Orthodox Christianity and Economic Development: A Critical Overview

Christianisme orthodoxe et développement économique : un aperçu critique

El cristianismo ortodoxo y el desarrollo económico: síntesis crítica

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Orthodox Christianity and Economic Development

A Critical Overview

A cursory look at both the older and more recent literature on modernization and religion in countries with a predominant Orthodox culture suffices to show that the relationship between Orthodox Christianity (commonly called Orthodoxy) and modernity has been viewed as problematic, if not outspokenly negative (Makrides, 2012a). This is because, for historical and other reasons, Orthodox societies have largely stayed outside the realm of West European modernity and have thus been only partially influenced by it. The long Ottoman domination over the Balkans, as well as the multidimensional gap between Tsarist Russia and Western Europe account for this. Another important reason for this lag can be found in the pervasive Orthodox anti-Westernism, initially triggered by the historical tension and separation between the two Christian worlds in the East and West. Modernity with its major facets (e.g., rationalization, secularization, individualization) as a West European phenomenon was viewed by the Orthodox East mostly in negative terms, given the fact that modernization was for a long time considered coterminous with Westernization. This led to deep internal cleavages between anti-Western and pro-Western currents within Orthodox societies, with detrimental effects on the state-induced modernization programs in the respective countries. It is thus no wonder that such programs remained mostly incomplete (Makrides, Uffelman, 2003).

More specifically, economic problems and deficits in countries with a predominant Orthodox tradition have not been attributed to the influence of this branch of Christianity alone. Yet, the latter was often viewed as basically different from Western Christianity (both Roman Catholicism and Protestantism), as less compatible with modernity, and as having played a role in the overall underdevelopment of Eastern and South Eastern Europe. Such views were expressed both by outside (mostly Western), but also by native observers of Orthodox cultures. In the 1990s, for example, this became evident during the wars in the former Yugoslavia, when the Orthodox Serbs were usually portrayed as less developed and modern than the Catholic Croats (Prodromou, 1996). This coincided with Huntington's geopolitical theory about the "clash

of civilizations” (1996), which presented predominantly Orthodox countries as mostly incompatible with Western modernity. Such perspectives have since been sharply criticized in the context of postmodern and postcolonial theories, which revealed the errors, ideological premises and biases of the dominant Western discourse about the “Other” (Bakić-Hayden, 1995; Todorova, 1997). Further developments in social sciences and cultural studies, such as the model of “multiple modernities” (Eisenstadt, 2000) and efforts to overcome Eurocentrism, also led to more pluralist and nuanced perspectives in dealing with Orthodox cultures (Hann, 2011).

As far as economic development is concerned, the relations between religion and economy constitute a multifaceted and interdisciplinary area of research, especially after the seminal contributions of Max Weber, who focused mainly on Protestantism and its particular work ethic. Its Eastern Christian counterpart, namely Orthodox Christianity, was only peripherally taken into consideration in this context. The main question here was whether Orthodoxy could foster or inhibit economic development. Trying to account for the numerous deficits of Eastern and South Eastern Europe compared to Western Europe, various analyses explained this situation by reference, among other things, to the lack of a specific work ethic in Orthodoxy and to the Orthodox strong anti-capitalist predilections (Müller-Armack, 1959). In recent years, the economic crisis within the Eurozone, particularly affecting a predominantly Orthodox country like Greece, was also viewed as a proof of this argument. However, the entire situation is not as clear as it appears at first glance. Across Orthodox history, examples of economic success among certain individuals, groups or local communities are not unusual, showing that Orthodox beliefs are not necessarily detrimental to entrepreneurial spirit. This article hence attempts to bring broader contextualization to this issue, drawing on a wide variety of materials from different Orthodox cultures, both past and present.

Applying the Weberian paradigm to the Orthodox case

What are the relations between Orthodoxy and economic development according to the influential Weberian tradition? In his comparative civilizational studies, Weber himself showed great interest in Tsarist Russia and the radical sociopolitical developments there, acquiring a reading knowledge of Russian and familiarizing himself with the works of L. Tolstoy and F. M. Dostoevsky. He also took occasionally Russian Orthodoxy into consideration and had the clear intention (expressed in a letter in 1919) of examining more thoroughly the Orthodox economic ethic (Fügen, 1985: 109). But he never completed this plan due to his untimely death. Drawing mainly on Russian religious philosophy (Treiber, 1991, 1995), he emphasized the mystical, collective and sentimental character of Orthodox religiosity, in contrast to the more rational character of Protestant religiosity, which brought strict discipline to life, and asserted the responsibility of each individual in the worldly quest for

success as evidence of electedness and future salvation. For Weber, Orthodox Christianity was too otherworldly-oriented to produce any significant and rationally articulated economic ethic and to have any lasting social and cultural influence (Weber, 1988: 466-467). The eminent Protestant theologian Adolf von Harnack (1916) also expressed similar views.

Since then, Weberian perspectives have been generally applied to the examination of Eastern and South Eastern Europe as a whole (Shils, 1993; Davydov, Gaidenko, 1995; Sterbling, Zipprian, 1997; Daskalov, 1999). The first scholar to specifically focus on Orthodox Christianity was Müller-Armack (1959) in a study first published in 1945. He attempted a systematic comparison between the major Christian traditions (Calvinism, Lutheranism, Catholicism and Orthodoxy) and identified numerous commonalities, but also different trajectories in several domains, including their economic ethic. Filling in some lacunae left by Weber, Müller-Armack looked more systematically at the Orthodox case and singled out certain basic features with great socio-cultural significance; for example, the lack of tension between church and state and the subjection of the former to the latter; a traditionalist work ethic, coupled with a religious legitimation aimed at safeguarding the existing *status quo*; sociopolitical centralism and limited structural differentiation; the overwhelming significance of the community or of the broader kin group; the lack of individual innovative endeavors; and the absence of major conflicts between religious, state and social actors. For him, contrary to Protestantism, but also to Roman Catholicism, Orthodox Christianity in its post-Byzantine forms did not promote any specific work ethic and thus could not lead to any significant socioeconomic development and change.

This issue was taken up in the 1960s by Savramis (1960, 1963), who was the first scholar to systematically apply Weber's categories to the Orthodox world, with a focus on Byzantium and modern Greece. Savramis shared the aforementioned assessment of Müller-Armack, aside from some revisions and completions. He supported the view that Orthodox Christianity had historically put greater emphasis on less social, more passive and world-denying values by focusing its attention mostly to otherworldly-oriented activities and world escapism. This is best evidenced among Orthodox monastics, who usually prefer to reside outside the world, in contrast to the Catholic monastic orders and their strong worldly social activism. He thus considered the later development of Orthodox monasticism as one reason for the economic decline of Byzantium (Savramis, 1962: 39-57, 81-94). Orthodoxy also lacked the social potential characterizing Western Christianity as a whole, as illustrated in the absence of a comprehensive Orthodox economic and broadly social ethic. He also believed that various phenomena associated with capital accumulation among the Orthodox were basically connected with the type of economy Weber called "adventurous capitalism" (*Abenteuerkapitalismus*); in other words, an economy that was not linked with a rational and thoroughly developed capitalistic spirit of wealth maximization following an internal motivation and an inner-worldly ascetic life, as in the Protestant case.

Another scholar, Buss (1989a, 1989b, 2003), thoroughly examined the relationship between Orthodoxy, modernity and economic development, this time by applying Weber's categories to Russian Orthodoxy. He identified the particular nature of the Russian state (patrimonial and later bureaucratic) as a crucial hindrance to commercial capitalism in Russia. In this reasoning, the Orthodox tradition only played an indirect role in this process, through its close connection to the patrimonial state, and by its favoring of specific spiritual features (e.g., mysticism, otherworldliness) central to the "Russian spirit" and not conducive to a reorganization of political and economic life. Also rooted in Orthodoxy was according to him the development of a Russian pariah-ethic, which supported passive and submissive values that could foster neither an internal motivation towards a mastery of the world nor an autonomous individual (Buss, 2003: 28-58, 91-95, 99-163). Thus, it is only by its influence on the broader Russian sociopolitical order that Orthodoxy inhibited the economic development in Russia. The lack of a direct positive link between Orthodoxy and the capitalist ethic, as well as the relative disconnect of the church from social and economic issues have also been noted in other Orthodox contexts, such as in Bulgaria (Kalkandjieva, 2010).

Contrary to these views, other scholars have argued that for a variety of reasons Orthodox Christianity cannot be considered as the (main) cause for the historically belated development and modernization or the economic underdevelopment of the respective societies. Also examining the lack of a capitalist development in Russian history before the second half of the 19th century, Baron (1970: 325) believed that the economic ethic of Russian Orthodoxy, and "*in general, the question of motivation [were] not a decisive ingredient*" against the development of a capitalistic spirit and related institutions. Rather than to a specific religious ethic, he pointed to the specific relationship between the government and the commercial classes, namely to a patrimonial state based on an all-encompassing and authoritarian ideology, both in the Tsar's proprietary claims and in his efforts to harness the country's resources and energies for his own purposes. In such an environment, capitalist free enterprises of private initiative could not be sanctioned and flourish (Baron, 1970: 327-336).

Yet another scholar, Stoianovich (1960), explored the Balkan Orthodox merchant class in the 18th century, in which Greeks played an eminent role. He thus observed that this class was economically successful under Ottoman rule, in the Danubian Principalities (Wallachia and Moldavia), as well as in Russia, Central and Western Europe. He concluded that it was easier for the Orthodox merchants at the time to attain wealth and thus exercise thereby political influence. Their wealth, regardless of its origin, received in most cases the blessing of the church and was seen as a sign of God-induced prosperity. Stoianovich (1960: 294) also claimed that the "*enormous number of fast days in the Orthodox calendar forced the faithful to practice frugality religiously and thus accumulate wealth for future investment, when times were propitious, as during most of the eighteenth century*". In other words, he spoke of an "Orthodox economic ethic" among the prosperous and successful Orthodox

Balkan merchants, but he did not explain this phenomenon using the Weberian thesis about the Protestant work ethic and its theological background leading to an inner-worldly asceticism and sanctioning the methodical pursuit of wealth.

Going further in the critique of the aforementioned views of Müller-Armack, Papaderos (1975), on the other hand, emphasized the need for a more complex view of the whole topic and pointed to the numerous cases where the Orthodox convictions of a believer favored economic activities and development. In his view, Orthodoxy is not exclusively otherworldly-oriented and indifferent to society, as the usual stereotype has postulated. Kokosalakis (1995) also pointed to the cultural specificities of Eastern Orthodoxy and their repercussions on society and culture. He argued that there is no evidence that the Orthodox belief system inhibits economic development, profiteering or any other monetary activities. Related problems should rather be attributed to other historical, political and social causes, not to the decisive influence of Orthodoxy. In his view, Orthodoxy seems to be compatible with global capitalism while at the same time trying to remedy its many deficits and deadlocks.

How different were Byzantine and Latin economies?

Considering the above diverging views, it is useful to take a more diachronic look at the trajectory of economic development in Orthodox contexts starting with Byzantium and its economic history (Laiou, 2002a). Byzantine economy flourished in numerous domains, experienced dynamism, stability and growth, presented various parallels to the West, and was successful on its own terms over a long period of time. Byzantium was also the only political entity in the Middle Ages, compared to those in the Muslim Near East and in Western Europe, that permitted money-lending while charging interest (by laymen, not by ecclesiastics), and regulated its rates. There was, though, a certain suspicion towards this practice, and canonists condemned it because of avarice and dishonest gain (Laiou, 2002c: 1136-1138). But there is enough evidence that churches and monasteries in Syria and Egypt accommodated themselves to the “credit economy” of Late Antiquity. It was about a church’s compromise with the established mundane credit practices, which in turn had an impact on the implementation of the Christian redistributive ideals (Samellas, 2017), namely the “transcendent credit system” and the concomitant spiritual cost-benefit calculations.

The differences between East and West became greater from the 13th century onwards, as the Byzantine Empire began unravelling, which severely affected its economy and from which it never recovered. Thus, for political rather than religious reasons, Byzantium was not able to make the transition to an early capitalist economy (Laiou, 2002b), as was the case in Italian cities. But Byzantines were far from unaware of these tremendous changes that were taking place in the West. Thus, Byzantine aristocrat Nikolaos Notaras invested a significant part of his fortune in the banks of Genova and Venice, as did his son, the Grand Duke Loukas Notaras (Matschke, 1995).

A comparison between Byzantine and Latin economic thought also reveals significant differences, which grew bigger from the High Middle Ages onwards, as the West seemed to deal in greater depth and detail with issues of profit, price, trade and money-lending. The seeds of the later secularization of economic thinking started becoming evident. By contrast, Byzantine economic thought has been described as generally lacking in reflexivity, systematization and more comprehensive approaches to long-term economic processes (Gotsis, 1996: 15-52). It was largely influenced by the Christian view of the material world and earthly life as being transient and was permeated by ethical principles, such as justice, modesty, ascetic life, and self-sufficiency (Laiou, 2002c). Byzantine and Latin economic thought also differed in their religious valuation of entrepreneurship and labor, as well as in the emergence and formation of secular enterprise values (Drakopoulou-Dodd, Gotsis, 2007).

A direct causal relationship between Orthodoxy and economic decline is nowadays usually avoided where Byzantium is concerned. Discussions of Orthodox actors or doctrines are usually placed within the broader context of specific sociopolitical developments (Laiou, 1996). Generally, the Church Fathers put more emphasis on the negative association between Christian identity and wealth accumulation. They recommended philanthropic activities as a necessary outlet for directing accumulated wealth to serve the much-valued Christian virtue of love. In some cases, though, we can identify elements associated with Orthodoxy, which might have inhibited economic development. This holds true for the pervasive Orthodox traditionalism, which grew much stronger in late Byzantium and often transformed into a broader social, political and cultural traditionalism inhibiting innovation and renewal in all domains. This was fostered by the progressive decline of Byzantium, its internal structural deficits and its growing detachment from Western Europe, which gradually became more innovative and was able to foster groundbreaking social changes (Makrides, 2012b).

Successful Orthodox entrepreneurship and church economic activities

Let us now consider the numerous historical instances of Orthodox actors, who engaged in successful businesses and became prosperous and influential entrepreneurs. Such data may be drawn on the Orthodox Balkans under the many centuries of Ottoman domination. In the period following the fall of Constantinople in 1453, numerous Greeks remained quite active in successful commercial activities of various domains (İnalçık, 1993). The relations between the Patriarchate of Constantinople, the sole institution surviving the fall of Byzantium, and the Ottoman central administration was in many respects an economic one. From the perspective of the Ottoman authorities, the Greek Orthodox prelates (but also the monks and their monasteries) were primarily regarded as tax collectors providing cash income for the state,

a status that was the result of constant negotiations between all involved parties, despite their often-conflicting interests. The Patriarchate was thus seen as similar to other such tax bodies and as such quite an important institution in the Ottoman administration. Unavoidably, this resulted very often in constant competition for ecclesiastical seats and corruption between the contenders and their supporters. This entire situation, however, which lasted for centuries, strengthened the involvement of the church in economic activities (Papademetriou, 2015). In this context, a new Orthodox and financially successful class also emerged, the so-called Phanariots (17th-18th c.), with their influential family dynasties, who came to occupy key positions in the Ottoman administration and acted as catalysts for significant social, political and cultural changes (Philliou, 2009). The relations between the other Eastern Patriarchates (namely of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem) and the Ottoman central administration during the long Ottoman period were also economic (e.g., taxing the income of the church's *vakfs*) (Çolak, 2012). Inevitably, economic activities were also of central importance to Orthodox institutions after the end of the Ottoman period, especially in turbulent political environments; for example, to the Patriarchate of Jerusalem in Palestine under the British Mandate (Papastathis, 2013; Papastathis, Kark, 2016).

As the Ottoman Empire gradually entered the capitalist world-economy from the second half of the 18th century onwards (Wallerstein, Kasaba, 1983), many Orthodox subjects expanded economically in an unprecedented way. An Orthodox merchant class emerged that was comprised of not only Ottoman, but also of Habsburg and Russian subjects (Chatziioannou, 2010). Their principal business was to bring goods in and out of the Ottoman Empire, which led to the flourishing of several cities as commercial centers (e.g., Smyrna/Izmir). There were occasional tensions between merchants and the church, because the former also promoted ideas of the Enlightenment. Generally, these merchants were Orthodox believers and remained quite close to the Orthodox tradition, even if in their own particular way (Clogg, 1981). There are several memoirs of such merchants, including by Ioannis Pringos, who lived and did business in Amsterdam in the 18th century. There he revealed his views on work, business and wealth, as well as their proper use according to Orthodox Christian values (Skouvaras, 1964). But this is hardly comparable to the theological underpinnings of the “Protestant work ethic”.

There were also cases when such economic activities were judged negatively by Orthodox clerics, who held strong views on otherworldliness and world-negating attitudes. Athanasios Parios (1721-1813), an Orthodox hieromonk and strong opponent of the Enlightenment, expressed such critique. In 1802 he warned Orthodox parents against sending their children to “Europe” (i.e., Western Europe) for commercial motives and against making profit because they would supposedly risk the salvation of their children’s souls in the face of the many dangers lurking in Western secularist societies (Makrides, 2013).

In reality, such admonitions were ignored, and business went on as usual. There is a long list of successful Orthodox merchants from the broader Balkan area in Ottoman times and later on (Davidova, 2016). The same holds true even today for Orthodox mercantile diasporas involved in various commercial networks or family businesses. The famous Greek maritime network of ship-owners and tycoons, especially in the 20th century, is a case in point (Harlaftis, 1996). The bond between a broadly understood Greek and Orthodox identity was usually preserved by such entrepreneurs, even though few would consider Orthodoxy as the moral base for their economic actions and success (Tassiopoulos, 2010). By living in various cities and countries, such economic elites were usually exposed to enhanced secularization and cosmopolitan attitudes (Sifneos, 2005). Such developments had been observed early enough among Greek entrepreneurs, and this led, for example, archimandrite Iakovos (1895/96), from the Vatopedi Monastery (Holy Mountain Athos), to a comparison between Greek and Russian cases. He thus extolled the attachment that Russians were showing towards their church – contrary to the more secular attitudes of the Greeks.

Another interesting case is that of the Russian Old Believers, a dissentious multiform movement, in which the interference of hard Orthodox convictions and social marginality has led to significant economic achievements. Despite their severe persecution by both church and state, many Old Believers managed to cautiously adjust to new ideas, technologies and habits in their surrounding environment and exhibited social mobility and entrepreneurial skills (Blackwell, 1965; Hildemeier, 1991; Crummey, 1998). Their lifestyles were characterized by hard work, a strong sense of inner ethic, personal responsibility, creativity, self-discipline, perseverance, rational planning, and solidarity within the community – features *mutatis mutandis* reminiscent of the Weberian case. Most importantly, in the 19th and early 20th centuries there were several industrialists from their ranks (e.g., the Riabushinsky family and its circle in Moscow, Vasily A. Kokorev) supporting a work-oriented ideology of Russia's future development and drawing on Orthodox and especially Old Believer traditions while combining them selectively with Western models (West, 1991). In this context, the accumulation of wealth was not stigmatized, but was seen as an element of professional pride and legitimization within Russian society. Old Believers thus proved to be very apt towards modernization, liberalism, development, and economic rationalism (Hildemeier, 1990; Roshchin, 1995; Beyer-Thoma, 2003: 285-297; Buss, 2003: 59-73; Kaminskij, 2018).

Old Believers also showed an openness in combining piety with progress and supporting novel currents, being patrons of art and being engaged in other public activities. Their marginality, survival strategies and endangered status as an autonomous religious subculture enabled the least seditious of their members to develop multifaceted skills, including entrepreneurial activities, while seeking greater societal legitimation by finding ways to bypass the established Russian autocracy and absolutism. This was possible through the development of a special Russian capitalism for the renewal of the country,

“the only vital and practical system for the conduct of economics” according to Old Believer Vladimir P. Riabushinsky (Moscow 1873 – Paris 1955) (West, 1991: 48). Some parallels to Old Believer economic success can also be observed among other Russian sectarian movements, namely the Khlysty, Skoptsy, Dukhobors and Molokans (Buss, 2003: 73-90). In imperial Russia more broadly, we encounter other interesting cases of successful Orthodox entrepreneurial elites and merchants, who acquired considerable wealth, high social status, influence and power (Owen, 1981; Rieber, 1982; Ruckman, 1984). Their material success was closely observed by several Orthodox intellectuals, who subsequently reflected on this type of “Orthodox economic ethic” (Bulgakov, 2000). Though there were various impediments to the development of an entrepreneurial bourgeoisie in imperial Russia, these were not directly related to Orthodox Christianity (Owen, 1991). Bearing all this in mind, the application of Weber’s thesis to Russia appears to be complex – to say the least.

Post-communist and other legacies

Let us now turn our attention to the post-communist situation when former communist societies, including many predominantly Orthodox ones, were forced to accomplish a rather abrupt transition to liberalism, free market economy and global capitalism. There are diverging views on this transition process. Kharkhordin (1994), for instance, has argued that the observed corporate ethic of Russian industrialists in post-communist times was not necessarily an obstacle to national market-building, while a new individualistic ethic of *samostoitel’nost’* (self-reliance), necessary for sustained capitalist development, has grown. Brym (1996) emphasized, however, the persistence of collectivist mentalities among business people and observed that this ethic of self-reliance was not very popular among the adult Russian population, also among Russian entrepreneurs. This weakness could be attributed to social-structural continuities from the Soviet period and its strong collectivist tradition, more than to religion.

My main interest here is to explore the potential role of Orthodoxy in this transformation process: do Orthodox convictions hinder capitalist entrepreneurship? In an interesting survey, Dinello (1998) examined sixty-one Russian bankers and their principal orientations in the post-communist period. This was because there is a well-known and long tradition of Russian thought (expressed by F. M. Dostoevsky, L. Tolstoy, N. Berdiaev, and many others), influenced by Orthodoxy, which denounces money-lending, profiteering, and utilitarian individualism as morally corrupt and which exhibited clear anti-capitalist predilections. After all, Orthodoxy, as a specific religious system, did not sanction the rational methodical pursuit of wealth by stewardship in the way especially Protestantism did. It was possible, hence, that such anti-monetary and anti-capitalist ideals may still prevail in post-communist Russia – not least because of the long communist rule and its own anti-capitalist dictates.

The question for Dinello was to find out whether these new Russian bankers were closer to a *homo orthodoxus*, influenced by the spirit and the ideals of Russian Orthodoxy, or to a *homo economicus*, influenced by Western-style modernity. Interestingly, these bankers emulated without any inhibitions the latter type, and nothing indicated that they were not culturally well equipped for the market economy. Hence, what Dinello considered as the traditional anti-capitalist preferences or imperatives of Orthodoxy did not seem to play any role in this context (cf. also Fedotova, Cross, 2006).

Similar findings can be drawn from a survey on public attitudes toward basic religious and life values conducted by the Institute of Sociological Analysis in April 1997 among 1593 Russian citizens from all over the country (Taivans, 2001: 8-15). For the sake of the survey, these values had been operationalized on the basis of “Protestant”, “Orthodox”, and “secular/cynical” orientation systems, together with their presumed sociopolitical consequences respectively. For example, the dominance of “Protestant” values would indicate good prospects for the modernization of Russian society. This opinion survey did reveal a deep gap between these three value orientation systems. It was found, for instance, that traditional “Orthodox” orientations in existential questions remained no longer valid and that the preference for “Protestant”, “Orthodox” or “secular/cynical” attitudes did not actually correlate with the corresponding religious affiliation. “Protestant” values (e.g., discipline, diligence, frugality) appeared thus to be accepted by the majority of Orthodox survey participants, whereas twenty percent of these Orthodox also seemed to prefer rather “secular/cynical” attitudes. This survey also revealed a clear predominance of “Protestant” values, including specific attitudes towards work, wealth, and individual freedom, viewed as crucial prerequisites for the modernization of Russian society. Although the reasons for this Russian predilection for “Protestantism” could be attributed to multiple factors, this survey showed that the traditional “Orthodox” value orientation system was not the most prevalent among the Russian population (including those who identified themselves as Orthodox) and that it functioned in mutual balance with the “Protestant” value system.

Additional statistical data from other surveys have also shown that Russian Orthodox, regardless if they identify themselves as devout Orthodox or as culturally Orthodox, do not seem to have problems with market economics and private ownership, nor are they disinclined towards (hard) work for wealth accumulation. Yet, at the same time, they also support the state’s involvement in and control of the economy to eliminate social inequalities and injustice, as well as to regulate the excesses of the free market. This is not due to a desire to return to a nationalization of the economy and to state socialism, but to the fact that many appear to be ambivalent about the exact nature of market principles and its resulting inequalities. These indications do not reveal an incompatibility between Russian Orthodox convictions and modern market economics and reform. In general, Orthodoxy does not support excessive work and wealth accumulation as ends in themselves, but prescribes a modest

and thoughtful economy based on ethical principles. Even if there may be an incongruity between some Orthodox economic values and modern capitalism, it does not seem that believers would follow the church's teachings or exhortations (Marsh, 2010: 181-183; cf. Marsh, 2008).

Furthermore, it is possible to find numerous Russian entrepreneurs who keep a *sui generis* attachment to Orthodoxy and are thus in a position to express their individual religiosity in a period of economic transformations and religious revival. Köllner (2012, 2013) has shown this in his ethnographic study of businessmen in the city of Vladimir. These businessmen were close to various Orthodox priests who functioned as their personal spiritual guides in religious and business matters. Since such guidance received various and ambivalent interpretations, it led to individualized worldviews and religious practices, and to the articulation of pluralist, "multiple moralities". These businessmen were not strongly connected to the life of the parishes, yet they contributed to the local Orthodox life in different ways (e.g., by supporting financially the reconstruction of church buildings), thereby buying themselves a positive public image, as well. In such a particular context, it becomes again difficult to talk about a negative correlation between entrepreneurship and attachment to Orthodoxy.

Numerous cases of Orthodox entrepreneurship can also be observed in other contexts. A case in point are the highly successful economic initiatives of the influential Greek bishop Irinaios Galanakis (1911-2013), which had a lasting impact on the island of Crete and its economy (Dimanopoulou, Zorbas, 2016). Given their overall structure and operations, Orthodox Churches today represent highly complex and bureaucratic organizations. They exhibit *mutatis mutandis* the features of secular organizations, with which they have to cooperate within the provisions and legal boundaries of the respective states. This also includes religious economics since churches have large properties and diverse assets, engage in numerous financial transactions, and deploy a wide range of economic activities with rational means and ends. Hence, they need to make proper use of their financial and material resources, to rationalize their planning and investments, as well as to optimize their gains and possessions. But generally, when money, financial dealings and profit are involved, financial scandals and corruption cases of all sorts are not out of the ordinary, especially in a capitalist context. This can be observed, for example, in the case of the post-communist Russian Orthodox Church (Timofeev, 2000; Elbakyan, Medvedko, 2001; Behrens, 2002; Mitrokhin, 2004: 121-173), which functions today as a "capitalist entrepreneur" at numerous levels (Caldwell, 2010: 341-344). The same holds true for the Greek Orthodox Church, especially in the period of the recent economic crisis. It is thus not unusual to observe the current leadership of the Greek Church looking for foreign investors for its property, to minimize its costs and to compensate for its incurred losses due to the economic crisis (Molokotos-Liederman, 2016). This church has also drawn considerable support from the European Union over many decades, but it has also been afflicted by various economic and

other scandals (Makrides, 2010). Generally speaking, all the above cases do not reveal a negative economic attitude on the part of Orthodox Churches and actors, at least on a practical level.

A spirit of economic profit can even be discerned among Orthodox monks in the recent history of the monastic community on the Holy Mountain Athos. They have received considerable financial support from the European Union for renovation works and other purposes over the last decades (Fajfer, 2013). In spite of the Athonite traditional otherworldliness and the alleged neglect of mundane activities, the real picture is quite different. The Athonite monks are interested in engaging in numerous economic activities, in doing profitable business (e.g., producing and selling wine and organic products), and in maximizing their assets through various means, including political support. But this entails again risks and dangers, as the much-discussed case of the Vatopedi Monastery in 2008 clearly showed. This concerned some of its real estate dealings, which were considered to be financially detrimental to the Greek state and which caused a major scandal in Greek society (Fajfer, 2010).

Concluding remarks

Having critically discussed the above selected cases on the relationship between Orthodoxy and economic development, it would be misleading to argue that there is a clear affirmative or a clear negative link. For example, the aforementioned positive connection between Orthodox identification and entrepreneurship is quite interesting, yet it says nothing about the economic development of the respective countries. In most cases, it is more about the individual pursuit of wealth among certain persons, families and groups, and this does not necessarily resonate positively with a respective sustainable and lasting economic development more generally. Ironically, in the Greek case, just before the economic crisis started in 2009, it was argued that various tenets of an Orthodox identification, belief system and worldview may have positive implications for business and entrepreneurial activities (Gotsis, Kortesi, 2009). However, they did not prevent the economic crisis, which instead turned to questioning how the Greek Orthodox culture could be associated with the recent economic crisis.

It is useful to address here this issue briefly, given that the overall policies in the Eurozone, and specifically in the context of this crisis, have often been connected with the specific religious traditions in the respective countries (Ozment, 2012; Richter, 2012; Nelsen, Guth, 2015; Hien, 2016). Contemporary Greek cultural philosopher Stelios Ramfos (2011) has systematically tried to capture and understand the links between the specificities of the Greek Orthodox worldview and way of life and the current economic crisis. He attributed the sources of the latter both to the distant Byzantine, but also to the post-Byzantine past of the country. In his view, for example, the individualization process in the Orthodox East remained always incomplete and did not enable the development of an autonomous, confident and responsible

individual, nor the emergence of attitudes supporting a mastery of the world. Orthodox anti-individualist premises and orientations have also played a role in this context. Aside from this long-term religious and cultural genealogy of the economic crisis, others have looked for causes in the more recent past of the country (since the 1980s). Specific discourses have circulated and spread among the population in the last decades, trying to explain and legitimize the features of a Greek Orthodox non-orderly (anarchic) way of life as a reaction against the Western obsession with order, law, authority and exactness (Makrides, 2015). It thus becomes obvious that the numerous and varied Orthodox dispositions and orientations towards economic development depend greatly on individual cases and their respective wider socio-political contexts (Slater, 1999; Graf, 1999: 634-636).

Contrary to Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, Orthodoxy has often been described in an essentialist way as inhibiting economic development. However, this critical overview has shown the complexity of the entire issue. Although there are significant differences between Orthodox and Western Christianity and their respective social consequences, it would be mistaken to attribute the economic underdevelopment or more generally the modernization deficits in Eastern and South Eastern Europe to the exclusive influence of Orthodoxy. There are some cases in support of such argument, yet there is also ample evidence showing exactly the opposite. In addition, scholarly discussions about the belated modernization and economic underdevelopment of this geographical area have focused on many other interrelated factors, generally not singling out the Orthodox factor as the most significant one. Bearing this in mind, a more contextual approach is needed in order to avoid generalizing and misleading conclusions on the Orthodox belief system as a whole and its practical consequences, including attitudes towards economy. It would be useful to examine further the intriguing aspects of the connections between Orthodoxy and economy; for instance, the various forms of an Orthodox entrepreneurial ethos; the articulation of a specific Orthodox economic ethic (e.g., individualist vs. communitarian economy); the huge array of economic activities and initiatives of church and monastic organizations (e.g., concerning religious tourism); and specific Orthodox views on “alternative economies”, either against neo-liberal economy or towards reforming it. The articles of the present thematic issue are a first step towards exploring these understudied facets.

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Orthodox Christianity and Economic Development. A Critical Overview

Max Weber's The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism has opened a debate that continues up to this day concerning the impact of religious beliefs on economic dispositions, attitudes and actions. His main thesis was subsequently tested in a variety of national, cultural and religious contexts including the Orthodox Christian. Weber himself, being familiar to some extent with the Russian Orthodox case, had occasionally expressed the view that this type of Christianity was too otherworldly-oriented to produce any significant economic ethic and to influence accordingly society and culture. This issue has been discussed subsequently in both Orthodox and non-Orthodox countries with diverging opinions and evaluations. In general, there was a widespread view that Orthodox Christianity is partly responsible for the overall underdevelopment of Eastern and South Eastern Europe, including in the economic realm. This debate resurfaced after several Orthodox countries from the former Eastern Bloc began a process of democratization, liberalization and transition to the free market economy. In this context, there were several critical voices pointing to a rather negative correlation between Orthodox Christianity and economic development. In turn, these critiques were met by various responses, mostly from the Orthodox world, referring to Orthodox cultural and religious specificities. The purpose of this paper is to offer a critical overview of this entire issue drawing on various periods of Orthodox history and examples from selected Orthodox cultures that illustrate the complexity and multidimensionality of the question and the need for more nuanced interpretations that defy unidirectional and stereotypical views.

Keywords: Orthodox and Western Christianity, Max Weber, economic development, Byzantium, Russia, Greece.

Christianisme orthodoxe et développement économique. Un aperçu critique

L'œuvre monumentale de Max Weber sur L'Éthique protestante et l'esprit du Capitalisme a ouvert un débat qui continue jusqu'à aujourd'hui concernant l'impact des croyances religieuses sur les dispositions, l'action et les attitudes économiques. Sa thèse principale a été par la suite testée dans le contexte du christianisme orthodoxe. Weber lui-même, étant familier dans une certaine mesure avec le cas orthodoxe russe, a exprimé occasionnellement l'avis que ce type de christianisme était trop orienté vers l'au-delà pour produire une éthique économique et pour influencer de ce point de vue la société et la culture. Ce constat a été discuté par des chercheurs, de pays orthodoxes ou non, qui ont exprimé des opinions et des évaluations divergentes. Selon une idée largement partagée, le Christianisme orthodoxe est tenu pour responsable du retard de l'Europe de l'Est et du Sud-Est, y compris dans le domaine économique. Ce débat a pris de l'ampleur après l'effondrement du bloc de l'Est et le début des processus de démocratisation, de libéralisation et de transition vers une

économie du marché. Dans ce contexte, de nombreuses voix se sont élevées pour souligner la corrélation plutôt négative entre christianisme orthodoxe et le développement économique. Ces critiques ont reçu des réponses variées, surtout dans le monde orthodoxe, concernant les spécificités culturelles et religieuses de l'orthodoxie. Le but de cet article est d'offrir un aperçu critique de ce thème, en s'appuyant sur des périodes différentes de l'histoire du christianisme orthodoxe et sur des exemples basés sur plusieurs cultures orthodoxes, et en montrant la complexité de l'ensemble du sujet qui se prête mal à une réponse unidirectionnelle et stéréotypée.

Mots-clés: Christianisme orthodoxe et occidental, Max Weber, développement économique, Byzance, Russie, Grèce.

El cristianismo ortodoxo y el desarrollo económico. Síntesis crítica

El monumental trabajo de Max Weber sobre La ética protestante y el espíritu capitalista ha abierto un debate que continúa hasta el día de hoy acerca del impacto de las creencias religiosas en el orden económico, en las actitudes y en las acciones. Su tesis principal fue posteriormente probada en variados contextos nacionales, culturales y religiosos, incluyendo el mundo cristiano ortodoxo. El propio Weber, que en cierta medida estaba familiarizado con el caso de los ortodoxos rusos, había expresado en ocasiones que este tipo de cristianismo estaba demasiado orientado hacia lo ultramundano como para producir una ética económica importante e influir así en la sociedad y la cultura. Este tema ha sido discutido posteriormente por académicos de países tanto ortodoxos como no ortodoxos, con opiniones y evaluaciones divergentes. En general, la opinión dominante era que el cristianismo ortodoxo era en parte responsable del subdesarrollo general de Europa oriental y sudoriental, incluso en el ámbito económico. Este debate reapareció luego de que varios países ortodoxos del antiguo Bloque del Este comenzaron un proceso de democratización, liberalización y transición a la economía de libre mercado. En este contexto, hubo varias voces críticas que apuntaron a una correlación más bien negativa entre el cristianismo ortodoxo y el desarrollo económico. A su vez, estas críticas recibieron diversas respuestas, provenientes en su mayoría por el mundo ortodoxo, aludiendo a las especificidades culturales y religiosas ortodoxas. El propósito de este artículo es ofrecer una visión crítica sobre este debate, a partir de varios períodos de la historia ortodoxa y de algunos ejemplos de culturas ortodoxas que ilustran tanto la complejidad y la multidimensionalidad del problema, como la necesidad de interpretaciones más matizadas que desafíen las miradas unidireccionales y estereotipadas.

Palabras clave: cristianismo ortodoxo y occidental, Max Weber, desarrollo económico, Bizancio, Rusia, Grecia.