

Aspects of political theology in the spiritual autobiographies of the Orthodox space?

New potential keys of lecture*

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Abstract. *Starting from the title question, the author tries to identify aspects of political theology in the spiritual autobiographies from the Orthodox space (especially from the 19th and 20th centuries). After presenting the main aspects that defines the genre, and, in the same time, after showing what political theology means, he emphasizes the main important elements of this topic that can be founded in the works of the aforementioned genre. Afterwards, he emphasizes the actual dimension of it and proposes a new key of lecture of the identified passages that contain elements of political theology taken from spiritual autobiography. Through these aspects, that may highlight new important ones, the author brings into attention elements that were not enlightened enough before. Although the diaries of Saint John of Kronstadt or Saint Silouan the Athonite, or the one of the Russian Philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev were not supposed to be works of political theology, they constitute important aspects for this topic and useful elements for an analysis that can show how the Gospel principles can be applied in nowadays world.*

Keywords: human being, politics, diary, memories, contemporary world, aspects of actuality.

Introduction

Important topic for the theological and political debates, "political theology" was, from its first use in 1922¹, very investigated. Authors from different confessional spaces and places, with different political orientations² have spoken about the way how the Gospel principle of love can be put into practice into the

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¹ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the concept of Sovereignty*, trans. by George Schwab, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1985.

² In books like: Grant N. Havers, "Carl Schmitt, Leo Strauss, and the Necessity of Political Theology", in Gabriel R. Ricci (ed.), *Politics in Theology*, col. "Religion&Public Life", vol. 38, New Brunswick and London, Transaction Publishers, 2012; Pantelis Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy and Political Theology*, col. "Doxa & Praxis", Geneva, World Council of Churches Publications, 2012; Jean-Yves Calvez, *La politique & Dieu*, col. "Essais", Paris, Les Editions du Cerf, 1985; Thia Cooper, *Controversies in Political Theology: Development or Liberation?*, col. "Controversies in Contextual Theology Series", London, SCM PRESS, 2007; Peter Losonczi, Mika-Luoma-Aho, Aakash Singh (eds.), *The Future of Political Theology. Religious and Theological perspectives*, Burlington, Ashgate, Farnham, 2011; Theodors Assefa Teklu, *The Politics of Metanoia. Towards a Post-Nationalistic Political Theology in Ethiopia*, col. "European University Studies", Series "Theology", Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 2014; Adam Edward Hollowell, *Power and Purpose. Paul Ramsey and Contemporary Christian Political Theology*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, William B. Eerdmann Publishing Company, 2015; Nathanael Micklem, *The Theology of Politics*, London, New York, Tokio, Oxford University Press, 1941; Luke Breherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics. The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness*, Oxford, Wiley Blackwell, 2010; Bernhard Giesen, Daniel Suber (eds.), *Religion and Politics. Cultural Perspectives*, col. "International Studies in Religion and Society", vol. 3, Leiden, Boston, Brill, 2005; Kristina Stoeckl, Ingeborg Gabriel, Aristotle Papanikolaou (eds.), *Political Theologies in Orthodox Christianity. Common Challenges – Divergent Positions*, col. "T&T Clark Theology", Edinburgh, T&T Clark and Bloomberg, 2017.

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political discourse of their time.³ Some of them tried to link it with topics like the theology of liberation,⁴ or Ecology⁵, and others with other topics. The results resided in some interesting researches published until today and in the way how this topic can be used to create bridges between theology and other cultural and scientific spaces.

Starting from the interdisciplinary meaning of this topic, we will try here to investigate if there can be founded aspects of political theology in the spiritual autobiographies from the Orthodox space. We will shortly define this topic, we will present the main works of the genre and analyse the main aspects from its content that fits with our key-word.

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Started in the 4th century of the Christian Era with the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine,⁶ but rooted much deeper in the 12th chapter of the 2nd Letter of Saint Paul to Corinthians⁷, the genre of spiritual autobiography knew during the time the

³ Jean-Louis Leuba, "Autour de la Théologie politique", in Mihail P. Grigoris (ed.), *Nikos A. Nissiotis, Religion, Philosophy and Sport in Dialogue. In memoriam*, Athens, Thessaloniki University Press, 1994, p. 203; Elisabeth Ferris, "Pace-making in the Emerging World", in *The Ecumenical Review*, 44 (1992), no. 3, p. 325-332; Lesslie Newbigin, "Whose Justice?", in *The Ecumenical Review*, 44 (1992), no. 3, p. 308-311.

⁴ Cf. M. D. Litonjua, *Liberation theology the paradigm shift*, Lanham, University Press of America, 1998; Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A theology of liberation history, politics and salvation*, London, SCM Press, 1988; James H. Cone, *A Black theology of liberation*, Maryknoll, N.Y, Orbis Books, 2010; Shaibu Abraham, *Pentecostal theology of liberation. Holy Spirit & holiness in the society*, New Delhi, Christian World Imprints, 2014; Dwight N. Hopkins, *Introducing Black theology of liberation*, Maryknoll, N.Y, Orbis Books, 1999; Thomas Kochuthara, *Theology of liberation and ideology critique. A study on the praxis of liberation in the light of the critical theory*, New Delhi, Intercultural Publications, 1993.

⁵ Fact that transformed even authors like the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in writers with contributions on political theology, according to some authors. Cf. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, *Et Dieu vit que cela était bon. La vision théologique de la création dans la tradition orthodoxe*. translated in French language by Jean-Francois Colosimo, Paris, Les Editions du Cerf, 2015; Olivier Clement, *Adevăr și libertate. Ortodoxia în contemporaneitate. Convorbiri cu Patriarbul Ecumenic Bartolomeu I*. translated in Romanian language by Mihai Maci. Sibiu, Deisis Press, 1997. Cf. Kwok Pui-Ian, "Ecology and the Recycling of Christianity", in *The Ecumenical Review*, 44 (1992), no. 3, p. 304-307; Elías Crisossomo Abramides, "Echical Aspects of Climate Changes", in *The Ecumenical Review*, 44 (1992), no. 3, p. 333-338.

⁶ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, translated by Henry Chadwick, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991.

⁷ See: Rudolf Bultmann, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, edited by Erich Dinkler, translated by Roy A. Harrisville, Minneapolis, Augsburg Publishing House, 1985, p. 218-236; Roger L. Omanson, "Second Corinthians 8:4 and 9:1 and the larger context of Paul's letters", in *Review & Expositor*, CVIII (Summer 2011), p. 307-311; Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, col. "Word biblical commentary", Waco, Word books, 1986; Larry Joseph Kreitzer, *2 Corinthians*, col. "New Testament Guides", Sheaffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1996; Mitzi L. Minor, *2 Corinthians*, Macon, Ga., Smyth & Helwys Pub., 2009; Ivar Vegge, *2 Corinthians - a letter about reconciliation: a psychagogical, epistolographical and rhetorical analysis*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008; *Fully Revised Fourth Edition The New Oxford*

contribution of some important writers and mystics like: Saint Teresa of Avila⁸, Saint John Paul the Second,⁹ Saint Faustina Kowalska,¹⁰ John Wesley,¹¹ Dag Hammarskjöld¹² and s. o. In some confessional spaces, especially in the branches of reform, this genre became very important being also used for proselyte purposes. This fact explains the huge increase of it there.

In the Orthodox space, there are many texts that contain passages of spiritual autobiography,¹³ but only three of them are really parts of the genre: the ones of Saint Silouan from Mount Athos,¹⁴ Saint John of Kronstadt's¹⁵ and philosopher's Nikolas Berdiaev.¹⁶ From the very beginning, we must specify the fact that each author focuses on his autobiography in a special way. The monk from Athos speaks about the works of the grace in his heart, Saint John speaks about his meetings with God into the Holy Liturgy but he also sometimes makes references to his life, while the aforementioned philosopher presents the same topic linked with the history of his country and with some philosophical meditations.¹⁷ Therefore, no one of them is particularly dedicated to the aspects of political theology nor do they speak about it at least in one chapter of their books.

If in the last book, there are some references to the every day life of people from that time, contemporary with the author, to the evolution of the Russian world,¹⁸ but also to the evolution of the whole humanity and even if sometimes the author criticises some political aspects and proposes solutions (as a secondary aspect of his memorial notes, because the primordially it belongs to his autobiography and to the evolution of his life), while in Saint John of Kronstadt's diaries there are some references to the relationship between politics and Church, in the notes of Saint Silouan there cannot be found a direct reference to this.

Annotated Bible. New Revised Standard Version With The Apocrypha, ed. Michael D. Coogan, Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 2035-2037, for more information about this topic.

⁷ John Barclay, "2 Corinthians", in: James D. G. Dunn,

⁸ Thérèse d'Avila, *Œuvres complètes*, Paris, Les Editions du Cerf, 1948.

⁹ Saint John Paul II, *In God's hands*, San Francisco, Harper One Press, 2017.

¹⁰ Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska, *Diary – Divine mercy in my soul*, Stockbridge, Marian Press, 2005.

¹¹ John Wesley, *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A. M.*, edited by W. Reinald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, col. "Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley", vol. 18, Abingdon, Abingdon Press, 1988.

¹² Bernhard Erling, *A Reader's Guide to Dag Hammarskjöld's Waymarks*, Minnesota, St. Peter, 2010; Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings*, London, Faber and Faber, 1972. Cf. Maxim (Iuliu-Marius) Morariu, *Autobiografia spirituală a lui Dag Hammarskjöld – o abordare teologică*, Cluj-Napoca, Argonaut Publishing House, 2016, for more information about this important spiritual autobiography from the Lutheran Swedish space.

¹³ Like the memories of the Romanian Orthodox monk Nicolae Steinhardt: Nicolae Steinhardt, *Jurnalul fericirii*, Cluj-Napoca, Dacia Press, 2002.

¹⁴ Saint Silouane, *Œuvres Spirituels – extraits*, col. "Spiritualite Orientale", vol. 5, Begrolles en Magues, Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1976.

¹⁵ Saint John of Kronstadt, *Viața mea în Hristos*, translated in Romanian language by Dumitru Dura, 2nd edition, Sibiu, Oastea Domnului Publishing House, 2005.

¹⁶ Nicolai Berdiaev, *Essai d'autobiographie spirituelle*, Paris, Buchet –Chastel, 1958.

¹⁷ Mario Casañas, Mario, "L'autobiographie de Berdiaev" *Revue Philosophique de Louvain*, XXXXVI (1982), no. 3, p. 282-288.

¹⁸ Cf. Nicolai Berdiaev, *Essai d'autobiographie spirituelle*, p. 38.

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But one could notice that, in his texts¹⁹, in some situations, Saint John of Kronstadt criticises the excessive rationalism. Isn't this fact linked with political theology? Wasn't the excessive rationality caused by a bad politic, by the struggles between the politics and the Church and a form of secularism?²⁰ Surely is. Therefore, from this point of view, there can be found aspects of political theology even in this short paragraph of the Russian starets²¹ where he apparently speaks about the contemporary world and its influence upon the Church.

Also, we must mention that some doxological texts can be also read and used in researches of political theology. For example, in his memories, he says that:

"Looking at the creatures that God created and at their infinite multitude, I see myself risen upon all, through the image and likeness of God, through reason and freedom, through the capacity of understanding with my mind the whole creation and wonder of how can be seen in it the hand of the the Creator, too wise and so good."²²

Here, as we can see, he speaks about the whole creation giving to his words an ecological content, like Pierre Rabhi²³, Pope Francisc,²⁴ or Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew²⁵ in their writings. But he also presents a pacific vision that can surely be used in the discussions of political theology.

The same thing can be said about Saint Silouane who, sometimes seems to despise the world and its values²⁶ and to be without interest on this topic, but, in other situations he prays for the world and for that the Grace of God work there:

"O Lord, give this love to all of us!

Give it to whole world.

Holy Spirit, come in our souls and make as to glorify the Creator with a loud voice: Father, Son and Holy Spirit! Amen! Amen! Aleluia!"²⁷

¹⁹ Saint John of Kronstadt, *Viața mea în Hristos*, p. 6.

²⁰ Cf. Maxim (Iuliu-Marius) Morariu „O perspectivă ortodoxă asupra fenomenului secularizării”, în *Altarul Banatului*, XXVI (LXV) (2015), no. 3-6, p. 76.

²¹ Maxim Egger, "Lumières et ombres d'un saint au milieu du monde", in Alla Selawry, *Jean de Cronstadt – Médiateur entre Dieu et les hommes*, traduction de l'allemand par Martine Redhon et Maxime Egger, Paris, Pully, Les Edition du Cerf, Le Sel de la Terre, 2001, p. 8.

²² Saint John of Kronstadt, *Viața mea în Hristos*, p. 58-59.

²³ Cf. Pierre Rabhi, *Manifeste pour la terre e l'humanisme*, Paris, Actes Sud, 2008; Pierre Rabhi, *Le Recours a la terre*, Lyon, Terre du ciel, 1995; Pierre Rabhi, *L'Offrande au crépuscule*, Lavalledieu, Candide, 1989; Pierre Rabhi, *Le Gardien du feu: message de sagesse des peuples traditionnelles*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2003.

²⁴ Pape François, *Le visage de la miséricorde*, Paris, Les Editions du Cerf, 2015.

²⁵ Patriarche œcuménique Bartholomée, *Et Dieu vit que cela était bon. La vision théologique de la création dans la tradition orthodoxe*; Olivier Clement, *Adevăr și libertate. Ortodoxia în contemporaneitate. Convorbiri cu Patriarbul Ecumenic Bartolomeu I*, p. 87-96; Elphidoporos Lambriniadis, „Ecological and Inter-Generational Solidarity. Initiatives of The Ecumenical Patriarchate”, in Ingeborg Gabriel, Helmut Renockl (ed.), *Solidarität in der Krise. Auf der Suche nach neuen Wegen*, Wien-Wurzburg, Echter Verlag, 2012, p. 113-120.

²⁶ "When I was a child, I loved the world and its beauty; the forests and the grasps; I loved the gardens ant the forest, the rain, the snow which was falling from the sky. I loved whole God's creation... But after God has known me, everything has changed and my soul became his prisoner. I didn't want the world anymore. My soul was always looking the places of the world leaved by my Lord. Like a prisoner bird who wants to escape from its cage, so my soul was looking for God. Where are you, my light? I search you with tears". Saint Silouane, *Ecrits Spirituels – extraits*, p. 32.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 79.

His words are a real exhortation at peace and love for the peace of the whole world. He also proposes there a solution for all the problems of the world, which political theology is dealing with, the rejoice in Lord's presence. Even now, after almost one century from his departure from us, his words are very actual and important. Used in the debates of political theology they can offer interesting solutions at some problems and help to a better Orthodox understanding of the world, of its problems and future.

Conclusion

As we can see, although the spiritual autobiographies from the Orthodox space are not dedicated to the political theology having little to do with this topic, there can be found interesting thoughts of their authors that can be read in that key, being useful for the investigations of political theology. Ecological points, the care for the whole world seen as a creation of God, the intercessions for God's intervention in its problems or for the work of Holy Grace upon all the people are only a few points that can be used in the debates of political theology. Reading from this perspective some parts of the aforementioned works, it can help to find solutions at some important problems of nowadays society but also to better highlight the Orthodox approach on some contemporary issues.

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