



Religious spaces as continually evolving modernities: Forms of encounter with modernity in Christian Orthodoxy and Islam

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The present study deals with the encounter with modernity in two neighbouring religious spaces: Christian Orthodoxy and Islam. Relying on Eisenstadt's theory about multiple modernities and on its further developments by Thomas Mergel and Kristina Stoeckl, Islamic and Christian-Orthodox dynamics in relation to the challenges of modernity are examined under two aspects: first, the decoupling between religion and culture as elaborated by Olivier Roy, and second, the development of modernist and fundamentalist currents as phenomena of modernity. The study contributes to the sketching of the profile of Islamic and the Christian-Orthodox modernities, pointing both to some of the commonalities and the differences, and inquiring the nature of their distinctiveness. Further on, it contributes to the theoretic discussion on modernity and its various, contextually shaped forms, shedding new light on the relation between the trigger of social changes and their processual character.

Contribution: Inside the Christian Orthodox and the Islamic religious space the decoupling between religion and culture and the development of modernist and fundamentalist currents are analysed as markers of the second modernity that arises from the encounter of the worlds mentioned with the challenges of the first modernity.

Keywords: orthodoxy; Islam; multiple modernities; second modernity; religion and modernity; religion and culture; fundamentalism; Kristina Stoeckl; Olivier Roy; Thomas Bauer.

Modernity and modernities in the social sciences

Classical theories of modernity see it realised in the interweaving of several processes that take place on the political level (emergence of the secular state, democratisation), on the economic level (industrialisation, development towards a market economy), on the social level (division of labour, class formation), and on the cultural level (secularisation), that run simultaneously and are mutually dependent (Hall, Held & McLennan 2003:2f.) Today, however, this is viewed as the western way of modernisation, and after 2000 Shmuel N. Eisenstadt's concept of *multiple modernities* (ed. Eisenstadt 2002), which are shaped by the respective socio-cultural contexts, has become an integral part of the scientific discourse. Modern developments in all parts of the world should therefore also be considered modernities, even if they deviate from the classic model. The question about the common denominator of these new modernities, about the core that defines a culture as modern, was answered differently by different authors. Eisenstadt sees the core of modernity in the radical delegitimisation of the traditional (Mergel n.d.), in the radical break with the recent past. The social scientist Kristina Stoeckl pleads for a somewhat broader core, based on Peter Wagner's considerations:

Modernization as a process has taken different shapes across different countries and continents, according to the societal and cultural prerequisites provided, and we find in the world a multiplicity of continually evolving modernities, which are all defined by the experience of rupture (with the past), of liberty (individual and collective self-determination), and of mastery (over the natural and social world) (Wagner 2001). Rupture, liberty and mastery are the three structural features shared across multiple modernities. (Stoeckl 2017:18)

Religions and the challenges of modernity, as synthesised by Kristina Stoeckl

For Kristina Stoeckl, 'these three challenges of modernity present themselves to the religious mind as the religious-cultural disconnect, religious freedom, and anthropocentric morality' (Stoeckl 2017:18). In Stoeckl's view, religions today necessarily deal with the three challenges of modernity and provide answers that can cover a broad spectrum in terms of content, but which

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are all nonetheless a form of modernisation of the religion in question. For example, in the case of the decoupling between religion and culture, both the insistence on a new connection between the two spheres and the celebration of the 'purely religious' detachment from culture are equally modern developments. The same applies to the question of religious freedom: religious communities can either insist that the state should keep the 'proselytism' of other religious groups in check by means of secular laws or even forbid conversions by law, or accept religious freedom as a characteristic of their own context of life and even praise it as a special gift from God and part of God's plan for the world. As far as anthropocentric morality is concerned, there is both the universalist view, according to which the same values must apply to all and the state must ensure through laws that all comply, and the particularist view, which assigns the religious morality of the few a testimony function to the outside world, equally modern. The answers can therefore be found on a broad spectrum, whereby it must be emphasised that all options are equally modern because they do not represent traditional forms, but new constructs that break with the past. It should be noted, however, that all of these diverse modernities arose from the confrontation of the respective cultures with the original, Western modernity. For this reason, they are juxtaposed with the first modernity as second modernities. This pair of terms originating from Ulrich Beck (2014) was further developed by Thomas Mergel in this sense (Mergel n.d.).

Objects and aim of the study

The Islamic world and its relationship to modernity has been studied intensively, even if the first, Western modernity, was generally used as a point of reference (Berger 2002:1–20; Biskamp 2013:103–125; eds. Palaver, Siebenrock & Regensburger 2008; eds. Zemmin, Stephan & Corrado 2018). A rich literature can be drawn on in this regard. In contrast, there are few authors who have devoted themselves to Christian orthodoxy from the same perspective; the best known are Makrides (2011:15–30; 2012:248–285), Kalaitzidis (2011:139–176, 2015:76–89) and Papanikolaou (2007:527–546).

I plan to examine the break with the past in the two religious spaces under two aspects: first, the decoupling between religion and culture, and second, the development of modernist and fundamentalist currents as phenomena of modernity. The aim of the study is to work out forms of the second modernity that arise from the encounter of the worlds mentioned with the challenges of the first modernity, in order to learn something about the modernisation capacity of the two spaces mentioned and to contribute to the sketching of the profile of the respective modernities.

There are several reasons for choosing the two aforementioned religious spaces as objects of analysis. Eastern and Southeastern Europe are the areas where Christian Orthodoxy is at home, and at the same time the areas that are geographically and culturally closest to the West and its modernity. And yet they develop their own history, as they are shaped by different historical circumstances than the Christian West. Orthodoxy

meets in South Eastern Europe and in its further expansions in the Middle East with Islam, which can also be viewed as a space that comes into close geographic and cultural contact with the West. The historical interweaving between Orthodoxy and Islam, which has led to mutual influences, but also to the need to distinguish from one another, makes it worthwhile to compare the two spaces in their relationship to modernity. In addition, Samuel P. Huntington treats these two spaces as two of the nine civilisations in which the world is said to be divided even today (Huntington 1996:26–29).

The first challenge: The decoupling between religion and culture, based on Olivier Roy's considerations

The idea of the decoupling between religion and culture as a sign of modernity can be traced back to Olivier Roy, and was developed by him in several writings, most extensively in *Holy Ignorance. When Religion and Culture Part Ways* (Roy 2013). When Roy talks about the decoupling between religion and culture, he means the culture in which the religion in question had become at home, which was shaped by it, and which still carries its values. A decoupling can occur either as a result of advancing secularisation or in the course of globalisation. For Roy, the secularisation, which displaces the religious from the public space, actually has the effect that the religious is removed from the cultural environment and appears as 'purely religious' (Roy 2013:2). In the course of secularisation, it is first defined what is regarded as religious and thus has to be removed from public space, in contrast to the permitted forms of culture. Roy puts it pointedly: 'There is a close link between secularization and religious revivalism, which is not a reaction against secularization, but the product of it. Secularism engenders religion' (Roy 2013:2–3). But secularisation also produces a culture that is opposed to religion, which, depending on the degree of distance from religiously determined values, can be characterised as secular, profane or pagan (Roy 2013:28–29).

Another factor that causes a separation between religion and culture is globalisation. For Roy, globalisation means above all 'circulation of ideas'. 'Ideas' and 'information' are also decoupled from their original culture and lead an autonomous life, whereby their meaning changes. Globalisation leads to a 'standardization of lifestyles, norms and values'; and to identical desires: 'self-affirmation, fulfilment, happiness, salvation' (Roy 2013:8). Globalisation also creates a religious market in which the potential customer seeks the satisfaction of his or her desires. The religions that are (physically or virtual) outside their cultural area try to prove themselves to be efficient in this market and adapt their message to the expectations of the addressees. Cultural ties are left out, the universal is emphasised or reinvented, and therefore the religious message is formatted to meet the expectations of the potential customer. It is a natural process of adapting to changed living conditions. Of course, not all religious forms succeed in adapting to the same degree. 'There are winners and losers' (Roy 2013:14). However, those who are best able to

decouple from limiting cultural factors, such as Pentecostalism, gain the most (Roy 2013:14).

The decoupling between religion and culture is a reality in both the Orthodox and the Islamic world, even if the causes of the decoupling are different. In the Orthodox world it has to do with the experience of communism, in the Muslim world with the consequences of colonialism, in both today with globalisation and with intensified migration. However, right at the beginning of their modernity, the Orthodox countries clad nationalism in religious theories and have since insisted on the close connection between religion and nation, which today is a peculiarity of the Orthodox world and in this form hardly has any parallels in the West and certainly not in Islam of the 19th century. There was no nationalism in the ranks of the Muslim population of the Ottoman Empire – despite popular opinion – until the fall of the Ottoman Empire, but rather a supranationalist ideology, Ottomanism, which was supported by Turks and Arabs alike. Hasan Kayali writes:

Contemporary European eyewitnesses viewed the prewar Middle East with their own nationalist perspective. They portrayed nationalism as a major, if not the major, political force in this late phase of the Ottoman Empire, even though for most Muslims the notion of belonging to a nation (much less to a nation-state) had no meaning at the time. Often Western European observers looked at the Balkan Christian communities that were experiencing nationalist movements and drew parallels between them and the Muslim communities. [...] The Arab Revolt was not so much the culmination of Arab nationalist activity or a rejection of the refashioned Ottomanist ideology, but a convergence of dynastic ambition and strategic exigency that contributed to the eventual political separation of Arabs and Turks. (Kayali 1997:3f.11. For more details, see Brusanowski 2005:183ff.)

Quite different in the Christian Orthodox world, which had been subject to the Ottoman Empire for centuries: here powerful nationalist movements developed in the 19th century. These included the church in the process of nation building, in contrast to the Muslim people, who – even later, when they wanted to distance themselves from the Ottomans – because of the identity between their religion and that of the previous rulers, could only stylise the ethnic as a distinguishing feature. In contrast, the Greek Filiki Eteria, for example, defined itself as a movement of the Orthodox Greeks against the Muslim Ottomans, which set itself the goal of developing an ethnic-religious identity, an identity in which the religious was a decisive component. More even: ‘ecclesiastical narratives were used for the creation of the ideological basis of Greek nationalism, which needed to serve the process of the establishment of a nation state’ (Tadic-Papanikolaou 2013:397). The same was true for the other Balkan countries: the ecclesiastical elite took an active part in the development of national consciousness, which also received a strong religious foundation (eds. Jakir & Trogrlic 2014; Tadic-Papanikolaou 2013:397).

After the fall of communism, the prevailing position is that which denies the break between religion and culture despite the obvious secularisation of society, emphasises the role of

the church as a carrier of culture and in the preservation of national identity, and wants to further promote it by all means. In this, they follow the thought suggested by Samuel P. Huntington in his theory about the clash of civilisations (Buda 2020:127–146; Huntington 1996), often without being aware of the fact that with regard to specific situations it is a contested matter inside the Orthodox world itself (Bîrzu 2013:262–291). The adherence to the idea of a strong link between religion and culture is not only reflected in the internal discourses, but also very much in the endeavours of each individual national church to have their diaspora under their own care, not infrequently on the grounds that the ethnic identity of the group concerned can also be preserved in this way.

The lack of a communist phase, but also the example of the orthodox diaspora, could give the impression that Greek Christianity would make an exception. This is not the case, however, because in the Greek world, in particular, the church is stylised particularly strongly as a culture and identity factor, so that an equality sign is set between being Greek and being Orthodox. It is true that the Church of Greece and the Orthodox Patriarchate did not agree with the ethnic principle of the Orthodox Diaspora for a long time, but preferred to take responsibility for all Orthodox who are in a foreign space. But first, the Greeks themselves have given up this principle at least since the Great Orthodox Synod in 2016; second, the religious structures of the Orthodox churches in the non-Slavic and non-Romanian world are usually so Greek that they also represent a new coupling between religion and a certain culture.

The construction and proclamation of the purely religious is not absent from Orthodoxy, but it is somewhat weak. It is true that there is the Synod of Constantinople in 1872, which condemned phyletism – that is, the identification of an ethnic community with a denomination – as heresy (Bigham n.d.; Moss n.d.), but it is hardly known or taken into account today (Admin n.d.). Among the Orthodox theologians, some people living in the West, especially Alexander Schmemman and Placide Deseille (Coresciuc 2010), were voices who spoke out against this close connection between religion and cultural realities. Some Greek theologians also do this occasionally (Papathomas 2013:431–450). However, they are in minority and do not in any way result in a movement towards a pure orthodoxy that is not caught in a particular culture. It is therefore not surprising that Orthodoxy remains trapped in its own small circles and does not develop as a religious form that is relevant worldwide today. Orthodoxy is too caught up in nationalisms to open itself to a spiritual impulse towards the purely religious, to supra-cultural orthodoxy.

Quite different in Islam, where the Tablighis and the Salafists (more precisely: Neo-Salafists) in general construct an Islam in itself, over and above all cultural conditions. So-called Salafism (Logvinov 2017:10) includes a large number of modern currents that want to orientate themselves towards the ancestors, more precisely: towards the first three Muslim

generations (Brown 2017:319) and consider the traditions that cannot be traced back to them as illegitimate. All historical and geographical differences are based on cultural traditions which, from the perspective of the Salafists, are alien to the core of Islam, represent an infection of Islam and must therefore be wiped away. What should remain in the end is deculturated, pure Islam.

But also in Islam there is not only the pole of the purely religious, but nowadays there are also different nationalisms that are struggling to preserve and strengthen certain Islamic cultural traditions. However, the Islamic nationalisms emerged as secular nationalisms after 1920 and only received the religious underpinning much later (Zubaida 2011:175ff.). These two tendencies exist in parallel in today's Islam, in a real tension, but without being mutually exclusive.

The second challenge: The development of modernist and fundamentalist currents, with reference to Thomas Bauer's theory on ambiguity

The newer, modern currents that can be found across the global religious landscape include reformers and fundamentalists alike. The Islamic scholar Thomas Bauer argues in his book *Die Kultur der Ambiguität. Eine andere Geschichte des Islams (The Culture of Ambiguity: A Different History of Islam)*, that reformists and Salafists are equally hostile to ambiguity and accordingly modern, because both have appropriated the modern insistence on monosemy that was alien to the old Islamic culture and, by staring at the West and adopting its instruments, have distanced themselves from traditional Islamic culture. Using examples, Bauer shows that the Salafists do not orient themselves according to tradition or the ancestors (*as-salaf*), but according to their pre-formed ideology, for which they at best seek a foundation in tradition. It is not uncommon, however, that their own interpretations have no anchoring in tradition and are merely presented as traditional by them (Bauer 2011:126). In terms of method, too, they are at odds with tradition. Their 'belief that they can advance to the only true and possible interpretation through their own hermeneutical efforts is a modern belief', and their methodological processes are therefore anything but traditional (Bauer 2011:127f.).

This can be illustrated using the attitude to the Koran (Qur'an) as an example. Both the different readings and the different interpretations of the Koran texts were seen as an enrichment in traditional Islam. The basic attitude was that God does not speak unequivocally, but ambiguously, and that the Koran must be an ambiguous text, since it has to express the fullness and perfection of God as well as his complex understanding of this world. The multitude of readings and interpretations only finds its limit in the postulate of consistency (Bauer 2011:119), that is, in the internal logic and in accordance with the principles accepted by the Umma. Fundamentalists and reformists, on the other hand, believe that their own hermeneutical efforts will arrive at the only true interpretation, and that belief is modern. The difference between the two is that the former choose one of

the traditional interpretations as the only valid one, while the reformers are convinced of the superiority of Western culture and practice an exegesis of the Koran based on the premises of Western modernity, for example, only historical – work critically with the aim of arriving at the actual and therefore only valid intention of the text.

The actual descendants of the pre-modern Islamic culture are the (moderate) traditionalists, who have the most difficulty in making themselves understandable to the West (Bauer 2011:58f.) and are therefore not heard or understood by the Western media. Fundamentalists and reformists, however, speak a language that the West can understand and thus make headlines, giving the Western audience the impression that they alone make up Islam, or at least that they are in majority.

In Orthodoxy, too, there are fundamentalists who want to understand the Holy Scriptures and the teaching of the Church in the only correct form, and reformists who would throw their entire tradition overboard in order to orient themselves towards the West. To name a few examples of reformism and fundamentalism in Orthodoxy: Reformists are the orthodox biblical exegetes who no longer allow any room for allegorical interpretation, but only want to conform to the principles of Western exegesis, without realising that they practically give up or even invalidate the principles of the Alexandrian School. But reformist tendencies are also present where, for example, the possibility is allowed to mix orthodox asceticism with insights and practices from yoga, all for the well-being of this world. It should be noted that this development is also a form of orientation towards western modernity, since the Orthodox do not experience yoga and the like through contacts in the Far East, but rather import western influences. Today's reactions after the Great Orthodox Synod in Crete in June 2016 (Perşa 2017:39–72), which for example denounce the ecumenical opening towards other churches, show, however, that the phenomenon of fundamentalism is also increasing.

In the Orthodox area, too, the number of intransigent reformists and fundamentalists is growing, to the detriment of the moderate centre. Orthodox fundamentalism came into the sights of Christian-Orthodox scholars in the recent years. For example, the theologian Dragoş Boicu reflects upon the psychological roots of fundamentalism (Boicu 2019:100–104), while the religious studies scholar Vasilios Makrides offers insights into the relation between modernity and orthodox fundamentalism. Makrides calls the members of this group 'rigorists' and notes:

No doubt, Orthodox rigorism appears to be at times vehemently anti-modern and anti-Western, yet at the same time it deals with modernity in its own manner. The latter ranges from the rational goals set and the modern means used to realise them to the 'Jacobin', all-encompassing and even totalitarian component of its ideology. The relationship of Orthodox rigorism with the modern world is not only antagonistic, but profoundly ambiguous too. It is thus vital to pay equal attention to the ways in which this protest movement reformulates and reconstitutes the concept of modernity itself and comes to terms with it. [...]

...they are not mere traditionalists, but rather 'radical traditionalists', namely representing a historical process of innovation of their own. Hence, they make selective use of both the Orthodox tradition and modernity. Ironically enough, their vision to restore an ideal order of the past often ends in an innovative adaptation to the socio-cultural conditions of today. Given the fundamental 'heterodoxy' of such protest movements, this innovation process is not far from the construction of 'alternative' and even of 'mutating memories' withing religious traditions, as they evolve continuously and are closely related to processes of general socio-cultural change. (Makrides 2016:245f.)

The two basic attitudes, however, have a longer tradition both in Orthodoxy and in Islam. For example, in the 19th century in Russia, Slavophiles and Westerners were the two groups who took divergent positions on the question of orientation towards the West (Bremer n.d.). However, the two tendencies became modern when they wanted to break with the immediately preceding tradition in order to tie in with the supposedly original form of their religion, which they undoubtedly believed they knew. As already mentioned, today's fundamentalist forms of a religion are not a return to the mentality and practice of the first religious adherents, but a further development of the religion in question in a new context. Fundamentalism is a new phenomenon that can be found in Orthodoxy and Islam alike, and is a form of the *second modernity*.

Conclusion

Orthodoxy and Islam – according to the theory of *multiple modernities* – both have their own modernity. Both can be related with the collective term *second modernity*, being reactions to the first, external modernity. Both Orthodoxy and Islam therefore go through their own confrontations with modernity, they adopt modern instruments and modern paradigms and allow these to merge with their own cultural conditions. In both cases, however, it is not a question of dealing with modernity, but rather several partly parallel, partly overlapping processes that can be viewed as *continually evolving modernities*. The visible results are broad. Here they were analysed on the basis of two pairs of opposites: *religious nationalism* and *purely religious*, respectively *fundamentalism* and *reformism*. It became evident that all these four forms of encounter with modernity are present in both worlds. It is a particularity of Orthodoxy that it tends to move on the pole of religious nationalism and much less on that of purely religious, in contrast to Islam, which takes both options equally. In contrast, fundamentalist and reformist attitudes are often present in both religious worlds. Other further investigations are required in order to come closer to the complexity of the constantly developing Orthodox and Islamic modernity and to outline their profile more precisely scientifically.

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