organisations are driven by both principles and pragmatic responses to policies or to governments' engagements with international organisations and international affairs. This also means that different alliances or groupings emerge when different agendas or shared interests emerge. Some of the multi-layered inter-ecclesial relations may determine the formation of a particular grouping united around a specific agenda, or individual Orthodox churches could simply use open ecclesiastical channels to pursue particular agendas. When Russia banned EU food imports in response to EU sanctions over Ukraine the Churches of Greece and Cyprus used their open channels with the Moscow Patriarchate to lobby the Russian government to relax parts of the ban (Kalmouki, 2014).

These interactions suggest that foreign policy analysts cannot underestimate the potential impact and role an aspired Orthodox Commonwealth may have on the shaping of the interactions between the Orthodox churches and EU institutions. It presents analytical challenges to the existing foreign policy approaches, and perhaps also challenges and opportunities for the Orthodox churches themselves to rediscover or redefine the patterns of solidarity and exercise of soft power typical for the Byzantine Orthodox Commonwealth at this time in an EU context. Orthodox churches within the EU may discover that they would be able to operate more freely within an aspired domain of an Orthodox Commonwealth. They would certainly be attracted to the idea of asserting the levels of soft power within and beyond the Orthodox world that this commonwealth permitted and which closely guarded modern nation-states restricted. Understanding the grammar of the 'soft power' of the Byzantine Orthodox Commonwealth tells us a great deal about interdependence and complex relations between states (Nye, 2009) and of the complex interplay and interdependence between religion and the

state.

It will be impossible to understand, and catastrophic to ignore, the positioning of the Orthodox churches in the public sphere today and in the past without a good grasp of the exercise of soft power in the Byzantine Orthodox Commonwealth, its fragmented manifestations in the modern period, and the claims for a full scale revival today in the foreign policy approaches of some of the Orthodox churches. The last figure to give expression to the idea of the Orthodox Commonwealth, Joachim III, Patriarch of Constantinople, died in the year of the outbreak of the Balkan wars. The end of the nineteenth century and the emergence of nation-states and *de facto* national churches was the end of the Byzantine Commonwealth (Obolensky, 2000), with Byzantium as a widely spread and varied complex with multiple centres, each with its own set of relationships and connections. It became a centre of concentric circles of influence and “soft power”, with “horizontal” as well as hierarchical strands of connection through “its credible show of majesty and piety” (Shepard, 2006: 36–41) embodying the prestige of centuries of history. In a sophisticated ‘symphony of powers’, imperial office and the church together exercised soft power through their parallel and interconnected networks throughout the Byzantine Commonwealth. It is through this exercise of soft power that other rulers found their models for imitation and wanted to associate themselves with this glittering symbol of imperial and court life and of the Orthodox faith. The decline of the empire placed an increased emphasis on the role of the patriarch, both within Constantinople in relation to the imperial office and outside it through Mount Athos as a microcosm of the Orthodox commonwealth, and on the need to deal diplomatically and in other ways with a complex variety of external actors (Cameron, 2011: 21–24). After the fall of Constantinople it was the ecumenical patriarch and the monks on Mount Athos who still represented that shared consciousness (Cameron, 2011). The Ecumenical Patriarchate, Mount Athos, and Moscow’s claim as ‘The Third Rome’, continue to serve that representative function today.

Orthodox networks and cooperation within the EU today are only a bleak resemblance of the Byzantine Commonwealth that survived the Ottomans (but not the Balkan Wars) and retained some fragments of cooperation in a contemporary context. It would nevertheless be naïve to underestimate the residual energy of the Orthodox Commonwealth, which is gradually being reconstituted in different contexts and has all the facilities to thrive within an EU context. Whatever one thinks of the legacy of the Orthodox Commonwealth from the point of view of foreign policy analysis it will be a grave error not to factor in existing ambitions and existing structures and political forms which are increasingly being deployed to establish continuity with the exercise of soft power of the Byzantine Orthodox Commonwealth.

### **Theological underpinning of the engagement with the EU: the absent political theology**

The Orthodox churches, united in their shared understanding of the unity between dogma and spirituality, have always asserted that their political theology is summed up by praying for the temporal powers (indeed any temporal powers, Christian or Pagan) during the Great Entrance of the Holy Liturgy. Articulated primarily within a liturgical space demarcated by the beginning bidding prayer – ‘Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit’ – and by the sense that past, present, and the Second Coming of Christ are united within the

boundaries of the liturgy. Orthodox political theology is in a sense perceived as something which transforms the world in the stillness of a moment which brings past, present, and future together, but much less so through social action. This does not mean that social action is not possible or desirable. But it could be argued that the church does not preach for political change outside of the context of the Eucharistic theology of the Orthodox liturgy. Striving for social change in the secular world would be perceived as a form of social engineering which would replace the imminent Second Coming and would be considered to be potentially idolatrous. Social and political action in this sense is driven by an internal spiritual transformation, not by following strategies of appropriate social or political engagement. The people of God therefore bear witness through patterns that are often difficult to assign to recognizable forms of social engagement. On that level, since the death of the last Christian emperor, the engagement with political authorities is counter-intuitive and merely pragmatic (Runciman, 1968; Sherrard, 1959, 1965).

And here lies the paradox. The Orthodox churches do not have a political role. Yet they have always depended on political organizations to legitimize their normative *corpus*. Most authors now agree that Caesaro-papism is an inappropriate formula to describe relationships between the Orthodox churches and the states they inhabit. But it will be very hard to deny that Orthodox churches have always been heavily dependent on the promulgation of church dogma through its incorporation within imperial law. Since the fall of Constantinople and the emergence of national Orthodox churches in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the community of Orthodox churches has never attempted to address the question of how they as a communion of churches genuinely relate to the idea of law as a normative structure parallel to their dogmatic normative corpus and body of ecclesiastical laws. Without engaging head-on with these questions, the Orthodox churches have developed pragmatic ‘realist’ relations with the political communities whose domains they inhabit. Those relations often border on compromise – Orthodox churches have always been accused of remaining silent about state persecutions (although such a view does not necessarily take into account the significant number of the members of those churches who did bear a silent witness and often paid, and continue to pay today, with their lives); churches often joined the process of national emancipation of a number of post-Ottoman states and effectively promote phyletism;<sup>6</sup> churches often adopt Protestant models of relationship between church and state, motivated by Lutheran or Catholic princes committed to modernizing their states and introducing political interference in the internal affairs of the national churches (Tsarist Russia and Greece).

One of the central challenges of engagement with the EU stems from the premise that the Orthodox churches approach the world through a theological lens inherently articulated via dogmatics. This focuses on ‘ontology’ as a way to fulfil human personality through particular perspectives and strategies about divine knowledge. This view is inherently suspicious of ethics-driven (rather than dogmatics-driven) approaches because of their overemphasis on ‘mechanics’ (i.e. properly applied principles of technical application) both in the context of theology but also in the context of social engineering (approaches which often merge with, and in some way debase, authentic theological enquiries that unify dogma and spirituality).<sup>7</sup> This is the reason Orthodox theology has doubts about political, social, and economic projects which over-emphasise the mechanics of social cohesion. This is also the reason why large political,

legal, or economic projects are viewed with suspicion not only by religious zealots but also by creative theologians. One of the key failures in religious organisations' engagement with any forms of regional or global political structures has been that they have often perceived institutional internationalization as a form of competitive theology (even though international institutional projects never were and were never intended to be theological paradigms) with which they have to engage theologically. This suspicion has extended to the EU. The Orthodox rapprochement as a result has been inherently utilitarian. Consequently there is nothing in terms of a substantive critique or a substantive apology that has distinctiveness which could be recognized as an original Orthodox contribution.

### **Between 'symphony of powers' and 'Babylonian captivity': prospects for Orthodox engagement with the EU**

Having established that there has been little substantive engagement with the idea of the EU itself, we now examine the extent to which Christian Orthodox theological foundations might create an environment and opportunities for the future development of such engagement. Such an analysis would inevitably be external and such questions would be absent from those forms of Orthodox theological thinking that assume the EU is yet another political community the church prays for but does not engage with. A more interesting question is whether the EU would create an environment for thriving Orthodox communities and whether they are likely to appreciate that. Does the EU as a particular legal order fit into some of the central ideas/premises of Orthodox theology or does this particular legal order make Orthodox theology more difficult to articulate?

On several levels one could propose that the EU is a fertile ground for thriving Orthodox theology. It creates a melting pot that helps Orthodox communities come out of the Babylonian captivity of religious nationalism and compromising church-state relations driven by Enlightenment and Ottoman political forms. The EU also makes churches more engaged with one another and more ecumenical. It seems that the dilution of political boundaries has helped divided churches to join forces to pursue matters that concern them all. On another level the idea of EU integration does to some extent work with the distinctive understanding of social structures in Orthodox theology, articulated by the twin concepts of 'sociality' and *sobornost*. 'Sociality' refers to a complex amalgam of multiple and individualized 'I-Thou' (rather than 'I-It') interactions with the Other, which shape what is generally understood as social currents. *Sobornost* alludes to a dialogical and mystical 'I-Thou' encounter within the Body of Christ, making the above mentioned individualized interaction in the context of sociality more coherent and possible to exercise (Zizioulas, 2006; Frank, 1992). The EU may seem to offer prospects for this kind of social cohesion. Yet the growing Orthodox diaspora increases the awareness that a fragmentation of national belonging presents opportunities, challenges, and responsibilities that some local Orthodox churches simply cannot meet. Growing Orthodox diasporas in 'new lands' within the EU are likely to lead to the birth of new Orthodox churches shaped beyond ethnic divides.

For the EU this presents a new situation. The Orthodox churches do not engage at any level with the *raison d'être* of the EU. Or rather, they do not engage differently from the ways they engage with any other political community. Because the local Orthodox churches have

accepted a status quo of existing within the context of non-Christian political regimes, it is no exaggeration to claim that their engagement with the cultural quality of laws and policies has somehow faded with the disappearance of the last 'Orthodox monarchies'.

At the same time this approach proposes that Christendom has not ended and Orthodox Eucharistic theology powerfully asserts this position by integrating the *entire* humanity into its liturgical drama. The limits of Orthodox political theology in some way present the opportunity to postpone the end of Christendom through its Eucharistic-political engagement with the world rather than through an 'evangelical' political engagement, which requires political communities to support the mission of the Church. This 'engaged dis-engagement' presents challenges for both ecclesial and political communities. At the same time it presents the possibilities of a 'living Christendom' where the salvation of souls pursued by the Church is not locked into a dependence on a political community that has to facilitate the mission of the Church. In the case of the Orthodox churches, a Thomist-style participation in public reason does not emphasise the conversion of political institutions, but rather the fulfillment of human persons. Attempts to convert political institutions are viewed with great suspicion because they may seem potentially idolatrous, utilitarian, and technology-driven, rather than 'ontological' projects, that is, projects which recognise and embrace the sacramental character of the world. Through an Orthodox theological lens "man's relation to God is not simply an intellectual and ethical relation, but a relation entirely and realistically based on the acceptance and use of created things; that is to say, on a eucharistic-liturgical utilization of the world" (Yannaras, 1973: 136). Such a primarily ontological stance is deeply sceptical towards any technological approaches to theology, philosophy, and any other intellectual strategies to social ordering.

No matter how far technology develops, it never ceases to be a *utilization* of the world which is necessary, legitimate, and commendable. The absolute importance assigned to technology expresses an attitude of a particular kind of utilization of the world; a utilization which does not view the created order as the handiwork of a personal God, nor seeks to bring out the meaning of things (the *logos*) and the disclosure of the uncreated divine energies in the world; but a utilization which presupposes the autonomy of man's needs and desires and man's arbitrary dominance over the physical world.

(Yannaras, 1973: 136)

Similarly, the reluctance to engage with questions of compliance of natural law with positive law may, perhaps, put Orthodox churches in a stronger position to be greater champions for international law and human rights as pragmatic legal tools than their Catholic and Protestant sister churches. This is partly because the latter have for many years entangled themselves in theological apologetics in relation to international law and human rights as if those represent a competitive theology which they have to reshape and with which they have to engage in theological disputation. The Orthodox churches in contrast have maintained that their authentic position in relation to civil law or any form of non-ecclesiastical law is always projected through the pastoral lens of canon law (civil law punishes, canon law heals). They engage with such parallel legal orders through parallel canonical approaches, but they are not expected to adopt, endorse, or reject any approaches of civil law, whether punitive or tolerant, in areas

which would largely be considered in a Western Christian context to be broadly a clash between Divine, natural law and civil law.

This does not mean to say that Orthodox churches will not assert their theological positions in areas of concern in common with other churches. It is, however, less likely that these positions will be articulated as ‘mechanical’ Christian social engineering projects such as often emerge in the political theology of the Western Christian tradition (and to some extent in the methodological emphases of ‘new natural law’ theories of authors such as Finnis [2011] and George [1999]). In this respect the Orthodox churches remain and will probably remain uninterested in political or legal institutions. One of the reasons that this is unlikely to change is the inherently dialogical rather than hierarchical institutionalism of the Orthodox churches, a pattern that also extends to political and legal institutions. Another reason is the general decline of hierarchical institutionalism in the relationships between political and ecclesiastical authorities in Europe, particularly manifested by the trend towards disestablishment.

In this environment of declining hierarchical institutionalism, Orthodox churches have a real opportunity to reassert their authentic dialogical institutionalism. In the EU there is already a forum facilitated by Article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty. It might just be possible that this facility will create the environment needed for the Orthodox churches to get accustomed to engaging with political institutions beyond national boundaries and to overcome the stalemate of interdependency of national churches and national governments.

Such an engagement will also fit well with perceptions of authority which orient Orthodox theology more closely to ‘personal authority’, perceptions driven by a dialogical situation and which open up towards sociality and *sobornorst*. This approach, articulated by certain key Orthodox theologians, derives from the Christological formulations of the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD). It emphasizes the idea of the personal authority of each Christian, centred on the powers entrusted to each person through baptism (‘priest’, ‘prophet’, and ‘king’) and on the people of God together as ‘shield-bearers of truth’. This dialogical dynamic between ecclesiastical hierarchy and people of God, one of promulgation and reception, can allow for many different forms of engagement in different situations and with diverse configurations of groups and individuals. The fulfillment of these roles within an ecclesiastical context means that relating to the world, individually or in a community, transforms the world through the transformation of the human beings in their ecclesial context. This amounts to a sacramental-ontological renewal of society and not necessarily a technological transformation of the political institutions.

Ware reminds us that what makes a church council universal is not simply an endorsement by the Pentarchy and the Emperor, but a reception by the People of God as ‘shield-bearers of the Faith’, a ‘priesthood of all believers’ co-responsible for shaping the church and the world (Ware, 1970). This is a role that the Orthodox laity may now extend to the forms through which its churches engage with the EU. This means that Orthodox theology has by default provided (at least in theory) greater space for the role of laity through the process of reception. It also suggests greater opportunities for dialogue rather than simply top-down clerical decision making. It implies that, outside as well as within the church, complex networks of clergy and laity will speak with a plurality of voices about the churches’ engagement with the world. More importantly if the ‘People of God’ choose to exercise their role as ‘shield bearers of

truth' in a secular context, they and their associations may play a pivotal role in preventing ecclesiastical institutions from losing their theological voices by being too sceptical or over-confident about the benefits of their interactions with political communities. In order for this to happen the people of God have to awaken and acknowledge their responsibilities. This has already been happening, in differing degrees in different Orthodox churches. In some, reclaiming their ancestors' religion has been seen as a sign of a new freedom. But in many contexts this sense of freedom has led to complacency in treating their churches as cultural monuments or a plant they fondly grow in their back garden.

This is an untapped potential of the role of the 'People of God.' Following the Greek crisis, the growth of grassroots charities with strong EU connections and endorsement from the Church of Greece may be the first signs of greater lay engagement alongside that of ecclesiastical institutions. This trend, however, does not translate across all churches. In some Orthodox churches, local bishops refuse to endorse such grassroots developments and view them as threats to their own power. They may like the idea of interacting with the EU but see themselves as gatekeepers and middlemen who facilitate such contact.

It is very difficult to see how this could change unless EU institutional cooperation with lay Christian organisations is developed and strengthened. Moving in that direction would certainly make sense, particularly in countries where the Orthodox church is stagnated by declining ordinations and monastic vocations, ecclesiastical corruption, dilapidated parish structures, lack of education, and a hard-line hierarchical defence of a status quo beneficial for a particular brand of Orthodoxy. In such cases EU institutions should be reluctant to designate gatekeepers with whom they choose to work. Broadening the roster of interlocutors will strengthen the role and the forms of lay (re)engagement on the ground and will have an impact on the ways local Orthodox churches engage with current issues. At the same time, EU involvement in domestic ecclesiastical politics must proceed with a due care for religious autonomy. A complex case such as the right to access to Mount Athos on the negotiation table could easily kill *all* negotiations.

We see, then, that one of the main features of the engagement with the idea of the EU by Orthodox churches is a great diversity of voices not easy to reconcile. Some Orthodox bishops speak openly with anti-EU/anti-European positions (and these two are not always clearly distinguished). Others are openly pro-EU, others remain mysteriously silent, while a few hold views which could be described as fascist. All this presents a challenge of unpredictability in the ways Orthodox churches are likely to interact with the public institutions of the EU. On the one hand, they have less historical baggage compared to the Roman Catholic Church and a number of European Protestant Churches. These have seen their ecclesial identities shaped through an evolving expectation of being (albeit in a different way) co-participants in the articulation of public reason. To avoid such an expectation, Orthodox churches are perhaps theologically reluctant to spell out a particular contemporary commitment of engagement with the political.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, because of the lack of an Orthodox political theology, Orthodox churches (and, for example, Orthodox MEPs) seem to adopt a plethora of political theologies. Some of those are fragments, others are hybrids, while most are borrowed either through historical circumstances, or through efforts at reconstruction, or simply by following what everybody else does. The result is that Orthodox voices within the EU institutions tend to

articulate generic ‘Christian’ positions alongside those of other Christian churches rather than distinct Orthodox perspectives.

### ***Urbi et Orbi*: levels and forms of engagement in an EU context**

EU institutions have provided an important context and a framework for an engagement with religious organizations. Orthodox churches actively pursue these opportunities, while their terms of engagement often display different attitudes towards the EU at home and abroad. Such diverse approaches are difficult to interpret. On the one hand they display a realist positioning of the churches engaging with different audiences, and, on the other, a possible shift away from church-state relations as a key *modus operandi* for the territorial Orthodox churches.

The Church of Greece, Cyprus, Romania, and the ROC have representations in Brussels. Those churches along with a number of other local Orthodox churches are also represented by the CEC. The membership of CEC goes beyond the boundaries of the EU and indicates once again that the interplay between inter-Orthodox relations and Orthodox interactions with European institutions are complex. In addition, a Committee of the Representatives of the Orthodox Churches at the European Union (CROCEU) meets regularly and develops joint strategies. Their recent statement (coordinated with CEC policy) could be considered a blueprint about the future directions of engagement of the Orthodox churches with the European Union. The statement, agreed and issued prior to the upcoming elections for the European Parliament of May 2014, is indicative of the consolidation of an agreed pan-Orthodox agenda to be pursued before the European institutions. In it the enlarged responsibilities and competencies of the European Parliament according to the Lisbon Treaty are considered and the importance of the role of European citizens, particularly Christians, in the next elections, affirmed:

The Orthodox Representatives would like to underscore that the European Union is not just another institution founded to safeguard individual and collective economic interests. It is rather the recipient encompassing the aspirations of hundreds of millions of people living in their own country who wish to be part of a larger family of nations that work together for the consolidation of social standards, dignity in life and security in society. All share a responsibility for building and developing institutions by all means socially, economically and environmentally sustainable. Christians are encouraged to take active part in the elections and, thus, to contribute to the improvement of the European project.

(CROCEU, 2014)

The CROCEU statement commits Orthodox Representatives to work together with any competent authority in order to promote such goals. The document deals, *inter alia*, with sustainability-driven environmental policies, the protection of human dignity, the right to life, family life (marriage defined as a union between a man and a woman), gender equality, social investment policies tackling social exclusion, unemployment and poverty, guaranteeing a minimum wage, care for the most vulnerable members of the society and commitment to the common good of the people, and to a dialogue encouraging co-responsibility and cooperation with the European authorities in the spirit of Article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty. The document

promotes a wider participation in the European elections and appeals to Orthodox Christians to exercise their democratic vote.

What is particularly significant in this document is that, among the commitments which spell out fairly predictable positions, the document also endorses a commitment on the part of the Committee of Orthodox Churches in Brussels to human rights, democracy, the rule of law and civic education. It calls for:

- Human Rights strategies for the protection of civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights. The aim is always to soften and not harden tensions in the society. Human rights must never become a battlefield. They rather have to be the firm ground to foster cohesion in the society and prosperity for its members. In particular, those who sustain freedom of religion, belief or conviction in fact work for promoting the values of peace and justice in the society. What is more, it is a duty for any state to secure access to efficient social services for all especially at a time of deepening crisis.
- Education strategies for democratic citizens who respect human rights and intercultural competences.
- Effective, humane, ‘democracy and rule of law’-driven social inclusion policies towards migrants and refugees as well as policies tackling the problem of extremism and racism.

(CROCEU, 2014)

This is a very specific endorsement, spelling out more clearly than many other statements or position papers of individual Orthodox churches a pan-Orthodox position in relation to individual human rights. This endorsement of human rights is at odds with some fundamental positions of some of the local Orthodox churches, voiced as a religious critique of international law (albeit borrowed directly from a CEC statement).

Another reason this document is particularly significant for the Orthodox churches’ engagement with EU institutions is that it shows both the ability and the commitment to engage with EU institutions on their terms and with language that is likely to have a greater traction in Brussels. A particularly fascinating feature is that the Orthodox churches have here expressed a political commitment to democratic elections, echoing the grammar of solidarity of the Christian Democratic movements of the early post-second world war period. Appropriation of such typically Roman Catholic political language is already significant enough. But what must be kept in mind is how differently the Orthodox churches relate to the EU institutions in Brussels as opposed to at home. While their representatives endorse the above values in Brussels, many of the national Orthodox churches have been historically silent during national parliamentary elections and have often endorsed fairly unsavory political elites. Papathanasiou (2013) even goes so far as to identify a national-socialist grammar in the statements of the Church of Greece and its alignment with the far right, especially after the economic downturn. This invites two possible explanations. One is that when engaging with EU institutions, policies and law at home and abroad, the Orthodox churches simply cater for different audiences. The other is that political and economic transformations, expanding Orthodox diasporas in Western Europe and a disillusionment with traditional alliances with governments at home, have brought the Orthodox churches genuinely closer to EU institutions – aided by the

fact that such institutions, through the Lisbon Treaty, facilitate dialogue at a level which is no longer possible with national governments at home.

From a policy point of view this might be a significant development. It represents closer engagement by Orthodox churches with regional and international institutions and even a willingness to endorse human rights at a EU level, even while the same churches are quite reluctant to do so and often do exactly the opposite at a national level. Driven by their complex inter-ecclesial relations and inherent tensions, by complex and reconciled relationships with the states where their mother churches reside, and by pure pragmatism, the Orthodox churches articulate their positions in a highly contextualized fashion. The ROC would speak in one way as an autocephalous church responsible for the Russian Commonwealth and by pursuing foreign policy agendas aligned with the foreign policy agendas of the Russian state. At the same time it may speak very differently as a member of CEC or CROCUE before the European institutions. The same would apply to the churches of Romania, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Serbia, Albania, and the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. While united in doctrine, these churches have been historically aligned in complex church-state relations and inter-ecclesial relations either close to ROC or to Constantinople, or acting fairly independently both in terms of relations with the major patriarchates and in terms of attitudes to Europe.

Thus it would be a gross oversimplification to try to consolidate this complex mosaic in order to adopt a common interpretation of all Orthodox churches (as it would be in the case of the Roman Catholic Church and the churches *sui iuris* in communion with Rome). A very important starting point would be to focus on what these churches share in common in terms of an understanding of unity between doctrine and spirituality and what are the examples of departure from their common tradition. On that level, issues such as homosexuality and biotechnology are negotiated to a greater extent at a 'constitutional level' by the ROC but contained at a level of penitential discipline by the other Orthodox churches. In other words, an engagement with the contemporary world would not be the common thread in Orthodox thought we might expect to see. Such an engagement takes different forms, picks different themes and rarely is endorsed by the whole local church or at a pan-Orthodox level.

Any engagement by EU institutions with Orthodoxy thus has to develop sophisticated tools to interpret these dynamics and to be aware of the inner diversity and independence of churches united by common doctrine. In doing so, EU institutions have to be aware of the inherent challenges of such a complex engagement. This would require balancing an awareness of the importance both of the hierarchical structures and of an independent, and at the same time properly endorsed and integrated, grassroots engagement with Orthodox laity. This might be pursued, for example, by championing programmes that would develop Orthodoxy's legitimate voice in the true spirit of the principle of subsidiarity. For one leading contemporary theologian, this includes paying attention also to the priority of the local parish itself:

Only the life of the parish can give a priestly dimension to politics, a prophetic spirit to science, a philanthropic concern to economics, a sacramental character to love. ... The liturgical unity of the faithful has to be the starting-point of all the things for which we hope: the transformation of the impersonal life of the masses into a communion of persons, the authentic and genuine (rather than the merely theoretical and legal) observance of social

justice, the deliverance of work from the bondage of mere need and its transformation into an engagement of personal involvement and fellowship. Apart from the local parish all of these are but an abstraction, naive idealism, sentimental utopianism. But within the parish there is historical actualization, realistic hope, dynamic manifestation. The eschatological self-understanding of Orthodox theology cannot be actualized outside of the setting of the local parish. It is to this setting that the dialogue must return, leaving aside the challenge of the West. The role of Orthodox theology within the historical and cultural milieu of the West is to draw attention to the eschatological witness of the Church as embodied in the parish.

(Yannaras, 1973: 146)

It also means that EU interlocutors would need to acquire the necessary religious literacy enabling them to develop broader coalitions with Orthodox faith-based organisations (FBOs). This could involve the following: (1) identifying feasible conversations to pursue and distinguishing them from those that would be premature; (2) understanding the agenda of individual Orthodox FBOs as well as the group dynamics of all Orthodox FBOs in Brussels; (3) developing broader networks of interlocutors in each church rather than relying on representatives in the EU that often have a purely symbolic role quite different from the role of Papal Nuncios; (4) taking the measure of the unique challenges each Orthodox church is facing in its engagement with the EU and how these challenges could be addressed; and (5) grasping the geopolitical role that the Orthodox churches play and could play within the EU, the Council of Europe, and beyond, and using this knowledge in the EU's external action. But such forms of awareness cannot be reduced to mere statistics and demographics. EU actors would also have to incorporate an awareness of the pivotal role of the distinctive theological discourses and voices already touched on in this chapter.<sup>9</sup>

EU actors might also seek to recognise that some of the sceptical perspectives Orthodox (and other religious) voices raise about the work of international institutions are not completely misguided. International organisations and EU institutions will always face the challenge of teleological visions and the technological processes which are implemented to pursue such visions. Forms of multilateralism are often constrained by political contention and proceduralism. Well-informed and genuinely engaged religious voices may open new agendas for change in the ways regional and international organisations engage with the world, helping them take into account the complexities of polyphonic voices. A calibrated approach to political institutions through the ontological lens of Christian dogmatics can and should contribute, in the words of Jacques Delors, to reinvigorating the 'European soul' through a genuine social concern beyond a mere political and legal technological statecraft. A leap towards such a theological renewal rooted in the genuine ontological engagement with the world and a rediscovered relevance of religious voices could hardly be articulated better than in the words of Metropolitan Kallistos Ware of Diokleia (2015): "If Orthodoxy is to triumph ... it must be a humble, even humiliated Orthodoxy open to the needs of the world around us, sharing its sorrows, doubts and distress."

## Notes

- 1 For example, the Slavophiles' anti-Westernism, Yugoslav anti-Westernism, Orthodox critique of the West as an extension of Communist propaganda during the Cold War, and critique of the West in the context of the Orthodox theological revival in Paris (particularly through the works of S. Boulgakov, N. Berdyaev, S. Frank, and V. Lossky), and Greece. See Yannaras (1973).
- 2 Since 1973 and until very recently the Orthodox Church in Oxford had two parishes with two bishops of two jurisdictions (Constantinople and Moscow) and two calendars.
- 3 Some of those include assemblies in the USA, France, UK, Spain, and Portugal.
- 4 In this respect, the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius, the Orthodox Theological Institutes in Paris and Munich, have been major hubs of dialogue and cross-fertilization of theological ideas.
- 5 This was apparent in the Inter-Orthodox Consultation on the Draft Constitutional Treaty of the European Union (Payne and Kent, 2011: 41).
- 6 On the current debates about Orthodox theology and nationalism, see *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* (2013).
- 7 Yannaras (1973: 131), for example, is prepared to link the theological presuppositions of modern theology with the medieval scholastic methodology and its intellectual effort to master the realm of accessible truth by defining and distinguishing the boundaries between man's capacities and the transcendent reality of God. A paradigmatic example of this 'technological' approach to theology is the definition of theology in Aquinas: "Nevertheless sacred teaching also makes use of human reasoning, not indeed to prove the faith (for that would do away with the merit of believing) but to *render manifest* some of the things which are delivered in this teaching." (ST I, Q 1, A 8, ad 2).
- 8 Strictly, the only appropriate form of government where the Church could actively engage remains a Christian theocracy. Other forms of government are seen as tolerating but not adequately facilitating a forum for the Church to participate in public reasoning.
- 9 For example, the 'I-Thou' theological strategies of encounter with the Other of John Zizioulas; the laity transformed by the authority vested upon them by Chalcedonian dogmatics in the theology of Kallistos Ware; the ontological corrective to social engineering in the theology of Christos Yannaras.

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