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'Eastern' Orthodoxy and 'Western' Secularisation in Contemporary Europe (with Special Reference to the Case of Greece)¹

EFFIE FOKAS

ABSTRACT

This paper engages with an ongoing scholarly debate on where Orthodox Europe stands in relation to (Western) European secularisation. It navigates between perspectives presenting Orthodoxy as an exception to European secularisation on the one hand, and as an imminent participant in the secularisation process via integration into European institutions on the other. Focusing on the Greek case, the inquiry examines the extent to which 'Europe' (both culturally and politically) may be considered to have a secularising influence on Orthodox Greece. Rejecting narrow and linear conceptions of secularisation, the paper emphasises the dialectical, discursive nature of secularisation which precludes generalisations about either 'eastern' or 'western' secularisation, much less about their relation to one another.

The Grand Narrative on Orthodoxy

Prevalent in a great deal of academic literature dealing with Orthodoxy is what may be described as a 'grand narrative', at the heart of which lies an emphasis on difference between Eastern and Western Europe, and between Orthodoxy on the one hand and Protestantism and Roman Catholicism on the other. The narrative is vast and polymorphic, and includes Samuel Huntington's 'The West versus the Rest' perspective (Huntington, 1996a, b) as well as other forms of Orientalism described eloquently by Edward Said (1979). Some normative in their approach and others not, such texts communicate critiques of Orthodoxy (at times used interchangeably with 'Eastern Europe') as mistrustful of liberalism, cosmopolitanism, universalism and democracy (Ramet, 2006); accounts of anti-intellectualism and racist and xenophobic attitudes (Danopoulos, 2004); difficult accommodation to Europe and to human rights protection (Pollis, 1993; Payne, 2003); an ambivalent relation to pluralism (Prodromou, 2004); and 'organic' ties between religion and nation (Byrnes, 2006).

The reasons for stated differences between Orthodoxy and 'the rest in the West' vary. At one end of the spectrum blame is laid upon the Orthodox faith's emphasis on the communal rather than on the individual, in turn stemming from Orthodoxy's emphasis on the Trinity (leading necessarily, the argument goes, to a weak attention to individual human and religious rights and freedoms). At the other, explanations are based on differing historical trajectories starting from the sacking of Constantinople

and the four centuries of Ottoman rule over most of the Orthodox world which precluded it from experiencing Renaissance, Reformation and the Enlightenment, and continuing with decades of communist rule over much of the Orthodox world, distinguishing it again significantly from the West of Europe. Certainly there are very real distinctions between ‘the Orthodox East’ and ‘the West’ which may be fruitfully examined (see for example Roudometof, 1999, 2010; Halikiopoulou, 2011; Martin, 2006).

This article addresses one such East–West distinction, that highlighting differences in secularisation in Eastern and Western Europe. Much scholarly literature on secularisation tends to overlook the Orthodox world altogether. An example of the latter is Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age*, the purview of which is indicated as ‘the “we” who live in the West’ (Taylor, 2007, p. 1), ‘the civilization whose principal roots lie in what used to be called “Latin Christendom”’ (Taylor, 2007, p. 21). The book echoes a generally accepted thesis about the birth of secularisation in Western Europe, but Taylor does concede that ‘secularity extends also partially, and in different ways, beyond this [western] world’ (Taylor, 2007, p. 1). From this one can infer that in Orthodox Europe there is potential for ‘partial’ and ‘different’ secularity.

While differences in secularisation across a notional East–West divide are widely accepted (and somewhat obvious), there is a conspicuous divergence in scholarly perspectives on what the future holds in this domain. Specifically, a question remains as to whether Eastern (Orthodox) Europe will continue to be unsecular or differently secular, or whether it will secularise in time and specifically under the influence of Western Europe. David Martin, for example, sees Christian Orthodoxy as resistant to secularisation which comes to it from Western Europe and from the European Union (EU) in particular. Specificities in the historical evolution of the relationship between religion and nation and between church and state in Orthodox contexts lead, according to Martin, to a different type of secularisation (Martin, 2011). From a different perspective, Peter Berger (2000, 2005, 2010) predicts the Orthodox world’s impending secularisation, via integration into European institutions. Berger considers that Western European secularisation is a powerful force which spreads eastwards with the ambit of the EU. According to Berger Orthodoxy is unable to ‘provide immunity’ against this development.

Which perspective best approximates to reality: the view of Orthodoxy as an outlier in its resistance to secularisation; or the expectation that Orthodoxy will catch the Western European contagion of secularisation? I flesh out each line of thinking in the following two sections. As will become evident, these perspectives are not mutually exclusive and the question is rather more complicated than a binary approach suggests. In a further section, I explore the complications around what we mean by secularisation, Europe and European secularity. Using as a frame José Casanova’s (1994) distinction among three forms of secularisation, I examine evidence from the case of Greece in order to assess the extent to which ‘Europe’ (both culturally and politically) may be considered to have a secularising influence on Orthodox Greece.

Orthodox Resistance to Western European Secularisation

In his seminal general theory of secularisation, David Martin (1978) examined what he described as differing degrees and kinds of secularisation (this, notably, when most of his contemporaries were generating theories of secularisation generalising a monolithic European secularisation; in 2005 he published a ‘revised general theory’). In 2005 he published a ‘revised general theory’. More recently (2011, ch. 8), Martin

has focused specifically on the Eastern European context to consider whether there is a distinctive Eastern European version of secularisation, and one particular to Orthodoxy. Martin contends that there are significant differences between types of secularisation, and that these differences hinge on three factors: the historical experience of particular countries and especially whether or not religion was positively associated with the origins and myth of the nation; the relation of religion to the class structure, to power and to the state; and the type of religion (with Protestantism faring radically differently to Orthodoxy, for example). On the basis of these three factors, Martin traces what he calls a 'common Eastern European pattern' of secularisation. The main point of commonality is an ethno-religiosity which is stimulated by subjugation to an alien empire of a different religion. In the Greek case, that alien heterodox empire is the (Muslim) Ottoman Empire and in other Orthodox cases the (atheist) communist Soviet regime. Given the Orthodox emphasis on the collective, he cites Steve Bruce in suggesting 'it is perfectly possible many countries will not proceed from a rather organic kind of collectivism to individualisation, and thus neither to democracy nor to secularisation' (Martin, 2011, p. 137). Martin recognises the elements of this perspective reminiscent of Huntington's 'clash of civilisations' thesis, but he argues that 'one does not need to take on board all the geographical implications of this map to explore the possibility of a different mode of modernity in the sphere of Eastern Orthodoxy' (Martin, 2011, p. 138). In a sense, then, 'multiple secularisations' is the logical extension of Eisenstadt's notion of multiple modernities (see Eisenstadt, 2000).

Martin raises the Greek example explicitly and wonders 'whether there is an Orthodox cultural bloc resisting assimilation to the kind of secularity represented by Western Europe, and more explicitly by the EU. Greece has been in the EU for some time, but it remains resistant to the kind of secularity the EU explicitly promotes' (Martin, 2011, p. 138). Key to the equation for Martin is the 'unproblematic and undifferentiated' nature of the relation of Orthodoxy to national identity: 'culture and religion, in Greece and Orthodox Eastern Europe generally, are woven without seam throughout' (Martin, 2011, p. 147).

Other scholars point to Orthodoxy as an exception to the secularisation thesis. Lina Molokotos-Liederman (2009) for example speaks in terms of 'selective secularization'. Slavica Jakelić argues that in 'collectivistic Christianities', such as Orthodoxy, religion is a constitutive element in peoples' collective memory. The belonging of these individuals is 'shaped by religious identification that is ascribed to individuals rather than chosen by them, and experienced as fixed rather than as changeable' (Jakelić, 2006, p. 136). She expects that through increasing encounters between secular Europeans and 'collectivistic' Christians resulting from EU expansion, the former will be influenced by the latter (see also Halman and Draulans, 2005). This argument resonates with the core thesis of the Byrnes and Katzenstein text on religion in an expanding Europe (2006). According to Katzenstein, eastward EU enlargement is 'infusing renewed religious vitality into Europe's political and social life, thus chipping away at its exceptional secularism' (Katzenstein, 2006, p. 2).

We have, then, a range of perspectives whereby Orthodoxy is resistant to secularisation and may in fact bear the potential to inspire a European *desecularisation*.

Orthodox Vulnerability to 'Contagion' by Western European Secularisation

Peter Berger offers a divergent, though not necessarily incompatible, perspective. Berger was among those sociologists of religion who, while David Martin was writing

about different types and degrees of secularisation, was predicting that secularisation, born in Western Europe, would increasingly spread to the rest of the world if and as it was touched by modernisation (Berger, 1967). In 1999 Berger publicly professed that he had been wrong. ‘The world today’, he wrote, ‘is massively religious, is anything but the secularized world that had been predicted (whether joyfully or despondently) by so many analysts of modernity’ (Berger, 1999, p. 9).

Alongside that famous ‘retraction statement’, Berger listed two debatable but commonly cited exceptions to what he describes as the ‘desecularization’ of the world: first, Western Europe (there, he argued, secularisation has continued to thrive); and second, a global, secularised elite. But he also made a new bold statement, and one bearing particular relevance for the topic at hand: he suggested that Eastern European (including Orthodox) countries would also secularise to the degree that they were integrated into the European Union (Berger, 1999, p. 10). According to Berger (2005, p. 443), Orthodox Europe faces a challenge of pluralism that is directly linked to its relations with Europe, and, specifically, with what he calls ‘Eurosecularity’. He perceives a ‘very powerful’ militant secularism emanating from Brussels which is embedded in EU legal and political actions. But he also observes a European ‘culture of secularity’ which exerts a powerful influence on member states. He argues that such a culture of secularity has dramatically changed the place of religion in Southern Europe (Italy, Spain and Portugal), in Ireland, and at least incipiently in Poland. Greece, he argues, is the one Orthodox country that has already been under the full impact of this secularity, ‘as far as I know, with similar consequences’ (Berger, 2005, p. 443). On this basis he predicts that the closer a society moves towards Europe, the more it will come under the influence of European secularity: ‘I doubt that Orthodoxy can bestow immunity against this process’ (2005, p. 443).²

In 2010, Berger elaborated on his perspective and presented Europeanisation as nearly synonymous with secularisation:

Quite apart from the *acquis* to the EU, there is an *acquis* to what I call the ‘European package’ – an aggregate of attitudes, beliefs and lifestyles, which has a cultural fusion effect within the borders of the EU, but which spills across these borders with varying force. Secularity is an important element of the ‘European package’. Whether they are initially aware of this or not, countries that come under the influence of this new European culture *ipso facto* open themselves up to secularization – a decline of traditional religion in the public sphere and in the lives of individuals. (Berger, 2010)

Notably, in this text Berger is discussing the case of Poland and not Orthodoxy, though with markedly similar material as in the discussion regarding Orthodoxy. This points to one of several complications in efforts to define a singular relationship between ‘(Eastern) Orthodox secularisation’ and ‘(Western) European secularisation’. I address further complications below.

Complicating the Accounts

One particularly conspicuous complication stems from the multiple meanings of the term secularisation. According to Casanova (1994), what passes for a single theory of secularisation is actually made up of three different propositions: secularisation as religious decline; secularisation as privatisation; secularisation as differentiation (Tschannen, 1991, refers to three ‘concepts’, based on the texts of several

secularisation theorists: 'worldliness', 'rationalization' and 'differentiation'). Thus when we speak of the potential influence of Western Europe on 'Eastern European secularisation', it is important to specify whether we are speaking of secularisation as decline of religious belief and practice; secularisation as privatisation of religious belief and practice; and/or secularisation as institutional differentiation. This means that there are separate questions on the table: will 'Europe' lead to a decline in religious belief and practice in the Orthodox East? Will it lead to a privatisation of religion and/or will it lead to church–state separation?

Taking Casanova's distinctions as our guide, then, we may ask: how does Greece fare in an assessment of the influence of 'Western European' secularisation on its own Orthodox secularisation? Response to this question requires separate handling of the domains of religious belief and practice in Greece; the state of private versus public religion; and the status of institutional differentiation (for example, church–state relations). This means that there are separate questions on the table. Will 'Europe' lead to a decline in religious belief and practice in the Orthodox East? Will it lead to a privatisation of religion? And/or will it lead to church-state separation? I shall deal with each in turn in the following sections.

A second major complication regards what we mean by 'Europe'. The definition of Europe is a vast philosophical and historical question beyond the scope of this paper and addressed in a great deal of literature.³ For our purposes it is sufficient to limit the question to what type of 'European influence' we are speaking of: cultural or political. We should distinguish, that is, between what may be termed the cultural (Berger, 2005), or as Herbert and Fris (2009) call it, the 'accidental' influence of Europe, on the one hand, and on the other hand the more direct influence of European institutions through ('militantly secular', according to Berger) policies and directives.

A third and related complication is the question of how secular (Western) Europe actually is. Any substantial discussion of its potential to secularise 'the Orthodox East' must contend with challenges to assumptions of both its cultural and its political secularity.⁴ This question is the focus of extensive scholarly debate. Berger for example sees a 'culture of secularity' in Europe (Berger, 2005, p. 443) which, beyond the European context, is identified mainly only among elites and cannot be described as a mass phenomenon nor as an aspect of the dominant culture.⁵ Meanwhile Martin observes 'secular mutations of faith [rather] than straightforward replacements and displacements' (Martin, 2006, p. 68), with Christianity maintaining a distinctly strong presence in Europe through culture and tradition (for example church weddings, baptisms and funerals), as well as through architecture and town planning (Martin, 2005).

Danièle Hervieu-Léger (2000, 2006) also challenges the notion of a culturally secular Europe, arguing that where religion is, actually, is not in the numbers of people present in the traditional churches but, rather, in a 'chain of memory', linking individuals to a community through memory of a shared past, with religion deeply rooted in tradition which persists in the (otherwise secular) present. Thus while practice may be declining, this is not necessarily the case for belief. Grace Davie too questions the cultural secularity of Europe, both through the notion of believing without belonging (Davie, 1994, 2006), and through that of 'vicarious religion' (Davie, 2000), which observes how Europeans expect their religious institutions to offer certain services and play certain roles, regardless of whether they are regular recipients of and participants in these. One might add here in relation to Orthodoxy the possibility of belonging without believing; many may feel a strong sense of belonging to their national traditional religions, demonstrating fairly high levels of loyalty, in spite of relatively low levels of belief, as can be measured through empirical surveys.

In terms of the ‘direct’ political dimension and the role of European institutions, the EU is in principle neutral on matters of religion. In this domain the principle of subsidiarity is applied. Itself a religious (Roman Catholic) concept, the principle of subsidiarity indicates that, by way of respect to national specificity, issues which can be effectively addressed at the national level should be addressed there, without EU intervention. There are however significant tensions between this foundational principle of the EU and another fundamental concept – namely, that of pluralism. The EU aims to influence member states in such a way as to create environments conducive to the flourishing of diversity and pluralism, including religious pluralism. These two interests – subsidiarity and pluralism – often come into conflict in particular cases, most conspicuously when the handling of religious matters in certain member states favours a majority church over the pursuit of pluralism.

The principle of subsidiarity is indeed respected, and there are no EU directives, legislations or treaty provisions on religion *per se* (Ferrari, 2006, p. 13), but of course, EU policy which is not on religion *per se* may still influence religious matters: a case in point (and an example to be addressed below) is how EU data protection directives led to the removal of religious affiliation from Greek national identity cards (Fokas, 2008). Certainly EU labour and equal opportunity directives significantly engage with religion through their application to such issues as whether religious dress is appropriate in the workplace, and if so which (for example, may a British Airways employee wear a visible neck cross, or a Sikh a turban?) and whether religious consciousness may be allowed to influence one’s offering of services through one’s employment (for example, refusal to offer marriage counselling to homosexual couples on religious grounds).⁶ Thus far at least, the EU emphasis remains on other issues, such as data protection and equal opportunity, and its approach to religion *per se* maintains the subsidiarity principle.

The most conspicuous European institutional influence on national religious affairs derives from the Council of Europe via the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), the task of which is to defend the ECHR, mainly by protecting individual religious liberties. Even this influence must be scrutinised carefully, as a nuanced consideration of ECtHR case law and changes in this over time yields contrasting perspectives on the ultimate EU influence over secularisation in member states. According to David Herbert and Max Fras, ‘the secularising potential of EU institutions may be less pronounced than their predominately secular rationalist discourse’: that is, their bark may be worse than their bite, because key institutions such as the ECtHR have resisted challenging perceived cultural norms (Herbert and Fras, 2009, p. 82).⁷ The main tool of the ECtHR in respecting perceived cultural norms is the ‘margin of appreciation’ doctrine, applied more or less broadly to respect individual countries’ traditions. The ‘margin of appreciation’ doctrine allows EU member states considerable flexibility in their domestic interpretation of the articles of the ECHR (Koenig, forthcoming). Certainly this margin is neither wholly consistent⁸ nor static, and observers have in fact noted a trend of the ECtHR towards more narrow margins of appreciation and, effectively, towards more secularist approaches (Langlaude, 2006; Koenig, forthcoming).

Thus the secularity of Western Europe, both in cultural and in political terms, cannot be taken for granted, but is rather multifaceted and in flux. In fact a great deal of contemporary sociological literature addresses the notion of a post-secular Europe (Beckford, 2012; Casanova, 2006; Habermas, 2006; see Fokas, 2009 for an overview). This is a critical part of the puzzle of Western Europe’s potential influence on Eastern/Orthodox secularisation.

The Case of Greek Orthodoxy

The case of Greece is particularly interesting among other majority Orthodox country cases because of its relatively long exposure to the European unification project (EU membership since 1981) and because of the fact that the Orthodox Church of Greece did not experience communist repression. Thus it allows us the opportunity to examine an Orthodox case in its relationship to Western Europe with the advantage of some temporal depth. Can Orthodox Greece be determined as successfully resistant to Western European secularisation, in David Martin's terms? Or is it vulnerable to the Western European secularisation contagion, as Peter Berger suggests?

Following the logic of the previous section, I would argue that the reality of secularisation in the case of Greek Orthodoxy is far more complicated than this oversimplification of two trends of thought suggests. In order to approximate this reality, we must assess both cultural and political secularisation in Greece, and in the three different meanings of the term secularisation: decline in religious belief and practice; the privatisation of religion and decline of public religion; and institutional differentiation. Clearly, the task cannot be carried out in a thorough manner within the confines of an article. Rather, through selective attention to each form of secularisation, my aim is to illustrate the difficulties around generalising about 'Orthodox secularisation', and the even greater difficulties around generalising about the influence of Western Europe on that process.

Belief and Practice

Quantitative research in the form of mass population surveys is useful in assessment of religious belief and practice, though with significant limitations. The European Values Survey (EVS) is among the most prestigious of such surveys for the European realm and useful for our purposes as it included Greece in the 1999 and 2008 rounds with a number of the same questions regarding religious belief and practice. This is a timeframe conducive for observation of changes that may have transpired over time with increasing 'Europeanisation' of Greece (its deepening integration into European institutional structures). On the basis of the survey data, what conclusions can be drawn about changes in belief and practice over the years in which Greece has been a member of the European unification project?

Table 1 below amalgamates some of the questions and responses relating to religious belief and practice most relevant for our purposes.⁹ The first column lists the questions; the second a selection of responses; the third and fourth, percentages for those particular responses in 1999 and 2008 respectively.

Clearly, Table 1 suggests that in many key indicators of both religious belief and religious practice there was notable growth between 1999 and 2008, years during which Greek integration into the European unification project grew in depth and breadth. Meanwhile, and indicative of the shortcomings of quantitative research when it comes to understanding religion and religiosity, other mass surveys with differently designed questionnaires have yielded rather different results. For example, the European Social Survey (ESS), conducted in Greece in 2002, 2004, 2008 and 2010, indicates steady decreases in religious belief and belonging in the period also studied by the EVS (2002–2009). The trend detected in the first three rounds of the ESS is presented in Figure 1.

The discrepancy between the results of the two surveys is striking, even for quantitative studies experts.¹⁰ On the basis of conflicting quantitative evidence, then, one cannot safely generalise about a secularisation in terms of maintenance of or decline in religious belief and practice.

Table 1. Responses to European Values Survey questions on religious belief and practice in Greece

European Values Survey questions	Responses	Percentage 1999	Percentage 2008
How important is religion in your life?	Very important	32.4	43.2
	Not at all important	11.2	4.6
Which religious denomination do you belong to, if any?*	Orthodox	93.4	93.1
How often do you attend religious services?	Once a week	10.6	15.5
	Once a month	19.4	21.2
	Never, practically never	4.6	7.4
Are you a religious person?	Religious person	74.8	85.1
	Not a religious person	14.7	11.2
	Convinced atheist	4.3	2.7
	Yes	39.6	42.5
Does the church offer answers for moral problems?	Yes	27.8	33.0
Does the church offer answers for family life problems?	Yes	56.7	52.0
Does the church offer answers for spiritual needs?	Yes	28.1	24.4
Do you believe in God?	Yes	83.7	90.0
	No	8.3	6.3
Do you believe in life after death?	Yes	47.4	48.8
Do you believe in hell?	Yes	32.1	47.2
Do you believe in heaven?	Yes	37.7	51.0
Do you believe in sin?	Yes	66.3	76.4
How important is God in your life?	Not at all	6.0	4.1
	Very	30.1	32.7
Do you get comfort and strength from religion?	Yes	69.5	79.7
Do you take moments of prayer/meditation?	Yes	58.7	70.1
How often do you pray to God outside religious services?	Every day	33.7	40.8

*To this question, other responses offered in 1999 were Roman Catholic, Jew and Other, and in 2008, Roman Catholic, Muslim and Other. In 1999 the percentage responding 'Jew' was 4.0 and 'Other' 0.3; in 2008, that responding 'Muslim' was 1.7 and 'Other' 0.4. These increases in the Muslim population and in the 'Other' category may account for the slight decrease in percentage belonging to the Orthodox Church, but those increases are not large enough to make a significant difference in most of the percentages in the following questions indicating rises in both religious belief and belonging.

Public Religion

The second aspect of secularisation to be addressed is the privatisation of religion. Most relevant for the Greek case in this domain is the relationship between religion and national identity, which undergirds an especially prominent place for religion in the public sphere. One could argue that, in practice and as a result of a long list of

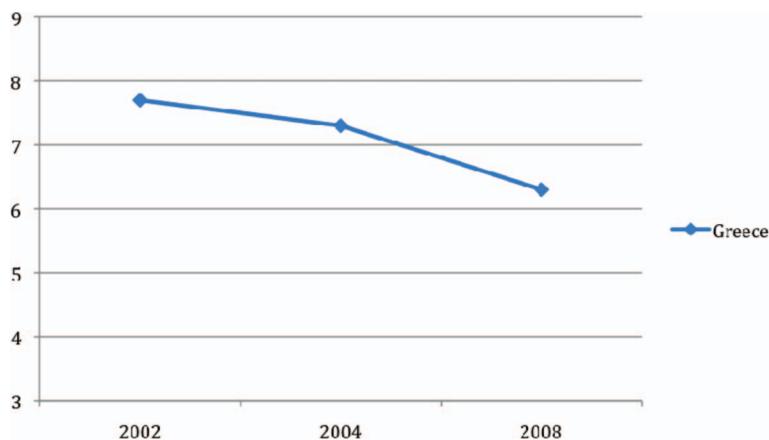


Figure 1. European Social Survey results on religious belief and belonging.

Note: The figure is borrowed and adapted from Stathopoulou (2011, p. 130), where it appears with the title 'Progression of religiosity over time'. It presents mean values of religiosity, with 10 indicating 'very religious'. See also Stathopoulou, 2010.

historical and political contingencies, the public place of Orthodoxy in Greece is largely influenced by its close relationship to national identity (Frazee, 1979; Alivizatos, 1999, 2001; Manitakis, 2000a, b; Roudometof, 2005).

In addition to these historical and political contingencies, agency has also played an important role, both in the public place of religion and in the relationship between religion and national identity, in the sense that some leaders more than others have worked hard to maintain a public place for religion, and to cultivate and preserve a close relationship between religion and national identity. In this there is a significant difference between the previous leader of the Church of Greece, Archbishop Christodoulos (1998–2008) – by all accounts a populist-style church leader whose incumbency was centred on issues linking religion with national identity and on church–state relations – and his successor, Archbishop Ieronymos. When Ieronymos was first elected the media coverage heralded a new era for the place of religion in the Greek public sphere (on this topic, see Fokas, 2008; Papastathis, 2011).

Manifestations of the historically close relationship between the Greek Orthodox Church and the Greek nation (what Kalaitzidis and Asproulis (2011) call 'the aberration which can't (or doesn't want to) end'), are prevalent in Greek society. One example is the connection of nearly all church feast days to some national event or holiday: for example the Feast of the Annunciation of the Mother of God is celebrated with the day marking the national Greek revolution of 1821 and independence from the Ottoman Empire (25 March); the feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God is the same as that celebrating the armed forces; the feast of the Holy Protection (*Agia Skepi*) is marked on the anniversary of the day when Greeks said 'no' to the Italians and the Nazis in the Second World War (28 October, or 'The Day of No'). As Kalaitzidis and Asproulis note, 'Today, 190 years since the Greek Revolution of 1821, the church in Greece seems unable to be liberated from the syndrome of identification with the nation; it seems unable to see its work, its teaching and preaching and its mission in general separate from the course of the nation' (Kalaitzidis and Asproulis, 2011, pp. 77–78; see also Kalaitzidis, 2010).

This relationship is not 'unproblematic' in David Martin's terms, but rather troubles a very large number of scholars, as well as certain politicians, clerics and

theologians.¹¹ Of course Martin rightly reflects on the perspectives of the mass population, but as demonstrated by Alfred Stepan (2000), in generalisations around religious traditions it is important to acknowledge existing elements of multivocality and to explore the potential uses of those multivocal components. In the Greek case the voices resisting the close linking of religion and national identity, and the public place of religion, are increasingly voluble and influential. In this same context, nor is the relationship between religion and national identity organic or static. It is certainly powerful and deep-rooted but, as many scholars have argued, including Victor Roudometof (2010, p. 29), this relationship has been painstakingly and calculatingly maintained through ‘the production and reproduction of collective memory managed and maintained by clergy, theologians and academics, propagated through official speeches, commemorative acts and other media and then duplicated through the school curriculum and holidays’. The religion–national identity link is also maintained through politicians yielding to church pressure and instrumentally and conspicuously using their links with the church, particularly around election time (Fokas, 2000, 2006). Such trends have served to keep religion public and the church very visible.

As I suggested earlier, the role of religion in the public sphere is not an area in which the EU would seek to exert direct influence: the margin of appreciation is precisely for respecting such relationships as that between religion and national identity. In principle, one potential European secularising influence would be manifested if the emphasis on national identity among Greek citizens were gradually replaced by an emphasis on European identity instead. This could theoretically demonstrate at least one indirect tendency towards a decrease in public religion, by undermining the salience of national identity and thus also of the religion–national identity link. However, as suggested in Figure 2, which reflects individuals’ sense of national versus European identity, Greece is a country with relatively little prospect for such a development. Even if national identity were to wane in survey data and European identity were shown to be greater, this does not necessarily mean a weakening of the link between religion and national identity, given that European identity represents more a civic than an ethnic identity (Smith, 1992).

As Theoni Stathopoulou notes, ‘although the constitutional arrangements of church–state relations in Greece, even the special privileges given to the church, are not very different from those in the rest of Europe, the visibility of the church in the public sphere is high – mainly due to the way religion is diffused in everyday life’ (Stathopoulou, 2011, p. 196). Religious diffusion is indeed an important element in the public place of religion in Greece.¹² One example of religious diffusion is the prevalence of celebration of Orthodox Greeks’ ‘name days’: the feast days of saints whose names they bear. Traditionally, name days rather than birthdays were celebrated in Greece (an example of emphasis on collective/communal rather than individual identities). This has changed over the last several decades, as noted by the anthropologist Renée Hirschon (2010), with a significant shift in focus from the religious collective to the individual identity of the person through the increasing emphasis on individuals’ birthdays. Hirschon argues that European integration since 1981 has resulted in significant shifts in Greek society and what could be dismissed as a trivial social feature – an emphasis on birthdays over name days – ‘is a sensitive index of a deeper conceptual change’ in which ‘the paradigm of the human subject is shifting from the Eastern Orthodox anthropology of the person to a western anthropology of the individual’ (Hirschon, 2010, pp. 296, 306). At the same time, however, in a notable example of ‘banal religion’, the Athens Metro system announces

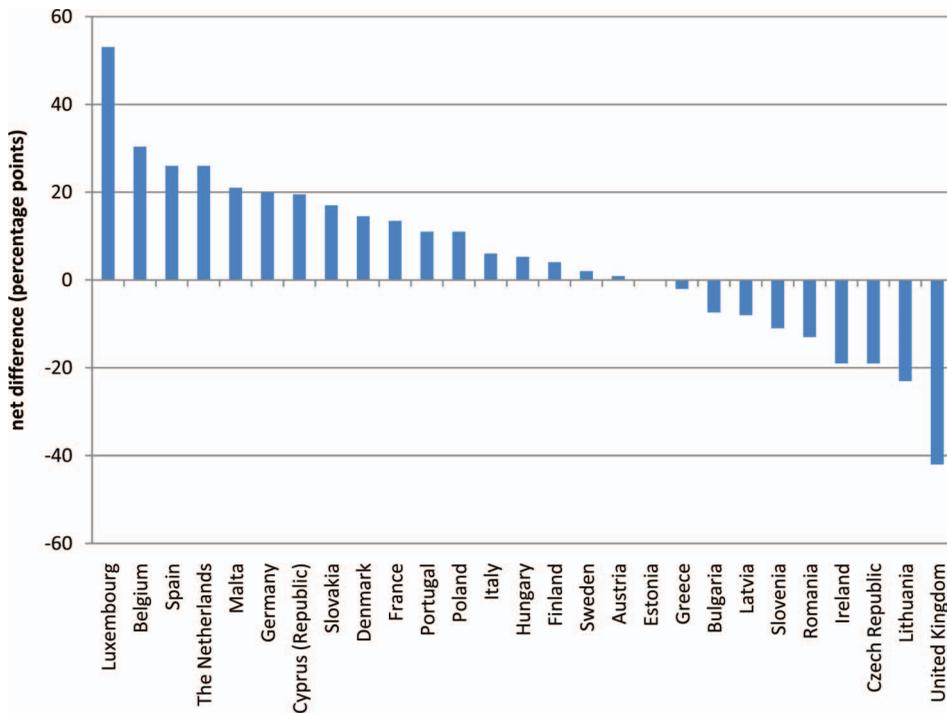


Figure 2. Net European identity in Europe, 2010.

Source: Eurobarometer 2010, calculations by Slawomir Mandes. The graph is borrowed from Trittler *et al.* (forthcoming). The calculations are drawn from the responses to the question 'In the near future, do you see yourself as... (nationality) only, (nationality) and European, European and (nationality) or European only?' Net European identity is calculated as follows: [(nationality) and European + European and (nationality) + European only] – (nationality) only. Analyses were conducted with a weighting factor to correct for socio-demographic characteristics as far as weights were provided. Missing values (don't know/no answer) were excluded.

via its electronic notice boards the name days celebrated on a given day. Another example of religious diffusion is the prevalence of icons not only in private but also in public spaces. This point leads us to the third dimension of secularisation, institutional differentiation and, specifically in the Greek case, the separation of church and state.

Institutional Differentiation

Close church–state relations in Greece are a logical extension of, and conspicuously buttressed by, the relationship between religion and national identity. It is in relation to this aspect of secularisation mainly that political influence is relevant, and specifically that of the EU.

Church–state linkages are embedded in Greek legislation and practice: the clergy of the Greek Orthodox Church (GOC) are remunerated and pensioned by the state; lessons on religion in state schools reflect official Orthodox positions; state holidays are compatible with the religious calendar; the Statutory Charter of the Church was passed by parliament; icons are present in all court rooms; public functionaries are sworn into office mainly by the archbishop of Athens and All Greece (though

alternatives are available); church and state leaders often jointly preside over state functions and national holiday celebrations; the archbishop is buried with state honours; and, until recently, the ‘opinion’ of Orthodox bishops had to be sought for the issuing of licenses for the building of places of worship for minority faiths. (All of the above contributes of course to the strong public presence of religion in the Greek public sphere as described above.)

Efforts to limit the privileges of the GOC have led to intense church–state conflict, notably over church property ownership (ongoing at some level since 1987) and, more recently, over the state’s removal of reference to religious affiliation from national identity cards (in 2000). In such conflicts the GOC has tended to mobilise public opinion in its favour and to thus limit politicians’ will to address such issues for fear of losing political support. Yet in the policy domain significant steps have been taken and the will to change has been expressed by certain politicians, though often timidly in the face of the GOC. In these cases indeed we may indeed speak of secularisation coming hand-in-hand with Europeanisation. Two examples will suffice to make the point.

One notable example of policy change influenced by or effecting secularisation as Europeanisation is the fact that the EU directive on protection of personal data served as at least an excuse for the removal of religious affiliation from Greek national identity cards in 2000. In this case, an EU directive helped make politically feasible an action that would otherwise have been difficult for Greek politicians to take, given the staunch resistance posed by the GOC. The details of the identity card issue have been much discussed and published and republished in a long list of texts (see for example Stavrakakis (2002); Molokotos-Liederman (2003, 2007); Alivazatos (2001, pp. 311–20); Anastassiadis (2004); Manitakis (2000b); Dimitropoulos (2001)). For my purposes it will suffice to draw on just a few major characteristics of the ‘identity (card) crisis’. The government’s argument for the decision was that Greece needed to conform to the EU directive on the protection of personal data, in accordance with which reference to religious affiliation on public documents (as are identity cards) violates the individual’s right to privacy. The GOC, in response, and especially Archbishop Christodoulos, presented the issue as a threat to national identity, and pressed (persistently but unsuccessfully) the president of Greece for a referendum on the issue. Christodoulos argued that if religion were removed from identity cards, ‘then the people will be disconnected from Orthodoxy... which especially for us Greeks entails a fundamental element of our identity’ (Ethnos, 2000).

Clearly one motivating factor in the GOC’s efforts was a sense that the whole situation represented a threat to church–state relations. Christodoulos complained about this specifically, with reference to the fact that the decision was taken by the government without first consulting the GOC. However, beside the government the main target of the indignation of the GOC, and especially of Christodoulos, was Europe, or the EU. In fact, the GOC leadership wavered between blaming Europe, the government and Greek intellectuals who, according to one cleric, were ‘more European than the Europeans’ (note the derogatory nature of the comment). Characteristic of this ‘wavering’ was Christodoulos’ statement during one of the mass rallies when, speaking against the backdrop of a massive EU flag behind the stage, he declared that ‘Europe may fill our pockets, but it can empty our souls’, indicating bluntly a conception of the EU as a secularising influence.

A second example of potential secularising influence from ‘Europe’ is the *Lautsi v Italy* European Court of Human Rights case (2009), in which the presence of the crucifix in Italian schools was deemed a violation of the European Convention on

Human Rights. The ECtHR decision was later overturned by the Grand Chamber ruling on the case (the hearing took place on 30 June 2010, following unprecedented intervention by a number of signatory states, and the decision was reached on 18 March 2011). Responses by Greek politicians, and the reaction of the GOC to the original decision, are telling of what might have been had the original decision held. The presence of icons in Greek school classrooms is not regulated by Greek legislation but is widespread by popular will. Before the overturning of the 2009 decision, the Greek justice minister had declared that if the decision held, Greece would have to comply by removing religious symbols from public spaces. If this politician's statement can be taken at face value, it suggests one example of Western European legal and political norms influencing secularisation as differentiation in Orthodox Greece. Notably though, the justice minister's statement on the necessary implementation of the final verdict included the phrase 'always in communication with the Church' (see Kathimerini, 2009, p. 5), representing perhaps lessons learned from the intense church–state struggle over identity cards (a decision taken without consultation with the GOC), and the feared political costs of another church–state confrontation.

It is interesting also to examine the response of the GOC to the 2009 *Lautsi v Italy* decision. The church hierarchy was relatively calm and measured in its statements, to a large degree as a result of a plan not to take the case seriously given the expectation that the decision would not hold in the long run. Archbishop Ieronymos described the discussions on the issue as 'ludicrous' and stated that 'rights are not only for minorities but also for majorities' (Bougatsos, 2009). The archbishop also reacted defensively with respect to Greek national identity, describing as 'provocative the stance of certain people who struggle for the disappearance from our lives of faith, holy symbols and the ethos according to which our nation followed its path' (Kathimerini, 2009). He stated that 'these things are unacceptable in Greek tradition and will, of course, not happen' and emphasised that 'all Greeks will need to appreciate that others cannot decide for us' (Tsatsis, 2009), an indirect reference of course to the European Court of Human Rights. Finally, when asked directly by a journalist what his reaction was to the notion that Greece would implement the *Lautsi v Italy* decision if it were eventually upheld, Ieronymos responded: 'The question is what is more important – the ruling, or the national right to our tradition and history? As we pursued our European course, they often told us that the identity and traditions of peoples will be respected. Is the ruling stronger than the identity of a people?' (Gilson, 2009).

The *Lautsi v Italy* case brought to light the fact that the GOC had done its homework and was acutely aware of the principle of subsidiarity and of the fact that if something can be interpreted primarily as a symbol of national identity, then that symbol should, as one Greek bishop put it, be 'protected' from 'European harm'.¹³ The reaction of the GOC to secularisation represented in the *Lautsi v Italy* case is, in David Martin's terms, resistant, and this applies not only to the church hierarchs but also to the broader population. Of course, the fact that nationalisation of a religious symbol entails, in effect, a secularisation of that symbol also, is lost on much of the Greek Orthodox hierarchy. Meanwhile, the heavy emphasis on the threat to national identity entailed by the 2009 *Lautsi v Italy* decision applies also to Italy, where for example the minister of education declared that 'no ideological European Court can negate our identity' (cited in Vatou, 2009). The evidence thus points to a religious–secular divide rather than an East–West, Orthodoxy–Roman Catholicism/Protestantism divide.

Concluding Remarks

Returning to our starting point and having addressed the Greek case, can we say that Orthodoxy is resistant to Western European secularisation, or that it is catching the contagion?

In terms of belief and belonging, survey data generate mixed results, with one significant study indicating increasing levels in religious belief and practice during critical years of Greek integration into the European unification project, and another study indicating opposite trends, thus precluding conclusive statements in either direction.

In terms of public religion, the role of agency (that is, of individual religious and political leaders), the strength of national identity and the relationship between religion and national identity are three very important variables in this domain often overriding European influence. Further, the subsidiarity principle explicitly protects the place of religion in national identities and, in the Greek case, national identity is one of the major factors maintaining a public place for religion. Significantly, the reaction of certain Greek Orthodox leaders to the *Lautsi v Italy* decision indicates that the European Court of Human Rights decision actually bore the potential to influence a situation wherein the GOC (and surely others) would increasingly seek to interpret religious symbols as national symbols in efforts to 'protect' them from 'European harm'. To the extent to which such a trend would materialise, 'Europe' would be steering the GOC towards even greater emphasis on national identity than is already the case. This is one of many different directions that EU influence on national religious trends could take.

It is in the domain of institutional differentiation that we see the strongest evidence that, in Berger's terms, Orthodoxy does not provide 'immunity' against such secularisation as may come through European-influenced legislation changes. Resistance to European secularising influence, as described by Martin, there certainly is, but this does not mean that the secularising influence (as in institutional differentiation) cannot and will not take root. It did in the identity card case and, to the extent to which the Greek justice minister's declarations were sincere, it would also have done so in the religious symbols case had the 2009 *Lautsi v Italy* decision held (though one may doubt how effective state implementation would have been on this front). In both cases, this is clearly a matter of political will in relation to church pressures, party politics, the timing of elections and other such variables, rendering the Orthodox factor a dependent rather than an independent variable.

Further questions remain regarding how secular Western Europe is for it to be influencing Orthodox Europe in the direction of increased secularisation. Tendencies in different directions are present across Europe and within different contexts. The sociologist's task is to identify and explain differences rather than to proclaim either religious retreat or religious revival in Europe as a whole,¹⁴ or indeed in Eastern versus Western Europe.

From all of the above we can conclude that even if an Eastern Orthodox pattern of secularisation can be identified based on historical trends in Orthodox countries, we should certainly question its utility as a map to explain the present and future. By breaking down the concept of secularisation into its different constitutive meanings, we see first that we cannot generalise about 'Greek secularisation' as a whole, as there are significant differences in the three forms of secularisation examined here, and second, that the situation is very much in flux, as indeed is the case in 'Western' European secularisation as well.

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Notes

- 1 This paper was written during a Marie Curie Fellowship at the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP). It also draws on ideas developed through the project on Europe, Religion and Multiple Modernities (EUROMM) funded by the Volkswagen Foundation.
- 2 Berger repeated and fleshed out this statement during a London School of Economics Forum on Religion seminar devoted to the topic of his 'retraction statement' on 12 November 2008 at the LSE.
- 3 See for example: Dawson (1952), de Rougemont (1963, 1966), Halecki (1950), Delanty (1995) and Geremek (1996).
- 4 Also critical, of course, is a realistic consideration of how 'religious' the Orthodox East is, including the complex phenomenon of postcommunist religious freedom that skews to a large extent the religious picture in each postcommunist context. This topic, however, is beyond the necessarily limited scope of the present article. On this see Borowik and Tomka (2001).
- 5 He does however qualify this description with the following parenthetical statement: 'I cannot discuss here the possibility of whether European culture itself may change in this regard. If it does, an important factor will be the challenge of Islam within as well as on the borders of Europe, a religious community that largely refuses to play by the rules of *laïcité*' (Berger, 2005, p. 443).
- 6 For more on religion in labour and equal opportunity legislation, see Vickers (2006, 2008). See also Carrera and Parkin (2011) and McCrea (2010).
- 7 Of course, the ECtHR is not an EU institution, but although the ECHR and the ECtHR are formally under the auspices of the Council of Europe, rather than of the EU as such, it is clear that the ECtHR and its rulings play an integral role in the EU's relations with individual countries. Further, EU accession requires prior membership of the Council of Europe, which entails also being a signatory to the ECHR.
- 8 According to one interpretation (Richardson and Shoemaker, 2008), the margin is greater for older member states and smaller for newer member states (and, particularly, for Orthodox and postcommunist states).
- 9 The table presents a necessarily selective sample of the research results, given space limitations. The questions included here are considered key questions indicating religious belief and religious practice. They appear in the table in the order in which they appear in the surveys.
- 10 According to Stathopoulou (2012), there are several possible reasons for the divergence of results between the EVS and the ESS, including methodological differences in how religiosity is measured (the EVS traces the *content* of religious beliefs, whereas the ESS is limited simply to whether religious beliefs exist); differences in the wording of the questions (where applicable; for example, 'how important is religion in your life' is not the same as 'how religious are you'); and differences in the scaling. She also suggests that particular events around the exact dates when the surveys were conducted in Greece might have skewed the results; but even this potential factor would not easily explain such divergent results.

- 11 These include Anagnostopoulou (2000), Dimitropoulos (2001), Kalaitzidis (2003a, b, 2007, 2010), Kokosalakis (1987, 1995, 1996, 1997), Makrides (1991, 1996, 1997, 2009), Manitakis (2000a, b), Vassiliadis (2003), and contributors to the special issues of the journal *Synaksi* on church–state relations (vol. 75) and church and nation (vol. 79).
- 12 Cipriani (2011) defines religious diffusion as religion that involves vast sectors of society beyond the simple limits of ecclesiastical religion and which is widespread as the historical and cultural result of the long presence of the majority religious institution in a particular nation and the outcome of its socialising and legitimising action over time.
- 13 The cited cleric made the statement at a public seminar held at a Greek theological institute in May 2010.
- 14 David Martin made this argument eloquently at the London School of Economics Forum on Religion seminar on 7 March 2012.

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