

## **BOOK REVIEWS**

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### **Pantelis Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy & Political Theology, (Doxa & Praxis)*, Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 2012, 148 pp.**

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Nine decades after patenting the topic of "Political Theology"<sup>1</sup> as a notion that speaks about the way how the love for the neighbour from the Gospel can be transmuted in the political life,<sup>2</sup> the work of professor Pantelis Kalaitzidis, from Volos Academy brings an Orthodox perspective on this topic. Since the beginning of the discussions about this subject, there were also some Catholic approaches of it,<sup>3</sup> Protestant and ecumenical ones<sup>4</sup>, and recently, it was published an interesting collective volume that summarizes the Orthodox view from multiple perspectives.<sup>5</sup>

In this context, a book to emphasize the Orthodox approach on Political Theology and to offer a synthesis of the topic from this point of view was not only important, but also expected. Therefore, answering this expectance and doing interesting connections with other confessional approaches, the aforementioned Greek scholar<sup>6</sup> is offering an interesting research, entitled *Orthodoxy and Political Theology*. His book brings together two texts that have already been published, connected together not only through the subject, but also through the approaches, as it is segmented in two big parts. The first one entitled: "*Orthodoxy and Political Theology*" (p. 15-86), debates some interesting topics, namely: "*The theology of politics*" (p. 15-44), "*The politics of Theology*" (p. 45-64), "*The public role of the Church and Theology*" (p. 81-86), and tries to answer the question: "*Why has Orthodoxy not developed a Political or Liberation Theology?*" (p. 65-80). The second one, entitled "*Eschatology and politics*" (p. 89-140) is dealing with the eschatological dimension of Church and

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<sup>1</sup> First used by Carl Schmitt in 1922. See: Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the concept of Sovereignty*, trans. by George Schwab, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985).

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Louis Leuba, "Autour de la Theologie politique", in Mihail P. Grigoris (ed.), *Nikos A. Nissiotis, Religion, Philosophy and Sport in Dialogue. In memoriam*, (Athens: Press of Thessaloniki Theological Institute, 1994), 203-207.

<sup>3</sup> Like: Jean-Yves Calvez, *La politique & Dieu*, col. "Essais", Les Editions du Cerf, Paris, 1985.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example: Thia Cooper, *Controversies in Political Theology: Development or Liberation?*, (Controversies in Contextual Theology Series), (London: SCM PRESS, 2007); Peter Losonczi, Mika-Luoma-Aho, Aakash Singh (eds.), *The Future of Political Theology. Religious and Theological perspectives*, (Burlington; Ashgate, Farnham, 2011); Gabriel R. Ricci (ed.), *Politics in Theology*, (Religion & Public Life 38), (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Kristina Stoeckl, Ingeborg Gabriel, Aristotle Papanikolaou (eds.), *Political Theologies in Orthodox Christi-*

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*anity. Common Challenges – Divergent Positions*, (T&T Clark Theology), (Edinburgh: T&T Clark and Bloomberg, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> There must be mentioned that some of his works has already been translated in Romanian language. See: Pantelis Kalaitzidis, *Ortodoxie și modernitate. O introducere*, translated in Romanian by Florin-Cătălin Ghiț, (Universitatis, Series Theologia Socialis 9), (Cluj-Napoca: Eikon Press, 2010).

its relationships with Political Theology (p. 89-112), relation between ministry and power (p. 113-134), and between Theocracy and secular power (p. 135-140).

From its very beginning, Kalaitzidis mentioned the aim of his research<sup>7</sup> by defining the fundamental notions and emphasizing the historiography of it. Afterwards, without losing himself in an analysis that imitates the Protestant model (like some of our researchers are doing today) he takes over its fundamental elements and benchmarks, and he goes deep into the History of Orthodoxy showing that the roots of Political Theology in that area must be sought in the beginnings of Christianity. Also their development can be seen in the history of Byzantine Empire,<sup>8</sup> where the people believed that "their state and society were the mate-

rialization of the kingdom of God on earth."<sup>9</sup> Then, comparing the opinions of two important theologians of nowadays about the Byzantine legacy, namely Zizioulas and Yannaras, he is disagreeing with the attitude of the last one on the idealization of those times.<sup>10</sup>

After these introductory and historiographical remarks, he points out some fundamental questions for the entire debate:

"Of course, the crucial question, after this brief reference, to left-leaning political theology and liberation theology, is: *Why, with few exceptions, had Orthodoxy not developed a "political theology" in this second, liberating, and radical sense of the term?* Why have prominent Orthodox theologians underestimated, or even misunderstood, the meaning and context of political theology? Why has the idea of the "theological Christian left" not developed in Orthodoxy, as it has in nearly all the countries of Western Europe as well as America? And furthermore, since we frequently consider elements of political theology *avant la lettre*, can we extrapolate from the texts written by the Fathers of the church: is the denunciation of wealth, propriety, usury, or economic exploitation enough for us to talk about the Fathers of the church having a "political theology" when these figures lived, worked, and wrote in an era completely different from our own, an era which clearly lacked democracy and freedom?"<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> "The aim of this book, therefore, is to study the relationship between Orthodoxy and political theology. Taking as its starting point the invention of "political theology" by the German conservative philosopher of law Carl Schmidt, followed by the leftist turn in political theology initiated by theologians such as Johann Baptist Metz, Jurgen Moltmann, Dorothee Solle and Latin American liberation theology, this work proposes to examine the reasons for which Orthodoxy – with a few exceptions – has not developed a "political theology", in the liberating and radical sense of term. It looks also to understand why prominent Orthodox theologians have underestimated, or even misunderstood the meaning and context the meaning and context of political theology, or why the idea of the "theological or Christian left" has not developed in the Orthodox milieu, as it has in many countries of Western Europe and America." Pantelis Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy & Political Theology*, (Doxa & Praxis), Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 2012, 9-10.

<sup>8</sup> "It is religious-political ideology that remains dominant thorough the Byzantine and post-Byzantine periods- never openly of fully declared as such but frequently alluded to in several Byzantine texts." *Ibidem*, 27.

<sup>9</sup> Steven Runciman, *The Byzantine Theocracy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1977, 1.

<sup>10</sup> "The same, however, cannot be said about Yannaras. Not only does he idealize, socially and politically, the theological texts he sets out to interpret – not only does he glorify entire cultures and societies, such as the Byzantine and the Greek society under the Turkish rule, while whole-heartedly condemning other societies such as the medieval West – he can be taken to task, I think for drawing a direct connection between texts and social reality." Pantelis Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy & Political Theology*, 40-41.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, 53.

Some of them are answered, others only debated in an interesting and useful presentation. Speaking about the fact that the Orthodox debate on Political Theology has never known the impact from other ones, he shows that the historical context has a huge influence on this.<sup>12</sup> He links the discourse about politics to the notion of power<sup>13</sup>, which may be a temptation for a secularised world like the one where we live in. After that, he points some very important aspects about this topic, offering a perspective about the way how the Church should behave with politics:

"The church's political discourse, then, must never lose sight of the fundamental importance in Christian consciousness of an active expectation of the kingdom of God, nor content itself with the now familiar themes of the defence of the nation and national continuity, ethno-cultural identity, or the demographic problem – which, of course, are neither issues nor priorities in the kingdom of God. The church's obligation, according to the example set by its founder, is to voluntarily withdraw from the quest of worldly power and authority, to fight the temptation to become a power itself or to decide to become involved in politics in an authoritarian way – to become established, in other words, within history, forgetting its eschatological orientation."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> "In everything I said above, which can be summarized as the unquestionable primacy of the ethnic-national over the theological-ecclesial and the social, we must also bear in mind the particular conditions in which the Orthodox Church lived during the 19<sup>th</sup> and primarily 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. And this has to do not only with the creation of national Balkan states or with the "Orthodox" Balkan monarchies and the religious nationalisms or ethno-religious ideologies, mythologies, and narratives that developed in the imaginations of their peoples. It also relates to the October Revolution of 1917 (as well as with the so-called "socialist" regimes that ruled in the Eastern Europe after World War II) and the unprecedented anti-religious persecution that this unleashed, the first victims of which were the Orthodox Churches of Russia and the other Orthodox countries." *Ibidem*, p. 74. Cf. Catherine Piskstock, "Is Orthodoxy Radical", in Peter Losonczy, Mika-Luoma-Aho, Aakash Singh (eds.), *The Future of Political Theology. Religious and Theological perspectives*, (Burlington; Ashgate, Farnham, 2011), 67-74.

<sup>13</sup> "The discourse about politics, apart from the obvious question about the relationship between the church and the world, and the church and history, leads to a discussion about the origin, nature and limits of power in its worldly manifestation, and begs the study of the phenomenon of power as a "temptation" and a "sign" of the church's secularisation." Pantelis Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy & Political Theology*, 92.

Written in an interesting way that brings not only information but also an overview of the history of Political Theology in the Orthodox academic debate, the work of Pantelis Kalaitzidis is not only an interesting contribution to the investigation of this topic from an Orthodox perspective, but also a book that surely enriches the reader and makes him to understand deeper the history of Eastern Christianity and its contemporary approach on different problems.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.