**What Future for Europe?**

**Has Theology a Place in the Current Discourse about Europe?**

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First of all, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the organizers of this regional consultation for the upcoming General Assembly of CEC. I have carefully read all the recommendations of the other regional consultations, and in general I cannot but subscribe them. My humble contribution and reflection as a start for discussion will inevitably concentrate on the specific problems this country at the edge of the south-eastern Europe is facing. The Center for Ecumenical, Missiological and Environmental Studies (CEMES), to which I preside, is planning an international and interdisciplinary conference (20-23 February 2018), together with Christian members of the European Parliament and other organizations (including CEC, few months before its General Assembly) on “The Political, Religious, and Spiritual Dimension of the Economic and Refugee Crisis”.

In addition, however, to the peculiarities of the south-eastern concerns, due to my denominational affiliation with the Russian Orthodox Church, a renowned and active member of CEC, I will also try to address their moral, and sometimes anti-Western, concerns.[[1]](#footnote-1) After all, in CEC’s open letter, in addition to the central focus of the Assembly on the European Union and its fundamental questions of common values that are threatened, we are asked “also to look beyond its borders”. Last but not least, I cannot ignore the hesitant position of my Church, the Church of Greece, to fully endorse and promote CEC’s *Charta ecumenica,* one of the most promising ecumenical statements, let alone its hesitance to allow it to be signed in Thessaloniki, as prof. Gregorios Larentzakis, one of its main drafters from the Orthodox side, has regrettably stated.[[2]](#footnote-2)

“If Europe wants to have a future, it needs a soul;” “Europe’s economy needs a new paradigm.” These are some of the statements issued by the Christian European MPs in the last five years.[[3]](#footnote-3) And these are some of the concerns “about the multiple and interrelated crises facing Europe today”, which CEC’s Open Letter is asking, requesting our Churches to “elaborate a theological perspective to these issues, including reflection on *koinonia* and *diaconia*,” and encouraging them “to make a positive contribution in building a common European home.”

Trying to answer the above question of the title I was given, in other words on how I understand the role of the Churches their theologies within a gloomy situation of a foreseeable disintegrating Europe (because we can only speak nowadays of a re-integration rather than the future of an already united Europe), I decided to change a little the focus on the *spiritual* future of Europe, and what message *the South and Eastern Europe* can send to the Conference in Novisand, Serbia. In addition, I will concentrate on the importance of *religion,* rather than of *Christianity*, despite my conviction that the founding fathers’ vision of Europe was that of “a community of peoples deeply rooted in Christian values”. Almost 10 years ago the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, speaking on “The Role of Religion in a Changing Europe”, remarked that “it is surely disquieting that, in the proposed Constitutional Treaty, despite protest from many religious leaders, there is no explicit reference to the contribution made by Christianity to the formation of the European heritage.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

As for myself, I propose to take this unfortunate development as a settled issue; that secularism, has won the battle - hopefully not the war. And I say this with confidence, because “religion is far too important for human existence to be excluded from politics,”[[5]](#footnote-5) especially in our dis-integrating and without a “soul” Europe.

I propose to show how such a development, namely a reconciliation between our faith and modernity, can be a real hope for Europe, provided of course that religion will be able to “exercise its tremendous potential and power to bring back moral values, and if recreates, and originates new images of what it means to be human in a just, peaceful and sustainable universe”.[[6]](#footnote-6)

But before doing this, it is important to specify the ambivalent relation between religion and politics. The host of this consultation, Dr. Pantelis Kalaitzidis has written a lot on Political theology.[[7]](#footnote-7) Politics is the theory of an on-going exercise of power, of coercion that includes legitimized violence. The EU very often address religious issues and make religious statements. But on the other hand, religions very often take up political stance and engage in political action. After all, most religions – and Christianity in particular – integrates the private and the public.[[8]](#footnote-8) But the Church’s role is of another dimension, the real nature of which I will attempt to describe later. This is why spirituality, rather than religion, was chosen as the focus of my presentation.

Europe, from the Far East to the Far West and from the Nordic zone to the Mediterranean see, is characterized in our days by the phenomenon of pluralism. Europe in our days - more than any other continent in our little planet, I would add – is shaped by multiculturalism and by pluralism. Pluralism, however, and especially religious pluralism, i.e. the acceptance of all religious paths as equally valid and able all to promote coexistence, is definitely related to, and for most scholars is the result of, “modernity”, the most tangible outcome of the Enlightenment that prevailed in Europe and dominated in all aspects of public life after the disastrous religious wars in the 17th century, that ended with the famous peace of Westphalia in 1648 c.e.

Despite the fact that all secular European institutions on the one hand, and religion and especially Christianity on the other, defend different values, and despite the opposite starting points and the different agendas between them, they still can cooperate and work hand by hand, provided that a clear line is drawn between “Gospel” and “Culture.” To address this delicate issue, however, it is necessary to briefly refer to the contrast and the successive stages of pre-modernity, modernity and post-modernity.[[9]](#footnote-9)

In the *pre-modern* world, the sacred cosmic stories of all religions provided, each for its own culture, the most certain public knowledge human beings believed they had about reality. After the Enlightenment, i.e. in *modernity*, the secular science replaced religion as the most public and certain knowledge that human beings can have of their world, whereas the religious stories were reduced to matters of personal belief and opinion. The ideal stance of modernity with regard to religion was, and in some cases still is, the separation of the religion (in Europe Christian institutions) from the state, and if possible its marginalization in the society at large, its relegation to the private or personal realm, and the declaration of the public realm as *secular,* in other words free from any religious influence. That is why all religions (Christianity included) were always reserved, if not hostile, to both pluralism and the principles and values of modernity, at least in the early stages. This is more evident in the Eastern and Oriental world.

*Post-modernity* is an ambiguous term used to denote first of all a time of transition in history. It is important to underline that post-modernity had its beginnings in the emergence of the social sciences, namely the sciences that at its earlier stages undermined the authority of religion and their public presence, and contributed to the secularization of society. When, however, the same methodological principles of sociological and historical criticism were finally applied to science itself, including the social sciences, it was discovered that there was no scientific knowledge without a possible alternative or counter knowledge, and in some cases some previously considered uncontested conclusions were to a certain extent also imaginative interpretations of the world.[[10]](#footnote-10) Suddenly, all our worldviews, including the so-called scientific ones, were relativized. This made people aware that their respective (modern) views of the world could not automatically be assumed to be objective descriptions.[[11]](#footnote-11) All these, together with other developments brought again religion back into the public domain. It is not accidental that in the European Union from the time of Jacques Delors the Churches were invited to cooperate in the shaping of the new Europe.

Having said all these, it is important to reaffirm what sociologists of knowledge very often point out, i.e. that modernity, counter (alternative) modernity, post-modernity, and even de-modernity, are always simultaneous processes.[[12]](#footnote-12) Otherwise, post-modernity as a worldview can easily end up and evaporate to a neo-traditionalism, and at the end neglect or even negate all the great achievements of the Enlightenment and the ensuing democratic institutions. The rationalistic sterility of modern life, has turned to the quest for something new, something radical, which nevertheless is not always new, but very often old recycled: neo-romanticism, neo-mysticism, naturalism, etc.[[13]](#footnote-13) There, in my personal view, can one find the roots of the rising euro-scepticism, some violent intolerance, even militant nostalgic to Nazi period behaviour. At the same time, the agenda of excessive modernists includes the original old anti-religious issues (e.g. they are not satisfied with just the human rights of people with different genders, insisting on dismantling the traditional Christian sacrament of marriage. I will come back to this.

In the past, Peter Berger tried to describe the attitude of the Churches toward the modernist revolution, and the pluralistic condition that entailed, in terms of two opposite positions: *resistance* and *accomodation*.[[14]](#footnote-14) In my view both these positions from a theological point of view (even from an Orthodox perspective) are inadequate.

*Resistance* is no longer suggested as a practical solution, because of the progress made in the theology of mission. As to *accomodation*, the impossibility of its application derives from a theological and ecclesiological ground.[[15]](#footnote-15) For the Church and her theology are incompatible with at least three cornerstomes of modernity: (a) secularism, (b) individualism, and (c) privatization.

If the Church fully accomodates to modernity and accepts *secularism*, then automatically her role, her nature and mission are all exhusted to her institutional expression. The Church will become yet another institution of this world, which can of course be welcomed, and even become a desirable player, by the dominant modern paradigm in the public domain, but she will loose her prophetic, and above all her eschatological, character. The Church, drawing her *esse* and identity neither from what she *is* at the present, nor from what it *was given* to her in the past, but from what *she will become* in the eschaton,she must not only avoid acting as an institution of this world, she must also critically respond and prophetically challenge all institutional and unjust structures, including EU.

With regard to *individualism*, it is quite obvious that the Church as a communion of faith, a *koinonia* of free people (and not as a oppressing communitarian system that ignores the individual human rights),[[16]](#footnote-16) is incompatible with any system that places as a basic principle the individual being and not his or her relations with the “other”, any other, and of course God, the “Ulimate Other”. This after all was rightly underlined in CEC’s Open Letter.

Finally, the relegation and extrusion of the Church exclusively to *the private domain* contradicts her identity, and nullifies her responsibility and imperative duty to evangelize the good news to the end of the world. This mission, of course, should not have an expansional character with imperialistic attitude and behavior, as it happened in the past,[[17]](#footnote-17) nor should it aim at the propagation or transmission of intellectual convictions, cultural traditions, doctrines, moral commands etc., but at the transmission of the life of communion, that exists in God.[[18]](#footnote-18)

If, nevertheless, neither resistance nor accommodation of the Church to the modern critical paradigm is legitimate on theological grounds, there is a third solution that has been applied by the Church on grounds of her missionary responsibility during the golden era of the 4th century c.e., that of the *social integration,* the famous Byzantine *synthesis,* when the Church took the risk to embrace the “empire” and practically reject the “desert”[[19]](#footnote-19) At that critical moment in her history the Church has not only integrated to the contemporary society of the Roman empire; she has not only shown respect to what was earlier called “Whore Babylon” (Apoc 17:5); but she even included the empire – certainly a “secular” institution – into her liturgical tablets. Τhe only thing she preserved intact was her identity (and this not without difficulties and risks) and her prophetical voice over the historical process. She followed, in other words, in this respect the example of St. Paul and not the radical stance of the seer/prophet of the Apocalypse.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Despite all these, I firmly believe that no Church, and especially the European Churches, can meaningfully and effectively exercise their mission in today’s pluralistic world without a reassessment of the present context, in other words without a certain encounter with modernity.[[21]](#footnote-21) If today this encounter is possible, and even desirable – despite the tragic events of Sept 11 – this is because of the undisputed transition of our culture to a new era, the *post-modern* era that brought with it the resurgence of religion; and this is undoubtedly both a threat and a hope. It is a threat if the fundamentalists manage to assume uncontrolled power, as in the US and in other countries, or dangerously show their ugly face, as in the case of the rising nationalistic or euro-sceptic political and social forces. However, it is a hope if religion is willing, or allowed, to exercise its tremendous potential and power to bring back moral values, and if the theologians recreate, and originate new images of what it means to be human in a just, peaceful and sustainable universe. Europe must embrace religious values, instead of being indifferent, allergic or even hostile to them. The alternative would certainly be a far-right-wing fanaticism. And this is something that we experience across the EU, but also beyond the Atlantic, and unfortunately eastwards.

What I consider, however, as the most optimistic development in Christian history, is that our European Churches began to address the human sin in the structural complexities of our world, and started ministering the socially poor and marginalized of our societies in their contexts, what we describe as the “global South,” and recently with regard to the refugees crisis. This was widely manifested especially after Pope Francis’ encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium.*

Speaking from the perspective of the South and the East, on the basis of “the economy of the Holy Spirit” we believe that God uses not only the Church, but many other powers of the world for God’s mission *(missio dei)* for the salvation of humankind and the entire creation.[[22]](#footnote-22) According to our biblical *Magna Charta* (Mt 25), God judges humanity with criteria other than the conventional religious ones. With the “Economy of the Spirit” the narrow canonical boundaries of the Church, are widened, and all cultural (and religious) superiority syndromes and arrogant missionary behaviour give their place to a “common witness” and a humble “inter-faith dialogue”.

In the recent New Mission Statement, entitled *Together towards life: mission and evangelism in changing landscapes,* it is clearly stated: “The church lives in multi-religious and multi-cultural contexts and new communication technology is also bringing the people of the world into a greater awareness of one another's identities and pursuits. Locally and globally Christians are engaged with people of other religions and cultures in building societies of love, peace and justice. Plurality is a challenge to the churches and serious commitment to inter-faith dialogue and cross-cultural communication is therefore indispensable.”[[23]](#footnote-23)

This rapprochement with people of other faiths[[24]](#footnote-24) does not mean a naïve affirmation that all religions are the same, or that a new “world religion”, a *Pan-religion,* is needed or is at hand, as it is feared or claimed by the ultra-conservatives from all religions. On the contrary, the inter-faith dialogue and co-operation are necessary, exactly because the various religious traditions are different and promote different visions of the reality. The inter-faith dialogue is an “encounter of mutual commitments and responsibilities”[[25]](#footnote-25) on the common goal of humanity to restore communion with God. After all, this is the ultimate goal of the divine economy, as it is clearly stated in the Christian Bible (cf. Eph 1:10, Cοl 3:11 etc).[[26]](#footnote-26) The inter-faith dialogue, and the encounter with modernity, from a Christian point of view does not simply aim at decreasing the enmity and the hostilities between people of different religions - this is what the secular powers in the world are interested in, but just for the stability of the present world order; the inter-faith dialogue,[[27]](#footnote-27) and the dialogue with modernity, currently being promoted and with full determination pursued, at least according to the *Charta ecumenica,* aim at building upon what is left unfinished in modernity by the so-called “secular condition And here I am referring to modernity’s inability to enforce a lasting just peace on earth, its unwillingness to preserve the natural environment, and its surrender to the rules of the dominant world economic system, which–allow me to remind us–has caused enormous pain to my country.

To some of these aspects I will limit myself in the remaining time, making use of the ground-breaking recent magisterial or collective Christian statements, in addition to the *Charta ecumenica*: one of them was recently issued by the Orthodox Church,[[28]](#footnote-28) two by Pope Francis,[[29]](#footnote-29) two by the wider Christian ecumenical community,[[30]](#footnote-30) one by the Evangelical *Lausanne Movement,*[[31]](#footnote-31)and the last one by an inter-faith initiative.[[32]](#footnote-32)

The failure or shortcomings of modernity in justice, peace, the integrity of creation, and the world economy, is to a certain extent the result of *individualism,* one of the pillars of modernity, and the ensuing absolute, unconditioned, uncontrolled freedom of the individual in all aspects of life, personal and collective, moral and social (sexual freedom, legally protected freedom in accumulating wealth, freedom to exhaust the natural resources etc.), heralded as the new faith after the Enlightenment.

Looking at the ambivalence of modernity many Christian theologians and activists insist that there must be a criterion to judge what should be saved from the values and achievements of modernity and what should be overcome. For with the free-market economy, the argument goes on, the power balance changed and modernity from a midwife of human rights became their murderer. Only if Europe listens again carefully and gleans from the shared wisdom of Christianity, of other religions and of other ages-old ethical traditions, can the positive values of the European “modern paradigm” be renewed and revitalized, and thus be accepted by the faithful. This, and only this, can save Europe from its dis-integration, or even worst, from the avalanche of fascist behaviours and the nightmare of Nazism. It is for this reason that from all religious quarters we now speak of a *liberation of modernity*.

The most tangible aspect of this liberation has to do with the most revered in the West document of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights.* In view of the last breakdown of the International Convention on Climate Change in Paris by the threat of the US Trump administration to withdraw, it became clear – at least in religious circles – that *human rights are awfully ineffective, if they are not accompanied by “Human Responsibilities”.* The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church reminds us, that “freedom without responsibility and love eventually leads to loss of freedom.”[[33]](#footnote-33) The people of faith nowadays believe that the values and principles that form part of a common world ethic need not only be publicly declared, they also require an international legal endorsement; they should be more effectively integrated into the work of the UN system and major international legal institutions, even if integrating such values and principles requires significant reforms to leading organs and agencies of the UN. And this battle must certainly start in Europe.

The inter-faith document, *Initiative on Shared Wisdom (ISW)–Thought and Action for a Sustainable Future,* produced by the most serious global movement initiated in Asia, with strong Muslim participation, insists that “a Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities that would stand beside the Universal Declaration of Human Rights” is a *sine-qua-non* for a just, peaceful and sustainable universe. Action has already been taken that the Secretary General of UN “acts to advance acceptance of a statement of shared ethical values and that the document be introduced into the General Assembly for debate and adoption”. And the document goes on: “To this end religious and other ethically based institutions should work with legal and political authorities (and I cannot see another place in the world than this can start except in Europe, and the EU in particular; and no other religious institution to promote it than CEC)…in order to develop a higher level of public understanding and awareness of commonalities in values between the major religious and ethical traditions, while fully respecting religious, ethnic and cultural diversity”.

At this point I would like to underline that the struggle of Christians to promote a Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities is not just a diplomatic initiative aiming at introducing in the world agenda religious or moral values at the expense of the values of modernity. It came out of pressure by prophetic and charismatic figures and theological movements – mainly from the third world – for social and ecological justice from a faith perspective. “Economic justice” is a concept developed by the Churches and the ecumenical movement towards achievement of global justice through advocating for equitable sharing of resources and power as essential prerequisites for human development and ecological sustainability. Long before a universal concern (political, scientific etc.) and advocacy for the dangerous effects of the climate change was developed, theologians put a critical question to their Churches: “Will the Churches have the courage to engage with the ‘values’ of a profit oriented way of life as a matter of faith, or will they withdraw into the ‘private’ sphere? This is the question our Churches must answer or loose their very soul,” declared a WCC consultation of Eastern and Central European Churches on the problem of economic globalization at the dawn of the 3rd millennium.[[34]](#footnote-34) And if the Churches, especially the European Churches, lose their “soul”, surely no “soul” whatsoever will remain for Europe!

The most fervent proponent within the ecumenical movement in the Christian world for a declaration of human responsibilities is the Russian Orthodox Church, regardless of her other motivations. And this common Christian concern will certainly bring closer the Churches of Western Europe with those in the East, especially after the tragic developments in Ukraine, that has divided not only that European nation, but also Christians and Churches there.

Allow me at this point to make an analysis which cannot be overlooked in the upcoming Assembly of CEC. The unexpected and regrettable political developments across Europe (with the rise of intolerant xenophobic forces), in U.S. (with the appearance of the Alt. Right, as a result of last year’s election), in Russia (with the anti-western and anti-modern agenda – identifying the West with an evil to be destroyed – and the *Rushky Mir* narrative), even the Muslim world with the extreme radicalized Islam (always using symbolically the acclamation “Allah is great”) is a reminder for the European Churches that they should not unequivocally surrender to the values of modernity. But at the same time they should not, as Pope Francis regularly repeats, exhaust their mission to a “culture war”, but concentrate on matters of faith.

The phrase “culture wars” represents a loan translation from the German [*Kulturkampf*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kulturkampf) that refers to the clash between cultural and religious groups in the 19th c. against the influence of the [Roman Catholic Church](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Catholic_Church). It describes the polarization between the different values which can be: [West](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Canada) versus [East](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Canada), [rural](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rural_Canada) versus [urban](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_the_100_largest_urban_areas_in_Canada_by_population), or  [traditional values](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conservatism_in_Canada) versus  [progressive values](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Progressivism_in_Canada), you name it. In addition to criticizing environmentalists and feminists, traditionalists concentrate on all sorts of [public morality](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_morality) issues as a real battlefield against the modernist agenda (on issues like abortion on demand, environment, homosexual rights, discrimination against religious schools, women rights etc.).

From the faith perspective the future of Europe will be determined by the willingness of the Churches in Europe to help moving beyond the “culture wars”. And in their struggle they must move beyond the divide between excessive modernism, especially militant atheists, and blind traditionalism.

The European Churches, following the example of the prophetic movements, must be concerned about two interrelated aspects of globalization: ecology and economy, both stemming from the Greek word *oikos* (household), and both carrying inherently the notion of communion *(koinonia),* so dear and revered in all Christianity, but definitely rooted stronger in the Orthodox tradition. Therefore, it did not come as a surprise the immediate response by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and Patriarch Bartholomew in particular, who has become known all over the world for his sensitivity for the environment, God’s creation, and his universally appreciated activities, like the series of the international ecological conferences, for which he was given the nickname the “Green Patriarch.” And lately, of course, by the *Laudato Si* encyclical of Pope Francis.

Moreover, on a theoretical level, all Churches in Europe, must more intensely examine from a faith perspective and implement what has become an axiom in the wider ecumenical movement: “Various aspects of climate, ecological, financial, and debt crises are mutually dependent and reinforce each other. They cannot be treated separately anymore.”[[35]](#footnote-35) Needless to say that the battle for achieving a legally established Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities cannot be won unless it is fought by a united front of people of faith, together with all people of good will. The *Charta ecumenica* urged for: safeguarding the creation, strengthening community with Judaism, cultivating relations with Islam, and encountering other religions and world views (par 9-12). If all religious leaders take actions similar to the ecological initiatives of Patriarch Bartholomew, or endorse the social and economic views, expressed by Pope Francis, a new and better world will certainly rise. A new Europe can appear again as a moral player in world affairs, a united and re-integrated Europe, worthy of its great legacy, will become a reality.

To return to Patriarch Bartholomew’s previously mentioned address – and with this I will end my presentation – “freedom, respect and the dignity and integrity of each human person (and the entire creation) are our (spiritual) vision of a United Europe.”[[36]](#footnote-36) This religious, “spiritual” and “political” project that I have presented is neither a naïve, unrealistic outcry of some visionaries with no sense of the reality, nor a biased intervention in the old struggle between centralized socialist and free-market capitalist economy; it goes beyond this old divide, because it focuses not on the process of production and fair distribution of our planet’s material wealth and natural resources, but on their *source* and *origin*. All three Abrahamic monotheistic religions are convinced that *“the Earth is the Lord’s and everything in it*” (Psalm 24: 1).[[37]](#footnote-37)

1. Cf. Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk’s quite recent (22 September 2017), speech at an international symposium on the “Christian Future of Europe”, which took place at the residence of Russia’s Ambassador to Great Britain (https://mospat.ru/en/2017/09/23/news150374/). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. More in the special chapter (6) on the *Charta ecumenicaa* of his recent book, *Το καθήκον της Ορθοδοξίας για καταλλαγή και ενότητα,* Ostracon Publishing: Thessaloniki 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. From the Congress on Values Economy, held in Brusses, Belgium June 7, 2012, and few weeks later from a seminar examining “Europe’s values in a ‘Post-Secular Europe’,” June 27–29, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, *In the World, Yet not of the World* (ed. by J. Chryssavgis, with a Foreword by Jose Manuel Barroso), Fordham University Press, New York 2010, 109-120, pp. 111f. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See my “Orthodox Christianity", in J. Neusner (ed.), *God's Rule*. *The Politics of World Religions,* Georgetown University Press, Washington DC 2003, 86-105, p. 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Cf. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Orthodoxy and Political Theology, trans. Fr. Gregory Edwards, “Doxa and Praxis: Exploring Orthodox Theology” series, WCC Publications, Geneva, 2012; and “Church and State in the Orthodox World. From the Byzantine ‘Symphonia’ and Nationalized Orthodoxy, to the Need of Witnessing the Word of God in a Pluralistic Society,” in *Religioni, Libertà, Potere,* Milan 2014, pp. 39-74, where further bibliography; cf. idem, “Toward an Orthodox Political Theology: The Church’s Theological Foundations and Public Role in the Context of the Greek Economic Crisis,” in: Kristina Stoeckl, Ingeborg Gabriel, and Aristotle Papanikolaou (eds), *Political Theologies in Orthodox Christianity: Common Challenges—Divergent Positions*, T&T Clark Bloomsbury, London, 2017, pp. 151-178. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. J. Neusner, “Retrospective on Religion and Politics,” in J. Neusner (ed.), *God’s Rule,* pp. 257-260. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. From Nancey Murphy’s three-fold approach to the subject (philosophy of language, epistemology, philosophy of science) I will concentrate only on the last one *(Anglo-American Postmodernity: Philosophical Perspectives on Science, Religion and Ethics,* Boulder: Colorado 1997). Cf. also Rodney L. Petersen (ed.), *Christianity and Civil Society*, ΒΤΙ: Boston 1995; and Jacob Neusner (ed.), *Religion and the Political Order*, Scholars Press: Atlanta 1996. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For some, this affirmation was as shocking as the discovery that the earth was not the centre of the universe, cf. e.g. Darrell Fasching, “Judaism, Christianity, Islam: Religion, Ethics, and Politics in the (Post) modern World,” Jacob Neusner (ed.), *Religion and the Political Order,* Scholars Press: Atlanta 1996, pp. 291-299. Also idem, *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?* Albany 1993. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. According to Stanley Grenz *(A Primer on Postmodernism,* Grand Rapids 1996, esp. pp. 161-174) the hallmark of postmodernity is “centerless pluralism”. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Jürgen Habermas, “Die Moderne-Ein unvollendetes Projekt,” W.Welsch (ed.), *Wege aus der Moderne. Schlüssetexte der Postmoderne Diskussion,* Weihnheim 1988, pp. 177-192; Jean-François Lyotard, “An Interview” *Theory, Culture and Society* 5 (1989), pp. 277-309, esp. p. 277; idem, *The Postmodern Condition* Minnesota UP, Minneapolis 1984; Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in 19th c. Europe,* J.Hopkins U.P.: Baltimore 1973; Ι. Petrou, “Tradition and Cultural Adaptation in Post-modernity,” *Synaxis* 75 (2000), pp. 25-35 (in Greek). W. Welsch, *Unsere postmoderne Moderne,* VCH Acta humaniora: Wenheim 1988, σελ. 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Postmodernity’s responses and reactions to the modern project of the Enlightenment to ground knowledge or “reason” as a timeless, universal construct, immune from the corrosive forces of history, has very seldom gone to the extreme. The enduring dream of modernity should not be minimized or dismissed out of hand, and the many achievements it has realized, such as a concern for universal human rights, a concern for justice and equality, all deserve commendation and praise from religions. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy. Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion,* Doubleday, New York 1967, pp. 156ff; also pp. 106ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. What follows comes from my book *Postmodernity and the Church,* pp. 38ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Cf. Kostas Delikostantis, *Human Rights. A Western Ideology or an Ecumenical Ethos?* Thessaloniki, 1995 (in Greek). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Cf. my article “Beyond Christian Universalism: The Church’s Witness in a Multicultural Society,” in *Επιστημονική Επετηρίδα Θεολογικής Σχολής. Τιμητικό αφιέρωμα στον Ομότιμο Καθηγητή Αλέξανδρο Γουσίδη.* n.s. *Τμήμα Θεολογίας,* vol. 9 (1999), pp. 309-320 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. I. Bria (ed.), *Go Forth in Peace*, WCC Geneva 1986, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. G. Florovsky, “Antinomies of Christian History: Empire and Desert,” *Christianity and Culture.* Vol. II of *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky,* Nordland Publishing Company: Belmont 1974, pp. 67-100. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Cf. my “Orthodox Christianity,” (n. 3 above); also “Σχέσεις Εκκλησίας-Πολιτείας: Η θεολογία της κοινωνικής ενσωμάτωσης (Σχόλιο στο Ρωμ. 13,1),” in  *Επίκαιρα Αγιογραφικά Θέματα. Αγία Γραφή και Ευχαριστία,* BB 15 Pournaras: Thessaloniki 2000, pp. 75-82. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Cf. my recent book *Unity and Witness: A Handbook on Inter-Faith Dialogue,* Epikentro Publishing: Thessaloniki 2007; and its predecessor *Postmodernity and the Church. The Challenge of Orthodoxy,* Akritas: Athens 2002. By and large, there still exist a aloofness between religion and modernity, which is caused not only by the former’ rejection of the latter, and the negative attitude toward the whole range of the achievements of the Enlightenment; but also by the obstinate persistence of the adherents of modernism – and of course the democratic institutions that come out of it – to allow historic and diachronic institutions, like religion, to play a significant role in the public life, without being either absorbed or alienated by it, with the simple argument that derive their origin in the pre-modern era. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. After all, God’s Spirit, the “Holy Spirit”, who is the “Spirit of Truth,” “blows wherever He/She wills” (Jn 3:8, leading us to the “whole truth” Jn 16:13), thus embracing the whole of cosmos. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. § 9 of the document with the above title of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME), fully endorsed in September 2012 by the Central Committee of WCC. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. The openness toward the faithful of other religions, or the “other” in general, any “other”, including the most militant atheist, is also reinforced by the unique Orthodox anthropology, expressed in such terms as *theosis* or deification. The human nature is not a closed, autonomous entity, but a dynamic reality, determined in its very existence by its relationship to God. Determined by a vision of how to “know” God, to “participate” in His life, and of course to be “saved” neither by an extrinsic action of God nor through the rational cognition of propositional truths, but by “becoming God”, this anthropological notion, developed in our religious tradition*,* is much more inclusive to “others”, to non-Christians, even to non-believers, and much more relevant to the social, economic and environmental issues, than the old conventional missionary attitude. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. More in my *Unity and Witness*. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Having said this, I have to underline that the aim of today’s inter-faith dialogue has nothing to do with the naïve experiment in Chicago at the end of the 19th century c.e. (1893) with the World’s Parliament of Religions, the ultimate goal of which was “to unite all religions against irreligion”, This initiative came out of the conservatives of the so-called “American awakening”. 100 years later, in 1989, the new inter-religious initiative was motivated by the new “mission paradigm”, which for the Christians was theologically based on the “economy of the Spirit”. In this gathering, again in Chicago, the person who gave the keynote addresses, and prepared the famous document: *Towards a Global Ethic: An Initial Declaration,* was the Roman Catholic professor of Tübingen, Hans Küng. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Christian mission, in addition, even considers the “other” a real partner in, and not just an “object” of, mission, which of course is an inner theological (i.e. missiological) development. Viewing the faithful of other religions as co-workers in God’s mission, the Christian synergistically assists in the realization of the work of the Holy Spirit for a new world reality, a global communion of love, which transcends his/her personal as well as cultural and ethnic ego. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. The Orthodox mission statement, entitled *The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today’s World* (2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. The encyclicals *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), and *Laudato Si* (2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. The first one is the CWME mission statement, *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes;* and the second one *Economy of Life, Justice, and Peace for All: A Call for Action,* prepared by the WCC committee “Poverty-Wealth-Ecology” of the AGAPE process focusing on eradicating poverty. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. *The Cape town Commitment* (2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. *Initiative on Shared Wisdom (ISW)–Thought and Action for a Sustainable Future* (2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. *The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today’s World,* B 3 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Rogate Mshane, *Globalization. WCC-JPC,* presented in the Harare WCC Assembly. *The Responsibility of World Religions for Ecology, the World Economic System, and the International Law.* [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. § 10 of the *Economy of Life, Justice, and Peace for All: A Call for Action.* The people of faith “discern the fatal intertwining of the global financial, socio-economic, climate, and ecological crises accompanied in many places of the world by the suffering of people and their struggle for life. Far-reaching market liberalization, deregulation, and unrestrained privatisation of goods and services are exploiting the whole creation and dismantling social programs and services and opening up economies across borders to seemingly limitless growth of production.” Only last year, during the 22nd session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva, a symposium was organized by the WCC in collaboration with other Christian organizations, interfaith networks and civil society groups. It was moderated by Dr Guillermo Kerber, WCC program executive on Care for Creation and Climate Justice, who in his concluding remarks called action for climate justice an “ethical and spiritual imperative”. From this perspective, he said, the WCC, other faith-based organizations and a broad coalition of non-governmental organizations are calling on the HRC to establish a Special Rapporteur on human rights and climate change. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, “The Role of Religion in a Changing Europe,” *In the World, Yet not of the World*, p. 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Cf. more in my article, “The Biblical Understanding of Economy,” *Θεολογία* 83 (2012), pp. 25-36(in Greek). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)