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**Religion and Populism:  
Reflections on the 'politicised' discourse of the Greek  
Church**

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It has been pointed out that it is always impolite to argue about religion or politics with strangers and dangerous to do so with friends. I am probably doing both in this paper and would never find the courage to embark in such a task without the support and valuable comments of colleagues who read earlier drafts of this text. In particular, I would like to thank Nicos Demertzis, Jason Glynos, Marcia Ian, Thanos Lipowatz, Francisco Panizza and, of course, Nicos Mouzelis who agreed to act as the official reviewer of this paper for the Hellenic Observatory. Many thanks are also due to Loukas Tsoukalis for offering his encouragement in the initial and most difficult stages of this research and to Othon Anastasakis and Maria Komninou for their overall help in preparing this publication.



## Introduction

In April 2000, after his second consecutive victory in the general elections,<sup>1</sup> prime minister Costas Simitis<sup>2</sup> appointed his new government. In a move far from typical for Greek political life, he appointed as minister of justice a non-parliamentarian, a university professor of law, Michalis Stathopoulos. On 6 May 2000, the newly appointed minister aired, in an interview, a series of reforms aimed at modernising the Greek legal apparatus in relation to issues of religious belief. He singled out the abolition of religious oath in courts, the introduction of the option for a secular funeral, and, most important, the exclusion of religion from identity cards,<sup>3</sup> the document (issued by the police) that every Greek citizen is supposed to carry with him/her at all times (*Ethnos*, 6-5-2001).<sup>4</sup> For Stathopoulos as well as for other academics and commentators this latter proposal was a necessary measure in order to ensure respect for human rights and, in particular, prevent discrimination against non Orthodox Greek citizens.<sup>5</sup> Needless to say, this was a view not shared by Archbishop Christodoulos - the head of the Holy Synod of the autocephalous Church of Greece and religious leader of the Greek Orthodox majority of the population.<sup>6</sup> Setting the

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<sup>1</sup> This was the third in a row for his party, the centre-left PASOK, since 1993.

<sup>2</sup> A self-proclaimed 'moderniser', critical of traditionalism and the populist discourse characteristic of Andreas Papandreou's PASOK of the 1980s.

<sup>3</sup> It seems that, in Greece, religion was first introduced by law in official identity cards in 1945, although the measure had been already imposed by the Nazi forces during the occupation (1941-1944), perhaps as a way of distinguishing Jews from non Jews (Alivizatos, 2001a: 314-5; Ierotheos, 2000: 84-5). It has been recently shown that religion was also included in the equivalents of identity cards introduced in the Ottoman Empire in 1880 (<http://iospress.gr/mikro2001/mikro20010113.htm>).

<sup>4</sup> Also see Stathopoulos, 1993, and Stathopoulos, 1999, for a more extensive and detailed account of his legal views and the range of his proposals.

<sup>5</sup> Since 1993, Greece has been convicted eight times by the *European Court of Human Rights* (Strasbourg) on issues related to discrimination against Greeks belonging to religious minorities (Alivizatos, 2001b: 9). It is generally accepted that part of the legal framework regulating the practice of religion is outdated and biased in favour of the constitutionally 'Established Church' (Eastern Orthodox Christianity). To give an example we can refer to the general law pertaining to the construction of churches and the designation of places of worship (Venizelos, 2000: 117). As Alivizatos has pointed out: 'This law, enacted in 1938 by the Metaxas dictatorship, provides that, beyond the usual building permit, the construction of any church or place of worship requires previous authorization by the competent Greek Orthodox bishop irrespective of the religion that is to be practiced in the specific place' (Alivizatos, 1999: 31). Although in 1969 the State Council interpreted this law in a way making it possible for the administration not to abide by the 'opinion' of the Orthodox bishop involved, his involvement remains a fact (Dimitropoulos, 2001: 140). However, although the Church of Greece is enjoying a variety of privileges within the Greek legal order, the Greek state 'grants fewer privileges of this sort than countries such as Ireland and, more recently, Poland and Croatia, which have given the Roman Catholic Church a more important role on societal issues like abortion and divorce' (Alivizatos, 1999: 28).

<sup>6</sup> After the census of 1951 there are no official data on the number of Orthodox Christians in Greece. According to the 1951 census, 96.7% of the population considered themselves Orthodox (Georgiadou & Nikolakopoulos, 2000: 149). It seems that this sense of belonging and identification remains to this

tone of what was to follow he responded that on this issue ‘only one factor exists and this is *the people*, that cannot and should not be ignored’ (*Eleftherotypia*, 9-5-2000).

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date as strong, with a *Eurobarometer* survey showing that in 1991, 98.2 % of the population considered themselves as belonging to the Orthodox religion (Demertzis, 1995: 12). Church-going, on the other hand, has shown some fluctuation, falling considerably since the 1960s, a trend that was consolidated after the 1967-74 dictatorship - partly because of the submission of the Church hierarchy to the junta - but showing an upward trend after the mid-nineties (Georgiadou & Nikolakopoulos, 2000: 151-2). However, although regular church-going and church-attendance has been lower in Greece than in many European countries (Demertzis, 1995: 12), this does not seem to indicate a loosening of the identificatory bonds with Orthodoxy since ‘in Orthodoxy there is less emphasis than in Roman Catholicism upon the obligation to attend church regularly’ (Ware, 1983: 219), and any gaps in church attendance seem to be compensated by other bonds between Orthodoxy and the Greek society.

Indeed identification with Orthodoxy does not seem to follow from the usual expressions of religiosity nor usually from a valuation of the hierarchy of the official Church itself (Georgiadou, 1996: 268). The identification is grafted, enshrined, and reproduced through a variety of other institutions and cultural activities (from state celebrations to the personal attachment to particular icons and local Saints and the association of particular religious feasts with special practices, customs and foods – for example the *paschal* lamb - that a family traditionally *enjoys*). It has also benefited from the protection of the state (Georgiadou & Nikolakopoulos, 2000: 169). This also explains what Alivizatos calls the average Greek’s ‘low spirituality if not indifference’ and also Mouzelis’ accurate observation that in the Orthodox way, being a Christian has little to do with internalising moral principles in the Western sense of the term. Although they still consider Orthodoxy an integral part of ‘Greekness’ ‘Greeks simply do not care much about religious matters, save Easter and some symbolic moments in their personal lives – namely baptism, marriage and death – which they like to celebrate or commemorate with relatives, neighbours, and friends’ (Alivizatos, 1999: 34).

Given this ‘secularisation’ of belief, it is far from ‘surprising then that to a contemporary Greek religion and nationalism are directly linked: being a good Christian means being a patriot and vice versa’ (Mouzelis, 1978: 63). Needless to say this is far from being an exceptionally Greek phenomenon; it is characteristic of many Orthodox countries, especially in the Balkans and Russia. As David Martin has put it, ‘to this day part of the strength of Orthodoxy lies in a feeling that being Russian and being Orthodox amounts to the same thing’ (Martin, 1978: 103). Ware gives a graphic illustration of this state of affairs: ‘I recall a conversation at Jerusalem when, as an Orthodox layman, I was dining at the house of a Greek dentist. My fellow guest was an English Roman Catholic. “You have both betrayed your nation (*ethnos*)”, said our Greek host. “Since you are English, you ought to belong to the Anglican Church”. And he continued: “Personally, I am an atheist; but because I am Greek, I am of course a member of the Orthodox Church”’ (Ware, 1983: 208). Consider also the following testimony provided by Makrides:

In a personal discussion with the son of a communist leader, he affirmed that his family was altogether atheist and that he also shared his family’s old tradition. Yet, he said, ‘we used to go to Church every year to celebrate Christmas or Easter, and we still do it’. This is not a contradiction, as it may, at first glance, seem to be. One can naturally find several other similar examples. They neither mean a faith in Orthodoxy as the authentic expression of Christianity nor the externalisation of signs of religiousness and metaphysical anxiety by professed atheists. They simply indicate that Orthodoxy – again as an abstract category – definitely constitutes an essential component of modern Greek identity ... (Makrides, 1991: 296-7)

This attitude can be interpreted more positively as an indication of the fact that Orthodoxy far from being reducible to a mere ‘religious ideology’ or a moralist dogma, ‘a prescriptively codified set of religious ethics, especially ones which required strict adherence’, involves a ‘way of life’, a set of personalised popular-religious practices (Demertzis, 1991: 109; Papanizos, 1991: 69-70), a particular form of the social bond (Yannaras, 1983a: 81; Yannaras, 1983c; Yannaras, 1992: 406).

In any case this general picture does not describe the religious life of sectors of the population more attached to religious institutions and monasticism. As far as the theological and ecclesiastical parameters of Orthodoxy are concerned, see Yannaras, 1991; Ware, 1997. For more information on the structure and institutional characteristics of the Church of Greece, see Ware, 1983.



At first no one thought that this ‘dogfight’ would have any serious political consequences given that most attempts of the government to intervene into issues related to religion, during the eighties and nineties, have ended in compromise for fear of alienating practicing Orthodox voters.<sup>7</sup> Indeed the first responses both from the government spokesman and the minister of education and religious affairs were pointing in this direction.<sup>8</sup> Everything changed, however, when the newly instituted – and up to that time generally unknown - independent *Hellenic Data Protection Authority* convened on the 15 May to discuss the issue. Its unanimous decision was that religious belief, among a set of other sensitive personal data, should be excluded from identity cards. A few days later, on 24 May, during prime minister’s questions in parliament, the prime minister confirmed that his government would stand by and implement the decision to exclude religion from identity cards. There is little doubt that his firm position, which surprised many, reflected the prime minister’s personal views and, at the same time, could enhance the left-wing profile of a government that has been unable to escape the policy limitations set by market globalisation on, more or less, all European centre-left governments. On the other hand, many PASOK politicians and supporters remained sceptical and even wary of the so-called ‘political cost’ such a decision would entail in view of the influence of the Church on certain sectors of the population.

In any case, this decision has triggered an extraordinary reaction on behalf of the Greek Church, a reaction that has polarised Greek society and has been dominating

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<sup>7</sup> These interventions included the introduction of civil marriage (which was eventually recognised in 1982 as equivalent to – the much more popular, to this date - religious marriage, although initially conceived as a replacement or rather a prerequisite to religious marriage), and the so-called issue of ‘Church property’ which sparked a lot of tension, culminating in the 1988 compromise (Karayannis, 1997: 195). The more general issue of the full constitutional separation between church and state has been often discussed since the restoration of democracy in 1975 but neither the government proposing the constitution of 1975 (New Democracy) nor the PASOK governments that led the processes of revising this constitution since then (in 1985 and 2000) found the courage to push through such a measure that, by many accounts, would benefit not only the state but also the church (Yannaras, 1983b: 166-7; Petrou, 1999; Agouridis, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> And this is why the Church has claimed that it was taken by surprise when things started to change. There is some truth in that in the sense that the Church was not informed or asked immediately before the decision, neither was there any major public debate on the issue – especially before the elections of 2000 - it is very debatable, though, to what extent this was part of a supposedly cunning plan on behalf of the government, an accusation subsequently made by Church circles. Considered in the long term, however, one cannot overlook the fact that there was a long history of discussions and public exchange on the issue at least since 1993, if not 1986, and two (aborted) attempts to introduce new legislation (Alivizatos, 2001a: 311). Ironically enough, the Archbishop himself recounts this long story in an article written in 1997 and entitled ‘Religion in Identity Cards’ (Christodoulos, 1999: 234-241).

political life and media coverage for most of 2000 and 2001. Archbishop Christodoulos<sup>9</sup> led a campaign to oppose it, articulating a discourse that was marked by a clear political profile. Starting from the premise that an identity card is not a mere administrative document but ‘a proof of my personality’ (Christodoulos, 2000c: 321), he, *off the record*, characterised the exclusion as a *coup d’etat*, and started a struggle to overturn it. This struggle included mass rallies in Thessaloniki and Athens, rallies that were attended by hundreds of thousands of people, interventions in the media – which started following him day in and day out in order to report his latest attack on the government - and a campaign to gather as many signatures as possible calling for a referendum on the issue, although such a procedure was not the one prescribed by the constitution. The polarisation was also reflected within the political and party systems: *New Democracy*, the largest opposition centre-right party, supported almost unconditionally the Archbishop in what many journalists were quick to call his ‘holy war’ – with many of its MPs attending the rallies and most of them, including its leader, Costas Karamanlis, signing the petition for a referendum.<sup>10</sup>

On 28 August 2001, it was announced that the Church had managed to gather 3,008,901 signatures asking for a referendum on the *optional inclusion* of religion in Greek identity cards.<sup>11</sup> Although it seems that signing the petition or opposing the government decision – a view shared by around 60% of Athenians, according to some polls (*Ta Nea*, 2-7-2000) - did not entail alienation from the government - given that most polls over the last period showed no significant effects on its overall electoral appeal - there is no doubt that, by all standards, the number of signatures was impressive. At the same time, however, it revealed that the Church was unable to

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<sup>9</sup>Appointed as head of the Orthodox Church of Greece only a few years before (1998) and an emerging media star.

<sup>10</sup> Of course, for parties to have links with Churches is not a rare phenomenon; consider for example Christian democratic parties (Lamberts, 1997) and especially the Italian Christian Democrats whose primary aims included ‘safeguarding the role of the Catholic Church in the country’ (Leopardi & Wertman, 1989: 4). However, due to the absence of a serious religious cleavage in the Greek political system, this was a move of considerable importance for Greek politics.

<sup>11</sup> According to the last census (2001) the population of Greece is 10,939,605 but the electorate (which excludes foreigners and children) in the last general elections (2000) was 8,976,135. As far as optional inclusion is concerned, by most accounts, it does not preclude the possibility of discrimination, this time against those who have not declared their religion.

mobilise the majority of its supposed following on such an (apparently) crucial issue. At around the same time (27 June 2001) the appeal of a group of theology professors and laymen against the exclusion of religion from identity cards was rejected by the constitutional court (*State Council – Conceil d’Etat*), which decided that any mention of religion (either obligatory or optional) is unconstitutional. At any rate a deep division was established in Greek public life and no obvious solution was visible since both the government and the Church were holding firm to their positions. On 29 August, however, the Church received another, this time unexpected and much more politically significant blow, a blow that led to a suspension of most politicised activities on its behalf. After receiving the Archbishop and a representation of the Holy Synod that was supposed to inform him on the number of signatures collected for the Church petition, the President of the Republic, Constantine Stephanopoulos - a former conservative politician - issued a statement that included the following lines: ‘The conditions for the calling of a referendum on the issue of identity cards have not been met, everybody is obliged to abide by the rules of the current Law and the signatures which were collected with a procedure that falls outside legally instituted procedures cannot overturn the provisions of the Constitution’ (*Kathimerini*, 30-8-2001). This was generally viewed as a clear prioritising of the secular model of a ‘neutral’ *rule of Law* over the identification of Hellenism and Orthodoxy *over and above the Law* that the Church was putting forward. It was even more damaging because it was coming from someone whose institutional position, huge popularity – higher than the Archbishop’s - and conservative credentials left no obvious strategy for the Church hierarchy to continue its struggle at the same level of intensity without creating a national schism.<sup>12</sup>

Now that the President has offered some sort of – at least temporary – solution, his intervention punctuating the whole struggle and retroactively marking a turning point; now that a whole cycle of mobilizations and discursive articulations on behalf of the

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<sup>12</sup> A recent visit by the Archbishop to the minister of education and religious affairs, ending a twenty month long gap in communication, might signify that, without changing considerably its position, the Church is now willing to seek a new *modus vivendi* with the government (*Kathimerini*, 20-12-2001).

Church and the Archbishop has come to a close, it is perhaps time to sketch a first set of reflections and hypotheses on the issue. Needless to say these reflections are not articulated in a vacuum,<sup>13</sup> but will be built on and try to develop further some of the points already made by many commentators and analysts. Although deeply suspicious of any ideal of ‘neutrality’, I will try in what follows to avoid the polemical style that has characterised most academic and non-academic discussions in Greece. The following section of this discussion paper will explore the issue of the *politicisation* of Church discourse in Greece against the background of global developments and by taking into account the theoretical and historical context. This exploration is designed to clear the ground from certain ideas and stereotypes that have dominated much of the debate but fail to address in a coherent way crucial aspects of the phenomenon under examination. In the next part I will try to articulate a reading of the Archbishop’s discourse focusing on the populist dimensions of his rhetoric. Needless to say, researching the populist dimension of Church discourse does not by any means exhaust the discussion around this complex issue. Thus, in the final section of this paper I will deal, very briefly, with certain related issues worthy of further examination. First, with the conditions of emergence of populist Church discourse in contemporary Greece. Second, I will try to situate this recent ‘outbreak’ of populism within the long history of Greek populist politics and in relation to the crucial cleavage between ‘modernisers’ and ‘traditionalists’ that seems to dominate contemporary Greek political culture.

### **A. Clearing the Ground: A Comment on Politicisation**

One of the conclusions shared by most commentators is that all these events marked a ‘politicisation’ of the discourse of the Church. Indeed, this politicisation is so evident in the Archbishop’s discourse that, by now, everyone in Greece is, more or less, used

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<sup>13</sup> There is already a considerable bibliography on this issue, most if not all of it in Greek. Apart from the numerous articles in newspapers and journals, some of which are to be found in the bibliography, it is worth consulting a series of books that have started appearing. See, in particular, Manitakis, 2000; Venizelos, 2000; Andrianopoulos, 2000; Pappas, 2001; Kontogiorgis, 2001; Dimitropoulos, 2001. The views of the Church and many of its supporters can be found in a 711 pages long, detailed and inclusive collection of documents, papers and speeches: Holy Synod of the Church of Greece, 2000.

to it. Take for example his most well-known book comprising a series of articles published in the 1990s. The titles of some of the articles are indicative: ‘Nation and Orthodoxy: The Unbreakable Bond’ (Christodoulos, 1999: 145), ‘The Volcano of Islamism – the Lava that “Burns” the Balkans’ (Christodoulos, 1999: 69), ‘Lost Chances for an “Orthodox Axis” in the Balkans’ (Christodoulos, 1999: 100), etc. Here, instead of discussing strictly religious, theological or even moral issues, it is clear that he is mostly interested in what he calls the ‘great’ national issues, especially those ‘related to the great horizons of our race [*genos*]<sup>14</sup>, our identity and our continuation’ (Christodoulos, 1999: 13) - he singles out the challenges posed by globalisation and membership of the European Union, Islamic fundamentalism, etc. It is also clear that these texts are marked by a feeling of eschatological urgency; they are written as a warning and propose a set of measures to avoid ‘tragic consequences for Hellenism and Orthodoxy’ (Christodoulos, 1999: 15) – two terms that are inextricably linked for the Archbishop. The aim is to resolve the ‘final stage of a slippery course’ which has led to our current identity crisis (Christodoulos, 1999: 81), especially now that the Greek people are ‘feeling surrounded by the vultures of misfortune with their deadly stench’ (Christodoulos, 1999: 153). In his pages, the Church is clearly presented as *the* institution that can offer a way to combat what threatens Greece and Hellenism with ‘elimination’ (Christodoulos, 1999: 219)<sup>15</sup>: ‘If we all become clean and good Orthodox, then we will bring change to our homeland’ (Christodoulos, 1999: 83).

Moreover, although sometimes the Church denies vehemently that its discourse is politicised, the Archbishop himself has actually conceded this point. While in the past his view was that if Orthodoxy were to become politicised that ‘would entail its spiritual alienation’ (Christodoulos, 1999: 116), in the Athens rally he stated explicitly: ‘They accuse us that we speak politically, that our discourse is political.

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<sup>14</sup> In translating *genos* with ‘race’, admittedly not an entirely satisfactory translation, I am taking my lead from Zakythinis, 1976.

<sup>15</sup>The agents of this elimination vary from Europeanisation to modernisation, from globalisation and intellectualism to secularism, etc. The Archbishop has even attacked on similar grounds the new legal framework regarding conscientious objectors that gives them the right to do social service instead of military service, which is still obligatory in Greece (Christodoulos, 1999: 248).

We reply, *yes our discourse is political*, only in the ancient Greek sense of the term; it was never associated with party politics’ (Christodoulos, 2000a: 66, my emphasis). He reiterates this view in a lengthy interview given to the newspaper *To Vima* in 11 February 2001, stating that ‘all our actions are political’ (Christodoulos, 2001a: 17).

In that sense, the ‘politicised’ nature of his discourse is not in dispute; it is not even denied or downplayed by the Archbishop himself. It is also the case that even a quick glance through some of his speeches reveals that not only are they political, but also that his discourse is *primarily* a political discourse. This ‘politicisation’ seems to be premised on a particular understanding of the role of the Church within Greek society. The state is deemed, by and large, incompetent in performing its duty vis-à-vis Hellenism and thus the Church – previously helping the state to fulfil this role – is left alone to accomplish the task: ‘The discourse of Christodoulos aims at administering national culture and reproducing nationalist ideology – in other words, at substituting the uniting function of the state that is weakening, with the Church’ (Pappas, 2001: 53). The Church of Greece has been invested from its creation as an independent institution with a political role: ‘the aims of the nation-state determined the position and the function of the Church in Greek society’. As a public/state authority, the Church endorsed all national aims and was transformed into a ‘national Church’: ‘And now we live the following paradox: whereas the Polity is gradually denationalised, the Orthodox Church of Greece, fearful and defensive against the challenges, feeling that its “ethnocratic” identity is threatened’ attempts to embody this role by itself and against the ‘pluralist’ state, which is now attacked for its ‘weakened national sensitivity’ (Manitakis, 2000: 17-8; 91). These hypotheses seem to adequately reflect the position of the Church itself.<sup>16</sup> For the Archbishop it is clear that, with the strengthening of the European Union and Greece’s full participation in

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<sup>16</sup> Almost twenty years ago bishop Kallistos Ware had described one of the challenges facing the Greek Church as follows: ‘The future vocation of the Greek Church is to be not an ethnic body but a communion of faith and sacraments, a spiritual family to which men and women belong, not because of the accident of birth, but in consequence of personal conversion and self-dedication. Let the motto of the Church in the 1980s be, not Ekklesia kai Ethnos, ‘Church and nation’. Still less Ellas Ellinon Christianon, ‘a Greece of Greek Christians’, but mia zosa kai elefthera Ekklesia, ‘a Church that is alive

it, 'the state has ceased to be the obvious guarantor of national identity'. As a result: 'The salvation of Hellenism can only be the task and accomplishment of the Church' (Christodoulos, 1999: 222-3).<sup>17</sup>

The question now is how, as social and political scientists, are we to understand this politicisation? Commentators inclined to adopt a strong 'Enlightened', 'Modernising' or 'pro-Western' perspective often express their *surprise* at the fact that the Church and the Archbishop use 'political' means (like mass rallies) and openly oppose the democratically elected government, thus articulating a certain 'political' stance, adopting a 'political' role like the one described in the previous paragraphs.<sup>18</sup> For them religious faith is – *or rather should be* – a matter of personal attachment that has no place in the public domain and should be confined to the private space, the individual life of citizens, or to an isolated/insulated corner of civil society.<sup>19</sup> Thus, many commentators have criticised the Archbishop mainly on the grounds that his political interventions are not justified within an order that assigns these political duties to other organs of the polity, on the grounds that his religious discourse does not legitimately occupy the public (political) space. For most of them these problems stem from the lack of a constitutional separation between church and state; such a separation, according to this view, would solve, once and for all, such confusions. There are, however, at least two major problems with such a view; one theoretical/analytical and another of a historical nature. First, it relies very much on a one-sided, ideological understanding of secularisation which views the complex socio-political realities of our late modern age through an outmoded and distorting normative lens. Second, it fails to take into account the historical background of the Greek case, in other words the long tradition of politicisation marking the Greek

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and free' (Ware, 1983: 227). One can speculate that the course followed would probably disappoint Ware.

<sup>17</sup> What is somewhat curious is that one would expect this argument to function in a way encouraging the Church to accept if not to lead the way towards its separation from this supposedly 'de-hellenised' state (Yannaras, 1983b: 198). The Church however is led to the opposite conclusion and blocks such a development.

<sup>18</sup> Imagine, however, the surprise of the Church hierarchy when its opinion on the identity card issue was not only ignored but not even asked before the particular decision was taken. Given its previous identification of Orthodoxy with Hellenism and the Greek state, a link sanctioned for almost two centuries by the state itself, it must have been a traumatic dislocation.

<sup>19</sup> In the United States there is a similar reaction by Liberal intellectuals who feel frightened from the rise of the religious right (Ian, 1999: 30). However, religion has also been important for American Democrats and Liberals like Jimmy Carter and Jesse Jackson.

Church; hence the surprise from recent events. It is clearly worth examining these two problems in some detail.

*1. Secularisation and politicisation.*

As far as secularisation is concerned, there is no doubt that, in its *soft* version - as the relative marginalisation of religion in increasingly ‘desacralised’ and ‘rationalised’ societies - secularisation is a reality; but only a *partial* reality.<sup>20</sup> Although religious attitudes have indeed changed in modernity (with a decline in religiosity and the ‘privatisation’ of faith), this change is neither uniform nor by definition irreversible. In David Martin’s words, we ‘need not assume that secularisation is a very long term or inevitable trend’ (Martin, 1978: 12) especially in an age in which any sense of historical inevitability is disrupted and religion itself is making a comeback. As for the prediction that religion would disappear completely in enlightened societies – the *strong* version of the secularisation thesis - this seems to be based on the attitudes of a limited ‘scientific elite’ and does not reflect conclusive trends in the overall population (Martin, 1969: 4), nor does it reflect the global reality of contradictory forces (Kedde, 1997: 22). It is also premised on a philosophy of history that views progress towards a rational and secular ideal society as ultimately inevitable, a view by now discredited - most recently attacked by discussions around modernity, late modernity and post-modernity, as well as by the increasing awareness of contingency and historicity characteristic of constructionist and poststructuralist theorisation.<sup>21</sup> Even sociologists like Peter Berger, who were initially of the rather opposite view, have come to acknowledge the importance of counter-secular developments and are increasingly putting into question the inevitability of secularisation: ‘The world today ... is massively religious, and it is anything but the secularised world that had been predicted (be it joyfully or despondently) by so many analysts of modernity’ (Berger in Ahdar, 2000: 3). Genuine defenders of modernity have also pointed to the fact that one-sided models of modernisation and secularisation ignore the historicity of human social existence and the irreducibility of contingency within it (Lipowatz, 1995: 168).

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<sup>20</sup> For a concise account of the process of secularisation in Europe, see Remond, 1999.

<sup>21</sup> See, in this respect, Stavrakakis, 1999a.



In other words, although secularisation has been crucial in the modern experience, it can only be understood as a contingent and partial trend. Trends of this sort have to be understood as the result of social negotiation and political struggle, of a non-teleological historical development that is bound to produce side-effects and resistances, including the recent global comeback and ‘de-privatisation’ of religion. Moreover, secularisation has not functioned merely as an external influence limiting the social function and appeal of religious institutions but has been a constitutive element in Christian Churches and, as we shall see from our analysis of the Greek case, has sometimes led to a manipulation that indirectly enhanced their social and political salience. In any case, the dislocation of the rationalist faith in the disappearance of religion and in the capacity of secular reason to resolve both practical and metaphysical questions (the so-called crisis of modernity), the collapse of the ideological imaginary of the Cold War, and the various dislocations produced in the course of globalisation, have led during the last two decades to the return of religion, a return that takes a variety of different forms, from Islamic fundamentalism to ‘New Age’ mysticism: ‘Contrary to once widespread expectations that religion would gradually disappear as a political force in modernizing societies, religious communities have been getting stronger in most nations over the last two decades or so’ (Hasenclever & Rittberger, 2000: 641).<sup>22</sup> The so-called *Revenge of God* is increasingly accompanying the *Death of God* proclaimed more than a century ago by Nietzsche. This comeback, however, does not always signal a denial of modernity (at least not *in toto*) and cannot be reduced to a mere side-effect of economic underdevelopment: ‘It is occurring in countries with different religious traditions and at different levels of their economic development, so it can not be explained as a feature of economic underdevelopment’ (Thomas, 2000: 816). Most importantly, it is by no means limited to the Third World. It is present even in the centre of the ‘secularised’ West, in particular the USA.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> This return of religion has been deemed so important as to deserve a special issue of the international relations journal of the London School of Economics (*Millennium*), in which it is proposed that a new branch of international relations should be introduced, namely *International Political Theology* which, ironically, rhymes with *International Political Economy* (Kubalkova, 2000: 675).

<sup>23</sup> A general overview of the relation between politics and religion in the USA is given in Wald, 1992.

As Marcia Ian has put it ‘if “secularisation” means a general falling away of religion into a world increasingly devoid of religion, then America has not secularised’ (Ian, 1999: 4). Paradoxically, one of the conditions of possibility for this trend was the constitutional separation between church and state, a founding principle of the USA.<sup>24</sup> Besides its liberal interpretations, this separation was initially conceived and eventually functioned to protect the religious domain from state intervention (Ian, 1999: 17). As a result, it benefited the Churches (Martin, 1978: 70), leading to a thriving of religious culture and to a *permeability* of the barrier separating them, this time originating from the religious side. Hence the ‘politicisation of some forms of American religion’ (Swatos, 1998: 89). The following vignette is revealing of these developments: Two days after the events of 11 September, ‘Jerry Falwell, founder of the *Moral Majority*, told *Christian Coalition* founder Pat Robertson (on the latter’s television show), that “God continues to lift the curtain and allow the enemies of America to give us probably what we deserve”. They agreed that the attack was God’s punishment for American toleration of pagans, abortionists, feminists and gays: “I point the finger in their face”, said Falwell. “You helped this happen” ’ (Lind, 2001: 26).<sup>25</sup> Ironically, a Western religious fundamentalism is called to remedy a non-Western religious fundamentalism.

But it’s not only that religious leaders put forward their own interpretations of political events and intervene in politics. What is most astonishing is that in a country founded on the so-called ‘Wall of separation’ between church and state – a phrase coined by Jefferson - politicians seem more than willing to respond in a way which legitimises the collapse of separation and of secularisation in general: ‘Today the Christian right is far more powerful in American politics than it was in 1800 or 1900 ... in 2000, both the Republican and the Democratic presidential candidates claimed to be evangelical Protestants who had personally “found Jesus” ’ (Lind, 2001: 26).

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<sup>24</sup> On the constitutional heritage of the USA regarding religious liberty, and the tensions involved, see Adams & Emmerich, 1990 and McConnell, 2000.

<sup>25</sup> Similar attitudes, although by and large marginal, are not absent in Greece, especially among fundamentalist circles of Greek-Orthodox zealots. As Makrides has put it: ‘moralizing explanations of historical (e.g. the invasion of Cyprus by the Turks in 1974) or physical phenomena (e.g. earthquakes) among fundamentalists are a standing rule. According to bishop A. Kantiotis, for instance, the strong earthquake in Thessaloniki on 20 June 1978 was caused by the wrath of God due to the increasing number of abortions and blasphemies in Greece’ (Makrides, 1990: 61). See also the explanations given by local priests and residents to contemporary ‘miracles’ (like icons that cry, etc.), explanations which are often uncritically presented by some Greek media, although usually rejected by the official Church.

Hence, secularisation (in the sense of a gradual disappearance of religion) cannot be accepted as an unconditional and inevitable trend. Furthermore, although social differentiation is both a reality and a necessity for the reproduction of modern societies it does not entail the strict separation between specialised areas of the social, something very much stressed by sociological theory: in that sense ‘religion is interconnected with the other elements of society and culture in complex ways’ (O’Dea, 1966: 99). There is always interaction between the religious and the cultural, the political, the economic and the societal, even when these are understood as distinct domains (Lipowatz, 1995: 168). As Rene Remond has put it, ‘the idea of an absolute separation of religion from society may be a utopia that could not withstand the force of reality’ (Remond, 1999: 8). The same applies to relations between law and religion: ‘Since religion and law are significant aspects of mankind’s social existence a complete compartmentalization of them is hardly practically feasible, even were it desirable in theory (which it is not)’ (Ahdar, 2000: 3).

In that sense the fact that the discussion in Greece has been largely hegemonised by a legal problematic and mainly focused on the issue of the legal separation between church and state, as if such a separation would be able to contain the politicisation of the Church of Greece and offer *total* insulation to a secular political system, is rather misleading. Not only because, although it does constitute a desirable development, such a separation - as we have seen - is no *panacea*; but mainly because such borders and *frontiers*, whether enshrined in legal or constitutional frameworks or not, are always the cause of tensions, disputes, conflicting interpretations and reinterpretations (Zacharopoulos, 1999: 9) and have to be accepted as such. It could never be otherwise as long as we are still far from the end of history, as long as, beyond all (useful) legal systematisations and normativities, the regulation of church-state relations will always be a matter of *political* choice (Dimitropoulos, 2001: 24).<sup>26</sup> In that sense, especially

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<sup>26</sup> Even in France, another example of separation between Church and state (institutionalised in 1905), one of the legacies of the anti-clericalism of the French Revolution, the last two centuries have been marked by tensions, culminating in the impressive street demonstrations by supporters both of secularism and of Catholic education in 1994 (Knapp and Wright, 2001: 6; Bell and Criddle, 1984: 15-19). What is revealed thus, is that ‘when husband and wife separate, it does not mean that they no longer have any contact, if only to decide on the upbringing of the children born to them when they were married. That is why the breach brought into force in France in 1905 was unable to put a definitive end to all relations between religion and society’ (Remond, 1999: 13). For a general overview of the relations between the Catholic Church and the state in France, see Ravitch, 1990.

within a non-totalitarian framework, separation can only be a form of *relation* – even if it will be a relation of *tension* - and neither guarantees nor presupposes a *wholly* secular society or the *total* exclusion of religion from political discourse (Adams & Emmerich, 1990: 51).

One may disagree with the way the Archbishop or the Church interpret and understand these frontiers, or with the way he is articulating his opposition to the redrawing put forward by the government – an admittedly limited, reluctant and, at the same time, clumsy redrawing. However, it is not politicisation *in general* which is to blame; it is the *particular* politicisation that many dislike. The Church is almost denied the right to speak on socio-political issues ultimately because its discourse is so alien from the image of Greece (as a thoroughly modernised, secularised democracy) entertained by some analysts - so much so that it becomes traumatic even to acknowledge its presence within the public domain.<sup>27</sup> Thus we experience a paradoxical situation in which instead of analysing its discourse seriously, understanding and challenging it accordingly – something that becomes easier from the moment the Church itself articulates a political discourse, opening itself to public criticism - some would prefer to silence the Church, exclude it from the public domain, avoiding any contact with what for them can only be a traumatic encounter with the dark side of Greek culture.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> At the same time the Church and the Archbishop are accused for not speaking against the military regime of 1967-1974. Christodoulos has served as the Chief-secretary of the Archbishop appointed by the junta and, by his own admission, knew nothing about the ugly face of the repressive regime (tortures, etc.). However, the paradox here is that it is often the same people that, on the one hand, deny the Church the right to intervene in the public domain and, on the other, accuse the Archbishop for not speaking openly against the junta (Zoumboulakis in Kitromilides et al, 2001: 32).

<sup>28</sup> The urge to repress this 'ugly' trace of ethno-religious discourse ultimately signals a difficulty in registering the ambivalent character of contemporary Greek identity and an inability to effectively negotiate a new hegemonic modernising future. Such a future cannot ensue as the automatic result of an essentialised form of modernisation. It would require a paradigmatic shift in what has served as 'the "myth-symbol" complex, and particularly the "mythomoteur" or constitutive myth of the ethnic polity' (Smith, 1986: 15; Armstrong, 1982). The equation of Hellenism with Orthodoxy, the hegemony of an 'ethno-religious ideology' has served as one of the 'founding myths', one of the most used *cliché* of the neo-hellenic state: 'it is taught in schools, enunciated from the pulpit, supported with fanaticism by politicians of all shades' (Pappas, 2001: 19). The fact that all these claims are being increasingly pushed to the margins of political life, does not entail their disappearance since they persevere in the form of largely unconscious fantasies, the same way that 'Orthodoxy means more to them [the Greeks] than their secular lifestyles would allow us to believe' (Makrides, 1991: 286). Even if agreement is reached on the content of such a modernisation, its success would depend on its ability to create a new hegemony involving a shift in the fantasmatic background that would be reflected in popular belief and social practice. If possible, a true modernisation of social and political life would thus presuppose a 'modernisation of fantasy'. Of course, it would also require addressing the dislocations and injustices

## 2. *Burdens of history.*

Second, such an attitude fails, to a large extent, to register seriously the consequences of the secular/political role played by Orthodoxy and the Church of Greece during the last few centuries and especially since it became an autocephalous Church (1833), independent from the Patriarchate of Constantinople.<sup>29</sup> In fact, the heritage of the official Church in Greece is a heritage of *Political Orthodoxy* (Agouridis, 2000: 360) going back to the Byzantine and the Ottoman past (Runciman, 1968; Svoronos, 1982; Kitromilides, 1989; Mango, 1994; Ware, 1997; Rudometov, 1998), and given a new lease of life under the auspices of Greek nationalism and the direct control of the Greek state following Greek independence.

When the modern Greek state was formed (1830), it tried, under the influence of Enlightenment ideals regarding statecraft, to modernise the Church by separating it from the pre-modern ecumenicity of the Patriarchate and its extended role within the Ottoman state; this modernisation entailed the *nationalisation* of the Church. The main architect of this refashioning was Georg Von Maurer, a German Protestant and member of King Otto’s regency: ‘If ever a church was legally stripped of authority and reduced to complete dependence on the state, Maurer’s constitution did it to the church of Greece’ (Frazee, 1969: 114). True, it was impossible for the Church of the new Greek state to remain under the auspices of an institution subordinate to the Sultan; ‘it also needed reorganization, but instead of helping the church to make the necessary internal improvements, Maurer’s constitution simply made it an agency of

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involved in modernisation and capitalist globalisation and the grievances that find refuge in the security of old fantasies (Psychopedis, 2000).

Albeit all the rhetoric, one often detects not only inability but also an unconscious unwillingness to deal with the construction, negotiation and popular legitimation of a new fantasy, a new social, political and national *mythomoteur*. Hypotheses explaining this unwillingness or difficulty include the fear that these old fantasies are still so strong – albeit in a more implicit way – that living in denial and fantasising their silencing or automatic elimination is easier than fighting them face to face, and/or the fact that although often expressed in an extreme form that many find appalling – as in the case of the religious/political discourse we are examining – these old fantasies are still ‘our own fantasies’, reveal something about our repressed self that is extremely traumatic to admit and even more difficult to change. On this issue also see Giannouloupoulos, 1998.

<sup>29</sup> See on this issue, Frazee, 1969, and Stavrou, 1994, for a first historical account of the relevant events.

an authoritarian state and a poor one at that' (Frazee, 1969: 124).<sup>30</sup> The result was a gradual 'instrumentalisation' of the Church of Greece (Demertzis, 1995: 10; Georgiadou, 1995: 307; Georgiadou, 1996: 250, 271), the 'total submission of the Church to the state' (Kitromilides, 1989: 182) to the point of becoming 'a branch of civil service' (Mouzelis, 1994: 64), an *instrumentum regni* (Makrides, 1991: 291), a mere ideological weapon in the hands of the Greek state (Skopetea, 1988: 133; Dimitropoulos, 2001: 61). The conversion of the Church of Greece to the secular values of Greek nationalism, its transformation into 'a secular doctrine and certainly one at odds with its own deposit of faith' (Martin, 1978: 272), was so deep that 'the Church of Greece spearheaded all nationalist initiatives in the latter part of the nineteenth and throughout the twentieth century' (Kitromilides, 1989: 166).<sup>31</sup> In the twentieth century the open politicisation of the Church took a variety of new forms: The Church sided with the king against the reformer prime minister Venizelos who was excommunicated and anathematised by the Archbishop in 1916; it played an active role in the ideological aspect of the 'struggle against communism' during the Civil War (1947-1949); and was largely obedient to the 'religious ideology' ('a Greece of Christian Greeks') introduced by the dictatorship (1967-1974) (Karayannis, 1997; Venizelos, 2000: 22; Yannaras, 1983: 247; Metallinos, 2000: 40).<sup>32</sup>

The recent 'politicisation' of religious discourse in Greece should not, therefore, come as a sudden surprise. Politicisation was there all along. Although the borders between the secular and the sacred are always unclear and socially constructed, in Greece one

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<sup>30</sup> Most accounts focus very much on the role of Maurer, but it seems that the demand for an independent Church was widespread even before the arrival of king Otto, although a more tactful procedure *vis-à-vis* the Patriarchate might have been followed without the intervention of Maurer (Conidaris, 1996: 220). Also see, in this respect, Paparizos, 1991: 67, and especially Troianos & Dimakopoulou, 1999: 13, 121, where important documents of the period are reproduced.

<sup>31</sup> In return the Church hierarchy benefited from privileges and the state flattery and priests became 'civil servants' to this day being paid by the state. Furthermore, some Church circles saw in state support the guarantee for the spiritual hegemony of Orthodoxy in Greece (Lipowatz, 1995: 174). Regarding the alienating results of these arrangements for the Church itself, see Yannaras, 1983a: 74-79; Ramfos, 2000; Yannaras, 2000; Yannaras, 2001: 168. Although Christodoulos has managed to bring the Church back to the centre of media attention and public debate, an extraordinary accomplishment in itself, it is debatable to what extent he is capable of changing a state of decay marking the Church since then, a state Yannaras has described as follows: 'The so-called "official" church looks as if it is in a state of comatose aphasia, with the Episcopal position the object of power manipulations ... the great majority of priests hostages to the professionalisation of their calling and the ecclesiastical schools in a tragic state of collapse' (Yannaras, 1992: 488).

<sup>32</sup> It has been argued that, in fact, the Church has been acting as an *Ideological State Apparatus*, in the Althusserian sense of the term (Chiotakis, 2000: 312). Also see Althusser, 1990: 67-121.

has to admit that the situation was more acute due to the ‘burdens’ of history. If the current politicisation seems striking and surprising to many it is because since 1974 the state has, to a large extent, ceased to play the role of the direct controller and manipulator of the Church. Many thought that this would prompt the Church to follow a de-politicised course. Such a view, however, could only be based on a neglect of the relevant historical record (the long-term politicisation of the Church is very difficult to change overnight) and of recent global trends that question the strong version of secularisation – as the inevitable marginalisation of religious institutions and beliefs – all of which point to the inherently politically constructed nature of social differentiation. What is indeed new is neither the politicisation nor the secularisation of the Greek Church; what is new is the *emancipation* of a traditionally politicised Church from the state. This is not to say that the form this emancipation is taking is worthy of the name: in fact, unable to assume a new role beyond its customary ‘voluntary servitude’ to the ideological priorities of the nation-state, unable to respond positively and creatively to this emancipation from above, fearful of the risks and challenges involved in the changing environment, the Greek Church in reality attempts to preserve the old regime (Kalaintzidis, 2001: 59-60). Insofar as the state continues its course towards pluralisation and loses its interest in controlling and using the Church; insofar as the Church, as a result, assumes overtime its new emancipated and more independent position, some sort of separation is bound to follow. The Archbishop himself, then bishop of Dimitrias, had accepted this in 1990 (*Eleftherotypia*, 14-6-2000). Such a development, however, will not be the automatic or inevitable result of some universal principle or trend, but of a long process of negotiation and change with its ups and downs, its tensions and contradictions. If in France, besides the long and strong anti-clerical tradition, legal separation was pursued ‘with moderation and relative generosity’ (Ravitch, 1990: 104), one would expect any political initiative in Greece to combine, at least in a similar measure, *resolve with respect*.<sup>33</sup> Its success will also depend on the ability to cultivate alternative (modernising) political and cultural ideals and *mythomoteurs* with deep popular appeal and hegemonic force.

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<sup>33</sup> In a 1997 paper, Stathopoulos himself has proposed ‘a system of friendly, very friendly separation’ between church and state in Greece (Stathopoulos, 2000: 59). A variety of legal steps in this direction is outlined in Konidaris, 2000.

Granted then the political character of the Archbishop's discourse, granted the *primarily political role* that the Church – or some sectors within it – envisages for itself. Instead of attempting to silence the Archbishop or stick to idealised and ineffective principles one would rather need to explore more closely the status of his discourse in order to understand his popular appeal and articulate a more effective analysis or critique. *Instead of 'is the discourse of the Church political or not?' the crucial question then becomes: what type of politics is put forward here? How is this role communicated and established? What is the discursive mode through which it addresses itself to its audience?* In actual fact, the discourse of the Archbishop has been the object of numerous analyses; it has been praised and celebrated as patriotic and faithful to tradition, but also criticised along many lines: as nationalist, anti-democratic, fundamentalist, traditionalist, even reactionary, and, last but not least, as *populist*.<sup>34</sup> It seems to me, however, that it is this last dimension that might be able to illuminate the aforementioned questions not only in terms of the discourse's concrete content but also in terms of the discursive logics that structure it and the way it communicates its message to its target, that is, to *the people*. In the following parts of this text then we aim at exploring some of the particular characteristics and tropes of the 'politicised' discourse articulated by the Church. Taking into account the theoretical insights of Ernesto Laclau and others, we will argue that it constitutes a populist discourse *par excellence*. It is not the first time that the politicisation of religious discourse has been described as 'populist' – Liberation theology in Latin America has been given this characterization by certain analysts (Lowy, 1996: 77-8) while others have noted the 'semitheological' language of classical American populism and its relationship with religion (Lancaster, 1988). The Greek case is, however, almost unique in its clear-cut picture, historical background and socio-political significance. The term 'populist' is not used here in its *polemical* sense, as is usually the case, but primarily as a tool of *discourse analysis*. Thus, before embarking in our analysis, we need to clarify, very briefly, what exactly we mean by populism

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<sup>34</sup> For example, the course followed by the Archbishop has been criticised by few bishops as leading to the formation of an ideology of 'para-religious *populism*' (Theoklitos, 2001). Furthermore he has been often described as 'charismatic and populist' (Pollis, 1999: 195), as the bearer of a 'neo-rightist populism' (Pappas, 2001: 57), as someone who speaks 'in the name of *the people*' (Manitakis, 2000: 140, my emphasis) articulating thus an 'ecclesiastical' (Dimitrakos, 2000) or 'religious populism' (Sotiirelis, 2001).



since this concept has been often attacked for its vagueness and its (lack of) analytical effectiveness .

In defining populism we take our lead from the theory of populism introduced by Ernesto Laclau in his texts ‘Towards a Theory of Populism’ (Laclau, 1977) and ‘Populist Rupture and Discourse’ (Laclau, 1980). What is Laclau arguing regarding the analysis of populism? First of all one has to take into account the political subject addressed and invoked in a given discourse: is it a nation? Is it a particular class or section of the population? Or is it ‘the people’? According to Laclau, ‘despite the wide diversity in the uses of the term, we find in all of them the common reference to an analogical basis which is *the people*. ... it is certainly true that reference to “the people” occupies a central place in populism’ (Laclau, 1977: 165). However, the central place of a signifier like the people does not seem enough to justify talking about a populist discourse, although it does constitute a first important criterion. If the structural location of ‘the people’ was enough to define populism then the majority of political discourses in modernity would probably belong to the populist family. Laclau was from the beginning aware of this problem; hence the introduction of his second criterion for distinguishing populism: ‘For a popular positionality to exist, a discourse has to divide society between dominant and dominated; that is, the system of equivalences should present itself as articulating the totality of a society around a fundamental antagonism’ (Laclau, 1980: 91). As he has pointed out, ‘the presence of popular elements in a discourse is not sufficient to transform it into a populist one. Populism starts at the point where popular-democratic elements are presented as an *antagonistic* option against the ideology of the dominant bloc’ (Laclau, 1977: 173, my emphasis). Surely what gives ‘the people’ its political salience and hegemonic appeal within populist discourses, is its antagonistic representation.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> In fact, Laclau’s discursive theory of populism seems to be the only one that offers theoretical sophistication without succumbing to idealism or to any kind of intellectualist reductionism, one that combines a thorough philosophical grounding with a sensitivity towards the realities of political struggle in a variety of contexts. Furthermore, ‘purified’ from its excesses (the class focus) and fortified by the subsequent work of Laclau and Mouffe, it can accommodate most of the criticisms to which it has been subjected (most notably the one by Mouzelis), and has been applied in an expanding variety of empirical analyses with satisfactory explanatory results (Lyrintzis, 1987; Lyrintzis, 1990; Sofos, 1994; Westlind, 1996; Barros and Castagnola, 2000; Panizza, 2001, to name just a few). For a detailed justification of our use of Laclau’s approach along these lines, see Stavrakakis, Yannis, ‘Religion and Populism in Contemporary Greece’, forthcoming in a collective volume edited by Francisco Panizza provisionally entitled *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, London: Verso, 2002.

Is the discourse articulated recently by Archbishop Christodoulos and the Church hierarchy a populist discourse? Does it fulfil the two criteria highlighted by Laclau: a central reference to ‘the people’ and an antagonistic discursive logic? Is it, in other words, organised according to a ‘populist logic’, a ‘populist reason’, to use the title of a forthcoming book by Ernesto Laclau? These will be the questions guiding our argumentation in the following section.<sup>36</sup>

### **B. The discourse of the Greek Church: Christodoulos’ populism?**<sup>37</sup>

Let us initially explore the first question, the status of ‘the people’ in the Archbishop’s discourse. Before the identity cards crisis the people is not assigned any privileged status in his discourse; signifiers like ‘race’ (*genos*) and ‘nation’ (*ethnos*) are largely preferred. It is the current crisis that leads to a radicalisation of the Archbishop’s discourse and to the necessity to address the people directly. This change of focus is also depicted in the officially published transcripts of his speeches, in the rallies and in the Holy Synod, where ‘*laos*’ – the Greek word for ‘the people’ – is printed with the first letter in capitals, together with words like ‘God’, ‘Greece’, ‘Orthodoxy’ and ‘Church’. It is obvious then that the people is now becoming central, one of the master signifiers at play; it also becomes a constant reference which is to be found in abundance in almost every paragraph if not in every sentence.

In the Athens rally, for example, the message is crystal clear: the Church ‘assumes the role of the leader of the faithful People in its desperate attempt to defend its spiritual self-consciousness’ (Christodoulos, 2000c: 309). Christodoulos’ main concern is that the Church has to fulfil its duty to ‘the People of God’ and the homeland (Christodoulos, 2000a: 72). It is representing and defending the people against the

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<sup>36</sup> Although the whole rationale of this exploration is based on the two criteria of Laclau’s discursive approach to populism, we will try to incorporate in our argumentation elements and additional criteria from other approaches (including those of Canovan, Mouzelis and Taggart) insofar as they can be grafted into a discursive problematic.

<sup>37</sup> Given that the hegemony of Christodoulos’ discourse on the official Church hierarchy is almost total (with few notable exceptions) we take, for analytical purposes, Church discourse to be overlapping with his own. Recently, however, this hegemony has been shaken by the fierce opposition of former allies, co-members of the brotherhood ‘Chrysopigi’, although this opposition had nothing to do with his handling of the identity cards issue (*To Vima*, 2-12-2001). ‘Chrysopigi’ had functioned ‘initially as a means to promote its members into episcopal positions and then as a way to co-ordinate their work’ (Yannaras, 1992: 388).

attack of an atheist government that ignores and opposes an essential Greekness guaranteed by tradition. More significantly, the modernising government is to be resisted on the grounds of its distance from the people. According to the Archbishop, contemporary Greek modernisers are characterised by living apart from ‘the people’, isolated from the ‘everyday popular ways of life’, ‘from the soul and the heart of the People’ (Christodoulos, 2000a: 52-3). This is what, within this discursive universe, explains – and *condemns* - their anti-ecclesiastical campaign. This is also what serves to legitimise and justify his own position.

The Church is presented as eminently qualified to perform this task of representation since there is no division between clergy and the people: ‘Our clergy is part of the People, kneaded with the People, working for the People, coming from the People’ (Christodoulos, 2000c: 311). The clergy consists of persons ‘devoted to God and its People’ (Christodoulos, 2000c: 322). Replying to the criticism that the Church has no right to speak on behalf of the people since it lacks democratic legitimation, he re-asserts his right to speak in the name of the people and vows to continue to do so on the grounds that when he speaks about the Greek people he means the faithful of the Orthodox Church, the ‘People of God’, the ‘People of the Church’, and not the atheists or the heterodox. There is no doubt that the notion of ‘the people’ does have certain theological connotations and a history within theological discourse.<sup>38</sup> However, it seems that the people is used by the Archbishop in a clearly political way. For example, it is himself who stresses the quantitative parameter of this people: since, according to him – and the available statistical data – atheists and heterodox comprise only 2-4 % of the Greek population, this is supposed to ‘legitimise’ his discourse on behalf of the Greek people in general, a people that ‘every day judges and confirms its trust on us’ (Christodoulos, 2000a: 64; Christodoulos, 2000b: 303). ‘Nowhere else in the world are People and Religion so close’ (Christodoulos, 2000b: 292) and that’s why the people expect support from the Church, ‘that’s why the Church speaks on behalf of this People’ (Christodoulos, 2000b: 303). It becomes clear that ‘the people of God’ is not used in the ecumenical and theological sense, but as a

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<sup>38</sup> See on this issue the special issue of the theological journal *Synaxi*, ‘People, Nation, Church’, no. 48, 1993. Also see Pinakoulas, 2001: 44.

statistical and territorial reference, a rhetorical device designed to mobilise supporters – through the establishment of a particular relation of representation - and terrify opponents. The argument put forward is that *virtually* all Greek citizens, *virtually* the whole of the Greek people, support the Church in its struggle against the government. Such an instrumental, political conception of the people is often retrieved when – and only when - the Church feels threatened and popular mobilisation is required to defend it; this was also the case with the ecclesiastical property crisis of 1987. As soon as crises are over, ‘the people’ loses its value for the hierarchy and is returned to silence, to the margins of ecclesiastical life (Thermos, 1993: 44).

The profoundly political references to ‘the people’ by the Archbishop raise the issue of the relation between the people and God. By claiming to represent the people, the Archbishop knows that he enters a dangerous field: the views of the people can change over time, while his position (presented as the bastion of traditional Orthodoxy, and, ultimately, the word of God) cannot be seen to change. The result is a hybrid discourse. On the one hand, as a religious discourse, contemporary Church discourse is based on a strong foundationalism and a representationalism rather uncharacteristic of Orthodox theology (in its apophatic tradition): ‘The Word of God is beyond negotiation. It is a word which is authentic and revelatory, and which comes from our Lord Jesus Christ himself ... The Church thus, when it speaks with the word of God, is not doing it the way a University Professor does it for his science or a politician for his ideology. The Church is not speaking a word of its own. It is transmitting the word of God’ (Christodoulos, Interview: 54). Elsewhere, the Archbishop states that, ‘The Church is unmistakable, because Christ is leading it’ (Christodoulos, Church and Nation: 9). It is hard to see how ‘the people’, in its profoundly political sense, can function within such a discourse that claims God as the first source of its legitimation. As we have seen, though, the Church operates both on the sacred and the secular level. Any confusions are resolved first by attributing to the Greek people the quality of the *chosen*, the people of God. The Greek people is always the ‘blessed People of God’ (Christodoulos, 2000b: 290). On the other, a strong link is articulated between the voice of the people and the voice of God.<sup>39</sup> If both these are presented as overlapping then the archbishop can claim to represent

both without any contradictions. Hence, the voice of the people becomes for Archbishop Christodoulos the voice of God: ‘your voice is also the voice of God’ (Christodoulos, 2000c: 327), *vox populi vox dei* being a standard populist theme (Canovan, 1999: 10).

Thus, the Archbishop becomes the direct representative of the voice of the people, and God ultimately acquires the role of the guarantor of this direct representation, having entrusted this role to the Archbishop. In the Archbishop’s own words: ‘I have received by God this responsibility, to move forward, and for you to follow your shepherd’ (*Kathimerini*, 1-7-2000). Here, the metaphor of the flock is also revealing of the organisational aspect of this discourse, a direct relationship between the leader and the led without mediating mechanisms, with the priests and the Church hierarchy in the roles of mere transmitters (something, by the way, not entirely consistent with Orthodox patterns of church organisation). In any case the emphasis is clearly on the leader’s charisma – cultivated by the intense media attention and the Archbishop’s initially positive response to the challenge of mediatisation - and on the necessity ‘for direct, unmediated rapport between the leader and “his people” ’ (Mouzelis, 1985: 334).

This stress on direct representation and on a populist style of organisation explains the attacks of the Archbishop on any other mediating mechanisms that would occupy and regulate the space between him and *his* people. Hence the typical populist distrust of Law and Rights: ‘Laws, when the People does not want them, are not applied, they fall into inactivity and are essentially abolished. They are rejected by the consciousness of the nation on what is right and what is not’ (Christodoulos, 2000b: 298). In his Athens speech he resorts to examples from Ancient Sparta to justify his view that ‘laws are not unchangeable’ (Christodoulos, 2000c: 322). Although undoubtedly true (since, at an ‘ontological’ level, constitutional and legal frameworks are social and political constructions), within the half-religious, half-political discourse of the Archbishop, this claim is clearly functioning as an attack on the constitutional basis of liberal democracy. By legitimising his role as the direct and only true representative of the people it also invests the majority with a divine

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<sup>39</sup> The crucial role of voice here should not escape the attention of deconstructionists and Derrideans

legitimation: 'It is a powerful idea because it plays on the tension in democracy between the power of popular sovereignty and the possibility of a tyranny of the majority'. To the extent that this tyranny of the majority can only be resisted through the introduction of legal and constitutional provisions then populism – and Greek Church populism - becomes 'hostile to a discourse of rights because, by definition, rights are tools of the embattled minority, while populism sees the majority as embattled and blames the excessive deference of the state to right claims of minorities for this injustice' (Taggart, 2000: 116). The crude majoritarianism of Church discourse, revealed in its mobilisation behind the petition for a referendum, seems to be based on a neglect for the rights of minorities and an impatience towards what are presented as 'legalistic restrictions that may stand in the way of salvation', to use a phrase by Margaret Canovan (Canovan, 1999:7-8). In other words, a populist modality of discourse is crucial for the Church because it makes possible to acquire democratic credentials without accepting the democratic politics of representation (Taggart, 2000: 98).

In any case, we can safely assert that 'the people' does constitute a central reference in the politicised discourse of the Greek Church. In order, however, to ground in a conclusive way the populist character of this discursive hybrid, this 'mixture of metaphysics and populism' (Tsatsos, 2000), it is necessary to examine the discursive logic dominating its organisation and articulation. Is the discourse of the Archbishop a discourse marked by the dominant operation of a logic of antagonism and division?

As with the references to the people, it is possible to view the identity cards issue as the crucial moment that signals a visible shift in Church discourse in this respect also. Describing the attitude of the Church before the crisis, the Archbishop himself points out that it was not antagonistic towards the state since that would harm 'the People', a people that in Greece is both citizen of the state and faithful to the Church (Christodoulos, 2000a: 35). Consequently, after the crisis, we can assume that it must be the same (populist) priority that obliges the Church to adopt an antagonistic attitude. The antagonism is always between the people (and their direct divine representative, the head of the Church), on the one side, and the state, the government and all the social forces supporting its decisions, on the other. The enemy is clearly

the secular power that has been ‘autonomised from God and People and stop[ed] discussing with the Church on issues that concern the People’ (Christodoulos, 2000b: 299). This claim is also historically contextualised: ‘History proves that the Church has always been attacked by the powerful of the day but has always emerged victorious. And it was attacked because it did not succumb to the secular power, because it did not “modernise” and did not follow its orders, orders that opposed the Law of God’ (Christodoulos, 2001b: 8). It becomes obvious here that it is particular attributes of the government and its social support that become the primary targets of the Archbishop. Furthermore, these targets are presented in the Archbishop’s dramatised quasi-eschatological discourse as comprising ‘the forces of evil’, fighting against ‘the Church and the will of God and trying to de-christianise our society ... only because they hate the Church of God and wish to push it to the margins of social life’ (*Eleftherotypia*, 26-6-2000). Now, generally speaking, what can be these forces of evil, the antagonistic enemy of the Church and the ‘people of God’?

Modernisation is clearly one of them: ‘Modernisation leads to the downfall of the nation and the ethical values of the land’ (*Eleftherotypia*, 8/10/2001). Another is often the intellectuals. Consider, for example, the Archbishop’s polemic against distinguished Greek intellectuals like Constantine Tsoukalas in his article ‘The Western-fed Intelligentsia’ and elsewhere (Christodoulos, 1999: 186). In his Thessaloniki speech this theme returns: ‘Unfortunately some of our intellectuals, the intelligentsia as they are called, want persistently to ignore ... the role of the Church in safeguarding our Tradition’ (Christodoulos, 2000b: 296). And he concludes: ‘To these progressive technocrats, who want at all cost to transform Greece into a country that will not recognise Orthodoxy and will not lean on it, we say clearly: You are losing your time ... The People of God are not following you. You will be left again alone. You do not express the People ... All the other Greeks are resisting your plans’ (Christodoulos, 2000b: 298). This anti-intellectualist attitude, coupled with the constant reference to the people reveals again the populist mode of the Archbishop’s discourse. It is also the case that this is a typical populist strategy to the extent that populism in some of its different forms has expressed hostility towards theory and intellectualism (Taggart, 2000: 50).

Even more revealing from the antagonistic content of this discourse is its style and, in particular, the war metaphors, which are numerous. An antagonistic climate of war and struggle is dominant here, with the monasteries becoming ‘inviolable fortresses’ (Christodoulos, 2000b: 291) in the struggle between ‘Enlighteners’ and tradition (Christodoulos, 2000a: 59), and the people being urged not to lower the flags and banners (Christodoulos, 2000b: 308). It is not a coincidence then that the Archbishop himself has offered the most graphic image of this struggle by holding the banner of the 1821 revolution, a symbolically charged emblem of the struggle against the Ottomans, in the Athens rally. From a semiotic (Barthian) point of view, the aims of this move are obvious. A new antagonism is grafted on a system of signification pertaining to a different context and a different period in order to acquire some of its mobilising power and popular appeal. This is not the only time the Archbishop has utilised national myths and symbols in his discourse. In December 2001, he stated that we are facing a new battle of Marathon, with new Persians – apparently a metaphor for the government or the forces it is supposed to obey – threatening ‘our faith, language and tradition’ (*Flash.gr*, 2-12-2001). Of course, the struggle against the Ottoman Empire or the Persians is not the same as the struggle against the democratically elected Greek government. How is the Church bridging this gap in its antagonistic discourse?

Before the crisis with identity cards, this antagonistic discursive organisation was present in another form: in the form of all the forces conspiring against Hellenism. In fact the Archbishop has spoken openly about the ‘conspiracies of the enemies’ of Hellenism (Christodoulos, 1999: 54) - conspiracy theories being another standard element in populist discourses (Taggart, 2000: 105). The Archbishop has been constantly overstating the dangers of Islamisation for the Balkans and Europe (Christodoulos, 1999:28-32) and the possibility of cultural obliteration and alienation due to membership of the European Union (Christodoulos, 1999: 35). ‘Panturkism’, ‘panslavism’ and the threat of ‘Papal expansionism’ were other usual references (Christodoulos, 1999: 51; 108). In order to avoid all these dangers he seemed willing to consider even an alliance between Orthodox countries (an ‘Orthodox axis’, mainly between Greece, Serbia and Russia) accepting thus a proposal put forward by Milocevic and Karadjic (Christodoulos, 1999: 102). The change occurring with the



articulation of the Church’s novel hybrid populism is that a new, powerful, but this time internal enemy – the government - is added to these external threats. The danger here would be for the government and its supporters – who are Greeks and not foreign conspirators - to ‘contaminate’ the purity of the ‘people of God’ as presented by the Church. This possibility, however, can be avoided by attributing their actions to the influence of ideologies (Enlightenment, modernisation, secularism) *foreign* to the Hellenic tradition: the agents of these ideologies are not deemed worthy of being Greek and thus the essential Hellenic identity defended by the Church retains its supposed purity and the symbols of past liberating struggles can be utilised in the new struggle without contradictions.

There is no doubt then that the discourse of the Archbishop is organized according to an antagonistic schema. It distinguishes between Us, the forces of Go(o)d (the *People* as represented by the *Church under God*) and Them, the forces of Evil (an *atheist, modernising, intellectualist* and *repressive* government), constructing thus two chains of equivalences at war with each other. In fact, the division introduced is so strong that the Archbishop falls short of assuming full responsibility for it. Presenting the mobilisation of the Church as an automatic and justified reaction, he blames the government for the division. When he is accused of dividing the people he replies that, in fact, he is interested in the unity of the people: ‘the division is not caused by us, but by those who created the problem. To them one should address the recommendations for the unity of the people’ (Christodoulos, 2000a: 70). Those who oppose ‘progress’ to ‘tradition’ are the ones to blame for the ‘artificial’ division of the people and the nation (Christodoulos, 2000c: 313). Yes, a deep social rift is emerging, he acknowledges in his Athens speech (Christodoulos, 2000c: 324), but this can only be due to the action of ‘the atheists and modernisers of every colour, who believed they could easily .... [m]ake Greece a state without God and the Greeks a People without faith’ (Christodoulos, 2000a: 38). Concluding our argument in this section we can assert that both in terms of its references to ‘the people’ and its antagonistic discursive structure the Church seems to be adopting a populist discursive style. Even if secularisation and politicisation are, more or less, unavoidable within the Greek historical background and current global trends, there is no doubt that this particular

populist politicisation poses some important questions for socio-political theory and political action within the framework of constitutional, representative democracy.<sup>40</sup>

### **C. To Conclude: Directions for Future Research**

As it has been already stressed, an approach like the one presented here, focusing on one particular angle – that of populism – is not designed to exhaust the analysis of such a complex phenomenon. Thus, in place of a formal conclusion, I will instead highlight some other angles and questions that relate to the discussion up to now and open new avenues of researching this huge topic. Let me start by touching on the very important question of the emergence of populist discourses. This is a problem with theoretical and empirical dimensions and I will try to make an intervention on both fronts - even if, for reasons of space, it will not be possible to provide an in-depth analysis here. Finally, I will try to situate the preceding analysis within the whole discussion of the cleavage between *Tradition* and *Modernisation* which, as it has been suggested, marks contemporary Greek political culture throughout.

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<sup>40</sup> This is not to say that Christianity is of no importance for a progressive political theory. In a book whose subtitle characteristically reads ‘why is the Christian legacy worth fighting for’, Slavoj Žižek has pointed out that the radicalism of Christianity should not be left to right-wing manipulation: ‘the authentic Christian legacy should not be left to fundamentalist freaks’ (Žižek, 2000: 2, 120). Not that one should return to the legacy of Munzer’s Anabaptist movement or the proto-communist millenarianism of the Middle Ages (Cohn, 1993). It is difficult however to forget Martin Luther King or, from the Greek experience, metropolitan Ioakeim of Kozani. In fact in many places of the world, religion, and Christianity, has played a thoroughly progressive political role: ‘In several South American countries (most conspicuously Brazil and Chile), the Church led the fight to defend human rights and was a leading force in opposing military rule. In Nicaragua, El Salvador, and even Guatemala, committed Christians took up arms to fight for revolution’ (Mainwaring & Wilde, 1989: 2). Here, the belief that political commitment and participation are legitimate – even necessary – expressions of religious faith serves the pursuit of social justice and democracy (Mainwaring & Wilde, 1989: 7). For a first account of the characteristics and the impact of Liberation theology in Latin America, also see Lowy, 1996.

However, Christianity should not be judged merely on such instrumental political grounds; it must also be judged according to its loyalty and its ability to develop further the universal, ecumenical gesture of St Paul. The need for a new spirituality - a post-traditional spirituality able to intervene in the crisis of modernity – has also been stressed by Greek commentators very critical of the official Church (Lipowatz, 1993: 41). Furthermore, as far as Orthodoxy is concerned, it has to be stressed that besides some, more or less, simplistic celebrations (Prodromou, 1995) and repudiations (Mappa, 1997), recognising the problems with particular formations of Orthodox discourse does not preclude registering the immense theological interest of Eastern Orthodox theology which cannot be reduced to religious populism. From a philosophical point of view, for example, one has to acknowledge the relevance of Eastern Orthodox negative theology (*apophatism*) for contemporary discussions on deconstruction and representation (Stavrakakis, 1999b: 145-6). See, in this respect: Lossky, 1957; Nissiotis, 1986; Yannaras, 1971.

*1. The emergence of populist discourses and the question of a populist desire.*

Let us briefly explore the question of the emergence of populist discourses. The emergence of new discourses and new identities is usually related to the *dislocation* or crisis of previously hegemonic discursive orders. It is a certain failure of previous identifications that forces subjects to seek refuge in a new discursive attachment and investment (Laclau, 1990: 39; Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000: 13). This is also the case with populist discourses. Populism is a phenomenon which emerges ‘in conditions of crisis and change of cultural values and social structures’ (Lyrintzis, 1990: 54). In Laclau’s words: ‘the emergence of populism is historically linked to a crisis of the dominant ideological discourse which is in turn part of a more general social crisis’ (Laclau, 1977: 175). This was, for example, the case with Peronism: ‘The invocation of a sense of crisis was key to Peron’s rise and also buttressed the importance of leadership’ (Taggart, 2000: 66).

As far as our case is concerned, this pattern seems to be once more reproduced. The increasing centrality of the Orthodox Church in the 1990s and the popular response to initiatives like the petition for a referendum on identity cards have to be seen against the background of a variety of external and internal dislocations marking the late eighties and early nineties: these include internal political developments (scandals, corruption, etc.) leading to increasing cynicism and political alienation, as well as international events (such as the crisis of 1989 entailing the collapse of the ideological division between Socialism and Capitalism). All these events helped the development of a religious sentiment given that the Church’s support of the dictatorship was being gradually forgotten (Chiotakis, 2000: 315). Our hypothesis, however, is that what acted as a catalyst in all these ideological fermentations and displacements was the dislocations and fears produced by Greece’s membership of EEC and, later, Greece’s full participation in the EU. Indeed, it has been observed that the upward turn in church-going in Greece and the shrinking of the number of those totally alienated from the church coincides with the increasing hegemony of the demand for modernisation (around 1996) and the new challenges this involves (Georgiadou & Nikolakopoulos, 2000: 177-180). Social subjects previously tied to discourses and demands that were marginalised by the new challenges, incapable of adjusting to the

new status-quo and alienated from the new style of political discourse, may have comprised a reservoir of tentative followers from which religious populism could draw support. What happened then might have been an interesting reversal, revealing the inherent contradictions of modernity and modernisation. If, in the beginning of the modern era ‘politics provided a functional alternative to religion, or in Marxist terms, the conditions under which hope loses its fantastic guise and gains the clear-eyed unity of scientific theory and political practice’ (Martin, 1978: 61-2), now we may be witnessing the opposite trend. The fact, however, that this resistance to modernisation has taken a populist direction may lead to another hypothesis which connects this current form of populism to the populist legacy of Greek politics.

For example, there is no doubt that Papandreou’s populism of the late 1970s and 1980s exhibited similar characteristics with Christodoulos’ populism. PASOK not only addressed ‘the people’ (very much like Christodoulos, Papandreou proclaimed: ‘no institutions, only the people!’) but also attempted to simplify the social topography along an antagonistic logic, stressing the division between *Them* (the dominant sectors, the power-bloc) and *Us* (the underdog, the oppressed and dominated sectors) (Lyrintzis, 1990: 57). Indeed PASOK’s discourse ‘presented the social and political space as divided into two opposed fields. ... The social base, identified as the “under-privileged”, is mobilized against the enemy, namely the “privileged”, while the political space is divided simply into Right and Left’ (Lyrintzis, 1987: 671). However, apart from this structural analogy – easily attributed to the fact that, besides their differences, they are both populist discourses - is there a more direct historical link between the two? Is Greek political culture historically more prone to populist interventions than other societies? Is Christodoulos more appealing to people who were previously interpellated by PASOK’s populism? Is there, in other words, a *populist desire* initially cultivated by Papandreou and then hijacked by Church discourse after the change of style in PASOK’s political rhetoric? These sound like hypotheses and questions that can stimulate further research.

2. *Tradition v. modernisation: from cultural dualism to split identity?*
- 3.

Our discussion of populism also needs to be situated within the broader discussion regarding the general profile of Greek political culture. In particular, the question of populism has been explicitly linked to an account of Greek political culture that understands political/cultural space as divided between two camps: modernisers and traditionalists. This argument, the ‘cultural dualism’ thesis, has been put forward, in its paradigmatic form, by Nikiforos Diamandouros (Diamandouros, 1994; Diamandouros, 2000). In essence, this schema implies that due to the fact that the construction of a modern state in Greece entailed the introduction of a variety of Western institutions and their accompanying logics, and ‘their grafting onto traditional and precapitalist, indigenous structures’, what ensued was a situation of ‘intense social, political, and cultural struggles in which potential beneficiaries and potential losers in the redefinition of power relations within Greece played the central role’ (Diamandouros, 1994: 8). Two distinct cultural camps, two cultures, clearly emerged out of these struggles. The first one, the underdog culture, became particularly entrenched ‘among the very extensive, traditional, more introverted, and least competitive strata and sectors of Greek society and was more fully elaborated by intellectuals adhering to this tradition’ (Diamandouros, 1994: 15). The younger of the twin cultures described by Diamandouros exhibits the opposite characteristics: it ‘draws its intellectual origins from the Enlightenment ...[it is] secular and extrovert in orientation’ (Diamandouros, 1994:17) and puts forward a modernising project aiming at making Greece a Western polity and society. While the underdog culture stresses tradition and is largely influenced by the Ottoman and Byzantine past, the modernising cultural camp pursues social, political and economic reform in order to promote Greece’s integration into the international system and the European family.

This general schema has been directly linked to the question of Greek populism, with Diamandouros assigning PASOK’s populism a place in the underdog culture (Diamandouros, 1994: 29). Thus, as Lyrantzis and Spourdalakis point out, although Diamandouros’ work is not primarily focused on populism, it offers an interesting framework on Greek political culture within which populism can be neatly situated. In this framework populism would be associated with the political culture of ‘the underdog’ (Lyrantzis and Spourdalakis, 1993: 152). The same conclusion has been reached by Mouzelis. In his view, like most societies that experienced a delayed

development in comparison with the West, Greece is marked by a continuous and diffused division between two antagonistic types of political culture: a traditionally oriented, 'native' type, inward and hostile to Enlightenment ideals and Western institutions, and a 'modernising' type that tries to adopt these institutions and catch-up with the West (Mouzelis, 1994: 17). Mouzelis also situates populism within the underdog culture by specifying two distinct types of underdog culture: the *clientelist* and the *populist* one (Mouzelis, 1994: 18).

Such a view is also congruent with the signifying realities of populist discourses themselves insofar as in populism the people are often presented as 'the underdog' which is oppressed, exploited or excluded from the *status quo* (Panizza, 2000: 179). We have seen this pattern being reproduced in the discourse of the Greek Archbishop. In fact the whole struggle around identity cards lends itself very easily to an analysis along the lines of the 'cultural dualism' thesis. The two major actors seem to be leading two opposed camps: the modernisers struggling to reform Church-state relations are led by prime minister Simitis, described by Diamandouros in 1994, long before the current crisis, as 'a respected academic long an advocate of reform and rationalization' (Diamandouros, 1994: 38), while the traditionalist camp is led by a representative of a supposedly outdated institution claiming its force from the Byzantine past. In fact, in the foreword to the Greek edition of his text, Diamandouros discusses briefly the identity cards issue as an example of the tensions arising between the two cultures (Diamandouros, 2000: 15).

Albeit an important instrument for understanding Greek political culture, the cultural dualism thesis has been the object of some criticism. For instance, Tziouvas has pointed to the fact that it is susceptible to the danger of all dualist representations: the sliding into a good/bad dualism which, based on a quasi-eurocentric logic tends to downplay the complexity of the issues in question (Tziouvas, 1995: 347). Demertzis has questioned the dualist schema insofar as it simplifies the relation between tradition and modernity and, in some of its versions, reproduces and uncritically justifies an unqualified pattern of transition from one to the other (Demertzis, 1997:

118).<sup>41</sup> Tsoukalas has also criticised the *essentialism* usually entailed in similar schemata insofar as the two camps are understood as unified along the lines of two self-enclosed and given poles-essences (*tradition*, on the hand, and *modernisation*, on the other) (Tsoukalas, 1983:37). There is little doubt that the ‘cultural dualism’ thesis, however helpful in clarifying the issues at stake, seems to presuppose a particular conception of political subjectivity which indeed tends to simplify a rather more complicated social picture. We take it that, perhaps unwillingly, it implies that subjects can belong, at any given moment, either to the modernising/reformist or to the traditionalist/underdog cultural camp.

On a fairly general level, both Diamandouros and Mouzelis seem to accept that the two different types of political culture correspond to different social identities (Mouzelis, 1994: 17-18). Of course, Diamandouros has highlighted the cross-sectional nature of the two cultures, ‘the tendency, that is, to cut across Greek institutions, strata, classes, or political parties in Greek society and not to become *exclusively* identified with any such structure across time or even at any given moment’ (Diamandouros, 1994: 9). This qualification is quite important but fails to address the problem at the level of the subject; it stays, so to speak, at the level of ‘ideal types’ of social identities focusing on the ways in which social strata, institutions, parties and other *collective* entities relate to these ideal types. Indeed there is not much discussion in Diamandouros’ text regarding the way cultural dualism is played out within subjective identity apart from very few references to what he calls the ‘adherents’ (*opadoi*’ in the Greek text) of the underdog culture (Diamandouros, 1994: 32, 36, 50; Diamandouros, 2000: 86, 92, 122) and to the fact that the underdog culture, ‘despite fluctuations, can be said to claim the allegiance of a majority of the Greek population since independence’ (Diamandouros, 1994: 16; Diamandouros, 2000: 57). In that sense, though not explicitly stated or analysed, one of the possible conclusions drawn from Diamandouros’ text is that, although allegiances often shift, at any given moment each person can either be a modernist/reformist or a traditionalist, an

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<sup>41</sup> Instead, Demertzis has proposed that what often takes place is a process of ‘inverted syncretism’ in which ‘retaining just a formal status, modernising patterns [lose] their original function while traditional ones [remain] intact or even [become] rejuvenated’ (Demertzis, 1997: 119). For evidence of this process, see Skopetea, 1988: 244. In particular, for evidence from the domain of Church-state relations see Anagnostopoulou, 2000: 352-353; Demertzis, 1995; Makrides, 1991: 287; Papanizos, 1999: 144-147.

‘adherent’ (*‘opados’*) of the one *or* the other culture. We consider such a conclusion justified not only on the basis of a careful reading of Diamandouros’ text,<sup>42</sup> but also based on Diamandouros’ recent introductory comments according to which ‘the heterogeneous social strata and the political alliances linked to them which at any given moment function as bearers and expressions of the two traditions exhibit a remarkable stability as far as their synthesis is concerned’ (Diamandouros, 2000: 13).

Such a picture, although possibly representative of certain subjective positions located at the extremes of the two camps, does not seem to take into account the complexities of subjectivity highlighted by contemporary psychoanalytic and post-structuralist theory and, most importantly, does not account, in a sustained way, for an empirical reality in which ‘the contradiction between tradition and modernity penetrates all camps, any identity, and every individual or collective political actor’ (Demertzis, 1997: 118). In Greece, it is not unusual for social subjects and institutions to behave in a ‘modernising’ way on one occasion and in a ‘traditionalist’ way in the next. The same people who support Simitis’ ‘modernising’ government might be supportive of the Archbishop’s position as far as identity cards are concerned; the same Church that seems to oppose modernisation claims its share from European Union funds which are supposed to enhance modernisation and plans to build hotels for the Athens 2004 Olympics (*Ta Nea*, 22/23-12-2001); the same Archbishop who articulated the most anti-Western statements has received the Pope with courtesy and dignity and was ‘rewarded’ for that by being smacked in the face by an Orthodox zealot in front of the Athens cathedral. Such examples are indeed endless. Mouzelis himself has suggested that there is a deep ambiguity marking Greek identity, which makes us admire and hate, at the same time, anything coming from modernised Europe. The same ambivalent attitude marks our relationship to the ‘homeland’ which is at the same time ‘whore’ and ‘Madonna’, according to a psychoanalytic metaphor Mouzelis uses (Mouzelis, 1994: 42-43). This situation cannot be attributed merely to the instability of the equilibrium between the two self-enclosed camps. On the contrary, this instability has to be accepted as a mark of each and every identity, each and every institution. Here the role of religion is, once more, revealing: ‘For we have seen that

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<sup>42</sup> Also see the places where he discusses the social constitution of the two cultures: Diamandouros, 1994: 15; 18.



religion is so overwhelmingly spread throughout the institutions, the rituals and ethos of Greek society that it would be absurd to assume that it can easily be registered in one of the two cultural camps’ (Demertzis, 1995: 15). In other words, the relation between tradition and modernisation is not always an *external* relation, a struggle between different (though variable) groups comprised of subjects with more or less fully constituted identities (either modernist or traditionalist). It is also an *internal* relation, a relation marking every subjective identity insofar as every identity *articulates* in different degrees elements from both camps.<sup>43</sup> The result is a series of complex subjective identities often articulating contradictory subject positions, resulting in what Lipowatz, from a psychoanalytic point of view, has called *the split Greek identity* (Lipowatz, 1994: 129). This way of seeing things does not necessarily entail that the two cultural camps do not exist as such; it merely suggests that in their continuous effort to constitute and reproduce themselves as pure forms (the identity cards issue being a prime example and the populist discourse of the Church one such effort) they often ignore or repress their internal tensions and interrelations – both at the subjective and the collective level. Our duty as critical theorists can only be to reveal these tensions and interrelations no matter how often their traces are blurred by totalising political or religious discourses of any type.

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<sup>43</sup> Tziovas has recently used the terms ‘dialogism’, ‘hybridity’ and ‘syncretism’ to refer to this type of relation (Tziovas, 2001: 202). For the usefulness of syncretism also see Lambropoulos, 2001. Future research will have to evaluate the operational value of such insights and many more (including Demertzis’ ‘inverted syncretism’) attempting to enlighten the nature of the relation.

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