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PERCEPTIONS OF ATHEISM WITHIN GREEK ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CIRCLES (1936–1974)

Sandy Sakorrafou

ABSTRACT: This article reviews the perception of atheism by Orthodox Christian circles in Greece from the early 1930s to 1974, as reflected mainly in texts published in various Orthodox periodicals. It focuses on their conceptualisation of “atheism” and how it was influenced by factors such as Christian education and apologetics, political motives, ethics and cultural beliefs. It shows that their perspective on atheism, which focused primarily on it as materialism and its facets, moved beyond its theological interpretation as a form of “apostasy” from God, shaping the portrayal of the relationship between science and religion within the Greek context.

In recent decades, the scholarly exploration of the intersection of science and religion in Greece has undergone a subtle yet significant development.¹ A nuanced portrait has emerged through local history narratives and case studies, revealing the complex dynamics of how science and Orthodox Christianity have intertwined within the local context. This article explores the perception of atheism by Greek Orthodox authors from 1936 to 1974, as reflected mainly in articles in various Greek Orthodox periodicals. These authors represent specific circles within the Greek Orthodox community, including the Church of Greece, clergy, monastics, academic theologians, laity and members of para- or extra-ecclesiastical organisations.²

The article focuses on the discourse within these periodicals, elucidating the authors’ definitions of religious unbelief, their depictions of the intersection of

* This article is part of the “Atheism, Hellenic Orthodoxy, and Science (At.H.O.S) (1936–1974)” project, which was conducted at the National Hellenic Research Foundation from 2022 to 2024. The primary aim of the project was to shed light on a previously overlooked aspect: the tangible role atheism has played in shaping the portrayal of the science and religion relationship within the Greek context, specifically from the early 1930s to 1974.

¹ For a short review of the historiography of science and religion in Greece, see Sandy Sakorrafou, “Science and Orthodox Christianity: Perceptions of their Relationship in Greek Christian Journals (1980–2010),” *Journal of Religion* 100, no. 2 (2020): 235–39.

² Para-ecclesiastical organisations emerged in Greece in the late nineteenth century, reaching their apogee from the 1940s to the 1960s. These organisations bore a resemblance to the pietistic movements of the Protestant tradition. Central to their ethos was the belief

religion and science, and their interpretations of the relationship between science and atheism. It focuses on their conceptualisation of “atheism” and how it was shaped by factors such as Christian education and apologetics, political motives, ethics and cultural beliefs, moving beyond a mere theological interpretation to perceive it as a form of “apostasy” from God.

Nineteenth-century Apologetics in Greece: Setting the Ground Perception of Science, Religion and Atheism

Greek Orthodox authors’ perceptions of science, religion and atheism, and their interplay, were primarily shaped within the apologetics framework that emerged in late nineteenth-century Greece.

Apologetics, as a form of ecclesiastical literature, was originally developed in the ancient church to defend the Christian faith from Jews and pagans. The church fathers continued this tradition, using apologetics to counter heresies and Islam, highlighting the Christological interpretation of Scripture and the subsidiary role of ancient Greek philosophy in theology. In contrast, the apologetics of the scholastics in the West emphasised ontological proofs of God’s existence and logical knowledge. In modern times, apologetics, as a systematic branch of Western Christian theology, sought to establish the content of Christian doctrine logically and scientifically, defending the transcendence of divine revelation in Scripture.

In Greece, apologetics was introduced due to the Protestant influence initially brought by certain Greek scholars and ecclesiastical figures during Ottoman rule. It was further enhanced by the arrival of Western missionaries for conversion immediately after the Greek Revolution and solidified with the establishment of the Theological School in Athens in 1835. This school, founded five years after the establishment of the new Greek state, followed the organisation of theological studies in Germany and the traditions of scholasticism, theological rationalism and pietism. The discipline was popularised in the late nineteenth century by the work of several apologists writing in various religious periodicals. Ioannis Skaltsounis (1824–1905), a jurist, honorary doctor of theology and politician, was among the first to discuss the nature of the Christian faith and the significance

in the Bible’s objective and absolute authority, prioritising individual faith and moral purity above all else. Their publications primarily engaged in apologetics, aiming to highlight the cultural significance of religion. Overall, they promoted a simplified and popularised version of Orthodox Christian theology. These organisations maintained close ties with like-minded clergy and occasionally engaged in direct communication with the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church of Greece.

of apologetics.³ He also elaborated on the ideal of science, the so-called “true science”, and established the foundational perception of the relationship between science and religion within Greek Orthodox circles.

Skaltsounis defines faith as “the metaphysics of the people”⁴ and regards Christianity, the so-called “last religion of humanity”, as the highest form of faith, transmitted through tradition, catechism and external worship, but also derived from scientific research. He considers apologetics to be the guardian of Christian belief, offering proof of its truth, repelling attacks on the religious conscience of believers and strengthening their faith.⁵

Defined as “scientific apologetics” by Skaltsounis, apologetics’ main purpose is to transform theology into an exact science, aiming to preserve the core of the Christian tradition against theories such as materialism that suggest room for doubt under the weight of recent scientific discoveries.⁶ As he points out, the work of apologists comes to replace the so-called “incomplete” efforts of the institutional church that is often unaware of the danger posed by those who question the truth of religion and poison the moral and religious life of the Greek nation; therefore, the Church of Greece must reform its discourse, using reason and science in public debate.⁷

Science, then, is regarded as a useful tool in apologetics, with an important caution: Skaltsounis emphasises the concept of “true science”.⁸ This “true science” is perceived as a creation of humans, derived from their natural mental and moral faculties, producing knowledge always within the limits of the sensible world. It is a product of “great scientists”, as opposed to “semiliterate-in-science” materialists, as he emphasises. According to him, the theories of “true science” do not lack reasonableness, unlike “materialist hypotheses” such as atomic theory or spontaneous generation. Within this framework, science is said to be based on faith, understood as a belief and trust in the conclusions of reason.⁹ Yet, it does not deny the Christian ecclesiastical worldview or exclude the supernatural

³ Ioannis Panagiotou, “Ο Ιωάννης Σκαλτσούνης ως απολογητής του Χριστιανισμού” (PhD diss., Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2018).

⁴ Ioannis Skaltsounis, *Θρησκεία και επιστήμη: Μελέται και θρησκεία και επιστήμη. Δημώδης του χριστιανισμού απολογητική* (Athens: Typ. Anesti Konstantinidou, 1898), 12.

⁵ Ibid., 3–5.

⁶ Ibid., 13.

⁷ Ioannis Skaltsounis, *Θρησκεία και επιστήμη* (Trieste: Typ. tou Austriakou Lloyd, 1884), 16–19.

⁸ For the concept of “true science”, see, Sakorrafou, “Science and Orthodox Christianity,” 249–65.

⁹ Skaltsounis, *Θρησκεία και επιστήμη* (1898), 196.

causes of Creation. The role of science is well-defined; as Skaltsounis notes, while science may not be competent to study and define the principle of beings, it can experimentally “judge” whether scientific theories are correct or false, simultaneously surrounding the Christian doctrine of Creation with scientific evidence. In addition, “true” science is said to have the role of a moral factor: used as a shield for the Christian faith, it exposes falsehood in theories, especially those associated with atheism, and contributes to the moral education of the people, thus fighting the decay of society. Skaltsounis equates atheism with materialism, which he views as immoral, a weapon aimed at attacking the Christian religion and what he considers “true science”. Drawing from contemporary debates in Germany and France, he specifically targets German scientific materialism,¹⁰ including the theory of spontaneous generation and Ernst Haeckel’s materialistic interpretation of Darwinian theory. In particular, Darwin’s ideas, first published in Greek by Spyridon Sougras, a doctor of philosophy and university lecturer in apologetics, in 1876,¹¹ sparked intense debate in Greece during the late nineteenth century.¹² The objective of Greek Orthodox circles was to undermine the scientific credibility of the theory (and the scientists who endorsed it) by recasting it as a philosophical materialistic doctrine.

Within this apologetics framework, future Greek Orthodox authors would further develop their accounts of the interplay between science, religion and atheism adapted to the conditions of each era, always in response to the demands of the Orthodox tradition.

Materialism and Political Atheism (1936–1949)

On 4 August 1936, Ioannis Metaxas established a dictatorship that lasted until his death, in 1941. His regime would draw upon traditional ethno-patriotism embodied with elements found already in the Greek political space: monarchism, antiliberalism, anticommunism and religiosity. His vision of the “Third Hellenic Civilisation” advocated for an ethical change that would result in the revitalisation of the Greek “race” and its authentic “national transformation”. Its

¹⁰ For German scientific materialism, see Frederick Gregory, *Scientific Materialism in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1977).

¹¹ Spyridon Sougras, *Η νεωτάτη του υλισμού φάσις, ήτι ο Δαρβινισμός και το ανυπόστατον αυτού* (Athens: Typ. Efimeridos ton Syzitiseon, 1876).

¹² Kostas Tampakis. “Being Orthodox, Greek and Modern: Scientists and Theologians in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Greece,” in *Science, Religion and Nationalism: Local Perceptions and Global Historiographies*, ed. Jaume Navarro and Kostas Tampakis (New York: Routledge, 2024), 164.

foundational principles revolved around the importance of family, fatherland, nation, Greek culture and the Orthodox Christian religion.

In the months leading up to the regime's establishment and also afterwards, Greek Orthodox periodicals continued to urge their audience to defend and strengthen the religious sentiment in response to the perceived moral challenges arising from Western values as well as from heretic (especially Chiliasm) and atheistic doctrines (such as communism and Darwinism) that had been introduced to Greece. Metaxas echoed their sentiments, viewing Orthodox Christianity as a crucial cultural feature of the Greek nation: "Greek society is deeply religious and committed to the Orthodox Church. The sad situation that prevailed until 4 August is due to the irreligion that had spread considerably."¹³

Perceptions of Atheism and the Science–Religion Relationship during the Metaxas Dictatorship (1936–1941)

During Metaxas's dictatorship, the apologetics discourse used since the late nineteenth century against atheism continued to be cultivated by Greek Orthodox periodicals, primarily published by ecclesiastical parishes and para-ecclesiastical organisations. For instance, in *Ο Απόστολος Ανδρέας*, published by the parish of Saint Constantine in the Kolonos district in Athens, religion is defined as an innate idea, engraved by the Creator in the human heart, aligning with the Apostle Paul's teachings. It is also seen as the nobility of human actions. By defining religion as intrinsic to human nature, as a universal law and a driving force, unbelief is depicted as an artificial phenomenon, a human construction. "The resistance of unbelief is temporary and superficial and is created based on various reasons and disappears at the right time."¹⁴ The author implies that there are ultimately no atheists: people return to religious faith, especially, during times of hardship. This viewpoint was also later echoed by the regime's ideologists, who firmly believed that atheism is not a genuine state of belief.¹⁵ He also emphasises the cultural dimension of religion, suggesting that it contains true morality and virtue, thereby safeguarding moral order. In contrast, unbelief is portrayed as burdensome: "atheism rejects morality and is synonymous with

¹³ Ioannis Metaxas, *Λόγοι και σκέψεις 1936–1941*, vol. 1, 1936–1938 (Athens: Govostis, 1969), 155; Isabelle Dépret, "Ioannis Metaxas et le religieux (1936–1941): Expérience historique et débats actuels en Grèce," *Cahiers balkaniques* 42 (2014): 1–18.

¹⁴ "Περὶ Θρησκείας ολίγα," *Ο Απόστολος Ανδρέας* 12, no. 188 (1936): 482.

¹⁵ Michalis I. Hatzidakis, "Ἡ ἀλήθεια ἐν τῇ ἐπιστῇμῃ καὶ ἐν τῇ θρησκείᾳ," *Νέα Πολιτική* 4, no. 2 (1940): 402.

anarchy, for duty and virtue have their source in God, whom atheism denies.”¹⁶ The causes of unbelief are attributed to several factors: (i) sin, as individuals may use unbelief to justify sinful lives against God’s laws; (ii) hypocrisy among professed Christians or heretics; and (iii) ignorance of Scripture, history and what is considered “true science”. The last-mentioned is believed to play a role in reinforcing faith by dismantling materialistic theories.¹⁷

Materialism continued to be perceived as the main manifestation of atheism, as evidenced by the religious periodical *Ανάπλασις*, which republished articles on materialism written by Skaltsounis, its former editor. Titles such as “The Dangers of Materialism and the Role of the Church and Clergy”, “Materialists’ Influence on the Public and Our Responsibilities” and “A Critique of Haeckel’s Ideas by the Famous Virchow” echo age-old arguments against materialism and Darwinism, despite the passage of over 40 years. Materialistic viewpoints are discredited as mere products of imagination using the words and actions of esteemed scientists, past and present, who oppose materialism. For instance, the critique of Darwin’s theory as scientifically flawed, criticised for its unscientific methodology and detrimental impact by the eminent naturalist Agassiz, is highlighted. The consistent overarching message is that the nation faces moral and social perils due to the proliferation of materialistic ideologies. The denial of God and embrace of materialistic theories are depicted as pathways leading to brutality and societal decay, with clergy members seen as ill-equipped to respond and politicians indifferent to these pressing matters. Drawing parallels with Byzantine history, where the church played a pivotal role in preserving the nation’s identity during Ottoman rule, there is a strong call for the church to vigorously combat atheism through preaching and active engagement in the public space.¹⁸

Yet even before Metaxas’ regime, another perceived threat to religion and the Greek nation was steadily gaining momentum: communism. Communism was regarded as the most dangerous manifestation of atheism not only because it promotes materialistic worldviews but also because it stands accused of denying the Christian faith, which is considered a constituent element of national identity.

¹⁶ “Ολίγα περί Θρησκείας,” *Ο Απόστολος Ανδρέας* 12, no. 189 (1936): 490.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 500.

¹⁸ Ioannis Skaltsounis, “Οι εκ του Υλισμού κίνδυνοι και το έργον της Εκκλησίας και του Κλήρου,” *Ανάπλασις* 48, no. 1 (1936): 2–4; Skaltsounis, “Οι προσκλήσεις των υλιστών προς τους λαούς και τα εκ τούτων ιδικά μας καθήκοντα,” *Ανάπλασις* 48, no. 15 (1936): 223–24; Skaltsounis, “Ο περίφημος Βίρχοφ δια μιαν πρότασιν του Χάικελ,” *Ανάπλασις* 48, no. 19 (1936): 385–87; Skaltsounis, “Πάντα τα γνωστά διαψεύδουν την Δαρβίνειον θεωρίαν,” *Ανάπλασις* 48, no. 20 (1936): 398–400.

This perspective aligned with the sentiments expressed in Greek Orthodox periodicals about the “denial of faith” seen as the cause of Greece’s spiritual and moral decline.¹⁹

Communism in this light was viewed as having a programmatic goal of eradicating religion, the church and the Greek state. This potential threat was taken seriously, as argued by authors in *Ανάπλασις*, which contended that the current state (before the regime’s establishment) lacked governance guided by Christian principles, showed indifference towards various social (moral and economic) issues and exhibited anticlerical tendencies. The authors asserted that communist propaganda had already infiltrated the working and peasant classes, and that its ideology had gained support among many young individuals and even some scientists. In the face of this alleged looming danger, politicians were depicted as apathetic, with certain people displaying hostility towards the church. Furthermore, the Church of Greece itself was criticised for not consistently opposing anti-Christian fanaticism. Consequently, according to these perspectives, the imposition of communism in Greece appeared increasingly plausible.²⁰

Metaxas indeed used the perceived threat of communism as a justification for declaring a dictatorship. By 1936, the competition between political parties had intensified, and there were fears that Greek society might fall under communist influence. According to the regime’s narrative, communism had allegedly infiltrated social institutions such as schools and the army. It is noticeable, that even after enacting laws against communists, Metaxas continued to emphasise the “communist threat” in an effort to maintain both regime stability and societal vigilance. He portrayed himself as fulfilling a historical duty and a responsibility to the Supreme Leader (that is, God), the Greek people and their history. This narrative served to justify the authoritarian measures taken by the regime, presenting them as necessary to protect Greece from internal subversion and external threats.²¹

¹⁹ Georgios D. Kapsomenos, “Η αξία και η αλήθεια της Θρησκείας,” *Χριστιανικό Φως*, no. 1 (1939): 3–4; 2, no. (1939): 10–11; 3, no. (1939): 18–19; no. 4 (1939): 26–27; no. 5 (1939): 35–36; no. 6 (1939): 42–43; no. 7 (1939): 50–51; no. 8 (1939): 58–59; no. 9 (1939): 66–67; no. 10 (1939): 75.

²⁰ P.C. Dimitropoulos, “Κράτος–Έθνος–Εκκλησία,” *Ανάπλασις* 48, no. 10 (1936): 148–51; Michail Galanos, “Υπόψιν του Κλήρου και των Πιστών μας,” *Ανάπλασις* 48, no. 10 (1936): 151–52.

²¹ Metaxas, *Λόγοι και σκέψεις*, 261–63; Alexandros Sakellariou, “Δικτατορίες και Ορθόδοξη εκκλησία στην Ελλάδα στον 20ο αιώνα: Πολιτικές, οικονομικές και ιδεολογικο-νοηματικές

Some periodicals that shared this narrative openly supported the Metaxas regime in an effort to reverse the decline Greece had experienced by restoring fundamental ideals such as religion, country and family. For instance, the 1936 issues of *Ανάπλασις* included quotations from Metaxas' speeches emphasising the "danger" posed by communism, which was portrayed as an enemy of Greek culture, Orthodox tradition, the fatherland and the family. The regime's rhetoric against communism gained indirect support even from publications where criticism of communism was less aggressive. For instance, in *Οι Τρεις Ιεράρχαι*, a self-declared "national-religious" periodical published by the homonymous religious association, some authors discuss the persecution and executions of bishops, priests, teachers, military and policemen who resisted the new regime in the Soviet Union, a reminder that this threat is real for the Greek state, noting that the Soviet paradise that communists in Greece support does not exist.²² At the same time, they attempt to make clear that the communist programme against religion has failed considerably in Russia, implying the innate character of the religious sentiment in humans. Hence, they claim that, according to Soviet newspapers, teachers in Russian schools do not speak against religion and do not use antireligious material, unlike teachers in Greece who undermine the idea of faith in school even though religion is supported by the state. This is a criticism against the domestic flock that is compared to the example of Russians' alleged attempts to save their faith.²³ In another case, having acknowledged the communist threat, it is recommended that the Church of Greece should do its duty by sending preachers to factories, to reach out to the workers, especially the young people who call themselves communists, most of whom supposedly do not know much and are unaware of what they are seeking.²⁴ Of course, behind this kind of recommendation lay the presumption that only the Christian religion as a moral force could revitalise Greece and lead people to moral improvement, restoring the country to its former glory and prosperity.²⁵

Confronting communism as both a moral and national threat was one challenge; disentangling communism from science, which was regarded as a gift from God, was another. The Christian Union of Scientists, founded in late 1937 under the spiritual guidance of the prominent Zoe Brotherhood of

σχέσεις υπό καθεστῶτα εκτάκτου ανάγκης" (PhD diss., Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, 2008), 391–93.

²² "Ο παράδεισος της Μόσχας," *Οι Τρεις Ιεράρχαι* 27, no. 852 (1936): 125

²³ "Οι εν Ρωσία διδάσκαλοι και οι δικοί μας," *Οι Τρεις Ιεράρχαι* 27, no. 852 (1936): 125.

²⁴ "Κηρύγματα εις τους εργάτας," *Οι Τρεις Ιεράρχαι* 27, no. 852 (1936): 77.

²⁵ "Μονον η θρησκεία," *Οι Τρεις Ιεράρχαι* 27, no. 867 (1936): 352.

Theologians,²⁶ played a significant role in shaping the perceptions of science, religion and atheism in the following years. The union worked to renew and reshape the discourse on the relationship between religion and science in Greece, drawing from the nineteenth-century tradition of scientific apologetics. As a collective of scientists, their motivation for criticising atheism stemmed from a desire to clarify the perceived misuse and misrepresentation of science by those who doubted Christian truths and showed disrespect towards the church through materialistic atheist arguments. Atheism was viewed as originating from a “lie”, a “forgery” of the true nature and boundaries of science. Recognising the limitations of scientific inquiry and its inability to address all existential questions, they emphasised that science studies solely physical phenomena; inquiries into fundamental aspects of life persisted as mysteries beyond the realm of scientific comprehension, despite advancements in technology and knowledge. The fact that communism promoted a scientific character made it even more imperative for them to strengthen the scientific character of faith and to redeploy the concept of “true science”, which was supposedly in harmony with biblical teachings. This approach was seen as essential in counteracting the communist narrative while reinforcing religious belief. Thus, faithful scientists were encouraged to actively participate in this defence of the truth of the Christian faith, employing their expertise to challenge misconceptions and advocate for the compatibility of science and faith, against scientists who rejected the concept of God.²⁷

The union operated within a given environment: scientific and technical ideals played a significant role in the vision of the Metaxas regime. According to it, scientists and engineers had a crucial role to play in the “national transformation”, driving societal progress and shaping the future of the Greek

²⁶ For the Zoe Brotherhood, founded in 1907, apologetics remained a consistent focus. In 1936, the academic theologian Panagiotis Trembelas contributed to this effort by publishing a book on topics such as Creation and Darwinism under the title *Απολογητικάί Μελέται: Η ζωή καὶ η γένεσις αυτής* (Athens: Zoe, 1936). This publication was part of a series titled “Απολογητικάί Μελέται” released by Zoe, which emphasised the importance of defending Christian beliefs through intellectual inquiry and argumentation. See also Christos Yannaras, *Orthodoxy and the West*, trans. Peter Chamberas and Norman Russell (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2006), 217–50; Alexander Gousidis, *Οι χριστιανικές οργανώσεις – Η περίπτωση της Αδελφότητας Θεολόγων “Η Ζωή”: Κοινωνιολογική προσέγγιση* (Thessaloniki: Pournaras, 1993); Amaryllis Logotheti, “The Brotherhood of Theologians Zoe and its Influence on Twentieth-Century Greece,” in *Orthodox Christian Renewal Movements in Eastern Europe*, ed. Aleksandra Djurić Milovanović and Radmila Radić (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 285–302.

²⁷ Editorial, “Προς επιστήμονας,” *Ακτίνες*, no. 11 (1939): 257–59.

people.²⁸ Scientific work was viewed not merely as a means of financial gain but as a noble pursuit aimed at advancing “pure”²⁹ (basic) science and discovering truth.³⁰ Metaxas’ scientific ideal aligned with the way Greek Orthodox periodicals portrayed scientists as “the future intellectual leaders of the Hellenic nation”³¹ and, as such, they were expected not only to be trained in scientific knowledge but also to embody the image of the faithful Christian scientist. Integrating Skaltsounis’ perception of science as a moral agent in the service of society, a Christian scientist was depicted as a person of decency and humility, who combined a deep Christian faith with a strong desire to comprehend the truth of creation.³² As early as 1938, the union, in its periodical *Ακτίνες*, presented atheism as a sterile form of “denial” of religious faith, a rejection undertaken solely for its own sake, emblematic of the prevailing spirit of contemporary times: not only have many people allegedly relinquished a sense of purpose and respect for the sacred, but also the notion of a shared goal or belonging to a community, once integral to human existence, has faded in significance. In this framework, where life is said to appear devoid of meaning, and a “culture of destruction” is promoted in society over traditions and values, the decline in religious affiliation and the rise of atheism is regarded as another manifestation of a broader societal shift towards individualism and secularism. Such a critique extended to both communists and bourgeois who questioned human life without God.³³

Within this context, Dimitrios Magriotis, a civil servant at the Finance Ministry, attempted to offer systematic insights into the intersection of faith, atheism and scientific inquiry in his work *Πίστις και επιστήμη*. The book was published in 1940 by the National Youth Organisation, established by the Metaxas regime. According to Magriotis, religious faith possesses specific characteristics: it is rational, devoid of superstition or blind credulity; it is a product of our free will; and it is supernatural, bestowed upon us as a divine

²⁸ Vasilis A. Bogiatzis, *Μετέωρος Μοντερνισμός: Τεχνολογία, ιδεολογία της επιστήμης και πολιτική στην Ελλάδα του μεσοπολέμου (1922-1940)* (Athens: Eurasia, 2012), 272–98.

²⁹ Basic science was theoretically considered “transnational science”, free from any national characteristics and ready to serve anyone. Yet, though it had flourished in Europe, it was regarded as a product of ancient Greek culture. Therefore, according to the regime’s ideology, any effort to restore scientific advancement in Greece was seen as a continuation of the scientific work of the glorious past.

³⁰ Metaxas, *Λόγοι και σκέψεις*, 145–46.

³¹ [A university professor], “Οι σκοποί της πανεπιστημιακής μόρφωσης,” *Ακτίνες*, no. 10 (1939): 193.

³² Metaxas, *Λόγοι και σκέψεις*, 208.

³³ Editorial, “Η Άρνησις,” *Ακτίνες*, no. 1 (1938): 1–2.

gift. The divergence between knowledge and faith, then, lies in how we attain certainty: through personal perception or by placing trust in the testimony of others. He contends that belief, as an act of trust, is essential to both religion and science. Thus, to grasp and understand the supernatural truths of religious faith, purportedly aided by the Holy Spirit, individuals must place trust in the testimony of others. Similarly, scientists not only have faith in the orderliness of nature, believing in the constancy of natural laws, but they also heavily rely on previous scientific work and conclusions.³⁴

In his investigation of unbelief and its causes, Magriotis identifies several factors contributing to it: (i) *The fallacy of science alienation*: According to this notion, science distances individuals from religion by fostering selfishness and arrogance, leading them to believe they are masters of natural laws, and that science can replace religion as a system of moral behaviour. Magriotis discusses the role of the Roman Catholic Church in fighting scientific progress (in contrast to the Orthodox Church, which regarded science as a gift from God, a means “to reveal the divine treasures of God’s love and wisdom”)³⁵ and the usual narrative of eighteenth-century anticlericalism that had allegedly shaped a negative attitude towards religion;³⁶ (ii) *Ignorance and lack of religious education*: According to Magriotis, many people’s unbelief stems from a lack of knowledge about religious matters and teachings; (iii) *Extreme expertise in natural sciences*: He argues that profound expertise in the natural sciences can sometimes narrow one’s perspective and breed arrogance, inhibiting open-mindedness towards religious concepts; (iv) *Indifference and distractions of daily life*: The preoccupations of everyday life are said often to divert attention away from spiritual matters, fostering indifference towards religion; (v) *Attachment to material possessions*: Excessive focus on material possessions and worldly pursuits can allegedly overshadow spiritual concerns, making it easier for individuals to disbelieve in the divine; finally, (vi) *Character-related causes*: For Magriotis, individuals who exhibit selfish or immoral behaviour may be more inclined to reject religious beliefs, viewing them as incompatible with their lifestyles.³⁷

Magriotis is also interested in defining atheism. He primarily connects it with materialism, a philosophical theory that is allegedly blended with science to establish credibility, often stretching the scope and the boundaries of scientific explanation.³⁸ However, he observes that scientists who once

³⁴ Dimitrios I. Magriotis, *Πίστις και επιστήμη*, 3rd ed. (Athens: Saliveros, 1946), 22–28.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 144.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 143–49.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 82–87, 110–14.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 116–17.

supported materialism have since renounced it, citing examples largely from Skaltsounis' 1893 book *Περί γενέσεως του ανθρώπου: Αρμονία Χριστιανισμού και επιστήμης*.³⁹ He also refers to Darwinism as an aspect of materialism. He depicts it as "a metaphysical theory that does not necessarily endorse mechanistic or materialistic explanations for the random creation of the world"⁴⁰ and repeats an older misconception, that humans – equipped with certain intellectual powers – do not descend from apes.

Magriotis' publication was authorised by the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece, although, for the latter, atheism was not a systematic concern as the dissemination of heresies (especially Chiliasm). Thus, for example, a rare article written by Metropolitan Irenaios in *Εκκλησία*, the official bulletin of the Church of Greece, refers to the boundaries of scientific reasoning or the alleged inefficiency of the theory of evolution to explain what life is. *Θεολογία*, the official periodical of the Holy Synod, published no articles on atheism either. A fleeting reference to atheism can be found in the speech of the archbishop of Athens on the radio, in 1938, later published in *Οι Τρεις Ιεράρχαι*. There he addresses the Greek people to preserve their faith and moral principles, and "not to be carried away by subversive ideas" that cause calamities to themselves, their families, and their country.⁴¹

The Argumentation of Science, Orthodoxy and Atheism during the German Occupation and Greek Civil War (1941–1949)

From 1941 to 1944, Greece was under German occupation. Two years later, clashes between nationalist and left-wing resistance groups erupted, underlining the very fact that the Cold War was looming over Greece. The civil war (1946–1949) between the forces of the official government and the communist resistance fighters was justified, once again, as an attempt to forestall a communist takeover of the country. The war ended with the defeat of the communists, who were persecuted and imprisoned in camps and prisons.⁴²

During the 1940s, the argumentation on science, religion and atheism in use was still borrowed from the nineteenth-century apologetics against materialism

³⁹ Ibid., 18–21, 183–98.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 136.

⁴¹ Editorial, "Ο Μακ. Αρχιεπίσκοπος Αθηνών προς τον ελληνικό λαόν," *Οι Τρεις Ιεράρχαι* 29, no. 901 (1938), 81–82.

⁴² Mark Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece: The Experience of Occupation, 1941–44* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), xvi.

and Darwinism,⁴³ enhanced by the “true science”⁴⁴ account and an extensive criticism of communism elaborated during the Metaxas regime. The network of para-ecclesiastical organisations dominated not only Greek Orthodox circles but also Greek society. The flourishing of their discourse stemmed, once again, from the alleged inability of the church to fight communist atheism and the spread of secularisation within Greek society. Independent of the Church of Greece, though members of the hierarchy were associated with them, these organisations dedicated themselves to the spreading of God’s word and those social-ethical values that they perceived as “Christian” in the fight against atheism.⁴⁵ Especially, the Zoe Brotherhood’s anticommunist propaganda and its fight against materialism and Darwinism were presented as parts of its effort to protect the so-called “Greek Christian nationality” from atheism and moral decay.⁴⁶

Accordingly, the Christian Union of Scientists continued to serve that purpose in its articles in *Ακτίνες*, employing the so-called “true science” as a weapon in its arsenal. For its members, it was only through the social and moral progress of the Greek nation, with science in harmony with Orthodoxy, that Greek society could regain its lost social order. In 1946, they intervened in the public sphere by publishing a declaration⁴⁷ on the deterioration of Greece’s political, social and moral situation. The declaration, issued in the aftermath of World War II, aimed to analyse the root causes of the collapse of twentieth-century civilisation.

The document attributes this collapse to a spiritual decline resulting from the denial of Christian faith, which embodies essential sacramental values. This rejection allegedly led to the rise of atheism, either as the result of communism or secularism. It also emphasises that the phenomenon of atheism is considered inconceivable for the Greek people as Christianity is seen as intimately linked to their national identity: the Christian faith is fundamental for the nation’s

⁴³ “Η πλάνη της εξελίξεως,” *Ιωάννης ο Βαπτιστής* 1, no. 2 (1949), 6–7.

⁴⁴ Dimitrios I. Magriotis, “Ο επιστήμων εις αναζήτησιν του Θεού,” *Εκκλησιαστικό Βήμα* 15, no. 129 (1947): 1–3.

⁴⁵ K., “Ο σημερινός παγκόσμιος αγώνας πίστεως και απιστίας,” *Ο Φρουρός* 2, no. 10–22 (1949): 283–84; Kon. D. Kalok., “Ο σημερινός αγών μεταξύ πίστεως και απιστίας,” *Ο Φρουρός* 2, no. 13–25 (1949): 381.

⁴⁶ For a preliminary reading on Zoe’s anticommunist propaganda in 1950s Greece, see Maria Siganou, “Ο αντικομμουνιστικός λόγος της ‘Ζωής’ στον εμφύλιο πόλεμο (1946–1948)” (BA diss., University of Thessaly, 2004).

⁴⁷ Christian Union of Scientists, *Δια κάθε Έλληνα: Διακήρυξις της Χριστιανικής Ενώσεως Επιστημόνων* (Athens: s.n., 1946).

existence, drawing parallels to the 1821 rebellion against Ottoman rule. The authors of the declaration are also eager to restore the allegedly lost reputation of science attached to atheistic materialistic theories. They criticise what is perceived as an intellectual decline, citing the endorsement of Darwinian theory by scientists of alleged moderate acclaim who were materialists. They contest the validity of Darwinian theory, presenting it as a mere hypothesis lacking conclusive evidence, highlighting various scientific discrepancies and forgeries in palaeontology in the past, while arguing against the materialistic worldview (in particular, spontaneous generation) regarding the origins of the universe and life.⁴⁸

On other occasions, in the various periodicals of parishes or metropolitans, members of the hierarchy engaged in “scientific apologetics” to strip the communists’ argumentation of any scientific support. Thus, they investigate the harmonious relationship between science and religion. For instance, Archimandrite Aspiotis, in *Αγ. Ιάσων και Σωσίπατρος*, published by the Metropolis of Corfu and Paxoi, argues for the nonthreatening character of “true science” and presents the declaration of the Christian Union of Scientists.⁴⁹ Similarly, Metropolitan Methodios, in another article, talks about a declaration signed by 15 scientists in the United States supporting the constituent role of Christianity in the birth of science and revealing the misinterpretation and manipulation of science by those who doubt the Christian truths and disrespect the church.⁵⁰

During this period, the Church of Greece continued with the very same policy: it never took an official standpoint against atheism or argued publicly about communism as an enemy of the Christian faith. Yet, there were cases where members of the hierarchy communicated their personal views through periodicals published by the church or individual metropolitans and parishes. Some of them proceeded with a preliminary ecclesiological and politological analysis of communism. For example, in *Εκκλησία*, Metropolitan Michael equates communism with fascism and Nazism. However, he argues that communism transcends mere political ideology and assumes attributes of a religion. From an ecclesiastical standpoint, two primary criticisms are directed at communism, that it suppresses individual freedom and marginalises those who dissent from communist doctrine. In the end, the author calls on the church to rectify errors, falsehoods and injustices, viewing it as part

⁴⁸ Athanasios B. Avramidis, “Η διακήρυξη της Χριστιανικής Ενώσεως Επιστημόνων (Με το μάτι ενός δευτεροετούς φοιτητού της Ιατρικής, το 1946),” *Ακτίνες*, no. 677 (2007): 5–12.

⁴⁹ Aspiotis (archimandrite), “Το μοναδικόν θεμέλιον,” *Αγ. Ιάσων και Σωσίπατρος* 12, no. 8 (1946): 67–69.

⁵⁰ Methodios (metropolitan), “Από όσα συμβαίνουν εις την Αμερικήν: Η θρησκεία και η επιστήμη μια κοινή διακήρυξις επιστημόνων,” *Αγ. Ιάσων και Σωσίπατρος* 12, no. 5 (1946): 33–34.

of its ecclesiastical duty rather than political interference to speak against communism.⁵¹

In another article in the same periodical, Metropolitan Germanos Goumas disagrees with an Anglican assessment that communism, either as a positive movement supporting the Christian principle of equality or as an economic phenomenon based on the New Testament, necessarily excludes belief in God. Although he understands that many communists are Christian believers and the phenomenon developed from outrage at class inequalities, Germanos considers the reading of communism as a movement with a Christian principle to be incorrect. The exile and persecution of people, the absence of freedom of speech and the propaganda against religion in the context of a police state could not be ignored. As for the interpretation of communism as an economic phenomenon based on the New Testament, he regards it as a perversion of Christian truth, since communism continues to promote the emphasis on material goods through material equality. He is also unable to accept that there is such a thing as “Christian communism”, given Marxism’s atheistic tendencies that are based on a false image of the church as the representative of the capitalist class, influenced by the anticlerical struggle of the eighteenth century. Germanos underlines that the alienation of human thought from religion is a basic premise of communist theory, and even Marxist dialectic is based on economic determinism, which not only denies the omnipotence of God but also the freedom of the human will: social welfare is said to be achieved by any means bearing unethical elements. For all the above reasons, communism is viewed as a threat to the world.⁵²

The same periodicals sometimes published harsher criticism of communism. Typically, the most intense arguments came from laypeople who adopted the language introduced by the para-ecclesiastical organisations. For example, in *Αγ. Ιάσων και Σωσίπατρος*, Spyros Dendias argues that communism falls into the category of scientism, which he identifies with materialism. It is noteworthy that his critique highlights a conflation of anticommunism with antisemitism and a rejection of revolutionary leaders as authentic representatives of the people, further linking political and religious arguments in opposition to communism. For him, communism is opposed to religion not because it questions the existence of Christ, but because it generally expresses ideas against Christianity as formulated by its founder, Karl Marx, who was of Jewish descent. Additionally,

⁵¹ Michail (metropolitan), “Εκκλησία και κομμουνισμός,” *Εκκλησία* 24, no. 25–26 (1947): 196–98.

⁵² Germanos Goumas (metropolitan), “Ο κομμουνισμός,” *Εκκλησία* 26, no. 18 (1949): 283–85.

he dismisses communism as a movement driven by alleged populists and professional revolutionaries, namely Lenin and Stalin.⁵³

It should be noted, though, that there were a few voices within the wider circle of the church advocating for a more compassionate approach towards communists. One such voice is found in *Αγιορειτική Βιβλιοθήκη*, which expressed views from Mount Athos. The owner and editor of this periodical invites Christians to bring their “communist brothers” back to the church through constant prayer and teaching.⁵⁴ Interestingly, he distinguishes between two types of communism: one arising from economic and social injustice, and the other rooted in atheism. The former type of communism, caused by economic and social inequities, is seen as curable through the willingness of the wealthy to give back to society. This perspective acknowledges the legitimate grievances driving some to communism and suggests that addressing these issues could reconcile them with the church. The latter type of communism, however, is seen as beyond redemption, posing a fundamental threat to both religious and national values.⁵⁵

Secularism and Cultural Atheism (1950–1974)

From the Metaxas regime (1936–1941) to the civil war (1946–1949), communism was regarded as the most dangerous manifestation of atheism because it was accused of denying the Orthodox Christian faith, which was considered a constituent element of Greek national identity, and of promoting immorality and materialistic worldviews. A Greek atheistic communist was depicted as someone devoid of morality, responsible for killing the elderly, women, children and priests, burning churches, and destroying entire villages during the civil war. Understood in terms of a material ideology, being born from ignorance and deception, communism was considered part of scientism.

However, at the time scientific materialism was no longer considered a significant threat to religion, since science, perceived as “true science” in general, was believed to be aligned significantly with the Bible. Under this perspective, it was suggested that science is beneficial to people and helps reevaluate the relationship between science and Orthodoxy as one of coexistence rather than competition. In the following decades, the perception of atheism extended

⁵³ Spyros Dendias, “Κομμουνισμός και Χριστιανισμός,” *Αγ. Ιάσων και Σωσίπατρος* 12, no. 8 (1946): 51–52.

⁵⁴ Sotiris Schoinas, “Περί της αθανάτου γλώσσης μας,” *Αγιορειτική Βιβλιοθήκη* 7, no. 73–84 (1942–1943): 3.

⁵⁵ Sotiris Schoinas, “Πλησιάσατε προς τον Χριστόν,” *Αγιορειτική Βιβλιοθήκη* 9, no. 97–108 (1944–1945): 5–7.

gradually from immoral communist materialism to immoral civil materialism. Atheism, regarded as the primary cause of apostasy, was seen as rooted in the contemporary civilisation of the secularised West. This was hardly a new pattern of atheism, but it was clearer to Greek Orthodox authors that material advances and technological development had led to the rebarbarisation of humanity and war and were responsible for Greece's intellectual and moral downfall.

1950s: Focusing on the Moral Motivations behind Atheism

By the early 1950s, Greek parliamentary democracy had been restored, though anyone considered to be on the Left was still excluded from political activities. Throughout the period between 1949 and 1963, the newly established democracy was fragile, governed by the conservative party, which pursued anticommunist "political-cleansing" acts.

Para-ecclesiastical organisations continued to thrive, and the interest in atheism showed little change. Greek Orthodox circles remained concerned about the challenges posed by materialism. For instance, in an article in *Ακτίνες* in 1951, Dimitris Pyrgiotis examines the nature of materialism, with a focus on its moral implications. Similarly, in a series of articles published in *Αγ. Ιάσων και Σωσίπατρος* from 1953 to 1956, Metropolitan Methodios delivered a materialistic interpretation of the theory of evolution, arguing that the latter undermines the traditional Christian understanding of creation and human uniqueness, posing a significant threat to the religious and moral fabric of society.⁵⁶

The moral motivations behind atheism were of significant interest. In *Ιωάννης ο Βαπτιστής*, a periodical published by the eponymous religious association, "theists", "materialists", "antichrists" and "sceptics", who question the universality of religious sentiment in human history, are all seen as battling the Gospel, viewing it as a product of deception, a falsehood, a myth and a text full of contradictions. They even question the person of Christ, accusing him of fraud, populism that caused division and a fanaticism that led to his death. Believers, who follow the Divine Logos inherent in all people, are contrasted with unbelievers, who ignore the Divine Logos and fall into atheism; their motives are considered vicious, not aimed at moral sanctification, and they are perceived as selfish, arrogant and proud, ignoring the greatness of God and the baseness of humanity.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Methodios (metropolitan), "Νέα εμφάνις των περι εξελίξεως απόψεων," *Αγ. Ιάσων και Σωσίπατρος* 19, no. 2 (1953): 9–11; 20, no. 5 (1954): 9–11; 21, no. 10–11 (1955): 95–96; 21, no. 1 (1955): 5; 21, no. 2 (1955): 17; 21, no. 9–10 (1955): 59–65; 21, no. 11–12 (1956): 77.

⁵⁷ "Η αλήθεια του Ευαγγελίου και η αντίθετος αυτής θεωρίας και οψις," *Ιωάννης ο Βαπτιστής* 220 (1950): 2–3; 221 (1950): 2; 323 (1951): 5–6; Christos M. Kanotidis, "Οι

There was also concern about presenting the scientific discrediting of atheism based on findings from religious studies, ethnology and psychology. In *Θεολογία*, published by the Holy Synod, professor of divinity Leonidas Filippidis argues that religious studies, as a scientific discipline, confirms the validity of biblical apocalypticism by refuting any accusations made by atheists. Studies have proved the universal and inherent character of religion, establishing (with the help of ethnology) that “in reality, there are no irreligious individuals”. To support this, he quotes the views of the Protestant German philosopher and poet Ricarda Huch on individual irreligion or atheism as a product of a pathological disorder. He also refers to the findings of psychologist Carl Jung on the relationship between mental illness and the patient’s problem of religious adaptation.⁵⁸

Following earlier ecclesiological and politological analyses, the debate surrounding communism now focuses on its comparison to Christian teachings and its status as a defeated ideology in the Soviet Union, as well as the revived interest among Greek people who have allegedly returned to the church.⁵⁹ For instance, Bishop Germanos Polyzoidis placed again under scrutiny, as the aforementioned Metropolitan Germanos Goumas did earlier, the thesis that communism is an ideology that promises to end misery and inequality, based on the ancient church’s values and way of life. Instead, he underlines that the communist ideology is embedded in Marx’s purpose to destroy every existing truth, religion and moral system. Regarding the thesis that claims there is a Christian understanding of communist economic theory, he insists that there is a distinction between communist economic principles and those of Christianity: the early church’s distribution of wealth and goods among Christians was voluntary, not compulsory. He cites the Christian encouragement of charity in support of his position. According to him, communism bears characteristics of the “stewardship” (*επιστασία*) system but is enforced: gifts, as explained by this system, were given by God to the people for the

σύγχρονοι άφρονες και οι αρνησίχριστοι και οι αντίχριστοι: Το τέλος και η απώλεια αυτών,” *Ιωάννης ο Βαπτιστής* 221 (1950): 6–7; 222 (1950): 6–7; 223 (1950): 2; 324 (1951): 8; 338 (1951): 7–8.

⁵⁸ Leonidas Filippides, “Σύγχρονος Θρησκευολογική Κίνησης,” *Θεολογία* 23, no. 3 (1952): 408–23. For Ricarda Hauch, Filippides refers to her contribution to the edited volume *Dichterglaube: Stimmen religiösen Erlebens*, ed. Harald Braun. (Berlin: Eckart-Verlag, 1931). For Carl G. Jung, Filippides refers to the collection of articles *La realtà dell’ anima* (Rome: Astrolabio, 1949).

⁵⁹ Panteleimon Karanikolas (archimandrite), “Το σύγχρονον πνευματικόν έδαφος και ο εργάτης του Θείου Λόγου: Η εποχή ημων εποχή υλισμού,” *Εφημέριος* 4, no. 14–16 (1955): 395–98; Grigorios Grammatikopoulos, *Ηττα του αθεϊσμού στη Ρωσία* (Athens: Democratic Institute of Athens, 1959); Vasilis Iliadis, “Η στροφή του συνόλου προς την χριστιανική πίστι πορεία της ψυχής προς τον δρόμο της αληθινής χαράς,” *Εφημέριος* 8, no. 9 (1958): 296.

benefit of others, yet communism denies the right of private property.⁶⁰ Five years later, in 1956, Germanos returned to the topic and discusses the differences between communism and Christianity with a focus on human rights. Unlike Christianity, which accepts the value of every human being before God, he points out that in communism the state is regarded as supreme over the individual and dictates how one should live and think (the education system supports atheism, materialism and Darwinism). In addition, he observes that the concept of justice differs: in Christianity, the law of God transcends man; in communism, the state defines the law and whatever serves the state is right and just.⁶¹

1960s: Defining the Phenomenon of Atheism and the Emphasis on Technology

In 1963, a centre-left government with a liberal orientation came to power, but its tenure was short-lived. The political crisis persisted, culminating in a group coup d'état of colonels in 1967, led by Georgios Papadopoulos, staged in 1967 in the coup d'état by the colonels, led by Georgios Papadopoulos, which established a military regime that lasted until 1974. During that period, communists were once again legally proclaimed as “enemies” of the Greek state. In 1974, democracy was restored and the persecution of communists gradually came to an end.

During the 1960s, para-ecclesiastical organisations gradually went into decline. The most powerful of them, the Zoe Brotherhood, split, with the more conservative members leaving to establish a new brotherhood, Sotir, while the remaining members, now weaker, stayed in a much-weakened Zoe. An attempt to create a Christian Democratic Party in the early 1950s failed, but the members of the brotherhood would help in the usual way (through publications, gatherings, speeches and philanthropic activity) in the spiritual renovation of the Greek people to strengthen their political conviction against the communist and secularist threat. Within this context, the critique of communist materialism persisted. Notably, in 1967, the year the junta was established, the Sotir Brotherhood published a book titled *To λυκόφως του Μαρξισμού*. According to the back cover, it offers “an anatomy of the founders of Marxism-Leninism, its philosophy, scientism, ethics, strategy and religion – for it is the religion of the Antichrist – and in general of its whole course and development”. The book claims to examine “the falsehood, fallacy, deceit, fraud, contradictions and wholly unscientific atheism of communist theory”.

⁶⁰ Germanos Polyzoides (bishop), “Ἦτο η πρώτη ἐκκλησία κομμουνιστική;,” *Εκκλησία* 28, no. 1–2 (1951): 17–18.

⁶¹ Germanos Polyzoides (bishop), “Βασικαί διαφοραί Κομμουνισμού καὶ Ἐκκλησίας,” *Εκκλησία* 33, no. 8 (1956): 153–54.

The arguments are presented as drawn from “the arsenal of the Spirit and modern scientific research”.⁶²

This endeavour to strengthen the defence of religion by defining the phenomenon of atheism and its various types continued throughout the 1960s. For instance, philosopher Nikolaos Louvaris, writing in the religious periodical *Παύλος ο Απόστολος των Εθνών*, defines atheism as the denial of God, of “the One, the Essence, of values, of meaning in the world and life”. According to him, atheism leads to nihilism. He also observes that although atheism existed throughout history and across cultures, it was introduced as a social phenomenon in modern times when it acquired a systematic philosophical character. This philosophical atheism influenced societies significantly: political parties and worldviews were formed, and states were organised based on an ideology of eliminating religion. As for the reasons that lead to atheism, the author assumes that they are deeply connected to the success of science and the problem of theodicy. He ends his analysis by distinguishing between unconscious and conscious atheism, arguing that there are two types of unconscious atheism: the “false atheists”, those who believe they are atheists but deceive themselves by denying a distorted image of the true God, and the “crypto-atheists”, who attend church and belong to a religion but deny God in their hearts. There are also three types of conscious atheist: “true atheists”, who toy with the idea of God and present themselves as progressive by declaring themselves unbelievers; “semi-atheists”, who are not entirely sure of their unbelief and have some reservations about the existence of God; and those who are certain that God does not exist and believe they have proven it through various means. The latter group includes those who use “materialistic proof”, asserting that everything is matter; “sensationalist proof”, claiming that only what is perceptible by the senses exists; and “psychological proof”, arguing that the idea of God is a human construction. In any case, atheism as a doctrine is considered less dangerous than atheism as an activity, since a practical atheist supposedly behaves on the principle that everything is permissible.⁶³

The perceived threat was now, however, seen to originate not only from communists but also from fellow Orthodox Greeks who followed Western morals emphasising material life. In this context, Metropolitan Aimilianos, in an article in *Εκκλησία*, argues that moral decay is linked to poor Christian faith. This type of faith, according to him, has a strong cultural character, handed down from generation to generation, and is not the result of personal struggle. He calls for a pastoral

⁶² Nikolaos P. Vasileiadis, *Το Λυκόφως του Μαρξισμού* (Athens: Soter, 1967).

⁶³ Nikolaos Louvaris, “Η Αθεΐα,” *Παύλος ο Απόστολος των Εθνών* 2, no. 13 (1961): 102–3.

ministry to help people conquer their faith and confront conventional faith which he identifies closely with atheism. Aimilianos considers the latter an urgent pastoral problem that must be addressed, urging a cautious examination of the causes of doubt and denial. He views religious faith as a supernatural gift but also something that must be cultivated through discussion and a search for answers that the church can provide. Aimilianos defines as atheist those who either have ceased to believe or have an experience of mystical life, who are not opposed to religion but have questions, showing a tendency to agnosticism. He also includes those who become atheists disillusioned by life's failures and difficulties or because of church abuses and scandals. He invites priests to reach out to "those who have broken off their relationship with faith and the church", insisting that superficial scholastic catechesis should be abandoned in favour of filling gaps in religious knowledge by observing the faithful and how they live in the context of a worshipping community.⁶⁴

It is in this effort to strengthen the defence of religion that "true faith" and its relationship with the so-called "true science" are defined. In 1962, monk Eusebios spoke about "true faith" and its characteristics. True faith is described as luminous and rational, elevating the intellect. Without it, there is no full moral life or healthy cultural development. Unbelief, conversely, is defined as a denial of true faith or an acceptance of materialism, which finds support in "superficial science". The latter is distinguished from "true science", practised by important scientists who believe in God.⁶⁵ A similar point is made in a series of articles in *Ο Σωτήρ*, a periodical published by the homonymous brotherhood, which highlights the cases of well-known scientists like Louis Pasteur and Werner Heisenberg and their faith in God to demonstrate that "true science" does not lead to atheistic views.⁶⁶

What was also important for these authors was to show the complementary character of the science-religion relationship. Thus, on the one hand, the periodical *Αγιορειτική Βιβλιοθήκη* argued that without religious and moral values, science loses its true orientation and becomes blind dogmatism, while religion without science loses its ability to access the secular reality – if faith cannot prove itself to be reasonable, it becomes superstition. Therefore, religious

⁶⁴ Aimilianos Timiadis (metropolitan), "Η αθεια επείγον πρόβλημα ποιμαντικό," *Εκκλησία* 47, no. 24–25 (1970): 491–92.

⁶⁵ Eusebios (monk), "Περί Πίστεως," *Αγιορειτική Βιβλιοθήκη* 27, no. 305–6 (1962): 64–65; 27, no. 307–8 (1962): 104–6; 27, no. 309–10 (1962): 163–66; 27, no. 311–12 (1962): 237–40.

⁶⁶ Methodios (metropolitan), "Οι μεγάλοι επιστήμονες διαβάζουν το Ευαγγέλιον, αλλά δεν το παρερμενεύουν, ούτε το προπαγανδίζουν: Οι προπαγανδισται διχάζουν τους Χριστιανούς," *Αγ. Ιάσων και Σωσίπατρος* 25, no. 12 (1960): 165–67; Germanos Polyzoides (bishop), "Η θρησκευόμενη επιστήμη ο καλύτερος σύμμαχος," *Ανάπλασις*, no. 101 (1962): 7–14.

education is considered a prerequisite for scientific practice; without it, an educated person or a scientist is a harmful or useless member of society.⁶⁷

From this perspective of a possible harmonious relationship between science and religion, a more positive theological discourse on Darwinism was gradually introduced. Theology professor Evangelos Theodorou argues, in the periodical *Εφημέριος*, published by the Holy Synod, for a plausible convergence of Darwinism and Christian teaching, given that elements of Darwinian theory (except for the origin of humankind) are implied in the Bible and can be decoded. He points out that the line of Creation in the Bible, from primitive animals through mammals to the creation of human beings, reveals a kind of evolution directed by God, which even the church fathers have acknowledged. In support of his argument, he observes the allegedly inconclusive character of Darwinian theory on how to define the evolution mechanism and the untrustworthiness of palaeontology to deliver evidence to support it, especially the Darwinian theory on the origin of humankind.⁶⁸

The perspective behind a special issue on atheism in the periodical *Σύνορο* was different. The periodical, which had a rather short lifetime – it was published from 1964 until the onset of the dictatorship in 1967 – was the initiative of a group of young theologians representing the so-called “generation of the 1960s” in theology. They were determined not only to introduce the modern theological discourse following the latest trends in international theological literature (the theological movements in the Christian West and the theological thought of the Russian diaspora) but also to challenge the dominant scholasticist and pietistic approach.⁶⁹ The group was convinced that Orthodox theology should be part of the social experience, though they did not share any concerns related to the political situation of their times.⁷⁰ Therefore, their openness to a dialogue with Marxism never seems to fulfil a proper response to the challenge since they were interested more in the salvation of Marxists’ souls. What they did manage, however, was to not succumb to the allure of anticommunism that was unceasingly creeping into Greek society at the time.

⁶⁷ M.C., “Θρησκεία και επιστήμη,” *Αγιορειτική Βιβλιοθήκη* 26, no. 293–94 (1961): 32–33.

⁶⁸ Evangelos D. Theodorou, “Η χριστιανική θρησκεία και η θεωρία της εξελίξεως,” *Εφημέριος* 9, no. 20 (1960): 724–27; 9, no. 21 (1960): 774–77; 9, no. 22 (1960): 807–10.

⁶⁹ George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou, “Augustine and the Orthodox: ‘The West’ in the East,” in *Orthodox Readings of Augustine*, ed. George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou (Crestwood: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2008), 27–36; Pantelis Kalaitzidis, “Από την ‘επιστροφή στους πατέρες’ στο αίτημα για μια σύγχρονη ορθόδοξη θεολογία,” *Σύναξη*, no. 113 (2010): 25–39.

⁷⁰ Dimitrios Moschos, “Theology and Politics in Contemporary Greece: A Missed Opportunity for the Greek Theology of the 1960s,” *Ecumenical Review* 70, no. 2 (2018): 309–21.

The special issue on atheism presented several accounts. Among them, the author Dina Kouroukli reflects on the de-Christianisation and atheism of the modern era and the need to make the meaning of the terms clearer and to set straight the problems confronted by modern society. She presents the account of the French philosopher, theologian and Roman Catholic priest Georges Morel, as expressed in the French periodical *Études*. Morel, being also interested in Marxist authors, was among the first theologians who attempted to politicise religious issues. His discussion focuses on Marxist atheism, which is said to represent the “dogmatic type”. According to the author, any attempt to logically justify the nonexistence of God leads to a dogmatic assumption, a typical example being Marxist atheism. The idea of God is defined as a reflection of the human conception of historical and cultural conditions. By accepting an empirical conception of God as a product of these conditions, Marxism implies the absolute dependence of human consciousness on these conditions. At the same time, Marxism supports that humans can exert an influence on historical materialism. But as fundamental human values are assumed to be unaffected by material determination, the author questions why the idea of God is excluded in Marxism. Furthermore, he discusses the different types of atheism. There is atheism as an expression of laziness to face up to the important issue of religious faith, and then atheism is also closely related to agnosticism and anticlericalism. Kouroukli concludes by arguing that the discussion on atheism should be viewed as a part of the wider debate between tradition and modernism as different ontological ways of existence.⁷¹ In the same special issue, Olivier Clément, the French Orthodox theologian, delivers a psychological analysis of the phenomenon of atheism. The latter is depicted in terms of the distorted perception of God as a “sadist father” and Christianity as a religion of terror and punishment. Both are viewed to be the result of the adoption of a Jewish way of thinking and a “Socratic” understanding of the Christian faith. Atheism is defined as a redemptive patricide. It is also perceived as a reaction against medieval piety that projected the idea of God as a sovereign monarch who wanted to punish whomever disobeyed him and against a normative morality based on the intellect and the hopeless desire for individual salvation. The meaning of the Cross is said also to be distorted: Christ’s sacrifice becomes an answer to God’s rage instead of a manifestation of his love for humans. Salvation is no longer presented as liberation from death and an answer to the question of the meaning of life, but a liberation from the whims of the temper of a furious God. Even the image of Christ has allegedly been biased: from the heroic, fierce and victorious Jesus of the Gospel, he has become a passive, reluctant and failed idealist. For Clément, atheists were

⁷¹ Dina Kouroukli, “Σύγχρονες απόψεις για τον αθεϊσμό,” *Σύνορο*, no. 35 (1965): 14–20.

no more than the victims of that distortion and it was up to the Christians to give them back their hope.⁷²

In 1969, the discussion on atheism was further enriched with a new term and a new aspect. Metropolitan Irenaios in *Χριστός Κόσμος*, a periodical published by the Metropolis of Kisanos and Selinos, refers to “false religions”, a term used to describe ideologies with church-like organisational structures, doctrines and sacred texts. According to him, such ideologies, though they deny the Christian religion, express the inherent human need to believe in something. There are several types of “false religions”: (i) the religion that deifies the nation and the race (this includes nationalism and national socialism); (ii) the religion of classes and political parties (he refers to the proletariat in Marxist theory that is idolised and replaces the transcendental god); (iii) the religion (worship) of leader figures such as dictators and cult founders; (iv) the religion of science (he refers to the elevation of science to a form of idolatry, often involving the concept of a “superman”), and (v) the religion of neohumanism (the latter views humans as inherently worthy and capable of goodness and self-improvement without the need for divine intervention).⁷³

During the 1960s, as the concept of “communist materialism” declined, the concept of “secularism” was further explored. Often depicted as a form of bourgeois atheism or termed “civil materialism” or “the materialism of the right”,⁷⁴ secularism was no longer thought to be a liberal ideology that secured the right of any Christian to believe, but a manifestation of the moral decay of the West. As radio, cinema and television became increasingly prominent in everyday life in Greece,⁷⁵ technology was to be regarded as the main agent of Western secular values. It was accused of contributing to moral corruption and the transformation of humans into materialistic consumers,⁷⁶ leading

⁷² Olivier Clément, “Το σύμπλεγμα του σαδιστή πατέρα,” *Σύννορο*, no. 35 (1965): 3–13.

⁷³ Irenaios (metropolitan), “Ο Χριστιανός και η εποχή μας Β’ Ψευδοθρησκεία των καιρών,” *Χριστός Κόσμος* 9, no. 97 (1969): 81–83.

⁷⁴ Nikolaos Psaroudakis, *Επιστημονικός σοσιαλισμός και κοινωνικός χριστιανισμός* (Athens: Christianiki Demokratia, 1966). In 1953, Psaroudakis published the newspaper *Χριστιανική Δημοκρατία* and shortly thereafter founded the Christian Democracy party. During the 1967 dictatorship, he engaged in resistance activities, for which he was persecuted and exiled. Psaroudakis expressed the movement of political theology in Greece.

⁷⁵ For more, see Sandy Sakorrafou, “Greek Orthodox Perceptions of Communication Technology: Past and Present,” *Christian Perspectives on Science and Technology*, n.s., 3 (2024): 27–60.

⁷⁶ Panteleimon Karanikolas (archimandrite), “Το σύγχρονον πνευματικόν έδαφος και ο εργάτης του Θείου Λόγου: Η εποχή ημων εποχή υλισμού,” *Εφημέριος* 3, no. 8 (1954): 215–19.

people away from the so-called “traditional Greek Orthodox way of life”.⁷⁷ This accusation was hardly new. Since the 1950s, a large part of the authors in Greek Orthodox periodicals were sceptical towards technology: not only was World War II perceived to be a lesson for the materialistic delirium the world fell into, but a result of neglecting Christian values and abandoning faith in God.⁷⁸

However, the Church of Greece quickly recognised the importance of technology and felt the need to adapt to the advancements in communication technology in the 1960s. The church’s periodical *Εφημέριος* contains several articles, mostly authored by Georgios S. Ferousis, discussing the potential benefits of technology for humanity, like higher living standards or more educational opportunities. They also point out the way modern communication technologies may serve the church’s ecumenical mission by spreading the message of the Orthodox Church to a broader audience.⁷⁹ It is noteworthy that some authors in the various Greek Orthodox periodicals shared this optimistic view on technology, recognising it as an inherent reality of humankind: God had created humans with the innate desire and ability to build and create. They regard technology as a manifestation of God’s diverse gifts to humanity to explore and thrive on Earth, even in outer space.⁸⁰ Some of them even attempt to attribute a moral dimension to technical education: its purpose is not only vocational rehabilitation but also the formation of morals and character.⁸¹ Others were, however, prone to a rather cautious attitude towards technology. For instance, in 1961, in *Εκκλησία*, theology professor Savvas Agouridis argues that while Western Christianity often perceives

⁷⁷ Christos M. Enisleidis, “Ραδιόφωνο και Πιστοί,” *Ανάπλασις*, no. 3 (1953): 41–43; Ioannis H. Konstadinidis, “Η θρησκευτική ζωή εις την σύγχρονον ελληνικήν κοινωνίαν,” *Ανάπλασις*, no. 14 (1954): 209–10; Spyros Moschonas, “Η Εκκλησία και το πρόβλημα της ψυχαγωγίας,” *Ανάπλασις*, no. 61 (1958): 45–46.

⁷⁸ “Ὁ ἀνεὺ Θεοῦ... πρόοδος!,” *Ἅγιος Παῦλος ὁ Ξηροποταμίτης* 3, no. 28–29 (1952): 444–45; “Πρόοδος (;)” *Ἅγιος Παῦλος ὁ Ξηροποταμίτης* 4, no. 40–41 (1953): 652; A.D. Konstadinopoulos, “Το μεγάλο δίδαγμα,” *Λυχνία* 9, no. 10 (1954): 142–44.

⁷⁹ Dimitrios S. Ferousis, “Νέα μέσα ποιμαντικής,” *Εφημέριος* 15, no. 9 (1966): 372–74; Dimitrios S. Ferousis, “Οἱ κλειστές πόρτες!,” *Εφημέριος* 15, no. 10 (1966): 424–25; Ferousis, “Ἐπικοινωνία ιδεῶν, ἡ αμεσότητα τοῦ ραδιοφώνου,” *Εφημέριος* 15, no. 11 (1966): 477–78; Ferousis, “Ραδιόφωνο καὶ Ὁρθοδοξία: Ἱστορία καὶ δεοντολογία,” *Εφημέριος* 15, no. 15–16 (1966): 417–22.

⁸⁰ A. Alexandridis, “Χριστιανισμός καὶ ἐπιστήμη (γύρω ἀπὸ μερικές σκέψεις τοῦ Hans Urs v. Balthasar),” *Ἀκτίνες*, no. 220 (1961): 140–45; A.F., “Ἡ ἐπιστήμη τοῦ διαστήματος,” *Ἀναπαλμοί* 1, no. 4 (1971): 62–64; A.F., “Ὁ ἄνθρωπος στὴν Σελήνη,” *Ἀναπαλμοί* 1, no. 6 (1971): 94–95; A.C. Fragos, “Διαστημικές ἐρευνες μετὰ τὴν κατάκτηση τῆς Σελήνης,” *Ἀναπαλμοί* 3, no. 30 (1973): 132–45.

⁸¹ Dimitrios K. Georgopoulos, “Σκοπὸς καὶ σημασία τῆς τεχνικῆς παιδείας,” *Ἀλιεύς*, no. 9 (1969): 13–14.

an unwarranted conflict between Christianity and scientific or technological advancement, Orthodoxy has historically maintained a more neutral position regarding specific technological developments. But, as technological progress has outpaced intellectual progress, it has become evident that while machines themselves may be neutral, their impact on human life and the human soul can be negative, despite improving living standards.⁸²

A special issue of *Ακτίνες*, published by the Christian Union of Scientists, also investigated the moral concerns about the rapid advancements in technology and the dangers they introduce to the point that they threaten the very existence of humanity. For the first time, this exploration links technology to Helleno-Christian ideals and their significance for Greek society within the framework of contemporary secular civilisation. The main argument emphasises that the response to these technological threats lies in the development of man's moral character, the consolidation of a sense of social responsibility, the strengthening of love for fellow human beings and the cultivation of virtues inherent in Helleno-Christian humanism. The latter is said to represent the union of the ancient Greek spirit with Christian teachings and ethics, creating a unique blend that illuminated Byzantium and was later transmitted to the West. In this context, ancient Greek humanism and Orthodoxy are considered pivotal creative forces in modern Greek history, decisively influencing and continuing to guide the course of the Greek nation. The vision outlined in the issue was to create Greece as a Christian model state for the rest of the world, a beacon of moral and ethical standards rooted in its rich historical and religious heritage. This vision entails a society where technological advancements are balanced with ethical considerations, ensuring that progress does not come at the cost of Christian values. It highlighted the importance of education in achieving this vision; Greek-Christian values had to be instilled in the younger generation.⁸³

This special issue on Helleno-Christian ideals was published in 1963. Somehow it was an extension of the 1946 Christian Union of Scientists' declaration, which was republished in 1960 as a reminder that not much had changed; Greece allegedly was still deteriorating politically, socially, and morally. Years later, the whole discussion would be reflected in the ideological motto

⁸² Savvas Agouridis, "Ο Χριστιανισμός και η Τεχνική Πρόοδος," *Εκκλησία* 38, no. 10 (1961): 182–83; 38, no. 11 (1961): 200–1; 38, no. 12 (1961): 221–22; 38, no. 14 (1961): 266–68.

⁸³ Ieronimos Kotsonis (archimandrite) et al., "Τύρω από το πρόβλημα: Ελληνοχριστιανικός πολιτισμός," special issue, *Ακτίνες* 26, no. 241 (1963). For education, see also Michail Kassiouras, "Κρίσις της Μαθητιώσης Νεολαίας," *Ελληνοχριστιανική Αγωγή* 17, no. 136 (1964): 45–48; 17, no. 137 (1964): 83–87.

“Greece of Christian Greeks” of the 1967 junta. The primacy of para-ecclesiastical discourse on atheism was soon restored since the ideological use of theological discourse had greater foundations (militant anticommunism, nationalism-ethnophilism) than the content of theological discourse itself. After all, the attempt of the “generation of 1960s” to renew theological discourse had neither penetrated the Orthodox Church of Greece nor reached the everyday citizen and, thus, did not bring about any great change.

Early 1970s: Back to Materialism

Until the end of the junta in 1974, the para-ecclesiastical organisations presented themselves as protectors of Orthodox Christian values, promoting moralistic behaviour in public life. They claimed the twentieth century was characterised by indifference, apathy and degradation:⁸⁴ “Technology is advancing in the world as a neobarbaric force with a raw dynamism that respects nothing. The machine threatens to crush human existence—materially, due to its immense scale and power, and spiritually, through the enslavement it imposes.”⁸⁵

Any deliberation on atheism was still strongly related to materialism (from Democritus’ theory to Ludwig Büchner’s materialism, Ernst Haeckel’s Darwinism, the spontaneous generation theory, and the theory of psychoanalysis) and was said to be due to (i) the ignorance and scientific illiteracy of the people who attempt to substitute the intuitive faith of religion with the intellectual one of science; (ii) the extreme expertise in natural sciences that leads to arrogance, bounded thinking and a limited interest in spirituality; and finally, (iii) to the moral decay of the West: the material prosperity that science and technology provided to people had transformed not only their lives but also their way of thinking, giving them a false sense of moral superiority, security and self-efficiency, being in the end selfish and indifferent to human suffering. Greek society was said to be ready to adopt anything that was said or done abroad, even to the point of violating traditional Christian moral values. Yet, there was still hope as people in Greece remained faithful, delivering a new Christian testimony in the modern world. Within this context, science was seen to be of great benefit through its complementary relationship with religion. Yet, the significance of religion remained and the deficiencies of science were supposedly still evident: there were boundaries between religion and science in their respective methods and objects of study as, on the one hand, science refers to the empirical world

⁸⁴ Christina Giatzoglou, “Ο εικοστός αιώνας,” *Αναπαλμοί* 2, no. 22 (1972): 126–28.

⁸⁵ Glykeria Vagia-Zahari, “Η κρίσις της εποχής και η αναγκαιότητα της παιδείας,” *Ο Όσιος Νίκων ο “Μετανοείτε”* 2, no. 13 (1973): 101.

and, on the other, religion answers the anguished and fundamental questions about the beginning and meaning of the world.⁸⁶

As for the anticommunist discourse, it became gradually milder, where communism was criticised not as a political and economic system but as a philosophical material system fighting idealism and religion.⁸⁷ What mattered again more was its deficiency of faith, described as a disease of the soul that afflicts much of Greek society. Unbelief and atheism were rejected as true states, as it was argued that everyone believes in something, often distorting the natural inclination of faith in God towards a person or an ideology.⁸⁸

Conclusion

This article represents a preliminary attempt to review the perception of atheism by Greek Orthodox authors from 1936 to 1974, as manifested primarily in articles in various Greek Orthodox periodicals. The authors represented certain circles within the Greek Orthodox community that shared a Christian education, political motivation and cultural beliefs. They inherited a late nineteenth-century apologetics discourse, characterised by a rather scholastic and pietistic nature that shaped their perception of the ideal of science – referred to as “true science” – and its relation to Orthodoxy as well as their perception of atheism which remained unaltered through the following century. It identified atheism with materialism as a category including its various facets: German scientific materialism, Haeckel’s materialistic interpretation of Darwinian theory and the theory of spontaneous generation. Understood as the theory or belief that

⁸⁶ Efthymios Stylios (metropolitan), “Οι καρποί της αθείας,” *Εκκλησία* 47, no. 27 (1970): 532–33; Editorial, “Τρόποι αντιδράσεως της Εκκλησίας κατά του αθεισμού και της θρησκευτικής αδιαφορίας,” *Το Φως* 2, no. 23 (1970): 145, 147; 3, no. 25 (1971): 6; 3, no. 26 (1971): 19–20; Daniel Aerakis (Archimandrite), “Ο ηθικός βίος των χριστιανών της συγχρόνου εποχής,” *Σάλπιγξ Ορθοδοξίας*, no. 48 (1972): 212–14, 221; Dimitrios Davros, “Η ασέβεια,” *Μεταμόρφωσις* 12 (1973): 3, 4, 8; I.D., “Η καταγωγή μας,” *Μεταμόρφωσις* 1, no. 7 (1973): 14; “Πίστις και των Σοφών,” *Ο Σωτήρ* 14, no. 591 (1973): 219–20; Timotheos (metropolitan), “Ο αδικημένος Χριστιανισμός – Φιλοσοφικά συστήματα,” *Αναγέννησις (Γορτύνης και Αρκαδίας)* 11, no. 119 (1973): 2590; “Ο αδικημένος Χριστιανισμός: Η επιστήμη και η πίστις,” *Αναγέννησις* 11, no. 120 (1973): 2606; S. Filaretis, “Δόγμα της πίστεως και η ηθική: Η θρησκεία και η επιστήμη,” *Ιωάννης ο Βαπτιστής* 24, no. 29 (1973): 3–5; “Λουδοβίκος Παστέρ,” *Ο Σωτήρ* 15, no. 624 (1974): 26; 15, no. 625 (1974): 45–46; 16, no. 626 (1974): 59–60; “Τα μονοπάτια της πίστεως,” *Ο Σωτήρ* 15, no. 659 (1974): 587–88; “Δεν μπόρεσα να αμφιβάλλω (Wer. Heisenberg),” *Ο Σωτήρ* 15, no. 631 (1974): 137.

⁸⁷ Editorial, *Ενοριακός Λόγος* 11, no. 111 (1974): 4.

⁸⁸ Editorial, *Ενοριακός Λόγος* 8, no. 65 (1970): 1–2.

nothing exists except matter and the material universe, materialism was seen not only as immoral but also as a weapon attacking both the Orthodox Christian religion and the Greek nation. As the social and political scene in Greece was about to change during the period under investigation (1936–1974), additional political and moral dimensions – such as historical materialism, economic determinism and secular values – were added to the materialistic interpretation of atheism, which was described as a form of “apostasy” from God.

During the Metaxas regime, antiliberalism, anticommunism and religiosity were on the rise, and atheism came to be understood in terms of communism and secularism, which were perceived as threats to Greek culture and the Orthodox Christian religion. Communism was regarded as the most dangerous manifestation of atheism, not only because it promoted a materialistic worldview but also because it was accused of denying the Christian faith, considered a constituent element of national identity. From this perspective, atheistic communism, the “denial of faith”, was identified as the cause of Greece’s moral and spiritual decline. Secularism was regarded as another manifestation of atheism, resulting from the decline of religious affiliation and the denial of Christian values. Both communism and secularism were perceived as the modern faces of the “old” materialism. While materialism was still under criticism, the arguments against it echoed nineteenth-century debates against materialism and Darwinism. Even the initiative of the Christian Union of Scientists to reshape the discourse on the relationship between religion and science, aiming to disentangle atheism from science and position science as an ally of Christianity, was drawn from the nineteenth-century tradition of scientific apologetics.

The aforementioned features of the discourse articulated within Greek Orthodox circles during the Metaxas regime continued to define the discourse in the following years. Materialism was consistently considered the foundational ideology of any atheistic discourse, as primarily analysed by members of para-ecclesiastical organisations with some members of the hierarchy becoming more engaged in this discourse.

The intense anticommunism, which dominated the conversation in the 1930s and 1940s, was partly replaced by ecclesiological and politological explanations of communist atheism in the 1950s and 1960s. At the same time, “scientific apologetics” was actively practised, highlighting the relationship between “true faith” and “true science”, and even introducing a more positive theological discourse on Darwinism. As technology advanced and modernity was introduced into Greek society, authors became increasingly interested in secular materialism and the moral motivation behind this type of atheism. Helleno-Christian ideals and their importance for Greek society within the framework of contemporary

civilisation were brought into the debate, initially as a humanist answer to the moral atheistic decline and the misuse of advanced technology.

Nevertheless, during the 1967–1974 junta, as the memory of the civil war persisted, Helleno-Christian ideals would acquire a more nationalistic character, to the loss of any reference to Helleno-Christian humanism and its cultivation of virtues. As for the anticommunist discourse, it would gradually diminish as communism came to be perceived more as another threat alongside the erosion of faith within Greek society, which was becoming the greater concern.

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