DOXA & PRAXIS
Exploring Orthodox Theology

Dr Pantelis Kalaitzidis, series editor

In light of the current challenges faced by global Christianity, Doxa & Praxis, a collaborative effort of the Volos Academy and WCC Publications, invites creative and original reflection that reappraises, reappropriates and further develops the riches of Orthodox thought for a deep renewal of Orthodox Christianity and for the benefit of the whole oikoumene.

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ORTHODOX THEOLOGY
IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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PANTELIS KALAITZIDIS
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FOREWORD
Pantelis Kalaitzidis*

Over the last several decades, Orthodoxy has been experiencing a creative and fruitful theological and ecclesial renewal, which is taking place in various contexts within the Orthodox world, in spite of some painful changes and the temptation of introversion. In our current post-secular age, Orthodoxy defines itself not as a besieged fortress or a defensive stronghold but as a genuine liberating message and rejuvenating spiritual experience, faithful to its apostolic roots and ecumenical vocation and ready to respond to the existential needs of humanity with its “words of eternal life” (cf. Jn. 6:68). The recent ferment in and growing influence of Orthodox theology have indeed led to wider appreciation of the strength and the richness of Orthodox tradition. Specifically in light of the current challenges faced by global Christianity, we are invited to a creative and original reflection that reappraises, reappropriates, and further develops the riches of Orthodox thought and insights for a deep renewal of Orthodox Christianity and for the benefit of the whole oikoumene. This is precisely the goal and the main concern of this new series, Doxa & Praxis: Exploring Orthodox Theology, a collaborative effort of the Volos Academy, Volos, Greece, and WCC Publications, Geneva.

We could not imagine a better beginning for this new series than this book by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware on Orthodox Theology in Twenty-first Century, which comes out of the Volos Academy’s

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series of public lectures. Faithful to its founding principle, which defines it as “an open forum of thought and dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the broader scholarly community of intellectuals worldwide, without defensive attitude or apologetic mind,” the Volos Academy for Theological Studies of the Holy Metropolis of Demetrias, in Volos, Greece, during the academic year 2003-2004, through a self-critical and open-minded discourse, attempted to raise timely and vital issues in the Orthodox ecclesial and theological self-consciousness. Thus, after the series of public lectures, seminars, and international conferences on Church and Eschatology; Orthodoxy and Modernity; Gender and Religion–The Role of Women in the Orthodox Church; Islam and Fundamentalism–Orthodox Christianity and Globalization; Theology and Modern Literature; Theology and Contemporary Church Architecture, and before the Volos Academy’s well-known international conferences on Forgiveness, Reconciliation and Peace; Turmoil in Post-war Theology: The Greek “Theology of the ‘60s”; Eucharist, Church, and the World; The Participation of Orthodox Women in the Ecumenical Movement; Church and Culture; Biblical Liberation Theology, Patristic Theology, and the Ambivalences of Modernity; Neo-Patristic Synthesis or Post-Patristic Theology: Can Orthodox Theology Be Contextual?; Christian Presence and Witness in Palestine and the Middle East Today: Theological and Political Challenges, and more, the Volos Academy dedicated its 2003-2004 program to the study of the issue of Orthodoxy and Multiculturalism. It was ground-breaking for Orthodox theology. The importance and the timeliness of this topic, both for the Orthodox Church and its theology as well as for the so-called traditionally Orthodox societies cannot be underestimated.

In fact, as was pointed out by many of the speakers of the
program on Orthodoxy and Multiculturalism, the challenge of globalization and the reality of multicultural societies, with the osmosis of populations, cultures, and religions, urgently raise the question of religious otherness, the relation with the “other,” who images the “Other” par excellence. The appearance and consolidation of many types of “otherness” (national, religious, ideological, social, age-based, etc.) in the lives of peoples and societies has led to the loss of a homogeneous social and religious space and to the radical transformation of closed traditional societies into something new. Economic development, information technology and the communication revolution, rapid geopolitical changes, and the consequent demographic population movements have brought about a radical amalgamation of peoples and a cultural osmosis. These factors make the demand for religious co-existence and dialogue between cultures an urgent matter, while at the same time pointing out the danger of religious syncretism—leaving always open, however, the call to evangelism and mission—and calling the Orthodox Church to become aware of the above changes, and to prepare itself for an appropriate theological and pastoral answer to them.

If multiculturalism and otherness represent the first great challenge for Orthodoxy today, the rapid progress of science and the biotechnology revolution—which radically changed the playing field in anthropology and bioethics—represent another equally important challenge. It is to this “other” challenge that His Eminence, Metropolitan of Diokleia Kallistos Ware (Ecu-

Menologial Patriarchate) – former Spalding Lecturer in Eastern Orthodox Studies at Oxford University and presently Emeritus Fellow of Pembroke College, Oxford – aims to respond in this lecture. Metropolitan Kallistos, one of the pre-eminent theological and ecclesiastical figures of our time, gave his public lecture in Volos, Greece, on *Orthodox Theology in the Twenty-first Century*, in the framework of the program on *Orthodoxy and Multiculturalism*, on April 28, 2004, in front of a packed audience that turned out not only from the city of Volos but from other parts of Greece as well, all of whom came to hear and meet with this distinguished hierarch and theologian.

The dominant motif of Metropolitan Kallistos Ware’s lecture is the thesis that while, during the twentieth century, the primary theological issue was ecclesiological – that is, the problem of the identity and the nature of the Church – in the twenty-first century, in light of rapid developments in science and information technology, environmental biotechnology, environmental ethics and bioethics, the quintessential problem for Orthodox theology will be the anthropological. The conditions and possibilities of dialogue between Orthodox theology, first with its past and with its ecclesiological/eucharistic self-consciousness, and then with the challenges of ecology, genetic engineering, biotechnology and modern anthropology, represent the major challenges outlined in this short but rich text. Its thematic autonomy in regard to the remaining papers of the series of public lectures on *Orthodoxy and Multiculturalism* is the main reason for this separate publication.

Before concluding this Foreword, let me extend warm thanks to His Eminence, Metropolitan Kallistos Ware of Diokleia, both for honoring us by accepting the Volos Academy’s invitation to deliver his public lecture and for his kindness in giving us
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permission to publish it as a book, first in Greek and now in English. For the Volos Academy and WCC Publications, it is truly a privilege and blessing to start this new joint series, Doxa & Praxis: Exploring Orthodox Theology, with this brilliant text, which says much and promises much more for the future and rejuvenation of Orthodox theology in the twenty-first century. Sincere thanks is also due to the Manager of WCC Publications, Mr. Michael West, for his continual support and encouragement, and his vital contribution to the preparation and launch of this new joint series Doxa & Praxis: Exploring Orthodox Theology.
ORTHODOX THEOLOGY
IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY
Chapter 1
LOOKING TO THE PAST:
OUR CHIEF TASK IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Let us begin by asking ourselves a double question, of crucial relevance to our situation as Orthodox Christians facing the cultural diversity and pluralism of the contemporary world. What has been the principal issue confronting Orthodox theology during the century that has just drawn to a close? And what will be the principal issue before us during the new millennium, as we embark upon the twenty-first century? Manifestly this double question can be approached from many different points of view, and others will certainly disagree with my order of priorities.

For myself, I see the dominant theme in Orthodox theology during the past century as ecclesiology. Indeed, well before the dawn of the twentieth century, in the 1840s and 1850s, the problem of the essential nature of the Church had already been raised in Russia by Slavophiles such as Aleksei Khomiakov. They were seeking to identify the distinctive character of Orthodoxy, as contrasted with Roman Catholicism on the one side and with Protestantism on the other; and this led them to insist, in their vision of the Church, upon the primacy of love over power. It is here, in their concern to liberate ecclesiology from juridical categories, that they made their most characteristic and enduring contribution to Orthodox thinking. That which holds the Church together, so they insisted, is not power of jurisdiction but mutual love. As Khomiakov affirmed, “The knowledge of the truth is given to mutual love.” By virtue of this mutual love, the Church, in its sobornost or collegial catholicity, is a living miracle of free unanimity. In the Church, and in it alone, mutual love – after the likeness of the eternal perichoresis or movement of reciprocal indwelling within the Holy Trinity – effects a genuine reconciliation between liberty and unity.

During the twentieth century this question of the essential nature of the Church was posed in the Orthodox world with fresh
urgency. This was above all for two reasons. The first reason was the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917, followed by the Bolshevik persecution of Christianity. Hitherto the Russian Orthodox Church had been closely integrated into the total structure of the state and nation, enjoying as a matter of course a privileged status at every level, whether politically, economically or in the realm of education. As a result of the 1917 revolution, the Constantinian *symphonia* between Church and state had been abruptly terminated, and this sudden change led Russians and other Orthodox to ask themselves: What is the Church here for? If it ceases to be a national or state institution, what then is its distinctive function? What does it do that nobody and nothing else can do? Moreover, if the ecclesiastical hierarchy no longer has any support from the civil authorities, what holds the Church together and maintains it in unity?

A second factor that brought to the forefront the question of ecclesiology was the widespread emigration of Orthodox Christians to the West (this, indeed, was partly the direct result of the first factor, the Russian revolution). Dwelling as a small minority among non-Orthodox Christians, Greeks, Russians, Arabs and others were challenged to give an account of their distinctive self-understanding as Orthodox; and this challenge was compounded by their growing involvement in the ecumenical movement. Once more as Orthodox we were obliged to ask ourselves: What is the Church here for? What do we as members of the Orthodox Church share with Western Christians, and what makes us different? What have we to teach the non-Orthodox, and what have we to learn from them?

To this question, “Why the Church?” a one-sided yet prophetic answer was given by Archpriest Nikolai Afanassieff, who had been brought up in imperial Russia but was driven into exile in 1920, set-
tling first in Serbia and then in Paris. In his search for the essential meaning of the Church, he looked back, behind the conversion of the Emperor Constantine and the “establishment” of Christendom in the fourth century, to the situation of the pre-Nicene Christianity. Appealing to the ecclesiology of St Ignatius of Antioch, he emphasized the fundamental bond between Church and the Eucharist. The Church, he maintained, is primarily a eucharistic organism, which becomes authentically itself when, and only when, it celebrates the Divine Liturgy. The distinctive and primary function of the Church is to celebrate the Lord’s Supper, the Messianic banquet of the age to come, until Christ returns (1 Cor. 11:26). Ecclesial unity is not imposed from above by power of jurisdiction but created from within through sharing in the Saviour’s body and blood. It is Holy Communion that holds the Church together: “We who are many are one body, because we all partake of the one loaf” (1 Cor. 10:17). The Eucharist constitutes, in a fallen and sinful world, the life-giving source of all the Church’s social, cultural and educational work. Without the Eucharist there would be no Church. The Church makes the Eucharist, and the Eucharist makes the Church. The Church is not a department of state but the place in which the Mystical Sacrifice is offered; its determining principle is not national or ethnic but sacramental.

Such was the theology of the Church that Afanassieff advanced in his celebrated essay, “The Church Which Presides in Love,” published in French in 1960 and in English in 1963.

senting ideas that he had first developed thirty years earlier. In this way he re-emphasized the basic intuition of the Slavophiles that the Church is held together by mutual love. But, whereas the Slavophiles had taken as their model for organic unity the Russian peasant commune, Afanassieff gave a greater clarity and cogency to their standpoint by affirming a model that was not sociological but mystical. Mutual love, he insisted —in a way that the Slavophiles had failed to do— is essentially eucharistic in character. The love that holds the Church together is not just an inner subjective feeling but has as its basis an objective act, the joint participation of Christians in Holy Communion.

In thus underlining the eucharistic nature of the Church, Afanassieff brought to the forefront its all-embracing character, as a reality that transcends national and cultural boundaries. The Slavophiles, by taking as their model the Russian peasant commune, had consciously and deliberately given to their ecclesiology a specifically Slav ethos. The catholicity (sobornost) of the Church, in their view, found its truest and fullest expression in Holy Russia. Afanassieff, on the other hand, by taking as his model the Eucharist, was no longer thinking in terms of Russian ethnicity. For in Christ Jesus “there is no longer Jew or Greek” (Gal. 3:28). And so in the Eucharist, as the sacrament of Christ’s body and blood, divisions of race or nationality are surmounted; meeting around the Lord’s table, we are all one. Eucharistic ecclesiology, then, is particularly appropriate to our Christian situation in the contemporary world, living as we do in a milieu that to an ever-increasing extent is multicultural and supranational.

Independently of Afanassieff for the most part, other Russian émigré theologians — most notably Archpriest Sergei Bulgakov and Archpriest Georges Florovsky — also recognized the essential con-
nection between Church and Eucharist. For Florovsky, the Church is above all the Body of Christ; and he has well aware of the double meaning of the term “Body of Christ”, signifying as it does both the sacrament of the Eucharist and the community of the Church.

Among Greek Orthodox theologians the eucharistic understanding of the Church has been systematically developed by John Zizioulas, Metropolitan of Pergamon, who has deepened and moderated Afanassieff’s approach, providing it with a more exact Patristic basis. In particular he questions the sharp contrast made by Afanassieff between “eucharistic” and “universal” ecclesiology. Metropolitan John points out that the Eucharist exists, not in isolation, but within a context that is both doctrinal and hierarchical. It is not enough to state, in unqualified terms, “The Eucharist makes the Church.” It is necessary to add: The Church is present in its fullness only in that Eucharist at which the true faith is proclaimed, and which meets under the presidency of the bishop or with his blessing. Moreover, each local Church, as it celebrates the Eucharist, does so in communion with all the other local Churches throughout the world. The “eucharistic” and the “universal” understandings of the Church are thus not alternatives but complementary, and both “models” have a place in a balanced ecclesiology. In short, Afanassieff has over-emphasized the local aspect of the Church.

Fortunately this eucharistic vision of the Church has not remained during the twentieth century merely an abstract theory, but its emergence has been accompanied by a revival of frequent communion in many Orthodox parishes (although, alas, not by any means in all). This is surely important. A eucharistic ecclesiology that is not reflected in the actual practice of the faithful would be unrealistic and even hypocritical. In the revival of frequent communion, a pioneering role was played in pre-revolutionary Russia by St John of Kronstadt. I recall his words each time that I celebrate the Liturgy: “The Eucharist is a continual miracle.”

Such, then, is my answer to the first part of my question: the principal theological issue in twentieth-century Orthodoxy has been ecclesiology. It is, of course, no more than a partial answer. Another vitally important development in recent Orthodox theology has been the rediscovery of hesychast spirituality, the renewed interest in St Symeon the New Theologian and St Gregory Palamas, and the ever-increasing influence of The Philokalia. Here a leading part has been played by the Russians Vladimir Lossky, Archbishop Basil Krivocheine, and Archpriest John Meyendorff, by the Greeks George Mantzarides, Panagiotis Christou and Protopresbyter John Romanides and by the Romanian Archpriest Dumitru Staniloae. Nonetheless I see the past century as par excellence ecclesiological in its orientation.