

Polis, Ontology,
Ecclesial Event

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Engaging with Christos Yannaras' Thought

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Chapter Eleven
Orthodoxy and the West: The Problem of
Orthodox Self-Criticism in Christos Yannaras
Brandon Gallaher

It's time we admitted the truth:
we're Greeks also – what else are we? –
but with Asiatic tastes and feelings,
tastes and feelings
sometimes alien to Hellenism.
*C.P. Cavafy*¹

Master and Lord, there was a
measure once.
There was a time when man could say
my life, my job, my home
and still feel clean.
The poets spoke of earth and heaven. There were no symbols
*Dennis Lee*²

'How My Mind Has Changed'

This essay might be called 'How My Mind Has Changed', or, perhaps, 'Why Yannaras is somewhat right about the West and I was somewhat wrong'. I have written about Christos Yannaras' work on a number of occasions including a book review of his great *Orthodoxy and the West*

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1. C.P. Cavafy, 'Returning from Greece' in *C. Cavafy: Collected Poems*, trans. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherard, ed. George Savidis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), ll.11–15, 187.
 2. Dennis Lee, 'Civil Elegies' in *Civil Elegies and Other Poems* (Concord, Ontario: Anansi Press, 1994 [1968]), 2, ll.40-45, 32.

(1992/2006).¹ Until now, I have always argued that Yannaras creates in regard to Orthodoxy and the West a sterile antinomy between Orthodoxy as Eastern-mystical-communitarian-Greek and Western-rationalist-individualist-Barbarian. In short: Orthodoxy=good; the West=bad. But I was wrong. I have changed my mind. I now think Yannaras' argument is more complex and even nuanced than I formerly gave him credit for, as I mean to show, though I do still think he does slip into language and characterisations of certain thinkers and periods that very easily leads to my previous conclusion. Moreover, part of my former difficulty with his opposition of Orthodoxy and the West was that I have for many years focussed on the continuity between the Orthodox Church and Western Christianity. I now believe I had, as it were, the wrong end of the theological stick. Orthodoxy is not Western in its ecclesial consciousness and part of the challenge of contemporary Orthodox theology is articulating its distinctness, its Easternness, its salt, light, and difference in a wholly Western context. Inevitably, when you are acknowledging that you were wrong, there enters in an element of autobiography about why you made a mistake and of just how precisely you came to be wrong and I shall allude to this element later in the paper. This paper is a personal meditation of sorts on Orthodoxy and the West, laying out what I now think is more accurately the position of Yannaras on this subject, pointing out where I think he is right and where I still depart from his reading of this theme. At the close of this study, I will lay out some basic principles or (in a Lindbeckian vein) 'grammatical rules' which will acknowledge the difference between Orthodoxy and the West without falling into a false opposition between the two, with the denigration of the second and the apotheosis of the first.

1. See Brandon Gallaher, 'Review of Christos Yannaras, *Orthodoxy and the West: Hellenic Self-Identity in the Modern Age*, trans. Peter Chamberas and Norman Russell (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2006), *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, 50:3-4 (December 2009), 537-42; 'Μία επανεξέταση της Νεο-πατερικής σύνθεσης: Ὁρθόδοξη ταυτότητα καὶ πολεμικὴ στὸν π. Γεώργιο Φλωρόφσκυ καὶ τὸ μέλλον τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης Θεολογίας' ['A Re-envisioning of Neo-Patristic Synthesis?: Orthodox Identity and Polemicism in Fr Georges Florovsky and the Future of Orthodox Theology'], trans. Nikolaos Asproulis, Lambros Psomas and Evaggelos Bartzis, *Theologia* 84:1 (2013), 25-92; and 'Eschatological Anarchism: Eschatology and Politics in Contemporary Greek Theology' in *Political Theologies in Orthodox Christianity*, ed. Kristina Stoeckl, Ingeborg Gabriel and Aristotle Papanikolaou, 135-49 (London: Bloomsbury; T. & T. Clark, 2017 [drafted in 2013]).

Christos Yannaras and the Critique of the West

Yannaras repeatedly insists throughout his work that ‘the West’ has, in a favourite phrase, ‘distorted the Christian Gospel.’¹ Here Yannaras consciously builds on the legacy of the Greek American theologian John Romanides (1928-2001)² whom he regards as the purest standard of Orthodoxy.³ Romanides in turn was himself indebted to the (considerably more nuanced) anti-Western polemicism of his teacher Georges Florovsky (1893-1979).⁴ Romanides developed an elaborate historical ‘myth’ of the corruption of Western theology. He argued that Western theology was originally broadly Hellenistic but was tainted by the conquest of the Barbarian tribes of ‘Franks’ of the Western ‘Roman’ (=Byzantine Orthodox) Empire in the eighth and ninth centuries. For Romanides, there are neither Latin nor Greek Fathers but only Orthodox ‘Romans’ in the West and the unsubjected East who taught ‘Roman Orthodox theology’ (which is various forms of Palamism) rather than ‘Carolingian Frankish’ heresy. The fall of the West to the Franks leads to all sorts of heresies, but especially the *filioque* (echoing Vladimir Lossky (1903-1958), another great influence on Yannaras) which ‘is as bad as Arianism’ and is a sort of corrupt root of Western Christianity, and most of these errors (especially the *filioque*) can be traced to Augustine (354-430) who differed from the ‘Roman’ St Ambrose (337-397).⁵

1. Christos Yannaras, *Orthodoxy and the West*, trans. Peter Chamberas and Norman Russell, (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2007), 33, 41, 51 etc. and earlier Christos Yannaras, ‘Orthodoxy and the West’, *Eastern Churches Review* 3:3 (Spring 1971), 286-300.
2. See Marcus Plested: *Orthodox Readings of Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 205-7.
3. See Yannaras, *Orthodoxy and the West*, 278.
4. See Brandon Gallaher, “‘Waiting for the Barbarians’: Identity and Polemicism in the Neo-Patristic Synthesis of Georges Florovsky”, *Modern Theology*, 27:4 (October 2011), 659-91 (and see the expanded version: ‘Μία ἐπανεξέταση τῆς Νεο-πατερικῆς σύνθεσης’, 25-92). For texts and commentary, see *The Patristic Witness of Georges Florovsky: Essential Writings*, eds. Brandon Gallaher and Paul Ladouceur (London: Bloomsbury; T. & T. Clark, forthcoming).
5. John Romanides, *Franks, Romans, Feudalism, and Doctrine Doctrine: An Interplay between Theology and Society*, Patriarch Athenagoras Memorial Lectures (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1981), 4ff, 53, 63ff. and 95. Romanides first developed his myth of the Fall of Western theology in *The Ancestral Sin: A Comparative Study of the Sin of Our Ancestors Adam and Eve According to the Paradigms and Doctrines of the First and Second Century Church and the Augustinian Formulations of Original Sin*, trans. George S. Gabriel (Ridgewood, NJ: Zephyr, 2002 [1957]). See also *An Outline of Orthodox Patristic*

Yannaras, like Romanides before him, develops in all his books this ‘Fall of the West’, this *mythos* or tragic horizon of modern Western self-captivity. I want to trace this *mythos* in some detail in what follows. The discussion of Yannaras’ critique of the West has a definite purpose: it is in order to reveal his thought’s (often overlooked) self-critical *telos*, the extent to which Orthodox critiques of the West are really attempts to self-critically distinguish the pre-modern vision of Orthodoxy (call it ‘East’) from its own self-captivity within modernity (call it ‘West’) and, then, on this basis, to propose some basic theological rules for future Eastern Orthodox (self-) critiques of ‘the West.’

Yannaras sees the ‘Western deviation’ as going back to its roots in Augustine who, he opines, would have remained ‘a solitary heretical thinker . . . if in the 9th century the Franks had not discovered the meaning of his teaching.’¹ Augustine, we are told, is replete with ‘numerous examples of legal formalism, absolutised intellectualism, and utilitarian positivism’ seen, for example, twelve centuries before Descartes, with the identification of both knowledge and existence with intellection.² Indeed, Yannaras even sees in Augustine a sort of proto-utilitarianism (seen as the quintessence of Western thought): ‘Knowledge is now linked definitively with the need for a useful result; it is turned into a utilitarian object, subject to the demands of the self-assertion and comfort of the individual.’ Here there is a fair bit of conflation of any number of contradictory trends and ideas but the key thought is that Augustine is the polluted origin or, better, the core of the West pictured as a negative spiritual-intellectual vortex sucking all life down into its depths. Augustine is said to be

commonly recognised as the fountainhead or father of this new era – the Father of Western European philosophy and the civilisation that depends on it – regardless of the viewpoint, ideological principles, or methodological presuppositions with which one approaches history. As the foundation both of Scholasticism and of the Reformation; as the theoretical source of political, religious, and ideological totalitarianism and individualism; as the forerunner both of Descartes’ *cogito*

Dogmatics, ed. George Dion Dragas (Rollinsford, NH: Orthodox Research Institute, 2004). There is also *The Romans*, available at: <http://www.romanity.org/index.htm>. Accessed on 16 February 2018.

1. Christos Yannaras, *The Elements of Faith: An Introduction to Orthodox Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), 154-5.
2. Christos Yannaras, *The Schism in Philosophy*, trans. Norman Russell (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2015), 92.

and Kant's critique and ethics; and as the inspirer of the leading exponents of intellectualism and also mysticism and pietism, Augustine summarises in a single root and principle the many branches and frequently conflicting offshoots of European civilisation – of the only civilisation that embodies a dynamic globalism and constitutes, in relation to every other cultural phenomenon, a new era.¹

Even stronger yet, Yannaras traces the origins of 'what we now call totalitarianism' to high scholasticism and Aquinas in particular.² He claims that from Augustine 'to Thomas Aquinas and up to Calvin' there was completed a new version of 'ecclesiastical orthodoxy' where Orthodoxy becomes a 'religion'.³ This religion is founded on subjectivism or what he likes to call (especially in his popular *I Kathimerini* columns) 'atomocentrism' which is the turn in scholasticism from reason as a common logos of communion, a participation in the realised community and cosmos to the 'era of *subjective reason*, of the absolute and self-evident priority of the subject' where it 'defines and exhausts the presuppositions for the knowledge of the truth'. This truth, Yannaras argues, was the metaphysical ideology of nascent Roman Catholicism with its elevation of papal authority; that is, this truth is objectively obligatory and focussed in one sole bearer who is the totalitarian ruler of the known world, namely, the Pope of Rome.⁴

Yannaras asserts that scholasticism – despite the fact that scholarship has shown that Aquinas drank deeply of the Greek Fathers and his work has profoundly marked modern Orthodox theology⁵ – entirely abandoned the ontological theories of the Greek Fathers of the Christian East in their pursuit of the construction of modern European philosophy on 'the basis of the ontological priority of substance or essence, the logical predetermination of existence, and the restriction of knowledge to the limits of the intellectual capacities of the subject'.⁶ In other words, the West and Western theology, from Augustine to Aquinas on down, is characterised by subjectivism, essentialism and hyper-rationalism. It should be noted that there is very little direct engagement of Yannaras – no exegetical engagement of specific works, let alone *ad litteram* commentary – with

1. Ibid., 95.

2. Yannaras, *Orthodoxy and the West*, 12 and *Elements*, 158.

3. Yannaras, *Elements*, 156, 158.

4. Yannaras, *The Schism in Philosophy*, 98-9.

5. See Plested, *Orthodox Readings of Aquinas, passim* (and on Yannaras: *ibid.*, 207-8).

6. Yannaras, *The Schism in Philosophy*, 210.

the figures he attacks, such as Augustine and Aquinas. Yannaras even repeatedly attacks throughout his corpus the Gothic Cathedrals as giving material artistic expression to the techniques of scholastic reasoning insofar as they are the first examples of the ‘technological violation of natural matter and its subjection to the human understanding, while at the same time being wonderful artistic expressions of the autocratic and emotional imposition of ecclesiastical power and majesty on the human individual’.¹

What we immediately find puzzling in such broad-brush critiques of medieval cathedrals, which assume that a sort of direct line can be drawn from the rarefied dialectic of the scholars to the workshops of the masons, is why precisely Hagia Sophia (or, say, the Dome of the Rock) does *not* fall under this same critique. Is it somehow artistically a perfect expression of the epistemological universe of Hellenism? If so, how? But to ask such questions is to miss the point of an historical *mythos* of the Fall of the West. The point of such myths is to provide us with a narrative explaining the origins of our own inner spiritual malaise as Westernised beings through a totalising description, what Nietzsche called a ‘horizon’, of a civilisational vision that is tragically ravaged by a sort of ontological-cum-spiritual virus. We are thereby directed to another mode of life, another horizon and vision, one of health and joy, which supposedly existed before the Fall and of which we can barely conceive as it goes beyond our present horizon’s limitations, the absolute presuppositions of our present existence.² Historical myths of this sort are goads to action, tools of self-critique, and inspirers of transformation spiritually and politically. The mistake is in thinking of the historical myths found in Yannaras’ work as akin to any other contemporary historical interpretation or account of past events. Yannaras’ mythologising of the history of the Fall of the West has more in common with the sort of polemical and nostalgic narrative seen in Edward Gibbon’s *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-89) than it does with the portrayal of the gradual, highly ambiguous, as it involved ‘curious synchronisms’,³ divergence from a common Christian way between the paths of the very different Christian civilisations of Greek East and Latin West found in more contemporary works of history.⁴

1. Ibid., 100.

2. See George Grant, *Time as History*, Massey Lectures, Ninth Series (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1974 [1969]), 29-30.

3. Andrew Louth, *Greek East and Latin West: The Church AD 681-1071*, The Church in History, Volume III (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2007), 6.

4. E.g. Henry Chadwick, *East and West: The Making of a Rift in the Church, from Apostolic Times Until the Council of Florence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) and Louth, *Greek East and Latin West: The Church AD 681-1071*.

For Yannaras, Western Christianity as a religion puts the individual at its core and religion becomes an ‘individual event’ which is subject to the whims and desires of each person and, above all, the natural need to appease ‘the unknown and transcendent – it is an individual effort towards individual faith, individual virtues, individual justification, individual salvation.’¹ With this Western medieval focus on the individual comes man’s theorisation in the early modern period (later set out systematically in the Enlightenment) as a rational subject set by nature over and against other such subjects who then calculate their own needs amongst the plurality of subjects. Religion births a new political order as equally diseased as the form of life of the Church and the art that expresses it. First they deduce normative moral principles for all from a logical definition of the common good which is in their interest and then, having accepted this good, they enter into a ‘social contract’ or mandatory code of law which outlines certain normative rights or powers (a ‘claim-demand’) to protect them both from other individuals encroaching on them and from the arbitrary use of power from above.² The code of law assures the individual that their rights are legally enforceable or mandatory upon all as individual claims.³ Rights were applied to man regardless of their social class or economic status, or indeed any other difference that marked them out as persons. Here the collectivity of ‘*societas*’ is simply the ‘blending together of individuals in the pursuit of common interests . . . an arithmetical sum total of non-differentiated individuals . . . human co-existence as a simple cohabitation on the basis of rational consensus . . . the ideal of societies of unrelated individuals.’⁴ In this way, a secular modern realm where the individual was the central focus was fenced off from a sacred realm where there was a meeting of all in a communion of persons. The individual is deprived of his existential difference and uniqueness found in the event of truth which is the community and, above all, the person has taken from him the innermost ‘knowledge of subjectivity and identity that comes with reference to a creator God who exercises providential care over his creation.’⁵ Secularism is born out of this state of affairs and faith becomes a private mute grasping after transcendence since the ‘advancement of

1. Christos Yannaras, ‘Human Rights and the Orthodox Church’ in *The Orthodox Churches in a Pluralistic World: An Ecumenical Conversation*, ed. Emmanuel Clapsis (Geneva/Brookline, MA: WCC Publications/Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2004), 83-9. See also Christos Yannaras, *Postmodern Metaphysics*, trans. Norman Russell (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2004 [1993]), 25.
2. Yannaras, ‘Human Rights’, 84.
3. *Ibid.*, 83.
4. *Ibid.*, 88.
5. Yannaras, *Postmodern Metaphysics*, 28.

individualism, a characteristic element of modernity, functions as the inexorable alienation of humanity' with ideology taking the place of religious faith, the sacred being eclipsed and substituted by the political rationalisation of the subject.¹ There is, Yannaras argues, a direct line from Western religion's 'individual metaphysical salvation' to the eighteenth century 'secularised (legal) protection' which is the origin of 'the political system of so-called "representative democracy"'.² In modern societies power frees itself from social control and becomes 'technocratic' and subject to the rationalisation of technological and market logic regardless of social needs and national budgets: "Democratic" government decisions which change people's lives are dictated by considerations freed from all legal control and are sometimes defended on the inviolable grounds of "national security"'.³ If this seems to be a rejection of modernity or anti-modern, then that is because it is. Yannaras writes of 'modernisation' as a form of 'fundamentalism':

One could maintain that the brightest minds in the West are now gathering up their belongings and getting ready to leave the train of Modernity, which is plainly heading for a complete dead end. And it makes no sense at all for us, the peoples of the Balkans and the Middle East, to insist even today on belatedly joining the train of Modernity which intelligent people are hastening to abandon.⁴

Thinking Beyond the West: Hellenism

Yannaras contrasts this apotheosis of egoism and individualism in the West – which birthed modern liberal democracy, modernity, secularisation and the culture of human rights – with Hellenism.⁵ Yannaras' vision

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1. Ibid., 27, 29.
 2. Yannaras, 'Human Rights', 87.
 3. Yannaras, *Postmodern Metaphysics*, 22.
 4. Christos Yannaras, 'The dilemma: modernization-fundamentalism' in Yannaras, *'Generous in Little': A User's Guide* (Athens: Patakis, 2003), 264-76, especially 271, cited in Pantelis Kalaitzidis, 'Orthodox Theology and the Challenges of a Post-Secular Age: Questioning the Public Relevance of the Current Orthodox Theological "Paradigm" in *Proceedings of the International Conference Academic Theology in a Post-Secular Age* (Lviv: Institute for Ecumenical Studies, UCU/St Andrew's Biblical Theological Institute/DEL, 2013), 4-25 at 6, n. 9.
 5. See Demosthenes Gaveas, 'Interview with Christos Yannaras, 24.03.2016'. Available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.gr/2016/03/24/giannaras-sinedexi-elliniki-taytotita_n_9517726.html Accessed on 17 February 2018.

of Hellenism can only be described as a sort of idyll of a lost political, liturgical and ontological paradise which inspires us to renew our world, to change society, the Church and, above all, ourselves for the better. It is the lost paradise of the myth of the Fall of the West. This comes out strongly in his description of ancient Greek democracy. In ancient Greece, he argues, there was no need for rights of individuals and, indeed, rights were only applied to social groups and this was because the collectiveness of the citizens, as persons not individuals, were transformed into an 'exercise' or 'event' of truth which is the city. All citizens in this democratic paradise held power together as an event of communion between persons so there was no need to be protected from the arbitrary exercise of power between individuals.¹ The assembly of people, the ancient Greek citizens, did not meet primarily to discuss, judge and take decisions on the ordering of their common life 'but mainly to constitute, concretise and reveal the city' as a way of life according to the truth. This is the direct forebearer of the Eastern Orthodox Church or *ecclesia* (taken from the ancient Greek *polis*) which meets to constitute and reveal itself in the Eucharist according to the truth and after the image of the Trinity where many are one.² Politics in such an ethos is a common exercise of life according to the truth where one is 'constituted around the axis of ontology (and not self-interested objectives)'.³

Put more theologically, Yannaras holds that Orthodoxy teaches that Christ reveals the mode of God's existence, which is a sheerly free and personal or hypostatic movement of loving communion, and He invites us to share in this gift of grace through incorporation into a loving communion of persons, His Body, the Church as an event of communion. Personhood presupposes a common nature but this common nature does not necessitate our existence, for each person hypostatizes himself uniquely in a mode different from any other through his common energies of judgement, will etc. In existing so uniquely, we 'stand out' (*ek-stasis*) from our common nature by revealing who we are in an ecstatic desire to and for an Other whom accepts our disclosure. We are revealed, therefore, as we are in intra-personal loving encounters where we participate in the life of the Other – existing because we love. This self-disclosure is inexhaustible, for we are always learning more of the Other in this loving communion. The Eucharist is the realisation in Christ through the Spirit towards the Father of this experience of loving participation in the Other.

1. Yannaras, 'Human Rights', 85.

2. *Ibid.*, 86.

3. *Ibid.*, 88.

Yannaras and the Critique of the West as Self-Critique

It would be very easy to conclude from much of what has gone before in our exposition that Yannaras is simply and crudely opposing Orthodoxy, understood as what is taught, celebrated and lived in traditional Orthodox countries like Greece, Romania and Russia against the West, understood as the UK, the USA and even Japan. But to conclude this would be an error, albeit one that is understandable, for ‘the West’ continually seems to be identified in his writings with foreignness¹ and the triumph of the Barbarian German tribes in the Western Roman Empire (the ‘Franks’),² Western churches,³ various presuppositions that define Western Christianity culminating in secularism⁴ and, as we saw, it is traced by him to Western ‘scholasticism’, whose poisoned well is Augustine and his ‘teachers’ (Tertullian and Ambrose).⁵ He attacks various eminent Greek theologians such as Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain (1749-1809) as ‘Westernised’, by which he means *inter alia* that they are guilty of a rationalism that treats God as an Object, a Being amongst beings thus ignoring apophaticism, individualism denying the person, ethical pietism focussed on prescriptive legal codes, a denial that the truth is given in experiential encounter (so ignoring the Palamite distinction of essence and energies) and a forensic approach to the mystery of salvation.⁶ In contrast, the ‘East’ or Orthodoxy, with a seeming Romanticism and blindness to its complex history, seems inevitably tied to the ‘Greek spirit’,⁷ by which he seems to mean not only the Greek Fathers and their characteristic teachings⁸ but a uniquely Greek approach to reality⁹ expressed in Christian Hellenism¹⁰ and which has its origins in the Greek-speaking Eastern empire.¹¹

Is this a wholly accurate reading of Yannaras? Well, yes and no. Yes, insofar as Yannaras all too often reads Western philosophy, religion and art polemically and mythically, resorting to sweeping generalisations and

1. Yannaras, *Orthodoxy and the West*, 184-5.
2. *Ibid.*, 14.
3. *Ibid.*, 184-5.
4. *Ibid.*, 246.
5. *Ibid.*, 16-17.
6. *Ibid.*, 33ff, 49-50, 135, 195, 200-3, 208, 210.
7. *Ibid.*, 126.
8. *Ibid.*, 47ff., 131.
9. *Ibid.*, 8-9, 66-7.
10. *Ibid.*, 251-2.
11. *Ibid.*, vii-viii, 18-19.

ignoring the messiness of its history, its discontinuities where no clear narrative can be traced as he is concerned with his myth of the Fall of the West; say, joining Augustine to Donald Trump and Theresa May. But we must also say 'No', this is not a wholly accurate reading of Yannaras on Orthodoxy and the West, for it leaves out one absolutely crucial element. All that Yannaras writes on the West, he writes as self-critique, self-criticism as reflection on an Orthodoxy that has capitulated to the West, has become Westernised. In a way, the mythic narrative we have just related is an explanation of the decline of contemporary Orthodoxy; its becoming a form of Western religion. A key passage deserves to be quoted at length:

Let me therefore make one thing absolutely clear. The critique of Western theology and tradition which I offer . . . does not contrast 'Western' with something 'right' which as an Orthodox I use to oppose something 'wrong' outside myself. I am not attacking an external Western adversary. As a modern Greek, I myself embody both the thirst for what is 'right' and the reality of what is 'wrong': a contradictory and alienated survival of ecclesiastical Orthodoxy in a society radically and unhappily Westernised. My critical stance towards the West is self-criticism; it refers to my wholly Western mode of life. I am a Western person searching for answers to the problems tormenting Western people today. The threats to the environment, the assimilation of politics to business models, the yawning gulf between society and the state, the pursuit of ever-greater consumption, the loneliness and the weakness of social relations, the prevailing loveless sexuality – all these seem to go back to the theological differences that once provoked the 'Schism' dividing Christendom into two. Today's individualism and absolute utilitarianism appear to have theological origins.¹

Westernisation is not only an historical process but also above all an interior and mythic process which defines the malaise of the thinker drowning in the totalising horizon of this age with its individualism, rationalism and essentialism exemplified by Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, and Descartes. Yet this means the Orthodox thinker is also Western and that his Orthodoxy is split down the middle by the West. We all are Western. The West is in us and is us. It is not elsewhere and outside, for it is the modern and we are the modern. As Yannaras puts it:

1. *Ibid.*, viii-ix.

The West in Modernity is no longer the portion or party that at the time of the Schism cut itself off from the body of the One Catholic Church. Now the whole of Christendom is the West, since all of us who bear the name of Christian live integrally and self-evidently within a Western cultural context; we embody the Western mode of life. Our routines, our mental outlook, our reflexes, our prioritisation of needs, the way our social institutions are formed and function are all absolutely obedient to the Western-individualistic not the social-ecclesial model. We live, we think, and we act in the mode fashioned by Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, and Descartes.¹

To criticise the West is to trace one's own psychic and personal history, one's place in the common myth, with all its sin and brokenness. It is, in the midst of the Fall, to turn in repentance from this distorted mode of life and attempt to grasp after another horizon beyond one's present which is a sort of civilisational paradise but a paradise that is a living goal for transforming and transfiguring every aspect of reality from the self to the monetary system. Here one might see the weaving of the *mythos* of the Fall of the West and the vision of Hellenism lying just beyond the present horizon as akin to Dante's allegorical narrative of the ascent of Mount Purgatory with the earthly Paradise at its peak, from which one jumps off to heaven, ready for the stars. Yannaras describes this self-critical process of purgation, or *metanoia*, as a turning from the West to Orthodoxy, exemplified by the Orthodox theological focus from the 1960s onwards on individuation as seen through person and eros, and ecclesial life as seen through Eucharistic ecclesiology:

The incontrovertible fact of the Westernisation of Christians in the Modern age leads us to understand that the ecclesial critique of the errors that led the West to break away from the body of the One Catholic Church cannot today (in the nature of things) be anything but self-criticism (that is, repentance – *metanoia*). There is no entity called the West 'confronting' Orthodoxy; the West is 'within us' and Orthodoxy is the common nostalgia of all who perceive the falling away of both East and West. . . . An attempt to express a criticism of the West in the form of Christian self-criticism began with sincerity and with no little risk in the 1960s on

1. Christos Yannaras, '2011 Commencement Address at Hellenic College and Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology'. Available at: http://www.hchc.edu/about/news/news_archive/1548 Accessed on 17 February 2018.

two fundamental levels of interconnected topics: On the level of ontology, . . . [a] hermeneutic of the existential event on the basis of the reality of *person* and *eros*. And on the corresponding level of the reconnection of the ecclesial event with the chiefly existential problem, on the basis of the so-called *eucharistic ecclesiology*.¹

We also see this self-critical aspect of Yannaras' critique of the West in his scathing attacks on Orthodoxy and its expressions in historical and contemporary Greece. Yannaras claims, as we said earlier, that from Augustine 'to Thomas Aquinas and up to Calvin' there was completed a new version of 'ecclesiastical orthodoxy' where Orthodoxy becomes a 'religion' and is now 'the confirmation to institutionalised ideology – which is sovereign because it is logically and socially and metaphysically obligatory'.² The contemporary Orthodox Churches, he claims, are examples of precisely such Westernisation in turning the Church into a religion, 'religious Orthodoxism'.³ In his *Against Religion* (2006/2013) and in newspaper columns in the well-known daily *I Kathimerini*, he relentlessly chronicles the 'religionisation of the ecclesial event' which is its refocusing on individualism and objectification. He relates how Orthodoxy has become 'Orthodoxism' from seeing salvation as a reward for individual moral effort and the reduction of the ecclesial event of the liturgy to a 'sacred rite' to the idolisation of tradition, worship of bishops and monastic elders and the promotion of a false asceticism which demonises all sexuality: 'The Orthodox version of the Church's catholicity seems now to have been replaced by an ideological and radically religionised understanding of Orthodoxy'.⁴ One of the most Western manifestations of the West today, Yannaras contends, can be found in the 'ideological anti-Westernism of the "Orthodox" opponents of the West, the individualism of the "Zealots" of Orthodoxy' such as the monks of Athos who turn the event of truth and communion into an intellectual certainty.⁵ In a startling critique, he even attacks the individualistic piety of the selection of texts in St Nikodemos the Hagiorite's *Philokalia*, regarded by many as the quintessence of Orthodox

1. Ibid.

2. Yannaras, *Orthodoxy and the West*, 156, 158.

3. Christos Yannaras, *Against Religion*, trans. Norman Russell (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2013), 183.

4. Ibid., 182.

5. Christos Yannaras, '2011 Commencement Address at Hellenic College and Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology'.

spirituality,¹ as yet more evidence of Orthodoxy's failure, its missing of the target of the ecclesial struggle for free ecstatic love in communion with the Other:

We Orthodox like to accuse the West of institutional rigidity and of imposing religionisation on the ecclesial event, of submitting it to intellectualism, moralism, and legalism. But the case of the *Philokalia* proves rather that the 'West' is within us – its historical outgrowths dwell in an obscure way in the 'inward' instinctive need of every human being for the individualistic self-protection and assurance.²

Orthodoxy and the West: A Personal Account

Though I now acknowledge that I previously misunderstood Yannaras on Orthodoxy and the West, I continue to be unhappy with any *sterile polarity* between East and West which his work all too easily slips into in its polemicism. Part of what has led to my reappraisal of Yannaras is in more clearly seeing – after reaching the date at which I had spent more than half of my life as Orthodox which coincided with my working at the Holy and Great Council of Crete in June 2016 – that Orthodoxy or the Faith of the Orthodox Church is *not a product of the West*. By the West I mean the culture and civilisation of the modern age, what Heidegger called the 'Age of the World Picture',³ and I would agree with Yannaras that at its core is a vision of individual reason as an abstract power that posits that which is before it as an object of enquiry, its relentless gaze stripping that which is thought down to its essentials, to each of its distinct parts that are known, with all mystery and dark depths eliminated by the klieg lights of rationality. That which exists, then, in thought as an object of subjectivity, which is thrown forward and interrogated to explain its secrets. This is a challenging of both beings and ultimately Being to reveal its *reasons* for being. It is a reification of existence to the end that reality can be used as a means to empower the self who is supreme and defines existence by his ratiocination of it. This way of thinking was something relatively new in history when it was

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1. See Brock Bingaham and Bradley Nassif, eds., *The Philokalia: Exploring the Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
 2. Yannaras, *Against Religion*, 196.
 3. See Martin Heidegger, 'The Age of the World Picture', in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (NY: Harper & Row, 1977), 115-54.

first developed through the nascent movement of scholasticism, though one can no doubt find traces of it in earlier periods. It was developed systematically in the Renaissance, with its understanding of man as the rational measure between heaven and earth, and from it blossomed the age of the revolutions. The focus on instrumental abstracting reason, and with it the slow turn to the cosmos being defined by the gaze of the individual, is thus the basis of technology, not merely as bits of machinery from my Apple Mac computer to a dishwasher but as a way of thinking which takes political and economic shape in representative democracy, mass capitalism and industry from the steam engine to Twitter. We see this type of instrumentalising Western modern reason in Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* where the Don Juan of the book – and Kundera is echoing Kierkegaard's Johannes the Seducer in *Either/Or* – is the Czech surgeon Tomas who pursues women not for love or the pleasure of sex, but for the sake of the will to power:

Tomas was obsessed by the desire to discover and appropriate that one-millionth part; he saw it as the core of his obsession. He was not obsessed with women; he was obsessed with what in each of them is unimaginable, obsessed, in other words, with the one-millionth part that makes a woman dissimilar to others of her sex. . . .

So it was a desire not for pleasure (the pleasure came as an extra, a bonus) but for possession of the world (slitting open the outstretched body of the world with his scalpel) that sent him in pursuit of women.⁴

If this is the West, then it differs from the faith of the Orthodox Church, Orthodoxy, as it still can be glimpsed in its tradition of liturgy and hesychastic prayer and is still available through the cycle of its services and its fasts and feasts as well as, acknowledging its problems, the ascetic life lived with greatest intensity in places like Athos, Sinai and Archimandrite Gregory Papazian's Holy Transfiguration Hermitage in Lone Butte in the interior of British Columbia, Canada. Orthodoxy comes from, was forged in and, in a way, maintains a perpetual memorial of a Christian civilisation which remains a sort of alternative narrative of Christianity to the one found in so many diverse forms in the West (and by West I include traditional Orthodox countries). Call it, if you must, the 'Christian East'. Western Christianity, which has given birth to the paradigm of modernity found in Western European culture

4. Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, trans. Michael Henry Heim (New York: HarperCollins, [1984] 1991), 200.

and civilisation, has a strong, and much needed, emphasis on rational symmetry, legal, ecclesial and liturgical order while the individual Christian is faced in faith with the awesome gift of the grace of Christ for salvation.

Orthodoxy, and here I want to emphasise that it can, although all too often does not, stand in creative not sterile polarity with the West, speaks in poetry, is chaotic and messy, is concerned with the upholding of particular community visions that often will clash with what is held as universal, is often just offensive and illiberal and always sides with drama over reason. Orthodoxy needs the gifts of the West and Western Christianity, above all Roman Catholicism. Its emphasis on particular community visions often leads to chaos and a complete internal breakdown in decision making as was seen at the Holy and Great Council of Crete in June 2016. Here a spiritual primacy of Peter, but a primacy with juridical teeth, far away from papal infallibility and universal jurisdiction, would be a gift in allowing the Orthodox Church to express its mind in a new context and age, helping it to balance its particular ecclesial and cultural visions with the universal whole. We need a creative, not a sterile, polarity: an interpenetration of East in West and West in East.

In some ways, Western Christianity needs Orthodoxy more than Orthodoxy needs it, for so much contemporary Western religion is, in its modernisation, chatty, tidy, moralistic and abstract like the secular sphere it engendered. Orthodoxy can help contemporary Western Christianity to remember its own pre-modern roots. It of course shares the essentials and much besides with modern Western Christianity but it retains other key elements of a pre-modern, non-Western spirituality still seen in religions like traditional non-Wahhabist Islam and much of Japanese Buddhism, amongst which I include: its doxological and sacrificial way of reasoning; its belief that the cosmos is filled with 'gods' or 'spirits', some malevolent (call them devils) and others good (call them saints), and that these spirits can be communicated with for good or ill; its belief that creation and God inter-penetrate and that creation is a theophany of the divine glory; that God and the world are one differentiated reality (whose unity and difference is unperceived); that in order to perceive this unity one must cleanse the senses through ascetic labours and this presupposes a normative behaviour; that through grace and a spiritual *podvig* one can realise in one's body and consciousness God's union with His creation (call this *theosis* or enlightenment); that religion is not privatised but speaks to the minutiae of life, including the ordering of society which in every part is called to transfiguration

and thereby secularism in its popular sense of a 'neutral sphere' is a lie; that the cosmos is structured in a hierarchy where each level mediates love and light to the one below; and that the heart of reality is light and silence. I find that many of these themes have been lost in Western Christianity – including, sadly, portions of Latin Catholicism – though it certainly still retains the Christian distinctives of the centrality of Christ, God as Holy Trinity and the Church as the Body of Christ. Lacking so much of the ancient context, however, it becomes at times hard to see the connection to classical Christianity and the links to other classical/traditional religious traditions.

Part of the reason I have come to this position is the June 2016 Holy and Great Council of Crete where I worked for my church, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, in its Press Office as a Subject Expert in Theology.¹ Crete was the first modern ecclesial meeting of Orthodoxy on a universal level, which brought together hierarchs from as many contexts and churches as possible. The Council of Crete – in being a universal modern Church council – was the first step along the way for Orthodoxy of coming to accept on a universal level that Byzantium is no more. Byzantium has a sort of liturgical afterlife in Orthodoxy, like Yeats' 'sages standing in God's holy fire/As in the gold mosaic of a wall.'² At Crete you begin to have a faint recognition by the Orthodox Church that Constantinople has fallen and will never return and never be revived. We are all, in some sense, Western now. What was clear in the documents and the discussion of the hierarchs is that Orthodoxy was elaborating itself in a post-Byzantine modern context. This explains much of the reactionary quality and the apologetic tone of many of the council documents, which both attacked modern Western ills like 'secularism' and 'globalisation' (which, it was alleged, give birth to things like genetic experimentation and same-sex marriage), and which simply stated in a sort of summary form the status quo of Orthodox practices post-Byzantium. But if Crete was the beginning of an attempt to articulate an Orthodox world after Byzantium then it was also the first universal conciliar attempt to acknowledge that it now finds itself in a new Western order that it has not created but which it now must respond to creatively.

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1. See Brandon Gallaher, 'The Orthodox Moment: The Holy and Great Council in Crete and Orthodoxy's Encounter with the West: On Learning to Love the Church,' *Sobornost*, 39.2 (2017), 26-71.
 2. W.B. Yeats, 'Sailing to Byzantium,' *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, 2nd Ed., ed. Richard J. Finneran (NY: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1996), ll.17-18, 193-94.

A Grammar for Orthodox Critiques of the West

In order to respond creatively to this new Western order, Orthodox theology needs to avoid falling into anti-Western polemicism without in any way denying that Orthodoxy at its core is not the West, even if it has in the modern period succumbed to Westernisation or its own religionisation. Here, briefly, in light of the study of Yannaras and in conclusion, I want to lay out a number of grammatical rules for Orthodox theologians when they discuss Orthodoxy's relationship with the West that both avoid a polemical attack on the West and a concomitant glorification of contemporary Orthodoxy. These rules would also help Orthodox theology not to fall into the trap of simply seeing the contemporary neo-liberal Western order as something for which Orthodoxy should strive. I am referring to the contemporary theological tendency of some Orthodox to call for 'reformation' or 'liberalisation', to call for Orthodoxy to update itself and seeing it as irredeemably irrelevant and out of step with the spirit of the age.

Rule 1: What should be clear from everything we have stated so far is that any Orthodox position on the West needs to lead with its weakness and begin with self-critique. Humility is endless and an Orthodox world that can look at itself and see its flaws, its need for repentance, renewal and even reformation, is one which people will be attracted to rather than repulsed by. What was most evident in the Crete documents – which were largely drafted by a small coterie of academic theologians trained at Athens and Halki and then revised by the representatives of the other local churches – was their triumphalistic and reactionary anti-Western tone.

Rule 2: Any discussion of Orthodoxy and the West, especially if it tries to give an historical account of this relationship, should acknowledge the discontinuity of history, its sharp breaks, its clashes and contradictions and, above all, its ambiguity. This means it will be more difficult to trace a sort of founding narration of the West with a clear break at the eleventh century, perhaps ending up showing how the sort of instrumental and subjective reasoning we have discussed can be seen much earlier in certain Greek Fathers. In emphasising historical discontinuity over continuity, however, it will be far more honest, and indeed persuasive. By identifying certain trends that are distinctively Western, arguing that these trends would grow into the civilisation that is archetypically modern, and by not immediately placing them in one era and with one intellectual movement, this will bolster the plausibility of the historical

story, especially if we see Western tendencies of thought at work in non-Western contexts but still leading to modernisation (e.g. Japan in the late 1860s).

Rule 3: Just as I have said that one should focus on historical discontinuity over continuity, so, too, one should avoid writing great thinker narratives that offer only one origin or root for complex historical phenomena. It is not plausible to see Augustine or Aquinas or, if you like, Duns Scotus (as in some thinkers of Radical Orthodoxy) as a sort of epistemological villain to whom one can trace everything from nominalism, the *cogito ergo sum* and Google to Mill's principle of utility, purgatory and, say, social media. Moreover, if we are to have a focus on such great thinkers then any discussion of their work must be grounded in *ad litteram* commentary and historically informed exegesis. It is not enough to attack Augustine's philosophical essentialism without a discussion in detail of Book 14 of his *De Trinitate* and showing how this tendency of thought was appropriated differently (but commonly) by both Aquinas and Palamas.

Rule 4: Any account of Orthodoxy and the West should be one where if it discusses East and West then it should do so by showing how these two realities exist in dialectical interpenetration. Each is dependent on the other and each touches the inner life of the other.¹ Orthodoxy cannot be creatively modern until it acknowledges that in some sense all are Western now and that there is no hermetically sealed Easternness to which one can flee, whether it be Athos or Holy Russia.

Rule 5: To understand the West in its difference from Orthodoxy – a non-Westernised Orthodoxy retained in the liturgical consciousness of the services of the Church and the tradition of the 'prayer of the heart' – one should focus less on the slippery and easily polemicised terms of 'East' and 'West' (or 'Greek' and 'Barbarian') but on the various notions of the 'modern'. We need to ask to what extent we can say that Orthodoxy has retained some sense of the Christian form of pre-modernity. In asking this sort of question, one will inevitably look at the West or Western European Civilisation less monolithically but as the wellspring of a paradigm of the modern which has been pluralised throughout the world from Indonesia to Japan. There is no one West, just as there is no one form of the modern, but instead 'multiple modernities' (Eisenstadt),²

1. See Gallaher, 'Μιά έπανεξέταση τής Νεο-πατερικής σύνθεσης', 82-92.

2. See S.N. Eisenstadt, 'Multiple Modernities' in *Comparative Civilizations and Multiple Modernities*, 2 Vols. (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2003), 2, 535-60. See also *Comparing Modernities: Pluralism Versus Homogeneity: Essays in Hommage to Shmuel N. Eisenstadt* ed. Eliezer Ben-Rafael and Yitzhak Sternberg (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2005).

contradictory and competing. If there can be a Japanese form of modernity (rather, there are many forms), then why cannot we speak of an Orthodox form of modernity? Why cannot Orthodoxy creatively appropriate and adapt modernity, allowing for an ‘alternate modernity’?¹

Rule 6: Lastly, if Orthodoxy retains to some extent a vision of the pre-modern which is apart from the West in all its sundry forms, including the religionised or Westernised forms of Orthodoxy, then surely we should be looking to compare it to other non-Christian civilisations that have also retained to some extent a form of non-Western spirituality. Here we are laying out the first portion of the argument as to why it is imperative for the Orthodox to have some engagement with other religions; specifically, an Orthodox comparative theology.²

Conclusion: The Fate of Orthodox Theology

The significance of our study of Yannaras on ‘Orthodoxy and the West’ the problem of Orthodox self-criticism goes far beyond simply understanding better a great but much maligned contemporary thinker. It has a universal dimension for contemporary Orthodox theology. Orthodox theology contains both polarities of East and West, Orthodoxy and Western thought in a ceaseless creative tension, which illumines the fate, cultural tragedy and opportunity/crisis of Orthodox theology in the contemporary West: to find itself unhappily Westernised in a new modern Western order that its Christian vision has not created, but which it now must respond to and shape creatively from the depths of that living tradition.

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1. See Brandon Gallaher, ‘A Tale of Two Speeches: Secularism and Primacy in Contemporary Roman Catholicism and Russian Orthodoxy’ ed. John Chryssavgis, *Primacy in the Church: The Office of Primate and the Authority of the Councils, Volume 2: Contemporary and Contextual Perspectives* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2016), 807-37.
 2. See ‘International Consultation on “Eastern Orthodoxy and Inter-Religious Encounter in a Secular Age”’, available at: <http://www.acadimia.org/en/news-announcements/press/477-international-consultation-on-eastern-orthodoxy-and-inter-religious-encounter-in-a-secular-age>. Accessed 17 February 2018.