

# The quest for national and cultural continuity: Ideological uses of Classical Greek philosophy and Christian Orthodox theology

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# General introduction – methodological remarks – conceptual tools

- - An approach dealing with problems in the history of ideas rather than in the history of philosophy
- - Of interest to both historians and philosophers – speculative and critical philosophy of history and of the history of philosophy/history of ideas – reflections on historiography
- - Conceptions of ideology (negative, neutral or positive/ descriptive vs normative, broad vs narrow)
- - The heterogeneity of the material to be examined (works by historians, philosophers, theologians, artists, writers and poets, cultural anthropologists, a.o.)
- - Some bibliographical references

# HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

- - What is at stake is the understanding of the Greek nation – presented through its history and appealed to by intellectuals and politicians interested in promoting one or another conception of the cultural identity of the Greeks, emerging at various historical moments from the formation of the modern Greek state to the present. – The “Megali Idea” (“Great Idea”)– the aspiration to the liberation of lands that had originally belonged to the Byzantine Empire – especially Constantinople and parts of Asia Minor. [Brief discussion of theoretical questions concerning the birth and evolution of nations: To what extent are nations “imagined communities” (Benedikt Anderson), created through the nationalist ideology of intellectuals and elaborated and imposed through the educational mechanisms of modern states, rather than preexisting “natural” entities (involving common language, customs, history, religion etc)? What is the role of preexisting ethnic elements that are reelaborated and revived in a new context – invested with a new symbolic significance? (Anthony Smith) ] When and to what extent were people inhabiting Greece and part of the former territories of Byzantium ready to adopt the conscious self-designation of “Hellenes” rather than “Romioi” (orthodox heirs of the Eastern Roman Empire)? - The dangers of essentialist and teleological approaches to the Greek nation (*Ethnos*, *Genos* or *Fyli*) – quest for the characteristic features of *Hellenism* and *Hellenikotita* (Greekness) – the teleological notion of a historical destiny of the Greeks (here we shall refer to the influence of German idealist thinkers and German romanticism – Hegel and Herder – “*Volksgeist*”) - Conservatism and radical right-wing politics

# Different approaches to the Greek Past

According to Dimitris Tziovas, we could isolate the following approaches to the Greek Past presumably determining the construction of Greek identity – our understanding of Greekness :

- a) the classical/symbolist/ideal – an emphasis on Classical Greece and its spiritual heritage
- b) the organic/romantic – the appropriation of folk culture- integration of the Byzantine legacy
- c) a modernist/ aesthetic/ dynamic conception of Greekness as a cultural archetype brought to light by artistic creation involving geographical and historical factors properly interpreted – the role of landscape
- d) a post-modernist/ironical/ open stance - images of a complex past “deconstructed”, relativized and “negotiated”

# Attempts to prove the continuity of the Greek nation

- The peculiar case of Greece – appeals to a supposed continuity stretching over three thousand years – the attempt to overcome traumatic breaks separating the different periods (roughly, the Ancient, the Byzantine and the Modern) – The challenge put forth by Jakob Philipp Falmerayer denying any such continuity and the response by Constantinos Paparrigopoulos, author of the *Istoria tou Ellinikou Ethnous* [1860-1874] – The importance of *laografia* (Volkskunde) which studies folk songs, rituals and customs with a view to pointing to ideas, motifs and stylistic patterns that can be traced back to ancient times (Nikolaos Politis) – The contribution of poets and writers who propose a new synthesis of diverse elements of a rich heritage and try to embody and display aspects of “Greekness” in their work - The presumptions of archaeologists and art historians also seeking to identify characteristics of a unique Greek aesthetic experience (Christos Karouzos) The particular role of *philosophers* who believe they can reconstruct the history of philosophical thinking in a way that shows a smooth transition from ancient to Byzantine authors. The problem they have to solve is the apparent gap, incompatibility, or even conflict between classical Greek and Christian ideas. The official ideology of the Greek state is based on the notion of a Helleno-Christian culture (Spyridon Zampelios 1815-1881) and, as we shall see, there are different versions of the Helleno-Christian synthesis invoked by most of the above thinkers and especially by philosophers and theologians. Indeed, one wonders whether one could isolate more or less persistent common features of the culture evolving in Greece before and after this synthesis.

# The agenda for our discussion

- A more detailed presentation and analysis of passages of texts by:
  - **Historians**
  - **Poets and prose writers**
  - **Philosophers**
  - **Theologians**
  - Philologues
  - Social scientists
  - Critics and other intellectuals

# More particularly

We shall draw on a variety of texts by Nikos Svoronos, Eleni Glykatzi- Arwheiler, Dimitris Hatzis, poems by Seferis, Ritsos and Elytis – but also some of their important essays, Tsatsos' *Διάλογοι σε Μοναστήρι*, «Διάλογος για την ποίηση», philosophical and theological essays by Christos Yannaras, Stelios Ramfos, and recent critical studies by Roderick Beaton, Katerina Papari, Giorgos Giannouloupoulos, Lakis Progidis, Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Nikitas Siniosoglou a.o.

# Questions we are trying to answer:

- Can we *detect* a certain kind of continuity of the Greek nation through the centuries? (Can we speak of the *same* nation?)
- What are the criteria of such continuity – presumably cultural rather than racial?
- To what extent do we *project* (from the present to the past) our own conception? – how much do we imagine and construct? (rather than discover)
- Is there a quality called “greekness” that we may attribute to some extent to the people who call themselves Greeks (*Hellenes, Graikoi, Romioi*) through the centuries? - What are its characteristic marks? – its constitutive elements?



# Historians

- Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos (*Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Έθνους*, 1860-74)
- Nicos Svoronos (*Histoire de la Grèce moderne*, 1953)
- Eleni Glykatzi – Arwheiler (*Πόσο ελληνικό είναι το Βυζάντιο*; 2016)
- Dimitris Hatzis - a novelist and a philologue, but also a historian of literature- («Γύρω από τα προβλήματα της συνέχειας», 1954)
- Stathis Kalyvas – a political scientist (*Modern Greece: What Everyone Needs to Know*, 2015/ *Καταστροφές και θρίαμβοι: Οι επτά κύκλοι της σύγχρονης ελληνικής ιστορίας*, 2016)

# Crucial questions about the evidence and its interpretation

- The need to examine thoroughly the relations between the three periods of Greek history – according to the Paparrigopoulos' dominant model (puzzles about the Greekness of Macedonians and of the Byzantine empire – which seemed to be doubted by intellectuals of the Greek Enlightenment, such as Adamantios Korais 1748-1833 )
- Nicos Svoronos' corrected version of the official narrative – his marxist background and his attempt to avoid nationalism – interpreting broadly and in a non essentialist sense the spirit of resistance that he attributes to the Greeks through the centuries
- Glykatzi – Arweiler on the origins of modern Greek identity in the late period of Byzantium – emphasis on a voluntaristic element, quoting and paraphrasing Voltaire: “In life (and in history) it is irrelevant whether something is true or whether it is taken to be true” – contrast with Dionysios Solomos' “το έθνος πρέπει να μάθει να θεωρεί εθνικόν ό,τι είναι αληθές»

# Critical reactions

- Hatzis (already in 1954) criticizes the easy adoption of narratives of continuity by the Greek communist party – alternative but also analogous to the model elaborated by Paparrigopoulos – he points out naïve claims about the alleged cultural continuity in customs (supposedly establishing identity of the Greek nation) and in literary expression and makes interesting remarks on the history of Greek literature –sharply distinguishing modern and byzantine from Classical
- More recently Kalyvas' work tries to undermine the myth of Greeks as being always the victims of injustice, presenting a mixed “success” story – providing a healthy response to attitudes which seem to betray what Akis Gavriilidis has characterized as “necrophilia” (attributing it to the so-called patriotic Left)
- Today few serious historians would espouse essentialist hypotheses about the Greek nation. In fact, there is a widespread acceptance of constructivist but also ethnosymbolist approaches.
- However popular history, integrating all kinds of “myths”, which often influences the way history is taught in schools and is exploited by conservative and nationalist politicians, especially on the Right, but also on the patriotic Left, clearly dominates the hearts and minds of ordinary people and encourages hidden, unconscious essentialist assumptions. Its appeal is also related to xenophobic attitudes, acceptance of conspiracy theories, readiness to believe “fake news”, etc.

# Current debates involving the interpretation of history

- The impact of the recent crisis – the manifestation of pathological symptoms (defensive and introvert stance – megalomania and self-victimization – blaming others – xenophobic, anti-western and anti-european tendencies)
- Who are we? - Where do we belong? - Who should we try to be?
- The political dimension – The rise of the extreme Right and the victory of the radical Left - consequences
- National myths and reality – which myths (positive and negative) could we endorse?
- How much deconstruction? – ethical and political issues
- Strategies for cultivating a different identity? – promoting a “success story” – seven “boom- bust- bailout” cycles (Kalyvas)
- Drawing on existing institutions – education and public discourse – the teaching of history - modifying attitudes – the role of civil society – public intellectuals
- Ambition – optimism - perseverance

# Poets and prose writers – authors of important critical texts

- Dionysios Solomos (1798-1857)
- Andreas Kalvos (1792-1869)
- Constantine Cavafy (1863-1933)
- Anghelos Sikelianos (1884 -1951)
- Yorgos Theotocas (1905 -1966)
- Yorgos Seferis (1900 – 1971)
- Odysseas Elytis (1911 -1996)
- Yannis Ritsos (1909-1990)
- Andreas Embeiricos (1901 -1975)
- Alexandros Papadiamantis (1851-1911)
- Zissimos Lorentzatos (1915-2004)

# National and Cultural identity expressed in literary works

- Alternative approaches to the Greek nation, the ideal of Hellenism and Greekness by poets and prose writers from the nineteenth century to the present
- Neoclassical and romantic elements in Solomos and Kalvos – the influence of German idealism and romanticism through Italian translations
- The unique case of C.P.Cavafy – the use of irony in the approach to Greekness
- The role of the writers of the “generation of the thirties” in expressing modernism in a Greek context – combining cosmopolitanism with an emphasis on the popular tradition - The reception and interpretation of Makriyiannis and Theophilos – The construction of national-cultural myths displaying Greekness – tensions in their theoretical and critical thought
- The importance of the work of Papadiamantis, expressing the Greek orthodox ethos in a more or less conservative and communitarian perspective. Contemporary debates about his significance and his impact  
The realism of Greek “ethographia” (depiction of life in village communities close to nature – the nostalgia of a lost harmony (Progidis)

# Seferis on “Greekness”

- “...In the realm of the intellect, European Hellenism was created (and, who knows, perhaps in our days is dying), our own ‘Greek Hellenism’, if I may be permitted to so call it , has not yet been created and has not yet recovered its tradition..sometimes there is a foreknowledge of this ‘Greek Hellenism’. But before we can see its face clearly, many great works will have to be created and many men, great and small alike, will have to work and to struggle. For this particular Hellenism will show its face when the Greece of today has acquired its own real intellectual character and features. And its characteristics will be precisely the synthesis of all the characteristics of true works of art, which have been ever produced by Greeks.” (from the “Dialogue on Poetry” with the philosopher Constantine Tsatsos)
- Hellenism, “a continent as big as China” (interview with Sture Linnér)
- Seferis’ original ambivalence towards the Byzantine heritage and its integration in the Hellenic world
- The quest for “authentic” expression in Makriyannis and Theophilos supposedly revealing “Greek ethos” – the “collective soul” of our people and the ideals related to it – (justice, measure/avoidance of hybris, honesty, exactness) –critical reactions (Giannouloupoulos)

# Seferis on Makriyannis

- “The free man, the just man, the man who is the measure of life, if there is one basic idea in Hellenism, it is this one. It is born in the dawning of Greek thought, then it receives in the work of Aeschylus its full and firm expression”  
(Makriyannis)
- Doubts about the accuracy of Seferis’ construal – idealization of Makriyannis’ personality – anachronism/ projection of Seferis’ own conception of Hellenism - playing a kind of “ventriloquist” trick, making Makriyannis say what he has in mind



# Elytis' "solar metaphysics" and Ritsos' *Romiosyni*

- Greekness in Elytis' *Axion Esti* – A Byzantine poetic model – religious poetry and Theodorakis' music
- “ I have often tried to speak of solar metaphysics. I will not try to today to analyse how art is implicated in such a conception. I will keep to one single and simple fact: the language of the Greeks, like a magic instrument, has –as reality or a symbol – intimate relations with the Sun. And that Sun does not only inspire a certain attitude of life, and hence the primeval sense to the poem. It penetrates the composition, the structure, and- to use a current terminology – the nucleus from which is composed the cell we call the poem.. not only a question of a return to the notion of a pure form” (“In the Name of Luminosity and Transparency”)
- Elytis' poetics – An alchemy of language – Neoplatonic influences and a hellenocentric orientation
- Svoronos' “spirit of resistance” in Ritsos' *Romiosyni*

# Philosophers and Theologians

- A short historical and systematic account beginning with the transition from the Byzantine to the Ottoman period:
- « Έλληνες... εσμέν το γένος ως η φωνή και η πάτριος παιδεία δηλοί...» (Georgios Gemistos/ Plethon)

# The reception and appropriation of classical thought and of Christian ideas from the late byzantine and the Ottoman period

- Byzantine humanism – the legacy of Neoplatonism – Georgios Plethon Gemistos (1355-1452) – How Greek was Byzantium? (Siniosoglou)
- 1) The revival of the study of Aristotle in the work of Theophilos Korydaleus (1620-1700) 2) The reception of Western ideas in the works of scholars and educators such as Eugenios Voulgaris (1700 -1770), Methodios Anthrakitis, Christodoulos Pamblekis 3) The growth of critical thinking pointing to the possibility of a Greek enlightenment Athanasios Psalidas, Iossipos Moisiodax, Dimitris Karartzis,, Adamantios Korais, (1748-1833), Neophytos Vamvas, Veniamin Lesvios, Theophilos Kairis, Konstantinos Koumas) 4) The birth of academic philosophy in Greece and in the Ionian islands – the first institutions of higher learning – the influence of French eclecticism (Victor Cousin, Petros Vrailas Armenis) and the gradual reception of basic elements of German idealism (Schelling, and Hegel) -
- Some contemporary scholars (G.P.Henderson, Paschalis Kitromilidis) speak of a failure or defeat of the project of the more or less liberal thinkers of the Enlightenment and point to the emergence of nationalism, following the adaptation and the elaboration of idealist and romantic views – The notion of “national awakening” as related to nationalist ideology and to irredentist claims.

# Some positions and arguments – readings and misreadings of classical texts

- Idealist philosophers -mainly the three philosophers educated in Germany, Ioannis Theodorakopoulos (1900-1981), Panayotis Kanellopoulos (1902 -1986) Constantine Tsatsos (1899 -1987), but also the classical scholar Ioannis Sykoutris (1901 -1937)- stress the importance of Plato - there are extensive studies of Plato's philosophy and of particular dialogues by thinkers such as Theodorakopoulos (*Introduction to Plato*, 1941, 2nd ed 1947)
- Marxists - Dimitris Glinos (1882-1943) and Haralambos Theodoridis (1883 -1957)- turn to the Presocratics, especially the Atomists and Epicurus. Theodoridis argues that the main ideas characteristic of Greek thought at its best can be found in Epicurus (*Epicurus, The real outlook of the Ancient World*, 1955, *Introduction to Philosophy*, first ed. 1934, many editions after the war, until the seventies), but one should also draw attention to the original reading of Plato's *Sophist*, by the Marxist Glinos (*An Introduction to Plato's Sophist*, first published in 1940) with an extensive methodological introduction dealing with humanistic studies in Greece and more particularly with guidelines for a fruitful interpretation of classical texts – applied to Plato, who is presented as having reached an advanced form of idealism that would eventually attain a higher stage only in Hegel's dynamic, dialectical account.
- - Here, it is worth remembering the arguments put forth by Dimitris Hatzis already in 1954, expressing his worry concerning the danger of creating another rather essentialist "Great Idea" which would invoke the "progressive" character of Greek thought "from Heraclitus to the political program of the communist party". As we saw Hatzis doesn't hesitate to criticize Svoronos among others (Dimitris Hatzis, *The Face of Modern Hellenism*, 2005)
- Hellenocentric theologians in search of a "lost (metaphysical) center" (Lorentzatos)
- Contemporary critical perspectives (Axelos, Castoriadis, neo-marxists, analytic philosophers, Siniosoglou)

# The appeal to Hellenism and Greekness in the confrontation with historical materialism

- A reference to the political agenda of the group of idealist thinkers (who met and became friends in Heidelberg) –their eventual involvement in real politics
- Variations on some common aristocratic and conservative ideals
- An opposition to marxist materialism but also to the excessive individualism and consumerism of contemporary capitalist society
- A messianic mission of Hellenism – to save the contemporary world – and help transform a nihilist, groundless culture.
- A defense of the idea of a helleno-christian synthesis, but also an initial difficulty to endorse a positive evaluation of Byzantium (e.g. Kanellopoulos)
- “Ideal” Greeks pursuing values such as freedom and “real” Greeks moved by passion and lacking moderation – causing discordance and conflict – eventually needing moral and political discipline (Tsatsos)
- “No other nature in the world is so full of spirit and metaphysical character as Greek nature – a peculiar interconnection
- Fruitful dialogue and interactions with the authors of the generation of the thirties

# Tsatsos idealist construal of Greekness

- “... Greece is ultimately one – if not a unitary substance- undoubtedly a dialectical system that cannot be torn apart”
- Plato can be regarded as the most “classical” Greek who understood that he had to “push the limits of Reason, in order to go beyond Reason itself”. (On the contrary, most Marxists would argue that the Greeks were precisely opposed to the otherworldiness of metaphysical transcendence that comes from the East.)
- ... Greeks throughout the centuries think employing the same conceptual forms or “moulds”, so that “poets such as Kalvos, Sikelianos, Cavafy could be correctly translated only into Ancient Greek” (*Dialogues in a Monastery*, 1974 – French translation 1978)
- We may agree on “ the unity and continuity of Greek history from prehistoric times until our days and of the “personality” or “essence” - if you wish – of the Green nation”
- The synthesis of the conflicting elements of Hellenism and Christianity is achieved in late antiquity when due to the new historical conditions – the two spiritual traditions had come closer - Neoplatonism

# Tsatsos on Theodorakopoulos

- Studying Plotinus and Origen, the great heretic of Christianity, Theodorakopoulos studied in depth the big problem of syncretism between the hellenic and more particular, hellenistic and the Christian spirit..” He understood that if you don’t begin with the study of Platonic dialogues you cannot fully understand some of the main aspects of Christian doctrine... Although he admired Plethon he didn’t share the idea of the separation of Christianity from Hellenism.

- “Every national civilization is covered by a metaphysical firmament (στερέωμα). It has its own metaphysical meaning. In long lasting civilizations this meaning may change through the centuries in its “modes”, but it always retains the highest unity of its essence in its continuity. Theodoropoulos thought was suffused with this metaphysical meaning of Hellenism. And he didn’t regard only in itself as an autonomous substance , but as a foundational element of European civilization as a whole, in science, in philosophy, in fine art and in Christian religion, which correctly, according to Theodoropoulos, cannot be conceived without the Greek...” («Θεοδωράκος και Ελληνισμός»)



- “It is difficult to sketch in a few words the meaning of Greekness as Theodoracopoulos experienced it and as I understand it... Greekness- with the ancient Greek world as its prominent basis – we sense as a virtue of light which chases what is dark and dim and makes what is weird and externally imported go away; which give clarity to the line and the contour of a figure and brings object close to our hands; a virtue of measure which doesn’t tolerate exaggeration and excess; which sacrifices the titanic and gigantic to the Olympian and human; which guides the soul like a charioteer and, after its every impetuous deviation, brings it back to the middle track; which turns to the whole, sacrificing the voluptuous detail for the sake of the discipline of this whole and the passion of the senses to the order of the idea; What is Greek is deeply rational (έλλογο), without being a servant of intellectual reason, immanent to the world without lacking the immensity of the mystical, ideal without being distant from things, capable of reconciling opposites without drowning their existence.”  
(«Θεοδωρακόπουλος και Ελληνισμός»)

# Theodoracopoulos

- “The moral and spiritual culture of every people transforms the mythical material which it has in its soul. The richer this mythical material is, the richer the myth accompanying the soul of a people, the stronger the people is, the more spiritual it can become. Myth is the first and all powerful spiritual and moral work of every people.. History is nothing but the spiritual and moral humanization of myth. The historical life of a people shows how this people managed to give clearly human form to its originally superhuman myths created by its poetic and religious imagination. Without the material of this myth, which becomes tradition and then slowly a concrete form of the spiritual and moral life of a people there is no historical life” (“Ιστορία και ζωή”)
- Each place has its own “ontology” which requires its own “deontology” (*Το πνεύμα του νεοελληνισμού και η τροπή των καιρών* )
- Disappointment because Hegel in his philosophy of history doesn’t make room for the historical importance of Modern Greece. Hegel’s philosophical theory supposedly falsified by the Greek nation in modern times! (*Αγαπημενη μου Χαϊδελβέργη*)

# Kanellopoulos

- A background in the study of sociology – The introduction of the thought of Ferdinand Tönnies
- The distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*
- The adoption of a form of *communitarianism*?  
Reference to Greek communitarian thinkers (Ion Dragoumis, Konstantinos Karavidas)
- conservative authoritarian tendencies and the progressive development of a more liberal approach

# Kanellopoulos on Christianity and Hellenism

- The miracle that was the imposition of Christianity also saved the Greek spirit. Without the spirit of Greece, the world as we know it couldn't have been formed as we know it, the Western world, let's say. However, also without Christianity, the Greek spirit would have been buried and lost under the ruins of the Roman world.. Greece had been saved. And the barbarians from the north who received Christianity, also received along with Christianity, Greece, the Greek spirit. Along with Jesus, the Greek spirit was also saved and resurrected."

*(Ο Χριστιανισμός και η εποχή μας)*

# “Hellenocentric”/ “hellenophile” “Neo-Orthodox” theologians

- Moving to the present ones has to take into consideration the central positions and the arguments of the main neo-orthodox thinkers, and more particularly Christos Giannaras and Stelios Ramfos, who along with others, including Father Ioannis Romanidis, Kostis Moskoff and Costas Zouraris, were related to the theological movement (for the renewal of Greek orthodox theology) of the sixties. These thinkers try to appropriate Greek and Byzantine philosophy as a whole (from the Presocratics to mystical theologians and Fathers of the Orthodox Church), claiming they can show a continuity of existential concerns and metaphysical sensitivity which are supposedly reflected in all aspects of culture and mark a clear distinction between the Helleno-Christian “paradigm”, as it was shaped in Byzantium, and both the contemporary Western European and Eastern cultures. They lament the lack of self-consciousness of contemporary Greeks, who don’t appreciate their heritage and risk to lose it in the alienating circumstances of the contemporary world. It should be noted that there is an important turn or rather reversal –occurring in the mid-nineties- in the thought of Ramfos, who now adopts a very critical stance towards the Modern Greek tradition and a more positive evaluation of Western European individualism. In any case, neo-orthodox authors put forth strong claims and don’t hesitate to make particular political suggestions, which are rather naïve and often dangerous, insofar as they are more or less based on a nationalist construal of the Christian Orthodox tradition which should be criticized on various historical and philosophical grounds. (Kitromilidis, Virvidakis)

# The main arguments of Hellenocentric/Neo-Orthodox thinkers

- One could perhaps summarize their positions as follows (including the views of Ramfos' earlier period) :
- 1) Ancient Greek epistemology is based on a correct understanding of the dynamic relation between the human mind and its natural and social environment. Knowledge doesn't involve an objectifying, "representational" conception of our access to reality. More particularly, according to this account of the thought of most classical philosophers: a) The analysis of vision from Plato to Plotinus involves a peculiar conception of the role of light emanating both from the eyes and the objects, a fact allegedly revealing the organic metaphysical affinity of all beings (objects and human subjects). Thus, some of the metaphysical dichotomies of Modern philosophy since Descartes can be easily avoided. b) There is a continuity between the senses and the intellect, and knowledge (conceived as a direct grasp of forms) is modeled on the function of vision c) Truth is not reduced to correspondence (*adequatio*) of mental representations to things, but is construed as a revelation of beings (or "Being" itself, if we adopt a more Heideggerian idiom) and at the same time as participation in the social realization of Logos. d) There is a clear emphasis on the teleological and the axiological dimensions of beings which makes possible the recognition of their "spiritual depth".

- 2) The Fathers of the Eastern Orthodox Church reject most of the tenets of Greek ontology, but retain to an important extent the legacy of the epistemology that was associated with it and connect it in a creative way to the relational ontology underlying Christian dogmas. (The doctrine of the Trinity properly construed) They elaborate an interesting existential and personalist conception of the relations between human subjects and God, as well as among human beings themselves, who can freely respect and embrace with love each other's "otherness", overcoming the shortcomings of their material nature. The distinction between divine essence and divine energies opens the way to an apophatic, mystical theology, which acknowledges the possibility of a spiritual transfiguration of matter already within our earthly lives.
- 3) The legalistic, juridical conception of sin emphasized in the Roman Catholic and the in the Protestant tradition is absent from the Greek Orthodox Church. Sin has an ontological sense and in the place of western moralism we find an ethics of freedom and Agape
- 4) The "sociocentric" and at the same time personalist "ethos" of the orthodox Helleno-Christian synthesis can be detected in many aspects of popular culture and in the everyday life of traditional Greek society, participating in the life of the church. Unfortunately, according to the diagnosis of thinkers such as Giannaras, the unique "idioprosopia" ("proper/unique face or figure") or special identity of this society is undergoing alienation due to the adoption of the individualistic and utilitarian models imposed by the Western technological civilization.

- Here, one could concentrate on the above theses and try to trace parallels in the original thought of some Russian slavophile thinkers of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century. There is a clear influence of the work of the theologian Vladimir Lossky (*La théologie mystique de l'église de l'Orient*). Now, Greek neo-orthodox intellectuals, whose “hermeneutics of Hellenism” points to the need of developing, or rediscovering a different politics, more adjusted to the helleno-christian “paradigm”, often express a pessimism that reminds one of the pessimism characterizing the conclusions of Alasdair MacIntyre in his *After Virtue*. Still, they seem to hope that Greeks might recover their “ethos” and achieve some kind of spiritual rebirth, if they could perhaps attain self-consciousness and cultivate those aspects of their heritage that testify to the specificity of their way of life, presumably conforming to the true spiritual dimension of reality. Sometimes they don't hesitate to criticize liberal values and institutions which they consider as incompatible with their ideal (including the notion of human rights - see a.o. Giannaras, *The Inhumanity of Rights*, 1998). One should also contrast such, rather simplistic accounts to the more careful theological analysis displayed in the works of Ioannis Zizioulas .(*Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, 1997) who has also written on the synthesis of Hellenism and Christianity.



# Ramfos “hermeneutics” of Greekness after his pro-Western turn

- “The idea of continuity, as it was realized by Paparrigopoulos in his field, presupposes a linear evolutionary course, a racial, linguistic and religious identity, unaffected by time, which in its turn retains its nucleus unchanged in the primordial past and, in this way, lends a helping hand to the anachronistic Greece. The overrated past shows a fixation on feeling, which makes it impossibly difficult for us to escape from the limiting horizon of our fatherland and forces us to fall victims to our impulsive self. It thus embraces the historical present and paralyzes it by drenching it with anachronistic symbolisms. Now the national is acknowledged as the true and not the opposite, as Solomos was affirming in words and deeds.”

*(Γενάρχες πεπρωμένων)*

“...Το Ελλην ου του γένους, αλλά της διανοίας...

...‘Ελληνες οι της ημετέρας παιδείσεως  
μετέχοντες..» (Isocrates)

“.. The major illusion of modern Greek self-consciousness, is what it itself (with very little modesty) calls hellenocentrism..

(Kostas Axelos)

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