



Investigating fundamentalist trends in the Orthodox Church of Greece: Balancing between traditionalism and fundamentalism

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Abstract The purpose of this article is to investigate trends and variations of fundamentalism in the Orthodox Church of Greece. In order to achieve this, the article analyses discourses and practices of the Orthodox Church of Greece since the restoration of democracy in 1974. The main argument is that the church, as an institution, produces public discourses and adopts practices with regard to modernity, more specifically on social, political, moral and scientific issues, using both modernity and tradition in order to strengthen its place in Greek society. The church, also, tries to establish an official response to the gradual marginalisation of religion both at the political and social levels, through moral dualism and strict behavioural requirements; perceiving sacred texts in an absolute and inerrant way; and creating sharp boundaries between Greek Orthodoxy and other religious communities, non-religious groups and the West, leading this way to the establishment of an elect membership through superiority. The main outcome is that the Orthodox Church of Greece is primarily a traditionalist institution, but it also meets a great number of the fundamentalist characteristics responding this way to the privatisation and marginalisation of religion in Greek society.

Keywords Orthodox Church · Greece · Fundamentalism · Traditionalism · Modernity

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1 Introduction

Although fundamentalism as a concept and movement has its roots in the first decades of the 20th century it was during the 1980s and 1990s that started to attract much academic attention. After the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the emergence of fundamentalist groups in other religions (e.g. in Judaism and Christianity) scholars begun to systematically study fundamentalism, its reasoning, ideology, practice and impact (Lawrence 1989; Marty and Appleby 1995; Kepel 1994; Riesebrodt 1998; Eisenstadt 1999). Despite the growth of academic studies and research in the fundamentalism field regarding every world religion, surprisingly enough Orthodox Christianity did not attract much scientific attention with only few recent exceptions (Vukomanović 2011; Stoeckl 2014, 2017; Hovorum 2016, 2021; Demacopoulos 2015). This observation applies to the Orthodox Church of Greece as well for which only a small number of studies have been conducted (Makrides 1991, 2016a).

The purpose of this chapter is to look into the discourses and practices of the Orthodox Church of Greece during the last five decades, since the restoration of democracy in 1974 in relation to fundamentalism through a number of questions. Does fundamentalism exist within the Orthodox Church of Greece? If it does exist, which forms this fundamentalism takes? Which is the relation between fundamentalism, nationalism and traditionalism in the Greek context and the Orthodox Church? The main argument is that from the 1980s the church produced public discourses and proceeded to a number of actions against crucial aspects of modernity especially with regard to social, political, moral and scientific issues. On the other hand, the church has been selectively using both modernity and tradition in order to strengthen its place in Greek society. Further to that, the church tried to establish an official response to the gradual marginalisation of religion both at the political and social levels, underlying the importance of morality and reproducing moral dualism, preserving sacred texts as absolute and inerrant, and creating sharp boundaries between Greek Orthodoxy and other religious communities and the West, leading this way to the establishment of an elect membership. Elaborating on a number of examples derived from the Greek context the goal of this article is to cast light on a topic which does not attract much attention in the academia. As a consequence, the principal goal is to investigate if the institution of the Orthodox Church of Greece meets any of the main characteristics of fundamentalism responding this way to a series of developments that lead to the privatisation and marginalisation of religion in contemporary Greek society.

2 The context: religion and politics

Despite the fact that during the last years a great number of evidence show a gradual distancing of the Greek people, especially the younger generations, from religion,¹

¹ During the last decade Greek society has seen a rise in the number of people who distance themselves from the Orthodox religion becoming atheists, agnostics and religious indifferent. This significant religious shift can be supported by a number of surveys conducted during the last years (Public Issue 2008; Kapa Research 2015; Dianeosis 2016, 2020).

the Orthodox Church of Greece has preserved its strong place and influential role in the fields of society and politics. Drawing on the historical and legal background it could be argued that the Orthodox Church and the state have been closely collaborating on a variety of issues. It was in 1833 when the Orthodox Church was self-declared an autocephalous church and incorporated in the state apparatus, becoming this way an ideological proponent of the national ideology.² With very few exceptions from then onwards the state has been protecting the church, considering it as the nation's savior during the Ottoman Empire (the "mother of the nation") and the church, on the other hand, has been supporting the state in ideological and political issues (e.g. reproducing Helleno-Christianism and supporting anti-Communism).³ Furthermore, the church has contributed to the re-production of a kind of public discourse which consists of primarily critical views and negative perceptions of the West and anything considered as Western (e.g. the Enlightenment, modernity, individualism, globalisation). At the same time through this public discourse it continuously praises the East and its culture, i.e. the Byzantine Empire and Orthodox Christianity (Makrides 2016b; Kalaitzidis 2019).

When it comes to the legal framework it could be argued that the Orthodox Church of Greece is much closer to what could be described as a state church (Sakellariou 2013a). The Greek Constitution starts with the phrase: "In the name of the Holy, one in-essence and indivisible Trinity", and according to Article 3 the "prevailing religion in Greece is the religion of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ".⁴ Based on the above, certain scholars claim that as long as there are such statements in the Constitution, Greece is far from what would be a secular state (Paparizos 1998; Dimitropoulos 2001, p. 70–80). On the other hand, others contend that the above constitutional elements are not substantial and have principally a symbolic and historical meaning, in order to acknowledge Orthodox Church's historical role and at the same time that the majority of the Greek society self-identifies with the Orthodox Christian religion (Venizelos 2000, p. 137–138; Manitakis 2000, p. 72–74).

Furthermore, article 2 of the first chapter of the law about the operation of the Orthodox Church and its relations with the state (590/1977, Official Government Gazette A 146), mentions that the church of Greece should cooperate with the state on themes of common interest, for example, the Christian education of the youth; the religious service in the army; the support of the institution of marriage and family; [...] the protection of holy relics and Ecclesiastical and Christian monuments; the establishment of new religious holidays; and can ask for the protection of the state whenever the Orthodox religion is insulted.

² Very regularly the Orthodox Churches which became independent from the Patriarchate during the 19th century are characterised as national churches. It could be argued that the Orthodox Church of Greece is a *de facto* national church, but not *de jure*.

³ This type of ideology includes in a combination ancient Greek heritage, Byzantine Empire and Modern Greece, arguing that the Greek nation is blessed by God, unique among the other nations in terms of history and culture, characterised by historical and biological continuity and that a 'true' Greek must be Orthodox, meaning that the Greek nation and the Orthodox religion are inseparable.

⁴ For an English translation of the Greek Constitution see <https://www.hellenicparliament.gr/UserFiles/f3c70a23-7696-49db-9148-f24dce6a27c8/001-156%20aggliko.pdf> (accessed February 11, 2022).

After the restoration of democracy in 1974, however, and primarily after the socialist party of PASOK came to power in 1981, there have been a number of initiatives towards the secularisation of the state and the minimisation of the church's role and influence over the state apparatus and the society.⁵ The most important developments, though, have been observed since the 2000s on a variety of issues. Some examples that could be considered as secular developments include the introduction of the automatic divorce for married couples without the church's involvement in 1976, the introduction of civil marriage in 1982, the legal establishment of cremation centres and the ban of confession in schools, both in 2006, the introduction of a civil oath together with the religious one in the Greek army (2007) and the provision for civil funerals (2016).⁶

In a landmark case, in 2000 after pressure from the European Union and the decision of the Hellenic Data Protection Authority,⁷ the socialist government decided to remove religious affiliation from the identity cards (Dimitropoulos 2001, p. 151–158). The Orthodox Church reacted against this decision considering it as an offensive act against the Orthodox religion and culture and organised massive demonstrations in collaboration with the right-wing opposition (Stavarakakis 2002; Anastasiadis 2004; Molokotos-Liederman 2007; Sakellariou 2014). Despite these reactions, the government stood firm and supported its decision and this was recorded as one of the most important victories the state won against the Orthodox Church and a key-decision of the secularisation process of the Greek state. From one point of view, it could be argued that the identity cards case opened the Pandora's box for further secularisation initiatives and demands.

During the last decade there have been other instances where discussion emerged with regard to the marginalisation of religion, traditionalism and fundamentalism. The rise and entrance into mainstream politics of the neo-Nazi party of Golden Dawn and the support it received from some Orthodox Metropolitans and lower rank priests was a key-issue from 2010 until the party's conviction as a criminal organisation by the court in 2020 (Zoumpoulakis 2013, Lagos et al. 2021). Furthermore, the agreement between the left-wing government of SYRIZA (Radical Left Coalition) and Archbishop Ieronymos in 2018, which's main goal was to resolve a number of issues between the state and the church led to strong reactions, both at the high and lower clergy levels resulting to the agreement's withdrawal. The main reason was that from large parts of the church it was considered as another effort to marginalise

⁵ In the political declaration of the Socialist Party (PASOK) it was mentioned that the Church will be permanently separated from the state and the monastery property will be socialised. This proclamation was never implemented when the party came to power <http://pasok.gr/diakhyrxh/> (accessed February 16, 2022).

⁶ The first legal attempt with regard to cremation was law 3448/2006 (Official Government Gazette, A 57), Article 57 and the more recent one law 4277/2014 (Official Government Gazette, A 156) Articles 48–49. Regarding the civil funeral, the legislation is law 4368/2016 (Official Government Gazette, A 21) Article 35A. The civil oath in the army was introduced via the fixed order 9–13/2007 of the Ministry of National Defense/Hellenic Army General Staff.

⁷ Decision 510/17 (May 15, 2000). The Council of State later verified this decision against those who appealed it (decision 2283/2001) and it was backed up by a ruling from the European Court for Human Rights in 2002.

religion. The coronavirus pandemic was the latest issue that could be examined through the lenses of modernity, marginalisation of religion, fundamentalism and traditionalism and that is why it is further discussed in the main analysis.

On the one hand, the above-mentioned developments could be considered as important legislative measures towards the secularisation of the state during the last twenty years. On the other hand, there are a number of other issues still pending before it could be argued that the Greek state has gone through a secularisation process.⁸ What is crucial for the analysis that will follow is that the Orthodox Church perceives such initiatives and state decisions as marginalisation and privatisation of the Orthodox religion.⁹

3 The material and the method of the analysis

The focus of this article is on the Orthodox Church of Greece as an institution and not on other Orthodox groups and associations. As a consequence, the material consists primarily of the Encyclical Letters of the Holy Synod made public from 1974 until nowadays as well as of the public discourse of some Archbishops and Bishops of the Orthodox Church. This selection was made in order to collect the official discourse and decisions of the Orthodox Church as they appear in the Encyclical Letters addressed either to the followers of the church or the Bishops and the lower rank clergymen. From this perspective decisions such as the initiative to organise a referendum or a demonstration are considered as discursive material and are included in the discursive analysis.

Discourse analysis, especially in its critical version, has been an important methodological tool for the social sciences and humanities in their quest to understand the social, political and historical context (Fairclough 1992, Wodak 1996). As it has been argued, the task of discourse analysis is to examine the dialectical relationship between discourse and social systems, but also to expose the way in which reason, language, and meaning are used by those in power, the rulers, in order to oppress and deceive the non-holders of power, the ruled (Howarth 2000). Furthermore, the study of discourses must not be cut off from the social and historical context. Discourses are always linked to the broader context as well as to other discourses that were produced earlier, at the same time or the following years (Fairclough and Wodak 1997, p. 277). Hence, the reason for the selection time frame of the material, from 1974 onwards, is because since then Greek society entered a period of modernisation and gradual secularisation (through the country's

⁸ Some of them are related to the Constitution which still includes the introductory phrase "In the name of the Holy and one in essence and indivisible Trinity", article 3 of the Constitution which still acknowledges the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ as the prevailing religion, the exclusively Orthodox Christian oath of the President of the Republic before assuming the exercise of his/her duties, religious class at schools which is Orthodox orientated, the school consecration at the beginning of each school year and the everyday Orthodox prayer in school.

⁹ It needs to be clarified that the secularisation of the state does not mean that there will be no relations and collaboration between the two institutions, since many European states are secular but without cutting their relations with Christian Churches or other religious groups.

participation in the European Union, the socialist governments of the 1980s, etc.). In the same period, later on, Greece also faced two significant crises, that of the economic crisis (2010–2019) and the latest of Covid-19 pandemic. As it will be probably shown during the analysis the above context is explicitly or implicitly related to the production of the church's discourse and any trends of fundamentalism observed in the Orthodox Church of Greece.

4 Debates over concepts: fundamentalism, traditionalism, rigorism

It is true that the academic and public debates over fundamentalism usually never lead to an agreement about its history and content, but mainly about its definition. Especially when the discussion moves from American Protestantism, i.e. fundamentalism in its 'original' form, to other variations in other societies and religions (Martensson et al. 2011), then the whole debate becomes even more complicated. As it has been argued (Makrides 1994, p. 85) a simple change of the term would not automatically solve all the existing problems, but could create more, because what matters is the content and not the external form (i.e. the name) of the concept. Therefore, there is an extensive dialogue and heated debates on the one hand of what could be defined as fundamentalism and on the other of the similarities and differences between concepts like fundamentalism, traditionalism, rigorism, integristism and conservatism.

According to Riesebrodt (1998, p. 8–9) fundamentalism is a variant of the type of movement that conjures up a mythical past to mobilise traditionalists. Fundamentalism, then, refers to an urban movement directed primarily against the dissolution of personalistic, patriarchal notions of order and social relations and their replacement by depersonalised values. That means that fundamentalism thinking is marked by a profound experience of crisis. At this point the discussion about tradition is crucial and the seminal work of Edward Shils (1981) is illuminating. In Shils's approach (1981, p. 12–15), tradition could mean a variety of things, but in its most elementary concept means simply a *traditum*, i.e. something transmitted or handed down from the past to the present. Further to that, Shils added that traditions develop because of the desire to create something better, truer or more convenient. It is obvious that the difference between traditionalism and fundamentalism might be very thin and unclear. Nevertheless, it is probably this perceived crisis and the need to a collective response to the marginalisation of religion and the threat against traditions that makes the greater difference.

Having the above in mind fundamentalism thinking does not only take the form of an independent, extra-institutional movement but could also emerge within institutions like the Orthodox Church of Greece. Previous work in the field (Makrides 2016a) which problematises over the use of fundamentalism in Greek Orthodoxy while suggesting the use of rigorism as a more appropriate concept, especially for those groups and voices outside of the mainstream Orthodox Church (e.g. old-calendarists or para-ecclesiastical groups) is taken into consideration. However, while one would not disagree with the use of the term in order to describe phenomena before the appearance of fundamentalism, at the beginning of the 20th century, it

wouldn't be a problem to describe later groups, phenomena and modes of thinking as fundamentalist.

The starting point for the investigation of fundamentalist trends and variations in the Orthodox Church of Greece is the classical characteristics of fundamentalism as they came out from the Chicago Fundamentalism Project. According to the findings of the project in order to describe a group as fundamentalist it needs to meet most, if not all, of the following criteria: 1) A response to religion's social marginalisation; 2) Selective use of tradition and modernity; 3) Moral dualism; 4) Absolutism and inerrancy of essential texts; 5) Millennialism; 6) Elect membership; 7) Sharp boundaries; 8) Authoritarian organisation; and 9) Strict behavioural requirements (Almond, Sivan, Appleby, 1995, p. 399–424). Further to the above nine elements, two other elements should be considered as crucial when discussing about fundamentalism. The first one is Shupe's (2011) suggestion, that nationalism quite often becomes an accessory of fundamentalism, which is also pointed out by other scholars who have studied fundamentalism in Greek Orthodoxy (Paparizos 2000; Kalaitzidis 2000). The second is that lay mobilisation is quite often an important parameter of fundamentalism (Riesebrodt 2000).

Moreover, as argued (Pollack, Demmrich and Müller, 2022) fundamentalism can clearly not be defined according to fixed religious beliefs. Rather, one should distinguish the changing beliefs of fundamentalist statements from the forms in which they are expressed. If certain religious beliefs are defined as binding objects of faith, then one could speak of orthodoxy (Fullerton and Hunsberger 1982, p. 318). Fundamentalism, on the other hand, denotes the absolute and unquestionable way in which people hold these or other beliefs. It therefore denotes the mode of faith, while orthodoxy denotes its content. According to Pollack, Demmrich and Müller (2022) fundamentalism is defined as an attitude characterised by four main claims: 1) exclusive truth, 2) superiority over all other positions, 3) the universal validity of this exclusive truth, and 4) the radical transformation of the world according to this truth. For Pollack, Demmrich and Müller (2022) such an approach is more specific and precise than Altemeyer and Hunsberger's (1992, p. 118) often quoted and widely accepted definition of fundamentalism.¹⁰ Pollack, Demmrich and Müller (2022) from their part suggest that the religious teachings in which the fundamentalist believes are not only an essential, but actually the only, truth, a truth not only opposed by other powers to be fought, but is superior to them. This truth must not only be followed according to the practices of the past, but the lost past must be restored through radical change.

It is important to stress, though, that when talking about fundamentalism one should not bring in mind only terrorist acts and violence. As it has been argued, not all fundamentalists are violent, in fact more are not (Emerson and Hartmann 2006, p. 136). That means that the disassociation of fundamentalism and violence is crucial

¹⁰ This approach defines fundamentalism as the belief that "there is one set of religious teachings that clearly contains the fundamental, basic, intrinsic, essential, inerrant truth about humanity and deity; that this essential truth is fundamentally opposed by the forces of evil which must be vigorously fought; that this truth must be followed today according to the fundamental, unchangeable practices of the past; and that those who believe and follow these fundamental teachings have a special relationship with the deity".

and should not be neglected in all relevant analyses. Based on the above approaches of fundamentalism five main themes related to the trends of fundamentalism in the Orthodox Church of Greece have been selected: 1) The social and political marginalisation of religion; 2) Morality, incorporating moral dualism and strict behavioural requirements; 3) The role of tradition and modernity; 4) The preservation of sacred texts; and 5) Superiority, incorporating elect membership and sharp boundaries. A final remark before proceeding with the analysis is critical. Although this article focuses on the Orthodox Church of Greece as an institution it does not neglect the existence of fundamentalism or rigorism in other groups (Makrides 2016a) and it doesn't underestimate their impact upon the Orthodox Church, which might be crucial for the development of any fundamentalist elements within the Orthodox Church.¹¹

5 Fundamentalism and the Greek Orthodox Church

5.1 Responses to the marginalisation of religion

Bearing in mind the discussion about the secularisation process in Greek society it could be argued that it is not without reason that the Orthodox Church perceives secular initiatives and decisions from the part of the state or other groups as a threat against Orthodox religion, Orthodox culture and the church as an institution. There are many cases that could be included in this category, some of them related to other aspects of fundamentalism, e.g. morality, which from the part of the church are considered as an effort to marginalise religion.

One of the most classical cases was that of the removal of religious affiliation from the identity cards (Stavrakakis 2002; Molokotos-Lederman 2007). The first debates on the issue emerged during 1990s when it was proposed that religious affiliation in the IDs should be optional. The church reacted against this suggestion through a series of encyclical letters (2548, 2550, 2551/1993) arguing that "Greece is facing a huge crisis" and that "the optional inclusion of religious affiliation comes from abroad, from some dark circles, which are trying to attack Greek nation's unity", while "the church will not allow the historical bond between Orthodoxy and Hellenism to be broken by foreign interests" (Holy Synod 2001a, p. 494, 497). After the church's reaction the government did not proceed to any changes and religious affiliation in the IDs remained.

Seven years later, though, the issue came back into discussion. The spark that lit the fire was the re-election of the socialist party and the following announcement of the Minister of Justice that the government intends to completely omit religious affiliation from the IDs. The reason was the decision of the Hellenic Data Protection Authority in 2000 according to which the inclusion of the religious affiliation on the IDs was unconstitutional and could lead to acts of discrimination from the part

¹¹ There are of course many aspects of fundamentalism within the church but the purpose of the article is to focus on the mainstream Orthodox Church and its relation with the state and the broader society. It is also acknowledged that there are para-ecclesiastical groups which could be considered as fundamentalist, but their in-depth study was not among the purposes of this article as well.

of the state. This decision was considered as unacceptable by the Orthodox Church, which after the insistence of the government to implement it, reacted vigorously. The reaction took the form of encyclical letters, interviews in the media, publication of articles, organisation of two demonstrations in Greece's two largest cities, Athens and Thessaloniki, and a petition in order to put pressure on the government side to conduct a referendum about the issue. The Holy Synod stated from the very beginning in an Encyclical Letter (2695/2000) that "the identity card is a basic and important issue and not a hangnail, because it is related to the ID holders' personality and more generally to the traditions of our land" (Holy Synod 2006, p. 207). In his public speech during the second demonstration in Athens, Archbishop Christodoulos, argued: "We are a small religious minority within the EU and we want to stress and declare our religious uniqueness on our national identity [i.e. the identity card]" (Christodoulos 2000a, p. 22–32).

Regardless of this reaction, the two massive rallies and the collection of more than three million signatures, the government stood firm in its decision. In one of its last public statements on the issue, the Holy Synod) argued: "This issue [i.e. of the identity cards] cannot just close, because it has to do with our national self-awareness and uniqueness, which are inalienable and necessary elements for the preservation of our identity as a People and as a Nation, living with dignity within the EU" (Holy Synod 2001b). Furthermore, according to the church, there were secret plans behind such a decision concerning the ID cards. These plans had as their principal object to subjugate the Greek people to the will of foreign interests: "The implementation of the aforementioned plan intends to transform us into immigrants within our own birth country, deprived from the spiritual warmth that the Orthodox faith has gifted to us" (Christodoulos, 2000b) and, of course, one of the greatest fears of the Orthodox Church was the transformation of Greece into a secular state like France (Christodoulos 2001).

To the allegations that the Orthodox Church reproduced Euro-skepticism in Greek society, the Holy Synod replied: "The church from the very beginning was in favour of the European orientation of our country, without this meaning the betrayal of our national and religious uniqueness" (Holy Synod, 2000). In addition, it was stated that during this period: "[...] many texts were published regarding the preservation and the avoidance of alienation of our cultural tradition in the melting-pot of globalisation and the 'new order'; additionally there were many discussions about the innate cultural discourse we can offer to the EU" (Holy Synod 2001c), meaning that the Greek Orthodox tradition should be protected because it can contribute enormously to the European identity.¹²

From the moment the government did not step back, the church decided to make a political manoeuvre and suggested the optional inclusion of religious affiliation in the identity cards, a suggestion that was rejected by the church in 1993. Nevertheless, this suggestion was not accepted, because it was also considered as unconstitutional. After that, the Church through the Holy Synod made the following statement:

¹² Globalisation has been considered as a great threat for the marginalisation of the religion and the church and Archbishop Christodoulos, more particularly, was one of the main proponents of this argument in his public discourse (Vasilakis 2006, p. 149–160).

The claim for the optional inclusion of religion [i.e. in the IDs] and the resistance against the various methodical handlings towards the de-Christianisation of Greece and Europe are and will remain holy obligations for which [...] the Clergy and its Hierarchs will constantly fight for (Holy Synod, 2001d).

Since one of the main elements of fundamentalism is religion's marginalisation and the reaction against such developments, it comes without saying that strong fundamentalist tendencies can be found in the Orthodox Church, even at a central and synodical level. The above analysis also supports what Asproulis (2020, p. 183) has argued, i.e. that in the Greek case the whole debate is not about the re-entrance of religion and the church in the public domain, but about the preservation of its important political role. Moreover, and bearing in mind that according to Riesebrodt (2000) lay mobilisation is important when it comes to fundamentalism it can be also concluded that the petition and the organisation of demonstrations support the argument on the observed fundamentalist tendencies within the church. This category of analysis, though, relates to the following one regarding morality since both of them have at their core religion's marginalisation and the last one on superiority.

5.2 The dangers of moral decay: Morality without religion?

Another aspect of religion's marginalisation relates to morality and strict behavioural requirements that usually the church asks from the people to follow. While the church very often makes suggestions with regard to people's moral values and how they should behave it is obviously difficult to achieve an impact upon each believer, especially when it comes to younger generations, which usually tend to be more critical against the church and its teachings. The church regularly addresses to its followers and to the broader public through public announcements and encyclical letters and sometimes tries to put pressure upon the state in order to preserve existing legislation and prevent any changes that are considered as immoral.

Often enough the church describes the broader social context as one of moral decay and laxity which is related to the marginalisation of religion both at the individual and collective levels. In one such example in 1980s the church addressed to the people asking them to:

Stand strong and preserve the traditions you were taught about and stay faithful to the church, the mother of our Orthodox nation. [...] [We face the] deterioration of the educational ideal through the degradation of Christian values. [...] In the media, especially the TV, there are many immoral programmes, the family and the church are being insulted [...] atheism and heretics are becoming stronger in Greek society. [...] these are bad omens for the country's future and the church calls everyone to a spiritual rebirth (Holy Synod 2001a, p. 157–160).

One of the topics that have been discussed publicly in previous years and sparked the church's reactions was the legislation on automatic divorce (1976). According to that, people could more easily divorce without the interference of the church as a consulting actor in this process. The church perceived that on the one hand as its marginalisation and on the other as a decision that will lead to moral laxity

since people would decide to divorce more easily compared to the past. The church sent out an Encyclical Letter (2134/1976) stating its strong opposition against such a development arguing that it “wants to protect the teachings of the Gospels and especially the moral order of the Greek society” (Holy Synod 2001e, p. 473–478). Furthermore, the church asked for a referendum in order for the people to express their will, but this did not move forward into any petition or other kinds of lay mobilisation.

Related to the above was the civil wedding legislation (1982), which for the first time introduced such a provision for couples. In an encyclical letter (2309/1982) the church argued that civil wedding will have negative impact upon marriage and family and the whole nation for three reasons: First, because it will make people think that marriage is a private issue since it will be de-institutionalised, meaning it will go out of the church; second, it will have a negative impact upon the unity of the nation since it will change the religious homogeneity of the Greek family, which is the “main cell for the preservation and dissemination of our Greek-Orthodox traditions”; and third, the dismantling of family as the basis of young people’s edification. It was additionally argued that if a Greek Orthodox follows the civil wedding option, then he/she automatically will no more belong to the Orthodox Church (Holy Synod 2001a, p. 10–12).

As it comes out from the above two examples the church is very much interested in family and any deviation from the Orthodox paradigm is perceived as a crisis and moral decay. In another encyclical letter (2212/1978) it was mentioned that:

The [family] crisis is moral and social and it is not irrelevant to the breakdown of the lively Christian life [...] the denial of the Christian moral values and the defection from our Christian faith. [...] Women should sacrifice their secular desires for the good of the family and child bearing and avoid any contraceptive measures (Holy Synod 2001e, p. 598–601).

The pattern of crisis comes again and again. In another encyclical letter (2659/1998), twenty years later, under the title “Support and upgrade of the holy institution of family” (Holy Synod 2006, p. 118–120) it is stressed that “family, a God made institution”, goes through a time of crisis and the causes for that are “moral decay, foreign influences, and the legislation introduced in previous time, like the automatic divorce, civil wedding and the de-legalisation of adultery”. This shows that church’s views on family and the relative legislation have not actually changed through the years.

When the discussion comes to family and morality the role of women is crucial for the church. Already in one of the above excerpts it was mentioned that “women should sacrifice their secular desires for the good of the family and child bearing and avoid any contraceptive measures”. That means that their principal goal should be creating a family and bearing children. Towards the same direction the church has repeatedly argued that since the fertility rates are very low there is a huge danger for the nation’s shrinking (encyclical letter 2488/1989, Holy Synod 2001a, p. 367–370). As a consequence, abortion should not be an option for women or at least it could be only permitted under extremely strict rules and under grave circumstances. According to the main argument, “every woman who makes an abortion is a terrible

murderer”, but the same applies for the father and every other person who is involved in such a decision and process (Holy Synod 2001a, p. 206–208, 2003).

A final topic is the church’s stance towards sexual relations. The church has clearly stated that sexual relations outside of the institution of family and marriage are theologically not acceptable (Holy Synod 2006, p. 161–162). Even very recently, Greek Orthodox Metropolitans have argued that “Sexual relations outside of the Christian marriage are a sin, are against the Biblical Law”. From this perspective, the church explicitly condemns sexual relations before marriage, “identifying them with prostitution, according to its religious teachings” (Serafeim, Metropolitan of Piraeus 2017).

Overall, the issue of morality and strict behavioural requirements are of principal importance for the church.¹³ The discussion over morality could move to other issues like novel reading, cinema and television in the 1980s and 1990s and homosexuality in the last two decades. Similarly to the previous category the church feels that its teachings are being marginalised and tries to react against this development. Regardless of how successful the outcome of the church’s reaction against what is perceived as moral degradation is, fundamentalist trends could be also traced in this broader category of morality. It is further clearly implied that Orthodox morals are far more superior compared to the morals of other religions and societies, especially the Western and secular ones.

5.3 The lost tradition and the selective use of modernity

The dialectical relation between modernity and tradition and their selective utilisation is considered as one of the most important aspects of fundamentalism. As it has been rightly supported (Makrides 2016a, p. 234) fundamentalism should not be equated to a mere traditionalism, although fundamentalists are looking ahead and backwards (Appleby 2020, p. 170). According to Shupe (2011) fundamentalism relies on and supports a return to a lost tradition, which is due to value corruption and moral breakdown, something already underlined in the previous section. Having that in mind fundamentalism builds clear continuities between itself and the lost tradition of a ‘golden age’ as the unique solution for restoration. At the same time fundamentalism does not reject modernity overall, and incorporates modern means (e.g. military, educational, media) to fulfill its goals. It is more accurate, then, to argue that fundamentalists are modern, but not modernists and that they oppose modernism and its proponents, but they are the product of modernity (Lawrence 1989, p. 1–3).

In relation to the above, fundamentalist thinking is marked by a profound experience of crisis (Riesebrodt 1998, p. 16). That means that apart from what was

¹³ It has to be noted that in many cases the ecclesiastical practice of *oikonomia* is implemented within the church. Very briefly, *oikonomia* is a discretionary deviation from the letter of the law in order to adhere to the spirit of the law and charity. This is in contrast to legalism, which is strict adherence to the letter of the law of the church. This means that while in its public discourse the church might appear very strict in moral issues in practice lower rank priests could consider other parameters in implementing central decisions. No matter how contradictory this seems it is an observed practice, but at the same *oikonomia* was not even once mentioned in all the encyclical letters and other material analysed in this category.

mentioned already in the section about morality and moral crisis it could be possibly argued that a call for a return to a lost or threatened tradition becomes stronger during different kinds of crises, e.g. the economic crisis Greece faced for almost a decade (2010–2019) and the Covid-19 pandemic. Such a call to go back to the roots is always suggested with an eye to the present and the future and does not include a return to a pre-modern way of life. With regard to the economic crisis, for example, the church has argued that “the passions of lust, ambition, avarice, ownership are those that lead people to financial crises. Prosperity, bliss, overconsumption are the generative causes of financial crises” (Holy Synod 2010a). That means that moral decay and religious disaffiliation are perceived as the key reasons for the experienced crises and the principal solution is the return to some core traditional and religious values. This was very clearly stated by the church during the economic crisis: “We should put Christ again in our lives and return to the old, classical roots of our fathers, to our traditions, full speed backwards” (Holy Synod 2011). In the same line of argument some Metropolitans have made their own suggestions:

Back at full speed, to find what has made our culture a landmark in World History: a) the return of Christ and Orthodox interpretation to our daily social practice, b) direct and immediate teaching of the ancient Greek language at all levels of Education, c) systematic acquaintance with Texts of ancient Greek, Byzantine and modern Literature, d) dynamic immersion in Mythology and our uninterrupted History from Homer until today, e) protect and promote our ancient Christian and Greek heritage [...] (Anthimos, Metropolitan of Alexandroupolis 2014).

The global pandemic crisis of Covid-19 has been also perceived as a Godsend sign of moral decadence and a call to re-discover and bring back some lost values. As it has been argued “the worship of God was replaced by the worship of Satan. [...] We need to return to God”. On the one hand, the pandemic was considered as a lesson (or punishment) from God because of peoples’ moral decay (Serafeim, Metropolitan of Piraeus 2020 and Ignatios, Metropolitan of Dimitriadis 2020). On the other hand, “the New Era and the New Order ask from us to deny the priority of faith [...] [but] only life in Christ could help us in the future” (Nektarios, Metropolitan of Corfu 2021).¹⁴

Apart from the above, in times of crisis there are other examples which signify the church’s stance against modernity. Bearing in mind the reactions about the identity cards discussed previously, the overall debate included another less known aspect which was related to the Schengen agreement between EU member states. When the agreement came in the Greek Parliament for ratification the church reacted and publicised encyclical letters (2626/1997; 2641/1998) against it. The church argued that these IDs are directly related to the Antichrist and that the “666 number of the new identity cards and the electronic systems should not be accepted and the

¹⁴ It is important to note that the Holy Synod of the Church has not expressed such views and especially after the first months of the pandemic has supported most of the governmental measures. However, the strong voices expressed even by Orthodox Metropolitans against the measures and in some cases against the vaccine have created huge problems within the church and society.

government should make an intervention to the EU to replace it [the number]” (Holy Synod 2006, p. 47–50, 87–90). Although at that time there were many religious organisations expressing this kind of arguments it was something of a surprise for the Orthodox Church to embrace such views and conspiracy theories, which signifies the role and impact of para-ecclesiastical groups on the church.

On the other hand, as already mentioned, the church does not reject modernity overall and its products, but tries to utilise them for its own benefit. The same year with the encyclical letters against the Schengen agreement the church openly declared its support of the media usage, acknowledging the usefulness of the mass media and declared its open attitude towards the different ways that the media could be useful in order to spread the church’s message to the people. It was also argued that it is acceptable to use the mass media (e.g. television and radio) for the transmission of the religious services, especially the Sunday mass (Holy Synod 2006, p. 62–63). This was even more evident during the Covid-19 pandemic when the church used not only the mainstream media for the religious services, but online media as well. In addition, a great number of meetings took place through electronic platforms either the meetings of the Holy Synod or conferences and workshops. Finally, what needs to be added is that at least since the 1990s the church has taken advantage of the funding opportunities the EU offers in various ways, for example to restore churches and monasteries, to digitalise archival material and organise libraries, to establish webpages for churches, monasteries or other church organisations. From this perspective, Lawrence’s argument about the difference between modernity and modernism in relation to fundamentalism could be paraphrased as follows: The Orthodox Church is certainly not modernist, but it is modern in the way it incorporates the products of modernity.¹⁵

5.4 The preservation of sacred texts

According to most of the approaches on fundamentalism the role of sacred texts are considered as highly important and a central element in the process of identifying fundamentalist beliefs and groups. This, however, primarily refers to the monotheistic religions in which the text plays a crucial role, but does not necessarily apply to all religions. As it was argued by the Fundamentalism Project (Almond et al.

¹⁵ Lawrence reflects on modernity and modernism based on the thoughts of Marshal Berman and his study, *All that is solid melts into air: The experience of modernity* (1982). According to Berman “to be modern is to experience personal and social life as a maelstrom, to find one’s world and oneself in perpetual disintegration and renewal, trouble and anguish, ambiguity and contradiction: to be part of a universe in which all that is solid melts into air”. Fundamentalists, like other moderns, recognise that the world in which they strive to locate their deepest identity is constantly shifting, that there is an unbridgeable gap between who they are and where they want to be. Fundamentalists are moderns but they are not modernists. Again, Berman provides a definitional framework that clarifies the difference. “To be a modernist is to make oneself somehow at home in the maelstrom, to make its rhythms one’s own, to move within its currents in search of the forms of reality, of beauty, of freedom, of justice, that its fervid and perilous flow allows.” While moderns recognise a collective past that informs their individual presents, modernists see only a single thread tracing their particular instincts, needs, and desires. If moderns are conflicted universalists then modernists are unabashed relativists.

1995) absolutism and inerrancy of essential texts is one of the main characteristics of fundamentalism.

The role of the Bible in Christianity and in Orthodox Christianity in particular, is substantial. Both Old and New Testament are considered solid and inerrant and no one can question their content. This does not mean that there are no different theological approaches and interpretations of the Bible, but this is certainly not the mainstream trend. When it comes to the translation of the Biblical texts one needs to take into consideration the historical background which includes a number of conflicts over this issue starting already in the 17th century (Vasileiadis 2022). Later and before the Greek Revolution in 1821 the Patriarchate has been very positive in the presence of Biblical Societies in the Ottoman region because the translation and offering of the Bible to the people was considered as beneficial for the strengthening of the faith. However, after the Revolution, in 1823, the Patriarchate changed its stance and the Synod condemned any translation old and new. In 1838 another effort for the translation of the Bible was initiated and was concluded in 1850. This translation took place by Neofytos Vamvas, an Orthodox priest and a proponent of the ideas of the Enlightenment and a strong supporter of the translation of the Bible. The Orthodox Church reacted against this translation as well, because of the close relation with Protestant missionaries (Metallinos 1977, p. 148, Giannaras 1992, p. 230–232).

It should be noted that at the beginning of the 20th century (1901) there were again huge reactions against the then translation of the New Testament into a more popular language, which led to street fights with dead and injured (Konstantinidis 1976) and then to the political decision to include in the country's Constitution the provision that any translation of the Bible is forbidden unless the Church of Greece or the Patriarchate of Constantinople decides otherwise and offers official approval (article 3, paragraph 3).¹⁶

In more recent times, in 2004 the then Archbishop, Christodoulos, suggested that Gospels should be read in Modern Greek language and not in the ancient version during religious services so that young people in particular feel attracted and come to the church. This suggestion was turned into a decision and for almost one year the New Testament was read both in the ancient and the Modern Greek versions in the region of Athens. Not all agreed with this decision and a year later this experiment was terminated by the Archbishop and the Holy Synod. The main argument was that there was no rise in the numbers of young people coming to the church observed meaning that the translation of the liturgical texts was not successful and had no significant impact.

This decision did not discourage other Metropolitans to take a similar initiative, a few years later, in order for the people to understand the texts when attending the church. This time the Holy Synod reacted more clearly and strongly against the translation of the sacred texts and disapproved the Metropolitan who initiated

¹⁶ The incidents of 1901 known as 'Evangelika' were also related to politics and the role of the Queen, who was of Russian origin (Stavridi-Patrikiou 2007, p. 73–85). In any case, the key-element is that after the Greek Revolution translating the sacred text of the Bible in Modern Greek has been very regularly a burning issue leading to conflicts, strong debates and condemnation from the part of the church.

the introduction of a Modern Greek translation in his region of authority. In an encyclical letter on this particular topic it was argued that “any translation of the liturgical texts could create a unity problem in the church” and that is why it is not allowed unless the Holy Synod decides otherwise in the future (Holy Synod 2010b). It could be argued, then, that sacred texts in the Orthodox Church are not subject to any translation or other interpretation than the already known and accepted official ones, verifying this way another one of the characteristics of fundamentalism.

5.5 The superiority of the Greek Orthodox religion

The last characteristic is that of superiority. According to Pollack, Demmrich and Müller (2022) in the eyes of fundamentalists what distinguishes them from everyone else is their unique superiority. This unique superiority is based upon the possession of the only truth, which in this case is perfectly signified by the use of the word ‘Orthodox’, which means the true, the right position and dogma, but also by the belief that this truth has universal validity and should be embraced by the rest of the world.

This superiority is very clearly depicted in the dichotomy between the East (the Greek Orthodox) and the West (other Christian Churches and the secular). This is evident through a number of encyclical letters and announcements from the part of the church which condemn books and other cultural products (e.g. movies, theatrical plays) as not appropriate for Greek Orthodox people, while other encyclical letters and announcements express their support of religious (Greek-Orthodox) cultural products (e.g. books, movies, periodicals). In some extraordinary cases in the past the church even asked from the authorities and succeeded to forbid the circulation of books which were considered as immoral and as against the triptych of morality, i.e. ‘fatherland, religion, family’ (Holy Synod 2001e, p. 382–383).¹⁷

Church figures have expressed their contradiction to materialism and prosperity turning against the kind of Western humanism which does not include God: “Godless humanism made the mistake of making man independent from God and nominating him as an independent being based on his own powers” (Christodoulos 2006, p. 20–21). At the same time it has been supported that the “educated Europeans feel the urgent need to receive from us, the Orthodox, messages of ecclesiastical, social and community morality, which will teach them and make them reflect. Europe has come to a tragic deadlock” (Christodoulos 2003, p. 440). This, as a consequence signifies the universality of the Orthodox values:

The values of the East are universal and redeeming and have as their backbone Jesus Christ and not the man of Humanism. These values are expressed through the Greek language and they are the only values that can help the desperate human being of the West (Christodoulos 2000c, p. 81–82).

¹⁷ The book about which the church reacted was ‘The Little Red Schoolbook’ by two Danish school teachers published in 1969. For more details about the book see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Little_Red_Schoolbook (accessed February 16, 2022). The reactions over this book were not the only ones but this is not the place to present all the cases of blasphemy laws implementation and censorship after the reaction of the Orthodox Church. For more details one could see Tsakyrakis 2008 and Sakellariou 2013b.

In addition to that, a responsibility to transmit these values in order to save the West is also expressed.

For this psychological condition of the human being in Western Europe and in North America we also feel responsible and we are willing to get close to him. With all the love of our soul, we have to make him familiar with the spirituality of Orthodoxy; to invite him to rethink from the beginning some crucial issues of his own existence and at the end his position as an heir of the European civilisation (Christodoulos 2000c, p. 113–114).

At the same time it has been argued through an encyclical letter (2695/2000) that “today the Western world is freed from the ideas of the Enlightenment and moreover there is a great turn towards the wealth and beauty of the Greek-Orthodox tradition” (Holy Synod 2006, p. 209).

This kind of superiority¹⁸ also includes the Greek nation and not only the Orthodox faith, meaning that the uniqueness does not refer to religion, but also to national and cultural identity and this leads to the establishment of close relations between religion and the dominant national ideology (Karamouzis 2009). As it was mentioned in previous sections about the marginalisation of religion (e.g. the removal of religious affiliation from IDs) or on issues of morality (e.g. fertility rates related to abortion) there is always the argument that it is not only religion threatened, but at the same time the Greek nation and the Greek civilisation. That seems to verify what Asproulis (2020, p. 183–188) argues, i.e. that the case of Greek fundamentalism fits both Abrahamic and Ethnoreligious modes (Almond, Sivan, Appleby 1995)¹⁹ with the last one being quite significant as it uses theological rigidity to serve an ethnic and cultural scope.

6 Conclusions

When it comes to fundamentalism usually scholars focus on non-mainstream organisations and institutions. There have been some efforts to study the role of fundamentalism in other Orthodox Churches, e.g. the Serbian, and the outcome was more or less the same, i.e. that its representatives often oscillate between traditionalism on the one hand and fundamentalism on the other (Vukomanović 2011, p. 166). It is understood that it is indeed difficult to approach fundamentalism within mainstream institutions and that usually fundamentalism is approached as a movement outside

¹⁸ According to a 2018 survey of the Pew Institute Greek people are the first among 34 European countries considering their culture as superior to others with 89 per cent. It would be very interesting for one to look into the Church’s role, among others, in the construction of this perception. For more details about this survey see https://www.pewforum.org/2018/10/29/eastern-and-western-europeans-differ-on-importance-of-religion-views-of-minorities-and-key-social-issues/pf-10-29-18_east-west_-00-03/?fbclid=IwAR3rhWMf8FM6Zzr3mZUZyOOE_AmXUgWA1og7Jk77DrcvCK6UckxK9eZj3sM (accessed February 16, 2022).

¹⁹ Abrahamic or theological fundamentalism has more or less religious goals, i.e. the transformation of the world. Syncretic or ethnoreligious fundamentalism uses theological rigidity to serve an ethnic and cultural scope.

of the official church (e.g. para-ecclesiastical groups), when it comes to Christianity. However, based on the preceding and other existing analyses, and regardless of the terms used and any definition debates, the Orthodox Church, as any other religious institution should not be neglected in the studies regarding fundamentalism, because such research might lead to interesting findings.

The effort to investigate fundamentalism in the Orthodox Church of Greece is certainly not an easy task. The main question that was asked from the beginning and throughout this endeavour was if the Orthodox Church of Greece is a fundamentalist institution. From all the existing material and the analysis that preceded it cannot be argued that the Orthodox Church, as an institution, is in total and primarily fundamentalist, so in a ‘yes or no’ answer the reply would be ‘no’. However, it could be argued that many of the main characteristics attributed to fundamentalist groups and organisations are equally found in the Orthodox Church, not only among particular Metropolitans, but even in some core decisions of the church expressed and made public through the Holy Synod and encyclical letters. These include the marginalisation of religion in society and politics; moral decay, values corruption and moral dualism; the importance of tradition and the need to return to some of its core values accompanied by a selective use of modernity; and the preservation of the liturgical language and the Bible, although this last characteristic does not seem to be pivotal. The wording of the church in its public discourse includes key-notions of fundamentalism: Crisis, attack, deterioration, degradation, rebirth, preserve tradition, protect the teaching of the Gospels and the world order and other. Nation also plays an important role expressed through the fear for the loss of the religious-national identity and the Greek-Orthodox culture and tradition. All the above explicitly or implicitly relate to the superiority of the Greek-Orthodox religion and culture. Nevertheless, characteristics of fundamentalism, like millennialism and authoritarian organisation seem not to be substantial making it difficult to come to a firm conclusion. Overall, it seems that the Orthodox Church of Greece as an institution is balancing between traditionalism and fundamentalism depending on the broader context and its relations with other social and political actors.

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