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AN ORTHODOX PERSPECTIVE ON POLITICAL THEOLOGY

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Abstract: Review of Kristina Stoeckl, Ingeborg Gabriel, Aristotle Papanikolau, eds., *Political Theologies in Orthodox Christianity. Common Challenges – Divergent Positions*, (T&T Clark Theology), Edinburgh: T&T Clark and Bloomberg, 2017

Key words: communism, Byzantine legacy, Church, politics, contemporary world, Kristina Stoeckl, Ingeborg Gabriel, Aristotle Papanikolau

From its first use in 1922 (Schmitt 1985), political theology has become a very important topic for the theological analyses. A lot of theologians from Catholic (like, Calvez 1985), or Protestant space (like: Cooper 2007; Losonczi, Aho, Singh 2011; Ricci 2012), have written interesting books, studies and articles about it, trying to highlight its meaning and to show how the love preached by Gospel can be understood and used in political life (Leuba 1994, 203).

While some have tried to link this topic even to Ecology and transform writers like the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople (cf. Bartholomew 2015,) in authors that offer interesting contributions to this area, others were rather focused on questions like the real interaction of the Church with nowadays world or on debatable subjects like the “theology of liberation”.

Neither the Orthodox space lacked for interesting researches dedicated to this theme. Although there cannot be seen major differences from one text to another regarding their richness, we still can talk about some very interesting and useful contributions that are exponential for the subject matter.

Therefore, in 2012, the Greek scholar Pantelis Kalaitzidis (Kalaitzidis 2012) from Volos Academy published an interesting booklet where he investigates this topic and he shows that the roots of political theology must be sought deeper in time, at the beginning of Christianity. Its maximum development in this confessional space must be seen in the Byzantine era. Using other interesting sources, he defines the political theology from an Orthodox perspective and speaks about its understanding in his confessional space. Also, in different books and journals, specialists from this space or researchers interested in it have tried to investigate the subject from different perspectives (see, for example: Piskstock 2011, 67-74).

Despite of these, a work was needed to summarize the Orthodox perspective and to present a complex theological, historical, sociological, philosophical and even economical perspective on the Orthodox approaches of this topic. Through the book entitled *Political Theologies in Orthodox Christianity. Common Challenges – Divergent Positions*, issued in 2017 under the coordination of the researchers Kristina Stoeckl, Ingeborg Gabriel, and Aristotle Papanikolau (Stoeckl, Gabriel, Papanikolau 2017) this mission is now accomplished. Segmented in five big parts, the volume brings together articles signed by researchers from all over Orthodox space, dedicated to different segments of this important topic. From its very beginning, the editors show that, although the book will contain references to the historical aspects, its main focus will be on the modern world and the way how, in this period, political theology has been developed. Therefore, they point the fact that:

“Modernity as a sociological phenomenon has implications for all areas of life, politics probably being the most important. The modern state balances this tension through the possibility of equal participation of all members of a polity and through a representative democratic government” (Stoeckl, Gabriel, Papanikolau 2017, 8).

After linking this affirmation with the theologocal space and showing its influence upon it, in the first part, entitled “Orthodox Political Theology and Modernity”, the reader can find general approaches like the one dedicated to the relationship between modernity and political theology, written by Kristina Stoeckl. Another one is the approach signed by Vasilios N. Makrides where he compares the Orthodox background to the Catholic one and where he shows how they have influenced the approach of the subject. The text written by professor Ingeborg Gabriel from Wien is dedicated to the Catholic perspective on political theology while the one of Effie Fokas focuses on the challenges brought by the religious freedom to the Orthodoxy.

In the second part, “Prophetic Political Theology”, the reader can find the analysis of Athanasios Papathanasiou entitled “The politics of a weak force”, but also interesting studies signed by Davor Dzalto, Brandon Gallaher and the aforementioned Pantelis Kalaitzidis, already known in the Romanian space through his work *Orthodoxy and modernity* (Kalaitzidis 2010). He speaks there about the way how the political theology can be seen in the context of Greek economic crisis.

The third one, entitled in a bold way “Ecclesial Political Theology,” contains also three interesting texts, signed by Serbian and Polish Theologians. The last of them written by Bogdan Lubardic brings into attention the interesting and, for some readers, the controversial personality of the Serbian theologian and saint, Justin Popovitch (for more information about his life and theology, see: Bulovich, Jetvich 2009, 7-9). He talks here about the relationship between theology and politics in modernity as it is reflected in Justin Popovitch’s thoughts.

Then, in the fourth one, entitled “Civic Political Theology”, Papanikolau comes with a new article about the public ecclesiology. He is accompanied by Konstantinos Delikostantis who speaks about the relationship between the Orthodoxy and the modern secular state. The diligent Archimandrite Cyril Hovorun, author of a recent and interesting sociological approach of the ecclesiology (see, Hovorun 2017) analyses the role of the civil religion in the Orthodox *milieu*.

The last part of the book, entitled “Symphonic political theology,” brings also three interesting approaches about the way how, during the time, politics and theology have interacted in different spaces and contexts.

The first one, signed by Elena Namli speaks about three important topics, namely: theology, politics and power, showing the way how the

interaction between them has influenced not only the history of the Church, but also the one of the whole world.

The second article, written by the Romanian theologian Radu Preda, specialized in the history of communism and author of an interesting analysis dedicated to its ideology (see, Preda 2009, but also Preda 2010 and Preda 2011, where there are interesting comparisons between the Russian and Romanian situation), speaks, as it was expected, about the way how Orthodoxy and democracy have developed their relationships in post-1989 Romania (for more information about this topic, see also: Conovici 2009, Conovici 2010). This idea is somehow continued by the text of Mariyan Stoyadinov, who presents the same topic, but adapted to the Bulgarian realities.

Plainfield for publication from 2014, as the editor shows in the foreword (Stoeckl, Gabriel, Papanikolau 2017, 5), the book entitled: *Political Theologies in Orthodox Christianity. Common Challenges – Divergent Positions*, dedicated to a very important and debated topic for nowadays world (Stoeckl, Gabriel, Papanikolau 2017, 7) is not only an interesting approach that offers an Orthodox perspective on this topic, but also a complex presentation of the historical background and its influence upon the Eastern World. In the same time the book constitutes an inter-confessional approach.

Starting from the idea that “the reality of the Orthodox Churches in the twenty-first century is much more complex than the simplistic notion of a so-called clash of civilizations might suggest” (Stoeckl, Gabriel, Papanikolau 2017, 7; cf. Huntington 1993, 22-50), the authors investigate the dynamic of the relationship between state and religion by emphasizing the evolution of it and some possible perspectives for their improvement in the future. For these reasons, but also for many others like the historical retrospective, the objective and dynamic investigation, actuality of message or the accuracy of the offered data, this book surely deserves the attention of the specialized readers.

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