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*The Affiliation between State and Churches:  
The Case Study of Greece*

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ABSTRACT

The issue of State-Church relations should be examined in detail, to reveal why Christian Orthodox Church and State in Greece are two sides of the same coin. For many centuries, both Christian Orthodox Church and State have been the pillars of social cohesion in Greek society. This paper highlights the importance of Church and State separation in Greece nowadays.

**Key words:** Christianity, Protestantism, Church, State, separation

1. INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that the political phenomenon is part of social sciences subject matter and can be based on three different edges. In particular, a political phenomenon can be seen:

1. as relationship,
2. as procedure, and
3. as value.

Therefore, there is an inevitable link among the aforementioned terms. Specifically, the principle stems from procedure (for instance new Greek government after elections), procedure stems from relationship (relationship between the citizens of

Greece and their right to vote) between objects (such as between State and Christian Orthodox Church in Greece).

However, it should be mentioned that the case study of Greece, regarding relationship between State and Church, is unique among the European Union member states.

### 1.1. CHURCH AND STATE IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE

For centuries, monarchs ruled by the idea of divine right which said that king ruled both Crown and Church, the well-known theory of ‘caesaropapism’ [Johansson 2010]. Advocates of Catholic Church argued that the Pope, as the representative of Christ, should have absolute authority over the State and Crown [Berg 2001].

Since the Roman Empire fall, during the 5th century, no single powerful government in the West emerged, but there was a central ecclesiastical power in Rome, the Catholic Church. Within this power vacuum, Church became the dominant power in the West. As Church expansion begun in the 10th century and secular kingdoms gained power, simultaneously, there were circumstances for a struggle between Church and Kingdom over ultimate authority.

The conflict between Church and State was in many ways a unique phenomenon originating in Late Antiquity (see Saint Augustine’s masterpiece *City of God* (417)). Contrary to Augustinian theology, Papal States in Italy, downsized to Vatican State in our days, were ruled directly by the Holy See. Moreover, throughout Middle Ages the Pope claimed to depose Catholic kings of Western Europe, and tried to re-implement it, either successfully or not, as with Henry VIII of England and Henry III of Navarre [Elliott 1851].

However, in Eastern Roman Empire, also known as the Byzantine Empire, Church and State were closely linked and collaborated in a ‘symphony’, with some exceptions. The concept of Church and State at odds would have been very foreign in Islamic society.

### 1.2. MODERN HISTORY AND RELEVANT STATISTICS

It is realized that an era of coexistence between individuals of different nations and religions is gradually approaching. Therefore, it is required to function at the same time in two levels: the one focusing on humans and their freedom to believe in their God or no God at all and the other focusing on traditional values and the roots of our Greek tradition. Owing to the fact that Orthodox Christianity is the official religion of the Greek State, we should first focus on this relationship after making reference to the types of relations existing throughout the territory of Europe.

First and foremost, it is beneficial to know exact percentages/ numbers of people from several religions among the European Union member-states. In addition, relevant

statistics can be found from the data of the aforementioned member-states. In Germany, for instance, there are books/ catalogues of birth registrations and full-name lists for people who leave their Churches. In Greece resources of this kind there are books/ catalogues of birth and marriages registrations. To sum up, in other countries there is specific declaration made by citizens regarding their religion identity (e.g. Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, Anglican, Islamist, etc.). According to recent survey, primary results indicate the following circumstances concerning the European Union member-states [Bishop Athanasios 2006, p. 1]. In particular:

Catholics 55.4%  
Protestants 13.4%  
Anglicans 6.7%  
Orthodox 3.1%  
Muslims 2.9%  
Jewries 0.3%  
Indifferent 18.25%

These statistics indicate that the tradition of Christianity prevails and this is reflected in the formulation of canon/ ecclesiastical law among European countries. It is understood that relevant affection of Islamic, Muslim and Jewry religion cannot be omitted since it affects the modern legal framework as regards religious affairs. Additionally, it should be mentioned that the existence of several and smaller communities of specific religions, which are linked with larger communities, ought to be considered by legislators.

The historical role of Church in each European country is a fact which is totally different and unique. Therefore, there are several kinds of political interventionism concerning religious affairs and specific personalities from State or Church in relation with public affairs. Overall, previous factors state that their role is significant regarding the formulation of canon/ ecclesiastical law framework among the European Union countries.

### 1.3. TYPES OF RELATIONS

The main principle that guides the relations between the Church and the State is the establishment of religious freedom as an individual right. There are no legal provisions regulating the beliefs of citizens. There are three main categories of relations between the Church and the State within the European Union. In particular:

- The first main category is characterized by close relations between the Church and the State – obviously to a different extent from one State to the other. This category comprises England, Denmark, Greece, Malta and Finland.

- Another relation category involves the strict distinction between the State and the Church, e.g. in the Netherlands and France (with the exception of the overseas territories and the three administrative units of German origin, i.e. North and South Rhineland and Moselle). In Ireland, national legislation imposes the distinction of the two powers, which however cannot overshadow the strong influence of religion to the society of this country, being strongly Catholic.
- The third type of relations involves a clear distinction between the State and the Church along with the mutual recognition of certain common objectives, the fulfillment of which requires common action and cooperation. This third category includes mainly Austria, the Baltic States, Belgium, Spain, Italy, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, and Sweden. In some of these countries there are concordats concluded between the two sides, which are important for the determination of their relations with the view of establishing a framework of cooperation and not of imposing the prevalence of a specific Church or religion.

In my point of view, an important observation in that respect is that apart from legal formalities (of the Constitution or laws), the influence of society itself and of the conditions prevailing in different countries is of utmost importance. Therefore, from this point of view, there may be different legal formalities governing the relations between the Church and the State in Greece, Spain and Italy. However, the prevailing social conditions and balances have brought these three countries quite close in respect of the role of the Church, especially when comparing Greece with Denmark and England, where the apparent proximity of the Church law does not correspond to the actual social and religious reality [Bishop Athanasios 2006, p. 2].

A key historical aspect in the relations between the Church and the State in Europe is that the anti-church movement – expressed in different legal forms – has now diminished. The role of religion in shaping social life has been widely acknowledged and religious activities are now given space to grow. The State guarantees the smooth exercise of religious faith. This is further assisted by the fact that, nowadays, the significance of fundamental human rights is being recognized by the State. The State is now responsible for protecting such rights as essential to all human beings, moving beyond its previous negative view that promoting and fighting for these rights is a revolutionary action of citizens turning against the authority of State power. Another important development is the fact that European countries often support the social activities undertaken by the Church and religious communities. Their support is non-discriminatory in theory. However, in practice, trust and mutual understanding tend to influence the development of cooperation.

#### 1.4. PROTESTANTISM: THE IMPERATIVE DIVISION OF CHRISTIANITY

Protestantism is one of the significant distributions within Christianity. It has been delineated as any of several religious beliefs denying the universal authority

of the Pope and asserting the Reformation principles of justification by faith alone, the priesthood of all believers, and the primacy of the Bible as the only source of revealed truth. In particular, Protestantism movement began in the northern Europe in the early 16th century, with the Reformation, as a reaction to medieval Roman Catholic doctrines and practices, along with Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy [Matsoukas 2000].

In addition, Protestantism became one of the three major divisions in Christianity. Early leaders were Jan Hus, Martin Luther, and John Calvin. Protestant Christianity rejects the Roman Catholic belief that Christ founded the Catholic Church as his sole representative and rejects the notion that priests or saints have special access to the divine. Yet, Protestantism greatly reduced the role of Mary, Christ's mother, as an object of devotion [Koutras 2012]. Therefore, Protestantism proponents' opinion should be accounted concerning the Separation of Church and State.

#### 1.4.1. SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE: PROTESTANT TRADITIONS

Darryl Hart lauds Christianity as an apolitical, otherworldly, secular faith. To enlist the Christian faith for political purposes, he says, is to distort Christianity's essential purpose: the salvation of man from sin and death. Past efforts by Catholics and Protestants to establish Christianity as the religion of the State in either Constantinian or theocratic fashion are condemned by Hart as having done grave harm to Christianity itself. It is not surprising then that Hart sees the American tradition of 'Separation of Church and State', safeguarded as it is presumed to be by the Constitution, as rooted in the Gospel.

Declaring himself a 'Christian by profession and a conservative by instinct', Hart rejects the proposition that Christianity has any clear political prescriptions, and indicts the conservative Protestant Right, specifically criticizing the Bush Administration's 'faith-based initiatives', and the social Gospel which marked a historic shift among Protestants from religious individualism to support for the liberal welfare state.

The Catholic tradition has never accepted the notion that the political order of any State must be religiously and morally neutral so that an atheistic or agnostic State may well result. Catholic political thought has always acknowledged that the Church is not tied to any particular system or form of government. The 'Separation of Church and State' in the American Republic does not mean the imposition of a secular humanist regime on a people whose religious beliefs are allowed to be expressed publicly but cannot be permitted to influence the actual legislation. Contrary to the aforementioned view that a Christian faith-politics is inherently incompatible with a pluralistic society, the Catholic view is not that separatist.

Years ago, Thomas Molnar noted in his *Politics and the State: the Catholic View* that a "humanistic religion" is, in fact, in the process of being imposed on the American people by powerful elements in academe, the media, government agencies, and the courts:

“It is all the more pernicious as it is not publicly recognized as a religion, thus exempt from the guidelines of the separation of state and Church... The Church owes it to Christ to denounce injustice, immorality, lack of elementary civil and religious freedom, and other acts that negate man’s spiritual and social nature”.

## 2. DEFINITIONS AND RELATED NOTIONS

According to the Greek Orthodox faith, the Orthodox Church is: a holy organization founded by Jesus Christ so as to save and bless the faithful, which includes all people that have faith in Jesus Christ as God and Savior of the world, spiritually linked to each other in one body with the Lord being its head, sharing the same Orthodox faith in communion of the same immaculate mysteries. The Church functions through the clergy blessed with the mystery of priesthood, and through its people. The Church is run by the bishops who communicate the values of Christianity by teaching the Apostles and through them the word of Jesus Christ [Mouratidis 1982].

This definition is actually dogmatic, making reference to the nature of the Church and diachronically describing its visible side (the clergy, the people) that exists and fights by our side, as well as its invisible side that triumphs in Heaven (our departed fathers, brothers and sisters).

On the other hand, the concept of the State is much simpler. The State is a society of people who are established in a country that exercises sovereign and independent power on its members, assuming the form of a legal person [Dimitropoulos 2004].

The concept of the State has been frequently discussed by the great Greek philosophers (Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Solon etc.) and other philosophers and thinkers of the modern times (Rousseau, Machiavelli, Locke, etc.), who used different terms and definitions in their attempt to approach this concept. The State has been an object of political thought and politics from the Greek

Antiquity to the Renaissance. Thus, apart from the definition provided above, which is based upon the theory of the state’s legal personality, several other definitions have attempted to reflect other theories on the State’s nature, which however are beyond the scope of the present paper. However, according to another interesting definition: A State is the entire organized administrative system of a country, including its instruments, citizens, elected leaders and the laws pursuant to which the State operates [Mpoutas 2008].

At the conceptual level, one may claim that Church and State are two clearly distinct, individual and autonomous institutions, responding to different human needs both at the spiritual and the practical level. As a matter of fact, this twofold nature of human existence has been disregarded throughout the course of human history, resulting to negative results for social life, by either overstressing material needs or exalting human spirituality.

### 3. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STATE AND CHURCH IN GREECE

The issue of the relations between the State and the Church in Greece is following a steady course (since the outburst of the 1827 revolution and certainly from 1827 until today) without fluctuations. There have been some periods of tension, when the issue has been an object of political discussions, causing deep social and mostly ideological conflicts, as there have been periods of calm when such issues were only discussed by experts like legal scientists, theologians and historicists.

However, when this issue attracts the attention of politicians and journalists it has great intensity and leads to rather hot-blooded views. The oldest example dates back to the conflicts for the autocephaly of the Greek Church (which begun in the period 1833–1850). Two more recent examples include the 1987 conflict on Church property and the 2000 conflict regarding the indication of religion on Greek identity cards.

This is quite natural, given that State/Church relations encompass some of the fundamental self-determination issues of the Greek society: its relation to important historical events, to the diachronic nature of the Greek civilization and especially to Ancient Greece and the Byzantine Empire, as well as its relation to the West and the western cultural model in combination with the Near East.

However, what is more important is that these issues are not examined independently but in relation to the European average, the European development model and generally the western institutional models of the Constitutional State [Tsaousis 2001].

The issue of State/Church relations can be approached in many ways, either as a bilateral interaction among the Greek State and Church or as a bilateral issue between the Greek State and the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate, or finally as a tripartite interaction among the Greek State, the Greek Church and the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate. One may find that these three approaches have significant differences [Venizelos 2000].

Regarding the Greek History, relations between the State and the Church have been shaped throughout three distinct stages: the Byzantine era, the Turkish occupation period and the period of the sovereign Greek State [Pantazakos 2002].

Finally, the issue of these relations should be approached wisely and calmly by Greek governments who should respect the history, habits and customs, traditions and mostly the Greek Constitution, the provisions of which will be analyzed below.

### 4. DELIMITED RELATIONS BETWEEN THE STATE AND THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

#### 4.1. THEOLOGICAL (BASED ON CHRISTIAN ORTHODOX FAITH)

Separation between the State and the Church has its origins in nations experiencing an intense presence of Protestant values and is inherent in Protestant theology,

according to which both the Church and the Government/State are man-centered organizations that draw strength from the citizens.

On the contrary, according to the Orthodox Church, both powers share a common origin in the Threefold God. According to Apostle Paul: “You are also members of another society, which disregards Christ. I write to you on how to behave/present yourselves within that society. Each man shall submit to the civil authorities. Because the State and its authorities agree with God’s plan, who has created man to experience life in society. Consequently, each power comes from God. High authorities that exercise power have been appointed after God’s decision or acceptance” (New Testament, to the Romans, Chapter 13, verse 1st).

However, there is differentiation as regards the essence and the boundaries of this power. The church is perceived as the body of Christ: “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock where you confessed your true faith, becoming the first stone of my spiritual construction, I will build my church, and death and the gates of hell will not overcome and will not defeat the Church, which will be eternal and immortal”. (New Testament, Gospel of Mathew, Chapter 16, Verse 18th).

On the other hand, the Government/State is a finite mundane organization: “Jesus knew their hidden thoughts and said: each kingdom divided in opposing sides/parties, waging war against their own, shall fall and disappear” (New Testament, Gospel of Mathew, Chapter 12, verse 25th).

The Christian Orthodox Church is an element that differentiates Greece from other member-states of the European Union and relates it to countries that are part of the wider European Area, which on the one hand do not form part of Europe’s closed circle and on the other hand have experienced socialism (Giannaras et al., 1998).

The issue of the tradition and History of the Greek nation is also quite significant since there are many differences as compared to other peoples of Europe (e.g. that have experienced the Caesaropapism and the crimes of the Middle Ages). The Christian Orthodox Church never attempted to obtain civil powers in the Greek nation or intervene in high-level political decisions. For one thousand years in Greece, apart from isolated cases, the State and the Church have walked side by side with an amazing relation of solidarity and understanding, according to the teachings of orthodox theology [Archbishop of Miros 2005, p. 5].

#### 4.2. CONSTITUTIONAL

Greece’s constitution provides a specific framework for the recognition of the roles, relations and competences of the Orthodox Church towards the Greek State/Government.

In particular, article 3 of the Constitution which defines Orthodox Faith as the main prevailing religion, is only one of many constitutional dispositions which regulate the relations between the State and the Orthodox Church. According to renowned



Greek constitutional expert E. Venizelos, this disposition is not regulatory but complementary, which means that the relations between the State and the Church (and generally the relations between the State and other Churches/ religious organizations) will continue to be constitutionally regulated even in case of a Revisory Parliament [Venizelos 2000].

However, it is worth mentioning that the constitutional framework of the Greek state, pursuant to article 13 par. 1 of the Constitution, defines religious freedom as a fundamental individual right, protecting different religions and avoiding the abuse of article 3 of the Constitution, which refers to the existence of one prevailing religion.

## 5. THE ISSUE OF STATE-CHURCH SEPARATION

When reading or hearing the views of those who support separation, it is clear that there is a lack of substantial arguments. These people often relate State-Church separation to the establishment of obligatory civil weddings, civil oath taking, civil funerals and burials, as well as cremation, or even to the abolishment of the dispositions on blasphemy against divine symbols and the restriction of conversion and religious sects.

Additionally, they even relate State-Church separation to the abolishment of prayer, as well as to changing the catechist nature of religious education, i.e. abolishing the lesson of religious affairs at schools. This means that they are not aiming to a simple separation but to a marginalization of the Church [Archbishop Miros 2005, p. 4].

## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

The coexistence of State and Church in countries of the European Union, as defined by their Constitutions, may be classified in several ways ranging from total disregard to an organic connection between the two, through the implementation of several criteria related for instance to the degree of the Church's dependence on the State, the impact that the Church has on the State and the general participation of the Church in the country's political, financial and social life [Fountouthaki 2000, p. 3].

The European Union founded upon the principle of subsidiary and adopting the open coordination method in the European Lisbon Summit (May 2000), is continuing its course to integration with more solidarity and mutual support. Thus, our country needs to follow this orientation of European development and consequently regulate the issue of State-Church relations. The nature of these relations in Greece may differ, as mentioned above, but can coexist with the European reality. Up to now, no European partner or supranational organization has ever requested the separation of the State and the Orthodox Church, as part of Europe's integration. Furthermore, there is no EU directive referring to the issue of State-Church relations in Greece or requesting their separation. Hence, it is quite clear that this issue should be managed

within Greece by the Greek governments, i.e. it is an issue that should concern elected representatives of the Greek people.

A number of issues, such as education, still remain under the authority/responsibility of the European Union member-states. As a matter of fact, the principle of subsidiary provides for the preservation, safeguarding, partial rationalization, maintenance and transfer of moral values, traditions and habits among the nations and peoples that are part of the European Union.

There is an imperative need for supranational cooperation to address the issues faced by European nations, such as the financial crisis that affects Europe (and not only) in the past four years, without eliminating the existing particularities among member-states. It is actually this pluralism of characteristics and mentalities and the multicultural nature of Europe that give life and color to the Democratic political systems found within the European borders.

Consequently, Greek governments, in representation of the State should always abide by the provisions of the Greek Constitution and respect and protect the rights of different religions and religious organizations, apart from the prevailing religion as defined in article 3 of the Constitution.

Taking everything into consideration, the Greek government should not apply the aforementioned article in disregard of article 13 par. 1 on religious freedom. On the other hand, it should not condemn or “uproot” through laws and dispositions, an institution which is constitutionally regulated and indissolubly linked to the History of the Greek nation. As Greek institutions, both the State and the Orthodox Church should steadily continue the effort to smoothen their relations by preserving their independency within a framework of harmonious coexistence.

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