

Eschatological Anarchism:
Eschatology and Politics
in Contemporary Greek Theology

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For nearly 70 years, Orthodox academic theology has followed with near religious fervour the 'neo-patristic synthesis' paradigm pioneered by the Russian theologian, historian and ecumenist Georges Florovsky (1893-1979). This theological approach begins and ends with the perpetual theological return to and renewal in the Patristic corpus (especially the Greek Fathers), monastic spiritual traditions and Byzantine liturgy. Theology to be worthy of the name must always be 'following the Holy Fathers'; itself a phrase found in the conciliar acts to introduce doctrinal definitions. Yet of late there has been an increasing awareness amongst Orthodox theologians in Western Europe and North America of the severe limitations of this type of theology, which all too often has been scholasticized by Florovsky's epigones, and thus the need for it to be reenvisioned. Neo-patristic forms of theology tend to be little interested in culture and politics other than in the Church arts such as iconography and hymnography and in rehashing various versions of the Byzantine 'symphonia' of church and state (itself a buzz-word in Putin's Russia). Only those forms of political and social order are acceptable that are part of the eternal artifice of the Byzantine ecclesial canon found as it were frozen in the gold mosaics of San Vitale. For this reason, it is quite rare to find an Orthodox theological exploration of the positive nature of modernity. In fact, what has become almost routine in Orthodox public religious discourse are unrelenting critiques of liberal democracy and "militant secularism" understood as two heads of the beast of "secular humanism."

In this study, I will contrast a well-known Greek Orthodox critic of modernity (Christos Yannaras (b. 1935)) with a new alternative pro-modern voice from the same

tradition (Pantelis Kalaitzidis (b.1961)). Kalaitzidis has consciously forged an Orthodox "contextual theology" or "liberation theology" that might respond to the rise (and fall) of secularism, the global economic crisis and, above all provide the beginning of a theological justification of liberal democracy and of the reality of secularism as a positive phenomenon.¹ It will be seen that rather unusually for a Eastern Orthodox context, the political theology of Kalaitzidis begin with his response to culture, (post-) secularism and the political not by an appeal to Marxism, post-colonialism and poststructuralism but with a characteristic Orthodox teaching: eschatology. But before I turn to Kalaitzidis let us look at the critique of modernity of the great Greek philosopher Yannaras.²

Christos Yannaras: A Critic of Modernity

What Yannaras has sadly become widely known for, despite the depth and nuance of so much of his oeuvre, is his extreme critique of democracy, secularism and human rights. To understand this one must understand his critique of the "West" as the two are inextricable. Yannaras repeatedly insists that 'the West' has, in a favourite phrase, 'distorted the Christian Gospel.'³ Yannaras, following the Greek American theologian John Romanides (1928-2001),⁴ sees the 'Western deviation' as going back to its roots in Augustine who would have remained 'a solitary heretical thinker [...] if in the 9th century the Franks had not discovered the meaning of his teaching.'⁵ Even stronger yet, he traces the origins of 'what we now call totalitarianism' to high

¹ A parallel project in the American context is that of Aristotle Papanikolaou (See *The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame UP, 2012)).

² See Andrew Louth, 'Some Recent Works by Christos Yannaras in English Translation', *Modern Theology*, 25.2 (April, 2009), pp.329-340.

³ Christos Yannaras, *Orthodoxy and the West*, trans. P. Chamberas, N. Russell, (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2007), pp. 33, 41, 51 etc.

⁴ See <<http://www.romanity.org/cont.htm>> (Last accessed: 6 April 2015).

⁵ Yannaras, *The Elements of Faith: An Introduction to Orthodox Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), pp.154-155.

scholasticism and Aquinas in particular.⁶ He claims that from Augustine 'to Thomas Aquinas and up to Calvin' there was completed a new version of 'ecclesiastical orthodoxy" (in contrast to Eastern Orthodoxy) where Orthodoxy becomes a 'religion' and is now 'the confirmation to institutionalized ideology--which is sovereign because it is logically and socially and metaphysically obligatory.'⁷

Western Christianity as a religion, therefore, 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.'⁸ But with this Western medieval focus on the individual comes man's theorization in the early modern period (later set out systematically in the Enlightenment) as a rational subject by nature over against other such subjects who then calculate their own needs amongst the plurality of subjects. First they deduce normative moral principles for all from a logical definition of the common good which is in their interest and then having accept 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.⁹ The code of law assures the individual that their rights are legally enforceable or mandatory upon all as individual claims.¹⁰ Rights were applied to man regardless of their social class or economic status or indeed any other difference that marked them out as persons.

⁶ *Orthodoxy and the West*, p.12 and see *Elements*, p.158.

⁷ *ibid.*, pp.156, 158.

⁸ Yannaras, 'Human Rights and the Orthodox Church', *The Orthodox Churches in a Pluralistic World: An Ecumenical Conversation*, ed. E. Clapsis (Geneva/Brookline: WCC Pub./Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2004), pp.83-89 at 85-86 and see *Postmodern Metaphysics*, trans. N. Russell (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2004 [1993]), p.25.

⁹ 'Human Rights', p.84.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.83.

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.'¹¹

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.'¹² Secularism is born and faith becomes a private mute grasping after transcendence since the 'advancement of 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 rationalization of the subject.¹³ There is, he argues, a direct line from Western religion's 'individual metaphysical salvation' to the 18th century 'secularized (legal) protection' which is the origin of 'the political system of so-called "representative democracy."¹⁴ In modern societies, power frees itself from social control and becomes 'technocratic' and subject to the rationalization 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

¹¹ *ibid.*, p.88.

¹² *Postmodern Metaphysics*, p.28

¹³ *ibid.*, pp.27, 29.

¹⁴ 'Human Rights', p.87.

security."¹⁵ If this seems to be a rejection of modernity or an anti-modern philosophy, then it is because it is. He writes of 'modernization' 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.¹⁶

Yannaras contrasts this apotheosis of egoism and individualism in the West which births modern liberal democracy, modernity, secularization and the culture of human rights to the event of communion, which he sees in the democracy of Ancient Greece. Its direct heir is 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.¹⁷ 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).'¹⁸ Yannaras writes that as a 'modern Greek', he embodies the contradiction and alienation of the remains of 'ecclesiastical Orthodoxy' in thirsting for the 'right' yet still bearing the unhappy reality of the 'wrong' in a society 'radically and unhappily Westernized.' In his critiquing the West, he argues, he is simply engaging in 'self-criticism; it refers to my own wholly Western mode of life.'¹⁹ However, in Yannaras, 'the West' continually seems to be identified with an alien and barbarian foreignness

¹⁵ *Postmodern Metaphysics*, p.22.

¹⁶ Yannaras, 'The dilemma: modernization-fundamentalism' in *idem*, "*Generous in little*": *A user's guide* (Athens: Patakis, 2003), pp.264-276, esp. p.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), pp.4-25 at 6, n.9.

¹⁷ Yannaras, 'Human Rights', p.86.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.88.

¹⁹ *Orthodoxy and the West*, pp.viii-ix.

reflected in the western churches and the 'East' with the 'Greek spirit' embodied in the Christian Hellenism of Orthodoxy.²⁰

Pantelis Kalaitzidis: The Context of the Volos Academy

The attempt at a sympathetic encounter with modernity found in the work of Pantelis Kalaitzidis is a fascinating contrast to the polemic of Yannaras. Kalaitzidis is the director of the Volos Academy for Theological Studies.²¹ It is a theological institute in Volos, Greece which is a port in the administrative region of Thessaly on the Greek mainland over 300 km north of Athens. The Academy is sponsored by the local bishop, Ignatios of Demetrias, and has strong ties to the Patriarchate of Constantinople and, especially, Metropolitan John of Pergamon (or John Zizioulas (b. 1931) as he is better known). This connection to Zizioulas is important as Kalaitzidis' theology might be viewed as a “Zizioulean” political theology with its strong emphasis on eschatology, Eucharistic community and appeal to the “true” neo-patristic legacy of Zizioulas' teacher Florovsky. Volos is not a degree granting institution but hosts conferences, roundtables, study days and seminars on philosophical, theological and political topics from inter-religious dialogue and women, violence and fundamentalism to theology and literature, church and state and the ecological crisis. It also has a lively publishing arm and most of these conferences have their proceedings published. Volos has attracted negative attention from religious conservatives in Greece. In reaction to its Summer 2010 conference, 'Neo-Patristic Synthesis or Post-Patristic Theology: Can Orthodox Theology be

²⁰ *ibid.*, p.126 (See my review: *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, 50.3-4 (December, 2009), pp. 537-542).

²¹ See 'Akeademia Theologikon Spoudon': <<http://www.acadimia.gr/index.php?lang=el>> (Last accessed: 6 April 2015).

Contextual?',²² a letter circulated online signed by conservative churchmen and academics denouncing the 'post-patristic heresy' and subsequently a retaliatory conference in 2012.²³

Orthodoxy and Political Theology: A Critique of Carl Schmitt

Kalaitzidis' work until recently has been best known for its systematic attack on the Hellenistic ethno-phyletism and anti-westernism of the Church of Greece and the Greek theologians of the generation of the 1960's (e.g. Yannaras).²⁴ His theology is wrapped up in a larger project of taking on the church establishment. To take on the church establishment in a Greek context is to take on the ethnic basis of Greek society and identity. The Church no longer, he believes, fulfills her role as both a witness to the Kingdom to come and a leaven through which it encourages society to transform its structures, which are themselves both unjust and not reflective of the call to universality of the Christian Gospel. Kalaitzidis' primary mode of discourse for his political theology is therefore "prophetic" and "eschatological." The best way to gain a sense of his thought is by looking at these themes in his book, *Orthodoxy and Political Theology* (Geneva, 2012). In this work, Kalaitzidis begins by attacking the German philosopher and jurist Carl Schmitt (1888-1985), author of *Political Theology* (1922). Schmitt, a Nazi (from 1933), represents everything Kalaitzidis opposes: anti-democratic authoritarianism, anti-Trinitarianism and hostility to eschatology.

²² See <http://orthodoxie.typepad.com/ficher/synthse_volos.pdf> (Last accessed: 17 April 2015).

²³ See <<https://metapaterikiairesi.wordpress.com/>> and <<http://www.impantokratoros.gr/dat/storage/dat/13192916/englisch.pdf>> (Last accessed: 17 April 2015).

²⁴ See *Pantelis Kalaitzidis*, 'The Image of the West in Contemporary Greek Theology', G. Demacopoulos, A. Papanikolaou, eds., *Orthodox Constructions of the West* (NY: Fordham UP, 2013), pp.142-160. (For bibliography see: <<https://eap.academia.edu/PantelisKalaitzidis>> (Last accessed: 7 April 2015)).

Authority, for Kalaitzidis, is loving service which like Jesus Christ who emptied Himself and took the form of a slave, sees authority not as an external imposition or legal coercion but self-offering in love, communion and freedom.²⁵ Trinitarianism 'introduces difference and dialogue among the three divine persons, which are not conducive to a pro-royalist perspective.'²⁶ Finally, eschatology implies 'openness to the future, a hope and an expectation for a renewed and more just future, and a world of forgiveness and reconciliation.'²⁷ Political theology here begins with Orthodox dogma, not secular ideology. But taking one's political bearings from Orthodox doctrine may seem naïve. Orthodoxy prevailed in Byzantium, but this was not the necessary and sufficient condition for social progress as a society based on 'love, justice, democracy and freedom' it was not. Furthermore, the Ecumenical Council Fathers did not exemplify the 'spirit of dialogue, liberalism, or tolerance towards other voices.' Thus one must know that 'textual truth does not necessarily result in social renewal' and avoid all simplistic moves from a particular vision of theology, ecclesiology and worship to the realm of 'culture/politics and state.'²⁸

A Political Theology of the Orthodox Christian Left

Although Kalaitzidis rejects a facile move from theology to praxis, it does not mean that theology cannot inspire the Church in her activity in the world. What is required for such a vision, however, is much more than a crude structural analogy (so Schmitt) between the lawfulness of the state and its institutions and the theology and metaphysics of the Church. It requires a different theological political approach. Such an approach has mostly been seen in liberation theologies. Furthermore, it runs the

²⁵ *Orthodoxy and Political Theology* (Geneva: WCC Pub., 2012), p.37.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.19.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p.20.

²⁸ *ibid.*, pp.38-39.

risk of simply reducing the Church to an NGO or any other left of centre political actor. This Orthodox theo-political approach is consciously one of the Christian Socialism or the left.²⁹ It builds on the work of the Greek theologian and ecumenist Nikos Nissiotis (1924-1986) in prioritizing the "revolutionary attempt to recreate the social structure, in which social injustice, the manifold forms of political and economic oppression, and ingrained biases impose the urgent need for theological thought to be renovated".³⁰

Here we see a two-part theo-political programme. It begins first with a full scale self-critique of the Church with an attempt to establish a more positive role for the Church vis-à-vis the world and the political. Kalaitzidis has gone a long way in this direction already through writing about Orthodoxy and modernity and calling rather audaciously (to much scandal in Greece) for a "reformation" in Orthodoxy.³¹ Secondly, the Church must become actively involved with the world working towards greater social and economic justice as well as the transformation of the social structures. However, in order to accomplish this mission of becoming engaged in the world, the Church must not become identified as an organ of the state: either as the state's pliable social-welfare arm or as a conveyer of culture, language and funny dances. In both cases, the result is a political quietism as the Church never takes its own counter-cultural positions but cedes this to the state. On the other extreme, the Church must avoid acting like a prophetic sect. In such a position, she stands apart from the world becoming absorbed by her own counter-story to the secular realm. Occasionally, she emerges from her cave blasting fiery rhetoric in the world's direction. It is in this second part of the theo-political task that Kalaitzidis returns to

²⁹ *ibid.*, p.65.

³⁰ Nikos Nissiotis, *Apology for Hope* (1975) cited in *Kalaitzidis, Orthodoxy and Political Theology*, p.45.

³¹ See 'Challenges of Renewal and Reformation Facing the Orthodox Church', *The Ecumenical Review*, 61.2 (July 2009), pp.136-164.

eschatology as the inspiring master theme of the Church's action in the world and in the political realm.

The Church, the Public Sphere and Secularism

But what is the basic stance of the Church towards the world? Kalaitzidis argues that the "religion" is a public not a private matter. The Church herself is firstly a public body with public teachings and then also a private body which one may be a member or not. This results in tripartite distinction in political theology between the state or government, the public realm in which the Church meets the world and the state in civil society and the private realm. In contrast to Greece, there needs to be a separation of Church and state so that both realities maintain their God given integrity and the Gospel is not jeopardized by power. This theological argument for the necessity of a secular civil order with no established church comes out of the experience of a theologically compromised Greek national Church.³²

The Church may be involved in the public sphere but she must be aware of 'boundaries and conditions' unique to her and which are not identical with the ecclesial bounds of the Church. Thus the public sphere in a secular society is ostensibly neutral in regard to ideology, religion and values and the Church must respect this status. The public sphere also has certain values which in some cases overlap with those of the Church (in the manner of the "overlapping consensus" of John Rawls (1921-2002)) but in other cases clash with it but the Church must respect these as well. Thus the Church must have a respect 'for the fundamental achievements of modernity and above all for human rights, religious freedom and tolerance of difference, and the distinct roles of Church and state.' Though the Church can act in

³² *Orthodoxy and Political Theology*, p.81; Contrast John Milbank and Adrian Pabst, 'The Anglican Polity and the Politics of the Common Good', *Crucible: the Christian Journal of Social Ethics*, 1 (2014), pp.7-15.

the public sphere, this in no way means she has 'authority' here. Her public role does not allow her to try to establish the sort of conventional positions found in Orthodox ecclesial rhetoric on foreign affairs, national issues and ethnic identity. The Church, therefore, must respect the fact that there are those with no religious belief and those with other different religious beliefs. In other words, the Church must respect the fundamental secular nature of the public sphere, which is distinctive to the modern, that is, 'the division of society into sub-systems or autonomous sectors of social affairs.' Each of these areas has its own logic and own autonomy and Kalaitzidis argues that this (western secular) separation is positive and safeguards 'democracy, freedom, respect, and toleration of difference.'³³ He does not believe that this separation of social affairs into sub-systems necessarily shatters and fragments reality and is counter to the 'holistic vision of Orthodoxy, which looks to a catholic transformation of the life of the world and of humankind, a radical change and renewal of every aspect of life.' This is, as we shall see, because he sees the reality of the Church is eschatological, a reality, which, when viewed in terms of its ideal personal subject, Zizioulas famously described as having its 'roots in the future and its branches in the present.'³⁴

Yet it must not be thought that Kalaitzidis is naively singing the praises of secularism. He is critical of it in his own Greek context. Ethnicism is but one more species of the negative aspect of a certain sort of secularization in that it sacralizes the nation and civil society. In this context, the Church substitutes an ethno-cultural national narrative of a people's continuous rebirth for her proclamation that in the Body of Christ, realized in the Eucharist as the foretaste of the Kingdom, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female (Gal. 3:5). This leads to

³³ Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy and Political Theology*, p.82.

³⁴ John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), p.59.

individuals identifying with the Church as a national or ethnic reality but then having a privatized belief set (e.g. atheism) completely at odds with her teaching. This combination of secularization and nationalism is found also in contemporary Russia and Japan.³⁵ The Church comes across

as an authoritarian and state-subsidized organ rather than serving as a *witness* to the church's living and prophetic presence in the world. The church's word has thus been secularized, betraying the fact that politics have invaded the church rather than society and politics being transformed and sanctified.³⁶

Postsecularism, Dialogue and the 'Cross-centred ethos of Christ'

It is imperative that religious associations be voluntary and grounded in free will and not connected to the state and the powers that be.³⁷ The status of the Church as a free association gives her the ability to embody the 'Cross-centred ethos of Christ.' The Church does not theocratically dominate the public sphere but she (somewhat kenotically by withdrawing) lets it develop freely by itself and likewise the citizens who participate in it. But the Church stands in relation to civil society in far from a passive role. She actively persuades those in it through living a different sort of life in but not of the world of the fruitfulness of the Gospel message.³⁸ At the close of the paper, I will develop my own thoughts on the political role of the Church as a kenotic but active witness to Christ in society.

Kalaitzidis builds on the work of Jürgen Habermas (b. 1929) on postsecularism. Postsecularism is not a call to 'de-secularization' (which would mean religion and modernity were incompatible) or a 'return to religion' but an embrace of a true pluralism of dialogue where there exists a co-existence of the religious and the

³⁵ In both Russia and Japan, the contemporary state has become strategically allied with certain national cults (Russian Orthodoxy, Shinto) that serve as caretakers of a sacred vision of the nation. These cults are widely identified with by the population as encapsulating their nationhood. Nevertheless, there is a drop in regular participation in traditional rites, which is combined with a radical privatization of belief. Adherents of the national cults often hold beliefs quite at odds with the teachings of the "official" religion (e.g. "Orthodox atheism").

³⁶ Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy and Political Theology*, pp.90 and see 92, 125.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.84.

³⁸ *ibid.*, pp.84-85.

modern: ‘the co-presence or co-existence within the same public space of religious and secular world-views, ideas, outlooks on society, and politics, which are called to live together, and to live together differently, in a “complementary learning process.”’³⁹ This is a post-Christian reality which, Kalaitzidis argues, is related to ‘religious and cultural pluralism.’ In theological terms, this means Orthodoxy must be prepared to be open for dialogue with the secular world working towards mutual understanding. And here enters another theological trope. Orthodoxy must not be subordinate to the flesh it takes on or incarnates (the social and cultural conditions in a particular age) but it will also not ignore or even scorn ‘societies and cultures or new cultural forms.’ Modernity and late-modernity can also be of God, for ‘everything bears the seal of the gift and the breath of the Holy Spirit [this is a line from the Orthodox baptism rite] who “blows where It wills” (cf. Jn 3:8) and is not restricted only to the socio-cultural models of the past.’ In practice this means there is a necessity for a de-Byzantinization of the Church or at least for the Church not to become identified with any one particular period in history. But such a unhooking of the Church from specific historical forms and ages can come only after a ‘theological, liturgical and spiritual renaissance and a reconstruction of its Eucharistic communities.’⁴⁰

The Action of the Church: Eschatology and Witness

The Church acts in society by being a 'witness' to the new reality of the Kingdom of God. She protests against social and institutional evil as well as the violation of human dignity and freedom and 'should be a voice defending the “other,” the “foreigner,” the least of our brothers, the needy, the weak, and the victims of

³⁹ ‘Orthodox Theology and the Challenges of a Post-secular Age’, p.8.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p.18; See Nikolaos Asproulis, ‘Pneumatology and Politics. The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Articulation of an Orthodox Political Theology’, *Review of Ecumenical Studies* (forthcoming 2015).

history, who are all icons of “the Other” *par excellence*, the “Foreigner” *par excellence*.’ Although he does not use liberation theology’s language of the “preferential option for the poor” this is certainly in the background. The main focus he says is the call to ‘repentance’ and witnessing to this in its liberating social activity although he is a bit vague on what this consists. In this way, the Church prepares humanity to receive her preaching about the Kingdom of God, which Kalaitzidis says involves ‘a creative, spiritual fruitfulness, and the Christ-centered healthiness of Christian communities.’⁴¹

The emphasis on eschatology in Kalaitzidis brings in a number of related ideas and we are given not so much a rational political programme than a new vision of how the Church relates to the world and how she might be active in it. First Kalaitzidis wants the Church to take eschatology as her master theme in her political theology because with it enters a dialectic between the present or “already” and the future or “not yet.” This dialectic--seen above all in the Eucharist as the sacrament of the Kingdom to come⁴²--distances the Church from the structures of the world. It allows her the freedom to refuse to settle down and identify herself with the world and history at the same time as she does not disdain the world or flee from it and history. Secondly, eschatology allows the Church to emphasize repentance for the past and faith in the openness of the future. By beginning with the end, one is able to not point to any final and established meaning within history and one becomes open to both radical criticism of all institutions and an idea of ceaseless movement into ever greater riches.⁴³ Indeed, Kalaitzidis even goes so far as to say that *The Church, therefore, is*

⁴¹ Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy and Political Theology*, pp.84-85.

⁴² *ibid.*, pp.98ff.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p.86.

not the Kingdom, but it is becoming the Kingdom; the Church is a type and icon of the Kingdom.⁴⁴

The role of the Church, her politics broadly speaking, is to witness to the Kingdom, to a new transformed way of life. Her witness transfigures and renews the world by prophetically denouncing 'reified structures of injustice and exploitation and ministering to the persons and groups that have been wronged and exploited.' She calls the world to repentance and announces the good news of Jesus Christ.⁴⁵ The Church overcomes in herself the spirit of egoism and authoritarianism and puts forward instead a vision of authority being one of self-emptying love and service, as the Church above all exists for the life of the world.⁴⁶ In this way, the Church by transforming herself can transform the world and its politics by presenting a new vision of power as service and care for the Other,⁴⁷ above all seen in Christ. Really this is not far off from the public acts of Pope Francis in washing the feet of inmates on Maundy Thursday, arguing for 'a poor church for the poor', calling for 2015-2016 as a 'Holy Year of Mercy' and generally avoiding the pomp and circumstance of his office. Kalaitzidis quotes his own bishop, Met. Ignatios: "'The Church can contribute to the 'resurrection of politics,' but only when it is a 'Church of the cross,' i.e. of sacrifice and service.'"⁴⁸

In a nice phrase, Kalaitzidis refers to his politics as 'eschatological anarchism.'⁴⁹ He opines that monasticism, in particular, with 'its coenobitic and ascetic spirit and its ethos of voluntary renunciation, has always provided the best example for Christians' journey in the world, while also standing guard and keeping a

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.109.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, pp.120-121.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, pp.124 and 126.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.124.

⁴⁸ Ignatius of Demetrias, 'Authority and Diakonia in the Life and Structures of the Church' in Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy and Political Theology*, p.135.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.130.

permanent vigil over the Church's eschatological identity' and so monastics are the Church's eschatological conscience, its 'eschatological watchmen.'⁵⁰ This is somewhat ironic as Kalaitzidis is a relentless critic of the monks of Mt Athos and his work at Volos has been denounced by certain conservative monastics (including many Orthodox bishops, all monastics by tradition).

Now this evangelical vision is beautiful and a breath of fresh air in the Orthodox context where theology so often simply sacralizes the political order of the day from the Colonels to Milošević to Putin. Yet, in its vagueness, it is unclear what this amounts to practically and so it fails not as a theology but as a "*liberation* theology." It so much emphasizes that the Church is a spiritual reality directed towards the Kingdom to come that it almost neglects and forgets that the Church is also a profoundly human institution with a material reality and a particular history. *Pace* Kalaitzidis, if the Church is to be renewed then it must *re-envision* (not "reform") its canon law, hierarchical liturgy (which glorifies the bishop as an emperor) and theology retaining continuity through a "living tradition." Kalaitzidis, in fact, has made concrete suggestions elsewhere not for ecclesial re-envisioning but a root and branch "reformation" of Orthodoxy. However, I think the vagueness herein and the extremity elsewhere is due precisely to beginning with eschatology--swerving between the extremes of the already and the not yet. The temptation is to see the Church as passing through the midst of history with her gaze fixed on the eschaton, surviving in this way the vicissitudes of history or building a liturgical paradise of justice, equality and hope and then projecting it onto society. History and culture for such a theology, despite words otherwise, are not the essential garments of the body of the living Christ, the Church, but at best afterthoughts to be abolished, ecstatically

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, pp.138-139.

taken up into the life to come or collapsed into an ideal Jerusalem of the elect as is found in so much socialism. The antinomies of history and the eschaton need to be kept in a creative tension through faith and tradition grounded in a kenotically envisioned Body of Christ that has bound itself to the world as it is of that world but beyond it. Without this polarity, the Church either becomes static or erratic.

A Christian Secularism of Witness or a Political Theology of the Royal Doors

It is such a creative ecclesial tension of history and the eschaton as the foundation of political theology that I want to explore in the last portion of this study. Here I will draw on hints in Kalaitzidis, especially his argument for the Church as a perpetual witness to the Kingdom and his kenotic vision of ecclesial authority. I want to argue, in the context of Western European and North American societies, for secularism (and with it liberal democracy) as a Christian phenomenon grounded in an account of the Incarnation involving Christ taking on the flesh of the world. In such a theology, many of the secular forms of the world are good in and of themselves as the world is 'very good' (Gen. 1:31) and as they tacitly propound Christian values. Yet there is always an awareness that the Christian is not at home, but only visiting this planet.

Modern culture, despite its great dangers, can be viewed, as Charles Taylor has noted, as providential to the extent that with its breaking with 'the structures and beliefs of Christendom' certain aspects of Christian life, its gospel ethic, such as in a more humane attitude to women and now sexual minorities, were taken forward and developed, penetrating human life and society, in ways that would simply not have been possible within a purely Christian culture.⁵¹ Thus the end of Christendom, and

⁵¹ Charles Taylor, *A Catholic Modernity?* (NY/Oxford: OUP, 1999), p.16.

the rise of a secular civil society, even one that only conceives reality within an 'immanent frame', that is, wholly outside any transcendent reality and working entirely on its own internal principles,⁵² this ecclesial dissolution is seen to be a necessary providential development for the spread of the gospel ethic and indeed perhaps part of the very trajectory of the Gospel.⁵³ One might be bold to say that the Church illumines things in the world by her very withdrawal, her self-emptying, via secularism and the end of Christendom.⁵⁴ In this way, the Church's light then can spill out far ahead onto the path society treads without her obscuring that light by her dogmatic and historical bulk.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) is amongst many who argue against a view that would see there being two spheres in perpetual conflict: one being divine, holy, supernatural, Christian, that is, the sacred, and the other being worldly, profane, natural, Unchristian, that is, the secular with its realm of the political. For the very next move is to put Christ on one side of this divide alienating Him and us from the world He created and redeemed. This forces man to seek Christ without the world in which He was incarnated, which is a sort of docetism, or it leads to an angry atheism where one seeks the world without Christ. There are not, Bonhoeffer argues, two realities but one reality of God in Christ in and for the world. In being with Him we stand as the Church both in God and in the world. Christ contains within Himself the world, He embraces within His very life as the Son of God the secular and the sacred and the world 'has no reality of its own, independently of the revelation of God in Christ.'⁵⁵ The opposites, then, sacred and secular, are in an 'original' or 'polemical unity' in Christ and do not have their reality except in Him in a polemical attitude

⁵² *A Secular Age* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2007), pp.542-557 and espec. 594.

⁵³ See *A Catholic Modernity?*, pp.18, 26, 29, 36-37.

⁵⁴ See Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity*, trans. L. D'Isanto (NY: Columbia UP, 2002).

⁵⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. E. Bethge, trans. N. Smith (London: Collins, 1964⁶), pp.196-197.

towards one another bearing witness in this way to their common reality and unity in the God-Man. History's movement consists of divergence and convergence from and towards Him.⁵⁶ One cannot understand secularism and liberal democracy apart from the fact that the world, the secular realm of the political is what is continuously becoming incorporated and sanctified into God in Christ through the Church, His Body.

If in Christ, God entered into the world so too what is Christian is only found in the secular, the supernatural in the natural, the holy in the profane, the revelational in the rational and the divine monarchical in the democratic. To be a Christian, then, is to be a secular person but always in Jesus Christ in His Body in the world, the Church.⁵⁷ If all of history is in Christ diverging and converging in and towards Him in the world in Him then might not the movement in history that is the end of Christendom and the rise of the secular or secularization with its liberal democratic order be viewed not as a divergence from Him but a tacit and mysterious convergence? And might not this convergence be identical with God's own self-kenosis in Christ? In order that Jesus can be more fully in the world He redeemed, He must withdraw His Body from its domination of the secular space in order that that space may in freedom develop of its own accord. The Church may sit in that space but she should sit lightly. In sitting, she witnesses by the beauty of her form to the life of Christ thereby coaxing the world to turn towards the one in whom it is upheld, freed and even validated in its pluralism. This does not deny that sometimes the Church must stand assertively in the space of society and denounce evil, which calls itself good (Is. 5:20). But the main theo-political mode of the Church in a post-Christian society, if she is to once more draw up creation up into the net of Christ like the

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, pp.198-199.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p.200.

fishermen made most wise through the sending down upon them of the Holy Spirit,⁵⁸ is a quiet testament of living in the world, but towards the Kingdom.

The Christians of this Church each have a mind that reflects the Body of which they are constituent members and the very suffering Servant who emptied himself who is their head. They are utterly involved with the secular world in situations that Christians encounter living in it, but in these situations they think Christian-wise, cutting themselves back to let the light shine through, rather than worldly-wise blocking the light through their dogmatic insistence. They are transparent. Part of this self-emptying mind of Christ each Christian possesses is to see not only a reality beyond the bustle of daily life—that all which is true is elsewhere—but that there dwells just beneath the skin of the planet, even in its most forthright worldliness, living signs of the presence and action of God and traces of His ends. This is because the Church is not only a divine Body from elsewhere but also a body of and from and for the world, a body of God whose flesh, muscles and organs are tissues of creation including within themselves the particular contradictory histories, ideologies, philosophies, tragedies and epiphanies of every human being that has existed, now exists and will ever exist on this planet on the table. When Christ ascended He took with Him not only a particular humanity but a human nature that recapitulated all of human history and all human agonies, desires and graspings after the inconceivable and He gave these realities back to us renewed through His Spirit in the Church. Thus when a Christian stands in the world they are certainly pointing towards eternity, existing directed towards the end of the Kingdom. But they are also in the Church standing with that world, sanctifying it tacitly in and through Christ, as they are members of His Body, in solidarity with all those who are seeking

⁵⁸ See Troparion for the Feast of Pentecost.

a life of fullness and abundance who may not be identified with the Church. Indeed, they may be in sympathy with those who even see the Church as a Body that is hostile to the aspirations of 'secular man' striving for political and democratic freedom. Such is an evangelical but also political Christian testament in the new postsecular post-Christian order.

It is precisely through the kenotic but testifying character, the self-emptying activity of the Christian in witnessing to something more, different, other than he images Christ and points secular democratic man to the divine roots of creation, to a polity of true equality where all stand before their loving Creator and Redeemer. The secular man sees the Christian behaving differently, otherwise, Churchwise. They are interested in the same things that the secular are interested in and care for the world, sharing in the struggles and joys of it, practicing its ways with a skill and effectiveness to build up society, as they are of it and for it. Yet the Christian does not preach at secular democratic man, he does not attack him for his faulty and even distorted assumptions. Instead they convict the secular about their assumptions being wrong 'by being the sort of people that they are. They share our work with us. They are always alongside us. They really do know, they really do care, but they bring to it something different, something different which makes us think.'⁵⁹ Michael Ramsey (1904-1988) points to this 'something different' being the Christian reverence for all persons as called from before the ages for sharing the glory of eternity with their Creator; a heavenly serenity which is seen in the saints who in the midst of hell are radiating a Paschal joy; and an authentic humility of those who have tasted the Kingdom and now ache to please its King above all by caring for His creation.

⁵⁹ A. M. Ramsey, *Sacred and Secular: a study in the otherworldly and this-worldly aspects of Christianity* (London: Longmans, 1966), p.70.

Such a politics of kenotic witness is based on asceticism,⁶⁰ on a disciplining of the passions, a cutting back of the old man in order to make room for the Spirit to remake us as new men so that we might shine with the light of Christ drawing the world back into tabernacle of the Church. Here in this disciplining of our selves, the self-cultivation of the virtues, we use the tools of the Church from regular participation in sacraments like the Eucharist and confession to care for the poor, fasting, vigils and above all contemplative prayer by which we draw closer to Christ and the world which is His flesh and blood. This is all to aid in the ascetic process of learning to love the brother in our political activity, our daily encounter with him in the desert of society and so drawing close to God in union and communion with Him in Christ in His Body the Church. They are formative political acts marking out the Christian community and allowing it to provide a space for a separate political order whose common good overlaps with its own even if its vision of the nature of that good may be otherwise.

Political theology here is founded on a vision of secular society and secularism, rightly understood, as an unmanifested or tacit version of the Church where what is secular or worldly has divine-human roots. So by the Church's withdrawal in society and her members silent radiating something different, other, a withdrawal which is its form of presence, ever witnessing to its Lord, she emphasizes that 'the world is relative to Christ, no matter whether it knows it or not.'⁶¹ This witness is best viewed in terms of persuading the world that at the points where the world's values align with the Church, indeed may be tacit developments of the gospel ethic, they find their true incarnation in Christ crucified. The place of witness of the Church can be viewed as akin to the royal doors of the Orthodox altar, the doors of

⁶⁰ See Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, espec. pp.196-197.

⁶¹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, pp.206-207.

the Kingdom, which are swung wide open during the whole of the "Bright Week" following Easter or Pascha. The Church simply points in between these doors to the altar, a space which has its foundation in God Himself, on which lies the sacrificed Lamb of God which is the true fulfilment of secularism and liberal democracy, the weakening God that lies secretly at the centre of creation, politics and of secular society: *Ecce homo*. Here at the centre of creation, at the centre of civil society and democracy, lies its true meaning—Christ crucified and resurrected. The Orthodox Christian is called in politics to lift high the Lamb of God and let the light of Christ illumine all so that all may come and taste and see that the Lord is good.