

Orthodox Engagement of Social and Political Issues

A Review Essay

The Teachings of Modern Orthodox Christianity on Law, Politics, and Human Nature, ed. by John Witte Jr. and Frank S. Alexander (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 371 pp.

Eastern Orthodoxy in a Global Age: Tradition Faces the Twenty-First Century, ed. by Victor Roudometof, Alexander Agadjanian, Jerry Pankhurst (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2005), xiv, 290pp.

Church and Society: Orthodox Christian Perspectives, Past Experiences, and Modern Challenges. Studies in Honor of Rev. Dr. Demetrios J. Constantelos, ed. by George P. Liacopoulos (Boston: Somerset Hall Press, 2007), xliii, 498pp.

By Adam A.J. DeVille

Speaking in mid-November immediately after becoming the metropolitan of the Orthodox Church of America, Archbishop Jonah (Paffhausen) posed a series of acute questions about Orthodox engagement with the world around us, inquiring “Where are the Orthodox hospitals? Where are the Orthodox schools? Where are the Orthodox charitable institutions? It’s a beautiful thing to build a medical clinic in a remote village in Ethiopia. But it’s also a beautiful thing to

build a medical clinic in a remote village in Kansas.” Continuing on, His Beatitude argued that “the fundamental institutions of our culture are falling apart.... We need to open not only our doors but also our hearts.”

Before one opens one’s heart – or perhaps simultaneous to that act – one must also, of course, engage one’s mind to inquire into and discern the fundamental hurts and needs of the world in order to bring the gospel’s medicine of mercy and hope. In different ways, each of the books reviewed here poses far-reaching questions not simply about the world of today, but of Orthodox engagement with it in both historical and current terms. Each of these makes a welcome and necessary contribution to a discussion that, for a variety of reasons, has not always happened to the extent that it perhaps should. Each is also supremely useful in dispelling such notions that engagement with questions of sociopolitical import is somehow “not Orthodox.” One frequently encounters this notion too often in standard treatments of “Christianity and politics” or some variation on that theme, where Protestant and Catholic views are given, and, if any Orthodox views are offered, they are often unhelpfully brief and, as often as not, marred by much laziness and foolishness about “caesaro-papism.” It has been hitherto relatively rare to find an entire book devoted to Orthodox perspectives, let alone three all appearing in rapid succession. Each is a collection of articles by a wide array of authors covering many topics including nationalism, globalization, Mount Athos, religion and politics in the Balkans, martyrdom, medicine, marriage, and so on.

The first of these, *The Teachings of Modern Orthodox Christianity on Law, Politics, and Human Nature*, is the third of three volumes devoted to various Christian perspectives on politics, law, and theological anthropology. The conveners of the conferences leading up to these volumes, the collaborators on them, and the publisher of them all deserve a very hearty thanks from Eastern Christians for taking

seriously the Orthodox tradition and giving it as much prominence in this volume as the two earlier volumes devoted to Protestant and Roman Catholic perspectives. We have in this collection in particular first-class scholarship elegantly written and smoothly edited by Witte and Alexander, both professors of law and directors of the Center for the Study of Law and Religion at Emory University. Both tell us in the foreword that they have designed these volumes not only for scholars, but also for “church leaders..., students, novitiates, and catechumens” (xii). Let us hope that leaders and academics take them up on that because this book, while perhaps weightier and more challenging than something freshmen (whether in the Church or academy) might be able to handle, would certainly be extremely thought-provoking in more advanced inquirers.

The editors note that historically Christianity has had quite a bit to say about law, politics, and human nature, but that in the period of modern secularism, Christian teachings on these topics have been gradually sidelined or ignored, and as a result many Christians have not devoted as much scholarly attention to them as they should. Focusing on modern issues and modern thinkers, the editors of this and the previous two collections have sought to begin reversing both trends, a project that will, they note, perhaps require greater effort from Eastern Christians given the “massive martyrdom of millions of Orthodox faithful in the twentieth century.” Such martyrdom, and the political oppression that was coterminous with it, have combined to ensure that the implications of Orthodox thought for “law, politics, and society have still to be drawn out” (xxvii), and the practical manifestations of such teachings are yet to be clearly made “more concrete” (xxx). Both challenges, the editors insist, cannot be done in isolation, and so Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox need to engage these questions together as they did at the conferences leading to the publications of this trilogy.

Orthodox engagements and the implications of those are drawn out by the five figures featured in this volume. It begins with a splendid overview by Paul Valliere, who also supplies the commentary for the first chapter, devoted to Vladimir Soloviev. In his introduction, Valliere explains why Orthodox perspectives on these issues still await development after a promising beginning in the modern period among such as the Slavophiles (whose "project" was interrupted, of course, by the Russian Revolution). He next examines the traditional Orthodox understanding of *symphonia* to describe the relation between religion and politics, Church and state, captured perhaps most famously by Justinian's sixth *Novella*, which speaks of the "two greatest gifts which God... has granted...: the priesthood and the imperial dignity. The first serves divine things, the second directs and administers human affairs; both, however, proceed from the same origin and adorn the life of mankind."

As lovely as this vision is, Valliere argues, it fails on at least two counts: it was rarely put into practice, and it is no longer workable in today's world. Thus the "political challenge for Orthodoxy in modern times is to find a resonant alternative to symphonia... The thinkers... in this volume all wrestled with this challenge" (13), a challenge that must deal, in part, with the lack of any centralized authority in the world today (i.e., the lack of a "Byzantine" empire), and with the question of "the role the church should play in the construction of a democratic civil society" (21). Gone are the days of *Pravoslavie, Samoderzhavie i Narodnost* (though troubling remnants of this remain in today's Russia), and Valliere quotes Solzhenitsyn in dismissing this "wretched Russian tradition" (21) of pining for an autocrat to run both Church and state. He notes that the document adopted by the Russian Church in 2000, "Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church," is a

“striking innovation in Orthodox practice,” and contains some positions “virtually unprecedented in Orthodox legal, social, and political thought” (22).

Valliere next provides an excellent introductory essay introducing excerpts from Soloviev’s writings on sociopolitical issues. Valliere puts Soloviev in context, assesses his writings, and argues that his legacy “can only grow in importance” (68) in light of today’s challenges and today’s Orthodox responses to them. There follows nearly thirty pages excerpting such works of Soloviev’s as *The Spiritual Foundations of Life, Law and Morality: Essays in Applied Ethics, Russia and the Universal Church*, and then long passages from *The Justification of the Good*.

The next four chapters follow the same format. The second chapter, on Nicholas Berdyaev, is written by the Armenian theologian Vigen Guroian, who has recently moved from teaching at Loyola College in Baltimore to the University of Virginia. Guroian skillfully introduces and contextualizes Berdyaev, from whom we then have excerpts of *The Destiny of Man, Slavery and Freedom, Freedom and the Spirit*, and *The Divine and the Human*.

The third chapter is devoted to the thought of Vladimir Lossky. Its introduction is written by Mikhail Kulakov, who teaches politics and philosophy at Columbia Union College, a Seventh Day Adventist institution in Maryland. This, too, is a good introduction, though the section “Patristic Roots of Lossky’s Personalism” is rather thin (only 2.5 pages), and deals almost exclusively with Maximus the Confessor. Additionally, I am not sure that the author is fully aware of all the implications of his rather blithe and undeveloped assertion in this section that “the Eastern tradition stresses the supremacy of the personal divine will” (197). That would seem; however inadvertently, to open the door to voluntarism, a movement that has done much damage

in Western theology (as Catherine Pickstock, John Milbank, Louis Dupré and others have shown) that one would not wish to see replicated in Eastern theology. There follows nearly twenty pages of original source material, almost all of it drawn, not surprisingly, from Lossky's *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*.

The fourth chapter focuses on the only female and only monastic in the volume, Mother Maria Skobtsova, whose life is narrated by Michael Plekon of Baruch College in the City University of New York. As with his earlier work on her (a chapter in his 2004 book *Living Icons: Persons of Faith in the Eastern Church*), Plekon here sketches out a wonderfully balanced portrait, showing how deeply Skobtsova lived the gospel, to the point of losing her life in a concentration camp two weeks before the Americans liberated it in 1945. Skobtsova was not; however, a figure without controversy in both her views and in her monastic life, which she entered unusually as one who had children and had been married twice. Both this history, and then her way of living monasticism in the world, serving the poor, made her something of a *sui generis* figure in Orthodox communities in Paris. Though Plekon does not say it, there are striking parallels between Skobtsova and another female quasi-monastic of that era viz., Catherine Doherty, the Russian Orthodox-cum-Roman Catholic who was also *sui generis* in many ways. There are, moreover, equally striking parallels between Skobtsova and Dorothy Day. What was it about this era that inspired such unique and important manifestations of the "liturgy after the liturgy" in these three women? This is a question worth taking up elsewhere, and perhaps a doctoral dissertation could be written on these three contemporaries, all of whom are well along the path towards official ecclesial recognition of their sanctity.

The fifth and final chapter, on Dumitru Stăniloae, is from Lucian Turcescu of Concordia University in Montreal. Turcescu's sketch of Stăniloae does not shy away from mentioning the latter's involvement with some extremely repugnant anti-Semitic nationalists (the "Iron Guards"), and his wholly unsatisfactory attitude towards the Romanian Greco-Catholics, who were brutally suppressed with Orthodox collusion in 1948: "Only after much prodding did he acknowledge grudgingly that the Romanian Orthodox Church itself shares some degree of culpability, and that this prevents it from proclaiming more loudly that justice is needed in Romania today" (312). Stăniloae's thoughts on political issues have to be read carefully, not least when it comes to his frankly bizarre project of attempting to conjure up a theological justification for Romanian nationalism. Here Stăniloae's thoughts in this last chapter need to be contrasted with Lossky's in the third, where he denounces nationalism as a disease, and where he says the "expression 'national church' must be regarded as "erroneous and even heretical" (192).

A very detailed index rounds out this extraordinary and exciting book, which deserves a wide audience. It does not, of course, provide answers to the social and political problems of today, but it never sought to. It succeeds admirably at doing what it set out to do: to give an introduction to the source material of five key Orthodox thinkers whose thoughts on sociopolitical matters bear much careful consideration by all Eastern Christians in the challenging years ahead.

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The second of the books noted above, *Eastern Orthodoxy in a Global Age*, begins from a very different starting point, proceeds in a very different manner, and ends up being a very different book than the Witte and Alexander collection. Both are collections of articles from diverse authors: in the former, we have Orthodox theologians and

scholars of them; in the latter, we have sociologists writing for other sociologists. That is not a bad thing; in fact, it is in theory a wholly good thing that sociologists of religion, who have almost never studied Orthodoxy, are at last turning their attention to this most-ignored part of the Christian family. To at least that extent, this collection is to be welcomed as the hopeful and necessary beginning of a new area of scholarly research. My comments below on the many flaws in this book should not be taken as evidence of ingratitude; nor should they discourage other social scientists from examining Orthodoxy. Rather, they should be taken as cautions of what not to do when attempting to analyze Orthodoxy without ever really bothering to understand even its most basic history and practices. Failing that, one runs the risks, much in evidence here, of producing analysis that is superficial and marred by often bewildering ignorance of basic aspects of Christian history and doctrine.

Consider, in this regard, the foreword, written by Sabrina Ramet, who begins with that old and discredited canard that "under the Byzantines as also later in tsarist Russia, the guiding principle of Church-state condominium was caesaropapism." No evidence is provided for this claim, which, coming as it does at the beginning of the book, rather shakes one's confidence about the reliability of the chapters to come. That confidence is even more undermined by what follows next: she asks "just what it can mean to preserve the unbroken tradition of Orthodoxy...over the course of the first four or five millennia [*sic*] after Christ." She immediately goes on to ask "Does it mean to hold onto the basic principles of morality? Obviously yes, and yet, as St. Thomas Aquinas (c.1225-1274) noted..." Why on earth would one cite Aquinas of all people here, a figure who is often taken by many Orthodox to be perhaps *the* Catholic scholastic against whom Orthodox theological methods and conclusions are most sharply contrasted? His relevance is not merely recondite in this context: the very fact that he

is so blithely introduced is what jars, and makes one wonder: does Ramet realize he is not an Orthodox theologian at all?

These missteps are in evidence also in the introduction, "Eastern Orthodoxy in a Global Age – Preliminary Considerations," by Alex Agadjanian and Victor Roudometof. These two tell us that the Emperor "Justinian (6 CE) [*sic*] provided the paradigmatic case" for Church-state relations in the East-Roman Empire. Factual figures are further muddled as when, on p. 11, we are told that the patriarchate of Georgia was made autocephalous in "1990," but on p. 41 Agadjanian claims it was "autocephalous since 1917." In fact, as the Church's official website (nowhere cited in this book) makes clear, the Church of Georgia established the roots during the apostolic times, Christianity was proclaimed the state religion in AD 326, and autocephaly was established in the 5th century. In 1811, after Russia's annexation of Georgia, autocephaly was abolished, and re-established again in 1917 during the 4-year liberation of Georgia from the Russian empire. In 1989, the Ecumenical Patriarchate recognized the Patriarchal honours of the primate of the Georgian Orthodox Church.

As with many social scientists, these two authors sometimes display a penchant for ungainly jargon ("the dialectic of globality," "glocalization" [*sic*]) and a fondness for dressing up the obvious in solemn-sounding phrases, but in general their country-by-country analysis of how Orthodoxy relates to its surrounding sociopolitical contexts in the modern period especially contains some useful insights to those who may otherwise have no knowledge of them. But even here these authors are not careful, and in their discussion of the situation in Ukraine fail to acknowledge that there are not two, as they claim, but in fact three rival Orthodox Churches: the only canonical one under Moscow's jurisdiction; the Church of the so-called Kyivan Patriarchate; and then the Ukrainian Autocephalous Church.

The second chapter, "Globalization and Identity Discourse in Russian Orthodoxy," by Agadjanian and Kathy Rousselet, is quite useful in its analysis, and groundbreaking in dealing with such controverted issues as the "canonical territory" of the Russian Orthodox Church, and of the supposed "proselytism" of other Christians within Russia and other countries of the former Soviet Union, especially Ukraine. For two decades now, Catholics and other Orthodox in particular have been ceaselessly hectored by Moscow, and condescendingly lectured by that patriarchate's spokesmen, about the so-called canonical territory of the Russian Church into which other Christians have supposedly "intruded" in order to begin proselytizing. Moscow has always acted as though this territory were clearly demarcated, and as though everyone ought to recognize the boundaries of that territory to be just what Moscow said they were. Under this ruse, the *Russian* Orthodox Church was not coterminous with the boundaries of the new, post-USSR Russian state. No: this notion included such other countries as Belarus and Ukraine, even in their new independence from 1991 onwards. In this, Moscow has been playing a puerile game and demanding to have things both ways, that is, to have others recognize its territory and not enter into it while, at the same time, having its own parishes established all over the world, including in the "canonical territory" of such deeply Catholic countries as Austria and Italy. The authors are thus quite correct in recognizing that "the 'canonical territory' of the Russian Orthodox Church has long been movable" in response to political expansion – whether tsarist or communist (40). In response to a changed and changing world, the authors note that the Russian Church has refused to go along with the blurring of cultural and other boundaries common in a "globalized" world, and instead "de-territoriality, a yardstick of the 'global condition,' is rejected and opposed by a firm, territorially embedded notion of 'tradition'" (51). This is bound up with a renewed

nationalism, and in particular, an "ethnophyletism" on the part of Russians both in the country and elsewhere in the world in the "diaspora" (45).

In his "Orthodoxy as a Public Religion in Post-1989 Greece," Victor Roudometof helpfully examines Church-state relations, and the changes they have undergone in the last two decades. Here, too, one sees the same flat-footedness when it comes to Orthodox practice that exists throughout this book. At one point, the author makes an extremely vague reference to "an annual celebration honoring the holy icon of the Virgin Mary" as though there is only one, as though one could immediately know which icon on which feast he is referencing. Spelling mistakes mar this essay also (e.g., *Ekklessia* [*sic*], p. 92).

The bulk of the article is given over to analyzing the direction of the Church in Greece, especially under the leadership of the recently deceased Archbishop Christodoulos of Athens, whose project is described as involving "the *de-privatization of Greek Orthodoxy*; it is a deliberate rejection of the Western European pattern of historical evolution." This project, the author concludes, has had only very limited success in part because too much of the approach taken by the "church hierarchy has assumed a highly nationalistic course," and the "central weakness" of Orthodox pronouncements on Church-state issues in Greece remains this nationalism (101).

Three other essays in this collection merit mention. First is Gavril Flora and Georgina Szilagyi's "Church, Identity, Politics: Ecclesiastical Functions and Expectations toward Churches in Post-1989 Romania," a helpful piece of analysis (though riddled with spelling mistakes) of the life of the second-largest Orthodox Church in the world. Their understanding of the state of Romanian Orthodoxy will need to be read alongside of, indeed supplemented by, two more recent and important

pieces of scholarship: the first is Michael Mates's article, "Politics, Property Restitution, and Ecumenism in the Romanian Orthodox Church" in *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 46 (2005): 73-94; and the second is the very substantial and significant monograph *Religion and Politics in Post-Communist Romania* (Oxford, 2007) by Lucian Turcescu and Lavinia Stan.

Victor Yelensky's "Globalization, Nationalism, and Orthodoxy: the Case of Ukrainian Nation Building" is a fascinating essay treating one of the most fiendishly complex of all Eastern Christian countries. Here he notes that Orthodoxy within Ukraine has often been viewed as insufficiently "Ukrainian," because it was too closely associated with, and attached to, Russia and the Moscow Patriarchate. Instead, the bearers of a putative "Ukrainian" identity, even before Ukraine was an independent state, were the much maligned Greco-Catholics (pejoratively called "Uniates"), above all in Galicia, a territory doubly problematic for the Soviet Union, because Catholics were so heavily concentrated here, and because those Catholics, as Yelensky notes, were staunch Ukrainian nationalists. Interestingly enough, the Greco-Catholics did not only pose a challenge to the Soviet state, but also to the three other Orthodox Churches in the country, making Ukraine "the most pluralistic and competitive religious market in all East Europe," as the author quotes Jose Casanova. A good bibliography rounds out this article, though it fails to include all the relevant works by John Paul Himka, and was published just before the advent of Christopher Hann and Paul Robert Magocsi's *Galicia: A Multicultured Land* (Toronto, 2005).

The final essay of note here is the one closest to our own concerns here in North America. Dmitro Volkov's "Living Eastern Orthodox Religion in the United States" offers some analysis of the developments of Orthodoxy on this continent today. He does not;

however, begin on a promising note when he speaks of such developments including “the defilement of the ethnic component of the Orthodox Church relative to its spiritual content.” I have not the slightest idea what the import of that statement is supposed to be, and the author provides neither elaboration nor evidence before moving on to focus on a handful of particular parishes, including some from the “ten U.S. canonical jurisdictions under the foreign autocephalous Patriarchates,” and some from the “seven Oriental Orthodox Churches (theological Monophysites [*sic*])” (227). His research has led him to conclude that Orthodoxy in the U.S. is torn in two seemingly rival directions: whether to maintain “the unity and doctrinal purity” of Orthodoxy or whether to foster “adoption of the social ideas and organizational practices consonant with this milieu” (241). Which ideas and practices, and consonant with which milieu, the author does not say; nor does he show himself capable of realizing that one can be at once faithful to Orthodox’s doctrinal teaching precisely by speaking to the social milieu in which one finds oneself. One can be a fully faithful Orthodox Christian while also using “organizational practices” of the world around one if by that he means such things as adopting the administrative practices, and technological advances that many other large institutions today make use of in the fulfillment of their mission.

This collection, as this last and indeed all the foregoing essays make clear, shows some insights into the social standing of Orthodoxy in various countries in North America and Europe, but these are very limited insights. In almost every case, the usefulness and trustworthiness of the analysis is called into question by a certain tone deafness (at best), and outright errors at worst, none of which should be found in a collection by scholars who had a long-standing and in-depth intimacy with their topics – rather than the mere theoretical knowledge that comes from spending too much time in the academy talking to other academics in that peculiar language of one’s guild. It is

clear that none of the contributors have such deep familiarity with Orthodoxy, and all of them are painfully awkward, or flat wrong, when they gingerly attempt to describe Orthodox practices and life. This is clearly not a book by Orthodox for other Orthodox, but by sociologists for other sociologists. And that is, as I noted at the outset, a commendable thing: Orthodoxy has too long been neglected, and is today too little understood, so that one wishes to encourage further study of the same. Those who are engaged in that study should use this collection with considerable caution, and should learn to avoid such errors as those one unfortunately finds in this book.

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The last book to be reviewed here, *Church and Society: Orthodox Christian Perspectives, Past Experiences, and Modern Challenges*, is also a collection of essays by noted Greek Orthodox (and other) scholars in what is a *Festschrift* for the scholar and priest Demetrios Constantelos. As with all such collections, the contents are mixed, but one of the happy benefits of this text is that it illustrates that Orthodox engagement of socio-political issues goes right back to the beginnings of the Church and has persisted through her long history. Thus one sees, e.g., in Aristotelis Eftychiadis's essay "Church and Byzantine Social, Medical, and Bioethical Perspectives," a grappling with complicated medical issues which we today fool ourselves into thinking of as singularly modern and complicated. Constantinos Pitsakis's essay on Byzantine philanthropy and penal codes shows the fact that theological reflection penetrated even into the question of how to punish grave robbers. These and other essays are organized into five sections: church history, theology and spirituality, church and society, canon law, and Hellenism. Contributors include such well-known Orthodox scholars as Emmanuel Clapsis ("Wealth and Poverty in Christian Tradition"), the patrologist John Chryssavgis, ("The Desert and

the World: Learning from the Desert Fathers and Mothers”), the biblical scholar Theodore Stylianopoulos (“Comments on Bible Translation”), the moral theologian Stanley Harakas (“European Multiformality and Dimensions of Orthodox Christian Social Ethics”), and the canonist Patrick Viscuso (“An Orthodox Perspective on Marriage”). All these are preceded by a very lengthy introductory section publishing congratulatory letters, biographical sketches, pictures, and such matters.

Chryssavgis’s essay is an excellent introduction, liberally laced with selections of actual patristic literature, to the spirituality of the desert fathers and mothers, about whom he has written several other excellent books. He makes these outstanding early figures come alive, and seem as relevant to us today as they were to their first spiritual children all those centuries ago in the upper Egypt and elsewhere.

Another excellent introductory overview is provided by Christos Krikonis’s “The Christology of St. Gregory of Nyssa.” This essay would be an excellent resource to use in an introductory course on Christology in general. The author skillfully provides a brief overview of Gregory’s life, and then a very cogent and compelling articulation of his Christology in a way that is accessible and free of jargon. (The only flaw here is that the running header on the top of every second page reads “The Crystology [*sic*] of St. Gregory of Nyssa”!)

The essay following Krikonis is Thomas Heffernan’s “Martyrdom, Charisma, and Imitation: Paths to Christian Sanctity.” It contains a helpful discussion of the components of Christian martyrdom, and how and why Christian martyrdom differs from that of other religions, especially modern Islamist forms of the suicide bomber. This essay deserves careful attention in comparative religion classes.

Following on, we come next to Stylianopoulos's "Comments on Bible Translation." This is by no means an exhaustive treatment, and the strongest criticism one can make of this essay is that it is not long and developed enough. The perspective the author brings to the task of biblical (and especially New Testament) translation is rich, nuanced, and sophisticated, and very much worth heeding. One can only hope that his comments receive a wide audience among other translators, and that Stylianopoulos elsewhere and in greater length looks at other instances of mistranslation in popular English versions of the Scriptures.

Not surprisingly, the author's command of the original Greek of the Scriptures is superlative, and is pressed into service here to advance some very necessary correctives of problems in translation especially as found in the widely used New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible; though others are discussed, including the RSV and the New American Bible. The author illustrates his concerns by focusing on two passages, both from the gospel of John, beginning with the prologue (1:3-4), where the simple placing of punctuation in different translations can have significant theological implications. The passage in John 12:14, where Christ sits on a young donkey, is used to illustrate the very significant nuance that is missed when the admittedly ambiguous Greek conjunction $\delta\epsilon$ is rendered as "and" in English rather than the "but," which Stylianopoulos maintains is far better. Thus, he argues the passage should read "But Jesus, finding a young donkey, sat on it, as it is written."

There is an even more alarming problem with the NRSV's translation of a later passage in John's prologue: John 1:18b is rendered as "It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known." This passage, for which Stylianopoulos fairly adduces the NRSV's reasons for translating it as they did, nonetheless "considerably diminishes the ontological and cosmic

nuances of the Son's relationship with the Father," especially as that relationship is elsewhere described in the gospel (6:20, 35; 8:12, 24, 28) (p.204). A far better translation, the author maintains, would "express the emphatic force of ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο" along these lines: "No one has ever seen God; God the only Son, who exists in the Father's being – He has made Him known" (p.205).

The final essay of note here is Patrick Viscuso's "An Orthodox Perspective on Marriage," which would lend itself to use in a survey course on Christian understandings of marriage. My only concern with Viscuso's essay is that it is perhaps slightly too narrowly conceived, focused as it is, for understandable and obvious reasons, on Demetrios Constantelos's own earlier book, *Marriage, Sexuality, and Celibacy: A Greek Orthodox Perspective*. Though Viscuso notes other Orthodox authors who have written on the topic, including John Meyendorff of blessed memory, his sources in the endnotes are limited to only a handful of texts when there are others that, surprisingly, are not even mentioned in passing. One thinks here immediately of Paul Evdokimov's *The Sacrament of Love*, which remains to my mind the single best theological text per se (as opposed to Viscuso's own much more historico-canonical treatment in which the theology seems secondary) on marriage extant today in French and English.

What unites all three books is their attempt to demonstrate that Orthodoxy has never been disengaged from the world, and has never been in a position of not caring about sociopolitical issues. That concern may have been severely truncated at times, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, and it may have taken forms that we today might question, but there has never been a period when the Church was not concerned with, and connected to, whatever surrounding cultural context in which she happened to find herself. There was never a time when one single model of Church-state relations pertained. At the very

least, then, these three books put the lie to the twin notions that Orthodoxy has, on the one hand, obscured the light of the gospel in a haze of incense, gold brocade, and ethereal chant while people outside have starved or been hauled away in cattle cars; or, on the other, that Orthodoxy has sold its soul to the emperor/tsar/ober-procurator/first secretary of the Politburo and thus emerged impotent under some "caesaropapist" regime. Neither notion is even remotely accurate; neither does justice to the complexity, diversity, and variety of forms that Orthodox engagement has taken, and Church-state relations have seen down through the centuries.

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