Kristina Stoeckl

Modernity and Political Theologies

The inevitability of political theology is a phenomenon of our modern times. In the pre-modern period, arguably, all theology was political and all politics were theological. A distinct modern political theology becomes necessary only once theology is called to define its stance vis-à-vis a world whose parameters are no longer contained within the religious worldview. One cannot hope to understand modern political theology without a prior grasp of the changes introduced by modernity, but neither can one claim complete comprehension of modernity without taking serious the variety of responses spelled out by religions in confrontation with the challenges of modernity. It is therefore necessary to recapitulate in some detail the passage from the pre-modern to the modern and the challenges that this entails for religious traditions. In this chapter, I develop a model of political theologies that should allow the reader to locate specific political theologies and in particular the Orthodox political theologies presented in this volume within the field of what I call "the challenges of modernity."

Distinguishing Modernization from Modernity

When sociologists and historians speak of "modernization" and of "modernity," they refer to two aspects of a historical development: "modernization" emphasizes process; "modernity" underlines a specific condition.

By "modernization" we generally mean a series of developments by which traditional, agrarian societies were transformed into functionally differentiated, industrial, urban and secular societies. Scholars may not agree on the precise periodization of this epochal change, but they would usually concur on the fact that modernization eventually creates new kinds of institutions—a market-based economy, a democratic polity, and autonomous knowledge-producing institutions, notably, science.[1] According to the conventional view of modernization, traditional societies relied on religion as a unitary source of meaning from which political and spiritual leadership, social rank, artistic production, and human relations all derived their

[1] Ronald Inglehart, 'Modernization, Sociological Theories Of'. In: *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences* (ed. J. Smelser Neil and Paul B. Baltes; Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2001), pp. 9965-71.

legitimacy. In modern societies, on the contrary, religion no longer plays this overarching role and is simply one functional system among others.[2]

The term "modernity" has been used in the social sciences only since the 1980s to describe the condition of modern society in a different way from the classical theories of modernization. Classical theories of modernization focused on the *processes by which societies become modern* (urbanization, industrialization, secularization, individualization). Theories of modernity focus on the *condition of being modern*.[3]

The difference becomes clearer when we consider how religion enters into each of these two perspectives. Whereas mainstream sociology long maintained that modernization would eventually lead to the disappearance of religion from society,[4] some sociologists recognized early on that modernization had only changed the place of religion in society. One of them was Emile Durkheim, who showed in his *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912) that modernization had brought about distinctively modern, seemingly secular forms of religion, for example in the cult of the nation. Also Max Weber focused on the way that traditional religions continued to shape secular cultures. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905) he argued that the Protestant Reformation inaugurated a change in economic mentality that brought about the demise of traditional economy and the rise of capitalism. Both Durkheim and Weber considered the relationship between religion and modernity as paradoxical: as a condition of simultaneous permanence and demise. Marcel Gauchet has summarized such observations in saying that the modern secular social and political order marks not a departure from religion but rather a transformation of religion, which continues to shape the modern outlook: "Modern society is not a society without religion, but one whose major articulations were formed by metabolizing the religious function."[5]

---

[2] Niklas Luhmann, *Funktion der Religion* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977).
[3] Peter Wagner, 'Modernity: History of the Concept'. In *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences* (ed. J. Smelser Neil and Paul B. Baltes; Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2001), pp. 9949-54.
[4] David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978).
[5] Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 163.

Modernization of Religion

Modernization theory generally envisioned the demise of religion. In a more moderate version, put forward by Jürgen Habermas, the endpoint of modernization of religion is not its demise, but its transformation in view of greater compatibility with modern liberal society. This compatibility, Habermas suggests, comes about through the "modernization of religious consciousness" in response to the challenges of religious pluralism, modern science, and positive law and profane morality. This modernization, according to Habermas, has three steps:

(1) "Religious citizens must develop an epistemic attitude toward other religions and world views that they encounter within a universe of discourse hitherto occupied only by their own religion. They succeed to the degree that they self-reflectively relate their religious beliefs to the statements of competing doctrines of salvation in such a way that they do not endanger their own exclusive claim to truth."

(2) "Moreover, religious citizens must develop an epistemic stance toward the independence of secular from sacred knowledge and the institutionalized monopoly of modern scientific experts. They can only succeed if from their religious viewpoint they conceive the relationship of dogmatic and secular beliefs in such a way that the autonomous progress in secular knowledge cannot come to contradict their faith."

(3) "Finally, religious citizens must develop an epistemic stance toward the priority that secular reasons enjoy in the political arena. This can succeed only to the extent that they convincingly connect the egalitarian individualism and universalism of modern law and morality with the premises of their comprehensive doctrines."[6]

This process of modernization of the religious consciousness is for Habermas the prerequisite for the inclusion of religion in the liberal public sphere. In my opinion, Habermas is setting too high a threshold for the inclusion of religions in the modern public sphere. Religions cannot escape the challenges of modernity, but it cannot be taken for granted that they confront them in a constructive way, or that this confrontation is uniform across all areas of conflict. I therefore

[6] Jürgen Habermas, 'Religion in the Public Sphere', *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2006): pp. 1-25 (14).

propose an alternative model, which starts not from the presupposition of demise or change of religions in modern societies, but from the assumption of their permanence and conflictuality.

Defining Political Theologies

A political theology is consequently best understood as the response of a religious tradition, a church or an individual religious thinker, to the changing status of religion in modern society with regard to politics, that is, with regard to the question how people live together and which laws govern the collectivity (given that these laws are no longer, as it was the case in the pre-modern period, the laws of religion). It is reasonable to expect that there will be different such responses, different according to confession (Western and Eastern Christianity, Judaism, Islam, etc.), different according to the historical epoch in which this political theology is formulated, and different according to the individual judgments of representatives of one and the same religious tradition. For this reason it makes sense to speak of *political theologies* in the plural.

This definition of political theologies has affinities with the discipline of history of ideas. It differs from the usage of the term in the vein of the legal theoretician of the Weimar Republic Carl Schmitt, who called "political theology" his theory of the sovereign state.[7] If anything, it historicizes the Schmittean political theology of the "Rechtsstaat" as one specific Christian response to political modernity.[8] Speaking about political theologies in the plural implies a certain agnosticism with regard to the ways in which religious men and women have defined their understanding of the political. It directs our glance to what all these different visions share, rather than to the specificity and particularity of each political theology, and is therefore structurally similar to speaking about modernities in the plural, as in "multiple modernities."[9]

The theory of multiple modernities holds that the Western trajectory of modernization as described by the classical sociological theories of modernization is not the only pathway to modernity. Instead, modernization as a process has taken different shapes across different countries and continents, according to the societal and cultural prerequisites provided, and we

[7] Carl Schmitt, *Politische Theologie: Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität* (1922; repr. 7 ed. Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1996).
[8] Cécile Laborde, 'Three Theses about Political Theology: Some Comments on Seyla Benhabib's "Return of Political Theology"', *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 17, no. 6 (2014): pp. 689–96 (693).
[9] Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (ed.), *Multiple Modernities* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2002).

find in the world a multiplicity of continually evolving modernities, which are all defined by the experience of *rupture* (with the past), of *liberty* (individual and collective self-determination), and of *mastery* (over the natural and social world).[10] Rupture, liberty, and mastery are the three structural features shared across multiple modernities.

Analogously, a theory of political theologies would hold that the Schmittean formulation of political theology is not the only possible definition of political theology. Instead, political theologies are responses that religious traditions give to the challenges of modernity according to their specific theological, historical and cultural resources. What they structurally share are the "problematics" that they address: the experience of rupture, liberty and mastery. These three challenges of modernity present themselves to the religious mind as the religious-cultural disconnect, religious freedom, and anthropocentric morality. They evoke different responses, which translate into different political theologies.

Religious-Cultural Disconnect

The term "religious-cultural disconnect" describes a situation in which a person's religious and cultural identity, his or her sense of religious and of cultural belonging are no longer perceived as naturally related. This rupture in self-understanding has widespread consequences on the individual and on society as a whole. Religious belief and the entire "parcel" of cultural belonging that comes along with it—a life structured around religious festivities, a diet in respect of religious commands, life-passages marked by religious rituals, and so forth—no longer have binding function on the individual and on the society he or she inhabits. Charles Taylor has described this situation as a condition, characteristic in particular of secular Western societies, where non-belief has become the "default-option," even though persons continue to seek orientation in their lives and even though religions continue to offer this orientation.[11]

The phenomenon of the religious-cultural disconnect has been described for different religions and different geographical areas,[12] but to my knowledge it has not yet been studied

[10] Peter Wagner, *Theorizing Modernity: Inescapability and Attainability in Social Theory* (London: Sage, 2001).
[11] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).
[12] Cf. Olivier Roy, *Holy Ignorance: When Religion and Culture Diverge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

explicitly in the Orthodox Christian context. However, the question of the religious-cultural disconnect seems of particular importance in the case of Orthodox churches. Due to their historical rootedness in nations and territories, paired with the particular historical experience of Communist repression of religion in large parts of Eastern Europe, the rupture between the religious and cultural poses a particular challenge to Orthodox churches.

Orthodox political theologies cannot avoid reacting to the modern rupture between religion and culture. One possible, albeit paradoxical, response among Orthodox clergy and believers is to negate the rupture despite overwhelming evidence of the contrary and to construct a fictional continuity between a glorious Orthodox past and present-day Orthodox identity. An example for such an attempt to "re-connect" in the Russian Orthodox context was an art exhibition at display in Moscow in 2015. Under the title "My History" and organized by the head of the conservative Sretenskiy Monastery in Moscow, Archimandrite Tikhon, the exhibition presented the Russian middle ages, from the baptism of Tsar Vladimir to the rule of Ivan the Terrible, as the focal point of Russian historical and religious identity, thus constructing a bridge of continuity between the past, when Orthodoxy was indeed the center of Russian nationhood, and the present.[13] The Patriarch of Moscow Kirill, too, has made the re-connect of Russia's present with the past Russian empire under an Orthodox ruler repeatedly the theme of patriotic speeches.[14] Such constructions disregard the impact of seventy years of Communist secularization from above and of the present-day secular constitution of the Russian Federation. However, the negation of the modern rupture or its alleged non-applicability to Orthodox consciousness is a recurring theme also in other Orthodox contexts, it is not specific to Russia alone,[15] and spells out one particular expression of Orthodox political theology.

[13] The exhibition had an elaborate website: http://www.rurikexpo.ru/ (accessed January 27, 2015).

[14] Russian Orthodox Church, 'Слово Святейшего Патриарха Кирилла на открытии XVIII Всемирного русского народного собора [Words of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill at the Opening of the 8th All-Russian People's Congress].' *Offical Website of the Moscow Patriarchate www.patriarchia.ru,* 11 November 2014, http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/3367103.html (last accessed 3 August 2016).

[15] For example, in some works of the Greek theologian Christos Yannaras, who constructs an ideological continuity between the Orthodox population under Ottoman rule and present-day Greece.

The other theological approach to the religious-cultural disconnect is to celebrate the rupture, rather than negate it. Social scientists generally associate the religious-cultural disconnect with the emergence of "pure-faith" religiosities.[16] The most frequently cited examples are the Salafists in the context of Islam, and Evangelicals in the context of Christian Protestantism. These are religious groups that consider the surrounding every-day culture as sinful or pagan and they are critical of the attempts of religious establishments to keep up a connection between public culture and religion. Instead, they construct religion as "pure faith," attainable and attractive to seekers across a variety of cultural settings, from South Korea to a Parisian suburb, from Indonesia to Brazil. The "purity" of the faith is often associated with a very strict observance of religious rituals and fundamentalism.

By contrast, in the Orthodox context, the "pure faith" mode is usually connoted somewhat differently: it is not associated, at least prima facie, with fundamentalism, but with liberalism. In a context where the political theology of the clerical mainstream invests all its energies into a re-connect of religion and public culture, the celebration of disconnect, the emphasis of rupture becomes a potentially politically liberal stance.

Religious Freedom

The second structural challenge of modernity is the experience of individual liberty. From the religious perspective, the modern affirmation of individual liberty translates into the question of individual religious freedom and the possibility of conversions. For many religious traditions today individual religious freedom and freedom of conscience epitomize the difficult relationship between religion and modernity, be it because these religions have membership models that are based on kinship rather than choice (for example some strands of Alevism), because religious norms forbid conversion (for example in Islam), or because conversions of believers upset the religious cosmology. No Orthodox political theology can ignore the question of individual religious freedom. The main question that interests me when trying to assess the range of available political theological responses is whether an Orthodox church tries to limit conversions through non-religious means by recurring to the laws of the State, or whether it accepts secular freedom of conscience norms as its natural environment,

[16] Roy, *Holy Ignorance.*

or, even stronger, whether it accepts the individual freedom of choice to believe or not to believe as part of the religious condition and divine plan for human freedom.

For the most part of their history Orthodox churches in Eastern and Southeastern Europe have enjoyed the privileged status of State churches, with laws that protected the majority churches. During the Communist period, individual religious freedom and freedom of conscience were oppressed throughout the region, regardless of individuals' religious belonging. One could have suspected that after this history of repression, Orthodox churches in Eastern Europe would have stood up for unconditional religious freedom, but this has not been the case. On the contrary, the official religious representatives in many countries have tried to curb individual religious freedoms and retain privileges for the Orthodox majorities (despite the fact that after decades of Communist repression of religion these majorities were mostly projections rather than backed up by hard sociological data). Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Orthodox Church, for example, was increasingly wary about the phenomenon of proselytization by other faith groups among the potential Orthodox flock. This concern translated into restrictive legislation on religious freedom in the 1997 Russian Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, accompanied by an official discourse of Russian "traditional religions," traditional meaning historically, culturally and ethnically rooted in the historical multi-ethnic Russian empire.[17]

Alternatively, many Orthodox theologians have incorporated modern individual liberty as a positive challenge into their religious self-understanding. They emphasize the centrality of divine-human freedom and of free choice, rather than coercion, in religion. The one Orthodox author who has maybe gone furthest in spelling out this lesson is Aristotle Papanikolaou, when he argues that it should be in the interest of all Orthodox churches to facilitate a maximum of religious freedom in their respective societies in order to render the choice of Orthodox Christianity truly free.[18]

Anthropocentric Morality

[17] Derek H. Davis, 'Editorial: Russia's New Law on Religion: Progress or Regress?' *Journal of Church and State* 39 (1997): pp. 645–56.
[18] Aristotle Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012).

The third central element of the modern condition is mastery over the natural and social world. What is meant by this is the empowerment of the individual to interact intentionally with him or herself and with the surrounding world. From the religious point of view the modern command to mastery constitutes a dual challenge. First, because religion itself becomes an object of human mastery; second, because an anthropocentric morality challenges the way in which religion sets limits to human mastery.

In the first sense, mastery refers to individual believers' selectivity regarding items of faith. Most believers today, at least in the West, no longer consider themselves "born into" a religion. Instead of accepting the whole package that comes along with a religious confession, they tend to select those bits and pieces that best meet their individual preferences. Selectivity is a characteristic feature of modern religiosity. In a highly individualized form of religiosity, believers select from the religious offer those contents that they consider most convincing, possibly extending their religiosity to non-church arenas (Davie 1994). Such self-constructed spiritualities may or may not translate into political theologies. They could be radically private and politically "silent," or they could be public in a very selective way and with regard to specific concerns, for example ecology.

The second aspect of mastery concerns public and individual morality. Political theologies are essentially challenged by the anthropocentric morality that modernity brings about. Inasmuch as they conceive of the individual in the context of a divine plan, the challenge in front of all political theologies is whether they seek to generalize their moral intuition and to translate the divine will into political structures, claiming that they have privileged access to the correct interpretation of the divine plan, or whether they consciously refrain from making concrete political claims, emphasizing, instead, the apophatic, unknowable nature of the divine plan and the particularity of the choice made by the believer.

The point becomes clearer when we consider the example of a morally controversial topic like prenatal diagnostics. This is a good example, because it is the direct result of human advancement in medicine and biotechnology, paired with the modern drive to mastery over nature itself. Political theologies can effectively take two stances on this problem; the first is universalist, the second particularist. From a universalist political theological standpoint, which is adopted by the Catholic as well as Orthodox Christian churches, limitless human mastery over life and death is problematic from an ethical point of view and sinful from a religious point

of view. Catholics and Orthodox may therefore consider desirable that limits to human mastery over human nature become a general norm, and may work, as religious constituency, toward laws of the State that limit prenatal diagnostics. From a particularist political theological standpoint, on the contrary, a believer would not present his or her religious norms about the sanctity of life as generalizable. The believer acting upon his or her conviction would act as a testimony, but would not recur to political strategy. Such a political theology would conceive of limits to human mastery only in the particular context of those who profess a certain belief, but not in the general context of public political culture and legislation.

To summarize: the modern condition presents three distinct challenges to religions: the religious-cultural disconnect (rupture), religious freedom (liberty) and an anthropocentric public morality (mastery). Political theologies are standpoints that religious people formulate in response to these challenges. I have distinguished two possible responses for each of the three challenges. Needless to say that there can be more than two in each of these cases, but the two responses I have spelled out delineate a continuum along which possible reactions may be situated. Table 1 schematizes this model.

	Modernity		
	Religious-cultural disconnect (rupture)	Religious freedom (liberty)	Anthropocentric morality (mastery)
Political Theologies	I.1. Attempt to re-connect secular culture and religious past	II.1. Religious freedom as a sign of apostasy	III.1. Universalistic standpoint: religious morality as public norm
	I.2. Pure-faith mode	II.2. Freedom as part and parcel of the religious condition	III.2. Particularist standpoint: religious morality as testimony

The advantage of this model over Habermas' model of modernization outlined in the beginning of this article is that it indicates three broad areas where confrontation between religious worldviews and modernity should be expected and it delimits a range of possible or likely responses, without setting any thresholds to indicate when a religious tradition has "come to terms with modernity." "Coming to terms with modernity" means, in my model, confronting the three structural challenges of modernity—rupture, liberty and mastery. We live in modern times. If one thinks of modernity as inherently dialectical, the range of conflictual responses vis-à-vis modernity spelled out by political theologies appears less a problem than an inevitable result of the modern condition.

It can be helpful to remember that this modern condition was experienced as constructive tension by philosophers like Marx and Nietzsche, around the turn of the nineteenth century to the twentieth century. These nineteenth-century thinkers were "simultaneously enthusiasts and enemies of modern life, wrestling inexhaustibly with its ambiguities and contradictions,"[19] and their self-irony and inner tensions stand in contrast to the flat dichotomizations that inform much of our contemporary debates. The study of different political theologies can therefore teach us as much about religions as it tells us about the predicaments of modernity.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion I would like to exemplify how some of the chapters contained in this book can be situated in the model I have just outlined. The political theology of Justin Popovic, described by Bogdan Lubardic in his contribution, is an example for a definition of Serbian culture and Orthodox religion as reconnected, with conservative implications for society and politics (I.1.); whereas the chapters by Davor Dzalto and Athanasios Papathanasiou each outline Orthodox versions of the religious-cultural disconnect, not in a

[19] Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 1983), p. 5.

pure-faith, but in a free-thinking and anarchist mode (I.2). Effie Fokas' article gives examples of cases where politics in Orthodox majority countries have come into conflict with European religious freedom norms. The background for all of these conflicts is the view that religious freedom is a sign of apostasy and that an Orthodox society should contain by law the effects of secularization on freedom of conscience (II.1). Exactly the opposite viewpoint is presented by Alexander Kyrlezhev, who argues that an Orthodox political theology would need to take in the idea that religious freedom is a part of the divine plan for salvation; a view shared by Pantelis Kalaitzidis and developed in the context of an eschatological vision of the church (II.2). The question of the Orthodox attitude to profane, anthropocentric morality is, finally, the topic of both Cyril Hovorun and Aristotle Papanikolaou. A civil religion presents, in fact, a universalistic religious morality, which pertains to be valid for all citizens (III.1). Both Hovorun and Aristotle point out how such a view can become problematic for the Church itself, which finds itself reduced to being a defender of moral conduct, rather than an agent of divine-human communication. Their proposals therefore move in the direction of the religious as a particularist moral standpoint that keeps away from trying to impose religious moral codes onto society as a whole (III.2). Taken together, the articles in this volume not only convey how broad the range of Orthodox political theologies is today, they also address political modernity from a variety of angles, bringing out how the confrontation with political modernity is not specific to Orthodoxy, nor to religion, but is our common challenge.