

**Orthodox Christianity in 21st Century Greece: The Role of Religion in Culture, Ethnicity and Politics**

VICTOR ROUDOMETOF & VASILIOS N. MAKRIDES, eds., 2010

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The book under review consists, apart from the Introduction, of two parts, each comprising five chapters. The first part discusses Orthodoxy, Greek ethnicity, and politics (for example, church-state relations and the status of non-Orthodox minorities) at a general level. The second part consists of case studies (for example, the debate of the building of a mosque in Athens, the role of women in Orthodoxy) illustrating the issues sketched in the first part. All the chapters variously combine historical, sociological, and anthropological methods. Six out of the eleven authors are women.

Taking into account the prominent role of Greece in European Union politics, surprisingly little has been written about the Orthodox Church of Greece, which

was established in 1833, except about church-state relations. The significance of the Church for Greek ethnicity and culture has often been claimed, but seldom studied.

The present work revolves around social, demographic, cultural, and other transformations which have taken place in Greece during the last two decades. They raise questions such as: how have changes affected the interplay between the Greek Orthodox Church, state, and society? What strategies have the Church and society adopted to adapt in the situation? Or, as Prodrornos Yannas put it (111), "how to live with, rather than suppress, difference?"

Several chapters discuss two topical issues: the position of women (within Orthodoxy and Orthodox society) and Islam. While Western presuppositions about the thorny official position of Muslims in Greece seem to be validated, it is evident that those concerning the position of women should be reconsidered, due, for example, to the fact that some Greek Orthodox theologians have recently seriously supported the ordination of women.

The collection clearly shows that the global religious revival has affected Greece, too. One indicator of this is that the Church re-entered, in 2000, the public field by contesting (unsuccessfully) the government's exclusion of religious affiliation from identity cards. (However, the ruling socialist party then lost the general elections in 2004.) It may be that, in the case of the identity card, the Church represented itself as anti-modernist, but by entering the scene it showed that it was, at least under the then archbishop Chrysostomos, willing to challenge secular transformation. As Victor Roudometof puts it, 'anti-modernism' is "a means to an end; it enables the church . . . to use the widespread localist feelings currently present throughout modern Greek society to reassert its public role . . . gain public support for its activities . . . and ultimately increase its visibility" (34). However, the disturbing consequence of such an adaptation to post-modern society is growing intolerance towards other religions, also known among religions other than Orthodoxy.

Does this mean that Orthodoxy would invigorate religious de-privatisation in Europe after Orthodox Cyprus, Bulgaria, and Romania joined the EU? The Greek case would suggest that Orthodoxy can at least challenge present secular understandings of religion in Western Europe. However, the authors of this book suggest that this cannot happen by a return to the past symphony of the Orthodox Church and the state. Rather, as Anastassios Anastassiadis shows, for example, the Church consists of various clerical and secular actors, who have various interests and aims, which all reshape the role of religion in twenty-first century Greece, the EU, and the world. Consider, for example, a group of monks (from a privately founded monastery), portrayed by Lina Molokotos-Liederman, who propagate Orthodoxy through rock music.

However, Orthodoxy, or religion in general for that matter, has also darker faces. As Vasilios Makrides's chapter indicates, for example, after the collapse of socialism in 1989–1991, the Church of Greece (and, I would add, some other churches as well—Orthodox and others) has evidently been involved in different illegal and dubious enterprises, such as smuggling, money-laundering, embezzlement, and bribery, not to speak of pedophilia. Without Makrides intending it, his chapter also throws new light on the financial crisis that shattered Greece in early 2010: the Church and the state institutions have dealt with change in a similar manner.

As a whole, this work—leaving aside some issues which could have been included, such as the changing role of monasteries (outside Athos), pilgrimage or male religiosity—is a much needed contextualisation of some current issues in the Greek (and Orthodox) situation. It also effectively dismantles the customary non-Orthodox presupposition of a monolithic, backward-looking Orthodox Church. What is still lacking is a comprehensive history of Orthodoxy (not only of the Orthodox Church) and religion in general in Greece in the twentieth century so that the issues which are discussed in the present volume can be further contextualised.

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