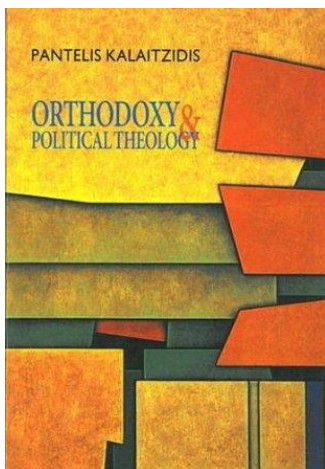


Pantelis Kalaitzidis



Review:

Orthodoxy and Political Theology

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Pantelis Kalaitzidis is editor of the Doxa and Praxis series and Director of the Volos Academy for Theological Studies from Greece. He has published and edited different volumes like: “The Church and Eschatology”, “Gender and Religion: The role of the Women in the

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Church”, “Orthodoxy and Modernity”, “Turmoil in Post-war Theology: The Greek Theology of the ‘60s” and “Orthodoxy and Hellenism in Contemporary Greece”.

Using historical and theological argues Kalaitzidis analyses in this book, from an ecumenical perspective, the role of Orthodoxy in political context. One can find here answers about the theology of politics and also about the politics of theology. This book provides us with a better understanding of the reasons why Orthodoxy hasn’t developed a political or liberation theology. The second part of the book is structured in three chapters about the eschatological dimension, the Church and the politics, and “Eschatology or Theocracy? God or Caesar?”.

According to the author, the aim of this book is to study the relationship between Orthodoxy and political theology. Kalaitzidis begins by analyzing the “political theology”, concept introduced in 1922 by the German conservative philosopher of law, Carl Schmitt, and then developed by theologians as Johann Baptist Metz, Jürgen Moltmann, Dorothee Sölle and finally by Latin American liberation theologians. Kalaitzidis examines the reasons why Orthodoxy hasn’t developed a “political theology” in the liberating and radical sense of the term. He affirms: “This book tries to gather the elements and premises of an Orthodox approach to political and liberation theology, based mainly on the eschatological understanding of the church and its Eucharistic constitution, on the biblical texts and the patristic tradition and on the works and major contributions of contemporary Eastern Orthodox theologians, especially those of the Diaspora”.

The author remembers here the words of Schmitt, who said that “the idea of the modern constitutional state triumphed together with deism” (p. 16). According to this idea, God has created the world and then instituted natural determinism, no longer intervenes in its function, but He has transferred, permanently and completely, the supreme authority, for decision-making on all worldly and spiritual affairs, to His

human representative on earth (monarchical/authoritarian regimes, “theology of empire” or a theological justification of monarchy). “This idea served as the corner-stone of so-called Byzantine caesaropapism since, in the political ideology which sprung from it, the emperor was looked upon as God’s representative on earth, and as an ‘equal to the apostles’” (p. 19).

According to Kalaitzidis, Byzantine theocracy and synallelia (mutual cooperation), which is the appropriate model for church-state relations, for many contemporary Orthodox theologians, is inconceivable apart from this significant theological shift.

Kalaitzidis says that Orthodox political theology and eschatology are often mixed with theocratic and caesaro-papist elements due to the Byzantine political system (p. 65).

Now, in the traditionally Orthodox countries, “the church seems to be trapped in a purely ethnocentric dimension operating exclusively within history, restricting its mission to the realization of the fortunes of the race and the nation and transforming the preaching about the coming kingdom of God into preaching about national salvation and the preservation of a glorious ethno-religious past” (p. 68), so in this case we can speak about an “ethno-theology”.

Trying to answer to the question about the public role of the Church, the author highlights that the Church is a public and not a private matter, the Church can be involved in the public sphere. The fact that the Church can exist and act in the public sphere doesn’t mean that it has authority in this sphere (pp. 81-86). The Church will also have to understand and accept the consequences of secularization.

The author concludes that the public ecclesiastic role should embody the Cross-centered ethos of Christ. It should be a witness to the new reality which the church lives and a protest against social and institutional evil, i.e. against the violation of human dignity and freedom. The Church should be a voice defending the “others”, the “foreigner”, the least of our

brothers, the needy, the weak and the victims of history, who are all icons of the “Other” (p. 84).

As a way of conclusion, Kalaitzidis says that the fullness and identity of the church is not located in the past or the present, but in the future, in the eschaton, in that which it will become. Expectation of the eschaton is something active, not passive, it is transformative, not an escape from the world, it is located in worship and prayer, but also in action!

This book is very important if we are aware about the meaning of the relationship between Church and state, and about the role of the Church in public space. This is why I would like to recommend this book to all those who are interested in these significant issues!