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CHRISTIAN ORTHODOX MIGRANTS IN WESTERN EUROPE

**SECULARIZATION AND MODERNITY THROUGH
THE LENS OF THE GIFT PARADIGM**

Maria Hämmerli



Christian Orthodox Migrants in Western Europe

Christian Orthodox Migrants in Western Europe: Secularization and Modernity through the Lens of the Gift Paradigm explores a religious community that has been getting increasing scholarly attention. While most of the literature in the field looks at this religious tradition in terms of its alleged inability to come to terms with modernity – due to its specific religious institutions, practices and dogma – this book takes a step back from such Western-centered and Protestant-biased analyses of religion. It addresses Orthodoxy's recent encounter with the West, modernity and secularization in the process of post-communist migrations from Eastern Europe, revealing the complicated identity redefinition and recompositions of a religious group that highly values continuity, tradition and ethnic/national belonging.

Using socio-anthropological qualitative research on Romanian, Russian, Greek and Serbian Orthodox migrants in Western Europe in a comparative perspective, this volume grasps the interplay between the institutional and the individually lived aspects of religion in their relation to the increasingly secular “conditions of belief” in Western European host countries.

This book is important for those studying or researching Orthodox Christianity, religion and migration, secularization and modernity, as well as those in related disciplines such as sociology, anthropology of religion, religious studies, political science, migration studies and cultural studies.

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Introduction

This book represents the end of a long research project, as well as the opening of a scientific journey, which seeks to cast a refreshed social scientific look at Orthodox Christianity (both in its homelands and abroad), beyond Rational Choice Theory approaches, which generally depict Orthodox Churches as interested actors trying to maximize their political power, social influence and financial capital. It also looks at the relationship of Eastern Orthodoxy to modernity beyond the normative critique of this religious tradition being unable to cope with modernity as it manifested itself in the West (e.g. through a series of separations and opposites, such as between Church and State, *cult* and *culture*, lived religion and institutional religion, the individual and the society, past and present, private and public, etc.).

The book attempts to overcome these well-entrenched biases by proposing an unconventional methodological approach to the research problem and an original conceptual framework of analysis. The former consists in taking into account both discourses *and* practices emanating from both institutional *and* individual actors, i.e. the Orthodox Churches' and people's *own* understanding of modernity and secularity, grounded on their *own* understanding of religion, which proved to be of a theological nature. Instead of "purging" the data of their theological content, I made the methodological choice of using those aspects of Orthodox theology that the actors brought in as *field data*, which further implied translating theologically embedded notions into social scientific theoretical language. As the data pointed to an Orthodox self-understanding in terms of the gift, I chose to analyze the data with the help of gift theories as developed by Marcel Mauss and his contemporary followers who attempted to apply it to religion (e.g. Camille Tarot).

The monograph is based on a socio-anthropological qualitative research on Romanian, Russian, Greek and Serbian Orthodox migrants to Western Europe (primarily located in Switzerland, but the field research is much wider) in a comparative perspective, a dimension which existing literature on Orthodox migrations generally lacks, being rather focused on particular ethnic groups (e.g. Romanians in Italy, Greeks in Germany, Russians in the United Kingdom, etc.). Unlike the bulk of scholarly literature on Orthodoxy in general, which focus heavily on the institutional aspect of the Church, its

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discourses and political involvement, the current book grasps the interplay between the institutional and the individually lived aspects of religion in their relation to the increasingly secular “conditions of belief” in Western European host countries.

To be more precise, the book focuses on the encounter of Eastern Orthodoxy with Western modernity and its most problematic (from an Orthodox point of view) outcome, secularity, through the example of religious developments among Orthodox migrants to Western Europe, with an in-depth case study of Switzerland.

I.1 Content of the volume

Before introducing the reader to the heart of the matter, let me explain the structure of the book. It has three parts: the first one contains two rather “technical” chapters, in which I discuss who the Orthodox are – both at home and in diaspora, with a special emphasis on Switzerland, and what their faith and religious practice is about. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the recent history of the main local Churches (Greek, Russian, Romanian and Serbian) whose members were part of my survey, in connection to the 20th century Orthodox migrations and settlement to Western Europe. Chapter 2 focuses on Orthodox migrations to Switzerland, with an update since my official fieldwork period which runs up to 2018. The introductory part ends with an outline of Orthodox theology, namely basics about dogma, ecclesiology, spirituality and lived religion, in Chapter 3.

The second part is theoretical and discusses a series of concepts related to the research topic: Chapter 4 reviews Orthodox representations about secularization and modernity, which it discusses against existing sociological theories of secularization. Chapter 5 follows the same path (from field to theory) in exploring the issue of the gift and operates a translation of the theologically embedded notion of gift, as it appears in the actors’ discourses and practices, into the social scientific concept of the gift inspired by Marcel Mauss and developed by MAUSS¹-related scholars (particularly Camille Tarot).

The third part of this volume consists in the analysis of the empirical data in light of the theoretical framework previously defined and deals with the way Orthodox identity, as a specific system of gift circulation, is affected by migration to and integration into non-Orthodox socio-political contexts that are determined by different gift regimes and which the Orthodox actors of this survey identify as secularized. It could be epitomized as the systematic exploration of gift permanencies and recompositions on each of the three axes of the Orthodox system of the gift: the vertical (Chapter 6), the horizontal (Chapter 7) and the longitudinal (Chapter 8).

The Conclusion of the book consists in a reevaluation of the content against the initial research objectives, as well as a reflection about the methodological and conceptual issues proposed. This makes this book the end of a particular project (a synthesis of one year and a half intense fieldwork combined with a

decade of observation and reflections about Orthodox migrations to Western Europe) and the beginning of a research agenda that aims at grasping specificities of the Orthodox religious and cultural systems and proposing methodological and conceptual tools capable of capturing and interpreting these specificities.

1.2 Genealogy and expansion of a research topic

When social scientists speak about their research, they tend to get straight to the findings, which is a reasonable way to proceed, so as to introduce the audience as quickly as possible to the heart of the matter and get to the discussion part. Efficient and rigorous as this may be, it implies that we obscure a whole range of upstream “collateral” activities and reflections, invisible in the research output, but crucial to the very execution of the research. For example, we rarely hear about what led someone to choose a particular topic, which is usually a combination of personal interests and external circumstances, about the gestation of the research problem, or about the factors that influenced the choice of the field and of the methodological tools, which are oftentimes a mixture of subjective and objective constraints. In all likelihood, we eclipse such discussions because we lack the time and the space for it, but I suspect there is more to it, something like an unacknowledged assumption that this kind of narrative is unscientific in nature. However, I deem it highly scientific to describe the *path* that leads to the production of knowledge, because the *path* is intimately connected to the *purpose* and to the *outcome*. For this reason, I will begin by taking the time and space to zoom in on the *making* of the research, before proceeding to exposing its findings.

It all started in 2006, when the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) launched a National Research Programme (NRP 58) on the theme of *Religion, State and Society in Switzerland*. One of the goals of the NRP was to stimulate research on new religious groups that had emerged with recent immigration waves and that were fighting their way through the Swiss religious landscape, alongside established Catholic and Protestant Churches. Though religion was not my field of interest (I was contemplating urban sociology and migrations at that time), the NRP 58 call for projects brought to my attention, in a different light, my earlier personal experience with a group of people who wanted to establish an Orthodox parish in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. As they had asked me to help them do a quick research about the number of Orthodox people in the country, already existing communities, jurisdictions, etc., I had come across figures of the Federal Office for Statistics (FOS) indicating that, over the decade prior to that moment (1990–2000), the number of the Orthodox population in Switzerland had nearly doubled, increasing from 71,501 in 1990 to 131,851 in 2000² and becoming the fourth-largest religious group in the country (after Catholics, Protestants and Muslims). Despite this growing numerical importance, the Orthodox community remained a very discreet presence in the Swiss society and had never attracted the attention of the academic community.

The unforeseen research potential of this experience became manifest to me. After I shared my opinion with François Hainard, then director of the Institute of Sociology in Neuchâtel with which I was affiliated, we decided to plan a research project in which we would question the social and political invisibility of the Orthodox community, by contrast with the Muslim population, which drew attention constantly in the media and in everyday life. Though one would hear in the media about ex-Yugoslavs (mainly Serbs and Kosovars) or Romanians, they would never be in the center of attention as Orthodox, but as ethnics or migrant citizens of a certain country. Conversely, Muslims were more visible as a religious group rather than Moroccans, Turks or Bosnians. Apart from the fact that, as Christians, the Orthodox appear less “alien” in the West, we made the hypothesis that the members of this community reached a degree of economic, cultural and institutional integration that made them look unproblematic. This became the core of our reflection, which we turned into a research project titled “Multiple Dimensions of the Integration Process of Eastern Orthodox Communities in Switzerland”,³ a four-year wonderful scholarly adventure (from 2007 to 2011), for which I am deeply grateful to François Hainard!

Initially, I planned a research centered on migration and integration issues, articulated around the following questions: if Orthodox migrants seemed to have a straightforward relation to their receiving society, was it because their parishes contributed to their integration? And if so, how? There was a further distinction between individual parish members’ strategies to integrate in Switzerland (emphasizing the role of their *religious affiliation* in the process of integration) and Orthodox religious institutions’ adjustment to the local religious landscape (relations with other religious groups and attempts to reach out to the larger society).

As I grew more familiar with the field realities, other issues became apparent, namely aspects of religious practice and identity in a migration context. When, during the exploratory phase I approached people with questions related to the resources they could access or maximize by attending their parish, they would rather explain this in terms of “spiritual gain” and point to the possibility of preserving their religious identity (continuity with the homeland) in a significantly different social and religious setting (the “West”). But how does a religious identity closely connected to its original culture and ethnicity develop in a new context? How does the Orthodox identity transform? How is it redefined in order to grow roots in a soil that does not contain its traditional “nutrients”?

By asking these questions, I drew closer to the heart of the problem, which consists in looking at Orthodox identity reconstruction in connection to the external factors that impact this process, i.e. in connection with the “conditions of belief” (Taylor, 2007) in which this process unfolds. Generally speaking, the Orthodox perceive the West as increasingly secularized and de-Christianized and culturally moving away from its Christian source. This situation is seen by some as a challenge that prevents the reconstruction and

affirmation of a clear Orthodox identity, and by others as an opportunity to bring back “authentic Christianity”.

The recurrent notion of “secularization” as a threat to religious identity, not only in spoken discourse, but also online (Orthodox blogs and websites overflow with discussions about “how to live an Orthodox life in a secular world”, including back in the Orthodox heartland), made it indispensable to examine the Orthodox view on “secularization” and, correlatively, on “religion”, since the way one describes “secularization” is directly dependent on how one defines “religion”, which is the object of secularization (Chaves, 1994).

My field experience (not limited geographically to Switzerland, but enlarged to Western Europe, and not limited to the interviews and in-site observations, but enlarged to online discourses) has revealed that Orthodox people tend to refer to their faith in terms of a gift from God or from the ancestors, which bears the moral obligation to be passed on untouched. Discourses about Orthodoxy as a gift are to be found also on the side of institutional actors I interviewed, who describe the Church as the depository and guardian of a divine gift. Moreover, the empirical evidence is underpinned by an abundant theological vocabulary centered on the gift: human life, salvation and the Church are explained as gifts of God to humanity, who is called to give back in various forms.

The aim of my research finally was to find out what elements of this gift-centered self-understanding were perceived as imperiled in the process of integration into what my informants perceived as a secular society. It is this final formulation of the research question that constituted the base of further reflection and research.

The next point I would like to take the time to discuss is my field experience: the field delimitation, the factors that influenced the field configuration, the negotiations that preceded field access, the type of data collected, the difficulties encountered on the field, etc. In other words, this is about method.

I.3 Methodological considerations

I collected data in parishes under the jurisdiction of the four major patriarchates in Eastern Europe who have a considerable presence also in Western Europe: the Patriarchate of Constantinople (PC within this text) in charge of the Greek diaspora; the Romanian Orthodox Church (*Biserica Ortodoxă Română* (BOR)⁴ within this text); the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR within this text), then newly reintegrated in the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC within this text), the Moscow Patriarchate (MP within this text) and the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC within this text).

The main factor that shaped the way I conducted fieldwork was that I had to deal with a religious group that had never been studied before in Switzerland and that had attracted little academic attention in Western Europe in general. Badly lacking literature and research predecessors on the topic, I was venturing into uncharted waters. Whatever information I could find about the

Orthodox, it had to do rather with religious beliefs and practices described in a more or less theological fashion or with ecclesiological issues specific to a migration context. However insightful, the above-mentioned existing literature was by far not sufficient for me to understand who were the Orthodox people and Churches in the West (and even less so in Switzerland), how they related to their receiving contexts, and how they (re)constructed their religious identity in a non-Orthodox context. Therefore, parallel to my pre-established survey schedule, I had to tackle also issues related to the history of the Orthodox presence in Switzerland and in the West more generally: waves of migration, patterns of settlement, reorganization of religious life, reception in the country, relations with other religious groups, etc.

Furthermore, in order to grasp more deeply the state of affairs of the Orthodox communities in Switzerland, I expanded the focus to the larger Western European context, especially cases of countries where the Orthodox presence is numerically more significant (Italy, the United Kingdom, France, Germany) and has deeper historical roots. But here again, I stumbled against scarce social scientific literature, a gap that I tried to fill with short visits to Orthodox parishes or monasteries when on private journeys in neighboring countries. This play of focus finally led me to add a third layer of investigation to my initial field research plan, i.e. a brief look into the Orthodox countries themselves, the original or sending countries. I followed the general developments in the Orthodox Churches of Russia, Romania, Greece and Serbia, with a particular focus on these Churches' relationship to what they called their respective "diasporas". Apart from consulting existing scholarship in the home countries, I also followed the official websites of these Churches and did small "incursions" in parishes in Romania, Serbia and Greece when on holidays or traveling for personal purposes in the region.

I would not describe this as a comparative approach that would put into perspective Orthodox in Switzerland with their coreligionists in Western Europe and in the homeland. It is rather zooming in and out on the research object in order to see it embedded in larger social realities. There is, however, a comparative dimension in this research, but it applies to the various ethnic Orthodox communities in Switzerland.

The second factor that shaped the geography of my fieldwork is a linguistic one. With its four national languages (French, German, Italian and Rumanth), Switzerland is a complex multilingual country. Add to that the ethnically diverse Orthodox communities, who bring their own linguistic specificities: apart from their respective national languages, Russians and Greeks celebrate religious services in older idioms, such as Church Slavonic and Koine Greek. The bottom line is that one needs to be a polyglot in order to be able to thoroughly cover this reality. As a native Romanian speaker, I had excellent knowledge of French and English and was in a very good command of Serbian. For the rest of the mentioned languages I only had a beginner or intermediate level of linguistic knowledge, which at that time I did not estimate sufficient to conduct in-depth interviews, but proved to be more than helpful

for reading parish bulletins or engaging in ice-breaking conversations. This explains why this research focused mainly on the Orthodox community in the French-speaking part of Switzerland (Lausanne, Neuchâtel, Geneva and Vevey) and to a lesser extent in the German-speaking area (Zurich and Bern), where I visited all four jurisdictions, but did interviews only in Romanian and Serbian parishes. I also insisted on covering, even if only partially, the German-speaking part, because I sought to overcome an unfortunate (and almost fateful) limitation specific to social scientific qualitative research in the Swiss academic landscape, whereby scholars often restrict their research field to the region where they feel most at home linguistically.

1.3.1 Sources of data collection

I spent one year and a half (from early 2008 to June 2009) immersed in my field: I did lots of *observation* and *participant observation* in nine parishes (out of the fourteen that I followed closely) while attending religious services, processions, commemorations, meals or “coffee hour” after Sunday liturgy, festivals, conferences, parish board meetings, parish general assemblies, Sunday school classes, and workshops. When first personal contact was established with priests and lay people (with various degrees of attachment and involvement in parish life), I also proceeded to more formal survey tools. I did a number of *60 semi-directed interviews* with clergy (priests and bishops), choir members, lay leaders or regular parishioners attending services with no further involvement in the parish life.

The interview canvas required them to tell their migration story since the moment they decided to leave their country until their settling down and how this intersected with the parish they attended. The interview grid also included questions about their participation in parish life, about parish-based networks that might have had an impact on their integration trajectory and about the transmission of the faith to the new generations. Many informants reacted to my research problem centered on integration by saying it was a fake problem: they considered they were successfully integrated and mastered the cultural codes of their receiving country and pointed to the fact that the true concern was what will become of the Orthodox communities in the West in the future. Consequently, I enriched my interviews with questions about religious identity, which I tried to structure at a minimum, adopting an inductive method of letting the field tell its own story.

The length of the interviews and the amount of data research participants provided varied significantly: some were very open and talked easily about the topics I brought into discussion, others were rather “thrifty” or simply no storytellers. But in both cases, much more interesting information was delivered after my recording device was off and taken away from the table than during the interview itself. This pointed to the fact that speaking about Church-based relationships, clergy or personal religious practice was rather an intimate topic for the Orthodox. Thus the most exciting and meaningful

data came out of *casual discussions*, while drinking and eating with people outside formal interview situations. The meal and socializing after the religious services turned out to be an ideal space to let go for those informants who were reluctant to leave a material trace of their discourse. I will get back to this in the next section of this chapter, which deals with the difficulties of doing fieldwork with the Orthodox.

I collected data from among people that sociological terminology commonly designates as “highly practicing”, i.e. those who frequently attend religious services. The nature of my initial research question (i.e. parish-based networks and forms of social capital channeled through them) brought me in contact with people involved in parish life and activities, which are also regular churchgoers. Only on special occasions like Easter, Christmas, parish feasts, conferences and other festivals, attended by far more numerous people could I get feedback from “occasionally practicing Orthodox”. By force of circumstances, the bulk of my interviews reflect rather the outlook of the “highly practicing”.

Though there may be a tendency to associate the “highly practicing” with the more traditional, conservative, close-to-the-institution views and the “occasionally practicing” with more liberal and secular views, my field experience provided surprising examples of mixtures and inconsistencies that make this dichotomy rather simplistic: some of the people who attended liturgy weekly and were deeply involved in parish life organization were very critical to the institution and its hierarchy, to strict fasting and monasticism; others were divorced and lived in free unions; one was a gynecologist performing abortions; two other people who were pillars in their parishes were not even Orthodox. Conversely, among the “occasionally practicing” I met people who, though not necessarily able to argue theologically for their convictions, were highly respectful of monastics and Church hierarchy, believed fasting was intrinsic to an authentic spiritual life, women would wear head coverings while in church, others would go for pilgrimages to places where they could venerate relics of saints, and many would sport small paper icons in their wallets and cars. I will keep using the distinction between “highly practicing” and “occasionally practicing” for reasons that have to do with simplifying categories, but the reader should bear in mind the nuances I mentioned.

Apart from questioning the Orthodox themselves, I wanted to have a glimpse at how they were perceived by the locally established religious groups. I therefore interviewed representatives of ecumenical bodies in which the Orthodox took part in each canton where the parishes I surveyed were situated.

In 2009 and 2015, I attended the Western European Orthodox Congress, a tri-annual gathering of several hundreds of Orthodox people living in the West, which offers conferences and workshops centered on a given theme: in 2009, keynote addresses were focused on man’s use of Creation and ecology-related topics; in 2015, the congress proposed a reflection on how to be an Orthodox in today’s society in the West. These were two major events that not only enlarged my empirical knowledge of the Orthodox presence in Western Europe, but

also made me more aware of their preoccupations, vision and projects for a more successful implantation in a new socio-religious environment.

Parallel to participant observation, interviews and informal discussions, I diversified the sources of data collection with what one could call *online observation* of a few Orthodox media based in the West, i.e. regular follow-up of news websites (e.g. <http://www.orthodoxie.com>, <http://www.theorthodoxchurch.info> and more recently <http://www.orthodoxtimes.com>), blogs that present Orthodox private opinions on various topics (<http://www.publicorthodoxy.org>, <http://www.orthodoxethos.com>, <http://www.orthodoxologie.blogspot.com>, <http://www.egliserusse.eu>, etc.), blogs and websites that inform about the Orthodox presence in specific countries (<http://www.orthodoxie.ch>, <http://www.orthodoxengland.org.uk>, <http://www.ortodossia.it>, <http://www.orthodoxie-in-deutschland.de>, etc.). Though not dealing specifically with the situation of the Orthodox communities in Switzerland, these websites gave me a large perspective of what was happening in the wider Orthodox world and made me reflect on how these general concerns were replicated (or not) in the life and work of the parishes in Switzerland. This was by far more informing and revealing than the follow-up of all the websites of the parishes I surveyed, which restricted their online activity to contact details, information about the Orthodox faith, some spiritual texts, liturgical service schedule and, in some cases, also the history of the parish.

Moreover, the short incursion into the Orthodox presence online revealed how Orthodoxy espouses new media and its opportunities and modes of expression, despite a parallel discourse that is highly critical of modern technology and its invasive and addictive side-effects.

1.3.2 On doing research with the Orthodox

One of the paradoxes I encountered when doing research on Orthodox Churches was the realization that nothing was really defined or systematized, yet everything seemed to ... function, and was said to have worked so for centuries. This is well illustrated in an anecdote Orthodox priests like to tell about a Jew who wanted to convert to Christianity. As he could not make up his mind which denomination to choose, he went to visit a few parishes: with the Roman Catholics he was overwhelmed by the greatness of cathedrals, the impeccable hierarchical distribution of charisma in the Church and the rationalization of theological reflection. With the Protestants, our Jew was also impressed with the well-organized religious services, the scrupulous scriptural analyses and the freedom of consciousness that reigned in these Churches. Last, he went to attend an Orthodox liturgy, and there he found total chaos: one priest was performing the liturgy, chanting all along, and another was listening to confessions. There were no pews and no chairs to sit on and people were moving freely in the church, venerating icons, burning candles, reading prayer books, coming in and out, running after children, etc.... At the end of the service, the Jew went to ask the priest about why he

had performed all those rituals. “Because this is how we’ve always done it”, blatantly came the answer. The Jew pondered for a while before making up his mind and then said to himself: “this Church is such a mess! But since she survived untouched for so many centuries, then *she* must be the true one!”

Even the most basic activity such as counting the members of the Orthodox communities ends up in a dilemma, which is difficult to solve partly because Orthodox communities are a relatively recent reality in the West and the continuing influx of new migrants constantly changes the social composition of parishes, their activities and pastoral care orientation. For instance, older parishes, which used to have economically, culturally and linguistically well-integrated ethnic members, started receiving new waves of co-ethnic Orthodox fellows, for whom the Church needed to provide some form of integration assistance, new catechism methods and a more ethnically centered parish life. These frequent adjustments and transformations affect the way Orthodox people approach their religious identity and, on a different level, also the way one conducts fieldwork in Orthodox parishes.

Fortunately, my research did not aim at producing quantitative data, thus the counting issue did not affect my research plan nor findings. When needed, I referred to the statistics provided by the Swiss FOS. Yet this revealed a significant fact about Orthodox identity: while taken for granted in the home countries, in a migration situation, there arises the necessity to define it. This involves self-reflectivity on the side of the actors, in relation to the new social and religious realities they encounter in their host countries.

Another paradox that struck me with some Orthodox clergy was their sheer reluctance to be transparent about parish records, documents (e.g. statutes) or archives (where they existed!), contrasting with their willingly discussing church politics, confidential matters of the parish life or even allowing me to attend parish board meetings. Likewise, many lay people would deliver a very plain discourse during the interview, but richly explain and detail their narration in an informal post-interview situation, often adding: “this is not for the recorder”. I was surprised that the respondents assigned such highly confidential nature to the reported information, which did not seem in any way compromising to me or endangering human relations. My recorded interviews are therefore balanced against the post-interview “supplement”, which often modified or connoted the recorded version of the informants’ speech.

In order to remain loyal to their wish for total confidentiality regarding our private communications, I will not reveal here any names (I will mention the ethnic origin though, because this will be relevant for comparing different ethnic communities). I understood this reluctance to a survey situation as a reminiscence of the communist traumatic past. Significantly, I met with such attitudes mainly in Russian and Romanian parishes, and to a much lesser extent in Serbian and Greek parishes, and among elderly migrants rather than among the younger ones. The former are generations who suffered directly from communist hostility to religion and for whom an investigation situation awakes bad memories.

1.3.3 Accessibility of the research field

After selecting the parishes I wanted to survey from an online repertoire (<http://www.orthodoxie.ch>), I contacted parish priests by letters explaining to them my research project and asking their permission to do interviews with members of their parishes, upon their recommendation. None of my letters to the clergy has ever received a reply, nor did most of my subsequent emails. ... And the priests politely dismissed me on the phone, leaving me a meager hope to talk to me “after Holy Liturgy on Sunday”. My perfect methodological plan was ruined and I had to start my empirical research by attending religious services and the meals or “coffee hour” with parishioners.

I initiated my field investigation in Russian parishes, where I did not have a red-carpet reception. Some fellow academics to whom I talked about this difficulty I was experiencing, hastily put this on the account of alleged narrow-mindedness and fear of science and modernity characteristic to conservative religious groups. At times, I would also comfort myself with this idea, because it was relieving me from my own responsibility before a human reality that resisted my attempts to inspect it so closely. Yet, the more I spent time on the field and the more access I had to the subjectivities of the actors under study, the more I understood the deeper reasons for the initial unresponsiveness and the reluctance of some informants to allow me to record their direct speech.

This had to do first with the way I introduced myself, as a social scientist working with a research institute on a project funded by the SNSF within a larger NRP on religious communities in Switzerland. I exposed my research problem, which consisted in accounting for how Orthodox parishes contributed to their migrant members’ integration in Switzerland and for how their religious identity changed in a migration context. What appeared to me as a professional identity securing high research quality, confidentiality and liability, read to them as a form of soft power and State intrusion into the privacy of their parish life and of their religious identity. Moreover, Russians spontaneously (and precipitately) associate sociology with Marxism, which is a reminder of the tragic recent history of their country. While not doubting my academic skills, some people perceived me as a State representative rather than a harmless scholar, as I thought I was, naively unaware of the potential political implications State-funded research could bear. The Orthodox communities’ reluctance to the State further challenged my preconceived idea that their Churches were religious institutions opportunistically seeking company and protection from the State.

Second, I presupposed that being myself a migrant and Orthodox will provide a common ground with my informants that would create a climate of confidence and openness. Yet, it did not turn out to qualify me enough to be “one of them” to facilitate my access to the field: for example, being something else than Russian made me rather an outsider. Moreover, me being

Orthodox and moving from one parish to another created the suspicion that I might be a kind of “ecclesial spy” or a potential rumor and gossip spreader.

Field access was also conditioned by the authority structure of the Orthodox Church: invariably, the parishioners asked me if I had the blessing of the priest or of the bishop to interview them. Though I had first to secure the agreement of the clergy before actually starting fieldwork in a given parish, I tried to avoid interviewing exclusively the parishioners recommended by the clergy, so as to avoid an institutional bias in the choice of informants.

I.4 Methodological and conceptual originality

As I mentioned in the previous section, I, like many other fellow academics studying Orthodox Christianity, came across the difficulty to answer the question, “Who is Orthodox?”. Notwithstanding the fact that, as a rule, defining religious identity may turn into a conundrum in any case, I believe the difficulty of the endeavor in the case of the Orthodox Christians stems also from the way we approach the question: by attempting to outline Orthodox identity in terms of belief, theological literacy, frequency of religious service attendance, separation of the religious and political spheres, etc., we expect to grasp Eastern Christian religiosity with categories shaped by and available in classical Western-centered social sciences and religious studies. Anthropological and ethnographic research indicates that for most Orthodox natives in Eastern Europe, their religious identity is less a matter of distinct individual choice based on a set of beliefs rationally analyzed before pronouncing adherence to them, less a matter of formally belonging to a religious institution that defines the faith. It is rather a matter of being part of a social, cultural and symbolic universe (Tomka, 2006; Hann and Goltz, 2010). In many contexts, this makes it hard to distinguish between religious and national/ethnic identity.

The difficulty we stumble upon when trying to come up with a valid criterion for “counting” Orthodox people reveals therefore a certain degree of inadequacy with regard to our methodological and conceptual toolbox. Given that Orthodoxy is a relatively recent object of social scientific study,⁵ it is sensible that the earlier wave of research be reliant on existing methodological and conceptual apparatus. However, in order to advance the production of knowledge about a religious group that is new in the radar of social science, it is further necessary to allow for some conceptual and methodological creativity. As Timothy Carroll (2017: 9) puts it,

insofar as the discipline is only willing to engage a cultural Other with recourse to existing schema of analytical tools, disciplinary discussion will stagnate. If, however, the discipline is willing to critique its own analytical tools in the face of a new Other ... and incorporate new analytical tools offered by the Other..., then the discipline may move forward.

The present work suggests that we could grasp a more adequate understanding of Eastern Christianity by *taking into account the actors' own definitions and self-identifications*, i.e. to look at Eastern Christians in their own terms, in line with Hann and Goltz (2010) and Carroll (2017). However, basing the analysis on so-called “emic” understandings and representations, does not imply adopting a “native” point of view, nor taking the discourses and practices observed at face value. It implies rather to design a theoretical framework that has the capacity to integrate the actors' discourses and practices (i.e. the data brought forth by the field itself), instead of eliciting the production of data against the background of a pre-established theoretical framework.

Taking into account the actors' own definitions and self-identifications brings us into the heart of two major debates. First, the famous *emic-etic* distinction that did not cease to haunt social sciences. Originally used in linguistics, as concepts describing sounds in a language as the natives produce them (emic), versus analyzing sounds according to a cross-cultural system of notation produced by non-native observers (etic), the pair of opposites emic-etic was introduced in the social scientific study of religion by Clifford Geertz (Mostowlansky and Rota, 2016), who recast it as “experience-near” and “experience-far” concepts. The first term designates concepts that an informant “might himself naturally and effortlessly use to define what he or his fellows see, feel, think, imagine, and so on”; the latter is used by experts to “forward their scientific, philosophical, or practical aims” (Geertz, 1974, in Mostowlansky and Rota, 2016: 324).

While emic and etic approaches are not mutually exclusive in Pike's work, since they are exogenous constructions of an observer, they seem to function dialectically in the field of social scientific study of religion, where, moreover, emic is conflated with the *insider*, i.e. religious practitioner, and etic is equated with the *outsider*, i.e. rational secular (MacCutcheon, 1999, in Mostowlansky and Rota, 2016). Therefore, parallel to the emic-etic distinction and sometimes interlocked with it, we have another pair of opposites, namely *insider-outsider*: is the practitioner-researcher able to deliver an objective account of the facts he monitors? *A contrario*, can the outsider really understand the deep motivations of the actors under study? Researchers on both sides produce a whole range of self-legitimizing discourses⁶ around these contrasting terms, which echo an old philosophical dichotomy about the possibility of knowledge, deeply ingrained in social sciences: on the one hand, the Romantic idea that access to knowledge is possible only by reliving subjective experience and emotions; on the other hand, the positivistic approach to knowledge as the result of “cold-blooded”, neutral and rational observation of reality.

I believe, with J.S. Jensen, that the distinction insider-outsider and its falsely coterminous pair of opposites emic-etic “obscures more than it discloses” (Jensen, 2011: 30). It distracts from important things such as “the quality of research, the critical data collected, and the responsibility we have to our research communities, regardless of our beliefs” (Aston, Cornish and Joyce, 2015: 2).

A possible solution to this conundrum is to consider research as a *relationship*, which implies that, whether a practitioner or not, the researcher engages in a sort of negotiation between himself, the field, his informants and his theoretical or methodological toolbox. In the end, all parties involved in the research contribute to the final “narrative” in one way or another. None of the participants (practitioners, researchers and the academic community) are clearly inside or outside the research (Aston, Cornish and Joyce, 2015). What matters is *the quality and depth of the argument*, resulting from the empirical and theoretical investigation, which can be assessed by the academic community by comparison with existing scholarship.

This ties in with the second major challenge that can arise when taking into account the religious actors’ own definitions and self-identifications, namely, how to address the theological nature of the actors’ statements and discourse. The underpinning discussion here is about theology as an object of social scientific inquiry. Historically, social sciences as a scholarly enterprise have emerged and developed in reaction to the theological, i.e. Christian, explanation of and knowledge about the human being and the world, making the two disciplines turning their back to each other in a sometimes hostile and radical way. A snapshot of the relationship between theology and sociology is captured in the now classical distinction between “religious sociology” (social scientific cognition in the service of the ethical tenets of the faith) and “sociology of religion” (the objective, scientific and secular study of religion). The latter definitely took the lead in academic scholarship, invalidating the former through decades of documenting the growing social irrelevance of religion (Christianity) in the West that resulted in the construction of the secularization grand narrative.

Similarly, anthropology and ethnography, whose beginning is somewhat connected to Christian missionary activity, evolved by parting ways with Christianity, which appeared too ‘ready-at-hand’ and familiar for most American and European anthropologists, leading to the assumption that “Christianity lacks the degree of cultural alterity that has until quite recently been definitional of an apt disciplinary object” (Bialecki, Haynes and Robbins, 2008: 1140).

However, social sciences have not been hermetically closed to *other* theologies, as indicates the appropriation in ethnography and anthropology of indigenous terminology such as *hau*, *mana*, *umma*, etc., which resulted in fruitful and creative theoretical enterprises. It can thus be inferred that approaching Eastern Christianity and its specificities in its own terms, while remaining epistemologically rooted in social sciences, is not only possible, but also necessary. Anthropologists like Hann and Goltz (2010) and Carroll (2017) convincingly argued that the social scientific study of Eastern Christianity needs to take its theology into consideration when analyzing, explaining or theorizing about it. Carroll went even further and claimed that, if we want social scientific research to progress, we need to engage in dialogue *with* theology and not simply satisfy ourselves with producing a discourse *about* theology.

What would this dialogue *with* theology imply, concretely, in the case of Orthodoxy? I suppose one of the outcomes would be to *borrow terminology* (as it has already been the case with *symphonia*, which designates the ideal collaboration between the temporal/political and the transcendent/religious authorities in the State in order to reach a common good) or to create social scientific *translations* of theological terminology. Notions such as the omnipresent divine–human communion (*theosis*), the liturgical language of *mysteries* or *Tradition* have been more often than not either overlooked and ignored, or too hastily dismissed as exaggerated attachment to the otherworldly and the past and thereby as obstacles to modernization. I believe that particularly the notion of Tradition needs a deeper sociological scrutiny, one which would take into consideration the Orthodox understanding of “time” and “truth”, so as to equip social scientific language with conceptual tools capable of explaining Eastern Christianity’s relationship to its own spiritual heritage beyond a mere nostalgic, naive clinging to a distant, revoluted and idealized past.

But we also have to be realistic and be aware of the fact that the dialogue of social science with theology cannot go too far, because of their fundamental epistemological differences: the former is anchored in the axiomatic presupposition that social life can be explained (and predicted) with the help of non-theistic, this-worldly and human-related factors, generating *rational knowledge*. The latter is grounded on *revealed knowledge* about the world as the Creation of a unique, Almighty and all-loving God, who intervenes in human life and history. Therefore, theology cannot really be taken as an analyzer. I support the idea of *translation* of theologically embedded discourses into social scientific language. The present work proposes the anthropological notion of the *gift*, as expressed by Mauss and as developed by his recent followers, as one potentially relevant social scientific translation of Eastern Christian theological notions and actors’ discourses. The analysis that follows in the pages of this book will substantiate and clarify this claim. However, the present work is just an *attempt* to study the research question in this manner, an *experiment* that does not claim to reach neither the height nor the depth of the objective.

Notes

- 1 This acronym stands for *Mouvement Anti-Utilitariste en Sciences Sociales*. For more details on its history and theoretical achievements, see Chapter 8.
- 2 The source of these data is the 2000 National Census.
- 3 http://www.snf.ch/SiteCollectionDocuments/nfp/nfp58/NFP58_Schlussbericht_Hainard.pdf
- 4 BOR is the abbreviation in Romanian (*Biserica Ortodoxă Română*), which I preferred to the abbreviation derived from English, ROC (as in Romanian Orthodox Church), so as to avoid confusion with the ROC that stands for Russian Orthodox Church.
- 5 Roughly speaking, Eastern Christianity has been available as a field research after the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, or, before that, mainly in Greece.
- 6 In the case of Eastern Christianity, research is mostly done by “native” researchers, be they practicing Orthodox or simply socialized and educated in contexts marked by Orthodoxy.

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Part 1

The Context



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1 The Point of Departure

The Orthodox Heartland

This chapter will discuss recent developments in the Churches of Romania, Russia, Serbia and Greece,¹ which have the largest numbers of expatriates in Western Europe and to which belong the actors that were part of the present research. The specificity of their recent history derive from the fact that three of these Churches have been marked by several decades of communist religious persecution,² followed by a complete reversal of the situation in the early 1990s, when the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe occasioned the “return” of Orthodoxy at all levels of the public sphere and the rehabilitation of the Church as an important social actor in those countries. Orthodox countries have joined the European Union (Greece has been a longstanding member, Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007, Cyprus joined in 2004 and Serbia is bidding for membership), and this new political situation leads to the fact that the respective Churches are directly connected to and affected by European realities and other global developments.

1.1 Orthodox churches during communism

The advent of communism in Russia in 1917 was followed by a series of policies and actions overtly hostile to the Church, which finally turned into open persecution, “the greatest in extent, savagery, and duration of the whole history of the Church” (McGuckin 2011: 53). Lenin’s antireligious politics were continued by Stalin, who resorted to most unscrupulous means to isolate and subdue the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), from abusively defrocking clergy, imprisoning and killing religious leaders and intelligentsia to demolishing worship places, depriving the Church of its right to religious education and clergy training, closing down monasteries and eradicating religious symbols from the public space.³ Any direct resistance of Church members was drastically repressed, so that in less than three decades, the ROC was in a state of decay, both moral (its hierarchy and institutional bodies ended up becoming compliant to the regime) and material (in 1939, there were only 4,225 churches left in the whole of Russia compared with 80,792 in 1913 (see Lupinin, 2010)).⁴

This repressive stage was replicated in other Orthodox countries (Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania) where communist parties came to power after

WWII. The Romanian Communist Party initiated mass purges that resulted in the decimation of the Orthodox hierarchy: archbishops died suddenly after opposing the new regime's policies, many other "uncooperative" hierarchs were arrested and the clergy were forcefully retired. A new campaign struck the church in 1958–62 when more than half of its remaining monasteries were closed, more than 2,000 monks were forced to take secular jobs, and about 1,500 clergy and lay activists were arrested (out of a total of up to 6,000 in the 1946–1964 period).

The same repressive measures are to be found also in the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC), which was already very weakened during the WWII because of the blow of the *Ustashi* fascist regime in Croatia, which had killed, imprisoned or expelled fourteen out of the twenty-one Orthodox bishops, killed half of the priests and imprisoned a quarter of them (Ware, 1993). After the war, the Church was again subject to suppression, this time by the Communist government of Josip Broz Tito, who viewed it with suspicion due to the Church's links with the exiled Serbian monarchy and the nationalist *Chetnik* movement. Along with other ecclesiastical institutions of all denominations, the Church was subject to strict controls by the Yugoslav State, which prohibited the teaching of religion in schools, confiscated Church property and discouraged religious activity among the population.

Lacking energy, proper leadership (the regime generally made sure to promote submissive bishops) and international support (Orthodox ecclesiology does not allow for interference of the Church on the canonical territory of another local Church), Orthodox Churches stopped confronting the regime directly and openly. By the 1950s, the Church as an institution reached a phase of close State control of its hierarchy and administrative bodies. After a period of opposition and martyrdom, the new bishops' (and laity's) attitude was reduced to silent consent aimed at ensuring survival. The necessity to come to a compromise with the State led the Church to take refuge into a double discourse strategy: on the one hand, in formal interactions with the Party, bishops⁵ would show docility and a flattering attitude, but on the other hand, they did so in their effort to keep the Church alive.

It is important to add that the nature of the collaboration with the regime has to be balanced against the awareness that the Church was not in a position to negotiate or to choose, but was rather constrained to find ways of looking unthreatening and of surviving. This is a crucial fact we should keep in mind in order to avoid hastily qualifying the Church's activity during communism as sheer opportunistic collaboration and compromise. In this sense, it might be useful to quote Trevor Beeson's research reports on religious persecution in Eastern Europe in the 1970s:

pious ideas about martyrdom should not be allowed to conceal the disastrous element in the destruction of Christian institutions and individuals. From the personal point of view some at least of the Russian church leaders might well have found martyrdom the more desirable course in

the 1920s – and since. Their decisions to bend to secular authority were certainly not easy ones, for they were likely to be faced not only with the continuing assaults of the State from without, but also with the accusations and scorn of those within the Church, who believed them to have betrayed the Gospel. Yet the result of their anguish is to be seen in the existence in the Soviet Union of a Church which, though shackled and handicapped in many ways, is still alive and retains the basic character of Russian Christianity.

(Beeson, 1974: 58–59)

Furthermore, it would be far-fetched to reduce the life of the Orthodox Churches during communism to their hierarchs' collaboration with the regime or to assume that Party propaganda was a major concern for the Orthodox Churches. The praises of the social realizations of the communist leaders were often hypocritical façade statements, which not only the Church had to comply with, but all institutions in the country. Parallel to the Church's cooperative attitude in official interactions with the State and the Party, there was also a rich resistance activity going on, either in a more private way (*samizdat* literature,⁶ interiorized religiosity) or underground, in monasteries and through charismatic religious intellectuals. In Yugoslavia, the *Bogomoljci* (literally "God-prayers") movement, which started in the 1930s as a peasant lay association critical of the West, urban lifestyle, intelligentsia and secularization, was channeled by the Church through the mediation of the charismatic bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, and became the backbone of the Church after WWII, providing it many seminarians and monastics with a clearly dissident force (Binns, 2002; Aleksov, 2008).

An example of resistance in Romania is the Burning Bush movement, created in 1945 at the Monastery Antim in Bucharest. Monks, theologians and other young intellectuals gathered regularly in the library hall of the monastery and discussed theological and spiritual matters, including techniques to practice the *Jesus prayer*. In 1948, the meetings of the group were forbidden by law and later its members were arrested and condemned to twenty-five years of hard labor.

Though communist prisons and gulags were for many a place of physical and moral perdition, a very rich memoir literature (similar to Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*) reports high religious activity and conversions in the concentration camps. These writings depict religion as the provider of resilience in the context of hostile and dehumanizing treatment. Detention turned for many into a mystical experience, for which they expressed gratitude, e.g. prison memoirs titled "Blessed be thou, prison" (originally in French – "Bénié sois-tu, prison", by Nicole Valéry (1991)) or "The Happiness Diary" (originally in Romanian – "Jurnalul fericii", by Nicolae Steinhardt (1991)).

The Churches' tacit or open obedience to the communist States in Eastern Europe stirred strong reactions among the expatriate population: an important part of the Russian émigrés in the West decided to separate from

the hierarchy in Moscow, giving rise to two new jurisdictions: the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) and another smaller group that sought canonical shelter under the Patriarchate of Constantinople (the Exarchate for Orthodox Parishes of Russian Tradition in Western Europe).⁷ The same suspicion that the State might use the Church to control the national diaspora arose among the Serbian Orthodox, who instituted the so-called “Free Church” in diaspora, and the Romanian Orthodox, among whom some conceded their parishes either to the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) or to the Patriarchate of Constantinople (in Western Europe).

The Orthodox Church of Greece (hereafter OCG) was geographically and ideologically outside the Iron Curtain. As such, it did not suffer directly from communism, yet was haunted by its specter for many years. Being aware of the religious persecutions in the Soviet Union, immediately after WWII the OCG allied with anti-communist forces in the country. In the political sphere, the combat against left-wing political forces led to the initiation of a military regime (known as the *Colonels' Junta*) in 1967, who promoted a “Greece for Christian Greeks”. The Junta privileged the Church because it could draw on the ideals of Orthodoxy for the “moral regeneration of the Greek nation” (Molokotos-Liederman, 2003b).

But the Church suffered not only from the political developments in the country, but also as a consequence of tremendous post WWII social change: the rapid urbanization of the country, accompanied by the embracing of Western lifestyle by the ever-larger middle-class population, found the Church unprepared to minister to the new generation. With a high rate of uneducated clergy and structured along traditionalist patterns, the Church was not in a position to adapt fully to the new social reality. The “brotherhoods of theologians”, independent semi-monastic organizations of clerics and lay people, played an important role in shaking the inertia of the Church, by expressing criticism about its uncreative style of pastoring and lobbying for improving clergy education (Makrides, 2010). This opposition brought about some “significant developments in the structure of the official Church, but also in religious life and spirituality” (Makrides, 2010: 261). The brotherhoods rediscovered the patristic tradition and the Orthodox mystics of the Byzantine period and insisted on people searching for a deep understanding of the liturgy. The influence of the brotherhoods contributed also to the revival of monasticism in Greece, especially in the Athonite community, which had been in decline for a long period.

The OCG kept its relations to the Orthodox Churches on the other side of the Iron Curtain, though not always without frictions, caused not so much by political issues, but rather by the “historical cleavage between the Greek and the Slavic-controlled Orthodox Churches” (Makrides, 2010: 262). Significant contacts were maintained in the field of theological education though: Orthodox clerics or lay people from the Eastern block were able to study theology in Greece, to the extent they were granted a passport and permission from the political authorities. Many Serb clerics took advantage of the more

“liberal” form of communism in ex-Yugoslavia and made their graduate studies in Athens and Thessaloniki, some of whom later became bishops.

1.2 Post-communist developments

In the aftermath of the fall of the communist regime in Eastern Europe, or sometimes precipitating its demise, Orthodox Churches came back to the public sphere in an unexpected vigorous way, with priests and bishops blessing the beginning of political and cultural events and taking part in debates concerning economic and political decisions. Polls indicate high rates of religious identification with Orthodoxy (85.9% in Romania;⁸ 90% in Greece; 53.1% in Russia),⁹ relatively high rates of regular religious practice (43% of Greeks and 42% of Romanians attend religious services at least once a month)¹⁰ and, more significantly, high rates of trust in the Church.

All these developments came as a surprise for scholars of religious studies and political science, who at that time were heavily documenting the disappearance of religion, as a “natural” consequence of modernity, industrialization, urbanization, education and separation of Church and State. Some scholars qualified the resurgence in society and the high rates of self-identification with Orthodoxy as “religious revival” (Greely, 1994, 2002; Evans and Northmore-Ball, 2012); others have expressed doubt about the genuineness of this process (Pankhurst, 2002; Rousselet, 2013), arguing that it was rather a nominal, not far-reaching, reaffiliation to Orthodoxy, under the effect of the general euphoria caused by the end of a dictatorial regime. Krindatch (2004) warned about the complexity of the process especially in Russia, and of the potentially normative requirement that religious self-identification be coherent with personal belief (orthodoxy) and regular religious practice (orthopraxy).

It was suggested also that Orthodoxy was so successful after the fall of communism in Eastern Europe because it was the only ideology available at hand to replace belief in atheism and communism, especially in Russia. However, as recent research shows, the presupposition that atheism and communism were widely embraced ideals was a myth: though atheism benefited from all conditions to replace Orthodoxy (e.g. the monopoly on the ideological market and all the necessary financial and material means to reach out to all social classes), it failed to provide a binding, engaging alternative (Froese, 2004). Despite bringing a strong blow to Orthodoxy and weakening it severely, it failed to replace it. Orthodoxy survived because it was deeply embedded in Russian/Romanian/Serbian culture and history, as well as an underground identity and a form of dissidence.

Gog (2007), Rousselet (2013), Agadjanian (2015) and Vukomanovic (2008) argued that “religious revival” was paradoxically doubled by a process of secularization, both in continuity with communist heritage, but to a greater extent as a result of modernization and increased contact with Western values and lifestyle.

A recent study of the variegated process of religious change in Eastern Europe (Gauthier, 2020) synthesized the past thirty years of post-communist transformation as the result of two major shifts: first, from a dictatorial regime to liberal democracy; second, less emphasized and discussed, from State-planned economy to a global market. In the following, I will briefly discuss the implications of these turns for the life of Orthodox Churches and their believers.

First, the political change in the region has brought about the renewal of the interactions between the ecclesial institution and the political sphere. Literature documents the Orthodox Church as a political actor (Vukomanovic, 2008; Buchenau, 2010; Papkova, 2011), its role in promoting or impinging democracy (Stan and Turcescu, 2005, 2007; Andreescu, 2007), its interplay with nationalism, its influence on the State and vice versa (Aleksov, 2004, 2008, 2010; Ramet 2006; Leustean, 2011), or its increasing self-affirmation as a provider of moral norms (Rousselet, 2011; Zigon, 2011; Stoekl, 2016).

Other important negotiations between Orthodox Churches and the State refer to introducing religious education in public schools and opening chaplaincy services in hospitals, prisons and military barracks. Despite an overstated responsiveness of States to the Orthodox Churches' demands, analysts show that it was not without some persistence that the Churches achieved (sometimes only partly) their goals. Though religious education was introduced without much opposition in all three ex-communist Orthodox countries, because it was considered a necessary measure for moral recovery of the society after years of destructive atheism (Aleksov, 2004; Turcescu and Stan, 2005), it has not remained an unquestioned issue. In Romania, freethinkers' groups have challenged the presence of icons in public schools (2006–2008) and the confessionalized way of teaching religion, militating for a religious studies-type of approach or its replacement with the study of ethics (2013–2014).

Another point on which Orthodox Churches were very keen to win the State's support was the restoration of their property (agricultural land, woods, residential and business buildings), which had been confiscated by the communist regimes,¹¹ and their rehabilitation in the public space through church construction. An average of one hundred and ten churches are being erected in Romania annually (Andreescu, 2007) and somewhere between hundred and one hundred and ten churches are to be built in Northern Moscow in the next years.¹² In Serbia, a small town like Novi Sad, with only 260,000 people, thirty new churches have been built since 1990 (Aleksov, 2008). This euphoric church-building has met with some criticism in domestic and international media, which mainly commented on the financing sources, including State budget and rich businessmen of doubtful morality (involved in financial scandals, war crimes or KGB). By far, the most contested building projects have been the three gigantic cathedrals in the capital cities of Belgrade (St Sava Church, finalized in 2004), Bucharest (the Cathedral of the Salvation of the Nation, partly finished) and Moscow (Christ the Savior, completed in 2000).

Though much has been written about the Church as an appendix to the State and the Church striving to attract the benevolence of the State, recent observers describe this as a myth and notice that the Orthodox Churches have their own agenda, which they pursue independently of the State (Richters, 2012; Agadjanian, 2014). Despite a few successes, their own internal divisions prevent them from gathering the force and numbers to dominate political and cultural life: lines of separation can be noticed in all Orthodox Churches nationalist vs. ecumenical, ascetical–contemplative vs. progressist–activist orientations, and a zealot–style movement, which raises its voice against the official Church.

Moreover, with Greece and Romania being full members of the European Union and Serbia negotiating its accession, these countries' political choices and decisions are strongly determined by EU legislation, which is not always compatible with the Church's agenda or moral standards. At the beginning of European integration discussions, the Orthodox Churches were rather skeptical and critical of such a political step, which they described as a threat to national and religious identity because of the European secularizing values and legislation. Though literature tends to describe Orthodox Churches as obstacles to the Europeanization process, not mentioning the influence the latter exerts on them would mean turning a blind eye to their recent efforts to keep up with political developments. When the majority of the population and the State expressed definite will to adhere to the European Union, the Churches reshaped their discourse (mainly in official declarations by Church representatives), asserting the European identity of their nations, underlying continuities and similarities with the West. They no longer defined the Orthodox identity in tension with the European identity, but rather presented themselves as defenders of a place for Greeks and Romanians *as Orthodox*, not *against* the EU, but *within* it.

Greg Simons and David Westerlund (2015) and Gauthier (2020) draw attention to the fact that religious transformations in post-communist countries are not only due to the political shift to democracy, but, more significantly, to the passage from State-planned economies to capitalist market economies. Martikainen and Gauthier (2013) and Gauthier and Martikainen (2013) argued that worldwide religious changes of the past decades are cast against the rise to dominance of economics worldwide, through the joint processes of consumerism/marketization and mediatization. As a result, religious institutions have increasingly shifted from providers of faith and moral norms to *providers of welfare*, from purely religious actors to *economic actors*, from traditions to *brands*, all of which is being channeled through an unprecedented use of media, especially digital ones. All these developments can also be observed in Eastern European Orthodox countries as well, though not to the same extent as in the West. In the following, I will quote a few examples.

With the exception of Greece, where the Church could lead its *diakonia* mission freely all through the 20th century, the other three Orthodox Churches under discussion here have initiated charity and philanthropic work, filling

up an important *niche* of social assistance, which their economically weak states struggling with corruption and transition were unable to provide. The SOC has its humanitarian agency *Čovekoljublje*, the BOR has the *Filantropia* charity and social assistance organization with many other smaller satellite bodies, etc. All Churches opened pastoral therapy centers, drug rehabilitation centers, shelters for the poor, for women in hardships, pro-life centers, soup kitchens, homes for elderly, orphanages, homes for the disabled, etc. The economic crisis that struck Greece in 2009 revealed the importance and extent of the Church's humanitarian work: 250,000 meals were prepared and distributed daily, both to Greek citizens and immigrants (Makris and Bekridakis, 2013) as well as regular and ad hoc social assistance through allocation of material support (food and clothing) and medicine to families, the elderly and the disabled (Molokotos-Liederman, 2016).

Besides their liturgical and social activities, Orthodox Churches developed products and services that gravitate around religious practice: priestly vestments, icons, books, prayer ropes, candles, health and life insurance, travel and accommodation, health care (hospitals and clinics), care for the elderly, Orthodox schools and kindergartens, etc. One could also mention the Orthodox publishing business: in Russia and Romania, a number of large and small Orthodox publishing companies try to attract customers by publishing numerous translations on Orthodox topics (Naletova, 2009). In Russia, the phenomenon of Orthodox fairs creates a market for goods produced in monasteries and parish workshops. These fairs are organized in large cities all around Russia at the time of Orthodox holidays (Naletova, 2006, 2009). In Bulgaria and Romania, monasteries are involved in tourism, with an offer of accommodation and retreat programs. Some monasteries ensure their survival through the commercialization of herbal-derived health-care products. Monastic products are particularly successful and they sell well online, where even the most closed communities as those on Mount Athos are now present.¹³

The Orthodox Churches also modernized and diversified their means of channeling their Christian message: they have created their own radio and TV stations, newspapers, periodicals and journals, travel agencies organizing pilgrimages to religious sites both domestic and in the Orthodox heartland (mainly Greece, Mount Athos, Ukraine, Russia and Israel), news agencies and official websites. They seek Internet publicity (the website of the Moscow Patriarchate is available in six languages) and try to overcome the stereotypical image of other-worldly Churches by showing they are involved with topics or current concern for all social categories. Their offer addresses lay people as well as clergy and monastics, children, women, youth and elderly.

1.3 Post-communist inter-Orthodox relations

After a brief overview of general developments in the post-Soviet life of the Orthodox Churches in Eastern Europe, let us now make a snapshot of how inter-Orthodox relations evolved once communication and cooperation

were again possible. For the purpose of this research, two factors that shaped these relations are relevant: first, the notion of “canonical territory” and second, the notion of “jurisdiction” and “primacy” over ethnic populations that spilled over the historical territories of the respective Churches through migration.

The fall of communism brought about the disintegration of two federations, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, followed by the creation of independent national States. Political independence was paralleled by claims of ecclesiastical independence from the SOC and the ROC, and the creation of new national churches, as a means of asserting and consolidating the newly created national identity. Montenegro and Macedonia have been pushing for the recognition of their self-proclaimed Churches by the SOC, creating a schism with the Mother Church. In the same way, the dissolution of the Soviet Union in early 1990s occasioned the formation of independent nation states in the Baltic region (Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia), in the Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) and in the West (Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus), all counting various proportions of Orthodox population on their territory. While the ROC and the SOC insisted on the preservation of ecclesiastical unity despite political fragmentation, the independentist claims of the smaller factions aspiring to full separation were often supported by the Patriarchate of Constantinople (PC). The simmering conflict and competition between the ROC and the PC has more often than not burst out, e.g. in the case of Estonia and, more recently, of Ukraine.¹⁴

The unprecedented migration after 1990, which have increased with the EU accession of Romania, Bulgaria and Cyprus, as well as the multiplication of Schengen agreements have brought many Orthodox people to Western Europe, where their Churches found themselves in the position of providing more than liturgical services and spiritual counseling, i.e. also ethnic identity and a sense of belonging. Since their pastoral care was exercised over national communities and no longer over a geographical area, the various national dioceses present in Western Europe came into a tacit conflict and competition with each other. An attempt to overcome these inconveniences, which I have already extensively discussed in other publications (Hämmerli, 2010, 2014, 2016), was the creation, in every country, of Assemblies of all canonical bishops having jurisdiction over the respective territory, so as to ensure inter-Orthodox cooperation and representation before local political and administrative institutions. Though these Assemblies are rather an expression of a Church diplomacy, even this formal role has been recently called into question by the crisis generated by the PC’s intervention in Ukraine, which, as mentioned above, led to the cessation of communion between the two major ecclesiastical actors in the Orthodox commonwealth, the PC and the ROC.

The Ukrainian crisis was a major blow to inter-Orthodox relations, which, moreover, followed very soon after the local Churches were recovering after another unsuccessful attempt to assert their unity: the 2016 PC’s convention of “the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church” in Crete. The

very title of the event was surrounded by much debate and contestation, which explains the use of the brackets in this text. Awaited for a millennium, prepared for almost a century, the event failed to gather *all* Orthodox Churches, as it was claimed to be the tradition. The pan-Orthodox character of the event was compromised by the last minute change of notice of four important local Churches (the ROC, the Bulgarian Church, the Georgian Church and the Patriarchate of Antioch), who disagreed with the formulation of certain documents and with the voting procedure. Some dispositions of the Council, especially those concerning the role of the Orthodox Church in the contemporary world, were also subject to debate, as they seemed too ecumenical or too liberal to the conservatives in all local Churches, and too shy and shallow to the liberals in all local Churches. Be it as it may, this event reflects the current cleavages that cut across all jurisdictions, and the heterogeneous mindset of the Orthodox commonwealth regarding a series of topics (e.g. self-definition of the Orthodox Church, relation to other Christian denominations, marriage, fasting, etc.).

There exists, however, successful cross-jurisdictional cooperation, at a smaller level, as testifies the long-lasting activity of *Fraternité Orthodoxe* in France, *Orthodoxe Fraternität* in Germany, *Saint Alban* and *Saint Sergius* in Great Britain and other youth organizations. Orthodox Churches also joined hands in order to create a common structure and diplomatic representation at the EU – the Committee of Representatives of Orthodox Churches to the EU (CROCEU), which aims at developing further relations with the European institutions and to lobbying in favor of an Orthodox position on a number of social and moral issues to which European institutions seek solutions.

Notes

- 1 I remind the reader that Greek migrants are formally under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, but, since they have inherited the Greek Church's ethos and maintain ties with the Greek Orthodox world, I will speak here about the Church of Greece and not Constantinople, unlike in other chapters (especially about the diaspora), where it is the developments connected to Constantinople that are more relevant.
- 2 Though Greece was outside the Iron Curtain, the life of its national Church was often oriented in reaction to communism.
- 3 For a thorough description of how Soviet laws were carried in practice and the abuses perpetrated on the ROC, Michael Bourdeaux's book "*Patriarch and Prophets*" (1969) is a well-documented reference.
- 4 Different sources provide different figures: for instance, in Beeson (1974), one can find that in 1914, there were 54,174 church buildings, compared with only a few hundreds in 1939.
- 5 For example, during their long years in office, patriarchs German of Serbia (1958–1990) and Justinian of Romania (1948–1977) adopted a pragmatic stance in relation to the political regime, which reduced tensions and allowed them to re-establish Church press, undertake publication activity, repair and build churches, maintain a few theological seminaries, and even receive support from State budget. This has attracted to them the label of "red patriarchs".

- 6 *Samizdat* is a Russian word that means literally *self-published*. It refers to a form of dissident activity consisting in individual initiatives of reproducing censored publications by hand and passing this document from reader to reader secretly. Copying and circulating censored material was a very dangerous enterprise, punishable with years of imprisonment.
- 7 ROCOR joined the ROC again after a few years of negotiations, in 2007. The Exarchate followed the example in 2018, after a series of misunderstandings with the Patriarch of Constantinople, who suddenly and unilaterally decided to dissolve the Exarchate, to which the ruling bishop John reacted by asking the ROC to receive him and his parishes.
- 8 Ministry of Administration and Interior. 2012. Tab. 8: Populatia Stabila Dupa Principalele Religii la Recensamantul Din Anul 2011 – Rezultate Preliminare. Available at: <http://www.recensamantromania.ro/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/TS8.pdf>.
- 9 Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2013. *2013 Britannica Book of the Year*. In the case of Russia, variations can be very strong, according to other sources that suggest as much as 75%: Eurel. 2010. Religious Affiliation in 2010. Available at: <http://www.eurel.info/spip.php?rubrique495>.
- 10 Loek Halman, *The European Values Study: a third Wave*, Tilburg, EVS WORC, Tilburg University, 2001. For data on Romania see : <http://www.eurel.info/spip.php?rubrique472&lang=fr>
- 11 This was a less welcome request: in Serbia the process of property restitution started only in 2006 (Aleksov, 2008) and to the present day, only 43% of the requested properties has been restored. In Romania, only 15% of that property has been given back to the Church and in Russia, this topic is still under negotiation (Papkova, 2011; Richters, 2012).
- 12 <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/71362.htm>.
- 13 The reader can find a more elaborate account of the Orthodox online commercial activity in a forthcoming article titled “Orthodoxy in the Global Digital Age” (Hämmerli, forthcoming)
- 14 In 2019, Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I, granted autocephaly to the self-proclaimed independent ecclesial factions in Ukraine, a territory claimed (and historically ruled) by the ROC. The ROC reacted by breaking communion with the PC, the consequences of which spilled over the geographical territories of the respective Churches and have been affecting the whole of the diaspora, with far-reaching consequences for the global Orthodox geopolitics. As the Ukrainian crisis occurred slightly after the empirical and theoretical work on which this book is based, I will not linger on it here.

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2 The Point of Arrival

Orthodoxy Spilling Out of Its Historical Territories

This chapter provides an overview of Orthodox populations' migration and settlement patterns and prepares the discussion of the consequences these processes have for the reconstruction of the Orthodox identity. Though the focus of this work is the situation of Orthodox communities in Switzerland, we cannot restrict the analysis only to this particular context, because this would imply to isolate the Swiss case from the larger historical, sociological and geographical picture of Orthodox migrations. Though methodological nationalism can be applied in studying the different Orthodox Churches in their national contexts, where they have developed specific relations to the local culture and the State, it is not a relevant methodology when it comes to understanding Orthodox expatriate communities, whose experience is locally anchored (depends on the receiving context) but tied to the global Orthodox *commonwealth* and to the “transnational Orthodox space” (Ihlamur, 2009; Ihlamur-Öner, 2014). Therefore, this chapter draws first a larger perspective of Orthodox Churches in Western Europe and then narrows the focus on the Swiss case, which will be situated against the background of the 20th century unprecedented population exodus from the Orthodox heartland and from the perspective of the integration of Orthodox population in this country.

2.1 Orthodox migrations to the West

Though confined primarily to their historical territories, Orthodox Churches have recently become part of the religious landscape also in Western Europe (with a slightly longer history in North America), as a consequence of migration. Orthodox populations were driven to the West either forcefully, because of hostile political circumstances, or voluntarily, because of economic reasons. Political migrations started with the advent of communism in 1917 in Russia and, after WWII, in other parts of Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Romania, Yugoslavia). Military conflicts in the Mediterranean also set numerous Greek Orthodox people on the road, following the 1919–1922 Turkish–Greek war and the expulsion of Greek ethnics from Asia Minor. The 1974 Turkish–Cypriot confrontations led to Cypriot migrations especially to Great Britain, with which Cyprus was related by its colonial past and where Cypriots have

migrated since the independence of their country in 1960 (Teerling and King, 2011). In the 1990s, the war in former Yugoslavia added to the politically driven exodus of Orthodox people to Western countries. Economic push factors generated also considerable migration waves: all through the 1950s and the 1960s, many Greek un- or low-skilled workers found a better life overseas (in the United States, Canada, South America and Australia) and in Western Europe (mainly Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland; see Kasimis, Venturas and Ziomis, 2012). At the same period, Yugoslavia had concluded economic agreements with Germany, Austria, Belgium, France, Switzerland and Sweden (Pejin-Stokic and Grecic, 2012), allowing its citizens to work temporarily in the industry sectors in which these countries lacked labor force. Though these resettlements started as temporary or seasonal working positions, many ended in permanent migrations.

After the successive fall of communism between 1989 and 1991, the patterns of migrations from Eastern Europe diversified and intensified. Romanians and Russian-speaking people from former Soviet Union arrived massively in Western European countries, especially in Germany, Great Britain, France, Spain and Italy. These countries experienced an important “brain drain” phenomenon, losing an elite skilled labor force in the field of medical care, engineering and new technologies. Low-skilled migrants, more often than not illegal, found temporary jobs in agriculture, housework, elderly care and construction sites in Western Europe.

A new major post-communist wave arrived after 2007, with the EU accession of Romania and Bulgaria and the perspective of EU enlargement to the South (ex-Yugoslav republics) and the multiplication of Schengen agreements during the last decade, which opened the possibility for other Orthodox nationals (e.g. Ukrainians, Moldavians, Macedonians) to make temporary visa-free trips to Western Europe. These events opened the possibility of free movement to and from countries with large (majority) Orthodox populations, so that today what is geographically known as “Western Europe” counts unprecedented figures of Orthodox people.¹ Though Switzerland has more restrictive cross-border movement policies, its membership in the Schengen area has considerably facilitated the circulation on its territory of citizens who would not have been able to enter the country without a visa fifteen years ago. This has led to an increased and diversified migration profile generally speaking and also concerning the Orthodox community in the country.

Though both political and economic driven migrants gather in their parishes as Orthodox worshippers in their host countries, the way they organize their religious institutions and redefine their religious identity can differ significantly. These categories of migrants differ in terms of their cultural and social features (class, education, marital status, etc.), migration project (temporary or permanent) and in their post-migratory relation to the place of origin (Martikainen, 2013). In Belgium, in the late 1950s, earlier middle-class Greek expatriates would complain that, with the arrival of young males who had little education and had been recruited as coal miners, “the church

has become full of coal dust” (Venturas 2002: 51). Likewise, the cultural differences between Russian émigré descendants and “new Russians” arrived in Great Britain after 1990s gave rise to an irreparable crisis in the Sourozh diocese of the ROC, which ended with the division of the diocese (Hämmerli and Mayer, 2014).

Political migration during communism from Russia brought to the West political, military or intellectual elites and dissidents opposing the regime, who played a crucial role in developing an Orthodox identity in the West by stimulating theological reflection at a high academic level in their own seminaries (Saint-Serge in Paris and Saint Vladimir’s in New York) and by making every effort to enculturate Orthodoxy in the West. At the opposite, other political migrants developed idealized imaginaries about the country of origin, maintaining it as the main point of identification. This happened with the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) and also some Romanian parishes. In any case, religion acted as an important factor of ethnic and national identity preservation and self-awareness (Vertovec, 2000, 2009; Baumann, 2002).

Labor migration, low and highly skilled, tends to happen among young people at the beginning of their working lives. Though usually voluntary migrants have strong motivations to improve their economic status and social welfare, it may happen that their migration project has to change or be interrupted, involving return to the homeland or moving further to another destination, closely following the evolution of global markets and economies. The movement of Orthodox populations mirrors this trend, as illustrated by the case of Greek and Serbian guest workers in Germany and Switzerland and more recently the case of Romanians, who had to return from Italy and Spain because of the economic crisis and high unemployment rates that have affected these countries. Such situations impact religious organization and the way migrants participate in parish life, which is the space where the various waves of migrants meet and negotiate their religious identity, pastoral needs and representations about the vocation and mission of the Church.

Apart from the reasons for migration, which differentiate how religion is organized in the destination countries, literature highlights that post-1990 migrations present specific characteristics. In her discussion of this matter, Peggy Levitt (2001b) identifies several differences between old and new migrations:

New communication and transportation technologies permit more frequent and intimate connections between those who move and those who remain behind. The airplane and the telephone make it easier and cheaper to remain in touch. New technologies heighten the immediacy and intensity of migrants’ contact with their sending communities, allowing them to be actively involved in everyday life in fundamentally different ways than in the past.

(Levitt 2001: 10)

Besides the effects on the connectivity between migrants and their homeland, new communication and transportation technologies have accelerated and amplified migration itself, allowing for networking between migrants and employers in other countries. The inclusion of Orthodox countries in the global market economy extended headhunter and employment entrepreneurs' activity to the East and the South of Europe, where they recruit the precise profiles they need to fill up the labor force gap in their own countries, for competitive prices.

The second characteristic of new migrations that differentiates them from previous experiences is the fact that the present receiving contexts are today more tolerant to ethnic and religious pluralism. This provides a social and political environment that encourages the maintenance of migrants' religious, cultural and ethnic traditions. Tuomas Martikainen argues that "contemporary migrant populations are more diverse than they have been previously and they have more resources available to them to sustain this diversity in the new local context" (Martikainen 2013: 3). In the case of Orthodox Churches, this translates into simpler procedures for establishing religious organizations, help from local Christian denominations in finding worship places, or, in some cases, politically facilitated recognition (e.g. Italy, Belgium, Luxemburg).

A third characteristic could be added, which describes the newest waves of young migrants, who have been socialized in the global consumer ethos, whose impact is to be felt also in Eastern and Southern Europe as well as in the ex-Soviet region. The cultural uniformization brought about by these global processes contributed to reducing some of the cultural differences between migrants and their Western host societies, making integration much easier.

2.2 Orthodox churches in Switzerland

This section provides a portrait of the Orthodox communities in Switzerland, where the largest part of the empirical research was conducted, in terms of their numerical size, geographical distribution, organization, parish life, social composition, governance and finance, relations to other Christian denominations and discourse about the host society.

According to the last statistical data available at the time of writing, there are 161,008 Orthodox people in Switzerland.² Data from the 2000 National Census indicates that 78% of the Orthodox population in Switzerland is of migrant origin (ethnic Serbs from the former Yugoslavia, Russian-speaking people from the ex-Soviet Union, Greeks, Romanians, Bulgarians, etc.; see Table 2.1). The significant number of Swiss Eastern Orthodox does not describe a group of native converts, although it includes them, but refers mainly to naturalized cradle Eastern Orthodox migrants and their children.

Most Eastern Orthodox believers live in the German-speaking part of Switzerland around big industrial cities like Zürich, Winterthur, Sankt Gallen and Basel. In the French-speaking part of the country, the Eastern

Table 2.1 Eastern Orthodox population in Switzerland
by country of origin, 2000

<i>Switzerland</i>	28,935
Greece	5,279
Former Yugoslavia:	58,984
Serbia	1,207
Croatia	102
Slovenia	15,657
Bosnia-Herzegovina	6,865
Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	
Romania	1,615
Former Soviet Union:	96
Moldavia	3,207
Russian Federation	1,061
Ukraine	133
Belarus	

Source: Swiss National Statistics Office, National Census (2000).

Orthodox presence is concentrated around the Lake Geneva region. Orthodox communities in the German- and the French-speaking parts of Switzerland differ quantitatively (the former counts much more Orthodox than the latter) and in terms of their history (the former have newer immigrations and newer parishes), but also with regard to the integration of their members and their institutions in the Swiss society. Due to a longer historical presence in the country and to a more extensive use of the local language in religious services and parish socialization, Orthodox communities in western Switzerland are more successful in cultural integration. Moreover, the presence of the Orthodox Center in Chambésy, close to the World Council of Churches in Geneva, the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey and other international organizations, has given more visibility to the Orthodox presence in the French-speaking part of the country. The process of Orthodox migrants' economic integration develops differently in eastern Switzerland, whose industrial urban areas offered working opportunities to the less-skilled during the 1970s and 1980s, and in the western part of the country, where more highly skilled professionals settled. Moreover, Eastern Switzerland challenges migrants with its quasi-bilingualism: in private, people use the local Germanic dialects, which are becoming a strong identity marker; standard German is resorted to only in formal professional situations, the media and in school for writing. Thus, migrants have to acquire double linguistic skills.

Despite a historical presence of Orthodox individuals and small communities dating back to the 18th century, the establishment of durable Orthodox parishes in Switzerland started in the French-speaking part of the country in the second half of the 19th century with the Russian Orthodox parishes in Geneva (1866) and Vevey (1878) followed by the construction of a Greek

Orthodox Church in Lausanne in 1925. A series of Eastern Orthodox parishes were established during the 1960s–1970s: the Holy Trinity Serbian Orthodox parish in Zürich; the Cyril and Methodius Serbian Orthodox parish in Bern; the Saint Paul-Apostle of All Nations Greek Orthodox parish in Geneva; the Holy Dimitrios Greek Orthodox parish in Zürich; the Saint John the Baptist Romanian Orthodox parish in Geneva; and the Lord's Resurrection Romanian Orthodox parish in Chambésy. Most of the Romanian and Serbian Orthodox parishes were established after the 1990s.

In 2010, I charted forty-two Eastern Orthodox parishes. Today, there are more than fifty parishes. These are organized in terms of ethnic criteria and depend on their respective Mother Churches: the PC, the ROC – Moscow Patriarchate (MP), the ROCOR, the BOR and the SOC (see Table 2.2). There are also multi-ethnic parishes, some of which hold services in the local language. In the French-speaking part of the country, nine parishes out of the twenty-one existing ones hold religious services in French, while the rest preserve the languages of their countries of origin. Paradoxically, in the German-speaking part where the Eastern Orthodox population is more numerous, only one parish (the ROC of the Resurrection, MP, Zürich) offers religious services in German (vespers and liturgy once per month).

The population of the Greek Orthodox parishes at the time of my field trips could be described as middle class and upper middle class: liberal professionals (physicians, lawyers, architects), scientists, employees of multinational companies in the Lake Geneva region and students. All my informants had already acquired Swiss citizenship and some were politically active in their canton (Vaud and Geneva). This strong cultural and institutional integration was paralleled by the cultivation of their Hellenic heritage and transnational relations with the homeland (many retain a residence in Greece or regularly visit family, monasteries and spend holidays). First-generation

Table 2.2 Eastern Orthodox parishes in Switzerland by church membership and ethnic composition, 2018

<i>Mother Church</i>	<i>Parishes</i>	<i>Number</i>
Patriarchate of Constantinople	Greek	9
	Romanian	3
	Francophone	3
Moscow Patriarchate	Russian	6
	Francophone	2
ROCOR	Russian	4
	Francophone	1
Romanian Orthodox Church	Romanian	13
	Francophone	2
Serbian Orthodox Church	Serbian	10
	Francophone	1

Source: Parish repertoire on www.orthodoxie.ch.

Greek Orthodox migrants tend to marry co-ethnics, maintain their Hellenic culture and language, and see the church as a place where their “true” identity is preserved. Their offspring tend to engage in intercultural and interdenominational marriages, and reduce their religious practice, yet retaining Orthodoxy as an important identity marker that they wish to pass on to their children by baptizing them in the Greek Orthodox Church. At the time of the field research, parish size was somewhat in decline because of the many return migrations of retired first-generation members, the lack of any significant renewal of migration waves and, according to some clergy, to the decrease of institutionalized religious practice due to the secularization of lifestyles. Since then, the economic crisis struck Greece over the last decade and more Greek expatriates have been trying to find a place for themselves in the labor market. They sought help for economic integration in Greek parishes, but, according to my informants, found the parish networks to be of little help in this sense.

In Romanian Orthodox parishes, the population is more diverse in terms of social class and status. In older parishes, founded before the 1990s (Geneva and Lausanne), the old-timers and the newly arrived (before vs. after the fall of communism) are not always in harmonious relations. The migrants who fled their homeland before 1990 were mainly highly skilled and political dissidents, who had strived very hard to rebuild their lives in a new context and to preserve and affirm their national and religious identity in the West. The post-communist freedom of movement allowed for many unskilled, economic migrants or young students to search for a better life in Switzerland. These waves of migrations differ in terms of cultural and social status, political options and representations about community, parish life, the Church, etc. The political circumstances that determined their exodus are also a factor of separation: while the former risked their lives in their search for freedom in the West (e.g. political freedom, freedom of expression, etc.), the latter arrived in much lighter conditions, and benefited from a more tolerant and welcoming context. Also, these two categories of migrants hold different representations about the homeland: while the former have thought they would never live to see it again and have tried to recreate it in the host country, the latter have a more relaxed attitude toward their country because it is more easily accessible, due to facilitated means of transportation and communications.

The social composition of Russian parishes is very diverse, containing descendants from the first Russian emigration waves after 1917, ethnic Serbs, Swiss converts and the so-called “new Russians”, i.e. post-Soviet migrants. While the Serbs in Vevey and Geneva were a considerable part of the parishes at some point in time, their numbers have diminished because of newly created Serbian ethnic parishes in Lausanne (2001) and more recently in the region of Geneva (since 2010). Just like in the case of the Romanian parishes, the *before* and *after* generations of Russian migrants carry different representations about the role of the Church in a diaspora type of context. While

“old-timers” seem to assert that Orthodoxy was important in itself, for the newly arrived, the Church tends to be the place where they can be reconnected to their culture, language and traditions.

Serbian Orthodox parishes comprise ethnic Serbs from all the countries of the former Yugoslavia. I identified four major generations of migrants: firstly, in the aftermath of the World War II, a political and social elite arrived who opposed the new political regime in Yugoslavia. Although few of them are still alive, their parishes strive to keep in touch with them and organize activities directed to their specific needs. Between the 1960s and all through the 1970s, the Swiss economy needed a qualified labor force in the fields of health care and engineering, and ethnic Serb doctors and engineers found a place in these sectors of the Swiss labor market. In the mid-1970s, low-skilled, seasonal workers started arriving. Their migration was not intended to be permanent and their families remained in the homeland. The migration project changed following the outbreak of war in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Family reunification during the war and the deteriorating quality of life after the dissolution of Yugoslavia led to the final settlement of these migrants in Switzerland. A new sociological profile emerged: young people who did not speak the local language and did not have their education and professional qualifications recognized in Switzerland. All these different categories of migrants make use of the parish not only as a place of religious practice, but also as a venue for identity clarification and reconnection to their primary socialization patterns.

Apart from creating parishes and opportunities for a regular religious practice, Orthodox migrants also founded monasteries in Western Europe. As it will be shown in Chapter 3, monasticism is one of the most important manifestations of Orthodox spirituality. Orthodox practitioners visit monasteries to ask for prayer and seek advice for different life situations. The first Orthodox Monastery in Western Europe was founded in 1946 in France (Bussy-en-Othe), and since then, there have been twenty more monasteries and hermitages in France, seven in Great Britain, five in Germany, three in Belgium, ten in Italy, etc. Switzerland counts two monasteries, one belonging to the ROC (Monastery of the Holy Trinity), located in Dompierre VD, founded in 1995; the other one is under the omophorion of the Romanian Orthodox Church (Monastery of the Protection of the Mother of God and Saint John of Shanghai), located in Canton Fribourg, where it settled since 2013. Holy Trinity counts two monks and a nun of Swiss and German origin. Services are exclusively in French and have thus attracted some converts, but also Russian and Serbian – speaking Orthodox people in the region, for whom the monastery became their parish. The premises are small and do not allow the monastery to fulfill one of the traditional monastic vocations, i.e. receiving guests. In order to support themselves, the monks used to have a day care medical institution (The House of the Good Samaritan), which has been recently transformed into a well-being center, where the monks provide services such as Pilates courses, massage and naturopathic medical

assistance. The Protection of the Mother of God comprises three Romanian French-speaking nuns and a hieromonk (priest monk) and is financially supported by the Romanian faithful who gravitate around it and by the handwork of the nuns (they sell homemade syrups, jams, herbal teas and soaps). They receive a limited number of guests and organize various family activities in connection to Orthodox theology and spirituality, which unfold both in Romanian and French. There exist also two hermitages, one near Yverdon-les-Bains (VD), inhabited by a female hermit (Sister Lydia) affiliated with the PC, and one near Roveredo (TI), inhabited by monk Gabriel Bunge, affiliated with the ROC.

In 2018, the Association of Orthodox Students at the University of Fribourg was created, as a venue for all Orthodox students to meet (Eastern and Oriental as well), exchange and enrich each other's lived religious experience and provide assistance for further integration in the larger university community. It also organizes regular multilingual prayer moments and liturgical services. Another aim of this association is to create the necessary conditions to develop a chaplaincy service in this university, when the Swiss and cantonal legal framework will allow for it in a more or less near future.

One noteworthy Orthodox institution in Switzerland is the Orthodox Center in Chambésy, which was created by the patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople in 1966, as a forum for rallying the Eastern Orthodox Churches and for ecumenical dialogue. The Center hosts an Orthodox philanthropic foundation and a theological institute for Orthodox postgraduate studies (in collaboration with the universities of Geneva and Fribourg), and, most significantly, it was in charge of organizing the preparatory sessions of the Council that was held in Crete in 2016. Although it was very dynamic under the guidance and leadership of Metropolitan Damaskinos, since his retirement due to health reasons, the Center's activities have decreased because of insufficient financial and human resources and of less energetic leadership. It was, however, the center of international attention and received the visit of all hierarchs and primates of the Orthodox commonwealth during 2015 and early 2016, for the last preparations of the Council.

More and more Orthodox communities manifested the will to overcome their dependency on the courtesy and generosity of Catholic and Protestant churches with regard to having access to a worship place. Ten parishes built³ their own churches: ROCOR in Vevey (based on private donation) and Geneva (based on Geneva State land donation and private donations from Russia), the Greeks in Chambésy/GE, Lausanne, Zürich and Basel (all based on private donations of rich Greek businessmen, but in the case of Chambésy, the construction of the Center was supported also by other Christian Churches), the Serbs in Bern, Lausanne and Zürich (the last two are civil buildings that were transformed in parish centers and churches), Romanians in Thônex/GE (private donations from Romanians in Switzerland), Neuchâtel and Bern. Moving from the status of renters or guests to church owners testifies of the Orthodox communities' economic success, capacity to

function in a network of financial and administrative structures, social and political acceptance; in a word, it is an indication of their becoming established, autonomous⁴ and integrated. This has additional practical benefits: first, it becomes possible to recreate the specific Orthodox liturgical space and atmosphere by putting up an iconostasis, painting frescos, using incense, ringing bells, etc. Second, it makes the clergy's task easier, in that they no longer need to carry around, deploy and fold back the large gamut of liturgical paraphernalia (e.g. books, vestments, icons, objects) required for religious service performance.

As a result of the multiplication of parishes, new clergy were appointed, some of whom are among the former PhD students in theology that gravitate around the Universities of Fribourg, Neuchâtel, Bern and Luzern. This proved a fruitful integration strategy, as these clergymen had the necessary cultural skills and knowledge of both the local religious landscape and the local language and were in touch with the pastoral needs of their future flocks. This new generation of clergy are more inclined to search for political, administrative, religious and financial resources available in the local context and mobilize them in the pursuit of their parishes' development, most of the time in the sense of enabling them to act as community centers, with a larger offer of services beyond the religious ones.

Almost all the bishops that had jurisdiction over Switzerland when I started my fieldwork have changed offices, so that the Swiss Assembly of Orthodox Bishops has a new composition at present, with hierarchs that have long-standing experience with the pastoral issues of the "diaspora", are in very good command of at least one Swiss national language (French and German) and generally are more open to the West. The concrete work of the Assembly, though never going farther than biannual meetings and surface declarations, has been completely hindered by the recent suspension of the activity and participation of Russian representatives in these Assemblies, as a result of the tensions that arose in 2018 between the ROC and the PC over the "Ukrainian issue" I described in Chapter 1. As usually in the history of Orthodox migrations, these have been deeply affected by political and ecclesiastical events happening back in the home countries and among the Mother Churches. However, no major disruption of inter-Orthodox relations has occurred in practice, beyond the Constantinople/Russian clergy not celebrating together and some parishioners who used to attend both jurisdictions having to choose between them.

Before this crisis, inter-Orthodox cooperation had made significant progress: after almost fifteen years of negotiations and hesitations, in 2018, the Orthodox communities in the Canton Vaud finally obtained the ecclesiastical permission to establish an association in view of securing State recognition and a legal status that would facilitate Orthodox Churches' access to hospital and prison chaplaincy among others. This echoes another similar successful initiative in Canton Zürich, where Orthodox communities (including Oriental Orthodox ones) created the Verband Orthodoxer Kirchen im Kanton

Zürich in 2014, which shares the same objectives. Apart from these politically oriented activities, inter-Orthodox collaboration occurs on occasions such as the Sunday of Orthodoxy (first Sunday during the Great Lent), when all parishes hosted in Chambésy share a multilingual liturgical service. In Zürich, the feast of the city's patron Saints Felix and Regula (September 11), is an occasion of inter-Orthodox celebration (even with the Oriental Orthodox Churches) and socialization.

Another important issue to be evoked and further analyzed, is the relation between Orthodoxy and ethnicity. Generally speaking, there is a strong historical connection between religion and ethnicity in the Orthodox heartland. Migrants from these countries inherit and tend to reproduce this intertwined relation, which remains stronger in the first generation and especially during the first stages of migration. In Switzerland, as in Western Europe more largely, recent migrants tend to view their religious institutions as providers of a framework that allows them and their children to stay in contact with their original identity. The church is a home away from home, where people can have unmediated access to their religion, language, cultural behavior, ethnic food, music and other traditions. Migrants insist on having religious services in their native language because this represents the gateway to their genuine connection to familiar worship style and religious practice. They received their religion in a certain language and culture, and for them, Orthodoxy has the flavor of their Serbian, Romanian, Greek, etc. culture. On the other hand, converts or cradle Orthodox born and raised in Switzerland argue in favor of a de-ethnicized and “de-folklorized” Orthodoxy, capable of expressing its universal dimension.

Being rather ethnically oriented, generally speaking, the Orthodox parishes are non-proselytizing and present themselves to the outside world as missions to their own communities. Churches do not envision larger impact, but prefer instead to minister their own flock in a rather self-oriented way. Though this ensures a peaceful cohabitation with the other Christian denominations and good relations with the larger society, in which they do not raise political claims (except for the project of getting State recognition), it also prevents outreach to the host society and, at some point, even inter-Orthodox collaboration.

Notes

- 1 For example, Germany counts more than 1.5 million Orthodox people (Bremer, Kattan and Thöle, 2016), Italy more than 1.5 million as well (Giordan and Guglielmi, 2018), the UK – a rough estimation of half a million (according to <https://faithsurvey.co.uk/>, but arguably much more), etc.
- 2 Swiss National Statistics Office, 2016.
- 3 The building process has not always unfolded smoothly because local political authorities or communities opposed the building projects either for land planning reasons (the initial plans of Byzantine style churches of the Greek communities in Chambésy and Zurich were refused on the ground that their

architecture did not fit the style of the neighborhood) or because of other practical reasons (the future worship places were seen by the local community as a potential source of noise and traffic nuisance). The Orthodox communities reacted by adapting their projects to the requirements of the local authorities. The architectural result was disappointing both to the Orthodox communities and to the local people, who regretted not having accepted the initial plans. The French-speaking Orthodox parish in Fribourg (Patriarchate of Constantinople) was refused the possibility of purchasing a plot of land where the parish projected to build a church. The parish leaders and the priest did not make any further efforts to negotiate with the administrative and political authorities. Unlike them, when the Serbs in Bern met with opposition for their construction project, they proceeded to information sessions to the local people and local religious communities and organized religious services open to the local community. They also assured other Churches of their non-proselytizing intentions. This strategy of dialogue resulted in a general atmosphere of mutual understanding and trust and opened the way for the building process to begin.

- 4 In the sense of financially self-supporting and solid, and not ecclesiastically, i.e. not independent from bishops' authority.

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3 What Moves on in Time and Space with Orthodox Migrants?

As I mentioned in the Introduction, the more I progressed in my field exploration, the more it became evident that I needed to take into account a series of basic Orthodox theological assumptions, which my actors recurrently drew on when describing their Orthodox identity and religious practice in Western Europe. This echoes the findings of Chris Hann and Herman Goltz (2010), who draw attention to the fact that studying lived religion among Eastern Christians calls for the recognition of a more complex combination of beliefs and practices, of *doxa* and *praxis*, which moves beyond the idea that these are simply a pair of opposites. Hann and Goltz argue that this is due to the Eastern understanding of *theologia* not “a scholarly discourse *on* God; it is rather a liturgical discourse *of* and *between* God and human beings” (Hann and Goltz, 2010: 14).

The purpose of this chapter is to give a glimpse of some important Orthodox theological and ecclesiological aspects that are relevant for the present research problem. It is crucial to have in mind some basics of Orthodox doctrine (on salvation, grace, anthropology, the Church), spirituality (sacraments, liturgy, fasting, veneration of icons and of relics) and Church organization (in terms of the system of governing, hierarchy, authority), in order to grasp the religious ethos that Orthodox migrants bring along and attempt to reproduce and reconstruct in Western European receiving countries.

3.1 Basics of Orthodox doctrine

The Orthodox Church holds that the faith it professes is God revealed and as such it cannot be changed, amended or revised. The sources of this timeless truth are the Bible, the Ecumenical Councils and the writings of the Church Fathers (all these are part of what the Orthodox call Tradition or Holy Tradition, in order to distinguish it from traditions).

3.1.1 *God as Trinity*

At the heart of Orthodox theology and worship lies the understanding of *God as Trinity*, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The mystery of the Trinity consists in

comprising three persons (*hypostases*), each equally and wholly divine, forming one essence and expressing one will, yet remaining distinct and separate. “The Holy Trinity is a mystery of unity in diversity and of diversity in unity. Father, Son and Spirit are one in essence (*homoousios*), yet each is distinguished from the other two by personal characteristics” (Ware, 1993: 39). The Trinity is not only the core dogma, but also the focus of worship: the doxologies (e.g. “Glory be to God, to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and to the ages of ages”) repeat hundreds of times the Trinitarian nature of God all through the numerous services and prayers of the Church.

The Trinity is also a model for social relations and a prototype of love among human beings. A Russian Orthodox theologian visiting the World Council of Churches in Geneva has reportedly stated that “our social program is the Holy Trinity”. This reflects the Orthodox understanding of being as a communion of love, and of human social and cultural life as *mimesis* of God’s life in interconnectedness. This is based on the understanding that the divine persons are not merely names or static aspects of God, but persons among whom there is a perpetual dynamic relation of love and communion. The social implications of this dogma will be discussed in Chapter 6.

The Trinitarian God is further described as absolutely transcendent and yet not cut from the world, unknowable in His essence and nature and yet present in the Creation, sharing His divine life with it. God is simultaneously transcendent and immanent. This particular aspect is of an utmost importance for the Orthodox understanding of grace.

3.1.2 Orthodox anthropology: between Fall and salvation

Orthodox anthropology is to be taken into account for a better understanding of the whole religious system in terms of the gift. In the following, I will only present the theological content of it, while its sociological implications will be discussed in Chapters 6–8. This being said, Eastern Christian theology, like all other Christian confessions, asserts the idea of Man being shaped by God as a crowning of His Creation, in His image and likeness, but elaborates more on the distinction between image and likeness and the ontological consequences of this distinction. While the image is something given independently of Man’s efforts (e.g. free will, reason, the sense of moral responsibility, the spiritual aspiration, the faculty of inner determination, etc.),¹ indestructible and inalienable, the likeness is something Man has to acquire and recover. By falling, Man did not lose the image of God, but only the likeness, which he can restore, through the means offered by the Church.

The Fall consisted in failing to give the right worship to God (by disobeying His commandment to refrain from tasting from a specific tree) and in failing to admit it and to take responsibility for it: by placing the blame on Eve, who in her turn blames the serpent, Man (i.e. Adam and Eve) implies that he was determined in his choice by Creation itself. However, God remained faithful to His initial plan, He continued to desire that Man should be united

with Him and made the restoration possible through the Incarnation of the Son, transforming the history of humanity into a “history of salvation”.

Orthodox theologians argue that the way Eastern Christianity has conceptualized the Fall, as “ancestral sin”, differs significantly from its Western counterpart as “original sin”: the former terminology would focus on the idea of an estrangement of Man from his ontological destiny of communion with God, while the latter would presuppose that Man inherited both the tendency to sin and the guilt of Adam. From here, two different approaches to salvation developed: while the idea of “original sin” would carry with it an understanding of salvation as “a state of forgiveness granted when certain conditions are fulfilled” (Meyendorff, 1978), the Orthodox community would conceive of salvation as a process that allows to restore the lost communion with God, sanctification and deification (*theosis*). The idea of process should be stressed, for in Orthodoxy, salvation is described as something that is at stake in every choice operated by Man, either to dwell in God or wander away.²

Two more specificities of salvation in Eastern Christianity that will be useful for further argument in this book are the following: first, however close Man may draw to God (through deification), the former remains distinct (but not separated) from God; and second, Man can be saved and can restore the divine likeness only in communion with his fellow men. Deification is not a solitary experience, but a “social” one, which can be reached only in the Church, through its sacraments (Ware, 1993).

3.1.3 The Church

Orthodox Christians confess the Nicene Creed, in which the Church is an object of faith: “I believe in One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church”. Unity derives from the belief that the Church is made, like Man, in the image of God the Trinity, and therefore reproduces on earth the mystery of unity in diversity: just as each person of the Trinity has its own characteristics and autonomy, so the Church is made up of a family of self-governing local Churches, each anchored in and colored by the local culture, yet fully epitomizing the One Church. The unity of the Church further follows from the fact that the Church is defined as the Body of Christ: since there is one Christ, there is One Church. The unity between Christ and His Church is achieved above all through the sacraments, and especially through the Eucharist, which unites each communicant to Christ Himself, but also unites them to one another (Ware, 1993; McGuckin, 2011).

The second attribute of the Church, holiness, is the result of God sanctifying it by drawing it into His divine life. The Church is believed to remain holy and perfect, despite the sinfulness of its members. John Meyendorff used to write that “the mystery of the Church consists in the very fact that *together* sinners become *something different* from what they are as individuals” (Meyendorff, 1960: 298), i.e. they become the “communion of saints”. Orthodoxy teaches that the sin of Man cannot affect the holiness of the Church, for, even

if Christians on earth may sin and be imperfect, the Church, as the Body of Christ and the fullness of the Holy Spirit, are perfect, holy and incorruptible. The Church lives in tension between its own holiness and the imperfection of its members, in a continual process of “becoming what it is” through the repentance of its members.

The third mark of the Church that we can find in the Nicene Creed is its catholicity. Russian–American theologians such as George Florovsky and John Meyendorff explain that the common understanding of catholicity as “universality”, either in the geographical sense of worldwide disperse or in a more ethnographic sense as spread to all people, is too narrow. It does not seem to be about an empirical universality, but about an ideal one, a qualitative characteristic of “inner wholeness”. The Slavonic version of catholicity, *sobornost*, contains in it the idea of conciliarity, i.e. that faith is not the knowledge of an individual, but a common “vision, implying *communion* in the Spirit with the saints of all ages and all places” (Meyendorff, 1960). The Catholic nature of the Church implies therefore the fact that “the experience of the Church belongs to all times” (Florovsky, 1973).

The fourth attribute of the Church mentioned in the Nicene Creed is its apostolic character. Apostolicity refers to the fact that the Church is believed to have been founded by the apostles (on the day of the Pentecost). Just as Christ was sent from God to the world, so Christ Himself chose and sent His apostles, as a link between Himself and the Church. Two crucial implications derive from this apostolic foundation: first, absolute fidelity to the apostolic teachings, which is not described as mere repetitions of the historical Jesus’s words and deeds, but as the “memory of Jesus” made alive by the Holy Spirit. This is strongly connected with the Orthodox idea of Tradition (which I discuss in Chapter 8), as the deposit of the apostolic faith once and for all given to the Church by Jesus through His apostles. Second, the Orthodox Church understands apostolicity as “apostolic succession”, i.e. the handing down of authority from the apostles to their successors in an unbroken chain of episcopal ordinations coming down to present-day bishops. Christian communities whose succession has been broken are considered to have fallen away from the Church, with the possibility of returning to it once their apostolic succession is restored.

3.2 Church organization

Orthodox Churches are headed by patriarchs (primate of an autocephalous church), archbishops (bishop of a large diocese) or metropolitans (bishops of a large city). These official titles are not ranks of a linear hierarchy, but reflect a certain “ranking of honor” (McGuckin, 2011), in the sense that a patriarch may have a supervisory role over the synod of all the bishops of his country, or that a metropolitan of a city may have some degree of precedence over the bishops of his province. Yet, theoretically, they are all *basically* bishops, and “equal in apostolic status” (McGuckin, 2011: 28). There is thus no pontifical

authority in the Orthodox Church, which recognizes only Jesus Christ as its real head. All primates are equal by virtue of the fact that the Churches they govern are equal.

However, a *primacy of honor* is granted to the Patriarch of Constantinople, on account of the history of Constantinople as the capital of the ancient Byzantine Empire. Besides, it is a primacy among equals: he is called *primus inter pares*. Within the Church polity, decisions are made by way of dialogue and agreement among bishops, who are expected to be in permanent dialogue and synergy with the laity, so as to manifest the conciliar nature of the Church. In Chapter 7, I discuss the tensions this type of ecclesial government generates in practice, the negotiations, conflicts and innovations Churches resort to in maintaining balance or at least apparent peace in the Orthodox Commonwealth.

Authority is not the prerogative uniquely of bishops, but is much more diffuse and shared by “Christ’s inspired people in their various offices and duties (bishops, priests, deacons, ascetics, married couples, prophets, martyrs among them)” (McGuckin, 2011: 29). This polycentric pattern of authority is considered both an asset (because it allows for flexibility in Church life management) and a shortcoming (because it makes it difficult to understand who leads concretely the Church and who speaks for it). The media often oversimplify the matter by identifying the Patriarch of Constantinople as the homologue of the Pope in the Orthodox Church.

Meyendorff argues that the advantage of this system of ecclesial government is its plasticity: it permits local self-governing churches to be found, abolished and re-established without affecting the entire Church organization.³ Many of the newer local churches became in time *de facto* national churches, operating within the boundaries of nation-states (Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, etc.). Their relations are not always easy and they evolve constantly, following global political frameworks and often reflecting the logic of international law, which guarantees sovereignty to states and their territories. This was the case after the breakup of Yugoslavia and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, as explained in Chapter 1.

3.3 Expressions of Orthodox spirituality

3.3.1 Divine liturgy

“Only he who understands the Divine Liturgy can understand the Church” (Khomiakov, 1998: 51) wrote Khomiakov in the 19th century, pointing to the centrality of the liturgy in the life of the Orthodox Church. This is because of two reasons: on the one hand, the liturgy is the narrative of salvation history and the re-enactment of Christ’s life: His coming on earth, His public appearance, miracles and teaching, with the climax in His sacrifice, the celebration of the Last Supper, and the transformation of the offerings of the faithful – bread and wine – into the body and blood of Christ. On the

other hand, the liturgy epitomizes the whole Orthodox dogma (accepted and codified faith of the community), doctrine (theological teachings), and worship (prayers and rituals through which the invisible is rendered visible).

As an epiphany of the Kingdom of God on earth, the outward aspects of the liturgy are decorated with splendor: the sacred space has to be covered with frescoes representing saints, angels and scenes from Christ's life; the priestly vestments with their high symbolism are meant to transform the celebrants into representatives of the Kingdom; the service is entirely sung or chanted by the priest, the choir and the congregation, unfolding very slowly, to suggest entering into eternity; the linguistic register is solemn and suggests reverence; the gestures include crossing, bowing, kneeling and prostrating. The priest uses incense abundantly and people light candles, as a means of communication with the "other world". As a rule, Orthodox churches are not equipped with chairs or pews, but people stand, as a sign of awe and devotion.

The liturgy has a corporate character, it is, according to its Greek etymology indicates (gr. *leitourgia*), a public, common work, of both clergy and laymen. There are therefore no private celebrations, nor can there be a liturgy without a congregation. It is celebrated on Sundays and on feast days and only in monasteries and big cathedrals on a daily basis.

To summarize, the liturgy is viewed as a total experience that appeals to senses (vision, smell, hearing), to aesthetic, emotional and intellectual faculties of the faithful, and also involves the body through a large gamut of gestures. This holistic form of worship is meant to convey theological content to both educated and uneducated people.

3.3.2 Orthodox sacraments

Orthodox theology does not speak much about *sacraments* but rather about "mysteries", pointing to the "secret operation of the Divine Lord" in the rites (McGuckin, 2011: 366). The performance of the mysteries implies a duality of the visible and invisible, in which material elements such as water (for the baptism), bread and wine (for the Eucharist) or oil (for Chrismation or the anointing of the sick) point to an inward spiritual grace (Ware, 1986). McGuckin (2011: 280) argues that "this double character of a visible material act and a spiritually charged energy" echoes the Incarnation: just as Jesus Christ took a human body and inhabited it as both human and God, not metaphorically, but *really*, so the mysteries *really* contain and convey God's grace through a material element. Orthodoxy does not understate the materiality of the sacraments, because it believes that matter and spirit are united and work in synergy.

Like in the Roman Catholic Church, Orthodoxy also enumerates seven sacraments (baptism, chrismation, Eucharist, holy orders, penance, anointing of the sick and marriage), but does not delineate strictly, extending the quality of "sacrament" to other "central experiences of worship and doxology ...

in which the grace of the Holy Spirit shines out in particularly glorious ways” (McGuckin, 2011: 281), e.g. monastic profession, burial service, anointing of a monarch). The Eucharist, “the sacrament of the Kingdom” (Schmemmann, 2003) is at the center of the life of the Church and is viewed as the foundation of all other sacraments (e.g. baptism and marriage are fully realized only when the newly baptized or the newly wed partake to Communion).

Most of the Orthodox mysteries are performed within the liturgy:⁴ e.g. baptism, chrismation, Eucharist, marriage and ordinations. The sacraments are personal, i.e.

they are the means whereby God’s grace is appropriated to every Christian *individually*. For this reason, in most of the sacraments of the Orthodox Church, the priest mentions the Christian name of each person as he administers the sacrament. When giving Holy Communion, for example, he says: ‘The servant of God ... (name) partakes of the holy Body and Blood of our Lord’.

(Ware, 1993: 358)

Let us also note that the sacraments are not considered the act of the priest, but that of God and of the Church.

3.3.3 Corporate and private forms of prayer

In the Orthodox Church, a very rich array of prayers and devotions are available, both collective and private. The service books consist in approximately twenty thick volumes,⁵ from which countless small prayer books for private and personal practice are derived. The liturgical year starts on the 1st of September and is divided in a daily prayer cycle (Matins, Hours, Vespers, Compline) and an annual sequence of feasts⁶ commemorating events from Jesus’s and Mary’s life, but also saints. Here, it is important to note that there are two calendars in use in the Orthodox world: the Russian Orthodox Church, the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Mount Athos monastic community follow the Old or Julian Calendar, which is at present thirteen days⁷ behind the New or Gregorian calendar, introduced by the rest of the Orthodox Churches starting with 1924.

Though corporate forms of worship play a great part in the Orthodox religious experience, private forms of devotion are practiced abundantly, not as opposed to the collective practice, but rather as parallel and complementary (Florovsky, 1973). Each individual is free to make up his own prayer rule or decides about it with a spiritual guide. Generally speaking, believers are encouraged to learn prayers and psalms by heart, to know them intimately so that they can recite them in times of distress. “The vast array of personal prayers, and the way in which so many are memorized and intimately internalized by the Orthodox, is a living characteristic of domestic Orthodox spirituality” (McGuckin, 2011: 346). Yet, these are selected from the prayers

of the Church, so that, even in personal practice, there is still a connection with the community.

Generally speaking, there is a large variety of prayers: acathists,⁸ hymns dedicated to saints, holy events or one of the persons of the Trinity, prayers for specific daily and life situations (e.g. prayers for when one starts and finishes work, prayers for the sick, for travelers, for the enemies, for a good crop, for the rain, for protection against natural calamities, before and after Communion, before confession, etc.), prayers written by well-known spiritual figures, but also spontaneous personal prayer. One of the most esteemed prayers in Orthodox spirituality is “the prayer of the heart” or “the Jesus prayer”, which consists in the repetition of the words “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner” in accordance with the rhythm of the breath. Though it is practiced more largely by monastics, ascetics and mystical “virtuosi”, many priests and spiritual figures recommend it to normal lay people as well.

Prayers could be categorized also according to the content: prayer of doxology and praise of God, thanksgiving and petition. Though the first two categories are regarded as the most noble ones because they represent a more contemplative and mystical way to respond to the divine gift and to unite with the divine, in practice people pray in order to beseech God for assistance in various life situations. Orthodox Christians can address their supplications not only to God the Father or to the Holy Trinity, but to the saints as well. It is widespread practice that Orthodox believers develop sympathy and affinity with certain saints, to whom they have special reverence. Saints have their own “call” or area of “specialization”: health problems, difficult relationships, finding jobs, overcoming passions, etc. Each Orthodox country has its favorite saints whose figures coagulate much of popular veneration and piety. In the Serbian Orthodox tradition, each family has a patron saint that is believed to protect the family through the generations (*slava*).

The body is also involved in prayer, through various gestures such as prostrations, crossing oneself, bowing, etc. Even the mystical “Jesus prayer” engages the body: while reciting repeatedly the words “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner” (or one of its variants), the person runs a prayer rope⁹ through his/her fingers, breathes in the rhythm of the words or does prostrations.

3.3.4 *Fasting*

Since the Orthodox Church insists on the unity of soul and body, the latter also needs to be trained and participate in prayer. Fasting is thus approached less as an act of atonement for one’s sins and more as an act of *askesis*, a method of cleansing the body, so as to enable the person to reach a state of spiritual watchfulness. In some traditions, fasting is required before one partakes to the mystery of the Eucharist, together with the confession of sins.

There are weekly fasting days (Wednesday and Friday, and for monastics also on Monday) and there are four important seasons: the Great Lent (begins

seven weeks before Easter), the Fast of the Apostles (ends on June 28 and varies in length between one and six weeks, depending on the computation of the Pentecost day), the Dormition Fast (from 1 to 14 August) and the Christmas Lent (from November 15 to December 24). The rules of fasting are very rigorous: no meat, no dairy products and generally no food of animal origin is allowed and sometimes even oil and wine are forbidden. In practice, many adaptations are possible, according to people's health (e.g. the children, pregnant women, as well as the sick or some elderly people are exempted from fasting) or to their spiritual and physical endurance (some people fast only during the first or the last week of the Great Lent, some keep fasting every Wednesday and Friday all year long, etc.). Adaptations and emerging new meanings of fasting are discussed in Chapter 6.

3.3.5 Spiritual direction and monasticism

It is common among Orthodox believers (practicing and less practicing) to seek for spiritual advice among monastics. Since its inception, monasticism was connected to spiritual guidance and it does maintain this aspect to the present day in the Orthodox world. The tradition of *starsi* (elders), charismatic spiritual figures whom people visit for advice, was made well-known to the larger Western public through Dostoyevsky's novel *The Karamazov Brothers* and the figure of Staretz Zosima. The elder is neither appointed as such by the Church nor ordained or trained to this effect. He becomes one because others identify him as a "bearer of the Holy Spirit". The spiritual father is "an expression of the Church as *event* or *happening* rather than of the Church as institution" (Ware, 2000).

The elder is a charismatic figure, to the extent that he is an individual distinguished by his exceptional qualities and recognized as such by a group of people. This is very similar to Weber's notion of charisma (Weber, 1978), yet, unlike with Weber, the elder does not assert these qualities, and he does not claim authority on the account of possessing them. It is the *others* who recognize these qualities and spontaneously follow him. There is a bottom-to-top movement that provokes the salience of the charisma and not the other way around.

The elder's qualities¹⁰ are not acquired by himself, but the Orthodox spirituality assesses the necessity of a guide. Therefore, the elder himself was "shaped" by his own elder, who in his turn had followed a spiritual father, in a generational sequence. Eldership is a matter of transmission of teachings and ascetic experience from elder to disciples. Elders usually speak quoting the "Fathers" and their predecessors, situating themselves in a spiritual genealogy embedded in Tradition (and not in his own opinions) which is what confers their word authority and authenticity.

The relationship people and disciples have with the spiritual father is very asymmetric, because it presupposes obedience. Though in Western cultures obedience is commonly understood in terms of power relations, as

submission that occasions oppression, this is a distorted description of how spiritual direction works in reality (Hämmerli, 2015). First, the student obeys the elder, who in his turn obeys someone else. Obedience is expected from everyone, and therefore it appears as “the great leveler, the ultimate equalizer or the common denominator...It serves not so much to establish a hierarchical structure, but rather to unite the community” (Chryssavgis, 2003: 65). Second, obedience to an elder implies the resurgence of a third actor, an invisible presence in this relationship: God or Christ. Both the student and the spiritual father direct their obedience to God. Third, the result of this circle of obedience is not oppression, but filiation: by continually embracing the will of the elder, the spiritual student becomes a spiritual son. It is because he wanted to be a son of the elder that he made the elder a spiritual father. It is a reversed filiation, in which the sons choose their fathers: “the monk describes himself as begotten by a genitor he has chosen himself” (Denizeau, 2007: 122).

Contemporary elders with a high audience in the West explain that if one is prepared to obey another human being, one is training the spiritual ability to obey God. “Because of our weakness, we need a fellow-man, visible and similar in appearance to ourselves, who will stand instead of God” (Elder Aemilianos from Mount Athos, 1999: 123). Elder Sophrony (Monastery of the Transfiguration in Essex, England) also makes the connection between obedience to another person and obedience to God in his spiritual writings: “If we do not practice obedience in relation to our brother, how can we ... learn to humble ourselves before God and be obedient in fulfilling His great, eternal and divine will?” (in Sakharov, 2002: 221). Elder Placide (Monastery of Saint Anthony the Great, France) states that obedience is a means of overcoming self-centeredness and of reaching out to one’s neighbor.¹¹

3.3.6 Veneration of icons, saints and relics

One of the first things that strikes a non-Orthodox entering an Orthodox church for the first time is the rich decoration with frescoes and icons representing saints, Jesus Christ, the Theotokos¹² (or the *Mother of God*, names that the Orthodox community uses for Mary), the apostles and different scenes from their lives. Orthodox believers come before the icons, bow down and make the sign of the cross upon their bodies and kiss it. This devotional activity, together with fasting, prostrating and other bodily practices, indicate that Orthodox worship has a sensorial and material aspect, in which the body also is a locus of spiritual experience (Riccardi, 2014). While many Protestant observers tend to view this as an act of magical worship of an idol, the Orthodox theologians explain that

the icon is a sacred, sacramental, means of evoking the presence of the Lord (or the Virgin or the saint that it depicts). It is a holy thing charged with a powerful blessing to assist the believer who prays before it, in

order to act as a medium of that presence which the believer desires to be in: be it that of Christ, the Virgin, or the saint.

(McGuckin 2011: 355)

Michel Quenot (1991) describes icons as “windows to the Kingdom”. The metaphor of the window giving access to the heavenly realm is also reported by Sarah Riccardi in her master’s thesis on American Orthodox vernacular devotions.¹³ These theoretical and empirical observations support the idea that devotion is not directed to the piece of wood itself, not even necessarily to the person depicted; or, to be more precise, the person who is depicted is honored and cherished only to the extent that he/she is considered to be a “Christ-bearer” and has acquired an intimate relation to God. Reverence is given ultimately to the prototype, God, and not to the “type”.

Apart from playing the role of mediators between the visible and the invisible, and enable connectivity between celestial beings and humans, icons also have an instructive function. As visual accounts of Biblical stories and saints’ lives, they convey a rich theological content that is sometimes more effective in terms of instructing the viewer than a long narrative. Prayer in an Orthodox worship place is supposed to be also an aesthetic experience. Yet, it is not about aesthetics appreciated in and by itself, but rather beauty must bear the print of holiness and help transport the believer to the spiritual realm. In the words of Vladimir Lossky, “an icon ... does not exist only to direct our imagination during our prayer. It is a material center in which there reposes an energy, a divine force which unites itself to human art” (Lossky, 1976: 189). The aesthetic experience one can have in the presence of an icon is meant to participate in the process of self-transfiguration and sanctification of the user.

As indicated by the fact that icons represent saints’ figures, Orthodoxy pays special reverence to those people who are believed to have collaborated in God’s grace and followed Christ during their earthly life, in such a way that they became united with God and thus holy. The relationship to saints (and icons) is not one of worship (which is given only to God), but one of respect and veneration. Saints are not seen as necessary or indispensable intercessors, who would mediate God’s grace and diminish it (McGuckin, 2011), but rather are invoked for day-to-day assistance and are believed to be guiding and protecting.

If one looks into a book recounting saints’ lives (the *Menologion*), one sees a great repertoire of forms of sanctity: men, women, children, married lay people, monastics, priests and bishops, intellectuals, analphabets, rich, poor, militaries, kings/queens, slaves, peasants, aristocrats, skilled and unskilled professionals, who all have in common the emulation of various virtues (humility, self-sacrificial love, total self-abandonment to God, love for the neighbor, patience, purity of body and soul, etc.). It is not the entirety of their life narrative that is considered saintly and instructive, but only particular aspects.

The Orthodox liturgical calendar celebrates every day the memory of at least one saint; there are collections of narratives of saints’ lives that are read during different services, or during meals in monasteries or simply in private,

by practicing Orthodox. There are several “categories” of saints: the Apostles (for being the first ones to spread the message of the Gospel), the Prophets (for having predicted the coming of the Messiah), the Martyrs (for sacrificing their lives while confessing their faith), the Fathers of the Church (for having explained and defended the faith), the Ascetics (monastics who lived in the desert and dedicated themselves exclusively to spiritual exercise), the Just (those who lived in the world, as clergy or married people and who had an exemplary life). Some saints are more popular than others or they have “specialized” areas of assistance: military saints are invoked in times of trouble for the nation (St Dimitri, St Theodore, St George), others in case of illness (St Nektarios, St Cosma, St Damian, St Panteleimon, St Charalambos), and others for different purposes.

Because Orthodox belief is that sanctification is not only a spiritual process, but also involves and includes the body, they consider the bodily remains of holy people as imprinted with grace and holiness. These are not “mere dumb bones and dusty grave memorials” (McGuckin, 2011: 365), but bones in which the Holy Spirit continues to dwell because holiness is a holistic phenomenon, through which both soul and body are transformed into “vessels of the holy mysteries and holy virtues”, into “temples of the Holy Spirit” (Paul, Cor:6:19, 3:17). The veneration of relics is thus a very common act of piety: people kneel in front of the relics, kiss them and touch an object (handkerchief or piece of clothing) on the relics in order to impregnate it with the grace that dwells in the relics and thereby benefit from it in a tangible way, beyond the moment of actual, physical veneration.

Notes

- 1 According to Lossky, Orthodox theology guards itself from concretely defining the image of God and “refrains from confining it to any one part of Man” because, since it reflects the fullness of the archetype, “it must also possess the unknowable character of the divine Being” (Lossky, 1976: 116, 118).
- 2 As an illustration of this, a European bishop giving a homily in a Greek parish in New York, told the following anecdote: he was on the bus, when suddenly a lady turned to him and asked him: “Are you saved”? Surprised by the question, he did not have much time to reflect for a clever theologically deep answer, but just said: “I am being saved”. Short as it may be, this answer actually encapsulates the very Orthodox approach to salvation, which is not something granted once for all, irrespectively of how one lives, nor is it something restricted to the circle of elected ones. But it is something happening all through Man’s life.
- 3 See the examples of (1) the Church of Georgia, which was autocephalous at times and under the Russian Orthodox Church at other times in its history, and (2) the several Serbian Churches that were formed in the 19th century in parts of the Balkan peninsula, to finally merge into one single patriarchate, recognized as such by the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Orthodox fellowship in 1922.
- 4 Today, however, baptism and marriage have become important family events, and are therefore often performed outside a liturgical setting. The recipients of these mysteries are invited to get back to church on the following Sunday in order to partake of the Eucharist, which is the sacrament that seals and confirms the others.

- 5 The service books are very complex. For example, the *Horologion* – the liturgical book covering the daily cycle, contains the morning service (Matins), the Hours (the First, to be performed at 6 a.m., the Third at 9 a.m., the Sixth at noon, the Ninth at 3 p.m.), the evening service (Vespers), and the midnight prayer (Compline). Other service books refer to the yearly liturgical cycle: the *Triodion* covers all the readings during the Great Lent and the three weeks that precede it; the *Pentekostarion* covers the readings after Easter until the first Sunday after Pentecost, etc. There is also a 12-volume *Menaion*, corresponding to the twelve months in the year and containing texts and prayers for each day's saints that are commemorated by the Church.
- 6 The Resurrection is the pre-eminent Orthodox feast, followed by other twelve great ones: the Nativity of the Mother of God (8 September), the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (14 September), The Presentation of the Mother of God to the Temple (21 November), the Nativity of Christ (Christmas, on 25 December), the Baptism of Christ (Epiphany, on 6 January), the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple (on 2 February), the Annunciation (25 March), the Entry of Our Lord into Jerusalem (Palm Sunday, celebrated always one week before Easter), the Ascension (forty days after Easter), the Pentecost (fifty days after Easter), the Transfiguration (August 6), the Dormition of the Mother of God (celebrated on 15 August).
- 7 For example, Romanians, Greeks or Bulgarians keep Christmas on December 25th, while Russians celebrate it thirteen days later, on January 7th. But the whole Orthodox world observes Easter at the same time, reckoning it by the Old calendar. The Church of Finland and the Orthodox Church in the Czech and Slovak Lands have also adapted Easter to the New calendar.
- 8 This is derived from the Greek word *Ἀκάθιστος* – “unseated” and its name indicates that during the recitation or chanting of this hymn, the individual or the congregation who performs it is expected to remain standing in reverence, without sitting down (except for the aged or the sick).
- 9 The prayer rope is like the Catholic rosary, but it differs from it in that it is made of wool, so as to avoid the noise of the beads when one runs them. It is known as *komboskini* in Greek, *chotky* in Russian, *broyanitsa* in Serbian and *metanier* in Romanian.
- 10 Irénée Hausherr (1955) provides a very detailed analysis of the attributes of a spiritual father, classifying them into two categories: *intellectual qualities* (discernment, clairvoyance, knowledge of God) and *moral qualities* (love, patience, understanding, a balanced combination of kindness and firmness with the others' passions and sins). The *intellectual qualities* do not refer to secular academic erudition. Indeed, some of the most famous elders were illiterate or had hardly ever received schooling or education. They became historical spiritual figures because of their exceptional spiritual and ascetic experience and gifts.
- 11 Placide Deseille. http://users.uoa.gr/~nektar/orthodoxy/history/placide_desaille_egypte_monastique.htm
- 12 Theotokos derives from the Greek terms *Theos* (God) and *tikein* (to give birth). Mary is the one who gave birth to God, not in the sense of having preceded the Godhead, but because of the belief that the son she bore in the flesh, Jesus Christ, was truly God. This title, which Mary was attributed officially at the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431, is a Christological statement, which affirms that the second person of the Trinity, who was born into history as fully human, is also really God.
- 13 Riccardi, S. 2014. “Praying through Window and Peering through Wood: Examining Vernacular Devotions in American Eastern Orthodoxy through a Materialist Lens”, Master's Thesis, Graduate College of Missouri State University.

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Part 2

Theoretical Considerations



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4 Orthodoxy Meets Western Versions of the Secular

As mentioned in the Introduction, secularization was not part of the initial research plan, but emerged during the field research, when my informants described the “conditions of belief” in their host country and seemed to express concern about integration (economic, cultural and institutional) resulting into various degrees of secularization (of behavior, belief, practice) that could affect their religious identity or its reconstruction in a new context. The data collected in this specific research echo a larger recurrent pre-occupation of Orthodox circles both in “diaspora” and in the homeland, namely the critique of “the world” and its multifaceted disenchanting forces.

As my approach was inductive, the analysis is based on the actors’ own use of the term “secularization” rather than on an existing theory tested through data collection (which is the deductive approach). Actually, the term “secularization” as such appears in interviews or discussions with clergy or theologically literate practicing people, the rest of my informants referring to it metonymically as “modernity”, “today’s world/society”, “the West”, “disbelief”, etc. Whether explicitly defined or not, the actors in my field seemed to agree that secularization was either a *threat* to the full deployment of their religious identity or it referred to *something missing or lost*, compared with what they knew in the homeland. In the following, I will discuss both these streams of representations about secularization.

4.1 Secularization as a threat

In the initial stage of the empirical research, my hypothesis about a direct connection between participation in an Orthodox parish and integration of migrants appeared uncomfortable to some of my informants. For them, integration meant a centrifugal movement, an effort to get out of oneself, meet otherness and make oneself permeable to what otherness has to offer. In contrast, their religious involvement was rather a centripetal movement allowing them to reconnect with their origins, their primary identity and ethnicity. Their Orthodox faith was not necessarily a subject of “negotiation”, despite the many admitted adaptations. Moreover, some informants suggested that participation in a faith group should not have other purposes than religion

itself. They were aware that many people voluntarily or involuntarily used parish-based networks to get integrated, and insisted that churchgoing should not be a springboard toward integration, because the aim of the Church is to be a place of prayer where people worship God, beyond “this-worldly” trivial matters¹:

one does not come to Church to get integrated. There are public services for that, clubs or other ways. One comes to Church to be in contact with God, or at least this is how it should be, because there are always some people who try to come here just to get help for different needs; and believe me, they may come up with very original demands...

(Russian lady, Vevey)

we do not make the Church a kind of social assistance office. We do help those in need, but not like the Protestants do. We come to Church to pray, to be with God, to confess... Anyone can give you a plate of fruit, but only the Church can give you Christ, the Eucharist and the sacraments.

(Parishioner of the Russian parish in Geneva)

Informal discussions following the interviews revealed that my informants believed that channeling the energy of parish life too much in the direction of charity and satisfaction of material needs meant introducing “a worldly spirit” that undermines the “true” purpose of the Church. They underlined the fact that letting “the world” (i.e. the secular realm) define and orient the life of the Church involved the risk to secularize the Church and divert it from its liturgical and sacramental vocation. I came across this view mainly in Russian parishes, among priests and second or third generation descendants of previous migration waves.

Conversely, I found that Serbian parishes devoted a lot of energy to helping their members solve practical issues. Serbian congregations have developed a whole range of activities for youth (camps, catechism, choir, theater, etc.), the elderly and women, organized parish libraries with national literature and Orthodox spiritual writings in Serbian language and translations in German or French, used the expertise and experience of long-term integrated members to offer counseling for those members who still searched their way in the Swiss administrative, health, insurance and education system. Similarly, Greek parishes try to respond to their members’ need for keeping in touch with their ethnic identity and organize Greek language and dance courses, festivals with Greek food and music and develop fundraising strategies in order to help those Greeks in Switzerland who are in financial hardship or have high medical costs. The priests and the people who assist them in carrying these tasks do not perceive these actions as potential secularizing factors, but rather as a way of incarnating Christian values in concrete life circumstances, of connecting theology and everyday life. The parish here appears as

the meeting point of Heaven and earth and thus as a place where people can access spiritual and material resources that prompt integration. Interestingly, both approaches, the more contemplative Russian one and the more pragmatic Serbian and Greek one, despite their divergence, share the same goal: preventing Orthodox believers from getting secularized.

Be it as it may, my informants' discourse expressing a subjective impression of a threat triggered an important question: *a threat to what?* In other words, what precisely in their religious self-definition, identity and practice is perceived as imperiled in the new "conditions of belief", be it in Switzerland, in the West and even in the homeland? Essential as it may be, this question cannot be answered at this stage of the argument, since more empirical and theoretical background is needed (developments are provided in Chapter 5). The reader will therefore need first to follow me while I attend to the purpose of the present chapter, which is to identify and examine Orthodox representations about secularity.

4.2 Orthodox "subtraction stories" of secularity

Further tackling of the research problem and of the issue of secularity brought to light representations of it in terms of *something missing* – because it has never existed in the host country's culture – or of *loss* – because of the increasing social and cultural irrelevance of Christianity in the West. These representations are grounded on subjective experiences and imaginaries: some informants draw repetitively on their knowledge, practice or "taste" of Orthodoxy in their home countries (*lived enculturated Orthodoxy*), others refer to an ideal-typical Orthodox *ethos* extracted from spiritual and theological readings (*imagined Orthodoxy*). These sources of representations play a normative role, since it is against them that the actors compare and contrast their Western social, cultural and religious setting, concluding to the absence of "something" in their host countries. The description of secularity through narratives of something that has been evacuated from the larger society and from individual consciousness resonates with what Charles Taylor (2007) calls "subtraction stories"²:

these (i.e. subtraction stories) are stories of modernity in general, and secularity in particular, which explain them by human beings having lost, or sloughed off, or liberated themselves from certain earlier, confining horizons, or illusions, or limitations of knowledge.

(Taylor, 2007: 22)

Before I proceed to exposing a few Orthodox "subtraction stories", I would like to remind that I collected representations of secularity and modernity (as threat and something lost) among people that sociological terminology commonly designates as "highly practicing", i.e. those who attend religious services frequently.³ It is therefore mostly this point of view that predominates

in the following examples of Orthodox substraction stories. The first one describes the lack of an Orthodox *ethos* in the surrounding culture:

I feel so home at Church because here I do not need to explain anyone the meaning of my faith and of my religious gestures; whereas outside, in the society, you constantly need to say why you fast, why you make the sign of the cross, why you kiss an icon, how you venerate the memory of your parents...everything. People here don't know anything about Orthodoxy and even less about what it means to live an Orthodox life".
(Serbian lady, Bern)

Some of my informants hold the belief that there is "an Orthodox way of being in the world",⁴ which has never existed in the West, or even if something similar did exist, it ceased to make sense to people. This includes the organization and sense of time, which is no more regulated by the liturgical yearly cycle of events in the life of Jesus Christ, the Theotokos and the saints, but rather by secular activities:

the first year I came here (i.e. Lausanne), it was close to Easter. Western Easter, not ours. I was looking forward to seeing how people celebrated Easter here. I was so disappointed to realize that nobody really cared; people were cycling and jogging, enjoying an ordinary Sunday. I was shocked that somebody simply had the idea of going cycling the day of Easter... People I saw on the street in the city did not seem to be aware that it was a great feast, nobody said the greeting 'Christ is risen!'...
(Romanian lady, Lausanne)

Since I've been here (i.e. in Neuchâtel), I have forgotten the days when we celebrate important saints. Back home, everybody knows that on the 8th of November it is the day of Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel and we call people who have these names and congratulate them; or if we have Michaels and Gabriels at work we get them flowers and a present that day, and they bring some snacks and drinks and offer them to their colleagues....But here, nobody has any idea about this and nobody celebrates name days... It's a pity, we forget these things because nobody cares about them... Maybe the Church (i.e. Orthodox local parish) does, but if this feast is not on a Sunday, there is no liturgy, no celebration. As if it did not exist...

(Romanian lady, Neuchâtel)

Orthodox people deplore the decrease of social significance of great Christian feasts, their de-sacralization and transformation in "secular" spare time (take the example of the informant who was scandalized by people going cycling on the day of Easter). Taylor speaks of religious feasts in terms of "higher times", moments in time that "gathered, assembled, reordered, punctuated

profane, ordinary time” (Taylor, 2007: 54). “Higher times” are special in that they bear in them a tinge of eternity and they reconnect people and events separated by centuries of history, bringing the past in the present in such a way that it shapes the present moment:

The Church, in its liturgical year, remembers and re-enacts what happened in *illo tempore* when Christ was on earth. Which is why this year’s Good Friday can be closer to the Crucifixion than last year’s mid-summer day. And the Crucifixion itself, since Christ’s action/passion here participates in God’s eternity, is closer to all times than they in secular terms are to each other.

(Taylor, 2007: 58)

The field data point to the fact that for higher times to be “higher”, it takes corporate action by a community, large enough to make a feast socially significant and relevant. Practicing Orthodox miss a larger community for which the feasts would be meaningful, a consensus extended beyond the limits of their parish or family, in tune with the projection “higher times” cast in eternity and the cosmos. Taylor speaks of “higher times” being embedded in different layers of social life and beyond. If the Orthodox people live “higher times” at a small scale, without social embeddedness, it is mostly because of their situation of religious minority. But this only adds to the evidence that the most popular Christian holidays shared by all denominations such as Christmas and Easter are no more times of plunging the whole community in an all-encompassing atmosphere of celebrating a sacred event. For the Orthodox sensitivity, this missing link in the chain of embeddedness has a disruptive effect on the capacity of “higher times” to provide meaning to ordinary time and cohesion to the social body. This explains the discomfort some of my informants said they experience when important religious holidays approach, compelling them to return for a few days to their home country.

In connection with the way people experience the organization and passage of time, belief in eternity and after-life constitute an additional area with respect to which some Orthodox believers in Switzerland express their feeling of absence of the Orthodox *ethos*:

I like graveyards. Here (i.e. French-speaking Switzerland) they are very well kept, there are always some flowers and candles. But the sad part is that it is not the family who cares for the tomb, they pay someone to do it for them and they almost never come to spend some time. As if you die and it’s all over... The funeral is the last thing the living do for the dead. We have so many customs that help us remember and keep in touch with our departed family and friends; we are still together, death does not really separate us...

(Romanian lady, Vaud)

The interviewee further speaks about folk customs in Orthodox countries that treat death as a moving to another life, for which the bereaved prepare the departed one: they place different items in the coffin, such as money (to pay for the “customs” that are to be passed on the way to Heaven), food (for the “road”), personal belongings, etc. The reconstitution of the terrestrial life into the after-life goes on after the burial, with periodical ceremonial offerings of clothes, food, tableware and furniture in memory of the deceased member of the family.

As Taylor notes, in premodern times, the living and the dead made up one community and the living kept performing prayers and saying masses for the defunct with the belief that this was contributing to their salvation. The Orthodox Church has preserved a wide range of rituals, ceremonials and beliefs about the after-life, as illustrated also in the few quotes from the interviews. The belief in the “community of saints” is still very much alive in the Orthodox consciousness and religious practice.

While it is not particularly difficult for the cradle Orthodox to symbolically maintain this continuum of relationships beyond separation induced by death, through participation in the services of the Church and mention of their departed family and friends at every liturgy, this is more complicated for the converts. Being usually the only Orthodox practitioners in their extended families, when their parents pass away, they can refer to them in their personal prayer, but not in the Church’s services. This points to the social and cultural embeddedness of these beliefs and practices in order for them to be “efficient”, an aspect that the practicing Orthodox people perceive as missing or lost from their Western contexts.

Another example of missing Orthodox *ethos* refers to the sense of the sacred and its manifestation in all aspects of human life. The sacraments, holy water, miracle working icons, relics, saints and the act of blessing are viewed as examples of manifestations of “concentrated grace” (Taylor, 2007). The absence of a sense of the sacred in the larger host society was expressed by some explicitly, as in the following interview excerpt:

how do you want me to integrate here? To what? Here people don’t know what is holy, and do not respect and not even wish for holiness in their lives...

(Serbian man, Zurich)

The Orthodox belief in spirits and in God’s power concentrated in certain people, places and actions, providing meaning and solutions to life situations, as shown in the previous section of this chapter, resonates with Taylor’s depiction of the premodern “enchanted world”:

In the enchanted world, meanings are not in the mind...If we look at the lives of ordinary people – and even to as large degree of élites – 500 years ago, we can see...they lived in a world of spirits, both good and bad... In the cult of the saints we can see how the forces were not all agents, subjectivities, who could decide to confer a favour. But power resided

in things. For the curative action of saints was often linked to centers where their relics resided; either some piece of their body (supposedly), or some object which had been connected with them in life.... And we can add to this other objects which had been endowed with sacramental power, like the Host, or candles that had been blessed at Candlemas... These objects were loci of spiritual power... So, in pre-modern times, meanings are not only in minds, but can reside in things, or in various kinds of extra-human but intra-cosmic subjects.

(Taylor, 2007: 32–33)

The second subtraction story is a direct consequence of the minority status of the Orthodox communities in the West, and describes secularization as the *decline of the collective, massive practice of religion* and its reduction to small scale (i.e. parish or even private, individual level). Some of my informants deplored the lack of a larger community (not necessarily a community of practicing Orthodox people) that would share their values and create a social and cultural climate favorable to “the Orthodox way of being in the world”.

This relates in some sense to Grace Davie’s idea of “vicarious religion”, which conveys “the notion of religion performed by an active minority but on behalf of a much larger number, who (implicitly at least) not only understand, but, quite clearly, approve of what the minority is doing” (Davie, 2006: 22). This concept is a refinement of Davie’s earlier “believing without belonging” and “belonging without believing”, which takes farther her demonstration of Europe being “not so secular” because of an enduring attachment to its Christian roots, manifested in extraordinary situations. My informants’ discourse emphasizes the necessity for a larger community for whom their religious activity would be meaningful, who would support their effort and would implicitly confer public recognition to the religious practice and the beliefs that inspire it. On the one hand, this understanding of vicariousness matches Davie’s concept: a minority of “religious virtuosi” is willing to perform religion in the name of a more passive majority. On the other hand, there is a point of break with Davie’s argument: her description of how religion works vicariously in Western Europe implies that the people in the name of whom religion is being performed do not need to “believe” nor to “belong”. The vicariousness the Orthodox speak about is not as symbolical and unengaging as it appears in Davie’s examples. My own field examples indicate that the minority of practicing Orthodox seems to yearn for a majority who not only share similar *beliefs* with the minority, but also consider the practice to be necessary and, for that reason, delegate the minority to do it *on their behalf*. For example, asking priests and monastics to pray *instead* of them and *for* them implies that the nonpracticing majority believes that that kind of prayer is necessary and does have an effect on their life, but are unable or unwilling to do it themselves.

In the case of Orthodoxy, vicariousness seems to be possible only if religion is socially embedded; the informants conclude that Christianity is rather uprooted from the society they live in, and they associate this process with the idea of secularization (a consequence or a characteristic of it). For highly

practicing Orthodox, disembeddedness and the impossibility of vicariousness appear as obstacles to developing a fully-fledged Orthodox identity.

One of the ways in which Orthodox practicing people compensate for the absence of a supporting community in the host society is to maintain close ties to monasteries or a spiritual community back in the home country or to join transnational Orthodox networks created around monastic centers in the West, such as the Athonite monasteries found by Father Placide in France, the monastery of Saint John the Baptist in Essex, England and other monasteries more recently created throughout Western Europe, especially by the BOR.

4.3 Orthodox and modern

If I were to stop my report of the Orthodox attitude toward modernity and the secular here, it would mean telling only part of the story and missing out those theologians, institutional actors and laypeople who believe a dialogue and exchange with the “world” is possible, desirable and beneficial. This was the main message conveyed at the Western European Orthodox Congress in 2015, in which one of the keynote speakers, lay theologian Assaad Kattan, argued in favor of a renewed relationship of the Church with post-modern realities, by supporting a dynamic interpretation of Tradition, enlightened by the discoveries of humanities, psychiatry and philosophy.

More recently (October 2016), a French-Russian youth organization (ACER-MJO)⁵ titled its annual conference “Has Orthodoxy missed the train of modernity?” and invited its members and conference participants to reflect on the responses Orthodoxy can provide to modern challenges:

At the dawn of the third millennium, at a time of the accelerating pace of history and radical transformations of the world (in terms of technology, economy, bioethics, computer science, etc.), Orthodoxy faces new challenges, which call for a renewed relationship with history. Is Orthodoxy able to enter into dialogue with today’s world? What language to use and how to answer these challenges? ...We will explore the Church’s resources, its tradition and theology, which qualify it as a valid interlocutor to modernity.⁶

The same youth organization has been running a journal, *Mouvement*, since 2014. The first issue’s editorial opens with the question about the place of Christians in today’s world, which “sometimes runs like a crazy train”:

... there is no prefabricated answer. The Gospel is not a software in which to enter the terms of an equation in order to obtain an irrefutable solution. To quote Father Cyrille Argenti, we Christians have only one imperative: to hold firmly the Paschal candle, to believe in the love of God and hope for the resurrection, to preserve its flame from the squalls, and to transmit it around us with all the love we are capable of.⁷

There is a wish to enter dialogue with modernity and confront its presuppositions against Orthodox theology and anthropology. The advocates of

this approach believe in Orthodoxy's potential to provide an alternative to modern secular presuppositions and in the possibility to defy some aspects of modernity through intellectual and theological reflection.

Interestingly, the highly practicing Orthodox who tend to view their religious beliefs/practices and modernity/secularization in conflicting, mutually exclusive terms, as reported in the previous pages of this chapter, in reality do resort to ideas and tools specific to modernity. Yet their usage of these is directed to empower themselves *against* modernity and secularization. Despite being critical of the virtualization of life, because of the internet, television and too much media consumption, Orthodox actors (institutional or lay individuals) produce this very criticism via blogs and websites, and in Orthodox countries also via a whole range of Orthodox media (daily newspapers, journals, magazines, radio and TV stations, news agencies). These platforms are used to reach out to people, to youth and to spread specific ideas.

The digitalization of the global era that affects and transforms religion in late modernity is highly present also in the life of Orthodox individuals. For example, messaging applications (WhatsApp, SMS, Telegram, Viber, Skype, etc.) and email are becoming common means of communication with a spiritual father in a faraway place. In this way, the charisma of the elder (see the explanation and discussion in Chapter 3) undergoes a process of transnationalization. With time, the possibility to extend spiritual guidance beyond borders and moreover beyond physical contact between the spiritual guide and the disciple may transform this relationship and add a new dimension to it.

Some priests use messaging applications and email to regularly send their parishioners inspiring excerpts from spiritual and patristic texts that they estimate as being supportive to their parishioners. This is especially so during fasting periods, when Orthodox Christians intensify their practice. Digital means of communication enhance the co-presence of a group or community of believers, creating stronger bonds despite geographical distance. This is one of the means to compensate for the lack of a supporting community in the immediate social and geographical environment. This echoes Gauthier (2009) who argues that new media tools support the de-territorialization of religion and the emergence of networked forms of community.

Monasteries and parishes have websites and Facebook profiles, which they use to present themselves, publicize the schedules of religious services or advertise for the products they sell. This gives them more visibility and helps them position themselves on the "religious market" in their respective countries and sometimes even as a brand.

Some priests use tablets and smartphones instead of liturgical books in order to celebrate services and find more easily the prayers, *troparia*⁸ and hymns that are part of the complex *typikon*.⁹ Some clergy and highly practicing people download on their smartphones applications, which help them navigate the complex liturgical calendar that indicates not only details such as the day's readings of the Gospel, saints who are celebrated with their respective icons, prayers of intercession and hymns, but also whether it is a fasting day and which food is allowed.

One could conclude from these data that the Orthodox discourse and position regarding secularization and modernity is not so homogeneous as it might seem. Despite general agreement that secularization as the disappearance of the transcendent dimension from human and social life is regretful, there is no ready-made solution for the perfect “Orthodox way of being in the world” without being “of the world”. Traditional conservative and more liberal trends cohabitate in the Orthodox Church, just as in other religious institutions (among Muslims, Catholics or Jews, for example). This tension between those who are inclined to embrace the world and those who tend to withdraw from it does not represent a line of divide introduced by modernity. The history of the Orthodox Church abounds in examples of such clashes, which have shaped its life and teachings from its early existence.¹⁰

4.4 Conclusion

Those Orthodox believers who make sense of their life by referring to God, the saints and the Kingdom of God and who situate the center of life and history in a “supernatural order”, live in societies whose organization, functioning and laws are rooted rather in a “natural order” based on reason and empirically verifiable statements. They perceive these “conditions of belief” similar to what Taylor calls the “immanent frame”, and which he describes as a natural consequence of disenchantment. “Highly practicing” Orthodox embrace a way of life and a worldview that corresponds in many respects to premodern enchanted paradigm, but they have to conduct and apply it in a social and cultural context which is one shaped by disenchantment. Some experience this as a difficulty, others as an opportunity, but in any case, the “immanent frame” seems to call on Orthodox people, theologians and clergy to position themselves within it: those who perceive secularization/modernity as hostile and threatening try to limit its influence in their life and their congregations and seek to empower themselves against it; those who perceive the “immanent frame” as an opportunity to promote their faith as an alternative to secularization try to engage in a dialogue with modernity and its ideological and philosophical developments; those who do not experience a contradiction between their religious identity and the changing nature of religion and of its place in the surrounding modern culture do not hold a discourse about the existence of some kind of “immanent frame”. Taylor would argue that this is due to the fact that the immanent frame became “unchallenged common sense”, so indiscernible, that we do not even realize it is there.

At the beginning of this chapter, I laid down the question: what is it that the Orthodox perceive as being imperilled in the process of integration in a secular society? What is it that is to be preserved untouched and what is “negotiable” in the dialogue with modernity and secularity? The underlying question here is: how do Orthodox people define themselves and their religion and what precise elements of this self-definition do they perceive as endangered by the “immanent frame”? This will be the topic of the next chapter.

Notes

- 1 In my field research, I did not come across integration as an explicit objective of parish activity (with one exception – a Serbian parish). Yet, my research findings in 2011 indicated that integration was more of a “side-effect”, unintended outcome of Orthodox migrants’ participation in their parish life (see Hämmerli, 2011).
- 2 Taylor’s subtraction stories narrate the evacuation of religion as a liberating factor that reveals genuine human nature, while the Orthodox subtraction stories interpret the waning of religion (and more precisely of traditional Christianity) as a source of disorder and distortion of human nature.
- 3 As explained in the Introduction, the way I did fieldwork brought me in contact rather with this circle of the Orthodox presence in Switzerland: being initially interested in the parish-based networks and forms of social capital channeled through them, I did observe parish life by attending religious services (mainly liturgy), parish board meetings, parish festivals, choir repetitions and all forms of socialization happening around these events. The people involved in these activities were also regular churchgoers. Only on special occasions like Easter, Christmas, parish feasts, conferences and other festivals, attended by far more numerous people could I get feedback from “occasionally practicing Orthodox”. However, the two categories are by far not ideal-typical ones: the highly practicing are not always (or not only) conservative and close to the institution, just as the occasionally practicing, are not so liberal and secular as one might suppose.
- 4 I borrowed this formulation from one of my informants.
- 5 The acronym stands for: Action chrétienne des étudiants russes en France
- 6 <http://www.acer-mjo.org/fr/congres-de-l-acer-mjo-8-9-octobre-2016>
- 7 My translation from Lucile Smirnov, *Mouvement*, no 1, 2014: 2, https://mouvementjjo.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/mouvement_no1_oct2014_ecran.pdf.
- 8 Plural of *troparion* (in Greek); it means a short hymn of one stanza in honor of the saint of the day, of the Mother of God, the Trinity or other important feast, chanted in one of the eight tones of the Eastern liturgical tradition.
- 9 The *typikon* is a book that contains instructions about the order in which to celebrate the various prayers and hymns of the liturgy, which is a very complex architecture of elements, whose performance depends on the day of celebration, the feast, the priests/bishops who celebrate, etc.
- 10 Already in the 4th century, the beginning of monasticism is a statement against the “secularization” of the Church: monks withdrew from the world in order to be able to live an authentic Christian life, far from “the madding crowd”.

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5 Orthodox Self-Definitions

The Gift Paradigm

As all key notions dealt with in this research, the *gift* was brought to my attention by the actors during interviews and surfaced even more plainly in field observations. Indeed Orthodox believers speak about their faith and Tradition in terms of a legacy given to them by the previous generations and the obligation to pass it on. Moreover, the various acts of devotion and worship and much of the parish activities are performed in the form of gifts. This empirical evidence adds to an abundant theological vocabulary centered on the gift, the bedrock of Christianity: Creation, life, existence itself, salvation, and forgiveness, the Church, etc. are all described as gifts of God and charity and worship as counter-gifts (see Chapter 3). For this reason, a discussion about the gift is needed at this point of the analysis. First, I will introduce the gift as the actors formulate it and then I will attempt to translate and grasp it by means of social scientific conceptual tools.

5.1 Gift examples from the field

In my initial interview grid, I had included questions about parish activities in order to trace parish-based social networks and their force of integrating Orthodox immigrants economically and institutionally. I also sought to test the widespread idea that individuals' intense socialization within close-knit ethno-religious communities is conducive to a *Gemeinschaft*¹ type of mindset that may hinder their integration into the larger *Gesellschaft* host society. Parallel to questions regarding integration, the collected data point to the fact that my informants spoke about what circulated in their religious community networks in terms of the gift:

In the Church we are not individuals who just seek for their own personal wellbeing, we have to give something – our time, our work, our energy...We have to be prepared to welcome our neighbor, to help, to pray, to give a nice word...Our parish does a lot for people who are in need, we organize fundraising and we support during each Lent a specific cause or case...

(Greek man and his wife, Geneva)

I am happy we have a Serbian parish because we can pray to God in our language... This is the most precious thing we can offer the world and the others: prayer, connection to God...

(Serbian woman, Lausanne)

The atmosphere in our parish is so warm, people treat each other nicely and they are ready to give their time, their friendship, share what God has given to them...this is the way love grows among people, when one gives to all and all give to one and together to God, to Christ...

(Romanian woman, Lausanne)

This gift appears both as something that emanates from personal freedom (people give *what* they wish and *how much* they decide), but also as a kind of imperative (many a time I heard my interlocutors saying: “as Christians, *we ought to help our neighbor/to care for the others*” or something similar). This note of obligation seems to coexist with the idea of gift also in interviews in which the actors speak about their religious identity: Orthodoxy is a gift inherited from the forefathers, which the present generations *must* pass on unaltered to their offspring:

Orthodoxy is not ours...it is our faith, but it is not our personal thing, we did not make it up... we received it from our fathers and forefathers and we will have to pass it on to our children and grandchildren...

(Serbian man, German-speaking part of Switzerland)

This obligation appears all the more compelling to some cradle Orthodox that the preservation of the gift entailed the ancestors’ self-sacrifice in various moments of the intricate history of their homelands:

Our ancestors fought against the Ottomans and all other nations which endangered the Church and they paid with their lives so that we can have a Church today, a place to worship God and to baptize our children...

(Romanian lady, Lausanne)

So many martyrs died for the Church during communism in Russia, so that we can worship today in peace and freedom...

(Russian clergyman, French-speaking part of Switzerland)

While the cradle Orthodox people’s approach to their faith in terms of a legacy can make sense in view of the long history of the interplay between religion, culture and ethnicity in their countries of origin, it appeared to me

somehow puzzling that converts, who *became* Orthodox by their own *choice*, describe their faith as a gift as well:

I was very grateful to have discovered Orthodoxy and for being received in the Church... It was a gift of God, who answered my quest...

(Swiss convert lady, canton Vaud)

Providence allowed for Orthodoxy to arrive here (i.e. in the West) so that we are reminded what true Christianity is. It was not just an accident of history that brought all these migrants here... it was also the will of God... it is a gift, an opportunity...

(Convert hieromonk, France)

As with the cradle Orthodox community, converts also describe the gift as something that contains the obligation of perpetuation:

We here in the West have a great responsibility to the Orthodox Church, because we have to keep the faith going, which is not something egotistically ours, but something we ourselves have received...

(Swiss convert, French-speaking part of Switzerland)

In addition to empirical evidence about an understanding of religion, religious practice and religiously motivated action as a gift cycle, one can notice that Orthodox theology, liturgy and rituals as well abound in allusions to the gift (after all, it is a Christian discourse). For example, Church history narrated by Orthodox theologians sets the beginning of the Church at the Pentecost, with “the gift of the Holy Spirit” descending upon the apostles; in their turn, they propagated this gift by ordaining bishops, so that, through an uninterrupted chain of episcopal ordinations, the Orthodox believe they partake still today to that initial grace. Not only is the Church described as God-given, but also as the place where God continues to give Himself to mankind, either by revealing Himself in the dogmas and in the mystical experience of the saints, or by offering the Body and Blood of the Son, in the mystery of the Eucharist.

Liturgy, which is the core activity of the Orthodox Church, is all about reproducing and reenacting a form of gift. The key theme of the prayers and hymns chanted in an Orthodox liturgy is the acknowledgment of the greatness of the divine gift and the human gratitude and reverence for it:

You brought us out of nothing into being, and when we had fallen away, You raised us up again. You left nothing undone until You had led us up to heaven and granted us Your Kingdom, which is to come. For all these things, we thank You and Your only-begotten Son and Your Holy Spirit: for all things we know and do not know, for blessings manifest and hidden that have been bestowed on us.

O Holy God, Who is resting among the holy ones, praised by the Seraphims with the thrice-holy voice, glorified by the Cherubims, and worshiped by every celestial powers, You have brought all things into being out of nothing. You have created man according to Your image and likeness and adorned him with all the gifts of Your grace. You give wisdom and understanding to the one who asks, and You overlook not the sinner, but have set repentance as the way of salvation. You have granted us, Your humble and unworthy servants, to stand even at this hour before the glory of Your holy Altar of sacrifice and to offer to You due worship and praise.

The above excerpts from the liturgy and quotations from the interviews share a theologically embedded notion of the gift. As mentioned in the chapter on method, insofar as Orthodox gift practices and discourses are shaped and informed by theology, a sound interpretation of the empirical data requires periodic glimpses in the field of theology. Resorting to theology has also the benefit to help identify the specificity of the Orthodox gift system and the commonalities it shares with other Christian versions of the gift. It is all the more necessary that social sciences have not devoted much attention to Eastern Christianity and have based their overall understanding of Christianity (and of religion in general) almost exclusively on observations from Protestant and Roman Catholic beliefs and practices. The present work attempts at translating the actors' theologically embedded understanding of gift into the language and concepts that pertain to the social sciences. In the next sections of this chapter, I will present some anthropological and sociological theorizations of gift that are helpful for grasping Orthodox reconstructions of religious identity in the context of migration.

5.2 Gift theories

The general Western understanding of the idea of gift as something free, spontaneous and disinterested has certainly its roots in Christianity, in which the gift is omnipresent. Yet social theory has not developed its conceptualization of the gift in dialogue (or in confrontation) with theology, but rather with economy and its increasing impact in defining social bonds in terms of interested calculus, contract, buying and selling, offer and demand, etc. Moreover, the first gift theorizations were not based on observations of Western gift practices, but on data collected in "primitive" societies. The intersection of social scientific theories of gift with the social scientific study of religion occurred much later and is still a field in development.

Social sciences owe the introduction of the gift in their field of investigation to the pioneering work of cultural anthropologist Marcel Mauss and his 1924 essay on "The Gift. The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies". Mauss based his reflection on comparative descriptions of commercial activity and social interactions accompanied by gift exchange in several tribes and ethnic groups from Polynesia, Melanesia and the American Northwest.

Mauss pointed out that the gift exchange that took place during trading of goods between clans or tribes were not mere appendixes to the actual transactions, but they were crucial events endowed with a highly symbolic value further impacting social relations. By accepting gifts and returning a greater counter-gift, the groups involved in the exchange created alliances and maintained relations on good terms. On the contrary, by refusing a gift or by failing to reciprocate, one caused conflict and even war.

Mauss explained that the objects and services exchanged were not ordinary commodities, but were loaded with “power”, with a “spirit” (*hau*) that bestowed a debt on the receiver, who was compelled to give back or to give further in order to avoid being under the “spell” of the initial gift. This created a gift cycle, in which the giver and the receiver would compete in generosity, a process in which their honor, social prestige and mutual recognition were at stake. Mauss argued that gifting could be reduced neither to interested calculation intended to enhance material benefits – because the rivalry in generosity could cause the ruin of the giving parties, nor to charitable action – because the objects exchanged had no utilitarian value.

Mauss further showed that gifting was not something optional, fully free and spontaneous, depending on the goodwill or disposition of the giver, but rather a moral duty. Likewise for receiving and giving back. This triple obligation to give—to receive—to give back represented the backbone of the social system and governed its economic, religious, juridical, esthetical and symbolic aspects. Mauss thus concluded that the gift was a “total social phenomenon” (*fait social total*).

At the end of his essay, Mauss expressed the conviction that the gift was not some kind of exotic specificity of “archaic” societies, but rather a universal human characteristic. He illustrated his statement with gift practices in ancient societies like the Roman, Hindu, German and Chinese ones and extended his observations to modern Western societies. He quoted examples of the enduring presence of the gift in modernity, such as invitations and courtesies that must be returned, but also the principles that laid the basis for the system of social insurance.

Though “The Gift” did not give rise to a specific school of thought during Mauss’s lifetime, it has inspired complex discussions on a wide range of subjects in the field of anthropology, especially among French-speaking scholars. Most prominently, it was the bedrock on which Claude Lévy-Strauss developed structuralism, and provided inspiration to Pierre Bourdieu (who borrowed the notion of *habitus* from Mauss and transformed it), Georges Dumézil, Jean Baudrillard and Claude Lefort, to name a few.

Starting with the 1980s, the work of Mauss came into the focus of social thinkers like Alain Testart, Maurice Godelier, Jacques Derrida, Marcel Hénaff, Jaques Godbout, Alain Caillé, Lucien Scubla and Serge Latouche, who revisited, revised or reappropriated the concept in various ways. Caillé and Gérald Berthoud proposed a return to a notion of gift that remains faithful to Mauss’s understanding, namely “a total social phenomenon” constituted

by three moments (give–return–give back) and paradoxical in nature because of its association with freedom and obligation, interest and disinterest.

The two scholars founded the Mouvement Anti-Utilitariste en Sciences Sociales (MAUSS) with the aim of challenging the mainstream theoretical reflection in the social sciences, exaggeratedly “contaminated” by economy and badly needing fresh input that would bring it back to its specificity and that would provide explanations of human action other than mere utilitarianism and selfishness. The MAUSS attracted a considerable number of scholars, who propose a break with the epistemological frame of the *homo economicus*, which in their view has increasingly biased social scientific descriptions of history and the social world. MAUSS-affiliated scholars have produced a thorough critique and deconstruction of the Rational Choice Theory presupposition that society and human relations are the product of rational actors’ strategies seeking to maximize their own material interest. Instead, they provide a theoretical alternative, which looks at the world as a place inhabited by the *homo donator*, whose main and ultimate motivation is to be part of a gift chain. Alain Caillé designates this epistemological renewal in the field of social sciences as *the gift paradigm*.

He and Jacques Godbout have devoted much scholarly energy to identifying gift practices in the modern world and thereby extending the application of Mauss’s theory to contemporary societies. They confirmed Mauss’s intuition that gift was not specific only to archaic societies, but rather a universal human characteristic, arguing that as long as society is made up of individuals who keep breaking and renewing ties with each other and circulating goods and services, then the gift logic must be at work. The gift appears as a fundamental human act whose value lies not so much in its material usefulness or symbolic worth (as a connector), but mainly in the fact that “it affirms participation in a world without cause and consequence, a world of the unconditional, of life itself”. Godbout wrote: “the gift is just as typical of modern and contemporary societies as it is typical of archaic ones; [...] it does not affect only isolated and discontinuous incidents in social life, but social life in its entirety”. This is because the gift “is true of life itself, which, at least for the moment, is neither bought nor obtained by force but is purely and simply given” (Godbout, 1998: 12). Therefore “today, still, nothing can be initiated or undertaken, can thrive or function, if it is not nourished by the gift” (Godbout, 1998: 12). For Godbout and Caillé, the gift is indispensable to a proper understanding of modern society.

Godbout explains that what makes us moderns less perceptive to the presence of the gift in our own societies is our utilitarian way of thinking that focuses heavily on the individual and misses out relations and their content. This translates into linguistic and cultural considerations that further obscure the endurance of gift relations: first, the gift being associated with traditional and archaic societies, which modernity has projected to depart from, the gift language fell out of favor. Second, our cultural understanding of the gift, undoubtedly marked by Christianity, as something completely free,

charitable and bearing no expectation of return, makes it sound naïve (if not impossible) in a context in which people tend to affirm themselves as autonomous subjects who do not owe anything to each other.

Caillé and his co-thinker Jacques Godbout identified two specificities of the modern gift: reciprocity and anonymity. Unlike Derrida (1992),² who believes that reciprocity annihilates the gift, the Maussians maintain that *reciprocity* simply perpetuates and preserves it. Godbout argues that this is based on “the lure of the gift”,³ a compelling desire deeply embedded in human beings. The two aforementioned authors insist, however, on distinguishing reciprocity from *equivalence* (specific to market relations), which presupposes repaying the corresponding material or symbolic significance to the initial donor without delay, thereby putting an end to the debt created by the initial act of giving. Unlike equivalence, reciprocity is not symmetrical: the return is not necessarily directed to the initial donor, and it is not worth the same value. On the contrary, most of the time, the counter-gift is greater or more valuable than the initial one. Moreover, the return is intentionally deferred by the receiver, who waits for the “right moment” in order to respond with another gift. In this way, there is constantly a feeling of debt at work in human relations, which gives rise to a circular movement of the gift. This further implies that reciprocity is a dynamic process. Conversely, equivalence implies paying off the debt and cutting short not only to a potential gift cycle but also to the social bond that was being fomented in the gifting process.

The second characteristic of the modern gift identified by Caillé and Godbout is *anonymity*, i.e. the fact that it *circulates among strangers*. The gift among strangers differs from the traditional gift in that it does not circulate in a community that shares a common past and culture, but aims at solving a specific problem or serving a specific cause; it cuts across social classes and it lacks the charitable dimension of the gift of the rich to the poor. For example, organizations based on volunteer work bridge the gap between the impersonal sphere of the state/the market and individuals, by reconnecting a donor and a receiver that are usually detached and disengaged from one another. This type of modern gift does not have an agonistic dimension because there is no real, substantial return from the receiver. The return is often imaginary. Godbout reports that in his interviews with people who volunteered in various organizations, some of them denied they would expect a return from the beneficiaries of their work, others identified a form of impersonal return in the subjective feeling of self-fulfillment they experienced in the act of giving. The modern gift performed by volunteers differs from the traditional charitable gift also in other ways: first, because they tend to distance themselves from any appreciation of their work in terms of sacrifice; second, because they insist on the dignity of the beneficiaries of their work, which they refuse to treat condescendingly with mercy or pity.

Godbout quotes another gift modality specific to modernity: mutual help groups, such as the Alcoholics Anonymous. These organizations are active in the field of social problems (such as addictions, violence, depression, etc.) and are based on the personalization of gift relationships between

producer and user. The principle of reciprocity is much more at work in these organizations, because their beneficiaries become themselves donors in turn, once they overcome their problem.

In discussing the origin of the modern gift to strangers, Godbout notes that it may well have its roots in the Christian teaching “love thy neighbor”, it has, however, lost its religious dimension. Moreover, the notion of “neighbor” extended to the (sometimes abstract) level of all humanity, so that *l’amour du prochain* (the love for one’s neighbor) converted into *l’amour du lointain* (the love for one’s remote neighbor, i.e. stranger).

Another specificity of the modern gift, which is not discussed by the authors explicitly as a third characteristic, but which I understand as such, is the fact that it *depends on the elective affinities* of individuals. This implies that individuals choose to devote time, money and skills to causes that they consider worthwhile and in line with their personal taste and convictions. This differs from the traditional gift, embedded in a pre-existing system of obligations and debts. The modern gift circulates in freely chosen relations, which one can withdraw from at any time. The modern Western social system allows Man to “exit” the debt cycle, even in the case of personal relations that are the most likely to be regulated by implicit moral obligations (such as between parents and children). This is possible by transferring the debt to the market or to the State (e.g. parents can put their children into daycare institutions; they can give up parental rights and relinquish custody of their children to substitute families or to child protection institutions of the State; elderly people are taken care of in specialized institutions).

Yet the possibility to break away with socially inherited duties does not eradicate the gift from modernity. Caillé argues that it continues to perform the role of “simultaneously the engine and the operator *par excellence* of human alliances” (Caillé, 2007: 19).⁴ Caillé and MAUSS-affiliated scholars remain faithful to the Maussian theoretical heritage and reaffirm the paradoxical nature of the gift, which is simultaneously free and obligated, disinterested and interested. While the incentive to give may arise from the free will of the giving subject, this form of spontaneity coexists with a form of obligation (one does not give to anyone under any circumstances). Likewise, while one may give out of disinterested generosity, the underlying motivations can nevertheless be colored by some shade of interest (*self-interest*, but also interest *in* and *for* others). As Caillé puts it:

Gift is a hybridization between self-interest and other-interest, and between obligation and liberty (or creativity). And not only is it empirically so. It also has to be so. If self-interest were not mixed with interest toward others (and reciprocally), the gift would become either a buying act or a sacrifice. And if obligation were not mixed with freedom (and reciprocally) it would become a purely formal and empty ritual, or collapse into nonsense.

(Caillé, 1992: 6)

Through his impressive production of essays, books and articles, Alain Caillé has inspired and trained many scholars, who, having emulated the MAUSSian research impetus, have documented the presence of the gift in modern societies, in all fields of human activity. A remarkable body of literature gathered primarily in the journal “Revue du MAUSS” addresses economics, medicine, art, politics, religion, etc. within the “gift paradigm”. The following section deals with those intersections of social scientific understanding of the gift and religion that are relevant to the research problem of this study.

5.2.1 Applications of gift theory to religion

As discussed above, social scientists have (re)discovered the gift at a moment when the economic model that had thus far biased their explanations of the world was proving increasingly irrelevant and incapable of grasping the complex reality of social relations. The field of religious studies has traditionally analyzed religious institutions, practices and beliefs as rational actors seeking to satisfy their interests, maximize their profit and ensure a successful perpetuation.

MAUSS-affiliated scholar François Gauthier has on numerous occasions (2009, 2016a, 2016b, 2017) drawn attention to the fact that such theories are subservient to an economic approach, which stipulates that religion is a provider of salvation goods, which sell like any other goods on a “religious market”, where offer and demand shape religious beliefs, practices and institutions. Gauthier argues that such an approach cannot grasp the ongoing mutations in the religious field because:

it leaves emotions, impulses, unconscious determinations (such as those linked to family and social status) and symbolic effectiveness aside. This model also reduces human behavior and institutional logics to the pursuit of interest (be it in economic or political terms) and capital (be it symbolic). Humanitarianism, empathy and other forms of disinterest which we find abundantly in religions are reduced to being particular (and peculiar) forms of self-interest, and are inserted into a utilitarian arithmetic of profits and losses.

(Gauthier, 2009)

Gauthier, however, does not deny the growing influence of economics on societies and cultures, but proposes to study religion in a way that does not reduce it to a mimicry of economics, and allows reinscribing the study of religion within a more general sociology of contemporary societies. This, he argues, helps understand that the advent of consumer society with its corollary idea of choice has induced a process of subjectivization, which involves “profound signification by actualizing social determinations and imperatives in individual and singular quests for meaning, happiness, liberty and recognition” (Gauthier, 2009). The reintegration of religion in the larger social

processes goes hand in hand with the understanding of religion in Maussian terms, as a symbolic system of gift exchange: the gift circulation in the religious field is embedded in the cultural and social dynamics, its meanings and norms evolve and make sense in the larger context of society.

Initially, my own research problem was imbued with an economic and utilitarian approach, since I started my fieldwork searching for capital-type of benefits that participation to an Orthodox parish could give rise to, in terms of economic and cultural integration in Switzerland. There was a hidden presupposition that Orthodox migrants were rational actors seeking to fulfill personal interests by getting involved in parish activities. In other words, they used religious participation for other purposes than religion itself. Though integration was not fully neglected by some clergy (especially Serbian ones, as shown in Chapter 2), empirical data pointed mainly in the direction of the gift, gratuity, generosity, gratitude, etc. At this point, the gift approach imposed itself as a theoretical and epistemological necessity.

While “digging” in the direction of the gift, it appeared to me somehow puzzling that in developing the “gift paradigm”, sociologists and anthropologists have not addressed the prolific religious (i.e. Christian) discourse on the gift. Not only has there been no dialogue with the field of theology, but it seems to me that there is a certain degree of suspicion on the side of the social sciences regarding the capacity of theology to have a (valid) say in explaining human relations. Conversely, theology has its own reservations about sociology’s claim to provide universally valid descriptions about Man. MAUSS-affiliated scholar Camille Tarot has drawn attention to this paradoxical situation, in which two academic disciplines turn their back to each other when it comes to discussing a concept that they both operate with. Tarot argues that a Maussian approach of the Christian gift holds a tremendous potential to provide a refreshed view on the recent religious upheavals in the West and to shed new light on the transformations of religious meanings and practices (Tarot, 2000).

In the following, I will take up Tarot’s challenge and apply his original definition of religion as a triaxial system articulated on the gift to the Orthodox case. This will help understand gift configurations in Orthodox theology and in actual religious practice and will clarify in what way “secularization” affects or endangers this specific distribution and circulation of the gift.

5.2.2 Camille Tarot: religion as a triaxial system of gift

Camille Tarot is not well-known to the Anglo-Saxon academic audience because his monumental work in the field of religious studies has not yet been the object of serious translations. Yet, he enjoys the reputation of an erudite social scientist among the French-speaking scholars of religion. I first heard his name when searching for a definition of religion that would befit my data and provide an appropriate framework for the self-understanding of my Orthodox actors. A colleague recommended a 2003 special issue of the

Revue du MAUSS dedicated to the question of the definition of religion, in which I found a contribution by Jean-Paul Willaime (2003), who provided a broad-stroke critical picture of existing definitions of religion and concluded that the only way to avoid previous theoretical and methodological pitfalls in approaching religion is to consider it as “a social bond articulated by the gift”. At this point, the paper quoted the definition of religion by Camille Tarot as a system of gift deployed on three axes:

All the great religious systems seem to articulate more or less straightly three systems of gift. A system of the *vertical* gift and circulation, between the *world beyond* (or the *beyond world*) and this one, that goes from the disturbing strangeness of alterities immanent to the *Sapiens* to the pursuit of pure transcendence. A system of the *horizontal* gift, between peers, brothers, ‘co-tribals’ or ‘co-religionists’, oscillating between the clan and humanity, because the religious plays a role in the creation of group identity. Finally – or first of all – a system of the *longitudinal* gift, according to the principle of transmission to the descendants, or of debts owed to group ancestors, or of faith, in short, of exchange between living and dead. It is by the way in which each religious system unfolds or limits a certain axis, and, above all, interweaves axes, it is in the dimensions and in the relative importance that is attributed to each of them, that religious systems distinguish themselves probably most of all from one another.

(English translation of Tarot’s article in Vandeveld, 2000: 148)

I moved further in my search and skimmed through Tarot’s work in the hope to find developments of this definition, but unfortunately, the author has not expanded on it. As far as I am aware, this model has been applied empirically by few researchers (Bobineau, 2005). In the following, I will apply this definition of religion as a triaxial system of gift to the Orthodox case, drawing both on lived religiosity, as I observed it on the field, and on the ideal-typical theological assumptions that inform and shape the practice. For each axis, I will provide examples of the gift, according to the triple obligation to give–to receive–to return, and identify the norm that governs the circulation of the gift specific to the respective axis.

5.2.2.1 *The vertical axis*

Tarot writes that on the vertical axis, the gift circulates between the *other world* of the gods and human beings. The Orthodox belief system is often described as profoundly *other-worldly*. This is partly because of its rich universe of “celestial beings” (the Triune God, saints, angels, archangels, seraphims, cherubims, thrones, powers, principalities, dominions, etc.) that are invoked at every liturgy⁵ and with whom believers nurture privileged contact through specialized prayers, iconography, hymnography and through cyclical commemoration in religious feasts. Most of the devotional practices, performed

either collectively in the liturgical celebration, or individually, in private acts of piety, point to some kind of connectivity between these celestial beings and the human world. It struck me during the field research that the existence or the reality of *another* transcendent *world* appeared absolutely self-evident to my interviewees, including to the not-so-practicing ones (who had grown up in an Orthodox culture). The latter held a self-justifying discourse about their not-so-serious practice, mentioning that their faith in the celestial beings is unshaken and they maintain a connection to the saints, the Theotokos and God through more privatized, individualized prayer and devotional practices. This appeared to me in stark contrast with my experience with the Reformed Protestant *milieu* in Switzerland, where even pastors would feel embarrassed to make too strong affirmations about the existence of God or His action in the world, focusing their sermons on the idea of doubt and showing much empathy with people's skepticism.

The importance of the relationship to the celestial realm is also emphasized by Orthodox anthropology, which has tremendous consequences for how Orthodox practicing believers relate to God on the vertical axis of the gift circulation. This anthropology could be briefly summarized as follows: God created man in His image and in view of infinite likeness with Him. Despite humanity's repeated failures to comply with God's requirements, He continued to remain faithful to the initial gift of eternity and restored His relationship with Man through a series of alliances, elections and blessings. The aim of this ever-renewed chain of the gift is Man's deification (*theosis*), his becoming God-like. If we were to translate this into the social scientific language of the gift paradigm, we could say that in the Orthodox belief system, God the Father is the originator and "instigator" of the gift process (Mauss calls this the "opening gift") by the very act of creation, through which He bestowed on Man and the world the gift of their own existence. At this stage, it is an utterly unilateral and free gift because there is no recipient prior to the gift and no obligation to give. The creature is a gift, which becomes the recipient of further gifts. Thus, initially, Man is a receiver, but, as he is made in the image of a giving God, this suggests that giving, reception and return are part of the cycle of human existence as well. This echoes the socio-anthropological perspective on the gift, as embedded in a triple obligation: to give—to receive—to return. The divine primordial gift thus calls for a response, which would make Man alternate the role of recipient with the role of giver. But how is Man supposed to respond to the immeasurable gifts of an Almighty giver? On this point, the various Christian theologies differ. The Orthodox believe that a gift of humanity to God is possible, despite the disparity of the parties. Man's primary stance is to acknowledge the gift and return thanks for what he received from God.⁶ Russian-American theologian Alexander Schmemmann says that Man was created as a priest for a cosmic Eucharist (let us remember that the meaning of the Greek word "Eucharist" is "to give thanks"), a grateful return of the gift he received when he was created. Apart from thankfulness, worship (individual, but more significantly liturgical forms of collective worship)

is one of the most important answers Man can give to his Creator, because it posits the acknowledgment of the sacramental character of the world as an epiphany of God, as explained by Schmemmann:

The term ‘sacramental’ means that the basic and primordial intuition which not only expresses itself in worship, but of which the entire worship is indeed the “phenomenon”- both effect and experience – is that the world be it in its totality as cosmos, or in its life and becoming as time and history, is an epiphany of God, a means of His revelation, presence and power. In other words, it not only “posits” the idea of God as a rationally acceptable cause of its existence, but truly “speaks” of Him and is in itself an essential means both of knowledge of God and communion with Him, and to be so is its true nature and its ultimate destiny...

(Schmemmann, 1973)

In the act of worship, Man acknowledges the initial divine gift (and therefore himself as a giftee) and gives glory and thanks for it. The following quotations from the text of the Orthodox liturgy⁷ richly illustrate this idea:

For to You all glory, honor, and worship are due, to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages.

Giving thanks with fear and trembling, as unprofitable servants, unto Thy loving-kindness, O Lord our Savior and Master, for Thy benefits which Thou hast poured out abundantly on Thy servants, we fall down in worship and offer a doxology⁸ unto Thee as God

Lord God Almighty... You accept the sacrifice of praise from those who call upon You with their whole heart...enable us to offer You gifts and spiritual sacrifices ...and deem us worthy to find grace in Your sight, that our sacrifice may be well pleasing to You...

It is proper and right to hymn You, to bless You, to praise You, to give thanks to You, and to worship You in every place of Your dominion...

We thank You also for this Liturgy, which You have deigned to receive from our hands...

Though these prayers are uttered by the priest, they are intended to be the words of all the community of believers, as the use of the first person plural (“we”) suggests. The audience participates in the act of worship not only by being epitomized in the priest’s prayer, but also by approving it verbally by answering “Amen” (so be it), and corporally, by crossing themselves, bending down or kneeling as a sign of reverence. It is important to note here that the act of worship is not only a purely intellectual or abstract idea, but it also involves the body and the human senses: bowing, bending, kneeling, crossing, smelling the incense and chanting. Worship practices are therefore not static, but involve the whole being, for a more efficient reconnection to the divine realm. The material mediation of worship is also illustrated

by the extensive use of icons, both in church and in domestic practice. The veneration of icons refers ultimately to the worship of the divine: “the honor given to the image passes over directly to the prototype” (Saint Basil the Great quoted in McGuckin, 2011: 355). Sarah Riccardi’s research on the use of icons by Orthodox believers in America confirms this:

in Easter Orthodox Christian devotional practices... icons are a fundamental aspect of connecting with the heavenly realm...with each actor (divine or human) conversing with, influencing and affecting one another.

(Riccardi, 2014: 35)

This corroborates Swiss convert Orthodox priest Michel Quenot’s widespread and extensively translated works on icons, which the author defines as “windows to Heaven”, implying the belief that through the icon, one can see into the heavenly realm.

The use of incense is another material form of mediating worship, as we can understand from the priestly prayer at the offering of incense: “Incense we offer to You O Christ our God. Receive it upon Your heavenly throne, and send down upon us in return, the grace of Your all-holy Spirit”.

The vocabulary of worship is varied and graded according to the context. It ranges from adoration (given uniquely to God and the persons of the Trinity), reverence or veneration (to the Theotokos and the saints) and respectful greeting (bowing down before icons, kissing the priest’s and bishop’s hand).

Worship being understood as the most significant form of giving back to God, it became critical for the Orthodox to perform the “right worship”, which is intimately connected with the idea of “right faith” or “right belief”. Incidentally, this also gave the name “orthodox” to the Church and its adherents, from the Greek “ortho” (right, true, straight)+ “doxa” (opinion, praise).

In practice, there are other forms of giving back to God on the vertical axis, one of which consists in self-offering in the act of pronouncing *monastic vows*: by renouncing the world (which does not mean denying the world), the monastic devotes his/her life to prayer, obedience, denial of self-will and self-interest, putting all his energy and talents in the service of God. Abbot Aemilianos of Simonos Petra, one of the most famous Athonite spiritual leaders in the 20th century Orthodox world, used to say that in monasticism, “visible man lives in order to possess invisible God” (Aemilianos, 1999: 123).

I had the opportunity to be present at a monastic tonsure in 2012 and I was struck by the text of the service with its blend of funeral and marriage vocabulary: the future monk is reminded that by taking the monastic habit (which is black), he engages to die to himself and to the world, but that is in order to unite himself very intimately to God, to Christ (as in a marriage). At the end of the ritual ceremony, the people who had been present went one by one to the new monk, kissing his hand and greeting him with two ritual wishes: some said to him “Have a good death!” (referring to the death of his

Self), others wished him “Have a good Paradise!” (as a consequence of his future union with God).

Fasting also provides an example of giving back to God. I have briefly mentioned fasting in Chapter 3 on Orthodox beliefs and religious practices, where I wrote that it consists of refraining from meat and dairy products, according to two cycles: a weekly one (every Wednesday and Friday of the year) and a yearly one (forty days before Christmas, forty days before Easter, a variable number of days before the feast of the Saint Apostles Peter and Paul in June and fourteen days before the Dormition in August). The Orthodox root their practice of fasting in biblical accounts of fasting (e.g. Adam was asked to refrain from tasting a specific fruit, i.e. to fast) and in the writings of the Fathers of the Church and the ascetic experience of various saints. The meaning of fasting is connected to the language of the gift in that it is described as a way of giving to God one’s own biological need for nutrition and other sensorial passions and lusts. An example from my field will illustrate this: the priest of a Russian parish situated in the French-speaking part of Switzerland who preached on the Sunday that precedes the Great Lent (before Easter), encouraged his congregation to fast in order to remember their own finitude and their dependence upon God, in order to exit the vicious circle of a life of earthly consumption and offer themselves more fully to God.

The idea of fasting as a means to return Creation to God has become the object of innovative interpretations by the new generation of theologians, inspired by the Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I, who describes fasting as a resource and solution for contemporary environmental problems: by exercising his will to refrain from accomplishing one’s egoistic desires, a mankind who fasts stops plundering and exhausting nature and the environment, God’s creation. This implies acknowledging the priceless value of the divine gift and treating it with reverence.

To fast is to acknowledge that all of this world, ‘the earth, is the Lord’s, and all the fullness thereof’ (ps.23:1). It is to affirm that the material creation is not under our control; it is not to be exploited selfishly, but is to be returned in thanks to God, restored in communion with God...Therefore, to fast is to learn to give, and not simply to give up. It is not to deny, but in fact to offer, to learn to share, to connect with the natural world. It is beginning to break down barriers with my neighbor and my world, recognizing in others’ faces, icons; and in the earth the face itself of God.⁹

I will discuss the implications of this new approach to fasting in Chapter 6 on vertical gift recompositions and permanencies.

The above examples of what is circulated on the vertical axis of the Orthodox system of gift (God’s gift to the world and to Man of their own existence, Man’s answer through worship, monasticism, fasting) are instances governed by a norm that needs to be clarified. Orthodox literature and the actors’ discourse put forward the idea of freedom: both giver and giftee have to be free

in their respective acts of donation and reception in order for the gift to be fulfilling. God creates the world and mankind freely (there is no force compelling Him to it) and Man is free to receive it and respond to it. Yet, if we apply the Maussian anthropological perspective, we discover that there is an aspect of obligation in the process of receiving and responding to the initial gift. Man is indeed free to receive, but in the event he chooses not to receive, he refuses the alliance with the giver, he fails to honor God's call and ends up turning away from his own being, his own existence, his own mission. On the other hand, if he receives but chooses not to give back, he remains a passive recipient, and he prevents the gift from growing and from manifesting its salvific and transforming power.

In all the examples of Man's response to God's gift, there is therefore a mixture of freedom and of obligation. Man *has to worship*, but there is a lot of freedom in the means, extent and forms of worship: collective liturgical prayer activities, church attendance and Eucharistic participation are highly recommended on a frequent basis, yet more individual private devotional practices are also recognized and approved. *Fasting is an obligation* of every Orthodox Christian, yet the rules are adapted to each person's life context and moreover elderly people, children, the sick and pregnant women are completely exempted from fasting. Monks *decide freely to enter monastic life*, but once the vows are pronounced, they have to give up their own will and obey their spiritual guide.

5.2.2.2 *The horizontal axis*

Let us now move on with the application of Tarot's definition of religion as a triaxial system of the gift and examine the horizontal axis. Tarot explains that at this level, the gift circulates between peers, brothers and coreligionists, at a more or less large scale. In the Orthodox case, this could refer to (1) the interaction between individuals at the level of a congregation (e.g. gift circulation in parish-based activities, sociability and charity; the relationship between a spiritual father and his spiritual children in the process of spiritual direction) and (2) the interaction at a more institutional level, such as that between the Church and the world (in the form of philanthropic and social work with the poor, the orphans, the elderly, people suffering from different addictions, etc.), or among the various local Orthodox Churches (their mutual recognition, granting of autonomy and autocephaly and the establishment of new local Churches).

In the following, I will provide examples that illustrate the functioning of gift-based interaction at the individual level and the norms that regulate it. Beforehand, it is important to note that the more recent parishes are (or in the process of getting established), or the more they are populated with newly arrived members, the more they are inclined to reduce their activity to liturgical services and coffee hour on Sundays. The priest being himself newly arrived in the host country needs to adapt to the legal, religious and cultural

realities specific to this context and to understand the pastoral challenges he has to face. Much energy is invested in gathering the people, getting to know them and the “human resources” on which he can rely to start building a community. At this stage, the parish has more of a marked ethnic character, and religious networks overlap ethnic networks. When they grow roots in the local religious landscape, have a stable population and a critical mass of regular attendants, gift-based interaction acquires more visibility because it becomes more routinized and formalized. The first example that comes to mind is the formation of a parish choir, whose members need to gather regularly to rehearse liturgical chanting, either on the premises of the parish or at one of the members’ home, over a meal or snacks and drinks. People involved in this activity devote their time, energy and vocal talents to enhance the aesthetic experience of the liturgy for their fellow parishioners or other church attendants. This is acknowledged by the priest as a sacrifice they offer to God and their community, and most priests express a word of gratitude to their choir members at the end of each liturgy.

Parish board meetings are also occasions when a group of parishioners meet and, based on the consultation of other parish members and of the priest and bishop, take decisions for a very wide range of actions, from financial issues (how to raise and spend money) to how to decorate the sacred space and how to reach out to people. The people who are involved are not necessarily the most practicing, but those who are ready to get involved in managing the life of the parish and have the resources to do it (these are usually highly skilled professionals, with longer experience of the local society and large network in the local community). The parish benefits from their experience and personal and professional networks in its integration process with the local administrative, political and cultural networks.

In Serbian parishes, there is the tradition to organize a women’s group, *Kolo srpskih sestara* (the Circle of the Serbian Sisters), who is in charge of preparing post-liturgical community meals and serving them, especially when bishops or other special guests visit the parish. The “sisters” deal with all details of the meal, from purchasing the products, cooking the meal, laying the tables, serving and cleaning the dishes. Depending on the scope of the event, it takes several days of work. They provide not only their numerous working hours and cooking skills, but in some cases also offer to buy the food at their own expense.

Apart from this kind of gift consisting in a group of specialized people offering their expertise to the benefit of the whole community, there are also gift practices that revolve around more theological and spiritual objectives: catechism, theological and spiritual lectures, prayer and psalm reading outside the parish services, visiting the sick, visiting people in prisons, collecting money to help a particular family in the parish or support some social program in an Orthodox country, etc.

Parishes that managed to buy or build their own worship place have succeeded because of the financial support from their community members

and their extended personal networks, but also thanks to the members' volunteering in the construction work. When asked about their motivation to give their time, energy, expertise and money to develop the respective parish, people involved in these activities usually answered in terms of a gift they made to the community, extended in space and time: their ethnic community will be able to develop and prosper and become a place where their children and grandchildren will be able to worship and where local people may come to benefit from the spiritual resources of Orthodoxy:

Building a church here means having a Serbian place for the following centuries and our children will be able to marry here and baptize their children... It is not only for us, we will die in a few decades, or we will go live somewhere else, but this place will remain here, as a witness of our presence, of our work for God.

(Serbian man, Lausanne)

We have to unite our forces, material and spiritual, to finish building our church. It requires sacrifice, we give from our time, from our money, we fast and we pray that God provides what we need to finish... Instead of going for holidays in a hotel, we will go camping, or simply back home to Serbia... but it is important to leave something here for the future, a trace of our presence in this country and in this life.

(Serbian woman, Bern)

Whatever we do to help in the Church, that we sing, or that we sweep the floor, or prepare coffee and anything else, we do it primarily for God and also for our neighbor, so that people feel good when they attend liturgy or simply enter the church to pray. We have to pay special attention to those who just visit, to welcome them properly, not to neglect anyone.

(parishioner, Russian parish in Vevey)

The material forms of gift that circulate in Orthodox parishes are always accompanied by more symbolic forms of gift. For example, when a family in a Greek parish went through a hard time because their child suffered from a sudden and severe sickness, the community asked the respective family about ways they could help. Both parents said they first and foremost needed others to pray for them and to intercede with God and the saints. Later, they also received concrete help from parishioners and the priest, in the form of driving, babysitting and searching for a good doctor.

The norm that the Church and parishes have instituted as the regulator of the gift circulation on the horizontal axis is inspired by Christ's command "to love one another as I have loved you". This implies a form of gift rid of the expectation of return and of self-interest. This corresponds to some extent to what Alain Caillé calls *aimance*, or unconditional giving. Though it is very hard to estimate to what extent this norm is the underlying motivation of

common behavior, it is, however, important to mention it because it shapes an ideal-typical form of gift. Actors do acknowledge they do not live up to it, but that it remains the model and ideal to follow. It is hard to have people speak about it, because those who may perform acts of “pure gift” would not speak about it openly. Some informants reported various stories about people they know or saints’ lives containing such examples. One of the stories is about a recently canonized Orthodox saint, Mother Maria Skobtsova, a Russian nun who lived in Paris during the Nazi occupation and who was deported in a German concentration camp under the accusation of having helped Jews escape Nazi control. She is said to have taken the place of a Jewish woman sentenced to the capital punishment, and dying instead of her.

At the institutional level, the norm of *aimance* has its own examples, but also a pragmatic delimitation of the gift. In my field research, I met priests who acknowledged having noticed that there are often abuses: some people become regular claimers of help, soliciting the gift because they know a parish has a kind of moral obligation to practice charity. Therefore, the priests feel compelled to set rules to the gift circulation and define the terms and conditions according to which this circulation can take place. Though in Western Europe this regulation is pretty much informal and spontaneous, in North American Orthodox parishes, gift circulation is much more organized and controlled (Krindatch, 2010).

A special type of horizontal gift, quite specific to Orthodoxy, is that which flows between an *elder* and his spiritual disciples/children. *Spiritual guiding* has been an important aspect of Orthodox Church life from the times when monasticism came to be widely accepted and included in the Church (starting with the 6th century). “Spiritual direction is not the gift of a response that solves a problem, but the gift of a path that leads the disciple to be saved – to be healed and made whole” (Chryssavgis, 2003: 68). It consists essentially in the fact that people spontaneously approach an experienced person (most of the times a monk) who is believed to have reached a high degree of spiritual maturity through prayer and different forms of asceticism (Hämmerli, 2015) and grant him authority over their spiritual life progress. Their relationship is based on the disciples’ total obedience to their elder, resulting in something they describe as spiritual filiation (monks or lay people who are in a relationship with an elder speak of their “spiritual father”). “Monastic life means: I follow someone. And thus at the center of monastic life is a particular person, and that person is the elder” (Maximos, 2007: 17). By granting him authority over their lives, the disciples “give birth” to the elder and as elder, he, in turn, shows the disciples the way from “life in the flesh” to “life in the spirit”. What regulates this gift’s circulation here is a mixture of total freedom and total obedience:

Though obedience presupposes a negative act – abdication from self-will, it is directed to something positive: acquiring a superior will, the divine one. This does not entail the suppression of personal freedom. Elder

Sophrony used to state that “obedience does not contradict freedom, but leads to it”.

(in Sakharov, 2002: 221)

In a long conversation about obedience, a Greek elder told me “the quality of obedience comes from freedom...It is like spiritual dancing, a harmony of two wills”. Spiritual direction and discipleship is the synergy of two wills and freedoms:

It is to the extent that the monk/spiritual student effaces his own will that he makes room for a different will, the superior, divine one, to replace his own, corrupted will. It is to the extent that obedience is done in freedom, that it does not become submission or does not engender feelings of high frustration, and it is to the extent that the elder does not force the student’s will that the latter does not feel dominated or subjugated.

(Hämmerli, 2015: 160)

The circulation of the horizontal gift at the more institutional level refers to the Church’s philanthropic and social work (*diakonia*). The Orthodox Center in Chambésy, Switzerland, has established the Orthodox Philanthropic Society, which organizes gala dinners and parties for the high society in Geneva and France as a fundraising strategy. This provides the means to assist Orthodox (but also non-Orthodox) people who go through temporary financial hardships, by covering health costs and insurance or different basic needs.

But the Church’s *diakonia* is more visible in Orthodox countries, where it deploys on a large scale because the Church has more financial means (from individuals’ donations, state subsidies, its own commercial activities), but also the necessary infrastructure and institutional means. For details about the Orthodox Churches’ *diakonia* in Eastern Europe, see Chapter 1.

The gift at this level is circulated from individual believers or the State to the Church as an institution that is in touch concretely with those who are in need and channels it further to them. We have here an example of a modern gift, which (1) circulates among strangers (from individuals and the state to an institution), it is more or less anonymous¹⁰ and impersonal (in the case of the state as giver)¹¹ and (2) is based on the free decision of individuals, according to their elective affinities (they identify with the cause of the Church). Moreover, the Church itself performs a modern gift, because it distributes it within target-/group-/problem-oriented activities.

Yet, the gift of the Church is in many respects traditional: it is based on the idea of mercy and charity performed in the name of an absent Other (God), as a moral obligation instituted by this Other. Not only is the Church’s gift motivated by religious values, it is complemented by the transmission of religious content. Many beneficiaries of the gift become re-inchurched in the course of the assistance they receive. Though the receivers of the Church’s gift do not need to be religiously involved nor necessarily Orthodox in order

to get help, the gift is organized in an Orthodox framework: priests perform services and prayers, bring icons, distribute religious books, propose confession and Eucharistic communion, etc. This differs considerably from the way Orthodox charity is performed in Western Europe, where the religious framework is very discrete if not absent (see the case of the Philanthropic society of the Orthodox Center in Chambésy). By giving to the Church, both individuals and the State indirectly affirm their confidence in the capacity of the Church to reach out to special categories of people and provide them with the appropriate assistance. Trust is what regulates the gift circulation at this level.

Horizontal gift circulation in the Orthodox religious system is also at work in the relationship between the various local Churches: as described in Chapter 3, the Orthodox “commonwealth” functions as a communion of local Churches (e.g. the Church of Greece, the Church of Romania, the Church of Bulgaria, etc.) that grant each other the recognition of the fact that they are *fully* and *equally* “one, catholic and apostolic Church” of Christ, independently of their size (in terms of territory and number of members) or institutional age (ancient patriarchates or newly created ones). Concretely, mutual recognition in the Orthodox commonwealth can be illustrated with the fact that hierarchs periodically visit each other and give speeches in the host country’s parishes, bring presents such as icons, mosaics, books, liturgical clothes and other liturgical objects. They also work on joint projects with youth, monastic exchange, theological students exchange, promotion of each other’s pilgrimage places, etc.

In the case of the “diaspora”, this flow of gifts is not so self-evident, because until recently the various bishops representing ethnic communities on the same territory (thus overlapping their jurisdictions, as described in Chapter 2), were in relations that reminded of competition rather than “fraternal” bonds. With the intensification of inter-Orthodox communication during the preconiliar process over the past ten years and pressure from the non-Orthodox Christian ecumenical bodies, Orthodox hierarchs in the West were forced to improve collaboration and cultivate cordial relations. Orthodox priests and bishops in the West are now seen more often concelebrating (most typically during the first Sunday of the Great Lent, also called “the Sunday of Orthodoxy”), visiting each other for their parish feasts or organizing youth activities, conferences, etc.

But this chain of gift has been broken many times in the history of Orthodox Churches, when one of the gift actors ceased to acknowledge the others’ territory, canonicity or orthodoxy. In sign of disagreement with a specific decision or action of a local Church, the others (or only some of them) cease communion until the situation is solved. Examples from the recent history of Orthodox Churches mentioned in Chapter 1 can illustrate this argument, such as the Russian emigration splitting into three ecclesiastical “branches” after 1927. The former has reestablished communion with the Moscow Patriarchate after the fall of communism, in 2007, while the Exarchate, part of

the Patriarchate of Constantinople (PC) until 2018, has recently made the same move.

The process through which new local Churches are created is also part of the inter-Orthodox interaction. Dioceses in a specific Mother Church's canonical bosom may develop over the time a common ethos that makes them increasingly distinct from the rest of the local Church to which they belong (because of using a common language, common culture and ethnical roots, different from the Mother Church). It has often been the case that this situation coincided with the formation of a new state, like after the breakup of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics or of former Yugoslavia. Under such circumstances, it is not rare that the decision to become a self-governing local Church in itself emerges. For example, some militate for the formation of a Macedonian Orthodox Church (separate from the SOC) or of an Abkhazian Orthodox Church (separate from the Church of Georgia). Also, back in Orthodox history, the Russian, Romanian, Greek and Bulgarian Patriarchates were born by separating from the PC at different historical moments and becoming independent (see Chapters 1 and 3). This was possible because the Mother Church granted them autocephaly, a term designating the possibility of self-organization and self-determination. Recognition of the development of a distinct ethos and the need to grant autocephaly is not an easy-going process. It is subject to negotiations that can last for decades. Further examples and discussions will follow in Chapter 7.

These cases illustrate the fact that the norm that regulates the gift cycle at the institutional level is recognition: it is to the extent that Churches recognize each other that they are in communion and develop gift relations among them. Conversely, a flawed recognition hinders or even interrupts the circulation of the gift. At this point, it is important to zoom on the issue of recognition and make a few clarifications. Recognition is both a vogue word invoked by social demand from all sorts of groups and individuals and a concept attracting increasing academic attention. Caillé (2007) argues that recognition is the new "total social phenomenon", which is strongly correlated with the advent of hyper-individualism in our societies. Similarly, Honneth (1996) argues that the rise of the modern "struggle for recognition" translates the affirmation of the Self, its autonomy and disembeddedness from socially or collectively constructed moral rules and norms. In modernity, the need for recognition emerged from the emancipation of the individual from traditions, society and institutions and from the ensuing need for constant negotiation and hence validation by the others.

Mutual recognition in the Orthodox commonwealth, as a necessary condition for orthodoxy and unity, both converges and differs from the modern understanding of the concept. It converges because it points to the recognition of a Church's distinctiveness, capacity and maturity to be self-governing. But at the same time, recognition functions as a safeguard measure against the individualization of the local Churches, i.e. against their claim to difference in terms of doctrine, worship, ecclesiastical organization, etc.

5.2.2.3 The longitudinal axis

The longitudinal axis of the Orthodox system of gift deploys itself in two areas: the relation Orthodox people and Churches have with the dead and with Tradition¹² and its transmission to future generations. As already mentioned in the previous chapters, Orthodox piety includes a strong belief in eternity, the after-life and in the continuation of the relationship with the dead through periodical remembrances in religious services and various forms of personal devotional acts. Practicing Orthodox speak about the dead, as people who “have fallen asleep in the Lord” and about death as a form of “birth into Heaven” or a “passage to eternal life”. At funerals and on other occasions on which the memory of the departed ones is honored, people sing three times “memory eternal” and often say a wishful “may the Lord forgive him/her” when they mention the names of the dead in conversations. The living bring tribute to the dead and they devote prayers in their memory in order to make sure they are in peace and will be received in Heaven. Sometimes people ask their deceased family members to pray to God for them, because they are believed to be in the presence of God.

Though physical disappearance from the world provokes grief to the living, it is relativized and alleviated by the belief in eternal life: death does not separate nor break human bonds; it does not annihilate the gift circulation, but it modifies it. Let me illustrate this with a few examples from the field: in a Greek parish, I met a lady who kept wearing her wedding ring despite the fact she was a widow, and spoke about her husband in the present tense. Here the void created by the physical absence is filled up at the symbolic level through the wedding ring, a gift of her husband through which the spouses sealed their union. In a Saussurian interpretation of this act, the signifier (the ring) replaces or epitomizes the signified (the marriage). Another example is the Romanian custom of distributing alms in the form of food, drink and all sorts of objects that reconstitute earthly life, with the intention to ensure the departed ones with “all the necessary things” in the afterlife. The gift is directed symbolically to the departed one, but someone else enjoys the materiality of this gift. In this example, the immediacy of giving and receiving (the departed one is supposed to receive this gift in another time and place) is disrupted, yet the gift cycle continues and it helps maintain the bond.

The Orthodox cultivate unceasing communion with those departed who are believed to have participated in the holiness of Christ: the saints. They are believed to have acquired God’s grace and to impart it to the ones who ask for it. When a person is proclaimed a saint by the Church, he/she is no longer prayed *for*, but prayed *to*. He/she changes from the status of beneficiary of the others’ prayers and offerings to the status of intercessor, the one who receives prayers and answers them. As already discussed in Chapter 3, saints are venerated to the extent that their life (or life narrative) provides an example of self-offering to God, according to their personalities and life circumstances. Priests try to bridge the historical gap between the times when particular saints lived and our times, trying to discern in the life narratives

of “old” saints examples that are relevant for their parishioners today. Also, they encourage the veneration of recent, 20th century saints, because they are supposed to better understand our times and to provide the necessary grace for believers to navigate late modernity. Interestingly, the non-Orthodox I interviewed when I was seeking to understand the image of the Orthodox communities in Switzerland in larger ecumenical Christian circles, also report finding inspiration in the lives of the 20th century Orthodox saints, who provide them with examples of how a Christian should deal with the secularizing forces in today’s Western societies.

The second manifestation of the Orthodox gift on the longitudinal axis is the relation to tradition. The etymology of the word itself contains the idea of gift: the Latin *trans* + *dare* means “to give across” and the Greek word from which the Orthodox understanding is derived, *paradosis*, made up of *para* + *didomi*, literally translates as “to give close besides”. It is the Greek terminology that better fits the Orthodox understanding of Tradition, as I will show, because of the idea of transmission in co-presence (human and divine presence).

Theologians mention two aspects: a visible one, which refers to the verbal and factual transmission of teachings, rules, institutions and rituals, as synthesized in the Bible, the Ecumenical Councils, the canons, the writings of the Church Fathers, the liturgy, Orthodox hymnography and iconography, and an invisible aspect, which refers to the communication of grace, sanctification and the Holy Spirit’s action in the world. Tradition appears as a complex web of visible and invisible gifts, as “Holy Tradition”, which is unanimously agreed to differ from “tradition” in the sense of customs and experiences of the past that people seek to reproduce in the present, but not fully separated from tradition as a body of customs shaped by religious practice. Though theologically there is a drive to distinguish (and even oppose) Tradition and tradition, in practice, the two are highly intertwined. The former is distilled in the latter, which added layers of secular or non-Christian practices and meanings to the former. Tradition plays an authoritative role because it is believed to be of divine origin and validated by the presence of the Holy Spirit (the modalities of this validation are discussed in Chapter 8). In Orthodox communities, whenever one wants to support a theological stance, one has to prove it is Tradition-compatible. Endorsed by the vertical dimension of the gift, Tradition has acquired a normative role in Orthodoxy.

The visible facet of Tradition as described by Orthodox theologically literate actors appears to have great similarities to what Danièle Hervieu-Léger has called the “chain of memory”, i.e. “an ideological, practical and symbolic system through which consciousness, both individual and collective, of belonging to a particular chain of belief is constituted, maintained, developed and controlled”. This shared recollection of religious experiences and writings is perpetuated through prayer, worship and obedience (especially in the case of monastics), through religious participation and catechism.

Catechism is a mode of transmission through formal teaching about the faith and the acting out of these teachings through ritual. In Orthodox

countries, this is part of the religious education programs included in the school curricula (more or less obligatory, depending on the country), whereas Orthodox in the West organize catechism in their parishes, according to the needs of the families involved in the parish life. In most of the ethnic parishes I was in contact with, catechism takes place actually in parallel or on the background of linguistic courses, where children learn their parents' language and culture together with religious content. Over the past few years, I heard more and more priests expressing their wish to separate the two and propose catechism in the local language, so as to make religious content more understandable and accessible to the generation born and raised in the West.

5.3 Specificities of the Orthodox system of the gift

After this attempt to make an overview of the Orthodox gift system according to Tarot's definition of religion, it is time to move on to the author's statement that the specificity of each religious system consists in the way it *articulates the three dimensions of the gift* and the emphasis it lays on one or another of them. From the previous considerations based on lived religiosity and theologically informed discourse, I argue that the first specificity of the Orthodox gift system consists in the *centrality of the vertical dimension*, which makes the relationship to God the measure and stakes of all human activity and moreover permeates the other dimensions of the gift system.

In Chapter 3, I discussed the centrality of God as Trinity in the Orthodox theology and worship. I quoted the example of the Russian Orthodox theologian visiting the World Council of Churches in Geneva and who, being asked by his fellow Western Christian Churches representatives about the Orthodox Church's social program, answered that "our social program is the Holy Trinity", suggesting an understanding of human social and cultural life as a form of *mimesis* of God's life in interconnectedness.

That the high emphasis on the relationship to God has practical implications in everyday life became obvious to me during my field research in a somewhat indirect way. While I was trying to find out whether the participation in the life of an Orthodox parish and to religious services was in any way connected to migrant integration, I often came across comments like the following:

one does not, or should not come to church to get integrated... But even so, if one is a good Orthodox, I mean if one rightly understands and loves God, if one prays, fasts and practices the virtues taught by the Church, then one feels comfortable anywhere and makes any place one's home... On the other hand we are not at home anywhere, we are all migrants on this earth and in this life here...It is as sons of God that we find our true selves and our true home, the Kingdom of God...

(Swiss-born woman of Russian origin, French-speaking part of Switzerland)

we will be better human beings, better citizens and will have good relations with our neighbor if we are good children of God, if we give Him the right worship. And the Church is the place where we worship God and where in fact we learn how to give God the right worship... Maybe we could eventually say that the Church does play a part in migrants' integration, although it sounds kind of strange... But it could be so to the extent that it teaches us to be a peaceful, divinely inspired presence everywhere we go, in any type of society or social environment, even a hostile one...

(Swiss-born man of Serbian origin,
German-speaking part of Switzerland)

the Church is everything to us, because there we find God and prayer to God is the most important thing because if one has God, one can then face anything in life... I feel good here in our Serbian parish, because I understand the language and what is being said, but if there weren't a Serbian parish I would anyway go to any parish, because the Holy Spirit is at work ...in other languages as well. It acts in the world and in us anyway...

(Serbian woman, German-speaking part of Switzerland)

So if we have God, if He dwells in us and we in Him, then anything we do will bear His blueprint...

(Romanian young woman, German-speaking part of Switzerland)

The circulation of the gift on the vertical axis appears to be the condition for a "successful" circulation of the gift also on the horizontal axis. As I will show in the next paragraphs, the gift circulating on the horizontal axis under the form of charity and almsgiving bears a symbolical connection with the vertical dimension: though the *de facto* beneficiaries of charity are concrete people or institutions, the gift is simultaneously directed symbolically to God Himself, in sign of gratitude or love. Orthodox practicing people are reminded constantly of this correlation between the horizontal and the vertical axes in homilies, in which priests insist on the fact that one's love for God is manifested through one's love for one's neighbor and with the idea of faith becoming manifest in concrete acts of charity in daily life situations.

The same idea seems to emerge also among my informants from a Serbian parish that was in the process of building its own church: a few people acknowledged that the transparent way in which the parish board managed the funds raised for this purpose made them feel comfortable making donations because it allowed them to follow the progress of the project and reassured them that their money was used for the intended purpose. But most people seemed not to care about how exactly the parish board spent the money, because they estimated this was the board members' own responsibility in front of God. They emphasized the fact that what was truly important

in the act of donating was their personal effort to participate in building a church where many generations will worship God. This brings to mind the appeal the Romanian Patriarchate made to all Romanians (in the homeland and abroad) to contribute financially to erecting the Cathedral of the Salvation of the Nation (see Chapter 1). The slogan of the fundraising campaign ran: “your gift to eternity” (*darul tău pentru eternitate*). Priests and Church representatives, as well as lay people who supported this project explained that the cathedral represents a legacy of this generation for the many following ones (longitudinal gift) and a gift each and every one could make to God Himself (vertical gift).

These examples indicate that the ultimate recipient intended in the act of giving on the horizontal axis is the transcendental *other* on the vertical axis. This transforms the triple obligation to give—to receive—to return in several ways. First, the one who is actually indebted by the gift is God, and not so much the actual beneficiary. This diminishes the expectation of return on the side of the giver and the obligation of return on the side of the *de facto* recipient. Second, this frees the giver of the constraint of a social pressure regarding the amount of what is given and allows the gift to operate rather in the mode of spontaneity and generosity. The third consequence of the fact that behind the giftee on the horizontal axis there is the specter of God implies more anonymity and discretion: the horizontal gift does not need to be disclosed publicly because this would imply a return on the horizontal dimension, manifested as gratitude from gift beneficiaries, social recognition and status, which would saturate the gift cycle and would no more create a debt of God toward the giver.

Even when one fasts and gives one’s own abstinence as a self-sacrifice to God, this should remain a highly private and confidential matter, because the admiration the person who fasts may get from other people is regarded as parasitizing the ascetic effort with an earthly return. Priests insist before Lenten periods on the fact that believers should remain very modest, reserved and unnoticed in their fasting efforts. One should rather eat meat in a non-fasters’ gathering rather than reveal one’s efforts to fast by refusing to eat non-Lenten food. Recognition for one’s good and virtuous deeds appears to be a too immediate and easy return for one’s efforts and gifts. The postponement of the return implies faith and trust in God, that He will respond at the right time.

The longitudinal gift is also highly imbued with the vertical one, as we saw it is the case with Tradition: the latter is so important for the Orthodox Church precisely because it is understood as partaking of the grace of God and the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is precisely through the connection with the vertical gift that Tradition plays a normative role.

The *second characteristic* of the articulation of the gift dimensions in the Orthodox gift system is the fact that *the axes are neither wholly separate nor self-sufficient*, but rather interlocked and interdependent. The circulation of gift on a precise axis is fulfilled (and fulfilling) to the extent that what is

circulated is related to the other two axes, so that the act of giving reaches beyond the concrete framework in which it was performed. The gift activated on any of the axes calls for its symbolic reproduction on another axis, or on all three of them, involving thus the whole gift system.

The gift operates a triple alliance: between the human beings in the visible world, between the living and the dead, and the visible and the invisible. The gift performed in the visible realm operates not only at the visible/immanent level, but points symbolically to the invisible/transcendent level and reaches its full potential by reconnecting the two of them. For example, when people give charity, they may intend it to God Himself, but also to the dead: what one gives to the living is what one offers in memory of one's departed dear ones, to honor them or to make peace with them. This implies that the horizontal gift is permeated with the longitudinal and the vertical dimensions, just like in the previously quoted example of the construction of the Romanian cathedral ("your gift to eternity").

This point can be illustrated with the following examples:

We will know Tradition and be able to live it in our parishes, hand it down to our children, only if we know God...if we pray, if we fast and seek to be spiritual.

(man of Russian origin, French-speaking part of Switzerland)

Here the successful circulation of the gift on the longitudinal axis appears to be dependent on the "quality" of the vertical gift: having the right relationship and communion with God is the necessary condition for knowing what to select from the spiritual legacy of the Church and what (and how) to pass further.

In the following interview excerpt, the horizontal gift is triggered by an imagined need for making an offering on the longitudinal axis. Though circulating concretely on the horizontal axis, the gift is symbolically directed and intended to satisfy the longitudinal dimension, which itself is ingrained in the belief in eternal life, which pertains to the vertical axis.

I had kept dreaming of my deceased mother for several nights...She was not very well, she was sad and kind of cold... I thought it would be good if I gave food and some clothes in her memory, so I bought groceries and offered a meal for the parish, at coffee hour...and some clothes for a family with many children and low income back in Romania... It was my way to make peace with my beloved mother. After that I stopped dreaming of her...

(Romanian woman, French-speaking part of Switzerland)

The actors exchange gifts whose reference points to the vertical and longitudinal axes and the result of this giving and receiving process is that the actors involved in it are drawn closer to what they perceive as being the vertical dimension.

Applying Tarot's definition of religion to the Orthodox case provided a useful theoretical instrument, which helps to make (sociological) sense of the theologically embedded model of the social relations established in the framework of Orthodox religiosity: what is given is part of social networks, which are part of networks of meaning and values. It also facilitates understanding that Orthodox communities function according to the specificity of being structured by the *omnipresence of the vertical dimension of the gift with its transcendent otherness permeating both horizontal and transversal axes*. Moreover, the human being appears as a given being, whose existence is embedded in a system of relations and obligations – to God, the ancestors, family, Church, nation, future generations, etc. Man belongs to a chain of celestial and earthly beings, in which he has a place and a debt. He chooses neither his place nor his debt, which are assigned to him by virtue of his embeddedness, but by accepting and fulfilling them, he reaches the fullness of his humanity and resemblance with the divine.

This brings the vertical and the horizontal axes of the gift in close relation, to the point that it is impossible to separate them and to speak of each of them independently. The horizontal/ visible and the vertical/invisible are in a constant dialogue that ends up modifying the visible, in the sense that the latter is not autonomous and self-sufficient, it does not contain its own ultimate explanations and reasons, and has to relate to the invisible in order to formulate them. This constitutes the basis for further reflection on the possible definition of an Orthodox ethic (in the way Max Weber discussed religious ethic) and its implications for how Orthodox societies function.¹³

For now, having uncovered the Orthodox definition of religion, we can return to the question: what is being perceived as endangered in the process of integrating in secular societies? If Orthodoxy is a system of the gift centered on the all-encompassing role of the vertical axis, then migrants' integration into "the immanent frame" that evacuated transcendent references from the life of individuals and societies – according to the actors' theologically informed discourses – presupposes the denial or the weakening of the normative role of the vertical gift in regulating social and political organization (i.e. the horizontal circulation of the gift), as well as cultural and religious reproduction and memory (i.e. the longitudinal axis of the gift). In a word, a full-fledged integration would jeopardize the actors' perceived specificity of the Orthodox identity.

Nevertheless, as the research showed, Orthodox individual migrants do integrate unproblematically in Switzerland, and more largely in the West, where their religious institutions are rather growing in terms of membership, action and recognition. Is the system of the gift unaffected by these developments? In the following, I will show that migrants' relocation in "conditions of belief" different from those that have shaped the system of the gift elicits recompositions of the gift that aim at preserving it. "Recompositions", a notion I borrowed from Marcel Hénaff (2003), consist in integrating new realities in the system of the gift by selecting those aspects that can be recoded

as compatible or already pertaining to the existing configuration. When a specific gift system is challenged by outside political, cultural or economic practices that have not been shaped by the respective gift system and that are apparently incompatible with it, the community that embodies the gift system first tends to resist and reject those practices. When resistance is no longer possible because of widespread tacit adoption of those practices, then *gift recompositions* are necessary for the gift logic to be safeguarded and perpetuated. In the next three chapters, I will analyze the perceived perils to the Orthodox system of the gift, its recompositions and permanencies.

Notes

- 1 I refer here to Tönnies' concept of *Gemeinschaft* (community) as a form of social organization based on personal face-to-face interactions and defined by traditional social rules, as opposed to *Gesellschaft* (society), characterized by impersonal and indirect social interactions guided by values and beliefs shaped by rationality and efficiency, as well as by economic, political and self-interest (Tönnies, 1988).
- 2 Derrida argued that the very notion of "gift" is a logical impossibility. His idea of "true gift" implies total unawareness and lack of intentionality both from the side of the giver and of the receiver, so as to avoid any form of recognition of the gift *per se*. Acknowledging the gift engenders feelings of gratitude and an irresistible urge to give back.
For there to be a gift, there must be no reciprocity, return, exchange, counter-gift, or debt. If the other gives me back or owes me or has to give me back what I give him or her, there will not have been a gift, whether this restitution is immediate or whether it is programmed by a complex calculation of a long-term deferral or difference.
(Derrida, 1992: 12)
- 3 Godbout's original phrase reads *l'appât du don*, a punning of the French idiom *l'appât du gain*, which translates as greed or lure for material profit. By speaking of "the greed for gifting", Godbout reverses the understanding of Man from an egoistically interested being to one that longs for creating and maintaining bonds with other human fellows.
- 4 « le don constitue le moteur et le performateur par excellence des alliances » (my translation)
- 5 For example: "there stand before Thee thousands of archangels and ten thousands of angels, the cherubim and seraphim, six-winged, many-eyed, borne aloft on their wings".
- 6 As shown in Chapter 3, failure to give thanks and proper worship to God is what caused Adam's fall, according to Christian anthropology. The Orthodox reading of the narrative of the Fall is that, instead of trusting God's command not to taste from "the tree of life", Adam followed other suggestions. Instead of recognizing God as God and giving worship to Him, Adam obeyed Eve. And instead of being thankful for what he had received, he made Creation his own possession when appropriating himself what God had defended him to approach, i.e. the "tree of life". The Orthodox understanding of the "original sin" and the subsequent issue of "salvation history" is about breaking and restoring the chain of gifts. God the Father is described as remaining faithful to His initial project to make Man the inheritor of eternal life and the bearer of His image and likeness and therefore trying to reestablish the relationship to humanity by sending down His Son, the second person of the Trinity. When humanity failed to recognize in the person of Jesus Christ the gift of salvation (the Messiah, the Savior), God sent the third

person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit and founded the Church. While before Christ the gift was reserved to the chosen people of Israel, in the Church, the gift is extended to the “gentiles” and “all nations” and to the whole of humanity, independently of ethnicity. We will see that this particular point is extensively invoked by some Orthodox in the West and especially by converts in order to deconstruct the intricate relationship between Orthodoxy and ethnicity in the historically Orthodox countries. It is within the Church that continues the series of donations started at the creation of the world: God is revealing Himself to Man through the Church dogma and through His grace, in the Eucharist (which commemorates and enacts Christ’s sacrificial death being restored to life in the act of the Resurrection) and the other sacraments. It is also within the Church that God awaits for Man to become an agent of the gift.

- 7 The excerpts are taken from the modern English translation of Saint John Chrysostom’s liturgy, the most widely used version of liturgy performed in Eastern Orthodox parishes.
Source: <https://www.goarch.org/-/the-divine-liturgy-of-saint-john-chrysostom>
- 8 Doxology in Orthodox Christian practice refers to a short verse or hymn praising God. The word comes from the Greek *doxa*, meaning “glory”, and *logos*, meaning “word” or “speaking”.
- 9 Patriarch Bartholomew I, Environmental Addresses, <https://www.patriarchate.org>.
- 10 I say “more or less” because many people accompany their donations in cash with a small piece of paper on which they write their names and those of their family members, so that they be prayed for by the priests (and monks) of the respective parish/monastery.
- 11 The relationship between the State and the Church are contractual in nature and often mutually interested. For example, in Russia, Romania and Greece the State uses Church property (buildings, land), in exchange for which it supports Church social projects or assists in building worship places.
- 12 The Orthodox spell it with a capital T, in order to distinguish it from “tradition” in the sense of customs and cultural norms inherited from the past. An in-depth discussion will follow in Chapter 8.
- 13 This is the topic of two forthcoming articles that attempt to define the *Orthodox ethic* building on this gift-centered definition of Orthodoxy.

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Part 3

**Gift Recompositions in
the Case of Migration to a
Secular Context**



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6 The Vertical Axis

Perils, Recompositions and Permanencies

In this chapter, I will put into perspective the Orthodox understanding of the vertical dimension of the gift system (discussed in Chapter 5) and elements of the Orthodox understanding of secularization (discussed in Chapter 4) in order to identify those concrete aspects of the Orthodox identity that are perceived as endangered, as well as the solutions the Orthodox attempt to provide to the famous conundrum of living in the world without identifying with the world.

As I explained in the theoretical chapters, the circulation of the gift between the transcendent world of God and the created world of human beings is of utmost importance for the Orthodox system of the gift. This appears to be more than just a theological assumption; it is present in religious practice too and, most importantly, has influenced the functioning of social relations, which are governed by an ethos combining human and divine spheres (Papanikolaou, 2007). The evacuation of transcendent references from human and social life – the chief aspect of secularization according to the Orthodox point of view – is depicted as something unambiguously negative by all Orthodox, independent of their “liberal”, “progressive” or “conservative” orientation.

Orthodox migrants experience a transition from gift-centered societies stressing interconnectedness, debt and embeddedness, to gift regimes that privilege freedom from the debt and disembeddedness. If in the former context, religious identity was something taken for granted, implicit, socially and culturally defined, negotiated and transmitted, in the new context, individuals cannot rely anymore on society and surrounding culture to access Orthodoxy. It is their own responsibility and task to build Orthodox communities and transmit religion. And the key question arises: to what model of Orthodoxy should they reconnect or should they reproduce? Different explorations of the past are imaginable. For example, Orthodox migrants from ex-communist countries try to overcome the trauma of the recent past by reconnecting to the glory of the more distant past, when they imagine Orthodoxy was thriving and was authentic. But is it possible to replicate these versions of Orthodoxy in the West, where the “conditions of belief” (Taylor, 2007) amount rather to disenchantment?

According to Hénaff (2003), a gift system and the community that embodies it tend to perpetuate it and adapt it in ways that allow its survival. In the following, I will discuss Orthodox vertical gift recompositions and permanencies both at the level of institutions and individuals. In the case of the Orthodox institutions facing secularity (according to their own understanding of it as a threat to the vertical axis of the gift), I noticed two types of reactions: on the one hand, a tendency to protect the gift by trying to reproduce an ideal version of it; on the other hand, an attempt to espouse those elements of secularity that appear least threatening (as a consequence of cultural and institutional integration), adapt the institution and recode its role in the gift system. In the case of individuals, I will look at the transformations of highly important devotional acts such as individual and collective worship, fasting and confession and detect those elements that are recoded so as to make these practices compatible with the contemporary ethos of choice, authenticity and self-fulfillment.

6.1 Threat, recomposition and permanence at the institutional level

The Orthodox Church understands itself as the locus of the gift circulation between the Triune God and Man: a gift of God Himself, the Church is the place where God continues to give Himself to humanity through the sacraments (especially the Eucharist) and where Man answers his Creator by giving back “right worship” (ortho-doxy), engaging in a process of gift exchange whose final aim is *theosis* or divinization of the human being (Chapter 3). As a community of *homo adorans* that has Christ at its head, the Church understands itself as a divine-human reality. If, according to the Orthodox description of secularization, humanity ceases to acknowledge God as the Creator in whom the world finds its ultimate meaning, this humanity becomes blind to the divine identity of the Church, and starts acting as if it were yet another human institution, which has, however, the originality that it manages the production and reproduction of religious ideas (dogma and theology), rituals (liturgy, confession, etc.), symbols (the sacraments), artifacts (iconography, music and architecture) and of a hierarchical staff (bishops, priests, deacons). This is how we could formulate **the first major perceived threat** at the institutional level, which is expressed in the field data by clergy and some highly theologically trained actors (among whom there are converts):

in a secular society like we have in the West we run the risk to deviate from the true nature and aim of the Church, which is not from this world, and to reduce it to worldly things, like charity to the poor...Of course we have to care also for the poor, but let's not forget that there are thousands of NGOs out there who help the poor, but there is no NGO who cares for the salvation of your soul. Only the Church can do this, only the Church gives you Christ in the Holy Communion.

(convert, ROCOR, French-speaking part of Switzerland)

the Church is not a human institution... The institutional part of the Church is the result of a human necessity to live and organize itself in the world,

(Russian bishop, French-speaking part of Switzerland)

if we turn the Church into a worldly institution, then it becomes a mere...service to the community, and the Eucharist is no longer a sacrament, but a kind of reward for those who fulfilled their task honorably...

(Russian parishioner, French-speaking part of Switzerland)

These interview excerpts resonate with other actors' remarks that I quoted in Chapter 4 on secularization and were warning that the "world" may push the Church to focus on social issues rather than on its liturgical and worship mission because the (secularized) world does not understand anymore the need for "right worship".

In order to remain faithful to the divine-human definition of the Church, some parishes adopt a contemplative and "mystical" style of pastoring their flock. Parish activities are centered on worship and "worldly" activities are not encouraged on the premises of the parish church, except for a short "coffee hour" after each liturgy and community meals for important feasts (Christmas, Easter and the parish feast). The priests make themselves very available for confession, adults' religious education or blessing of houses. Unlike in many parishes where priests use homilies as opportunities to reflect also on current social and cultural issues, in contemplative-style of parishes, the sermon addresses strictly theological content, in connection with the reading from the day's Gospel. This is correlated with the fact that the expression of political views by parishioners is disapproved of. Church members are reminded that the only way to make the world a better place and the best way to act in society is to purify one's heart and life of personal sin in order to become God-like, and that the Church is there to assist in this task. There is a clear separation between clergy and lay people and the former enjoy high respect and confidence, manifested also in the fact that there is little contestation (or none) and little lay initiative or involvement in liturgical and spiritual matters.

These parishes keep a low profile in the local religious landscape and pursue rather theologically oriented goals. They do not have any strategy of recruiting members and do not seem interested in enlarging the number of attendees, but rather let the principle of "natural selection" determine the size of the community: only those believers who comply with the contemplative spirit of the parish will stay. The solemnity and length of services, as well as high strictness with regard to the possibility of making noise or moving around in the church during the service make it difficult for families with young children to attend such parishes.

I came across this style of parish life centered strictly on worship and theological matters in two parishes belonging to the PC and two others affiliated

with the ROCOR. These parishes could maintain the style of pastoring mainly because they were headed by clergy with a certain degree of authority and willing to imprint a contemplative style of parish life, by reproducing an ideal version of the Church as a divine–human institution. The Russian parishes were less successful in applying it because their population was constantly increasing with new waves of migration after 1990 and since 2000. This population growth was out of the control of the clergy and of the core lay people who ran the parishes.

But what are the ideal gift systems these kind of parishes try to reproduce? The first two (belonging to the Patriarchate of Constantinople) identify this ideal with a monastic community, a body of brothers and sisters having the priest as their abbot (who in his turn represents Christ), who decides in all matters and to whom respect, loyalty and obedience are due. All parishioners are encouraged to confess to their parish priest and devote their spiritual energy in supporting the community with their prayer, obedience and love for each other. This way of belonging is supposed to benefit both individuals, by providing them with a space where they can give “right worship” to God, and a community that supports their religious identity and empowers them to cope with the secular environment in which they have to live their daily lives.

The Russian parishes strive to reproduce a model of parish organization uncorrupted by the interference of political interests, i.e. neither by the soviet regime, nor by the previous legacy of Peter the Great, who had turned the Church into a State department closely controlled by the latter. Two Russian bishops reported that this ideal model can be found in the provisions stipulated by the All-Russian Council of 1917–1918, which took place in Russia right during the Bolshevik revolution. Given the historical circumstances, with the communist regime drastically limiting religious activity and the Church’s ability for self-governance, the decrees of the Council could not be implemented within the Russian Church itself, yet they provided inspiration to parishes and dioceses outside the soviet territory. The provisions that refer to parish life describe it as the primary locus of Christian life, and assign it the task of incorporating believers in the Trinitarian unity of Christ’s Body and bring salvation. As such, parish life should be re-centered on preaching the word of God and all human resources should be mobilized in this sense: clergy, monastics and pious lay people who have the necessary knowledge and ability to preach can be granted the blessing to evangelize (Destivelle, 2006). The Russian clergy I interviewed based their pastoral style on this renewed affirmation of the divine–human nature of the Church. It is in order to protect this specificity of the Church that they maintained that the parish should not allow for ethnic socialization and other social projects.

The second “strategy” to protect the vertical gift at the institutional level is, as I mentioned previously, to recode the gift, so as to integrate new realities in the gift system. In the present case, “new realities” refers to the withdrawal of the transcendent divine paradigm from the surrounding culture, which implies the expectation that Churches and religious institutions behave like

this-worldly institutions. This runs counter to the Orthodox Churches' claim to be divine-human organizations whose mission is to provide salvation. In order to be able to continue to assert their divine-human nature, according to their self-definition, Orthodox Churches adapt by temporarily suspending their claim to divine origin and mission, and by giving prevalence to the human aspects of their identity. In this way, secular actors (or even members of their own flock) recognize them as valid interlocutors, creating the necessary conditions for a relationship to be established. After that, Orthodox Churches reaffirm the divine aspect of their identity by pointing to the fact that their social or political involvement (i.e. the human side that the interlocutors appreciated) is meaningful to the extent it is inspired and commanded by their divine identity. In this way, they refer their this-worldly agency back to the vertical axis, which they advocate as the genuine locus of their existence and action.

Examples that illustrate this argument are numerous and they are the result of institutional integration of the Orthodox Churches in their host countries. To start with, let me mention that Orthodox parishes get in contact with local civil and political authorities for various reasons (e.g. migrant integration, support for social programs or for cultural activities) and often invite the latter to take part in parish feasts or local saints' celebrations (such as Felix, Regula and Exuperantius, the patron saints of the city of Zürich) and to give a speech to the Orthodox believers. I have witnessed three such events and, surprisingly, the politicians' speeches were very similar, underlying the fact that the Orthodox presence in their canton was important because it reinforced a climate of peace, social justice and "green" attitudes, a message that the world needs to hear from religious institutions in today's world. On one occasion, the parish priest took the floor and addressed the audience in order to confirm what the previous speaker had said and to add that if the Orthodox Church is socially and environmentally engaged, it is because it respects Christ's command to love one's neighbor and to protect God's Creation.

A second example of vertical gift recomposition at the institutional level can be found in the Serbian Church. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, Serbian parishes in Switzerland (and more generally in Western Europe), have developed a large array of activities through which they cater to the social, cultural and psychological needs of their members. Some of the priests I interviewed acknowledged (and also mentioned in homilies) that the Church is primarily a place for prayer, repentance and salvation and that activities with this-worldly character are a means to in-church people and to reconnect them with the ultimate theological realities that lie beyond rituals and that inform the Church's action in the world. Some Serbian priests reported that Serbs are not very practicing and they tend to come to church in order to find a piece of home, where to release pressure accumulated from the sometimes tense relation to the host society. Thus parishes not only allow for a place where people can socialize, enjoy ethnic food, religiously connected folklore, but also get practical help in the form of counseling (for financial, health or

schooling matters) and networking (with local authorities and services or with other co-ethnics who possess human and material resources). People who would not come to church under normal circumstances started attending the parish and reconnected to their religious traditions, learning about the faith and increasing their theological knowledge:

The first time I came to church it was because I needed to meet other Serbs, I felt alone. I found here wonderful people, especially our parish priest. Then it became a habit to go to liturgy on Sundays. Soon after, I started questioning the priest about confession, about sin, about the meaning of liturgy. When I found out all these wonderful things, I just cried out of joy and at the same time of sorrow, that nobody has informed me about that before! How come we have all this treasure in our Orthodoxy and we don't know about it? I can no longer imagine my life without Christ, without the prayer of the Church...

(Serbia woman, Bern)

The third example of vertical gift recomposition is from the Orthodox heartland, where the Mother Churches become increasingly bureaucratized, as a result of the multiplication of their fields of action, which commands division of work and specialization of tasks. Orthodox Churches back home try to become (or remain) partners of the State in defining national identity, national interest and in responding to the population's needs. To this effect, they had to intensify contact with complex secular institutions and subsequently to adapt to modern ways of communication and negotiation. Moreover, facing increasing numbers of believers in need for pastoral and practical assistance in order to cope with various forms of suffering, Orthodox Churches had to develop specialized bodies to fight poverty, violence, abuse, addictions, diseases, etc. Paradoxically, in order to ensure better conditions for accomplishing their divine mission (i.e. to allow for the vertical gift to circulate between God and human beings), the Orthodox Churches developed their human component in the same fashion as this-worldly institutions: they are organized in departments (headed by clergy) and administrative units, run charities, social projects, and other types of services (Naletova, 2009). The bureaucratic aspect is motivated by the need for efficiency, which itself is a new standard introduced by the logic of neoliberalism, which Gauthier argues transforms all religious institutions, including traditional ones (Gauthier, 2017). Be it as it may, Church representatives of charitable work insist on the fact that this-worldly institutional aspects (bureaucracy, efficiency, etc.) have to remain connected to the divine, vertical axis:

The cooperation of the Church with various associations, foundations and humanitarian organizations is beneficial only to the extent that the Church does not lose its pastoral identity and its saving vocation.¹

The social work of the Church derives from the Gospel of love given by Christ to all men, and from the Divine Liturgy, which celebrates Christ's merciful and self-sacrificing love for humanity.²

Another example of gift recomposition at the institutional level – this time one that has a higher impact on Orthodox Churches in the West – is provided by the Orthodox presence at the EU and the statements issued by Orthodox bodies such as the Committee of the Representatives of Orthodox Churches in the European Union (CROCEU).³ This is a joint body created with the aim of monitoring European policies and activities that are of interest to Orthodox Churches and which reflects their initiatives of institutional integration in the larger political system. In this precise context, Orthodox Churches behave like pragmatic “human” institutions that adapt to their secular interlocutors, especially with regard to the choice of terminology, thus enhancing their chances of having a greater leverage in Brussels.

Let us consider the following excerpt from a statement CROCEU issued before the European elections in 2014:

The Orthodox Representatives would like to underscore that the European Union is not just another institution founded to safeguard individual and collective economic interests. It is rather the recipient encompassing the aspirations of hundreds of millions of people living in their own country who wish to be part of a larger family of nations that work together for the consolidation of social standards, dignity in life and security in society. All share a responsibility for building and developing institutions by all means socially, economically and environmentally sustainable. Christians are encouraged to take active part in the elections and, thus, to contribute to the improvement of the European project.

(CROCEU, 2014)

This statement indicates a highly positive attitude of the Orthodox Churches toward the European project not only as a political and economic alliance but also as the embodiment of “the aspirations of hundreds of millions of people”. Further on, the document endorses a commitment on the part of the Orthodox Churches to human rights, democracy, the rule of law and civic education (Petkoff, 2015). This is at odds with some fundamental positions local Orthodox Churches regularly voice as a religious critique of the secular ethos (e.g. *Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church*), and with the suspicion vis-à-vis the European project (especially with regard to its legislation and cultural influence) that some bishops, priests, spiritual charismatic figures and lay people in Orthodox countries have been expressing over the past two decades.

This document indicates the ability of Orthodox Churches to engage modern political issues, while concurrently disagreeing upon the modalities of practical implementation and application in society. It is an example of

gift recomposition in that the perceived threat to the gift (modern political thought, fomented in a philosophical framework alien to Orthodox theological and ecclesiastical assumptions) is not dismissed and bluntly rejected, but approached in a way that tries to “tame” the threat and incorporate it in the gift system. The “taming” consists in selecting social issues of concern to EU policy that have some common ground with or at least do not come up against the Orthodox/Christian consciousness (e.g. civic participation, defense of ecological well-being of the planet, human rights, equality, social justice, etc.), without however discussing the profoundly different philosophical presuppositions that underpin the respective shared concern or the different means employed to attend to those concerns. In this way, the goal or the ideal (e.g. the preservation of human dignity) is disembedded from the fundamental Christian tenet underneath it (e.g. the worth of human life derives from the fact that it was created by a transcendent God in view of participation to the divine life).

By adopting a conceptual framework acceptable to the EU, the CROCEU ensures to be received as a dialogue partner of EU institutions and thereby develop theologically connected activities, parallel to staying in touch with political institutions: they organize art exhibitions showing the contribution of Orthodox iconography to European culture, seminars on Orthodox spirituality, conferences on Orthodox theology and science/bioethics/law/human rights, etc.

Some (e.g. Petkoff, Papanikolaou) see in this European engagement a hope that the Orthodox Church may become more porous to modernity. Or a hope that the gap between Orthodox Churches in their homelands and the West will be bridged. Others see in this European participation a betrayal of the faith and of the ethos of the Church for the sake of ranging with the powerful of the time. From the gift perspective, the Orthodox presence at the EU and the diplomatic statements issued on different occasions by the CROCEU read as an attempt to protect the gift, similar to the collaboration of Orthodox Churches with the communist regimes or other political regimes. It is a pragmatic choice that consists in stripping themselves of their divine claims when interacting with secular political bodies with decision power, so as to secure good relations with the political institutions of the time and thereby guarantee a climate in which they can go on performing their sacramental dimension.

The **second perceived threat** to the vertical dimension of the gift is the **sacralization of political ideals** such as democracy, equality or pluralism. Orthodox Churches have to make the transition to “political societies”, which put at their core the public space and call for replacing the bilateral reciprocal bond with a multilateral collective bond (Hénaff, 2003). The closely knit connection between the vertical and the horizontal axes (e.g. the understanding of human flourishing as the result of humanity becoming more like God), is challenged by the emphasis on the horizontal axis in “political societies” (human flourishing is the result of living in a just social environment achieved by perfecting institutions and governance).

My attention was drawn to this issue by some clergy and theologically educated lay people engaged in the Church. I will discuss only three examples here. First, a bishop who at the time of my field trip had jurisdiction over Russian Orthodox parishes in Switzerland told me that some clergy worried that the transformation of equality into an absolute, unquestionable norm in society could have important consequences for the Church: in the future, political authorities might feel entitled to extend the application of this norm to the internal organization of religious institutions. In the case of Orthodox Churches, this could imply the obligation to ordain women to the priesthood in the name of gender equality. This is formulated as a threat not because it calls into question a two-thousand-year-old tradition of the Church, but because it introduces a human and cultural factor (i.e. gender equality) into the definition of the vertical gift (i.e. the divine gift of priesthood was granted by Christ to the Apostles, who were men).⁴

Second, a Russian informant told me in a post-interview conversation that the generalization of the imperative of equality could impact Orthodoxy with regard to the hierarchical organization of the Church and the way in which spiritual authority is exercised. Her understanding (in line with Orthodox theology) was that clergy's authority is derived from the belief that priesthood and episcopacy are a special sacramental type of grace, a divine vertical gift, which is threatened to be flattened down and reduced to this-worldly considerations by those who advocate a democratic, egalitarian, horizontal model of Church governance.

The third example of a pillar of Western democracies that Orthodoxy feels pressured by is pluralism. This was brought to me explicitly in interviews with three non-Orthodox informants involved in ecumenical dialogue at the cantonal level, who were in regular contact with Orthodox priests. While reporting very positively about the Orthodox contribution to the inter-Christian dialogue at the local level and far beyond it, they expressed reservations about the Orthodox Church's claim to be the true Church of Christ. My Protestant and Catholic interlocutors estimated such a declaration was untenable in a religiously pluralistic country, based on equality of all religions and on the presupposition that no single faith-institution/community can claim monopoly on the truth, because all faiths contain a share of the truth. They interpreted the Orthodox claim as a sign of theological immaturity due to an alleged theological isolation, which supposedly prevented the Orthodox Churches to question their dogma and to practice "theological evolution".

When I tackled this topic with a young Romanian priest, at that time newly arrived in Switzerland, he said:

I do not say this [i.e. that the Orthodox Church is *the* Church of Christ] out of my own mind or of my own will...it is not like a personal opinion that I express, it is what the Church says, it is the mind of the Church! And this is not triumphalism, as some say!

This strong belief that is part of the Orthodox gift system, derives from the Orthodox Church's self-understanding, as described in Chapter 5: the Church was established by Christ, who is the Truth. Therefore Truth can only exist in its fullness, in one place; it cannot be broken down into layers or pieces, which religious groups appropriate according to their sensitivities and historical contexts. Pluralism is perceived as a threat to the vertical dimension of the gift, because it challenges Orthodox Churches to situate themselves among other *claimers* to truth and to act as a *partaker* to the truth (as opposed to a *unique bearer* of it).

How is then the growing importance of equality, democracy and pluralism dealt with at the institutional level? Once again, we find two reactions: either reproduction of an ideal-typical model, or recompositions consisting in taking in cultural developments, discussing and incorporating some of their aspects into the existent gift system, so as to preserve it despite the changes of the "conditions of belief".

6.1.1 Gender equality

With regard to equal possibilities (for men and women) of admission to priesthood, in my field research in Switzerland, I had no informant asserting dissatisfaction with the fact that priesthood is exclusively male or that access to the sanctuary is restricted to men. It did not seem to me this was an issue at the level of the parish. And I could not say I came across striking examples of reproduction of traditional male–female roles in the fourteen parishes I visited most frequently. I would mention, however, the following observations: the gender separation of the sacred space mostly in Serbian and Romanian parishes, with women standing in the left side of the church and men on the right side; women with headscarves and bare-headed men in Serbian and Russian parishes; more women involved in preparing and serving food, especially in Serbian parishes (*kolo srpskih sestara*); generally speaking more numerous male membership in parish boards. But this did not seem an issue for any of my female informants and my general impression was that no disproportionate privilege or attention was given to one gender or another. I tried to tackle this topic in a discussion with a female convert, who told me that when she got interested in Orthodoxy, she was warned it was a "macho" religion and expected sexist treatment in her first visits to some Orthodox parishes in Switzerland. Contrary to her preconceived ideas, she noticed that Orthodox spirituality granted a high place to a woman, the *Theotokos* (my informant reported having been touched by iconography depicting the Mother of God) and provided numerous spiritual models incarnated by female saints. She later discovered that it was possible to receive spiritual guidance also from "spiritual mothers" (*ammas*) and not only from "spiritual fathers" (*abbas*). When later she started confessing, the priest did not make any comments about her having a career, being divorced and imagining marrying again. She was also relieved that nobody in the parish made comments about her wearing pants and no headscarf in the church, etc.

A plausible explanation of the fact that the parishes I visited do not push for a return to traditional gender roles could be that most Orthodox migrants come from ex-communist countries (ex-Yugoslavia, Romania and former URSS), where the emancipation of women was not only promoted, but also forced to happen (cf. Ghodsee, 2009): women had to be fully employed and benefited from a large variety of cheap daycare for children, they had to be Party members and be involved in politics, etc. Orthodox women in the parishes I visited work, have careers and have an average of two children.

Discussions about female ordination are restricted to small circles, in which are involved academics, theologians and bishops, and have been triggered by a need to respond to Protestant denominations who liberalized the priestly vocation starting in the 1970s. As stated previously, the general Orthodox position is against female ordination, which is expressed in two official documents – the declaration at the Anglican-Orthodox Joint Doctrinal Commission held in Athens in 1978 and the Inter-Orthodox Symposium held at Rhodes in Greece in 1988. Some Orthodox scholars once strongly opposed to female ordination are bringing nuances to their positions. The most prominent of them is bishop Kallistos Ware (Patriarchate of Constantinople in Great Britain), who stated that “there are no essential or ecclesiological reasons preventing the ordination of women in the Orthodox tradition”. The most ardent supporter of this change was Elisabeth Behr-Siegel in France, who wrote:

Removing himself as an individual, the priest – minister, meaning servant – turns his hands and his tongue over to Christ. Why could these hands and this tongue not be those of a Christian woman, baptized and chrismated, called by virtue of her personal gifts to a ministry of pastoral guidance, which implies presiding over the Eucharist? As the Fathers – with the Gospel at their foundation – have always claimed, the hierarchy of spiritual gifts granted to persons has nothing to do with gender.

(Behr-Siegel, 2003)

Followers of Behr-Siegel in France raised a critical voice about the Orthodox Church being too traditional in its treatment of women at the All-Orthodox Congress in Western Europe), which I attended in Bordeaux (France) in 2015. But these personal opinions did not generate any further argument among the audience. From my field experience, I can say that the issue of female ordination remains marginal in Western Europe (and is almost nonexistent in the Orthodox heartland). There are indications that it has a somewhat greater echo in the United States: there exists a blog and a publication called “Saint Nina’s Quarterly” that documents women’s historical contribution to the Orthodox Church and openly militates for the ministry of women; Orthodox female theologians are invited in parishes and at Orthodox retreats to speak and explain the Church’s position (e.g. Frederica Matthewes-Green).

My understanding of this difference between the two continents is that in the United States, there is a higher rate of converts, who were educated in American values, which cherish feminist ideals and are more deeply shaped by egalitarian principles. Orthodox laity's little concern with the all-male priesthood as a potential form of discrimination *against* women or a form of domination and oppression may be due to three factors: first, the perceived aim of human life is to reach communion with God, which is possible for anyone, independently of sex, ethnicity, race, state of health or other external, social, historical and cultural conditions. In this larger context, priestly ordination is only a detail and not a particularly coveted role that would guarantee a "better" relationship to God. Moreover, human existence is perceived as embedded in a system of relations and obligations in which one is *assigned* a place and a debt (it is thus not a matter of *personal choice*). One can reach the fullness of one's life by creatively assuming this place and fulfilling this debt and not by trying to overturn the system of relations and obligations. Consistency with this line of thought is not conducive to calling into question the "order of things" and thus also not the all-male priesthood.

Second, clerical ordination is not understood as gratification for personal merit and worthiness, but as a divinely granted sacrament (which in the Judeo-Christian tradition, i.e. "order of things", is reserved to men) that does not prevent women from performing other highly valued ministries. A glance at the history of the Orthodox Church indicates that women have exercised a vast range of such ministries: healers, missionaries, debaters, evangelists, spiritual mothers, miracle-workers, prophets, iconographers, theologians, martyrs, etc. Recognition of their contribution consists in their canonization as saints to be venerated by many generations of men and women who seek inspiration for their life situations. This is a much more "enviable" and desirable position for Orthodox people than simply priestly ordination, which in and by itself is not conducive to *theosis*.

Third, as I have noticed in my field research, Orthodox women seem to be satisfied with other forms of participation in the Church's life and the recognition they get for that: in parishes, they can be choir directors, parish board directors, event organizers, sometimes preachers and spiritual mothers (especially monastics). In female monasteries, nuns take care of the sanctuary (usually accessed only by men) and do all the "men's jobs" needed in the community. Also, in recognition of the important ministry of the priest's wife, people address her with the title *preoteasa* (in Romanian) or *presbytera* (in Greek), which literally means "the priestess".

However, the challenge to reconsider women's ministry in the Church did bring the Orthodox Churches to imagine a reconstruction at this level: the restoration of the order of deaconesses, which existed in the incipient stages of the Church, but was abandoned gradually, without having been officially abolished. As early as 1988, the Inter-Orthodox Theological Consultation on the Place of the Woman in the Orthodox Church and

the Question of the Ordination of Women (Rhodes, Greece) addressed this issue:

The apostolic order of deaconesses should be revived. It was never altogether abandoned in the Orthodox Church, though it has tended to fall in disuse. There is ample evidence from apostolic times, from the patristic, canonical and liturgical tradition, well into the Byzantine period (and even in our day) that this order was held in high honor.

This represents a recomposition because it attempts to cope with an external pressure (extend clerical ministry to women) in a way that preserves the “order of things” (ordination to priesthood is possible only for men). This consists in tapping into the reservoir of Orthodox tradition, identifying ancient practices that can be interpreted as gender-inclusive forms of Church service (e.g. the order of deaconesses) and proposing to revive them. However, this revival would take on completely new meanings, especially related to gender equality, which was by no means the concern at the origin of this practice in the ancient Church.

A concrete step in this direction was taken by the Patriarch of Alexandria (Africa), who, as of February 2017 appointed a “deaconess of the missions” of the Metropolis of Katanga and read the prayers for five other women (three nuns and two catechists) to enter “ecclesiastic ministry” (this is only a generic blessing for any lay person who enters Church work). This was met with suspicion in the Orthodox commonwealth, especially in the United States, where fifty-seven Orthodox clergymen and lay leaders have issued a public statement⁵ calling on the Church leaders to oppose the appointment of deaconesses in the Orthodox Church. The group argues that there is not enough historic evidence about the exact duties and status of deaconesses, nor about the exact way they were appointed, and that the “order” was repeatedly contested and prohibited in the history of the Orthodox Church. The opponents of the “restoration of deaconesses” further argue that this would be an ambiguous move, which would empower liberal forces in the Church with an instrument to create a form of female clerical ministry that could later develop as a basis for female priestly ordination.

I will end this section with the observation that female ordination is a top-down preoccupation, which has not emerged organically in the Church (as it was the case with Western Christian denominations), but surfaced mostly in high-clergy and theological circles, supposedly as a result of 20th-century dialogue with Protestant denominations that internalized the claims of feminist movements in the 1960s. It has however the potential of enlarging the circle of discussants on the bottom of the pyramid in the decades to come, as feminist ideas are spreading rapidly also in Eastern Europe and among Orthodox theologians who increasingly nourish their reflection with Western theological productions.

6.1.2 Democratic church governance

One of the most powerful legacies of the Reformation and the Enlightenment in Western Europe is anti-clericalism, which led to a de-sacralization of the priestly ministry in most Protestant denominations, to a gradual obliteration of the difference and distance between clergy and laity and finally to the fading away of clergy's authority in matters of private and public life. This is far from being the case in the Orthodox Church, which is known for the high reverence its hierarchs enjoy among the believers, who kiss their hand and ask for their blessing whenever they meet them. Another visible mark of the clergy being "special" is the fact that they have exclusive access⁶ to the sanctuary, which is separated from the rest of the church by the iconostasis. This is theologically motivated by the fact that they share in a special type of grace: bishops receive the gift of apostolic succession (explained in Chapter 3), by virtue of which they can ordain priests, i.e. "delegate" them to celebrate the Eucharistic communion and the other sacraments instead of the bishop, in parishes.

However, the modern objection to clergy's "privileges" is making its way also among Orthodox theologians, who have been re-evaluating priesthood and clergy-laity relations over the 20th century until today. Their renewed vision did not have a great practical impact in Orthodox countries, but rather reverberated in parish life in Orthodox communities in the West. Before I show how, I will briefly discuss the theological elaborations that gave rise to gift recompositions. Russian theologian Nicolai Afanassiev (1955) from the Orthodox school of theology in Paris argued that Christian priesthood is of two kinds: the universal, ontological one, of all baptized members of the Church, and the ordained, consecrated one, of those who receive the grace to preside at the Eucharistic assembly. The clergy are "special" only because they have an additional type of "functional" grace, but this does not make them superior to the people, nor puts them in a competition with them. On the contrary, clergy and laity should have a relationship of communion (by virtue of the fact that they are co-servers) and of complementarity (the priest cannot celebrate liturgy without the assembly, and the assembly cannot partake of a Eucharistic celebration without the priest who "prepares" the Eucharist).

Afanassiev argues that clergy and laity part ways in the sphere of governance and teaching, where the former have the "grace of presiding", while the latter do not. Meyendorff (1955), a former colleague of Afanassiev in Paris, who participated in the Orthodox theological renewal in the United States, opposed this separation of the spheres of priesthood and of teaching/governance, arguing that they are intimately connected, just as the Kingdom (priesthood) and the Truth (teaching) are. He further stressed the active role of the laity in the liturgical celebration: the "Amen!" they utter after every blessing and the "Kyrie eleison!" they utter after every litany of the priest is a way of ratifying his supplication (no Orthodox liturgy can be celebrated in the absence of the assembly who responds to the priest's petitions to God);

the “Axios” (in Greek: “he is worthy”) that people cry out when a bishop is ordained is a confirmation of the worthiness of the bishop to receive apostolic succession (the episcopal ordination is not valid without the people’s “Axios”).

Romanian theologian Dumitru Staniloae (in Rosu, 2014) has stressed the synergy between the lay people and clergy, who cannot be hoisted above the community of believers, and supported the view that laymen are, or should be, active participants in the life of the Church. Staniloae noticed, however, that people in the Church are not concerned with dogmatic speculation, but have rather a doxological way of participation (i.e. through giving praise to God and offering the “right worship”). This explains the fact that in Orthodox countries, the Church hierarchy enjoys high reverence from people and that there is a very clear distinction between clergy and the lay Church members.

Orthodox communities in the West oscillate between reproducing this model and revisiting clergy–laity relations under the influence of Protestant anti-clericalism, of democratic models of Church governance and of the Orthodox theological renewal. In my field research, I came across few examples of reproduction of rigid relations between priests and their flock. This was especially the case in contemplative-style parishes, which were influenced by the monastic model of relations between the abbot and the community. In other cases, priests would put distance with certain members consciously and purposefully, because those people tended to monopolize their attention, resources and availability. But in most communities I followed closely, clergy–laity relations were cordial and parish governance functioned democratically, with a parish board that consulted the parish assembly, with voting and financial transparency practices, in accordance with the civil law that regulates private organizations and associations.

However, the fact that priests are the employees of the parish, on a contractual basis, impacts the way they exercise authority: they are considered experts on liturgical and spiritual matters and therefore have to restrict their activity to this area (Hämmerli and Mayer, 2014). And even on this point, priests cannot simply follow their own project, but need to comply with their bishop’s agenda, on the one hand, and to adapt to the pastoral needs of the community they are in charge of, on the other. For example, some priests would like to celebrate liturgies in the local language, but their congregation is not prepared to experiment with prayer in a language that is not their national one. Greek and Serbian parishes can be a prominent example in this sense. Also, a sensitive point is the frequency of Eucharistic Communion: on two occasions, I heard clergy (Serbian and Romanian) exhorting people to commune as often as possible, and despite that openness, people maintained their perception of Communion as something too holy and special to be approached regularly. Conversely, other clergy (especially in the Russian and Serbian traditions) insist on the necessity of confession right before Eucharistic Communion, which some believers do not accept because they

confess to another priest or have a spiritual father in a monastery far away, who gave them the blessing to commune frequently. Priests therefore do not impose their own rule, but “negotiate” with each believer, according to his/her spiritual discipline.

All these circumstances considered, laity have the means to resist or contest clergy, as testifies recent research on Orthodox parishes in Norway (Thorbjørnsrud, 2014) and new field evidence in Switzerland and France, where two bishops (ROCOR and respectively former Paris Exarchate) were removed from their dioceses because of lay intervention. This is unheard of in a country like Romania, for example. In Russia, the removal of the ROCOR bishop was harshly criticized (e.g. by the abbot of the Valaam Monastery)⁷ as a proof of secularization of the parish, due to an abuse of power on the side of laity, which the respective critic paralleled to the soviet *dvadtsatka*⁸ (twenty people).

Both theological elaborations and empirical evidence point to the fact that the ideal of egalitarian democratic way of governing, coupled with anti-clericalism, did impact the Orthodox communities in the West, where the vertical gift of priesthood and episcopacy is being reconsidered in ways that seek to bridge the gap between Church hierarchy and lay people (by underlying their common gift of universal priesthood and their complementarity) or even allow revert domination (by underlying the fact that the clergy’s special sacramental grace implies they ought to *serve* the community of believers and not the other way around). Generally speaking, the area of the priests’ influence is shrinking, remaining primarily concentrated on sacramental and liturgical matters, regulated by Church canons, while administrative and financial decisions are being handed to the congregation members, who manage them according to secular civil law. At times, the spiritual and the secular law collide, giving rise to conflict, negotiations and new practices.

6.1.3 Pluralism

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter section, in religiously pluralistic contexts, the Orthodox Church is challenged in its claim of being the one and true recipient and bearer of the divine truth revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. The feeling of threat does not arise from some lack of experience with religious pluralism (as one of my informants suggested at some point), because Orthodox Churches have historically cohabitated with other faith groups (e.g. Greece, Romania, Bulgaria under Ottoman domination; the Russian empire was a multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic, multi-religious political entity; the Orthodox Church in the Middle East and North Africa is a religious minority in a predominantly Muslim environment, etc.). This could be more accurately portrayed as “religious diversity” or as *de facto*, descriptive pluralism, in which faith communities live parallel lives, with traditionally defined social and geographical boundaries, and little or no theological debate among themselves. This differs from the modern idea that faith communities need to go beyond mutual tolerance and engage with each other in

a self-critical way, so as to emulate civil society. This approach is normative in several respects: first, it implies that “the diversity of religious outlooks and collectivities is, within its limits, beneficial and....desirable” (Beckford, 2003: 81). Second, it implies that religious collectivities should not content themselves with mere peaceful coexistence, but should become joint actors in meeting individuals’ needs and shaping a harmonious social and political environment. Third, normative religious pluralism presupposes that, when acting together, religious groups should put aside truth claims that may turn out to be contentious.

My non-Orthodox informants from ecumenical circles in Switzerland expected from the Orthodox Churches precisely a self-critical stance in the above-mentioned sense. But since the Orthodox Church derives the doctrine of the infallibility of the Church from the belief that it received its own existence, mission and message (i.e. teaching, discipline, liturgy, etc.) directly from Christ, prescriptive pluralism logically appears to them as a threat to the institutional aspect of the divine vertical gift.

How do Orthodox priests concretely manage situations in which they are expected to act jointly with representatives of other religious groups? I did not expand much on this issue during my field research, but I noticed that, when in a delicate position because they have to comply with outside expectations that require some infringement of the Orthodox theological framework, Orthodox priests refer to their bishop and “the Church” to motivate the impossibility of collaboration. For example, a convert priest told me that he was asked by a Protestant pastor to concelebrate a baptism of a child born to a Romanian (Orthodox)–Swiss (Protestant) couple.

He told me: ‘You can perform one or two Orthodox rituals that are a must in Orthodox baptism tradition, so that the mother of the baby does not feel her faith is left apart...’ And I said: ‘look, this is not possible... The parents have to decide whether the baby will be Orthodox or Protestant. If they want to make him Protestant, then let him be Protestant, that’s fine, but we cannot make him half-half...’. The pastor insisted, he thought it was my personal ill will that made me refuse, but I told him: ‘Sorry, it is not *me* who says so, it is not *my* personal opinion... I have a bishop, I have a Church, I have a theology that do not let me just do whatever I please with the sacraments’.

This example illustrates the fact that Orthodox clergy understand themselves as “administrators” of the gift, not as its possessors or its masters. The gift is governed by norms and rules that are independent of the priest’s personality. The priest is not a giver himself, because he does not give something of his own, he only mediates the gift. He cannot therefore interfere with the norms that govern the gift, he cannot decide according to his own feelings and opinions with regard to ecclesiological issues, but based on the fact that he is the “messenger” of the bishop and acts in the latter’s name.

The Orthodox priests' involvement in local ecumenical bodies, an activity that stimulates the Orthodox people's cultural and religious openness, has the paradoxical side-effect of reinforcing the connection between Orthodoxy and ethnicity. This is so because priests refrain from reaching out to the local population, an attitude commanded by a spirit of non-competition on the local "spiritual market". In this way, while in speech they promote the universal vocation of Orthodoxy, in deed they restrict it to their ethnic flock, so as to avoid looking proselytizing. This makes them unwillingly reproduce and reaffirm the interplay between Orthodoxy and ethnicity.

But the major challenge religious pluralism exerts on Orthodox Churches consists in the expectation that Orthodox Churches be more self-critical with regard to the claim that they are the one and true Church of Christ, as a consequence of which they tend to define other Christian denominations as "heretic" or "heterodox" and to limit liturgical and ecclesiastical interaction with the latter. Bishops or other Church representatives engage with representatives of other Christian denominations in fields that do not necessitate dogmatic agreement, such as standing together in the face of natural or human catastrophes (e.g. terrorist attacks, floods, wildfire), environmental issues, poverty, migration, social exclusion, etc. In small-scale ecumenical contexts, Orthodox priests in the West navigate their way by avoiding putting forward the creed that they belong to the one true Church of Christ, or, when faced with its practical consequences (e.g. impossibility of concelebrating), by denying personal responsibility for this situation.

Orthodox theologians and hierarchs who engage in ecumenical dialogue not only personally, but in the name of the Church as well, provided a unique example of gift recomposition on the occasion of the Council in 2016. The Council document titled "Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World" brought about an absolute novelty in the history of the Orthodox Church: the revocation of negatively connoted terms such as "schismatic" or "heretic" to qualify non-Orthodox Christian denominations, which went hand in hand with the extension of the word "Church" to these denominations. Orthodox Churches have historically used the term "Church" to describe themselves exclusively, as a consequence of the belief that Orthodoxy is the one true Church of Christ. After stating that "The Orthodox Church ... has always cultivated dialogue with those estranged from her, those both far and near... and has participated in the Ecumenical Movement from its outset", the document moves one step further and grants "those estranged from her" the name of "Church":

the Orthodox Church accepts the historical name of other non-Orthodox Christian Churches and Confessions that are not in communion with her, and believes that her relations with them should be based on the most speedy and objective clarification possible of the whole ecclesiological question, and most especially of their more general teachings on sacraments, grace, priesthood, and apostolic succession.⁹

The defenders of the document argued that, despite the Orthodox Church having faithfully maintained “the fullness of Revelation and thus having manifested the Church of Christ to a full degree”, it has to acknowledge that “other Churches manifest various degrees of that fullness” (Apostolos, Bordeianu, Ladouceur, Linsinbigler, Siecienski, 2016).¹⁰ And naming these other communities “Churches” would be a form of recognition of their participation in the fullness of the Revelation and a sign of respect for their self-definition.

This represents a gift recomposition because it attempts to reconcile the Orthodox prerogative to be the only true Church of Christ, with other religious actors’ claim to share in that prerogative, by enlarging the gift circle and granting the “non-givable” (the attribute “Church”) to the ones who are considered to be outside the gift, by their own fault (they have “estranged” themselves from the Church).

The third perceived threat to the vertical gift is identified with **the sacralization of the nation** (the Orthodox term for that is *ethnophyletism*), which represents a reversed order of worship, i.e. nation comes before God, the Church and the whole belief system. This is analogous to what scholars termed *ethnodoxy*, “an ideology that rigidly links a group’s ethnic identity to its dominant faith” (Karpov, Lisovskaia and Barry, 2012: 639). Gregorios Papathomas defined ethnophyletism as:

a confusion between the Church and the race/nation, an assimilation – and even, sometimes, identification – of the Church with the nation...a rather odd correlation of two dimensions, in which phyletism “tribalizes” the Church.

(Papathomas, 2013: 432)

Ethnophyletism was described as a threat to the vertical axis of the gift by two of my informants, one convert and one cradle Orthodox born and raised in the United States, but it was suggested by a larger number of interviewees, though not explicitly and not using the term “ethnophyletism”:

the true danger of secularization does not come from outside the Church, because such hostile circumstances have always existed in the history of the Church. The real enemy is within the Church, it is our *ethnophyletism*.

I don’t like to go to ethnic parishes anymore, there is no true Orthodoxy there, it’s just people who come together to eat their national food after the liturgy, which by the way, has to be short, the homily has to stick with lamenting national problems and the priest gets in serious trouble if he mentions the Gospel or the theology of the Fathers...No, no, no...God forbid to mention such things as salvation...

Other informants, mostly converts or Western born and raised cradle Orthodox, did express frustration about ethnicity allegedly overshadowing the “essence” of Orthodoxy. But their discourse was more nuanced (e.g. they acknowledged

that cradle ethnic Orthodox contributed to transmitting lived Tradition) and it suggested additionally that ethnophyletism prevented the Orthodox Church from engaging creatively with contemporary scientific findings, from contributing to current debates in the West, such as the fight against poverty, social exclusion, environmental degradation, etc. These informants argue that the preoccupation with maintaining alive a particular ethnic identity outside its national context is something trivial and secular, unrelated to the Church ethos; moreover, culture, language and ethnicity are described as spiritually neutral, contingent categories, incompatible with notions of salvation and eternity that are at the core of the Church's teaching. In my actors' view, nationalism is dangerous for the Church not only because it is a secular ideology, but also because it hijacks the very nature of the Church, which is universal. They underline the proclivity of ethnophyletism to view the Church not as "the one, holy, catholic and apostolic", but rather as an institution limited within history, which has played an important role in the past of a specific nation.

I interviewed actors who held this discourse quite at the beginning of my field research and their outlook initially influenced my perception of the field. But after one year of intense observation of fourteen parishes in Switzerland and multiple visits to other parishes and monasteries in Western Europe, I understood that the critique of my first two informants was not necessarily objective and balanced and that their hypothesis did not match the data I was getting from my interviews and observations. I cannot say I encountered parishes that were driven by ethnophyletist motivations, such as the exaltation of a particular nation at the expense of dogmatic issues. Most parishes do uphold their ethnic colors, in terms of celebration language and style of piety. Despite the fact that this is an obvious and constant feature, I would be cautious in qualifying them as *ethnophyletist*. I would rather argue that the way these parishes and their immigrant population relate to ethnicity falls under the category of *symbolic ethnicity*, as discussed by Herbert Gans:

a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country...[which] can be directed at a generalized tradition, or at specific ones: a desire for the cohesive extended immigrant family, or for the obedience of children to parental authority, or the unambiguous orthodoxy of immigrant religion, or the old-fashioned despotic benevolence of the machine politician. People may even sincerely desire to 'return' to these imagined pasts, which are conveniently cleansed of the complexities that accompanied them in the real past, but while they may soon realize that they cannot go back, they may not surrender the wish. Or else they displace that wish on churches, schools, and the mass media, asking them to recreate a tradition, or rather, to create a symbolic tradition, even while their familial, occupational, religious and political lives are pragmatic responses to the imperatives of their roles and positions in local and national hierarchical social structures.

(Gans, 1979: 9)

There is, however, one point on which I argue some of the Orthodox congregations I surveyed (at least one from each ethnic group under study) do behave in an ethnophyletist way: religious education for youth. Catechism, conceived as a venue for transmitting religious content, is often used as a pretext for teaching national language, music, dance, cuisine and other traditions. This aspect will be discussed more in-depth in Chapter 8. But it is important also to mention that the strong correlation of Orthodoxy and ethnicity in a migration context is the result of the fact that migrant Orthodox people inherit an understanding of religion as something deeply connected to the history and identity of the community that practices it (see also Ghodsee, 2009). Seen from this perspective, an Orthodox Church with the ethnic qualifier “Russian” or “Greek” in its name, which does not care for its people’s Russianness or Greekness appears as a betrayal (Hämmerli and Mucha, 2014). For many converts, the “Russian” in ROC or “Greek” in Greek Orthodox Church, should stand rather for a certain liturgical and spiritual tradition. This understanding explains why the ethnic parishes’ proclivity to a religious practice wrapped in the ethnic colors of their homeland appears to many converts as a betrayal of Orthodoxy.

Converts often assume that cradle Orthodox migrants’ association or overlap of religion and ethnicity implies that they believe that one cannot be Orthodox if one is not Russian/Romanian/etc. The surprise (mixed with a feeling of satisfaction) cradles tend to express at some local people’s conversion, is interpreted as stemming from the cradles’ assumption that it is impossible to *become* Orthodox, or that Orthodoxy is *only* for Greeks and Russians. My field experience indicates that cradles tend to project the same strong relation between religion and ethnicity on the Swiss (or Western) social landscape: to be Swiss would imply to be deeply connected to Protestantism. Therefore, conversion to another religion may appear as a personal separation or distancing from one’s roots, culture and family.

Many converts imagine Orthodoxy in terms of a system of beliefs and practices, which draws its ethos from Early Christianity, the Church Fathers and the Ecumenical Councils, or as a source of truth, which provides a path of salvation, to which all humanity is called. This echoes research findings on converts to Orthodoxy in America (Lucas, 2003; Slagle, 2011). In discussing the challenges two former evangelical communities who joined ethnic parishes in the United States experienced, Lucas concluded that

converts are...likely to view many ethnic Orthodox customs and practices as culturally idiosyncratic, peripheral, and easily separated from the ‘transcendent’ treasures of Orthodoxy, such as its theology and dogma, its festal calendar, its mystical spirituality, and its ancient liturgical forms.
(Lucas, 2003: 12).

Concern with text-based truth and inner states of belief detaches religion from territory, ethnicity and nation (Hann, 2014: 182–183), detaches “cult” from

“culture” and thereby impacts the interconnectedness of all these elements, which is a very powerful element of the Orthodox ethos.

Many converts imagine that a process of *privatization of ethnicity* would allow for a more universal expression of Orthodox Christianity and for the possibility that the Church pursues its pure liturgical and theological vocation. But are converts really unaffected by ethnicity? I argue that this is not the case, because the effort to translate and enculturate Orthodoxy in Switzerland, Great Britain or France, does not result in an *ethnicless* Orthodoxy. English or French Orthodoxy would have their own cultural and ethnic colors. Ethnicity here is rather invisible and not upsetting (Doane, 1997 speaks of *hidden ethnicity*), but it is not inexistent, as it is claimed. Research findings from Orthodox congregations in the United States support this argument (Slagle, 2011). The process of enculturating Orthodoxy in new contexts implies associating it with other ethnicities, and not divesting it of any form of ethnic expression. However, by providing the possibility that Orthodoxy is vested with other ethnic forms would be the confirmation of its universality.

Similarly, we can ask: are converts and supporters of an ethnicless Orthodoxy really unaffected by “culture”? This is definitely not the case, since the very criticism of what they describe as *ethnophyletism* (which is at times used as a synonym for *symbolic ethnicity*) is grounded in their cultural heritage of separation of religion and culture, politics, arts, education, health, etc.

6.2 Threat, recomposition and permanence at the individual level

When I explained the Orthodox gift system in Chapter 5, I mentioned examples of the ways in which individuals can respond to the divine gift on the vertical axis, among which worship and fasting. I will also add confession here, as the gift of one’s sins to God. In the following, I will illustrate how practicing Orthodox perpetuate, alter or negotiate these forms of gift exchange between human beings and the transcendent God, in “conditions of belief” they at times perceive as threatening.

Worship, as an acknowledgment of the fact that the world is an epiphany of God, is of utmost importance in the Orthodox system of the gift, because it represents the main form of responding to the divine gift and of maintaining an active relationship to God, in view of acquiring *theosis*. It has therefore to be the *right* worship (ortho-doxy), given collectively through liturgical service but also individually in personal prayer. I will focus now on this last aspect.

Discussions about prayer were recurrent in the interviews. The importance of this devotional act is confirmed also statistically: a 2014 survey¹¹ about the practice of prayer in Switzerland among religious groups indicates that the Orthodox were very high on the list, with 48.4% praying between several times a day and several times a month. At the Orthodox spiritual retreats I attended, the believers expressed a wish to pray more and the concern with

the fact that modern secular life is so dynamic, changing, demanding and full of distractions, that there is hardly time and disposition left for prayer. Also, as a result of cultural integration, people adopt lifestyles that privilege hard work combined with sports and leisure activities or forms of socialization that do not have a religious character (even less so Orthodox). Other believers raised the argument that supporting family life in today's world implies solving problems by relying exclusively on rational and materialistic tools, with no implication of things divine. The assumption that the "immanent frame" is all-encompassing appeared as endangering personal relationship to the divine. The speakers (priests and spiritual figures) warned the audience about the risk of turning what they described as the "immanent frame" into fatality. They insisted on the reaffirmation of inner freedom, which is inalienable: personal prayer and relationship to God are possible anywhere and in any external conditions. Hence the exhortation to set prayer among one's top priorities and to organize the daily schedule so as to include moments of prayer in it.

If you postpone prayer until you can say 'oh, now it's the right time for prayer', then you will of course never pray. From the worldly perspective, there is never the right time for prayer, because from that perspective prayer is boring, it requires inner attention, discipline, which is hard of course... But at the same time, every second is the right time for prayer, because for us Christians we cannot live without being in constant contact with God.

(Romanian monk, spiritual talk given in canton Fribourg in 2012)

On this point, my informants reported they needed to be creative in finding solutions that allow them to accommodate prayer with a busy modern life: one doctor said she recited the morning prayers (which she knew by heart) with her children in the car, while driving to school and to her practice; many people said they just abbreviated the morning and evening prayer rule; others said they picked and chose from the prayer book those prayers that resonated more deeply with their spiritual sensitivity; one lawyer shared that he took time to listen to psalms and Byzantine music while commuting by train to his job on a daily basis; another lady mentioned that she listened to recorded acathists while doing housework or cooking (headsets on, mobile phone in her pocket); a young informant reported she did not like acathists nor long prayers, but preferred spontaneous prayer formulated in her own words while cooking, while waiting for the bus or during moments when she was alone. These examples illustrate the fact that people use a modern tool – technology – to overcome the perceived threat of modern life and free up time for prayer; and they seek to develop a modern virtue – efficiency – in order to balance professional life, family life and spiritual needs.

Another concern people expressed was: "How do we know we pray well?". And the answer was, "You can find out by yourself, according to the fruit it brings in you, if it brings you any closer to God". Because prayer is

understood as a transformative practice that draws one closer to the divine, it requires skills and discipline. The skills are not inherent, but have to be acquired, by learning from someone experienced. This is why Orthodox people prefer to pray according to canonically authorized texts, written by saints, Church Fathers or by monks, instead of having “a casual chat with God” (Luehrmann, 2016) where they simply pour out their own feelings. Sonja Luehrmann, who did extensive field research on prayer in Russia, explains this tension between traditional and spontaneous prayer as follows:

I sometimes think about it [recitation of the existing texts vs. praying with one’s own words] as dialing God’s telephone number to then tell God what you really want to say. The traditional text is like the telephone number. It is the way to get through to God. Then once you’ve established the connection, you feel that it’s the right moment to add what it is you want to say.

(Luehrmann, 2016)

Back to the issue of worship, I mentioned in Chapter 3 that Orthodox spirituality distinguishes between worship, directed exclusively to God, and veneration, granted to saints. Prayer to saints is a very common Orthodox devotional practice. People have their favorite saints, whom they pray for assistance in various life situations and whom they regard as examples that inspire their own life. A priest in a French-speaking parish told me he often advises his congregation to pray to 20th-century saints because “they are closer to us, they know what we are going through, they can understand us and intercede for us”. The temporal and cultural proximity with saints seems to be a guarantee for a more “successful” prayer and to facilitate a more effective circulation of the gift with the divine realm.

In a conversation with adult catechumens, a Swiss convert priest said the veneration of local saints (i.e. first millennium saints in the West, of the “undivided Church”) is highly important for the future of Orthodoxy in the West: for converts, the relationship with saints from their own countries benefits their reconnection to the Orthodox roots of their culture and history; for migrants, venerating local saints helps building new spiritual connections that stimulate a more profound attachment to the host country. And by having a common object of devotion, those who worship in the present, converts and cradles, become spiritually united, beyond their cultural differences. The priest’s argument is underpinned by the idea that prayer to “new” saints enlarges the chain of celestial beings with whom one can engage in gift exchange on the vertical axis. This impacts the quality of connectivity between the visible and the invisible on the longitudinal axis and within the visible realm (between fellow co-religionists) on the horizontal axis. The veneration of Western saints leads to the creation of a “mystical patrimony” that empowers the devotees to have deeper access to the early history of their country and to create a new Orthodox culture in the present.

A step further in this effort to recover the “Orthodox heritage of the West” is to recreate specific styles of piety, prayer and liturgy in continuity with pre-1054 Schism liturgical reconstructions (e.g. the Gallican rite), cast within musical and linguistic forms, as well as bodily gestures that are deemed compatible with Western Christian heritage and sensitivity. Though the veneration of Western saints and the revival (or construction) of a Western Orthodox rite pertain rather to the longitudinal axis of the gift and will be dealt with in detail in Chapter 8, these practices can be mentioned also as a form of vertical gift recomposition because they predicate an innovative form of worship, inspired by old rites, in order to cater to the emerging subjectivity of the Western Orthodox Self. All this is consistent with the Orthodox way of reconnecting religion, history, language and style of piety, or, on a different level, religion and ethnicity.

This overview of the field data points to the fact that there is *permanence and continuity* in the Orthodox migrants’ practice of individual prayer, apart from minor adaptations. But we can conjecture that significant changes might occur in the practice of prayer due to the prominence the Internet and digital technologies are gaining in all fields of human life.¹² The case of people listening to podcasts with prayers and acathists is very telling in this respect. To understand this, we have to recall three specificities of Orthodox spirituality: first, prayer is an active process, in which the praying subject utters the words of the prayer, even if the text was written by someone else, and enters into a personal relationship with the meanings or the narrative they contain. Second, the relationship to God is mediated in embodied forms: while praying, people cross themselves very often – after every “Amen” or after any sentence that speaks to them in a meaningful way, they bow, prostrate, kneel or lift their arms in the air. Third, other senses are involved in worship: people pray before icons, burn candles and incense. Listening to prayer recited by someone else while corporeally engaged in another activity (worldly in nature) implies two major differences with the traditional way described above: first, the act of listening engages the practitioner differently in comparison with reading it, transforming the intimate experience of prayer by rendering the praying subject somewhat passive (he/she no longer needs to utter the words and extract the phonetic and semantic meaning out of a visual support). Second, an audio prayer one listens to in the train is more “excarinated”, transferred out of an embodied form to something more “in the head” (Taylor, 2007). Technologically mediated prayer may be conducive to the disintegration of the holistic dimension of the traditional way of praying, providing in exchange the possibility of pursuing contact with the divine in the middle of the speedy and busy modern way of life and of making what Taylor coined as “punctual holes” in the “immanent frame”. To what extent this will become common practice or will coexist with traditional prayer, we cannot predict for now. But it is definitely worthwhile to closely watch the impact of new technologies on Orthodox practices of prayer in the decades to come.

The **second form of gift exchange** on the vertical axis that I will consider here is **fasting**. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, this is an ascetic practice consisting in dietary and lifestyle voluntary limitations, offering one's biological needs to God and making oneself more available to prayer. In spite of the acknowledgment of the importance of fasting and the existence of very well-defined fasting norms, it is a domain in which people make many adaptations, either under spiritual guidance of their father confessor, or freely by their own decision. For example, some refrain from meat only, others fast only during the first and the last week of the great Lenten period, others fast intermittently. One recurrent motivation underlying the customization of fasting rules I came across on the field was: "in our times strict fasting is overwhelming, so we have to adapt it to our possibilities". I asked informants to explain why "our times" were particularly unfavorable to fasting and they invoked the idea that human condition has become weaker due to increased comfort, hyper-industrialization, urbanization and digitalization of life:

We read in the Fathers that they could eat only bread for forty days, but they did not live in polluted, noisy cities as we do, and did not eat all the chemical stuff we eat today, they did not need to undergo all the radiations we undergo today, because of cell phones, computers and so on.

(Greek man, French-speaking part of Switzerland)

I remember my grandmother used to clean all the frying pans when Great Lent started, to clean away any trace of oil and fat. And they ate only potatoes, cabbage and beans the whole winter, through spring. But they could fast so strictly because they were more in contact with nature and with the rhythm of seasons: in summer, when it was sunny and warm, they worked hard in the fields, and in winter, when there was less sun and cold, they would sleep much longer and work much less. Look at our life rhythm, it's crazy! How can we deprive our bodies of fat and proteins under so much stress?

(Romanian man and his wife, German-speaking part of Switzerland)

Interestingly, actors who advocate for a strict way of fasting use exactly the same argument of contrasting "our times" with the past, but in a reversed logic that asserts "our times" as far more propitious to fasting than the forefathers':

we live the best times ever, we have a huge variety of fresh vegetables and food available in supermarkets all year long; this is not even to be compared to the life conditions of our ancestors, who ate only a few types of food for very long periods of time and who had to work in harsh conditions, in the frost and the cold or in the burning sun... Look, today we have air conditioning everywhere, people have warm houses in winter, we work and live in comfortable buildings, we have cars, trains... Our

life is much easier today, so we have no reason to complain about the rules of fasting.

(Russian lady)

A Serbian informant told me she and her family find it very easy to fast because of the possibility to purchase various vegan produce and cook vegan recipes she finds on the Internet. However, there are theologians who contest the consumption of vegan produce because its aspect and taste imitate so much food of animal origin (e.g. vegan sausages, cheese, minced “meat”, etc.), that fasting is reduced to replacing matter, while keeping the visual and sensuous value of non-Lenten food. This practice is dismissed as superficial, legalistic and unrelated to “the spirit” of fasting, which consists in giving up the pleasure of the senses.

Indeed, fasting is not only about food restrictions, but also about simultaneous accrued inner attention, self-scrutiny and self-discipline. This is why many people prefer to practice an internalized fasting method: some monitor their thoughts and emotions and seek to straighten them up, others try to change bad habits and make healthy resolutions, others voluntarily give up activities they estimate addictive or superfluous, such as TV, social media, computer games, smoking, etc.

A Romanian informant reported about her favorite spiritual figure back in Romania saying to people: “never mind if you ate meat last night. Tell me rather whether you ate human meat”, meaning that gossiping about and misbehaving to one’s neighbor amounted to symbolically killing the person, which was much more serious than mere ingestion of non-Lenten food. This points to the fact that there is a hierarchy between the two dimensions of fasting, with the interior aspects overseeing the external bodily asceticism.

Despite the implicit collective agreement that fasting is highly important for one’s spiritual life because it is a form of giving oneself to God (which shows permanence in the understanding of gift circulation on the vertical axis), the fact of dissociating between its different aspects and privileging one of them at the expense of the other leads to two recompositions: on the one hand, moving toward an internalized practice of fasting, as a period of time in which one meditates and prays more in order to renew the relationship to the divine, without involving the body in this endeavor. This calls into question the holistic aspect of fasting. On the other hand, it is the transformation of the motivation for fasting from a spiritually embedded practice to a medically driven one. I noticed that more and more Orthodox literature and blogs insist on the medical benefits of a strict diet and that parishes invite doctors and nutritionists to speak about how fasting helps burn fat or prevent cancer. Also many people ask for advice about how to fast and still feed the body the necessary nutrients. While fasting is described as a form of giving oneself to God and a means of self-purification in order to become closer to God, underlying its medical benefits introduces secular or mundane incentives for it. Moreover, preoccupations with self-preservation during Lent divert the

fasting subject from aiming his/her gift to the vertical axis and redirects attention to the Self and to the horizontal axis.

In the following, I will talk about a recent innovative recomposition of fasting, which consists in approaching it no longer as an individual spiritual practice, but as a collective form of response to environmental problems. Ecological preoccupations, initially coming from the secular world, have entered the scope of theological discourse over the past decades, especially since the Patriarch of Constantinople started showing deep concern for the state of nature (which attracted him the reputation and nickname of “Green Patriarch”). This had an impact also on Orthodox parishes and people in the West, as convincingly illustrates the fact that the 2009 Three-Annual International Western Orthodox Congress in Amiens (France), attended by some 700 Orthodox people from different countries in Western Europe, was dedicated to the topic of the generalized ecological crisis, under the title “Creation entrusted to Man”. In some of the round tables, discussants expressed criticism about the Eastern Orthodox countries and Orthodox migrants’ general unawareness of the “ecological catastrophe we are witnessing”. They fully agreed with one of the keynote speakers of the Congress, theologian Elizabeth Theokritoff, who drew attention to the inconsistent behavior of Orthodox Christians, who are not able to extend the *eucharistic ethos* of the Church to their use of natural resources, which should be done with thankfulness, i.e. by offering them back to God.

Theokritoff and other scholars recently criticized the 2016 Council’s document on “The Importance of Fasting and its Observance Today” for treating fasting too much as an individual spiritual matter and giving little consideration to its collective dimension and cosmic implications:

One’s fasting practice...has tremendous effect on others, as fasting is never done individually but always in relationship (with God, each other, and the environment)... This means that the Church, in advocating for fasting, must have in mind not only its own members, but all of humanity...The document could do more by serving as a venue for the Orthodox Church to take the lead in raising awareness of fasting not just as a spiritual benefit (on that, the document does well), but as a communal benefit.¹³

Though initially intended as a counter-gift to the Creator, contemporary Orthodox theologians, such as those quoted previously, tend to attribute fasting a rather utilitarian, immanent and secular value: it should become a *means* to slow down the material degradation of the planet. At this point, theologians operate a reorientation of the gift from the vertical to the horizontal axis.

The third example of human response to God’s gift on the vertical axis that I will discuss here is confession, which in Russian is colloquially referred to as “*sdat’ grekhi*”, literally “to hand in sins”, just “as one might do with a bottle at a recycling center” (Luehrmann, 2017: 170). One of my informants told me an anecdote that illustrates the fact that confession can be understood as

a human gift to God: a saint was conversing with Christ in a vision, saying to Him that he would like to do something exceptional and extraordinary for Him. Christ replied, "Then give me your sins".¹⁴ It sounds like a strange kind of gift to an Almighty God, but my informant explained the meaning of his parable-like story: the respective saint understood he had sins he was unconscious of, which he had therefore not repented for and not confessed. And, he went on, "what we do not confess, is not forgiven, and what is not forgiven is not healed and stays between us and Christ".

This explanation is in line with the Orthodox understanding of sin as an act that separates Man from God and of confession as a therapeutic practice that restores this link by virtue of the subject's introspection and repentance. Theologians explain the meaning of sin and repentance starting from the original Greek terms: "hamartia" (sin) means missing the target, i.e. falling short of the glorious purpose for which God created Man; "metanoia" (repentance) means the change of mind, or conversion.

It means not self-pity or remorse, but conversion. It is to look, not backward with regret, but forward with hope; not downwards at our shortcomings, but upwards at God's love. To repent is to open our eyes to the light. Repentance is not a single act but a continuing state, an attitude of heart.
(Ware, 1979: 151)

This theological sequence (sin—repentance—confession—restoration) can be read in a gift key as follows: sin is Man's failure to answer the divine gift or live up to the divine call; repentance is the acknowledgment of this failure expressed ritually in the act of confession. The priest *hears* the confession, he is just a "ratified hearer" (Goffman, 1981), a visible witness representing the actual invisible addressee of confession – Christ/God himself; forgiveness, performed through the priest's ritual reading of the prayer of absolution at the end of confession, is what makes the relationship between the two parties of the gift exchange possible again and restores the gift chain. However, this is an ideal-typical process that is not always reproduced as such in reality. Russian-American theologian Alexander Schmemmann, an experienced father confessor in the decades between 1960s and 1980s, denounced a widespread deviation from the ideal-type, which consists in transforming confession into a ritual obligation. The source of this deviation, he argues, lies in a distorted recoding of sin in terms of "the infringement of ethical standards", or "moral or ritual legalism in which sin is the transgression of an established rule" (Schmemmann, 1961):

In a man-centered and self-satisfied society with its ethics of success and purely external 'decency', these rules ... were reduced to a socially accepted ethical code. The modern Christian, since in the eyes of the society he is a decent man and a 'nice fellow', always 'feels fine' about himself and thoroughly enjoys his self-admiration.

(Schmemmann, 1961: 39)

In these conditions, Schmemmann argues, confession becomes a “religious duty to be performed ... for the satisfaction of an abstract canonical norm, a real end in itself with no spiritual consequences whatsoever” (Schmemmann, 1961: 40)

Though I am in no position to speak about the quality of my informants’ practice of confession, I have, however, a few data that allow to confirm Schmemmann’s observation about the relation between a flawed understanding of sin (as breaking social and ethical rules) and the misrepresentation of confession (as religious duty), compared with the theological ideal-type described above. Take these Greek ladies’ comments as an illustration:

I come to church regularly, I do my duty towards God and my neighbor, I take communion, but I never confess. Because I am nice to everybody, I work hard, I am an honest person, I do not harm anyone. What would I confess? And why should I confess to the priest, who is himself a sinner? He is no better than me. I do respect him, I respect his habit, but he is just a human being, a sinner like me and you.

When I was baptized an Orthodox, a lady in the parish told me I should first confess. But I refused. And luckily the priest did not ask me to confess, he respected me. But even if he had asked me, I would have refused, because this is something very embarrassing. Besides, I have not done bad things in my life, so why to bother anyway?

I found another example of formalization of confession (as a duty to fulfill, because required by the canons) in a parish where individual confession, rather sporadic, was replaced by a collective acknowledgment before God of human unworthiness to partake to the divine communion. The priest was turning to the iconostasis and people gathered behind him, bowing their heads, while the priest was improvising a prayer asking forgiveness in the name of the congregation.

In most Russian, Serbian and Romanian parishes, confession is a precondition to partaking in the Eucharistic Communion, which for some people means every Sunday. If the believers did not have the time to confess during the confession timeslot, they are given a last opportunity to do it right before the distribution of the Eucharist, during liturgy. In big parishes with two or several priests, one conducts the service while the other one confesses people and reads the prayers of absolution. In case the parish has only one priest, he pauses the liturgy, briefly confesses people and reads the prayer of absolution and then distributes Communion and resumes the service. This formalization of confession as a precondition for Communion, in the context of frequent Communion, appears to me to fit what Schmemmann described as the recoding of the ideal-type in the form of “religious duty” because the way confession is performed (i.e. under time pressure and as a precondition to partake in Communion) sabotages the effectiveness of the ritual in reestablishing the gift relationship on the vertical axis. In the case of the Greek ladies, confession is dismissed altogether: in the absence of the subject’s recognition

of his/her disruption of the order of things, confession is superfluous. The informants do not represent themselves confession as the enactment of an instance of the vertical gift, but level everything down to the horizontal axis: the “target” is not the relationship to the divine, but to one’s neighbor (I am nice to people, I do not harm anyone, etc.); the actual addressee of confession is not God/Christ, but the priest, who shares in their human condition, and therefore cannot be in the position to make moral statements.

In the other examples, confession is practiced as a “procedure” one has to go through in order to reach the actual end, which is Communion. Indeed, the Eucharist is the climax of Orthodox liturgy and, for many people, the very reason they attend the service. Confession and penance being direct prerequisites to receive Communion, they were compressed in time and space so as to allow for their ritual performance minutes before the Eucharistic celebration: believers are supposed to have already examined their consciousness over the days or weeks preceding actual confession, during which they can formulate the “findings” of their introspection. This has to be brief because many people wait in line, and whispered discreetly in the priest’s ear, so that other church attendants do not overhear. This formal, quasi-impersonal organization of confession in the parishes I mentioned results in orthopraxy taking over orthodoxy: the correct and timely performance of confession matters more than individual commitment to the doctrinal significance.

Another practical nonconformity with the ideal-type of confession as ritualized instantiation of repentance and forgiveness is the transformation of confession in a “discussion” in which the penitent seeks advice about how to deal with social and psychological entanglements. This is the main finding revealed in a research about confession in Orthodox Churches in Finland, where most interviewees mentioned they had this expectation from the priest (Kettunen, 2002). My field research in Switzerland and also my larger experience with Orthodoxy both East and West point to some people’s proclivity to imagine confession not so much as a legalistic enumeration of sins, but rather as a moment of “revelation” of one’s “real problems” in life and of the corresponding solutions. The priest is supposed to elicit and lead discussions that can prompt awareness about sin. The ideal confessor is warm, humane, understanding, generous with his time, diplomatic, non-judgmental, refined psychologist, capable of listening, patient, but also very well trained in theology and firm in his statements. The therapeutic aspect of confession, doctrinally described as a consequence of liberation from sin and reconnection to the divine, is overemphasized in the psychological approach, albeit with a different orientation: the penitent is healed from his/her own problems in the world (and not from having failed to remain in a gift relationship with the divine) and in view of a better connection to his/her own Self.

These two tendencies of reducing confession to one of its aspects are born in reaction to one another: the legalistic and too formal way of conducting confession generated a more informal, psychological approach, which in turn

is being challenged by more rigoristic approaches, which promote the need for a more “serious” practice of confession.

6.3 Conclusion

The Orthodox gift system being structured around the vertical axis, the main perceived threat refers to the disruption of the transcendent dimension of the Church and of human life as well, with the consequences I have enumerated: the Church stripped of its divine nature becomes an institution, a social and political actor in the society; the sacraments separated from the vertical dimension function as service to the community; liturgy, individual worship, confession and fasting become ritualistic “duties” to be fulfilled in a legalistic way that corresponds to the disconnection of orthopraxy and orthodoxy, against their ideal-typical connection specific to the Orthodox gift system. Deviations have occurred at all times in the history of the Church, under various forms and to various degrees, calling for the corresponding correctives and rectifications in order to reestablish the holistic, all-encompassing nature of the theological ideal-type.

Deviations are generally explained as forms of disorder in the process of gift exchange (e.g. failure to recognize a gift, failure to recognize and comply with a debt, failure to give to the right receiver, etc.), which result in the destabilization of the ideal-typical articulation of the gift dimensions. This chapter showed that when human, mundane or worldly (i.e. secular) aspects intrude into the gifting process on the vertical axis, the idea of a transcendent divinity interfering in the social and political organization becomes subject to contestation, requiring the reconfiguration of the gift system in such a way, as to lay less emphasis on the vertical axis.

Notes

- 1 <http://ziarullumina.ro/misiunea-social-filantropica-a-bisericii-20195.html>
- 2 <http://patriarhia.ro/programul-masa-bucuriei-9204.html>
- 3 CROCEU was established in 2010 in Brussels and is made up of representatives of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, the Church of Greece and the Church of Cyprus.
- 4 Orthodox argumentations against female ordination invoke neither tradition(s) nor disciplinary rules or capacity of pastoral directorship as the main impediment, but the fact that masculine priesthood was divinely instituted.
- 5 <http://www.aoiusa.org/a-public-statement-on-orthodox-deaconesses-by-concerned-clergy-and-laity/>
- 6 There are, however, laymen who receive a special blessing to assist with the religious services and who can enter the sanctuary for this reason. In women’s monasteries, a nun receives this blessing too.
- 7 <https://orthodoxie.com/lhigoumene-monastere-de-valaam-crise-sein-diocese-de-leurope-occidentale-de-leglise-orthodoxe-russe-frontieres/>
- 8 A parish council made up of twenty lay people chosen by the soviet regime to rule the legal and administrative issues. The priest could not have membership

- in this council and no right of vote or veto to its decisions (Bourdeaux, 1968; Pankhurst, 2013).
- 9 <https://www.holycouncil.org/-/rest-of-christian-world>
 - 10 <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2016/05/24/response-to-the-pre-conciliar-document-on-relations-of-the-orthodox-church-with-the-rest-of-the-christian-world/>
 - 11 Swiss National Statistics Office, Enquête sur la langue, la religion et la culture 2014.
 - 12 This text was written before the pandemic and the generalization of digital practice of religion.
 - 13 Rev. Dr. Michael G. Azar, Elizabeth Theokritoff, Very Rev. Dr. Harry Linsinbigler, 2016. “Fasting, the church, and the world”, retrieved from <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2016/06/13/fasting-the-church-and-the-world/#more-1141>.
 - 14 My informant might have inspired himself from the narrative of Saint Jerome’s mystical experience in Bethlehem, where he went on Christmas Eve, days after he finished his translation of the Scriptures. According to the account, Jesus appeared to him around midnight asking him: “Jerome, what will you give me for my birthday?”. Jerome proudly declared: “Lord, I will give You my translation of Your word”. Jesus replied simply and bluntly: “Jerome, this is not what I want”. Jerome started suggesting other ways of honoring Jesus’ birthday – fasting, becoming a hermit, giving his possessions to the poor. To each of these Jesus replied, “No. Jerome. That is not what I want most”. Finally, Jerome protested, “Then you tell me, Lord. Tell me what would give You the most joy on Your birthday, and You shall have it”. Then Jesus replied: “Give me your sins”. Source: <https://desertnuns.com/give-me-your-sins/>.

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7 The Horizontal Axis

Perils, Recompositions and Permanencies

After having explored Orthodox representations of threat at the level of the vertical axis of the gift and the ensuing reactions to preserve the gift, I will move on to analyze the situation of the gift circulation on the horizontal axis. Generally speaking, the main threat the Orthodox perceive about the horizontal circulation of the gift refers to its autonomization from the vertical axis (in various forms and to various degrees), because of social, ecclesiastical and political entanglements. To put it differently, the data point to the fact that inter-Orthodox, intra-parish and interpersonal relationships appear to deviate from the theologically formulated ideal-type, rooted in the vertical axis (i.e. transcendent authority), and are conducted so as to meet with pressure and challenges that partake to the horizontal (i.e. immanent) dimension of human existence.

In the following, I will analyze concrete examples of the above outlined threat and subsequent responses to it, at the macro (institutional), mezzo (parish) and micro (individual) levels of the Orthodox “diaspora”.

7.1. Inter-Orthodox relations: recoding the gift so as to cope with multiple jurisdictions, primacy, autocephaly and consensus

In Chapter 3 in which I described the organization of the Orthodox Churches, both in the homeland and in a migration context, I mentioned the fact that it is based on the ecclesiology of the local Church, i.e. a territory (delimited according to civil, secular criteria) headed by a bishop/archbishop/patriarch, who is a guarantor of the Eucharistic celebration on that specific geographical area. The respective hierarch has the right of jurisdiction only on his geographically delimited diocese/metropoly/patriarchate and no other bishop can interfere in ecclesiastical matters on the so-defined territory. While the principle of *one territory—one bishop* has functioned quite unproblematically over the centuries, massive migration to non-Orthodox lands in the 20th century has brought about an unprecedented infringement of this principle: outside the Orthodox heartland, where there was no official canonical Orthodox bishop, the Orthodox communities organized themselves along

ethnic and national lines, each of them being headed by a bishop of the respective Mother Church, causing a multitude of canonical bishops to overlap jurisdiction on the same territory (though not on the same population).

With no exception, the theologically knowledgeable Orthodox people I interviewed qualified this situation as an “anomaly”, which they believe endangers Orthodox ecclesiology (and also its credibility in the Christian landscape), inter-Orthodox relations, and ultimately Orthodox identity itself.

it’s sad, it’s very sad that we are in this situation, which started without our being aware of it, we only realize it’s gravity now, that we look back to our communities and we see that we, the Orthodox, are the first ones not to respect our own theology, our own ecclesiology... and nobody knows how and when this situation will be sorted out.

(Greek priest, French-speaking part of Switzerland)

our situation in diaspora is a true shame. What kind of testimony of the unity of the Orthodox do we deliver to the world, when we keep our Churches in a kind of ecclesiological cacophony? What are the Catholics to understand about what it means to be Orthodox? That it means to be Greek? Or Russian?

(Convert in a Greek parish)

Why is the overlapping of episcopal jurisdictions presented as a serious threat to the Orthodox unity and the Orthodox identity? To understand this, we have to get back to the Orthodox gift system and recall the fact that the Orthodox consider their ecclesiology as divinely inspired (vertical gift) and a continuation of apostolic practice (longitudinal gift). As such, it needs to be fully respected and applied, which appears not to be the case in the “diaspora”, where the ethnic criterion, which partakes of the horizontal/immanent dimension of human existence, has taken over the divinely inspired and apostolically established territorial principle. This has determined the overall organization of the Orthodox presence in the West, where several bishops exercise authority over ethnically defined communities within the boundaries of the same territory. For example, in Paris, there are at least seven Orthodox bishops pastoring their own ethnic flock, instead of one single episcopal representative, as it would have been coherent with Orthodox ecclesiology. This parallel hierarchy is viewed as a negation of Orthodox unity, because it seems to imply that the respective ethnic Orthodox communities behave as if they were not in communion with each other and did not recognize each other’s episcopate. Unity being one of the core attributes of the Church, defined in the Nicene Creed (“I believe in *One*, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church”), because it is supposed to mirror the unity of the Holy Trinity, it is therefore critical that it is *de facto* embodied in the life of the Church.

Besides failing to provide unity as commanded by a sense of coherence with the vertical and longitudinal gift, the overlapping of jurisdictions in

“diaspora” contains another ecclesiological “sin”, that of the Mother Churches overstepping their right of jurisdiction by extending it beyond their canonical geographically ascribed territory. They recode their role of “managers” of the gift on a defined geographical area, by shifting the focus from the territorial criterion to the ethnic criterion, which requires the Church to be the faithful pastor of a particular community, wherever the latter may move geographically. This further legitimates national Churches to exercise jurisdiction outside their original canonical provinces.

How does this influence inter-Orthodox relationships (in the West) in a pernicious way, as claimed by the interviewees? First, political and institutional entanglements back home are reverberated in the “diaspora”. This means that parishes of Russian, Romanian, Serbian or Greek origin in the West get to be influenced by domestic realities (examples provided in Chapters 1 and 2), in addition to the challenges prompted by the host country’s socio-political and religious specificities (see Chapter 2 for details). Orthodox migrants in the West need therefore to consider this double constraint when they reconfigure their religious identity. The perpetuation of the gift, between reproduction and recomposition, is under the two-fold influence of the home and the host contexts. The relations among the Orthodox Churches in the “diaspora” (i.e. among ethnic dioceses, but also among ethnic parishes) are embedded in global ecclesiastical and political stakes.

Second, the multiple-jurisdiction leadership in the West raises the question of which Church is more entitled to have authority over these territories. Historically, Western Europe used to be part of the See of Rome. But since the bishop of Rome ceased to be commemorated as an Orthodox hierarch by the Eastern Church (after the 1054 Great Schism), there has been a void of ecclesiastical leadership in these regions. The major claim for jurisdiction on the Orthodox populations situated outside the autocephalous Churches emanates from the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and meets with serious opposition from the other patriarchates, the most vocal of which is Moscow. Though some observers, especially coming from the area of political science (e.g. Fajfer and Rimestadt, 2010), reduce this tension between the two Churches to a replication of the political dispute between Turkey and Russia or between Russia and the West, I find that the discourse itself is formulated rather in theological terms (centered around the issues of *primacy* and *conciliarity*). It can be translated in the language of the gift as an issue of claiming, granting and returning *recognition*. In the following, I will analyze the arguments used by both sides and the ensuing recordings of the gift.

Constantinople grounds its claim to primacy over the whole of the “diaspora” on a particular interpretation of a specific provision of the Council of Chalcedon: canon 28¹ grants the See of Constantinople equal prerogatives to the See of Rome because of the importance of this city in the Empire, ranking it “second in honor after Rome” and designating it as “the second Rome”. The canon further clarifies that the bishops of three specific dioceses

(including bishops of provinces situated in “barbarian lands”) were to be ordained by the archbishop of Constantinople.

The primacy of the See of Constantinople, derived from the afore-mentioned canon, is admittedly an honorific one (the “first among equals”, or *primus inter pares*). This is in accordance with Orthodox ecclesiology, which prescribes total equality among Church primates, as a logical consequence of their representing equal Churches, by virtue of the fact that each diocese/local Church, independently of its size, manifests the fullness of *the Church*. The status of *primus inter pares* is unanimously recognized by the Orthodox commonwealth, as a divine gift attributed to a specific recipient. Recognition is unproblematic as long as primacy is symbolic and honorific, and therefore does not modify the established circulation of the gift on the horizontal axis, where all actors are equal. However, the stakes change when there are attempts to reconfigure the horizontal dimension of the gift by recoding the vertical gift, which provides its substance, legitimacy and norms.

Since the 20th century, Constantinople, in the person of its recent patriarchs (Meletios, Athenagoras and especially the present Patriarch Bartholomew), has repeatedly reaffirmed its divinely granted gift² of primacy, arguing that it contains at least three *obligations*: first, to ensure warm and brotherly inter-Orthodox relations and convene and preside pan-Orthodox meetings; second, to grant or remove autocephaly and third, to provide protection and pastoral care to Orthodox believers *universally*. There is no contestation on the side of the other Orthodox actors that the gift entails obligation. However, partisans of the Russian Orthodox Church denounced the fact that these self-attributed *obligations* are actually *privileges* in disguise.

The contestations refer to the fact that the self-attributed obligations may provide the grounds for the instrumentalization of the divine gift in order to institute *de facto* leadership on the horizontal axis, where the gift is equally distributed, i.e. entails no concrete privileges for any of the Churches. The most vehement opponent to such developments is the ROC, itself a former dominant actor in the Orthodox commonwealth, aspiring to recover a key position and the symbolic status of “Third Rome”. The Russian argument typically runs as a critique of Constantinople gradually shifting from the status of *primus inter pares* to the status of *primus sine paribus* (“first without equals”, a phrase coined by Constantinople metropolitan bishop Elpidophorus Lambriniadis),³ through at least two recodings of the initial gift: first, by recoding *privilege* as *obligation*, as mentioned previously, and thus making it sound acceptable and compatible with the Orthodox gift system. Second, by recoding primacy as a multi-layered attribute with corresponding privileges: on the local level, the primacy of the archbishop of Constantinople remains honorific and symbolic, as *primus inter pares*; on the regional level, the archbishop of Constantinople is patriarch; at the universal level, he is “Ecumenical Patriarch”, and as such he can only be *primus sine paribus*, allowed to grant autocephaly, convene and preside pan-Orthodox synods/gatherings/etc. and entitled to provide canonical and pastoral care to all Orthodox people situated

outside the canonical and historical territories of autocephalous Churches, i.e. Western Europe, North and South America, Australia, Far East and so on.

The Constantinopolitan claim to *universality* is grounded as well on the divine gift (i.e. the canon 28's mention of the archbishop of Constantinople's right to ordain bishops in three dioceses that had provinces situated on the "barbarian lands"). Depending on how one defines the geographical area designated as "barbarian lands" (a specific territory situated at the periphery of the Empire vs. the whole world situated outside the Empire/Oikoumene), Constantinople's right of jurisdiction in the world can be moderated or enhanced. This is coupled with Constantinople's increasing affirmation of its self-designation as "Ecumenical Patriarchate", grounded in its Byzantine history (the *oikoumene* used to be the civilized world, i.e. the Empire vs. the "barbarian lands"), but which has acquired new connotations in the 20th century, namely that of "universal".

The Russian hierarchy proposes its own recoding of primacy, as a more abstract gift, disconnected from its recipient, with specific "functions" (instead of "privileges"), which, it argues, are not transferable from the level of a diocese to the universal level because this would amount to *recognizing* "a special form of ministry, ...possessing the magisterial and administrative power in the whole Universal Church...and leading to the emergence of a jurisdiction of a universal first hierarch never mentioned either in holy canons or patristic tradition".⁴ The Russian commentators insist that this form of horizontal gift circulation is contrary to the vertical gift in which it claims to root its existence and legitimacy, and that in the Universal Church there can be no visible head because Christ is the invisible head. The best form of regulation of the circulation of the gift on the horizontal axis should remain *conciliarity*, historically recognized by the Orthodox commonwealth as a completely decentralized type of governance, consisting in reaching consensus among local Churches on every major issue concerning Orthodoxy. This means that a truly orthodox (and Orthodox) decision cannot emanate from a specific hierarch, but only from the consensus bishops/primates reach after mutual consultation. In this context, the primacy of honor of the archbishop of Constantinople could consist in "offering initiatives of general Christian scale and addressing the external world on behalf of the Orthodox plenitude provided he has been empowered to do so by all the Local Orthodox Churches".⁵

However, were there to be a leadership in the Orthodox commonwealth, Russian representatives argue that it should lie with the ROC, given the fact that it pastors the vast majority of the Orthodox population on the globe. Primacy is recoded here as a "numeric" primacy, no longer rooted in a divine gift granted through consensus of all Orthodox hierarchs, but in a contingent and immanent principle, deduced from demographic and historic realities. Critics of this approach to primacy argue it stems from Russian Orthodoxy's imperialistic character, "based on the principle *ubi russicus ibi ecclesia russicae*, that is to say, 'wherever there is a Russian, there too the jurisdiction of the Russian Church extends'".⁶

The confrontation of these different logics, one claiming universal jurisdiction, the other one opposing it and hindering its implementation, deeply affects the Orthodox presence in the West. Caught between theological disputes, political and ecclesiastical interests, the Orthodox “diaspora” remains in a *status quo* of deviation from the ideal-type of the gift circulation on the horizontal axis, none of the suggested gift recodings being able to get the necessary recognition to overcome the parallel-jurisdictions model of governance. This obstructs Orthodoxy’s further growth, cultural integration and, more significantly, retards its maturation in the West, to which contributes greatly the prolonged dependency on Mother Churches.

After decades of consultation and inter-Orthodox dialogue, enhanced by the fall of the Iron Curtain and the strengthening of two major patriarchates (numerically speaking), i.e. the Russian Orthodox Church and the Romanian Orthodox Church, Orthodox hierarchs proposed a “Third Way” kind of solution that advocates a satisfactory gift recomposition for the time being: in 2009, an inter-Orthodox conference deliberated on the creation of “Episcopal Assemblies”,⁷ consisting of all the bishops in each region who are in canonical communion with all of the Orthodox Churches, and chaired by the bishop representing the Church of Constantinople. The aim of these bodies is to manifest the unity of Orthodoxy, the development of common action of all the Orthodox of each region to address the pastoral needs of Orthodox living in the region, a common representation of all Orthodox vis-à-vis other faiths and the wider society in the region, the cultivation of theological scholarship and ecclesiastical education, etc. Decisions on these subjects are taken by consensus of the Churches who are represented in the particular assembly.

We do not have enough data about the activity of these assemblies, which gather only once a year. Some of my informants who were close to bishops and involved in ecclesial issues of their dioceses point to the fact that these assemblies run the risk of bringing more centralization and bureaucratization in inter-Orthodox relations because bishops monitor each other’s activities, in terms of ordaining new priests, opening new parishes, creating monasteries, etc. This is because they are supposed to function according to the principle of consensus, i.e. to reach full agreement in view of achieving unity, so that one day these local episcopal bodies may become new sovereign Churches. The question that arises is: who will grant them this independence? Some argue it should be the role of Mother Churches, with the agreement of the sister Churches that make up the Orthodox commonwealth. Others argue that only the PC has the prerogative to grant autocephaly.

Autocephaly is another point of crystallization of the stakes of inter-Orthodox relations and gift circulation. Ideal-typically, autocephaly consists in the recognition of a new local Church by the other Orthodox Churches as capable of self-governing and electing its own primate, with no interference of any other Church in its internal organization and decisions.

Most of the time, however, it is not clear when a Church becomes mature enough to be granted independence by the Church to which it initially

belonged (the so-called Mother Church). Nor does this gifting process unfold unproblematically, because it implies a risk on both sides: on the one hand, it weakens the Mother Church, because it has to let go of members, territories and resources, with no equivalent gift in return. On the other hand, it is a gift that entails great responsibilities on the side of the receiver – the newly created Church, which needs to build its own mechanisms to keep the gift system going. The recent crisis in Ukraine, due to the interference of Patriarch Bartholomew on a territory historically claimed by the ROC in order to grant autocephaly to so-called schismatic factions, is a case in point.

By far, the most interesting example of entanglements around the issue of autocephaly in diaspora is that of a new Church created outside the Orthodox traditional territories, the Orthodox Church in America (OCA), which has been striving to get recognition and independence from various Mother Churches for almost eighty years now. OCA traces its origins to the arrival in Kodiak, Alaska, of eight Orthodox missionaries from the Valaamo Monastery (northern Karelia region of Russia) in 1794. The missionaries converted Alaskan natives, and by the 1820s had already liturgical services and the Bible translated in their dialects. At about the same period, immigrants began arriving in the United States, especially from Greece. Serbians and Russians joined them and, in the 1860s, a parish was established in San Francisco. Gradually other similar parishes were established across the territory of the United States because of the great waves of immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Southern Europe at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. By the early 1900s, almost all Orthodox communities, regardless of the ethnic background, were united in a single diocese, under the ROC. After the break of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, communications between the North American Diocese and the Church in Russia were greatly hindered. As a result, the former organized itself autonomously as the Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church of North America, or the Metropolia. In 1970, the Metropolia once again entered into communion with the Moscow Patriarchate, which granted it autocephaly. It was decided that the Metropolia should be renamed the OCA. Though counting about 700 parishes, missions and institutions, almost exclusively non-ethnic in origin and employing only the English language in worship, OCA is still not fully recognized by the Orthodox commonwealth, primarily because of the opposition from the PC, a competing ecclesiastical body claiming for jurisdiction over all of the Americas. This was why despite the high support the OCA gave to the much-contested Council in Crete, this Church was not invited to participate in it.

The last example I will use to illustrate recompositions within the horizontal axis of the gift system refers to the negotiations around the Orthodox definition of conciliarity as a form of decision-making by consensus, especially with regard to dogmatic issues. While consensus was envisioned as the *modus operandi* of the Council in Crete (at the insistence of the Russian Church), as the date of the Council was approaching, the meaning of *consensus* was no longer agreed

upon among the different actors: on the one hand, representatives of the ROC (most notably, Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev) and more conservative partisans insisted on a definition of consensus as the *unanimous agreement of all hierarchs* present at the Council, as it was supposedly the practice for the first Ecumenical Councils; on the other hand, the PC and its supporters argued in favor of a *nuanced form of consensus, through negotiation and persuasion*, and even through *democratic vote*, as it was presumably the case in the history of the Church (Bouteneff, 2016; Chryssavgis, 2016; Gavriilyuk, 2016).

Though consensus is recognized by all as a divinely instituted practice that inspired the Church all through its history, its practical enactment is not self-evident: while some argue that it is the literal definition (as unanimity) that would be ideal, because it joins together the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (the vertical axis) and Tradition (the longitudinal axis) in the organization of negotiations (the horizontal axis), others claim such a literal interpretation would be a source of *status quo*, because decision-making by unanimity is a lengthy process that would prevent the Spirit from blowing over the Church (i.e. the action of vertical gift on the horizontal axis would be delayed if not impinged).

Defenders of the approach of consensus as the unanimous agreement of hundreds of hierarchs argue that it is the only way to integrate the will and opinion of each individual hierarch and each ecclesiastical institution represented at the gathering, and to ensure that God's will is manifested through the harmonious convergence of the hierarchs' wills. Their speaking "with one mind" is a guarantee of orthodoxy and Orthodoxy. To put it differently, consensus by unanimous agreement is described as the positive side of the gift sequence (to give—to receive—to return), in which agreement is *given freely* by each hierarch and the Church he represents, *received* by the community of hierarchs and Churches, which in turn *give back* to ecclesiastical actors the support for carrying into practice the respective resolution. In this way, inter-Orthodox relations would be maintained on the basis of equality among Churches and primates. These actors oppose decision-making by democratic voting, which they describe as the manifestation of the negative side of the gift sequence (to take—to refuse—to not return): some individual hierarchs and Churches *do not give* their consent to a particular idea or proposal, yet the majority *takes* a decision against the will of the minority. As a result, the latter *does not return* support to the respective verdict, causing frictions in inter-Orthodox relations.

Partisans of a renewed approach to consensus argued in favor of a more efficient way of proceeding that would be less time-consuming and that would involve less organizational, logistic and financial effort. The convening of the Council appeared to them as a necessity or as an emergency. Consensus by unanimity in this context would amount to procrastinating the much-awaited event. Therefore, they advocate for engaging creatively with the traditional notion of consensus, so as to allow for dialogue among the hierarchs and partisans of divergent opinions, but also for a "move forward". This approach proposes a reconstruction of the gift that combines the traditional

“mind of the Fathers” with more modern notions of efficiency,⁸ a notion inspired from economics, and democracy, a notion inspired from politics. The supporters of this new form of consensus maintain that in the absence of a pragmatic stance, the vertical gift (the inspiration by the Holy Spirit) is likely to remain self-enclosed and to fail to inform the other axes of the gift system, which comes down to negating and invalidating Orthodoxy itself.

7.2 Gift, peril and recomposition at the parish level

The parish is a very important ecclesiastical level, because it represents the meeting point of the Church as a larger institution and the individual believers, of theology and lived religion. In the West, parishes are also constituted as legal persons (pertaining to private law most of the time and only in a few countries pertaining to public law) and as such are governed by the respective country’s legislation, parallel to the Orthodox canonical law. This overlap of civil/secular and religious law does have some impact on the way parishes operate and function, which consists in an increasing separation of the administrative and the religious/spiritual matters, with lay people involved in managing the former and the clergy in charge of the latter. Some parishioners (and even priests) understand the separation of the two fields as a beneficial “division of labor” that serves two important purposes: first, it involves laity to a greater extent, empowers them with new responsibilities and awakens awareness that a parish in the “diaspora” can exist only through common efforts and active involvement; and second, it dispels suspicion that clergy may misuse parish finances or resources. On the other hand, there are also Orthodox believers who see in the division of the “dogmatic” and the “administrative” fields the influence of secularization, through the fact that it echoes the separation of the State and the Church, which contains the presupposition that institutions should be free of religious content in their management and organization.

Orthodox parish civil law statutes have to comply with this formal separation, but they also reflect the traditional role of the clergy: in most of the cases, the priest is designated as the association’s president by default and the bishop as a guarantor of peace in case of internal disputes. Both priests and lay people involved in the running of parishes reported the importance of asserting the role of clergy in the statutes, in order to avoid ambiguity. But also in order to comply with Orthodox practice in case of conflict: the priest helps sort out the matter by inviting the parties involved in the conflict to self-questioning, confession, forgiveness and reconciliation. And if none of these methods work, then people may appeal to the bishop to help settle the issue. This is in line with the Orthodox system of the gift, in which the vertical gift, embodied in the person of the priest and in the spiritual resources of conflict resolution, is central to the functioning and circulation of the gift between coreligionists on the horizontal axis, and with the idea that all human activity is embedded in a higher-order network of meaning.

A more in-depth comparative analysis of parish statutes could shed light on how the Orthodox Churches accommodate their ecclesial law with the legal framework that regulates religious institutions in host countries. Statutes crystallize the encounter between the religious institution, structured and governed by values and norms emanating from an “other-worldly” law, and the host society’s legal order intended to protect and ensure “this-worldly” values, such as democratic participation, equal rights of clergy and lay members, and autonomous self-governing of the religious institutions, free from the intrusion of third-party actors such as higher clergy who are not actual members of the community (e.g. bishops).

In practice, the statutes are applied with more or less accuracy. For example, in some communities, decisions are not taken by voting, but by a kind of consensus that members reach after consultation with the clergy and the well-respected people in the parish. While in Orthodox countries the parish board is more often than not a mere formality, the priest being the actual decision-making actor, in the “diaspora”, the administrative bodies have more weight in decisions concerning parish finances and the priest does not exert much privilege from the fact of being the president of the association. Another example of the not-so-strict application of the legal statutes is provided by the authority bishops exercise in parishes under their jurisdiction in cases of conflict resolution or sanctions in the event of religious misbehavior. This is so because in the Orthodox ecclesial organization, a parish is not an independent body, but part of a larger community – the Church, to whose well-being and interest the parish and each individual member is called to submit.

Legal statutes introduce the separation and autonomy of the spiritual/religious aspects of the parish life – part of the vertical dimension of the gift, and the material/administrative aspects – part of the horizontal axis. This collides with the specificity of the Orthodox system of the gift that calls for the horizontal to be embedded in the vertical. Despite the predominance of the “spiritual law” in most parishes, secular law emerges as a court of last resort in case tensions cannot be solved by mobilizing religious means and resources. This appears to some Orthodox people involved in running parishes as a threat to the Orthodox system of the gift:

As Christians we have our own ways and means to solve conflicts, the Church has very thoughtfully provided this for us. It is a shame that we have to resort to the legal system to sort out things in the Church. This can only disgrace us as Christians, and the Church of course.

(French-speaking cradle Orthodox man)

I came across several examples of disputes between a parish and its priest or between a priest and his bishop. In one case, the conflicting parties refused to resort to court trials and judgments in order to avoid tarnishing the image of the Orthodox Church in Switzerland. But in other cases, provisions of the legal statutes were used in order to end the dissensions or to prevent the

bishop from interfering in the financial matters of the parish,⁹ to which the bishop responded with ecclesial law sanctions against the respective priests and their parishes. This provoked a confrontation between the canon law of the Church and the civil law of the host country, which did not prove very efficient. Though the Swiss case was solved by renewed negotiations between the new bishop and the “dissident” priests, this type of situation persists in some dioceses in Germany, where the relations between the bishops and some priests often turn into power games.

While in most cases civil statutes are resorted to by lay people in order to limit the power of the clergy, the recent removal of ROCOR bishop Michael from his diocese based in Geneva points to a different logic: parishioners launched an online petition¹⁰ in support of their bishop, denouncing the activity of the parish board as illegal from the perspective of the Swiss legal statutes, and advocating for the parish administrative bodies to be again supervised by the clergy. The petition also argues in favor of the reconnection of administrative and ecclesial/theological aspects of the parish life.

Despite the repeated criticism of the separation of the spiritual and the material/administrative as a way of secularizing parish life, in practice, the two aspects continue to part ways. We could presume that this might all the more affect Orthodox Churches in countries where they are recognized by the State, because they have to comply with all the bureaucratic rules and norms required by the legal system of the respective country (e.g. employment and labor legislation, bookkeeping, etc.). This leads to more paperwork that reflects the efforts to provide financial transparency, personal data protection and democratic functioning, which are nothing but aspects of *governance*, a phenomenon that first affected economy, later entered politics and is now determining the way religious institutions, including traditional ones, manage and organize themselves (Gauthier, 2020). An American Orthodox observer (Ferencz, 2015) described this phenomenon as “congregationalism”.

The congregationalist model of parish organization represents a gift recombination, which seeks to preserve the quality of the vertical gift (spiritual and liturgical matters in the parish) by separating the liturgical aspect from the increasingly burdening administrative work, which pertains to the horizontal axis. In this way, a solution is sought to allow the clergy to remain available for their ministry and delegate the administrative tasks to members of the congregation who are competent to fulfill them. However, as the examples quoted above indicate, this entails further transformations of the clergy-laity relations and of the parish life.

For example, the Orthodox Church of Finland is so overwhelmed with the administrative work, that it envisages a reform that affects parish organization significantly: it consists in regrouping parishes in a certain geographical area under a single administrative unit, a so-called “mother-parish”, which will supervise the smaller worship units. The latter will no longer have a parish board and all issues related to property, real estate and employment (of clergy, choir director, etc.) will be dealt with by the “mother-parish”,

i.e. by an external authority. The Church of Finland argues this reform is necessary in order to allow parishes to focus more on spiritual matters and waste less energy with paperwork. Though ideal-typically the two aspects are connected (a parish is run on a spiritual basis), their organic functioning is hindered by the exacerbation of the administrative work commanded by recent developments that promote an economic model. The separation of the organic connection of the spiritual and the administrative stipulated in the ideal-type is aimed at the preservation of the parish as a locus of worship, a “meeting point of Heaven and Earth, of Man and God”.

7.3 Horizontal gift reconstructions in interpersonal relations

When I described the horizontal dimension of the gift circulation on the horizontal axis in the Orthodox system of the gift, I mentioned forms of self-giving to the community, through chanting, cleaning, cooking, volunteering for different activities, but also concrete action to assist people in the parish (and outside it) for precise tasks or needs (e.g. visiting prisoners, visiting the sick and the elderly, giving a lift to people who do not own a car, buying groceries to people confined to bed, etc.). I also mentioned that an unspoken rule of anonymity in the case of generous donations is at work in these communities, and I explained that this is commanded by a sense of meekness and the belief that a too obvious rewarding in this world (for example, in the form of social recognition and social status enhancement in the parish) is contrary to the Christian postponement of the return for the after-life or its projection in eternity. I will not develop on this any further because it is quite a classical illustration of gift circulation in religious organizations (especially Christian ones), where the obligation to give freely, spontaneously and generously is paralleled by the injunction to expect nothing in return.

There are, however, ways to *give back* to donors, to reward them: granting them honorary roles during important ritual moments (e.g. holding the Epitaphios¹¹ on the Holy Friday service of the Deposition from the Cross; performing the Sunday reading from the Epistle¹²); making a *benefactors' dyptich* (i.e. repertoire) that lists the names of the donors and all their family, living and deceased, who will be prayed for as long as the parish will exist; delivering “*benefactor's certificates*” to the contributors of a specific project; instituting a *benefactors' day* in which all the community prays for them. In Switzerland, parishes deliver their donors a document intended for the national tax office, which states the amount of the donation and requests the deduction of the respective amount from the taxable income.

In multicultural Orthodox parishes with converts and Western cradle Orthodox, where integration is not much of a stake, interpersonal relations are shaped, among other things, by the ideal-type encapsulated in the syntagm “brothers and sisters in Christ”. This ranges parish socialization within family bonds rooted in the vertical axis. However, I noticed that the understanding

of the “brother” or “neighbor” has extended beyond the “brothers and sisters *in Christ*” and points increasingly to humanity in general. The community in which the gift circulates is enlarged beyond its narrow definition by virtue of the filiation in Christ, and is re-rooted in the belief that all humanity is a family that shares in a common condition, that of God’s children (including those who do not believe in God). Many homilies remind the congregation their duty to “see Christ in our neighbor”, especially in those relationships that are difficult or sensitive.

“Seeing Christ in one’s neighbor” ideal-typically illustrates the articulation of the vertical and the horizontal axes of the gift circulation: it implies that the way one relates to other human beings (i.e. the circulation of the gift on the horizontal axis) is underpinned by the belief that each person is a bearer of the image of God (i.e. the vertical dimension of human existence). The presence of Christ/God in the other is what triggers the *obligation* to give, to give back and therefore to circulate the gift.

Though this is a centuries-old Christian injunction, there is, however, an aspect of novelty in today’s “love thy neighbor”, which resides in the broadening of the category “neighbor”: there is a shift from the concrete “neighbor” anchored in geographical proximity (the neighbor is someone who lives nearby, be it nuclear family members, extended family, workmates, the people next door, etc.) to the more abstract and distant “neighbor” as the whole of humanity. Two parishes I surveyed used to make fundraising for orphanages or victims of natural catastrophes in faraway countries; three of my interviewees mentioned that their way of showing Christian charity was to be engaged in various militant NGOs (e.g. the defense of Human Rights, the abolition of torture and the abolition of death penalty). The “global neighbor” is most of the time unknown to the giver and this is considered to be a higher form of giving. Directing the gift to people one knows and loves appears as not enough disinterest because helping family members can ultimately come down to catering to the prolongation of one’s Self.

The global, collective and anonymous “neighbor” points to the hybridization of the traditional Orthodox gift with modern forms, i.e. a gift to strangers and anonymous, as defined by Godbout (1998) and as explained in Chapter 5.

The same type of recomposition is at work in the re-emergence of the old notion of “the sacrament of the neighbor” (*le sacrement du frère*), meant to symbolize the sacred value of helping those in need. According to Chesseron and Vilain (2000), it was Saint Augustine and Saint John Chrysostom who coined the phrase, in an attempt to emphasize that the love of God is strongly connected to the love of the neighbor. However, its contemporary application contains a slight deviation from the original meaning.

Though the formulation in terms of sacrament safeguards the linguistic register familiar to Orthodoxy, which lays strong emphasis on the sacramental nature of the world, it departs from the traditional understanding of the sacrament as grace infused by God in a visible reality through performance

of ritual, by a minister, in the Church. It is a highly modern “sacrament” because it can be performed by lay people, informally, outside religious institutions and authority, rid of doctrinal creeds, in a variety of forms that allow for the subjectivity, sensitivity and emotions of the “celebrant” to arise and manifest themselves. French Orthodox theologian Olivier Clément (2008) described it as the crowning of all the other sacraments, which has the advantage to make God present anywhere and on any occasion.

Moreover, while the definition of the sacrament contains the idea that it has a transformative effect on the individual who partakes to it by the effect of grace, the “sacrament of the neighbor” insists on the transformation of the world into a better place, with no further eschatological elaborations, dissociating it from the “sacrament of the altar”. This is further supported by findings of a survey the French-speaking youth magazine *Mouvement* made among Orthodox people in the Paris region, regarding the place of the Christian in a secular world: younger generations define the true Christian as someone who serves his neighbor, while elder generations think a true Christian is a person who has a set of beliefs that guide his life and command love for the world. The contributors to the respective issue of *Mouvement* further insist on the fact that Christian witness in today’s world should consist in service to one’s neighbor bereft of proselytizing.

The “sacrament of the neighbor” bears strong similarities with the modern gift Godbout describes when he speaks of the philanthropic activity of religious NGOs: the gift must be detached from the religious message, which represents only the motivation that triggers the gift cycle, but must not reach out to the beneficiaries of the gift. The donors uphold their religious message, internalize and privatize it, so as to make the gift “givable” in today’s society. My presupposition is that proselytizing along with giving is perceived as a form of “corruption” of the gift, which, if associated with the propagation of religious ideas, becomes interested: mere “lure” to recruit new members. The material, concrete, immanent gift has to be an aim in itself in order to qualify as a disinterested gift. This differs from the effort of maintaining the connection between the message that triggers the gift, the gift itself and the receiver, which operates in Orthodox countries, where the philanthropic activity of the Church is systematically accompanied by an activity of evangelization. Here the perspective is reversed: it is the religious message that is considered the most precious gift, because it relates the receiver to the vertical dimension of existence and provides a path to salvation (interest-in-the-other), while simultaneously attending to the this-worldly needs of human beings (horizontal axis).

What triggers this type of gift reconstruction among the Orthodox in the West? It could be the interplay of several factors: mixed marriages, conversion of local people, immersion and integration in cultures marked by Protestant social activism, cultural and religious pluralism, etc. All these challenge the Orthodox to provide a renewed way of relating to each other and to their fellow human beings, especially in a context in which they are a religious minority, called to integrate in the host society and to adopt its culture.

The above-described gift recompositions are not generalized practice in Orthodox parishes in the West. Ethnic parishes (especially the most recent ones) are still highly impregnated with traditional forms of gift relations on the horizontal axis, with the vertical aspect playing a crucial role in triggering and circulating the horizontal gift.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated a few fields in which Orthodox Churches and individuals in the West engage in a series of recodings of the gift, so as to adapt to external challenges. Be it at the macro, mezzo or individual level, the great gift recompositions aim at creating the impression that the specificity of the Orthodox system of the gift (i.e. its circulation on the horizontal axis is appropriately connected to and rooted in the vertical axis) is preserved: primacy as *primus sine paribus* is presented as a hierarchy's attribute derived from the vertical gift received by the Church on the occasion of an Ecumenical Council (the famous canon 28 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council); consensus as democratic voting is depicted as an accelerated way of manifesting the Holy Spirit's presence in the Church; the separation of lay people and administrative management of the parish, on the one hand, and the clergy and the spiritual matters, on the other, is described as a measure against the encroachment of worldly matters on the liturgical activity of the parish; the "global neighbor" and the "sacrament of the neighbor" are ways to manifest the "sacrament of the altar", while being detached from it.

Despite the fact that the semantic register in which the recodings are formulated remains close to the theological ideal-type, the reality behind the recompositions points rather to *de facto* adjustments to new socio-cultural norms that are hard to admit in the Orthodox world: *primus sine paribus* bears similarities with Roman Catholic papacy, based on the centralization of authority in the person of one single hierarchy; consensus by democratic voting is not the same as a synod of bishops "speaking with one mind"; parish administration separated from its dogmatic and liturgical foundations, as a form of necessary labor division, gives rise to the autonomization of each sphere and introduces the logic of *governance* in the functioning of the ecclesial institution; by the same token, the "sacrament of the neighbor" has departed from the traditional understanding of the sacrament as an institutionalized, ritualized instantiation of grace (vertical gift) acting in the world (horizontal dimension of existence) in order to transfigure it, increasingly emulating the work of secular social welfare (at least as far as externalities are concerned). These imperceptible reworkings of the gift indicate that the Orthodox Church has adopted practices and notions that have the potential to operate deep changes in its system of the gift, similar to those Western Christianity experienced as modernity advanced.

Notes

- 1 The text of the canon reads as follows:

Following in every detail all the decrees of the holy Fathers and knowing about the canon, just read, of the one hundred and fifty bishops dearly beloved of God, gathered together under Theodosius the Great, emperor of pious memory in the imperial city of Constantinople, New Rome, we ourselves have also decreed and voted the same things about the prerogatives of the very holy Church of this same Constantinople, New Rome. The Fathers in fact have correctly attributed the prerogatives (which belong) to the See of the most ancient Rome because it was the imperial city. And thus moved by the same reasoning, the one hundred and fifty bishops beloved of God have accorded equal prerogatives to the very holy see of New Rome, justly considering that the city that is honored by the imperial power and the senate and enjoying (within the civil order) the prerogatives equal to those of Rome, the most ancient imperial city, ought to be as elevated as Old Rome in the affairs of the Church, being in the second place after it. Consequently, the metropolitans and they alone of the dioceses of Pontus, Asia and Thrace, as well as the bishops among the barbarians of the aforementioned dioceses, are to be ordained by the previously mentioned very holy see of the very holy Church of Constantinople; that is, each metropolitan of the above-mentioned dioceses is to ordain the bishops of the province along with the fellow bishops of that province as has been provided for in the divine canons. As for the metropolitans of the previously mentioned dioceses, they are to be ordained, as has already been said, by the archbishop of Constantinople, after harmonious elections have taken place according to custom and after the archbishop has been notified.

Source: <https://www.svots.edu/content/chalcedon-canon-28-yesterday-and-today>

- 2 I will briefly remind here the fact that the Orthodox consider the provisions of Ecumenical Councils as part of the divine revelation, along the Scriptures, counting therefore as a gift from God to the Church and to humanity.
- 3 <https://www.patriarchate.org/-/primus-sine-paribus-hapantesis-eis-to-peri-proteiou-keimenon-tou-patriarcheiou-moschas-tou-sebasmiotatou-metropolitou-prouses-k-elpidophorou>
- 4 <https://mospat.ru/en/2013/12/26/news96344/>
- 5 <https://mospat.ru/en/2013/12/26/news96344/>
- 6 <https://www.patriarchate.org/-/primus-sine-paribus-hapantesis-eis-to-peri-proteiou-keimenon-tou-patriarcheiou-moschas-tou-sebasmiotatou-metropolitou-prouses-k-elpidophorou>
- 7 The regions in which Episcopal Assemblies were created are defined as follows: Canada, United States of America, Latin America, Australia, New Zealand and Oceania, Great Britain and Ireland, France, Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg, Austria, Italy and Malta, Switzerland and Lichtenstein, Germany, Scandinavian countries (except Finland), Spain and Portugal.
- 8 Gauthier (2020) argues that *efficiency* is a value pertaining to the emerging notion of *governance*, which replaces or complements *government* (or the idea of *governing*) in an attempt to avoid rigid institutionalization and provide a larger participation of all actors in decision-making processes.
- 9 More often than not, bishops ask for redistribution of capital to poorer parishes in the diocese.
- 10 <https://www.change.org/non-la-répression-de-l-orthodoxie-pour-la-réintégration-de-monseigneur-michel>

- 11 The Epitaphios is an icon embroidered on a richly decorated piece of cloth that depicts Christ's dead body lying down, surrounded by the Mother of God and other biblical characters who lament on the grave.
- 12 The unfolding of the Orthodox liturgy comprises two moments of brief reading from the Scriptures: one from the Epistles or the Acts of the Apostles and one from any of the Gospels. These are highly solemn moments, during which in some parishes (especially Romanian ones) people kneel down. The reading of the Epistle is usually performed by the deacon, but since many parishes do not have a deacon, a layman in the congregation is designated to do it.

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8 The Longitudinal Axis

Perils, Recompositions and Permanencies

In Chapter 5, I mentioned that the relationship to Tradition is one of the most representative illustrations for the Orthodox longitudinal gift circulation. A multi-faceted and at times vague concept, Tradition plays a highly authoritative and normative role in the Orthodox system of the gift, providing an organic binder of present, past and future anchored in the vertical dimension of the gift. In this chapter, I will analyze those elements of Tradition that the Orthodox actors perceive as endangered by secularization, as well as the various (often divergent) attempts to preserve Tradition, under the two modalities of expression described in Chapter 5, namely filiation and translation. First, I will discuss the relationship of Tradition (and traditions) with modernity as a historical process and cultural phenomenon, but most importantly with modernity and secularization, as these notions emerge in the actors' discourse; second, I will present the heterogeneous Orthodox positions and stances with regard to how to perpetuate the gift on the longitudinal axis (emerging filiations, literal vs. intelligible translations of Tradition in new contexts, and transmission to younger generations) in the context of migration.

8.1 Tradition, tradition(s) and or versus modernity

Before proceeding to the analytical section of this chapter, which deals with concrete field data, I deem it necessary to introduce first a discussion about the Orthodox emphasis on Tradition (and tradition), which determines the standing point from which Orthodoxy further “negotiates” with modernity. This will be helpful also in order to complete the description of the “conditions of belief” in which the longitudinal gift permanencies and recompositions operate.

As mentioned in Chapters 3 and 5, the Orthodox definition of *tradition* is rather vague, even when it is formulated by theologians (Papanikolaou, 2015): “the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church” (Lossky, 1974), “the continuous life in the Truth” (Florovsky, 1972) and the “inner spiritual mystery of the Church” (McGuckin, 1998). Looking at various attempts to define it theologically and to the way it is used by the Orthodox people in common

parlance, we can notice, however, that there are two components to the concept: on the one hand, there is Tradition with a capital T, designated also as “Holy Tradition”, which points to a series of dogmatic and liturgical formulations by the Ecumenical Councils and the Church Fathers dating back to the early centuries of Christianity. It is a non-negotiable, “solid” component, to use Zygmunt Bauman’s metaphor,¹ a gift of God to humanity, in which He reveals Himself, and, as such, it cannot be subject to amendments or other “human additions”. On the other hand, there is tradition with a small t, which can be used in the plural, and points to the social embodiment and enactment of Tradition. As such, tradition is multi-faceted, adaptable and context-sensitive, and can cover a variety of expressions, espousing the subjectivities of those who incarnate it, without, however, being reduced to nor mistaken with these subjectivities. To continue using Bauman’s metaphor, tradition(s) are more “liquid” elements of the Orthodox understanding of *tradition*. As social and cultural forms in which Tradition is molded, tradition(s) are a depository of practices, rituals and teachings that continue to inspire Orthodox believers universally and inform culture in Orthodox countries.

This strong attachment to tradition(s) and the sacred status granted to Tradition, represents a distinctive Orthodox “trademark”, which the Orthodox Churches and people use as a source of authenticity: because their faith is ancient, has been preserved untouched by the time and practiced in its original forms, it has the legitimacy of claiming to be the “true faith”. Makrides (2012: 34) argues that

for the Orthodox Christians the past is of higher significance than the present and the future, whereas Western Christians either support the opposite, or at least keep a greater balance between all three main divisions of history (ancient, medieval and modern).

Orthodox theologians and clergy argue that this strong bond with the past is by no means a source of religious backwardness, but a source of creative and ingenuous enactment of dogmatic affirmations, a spiritual exercise that is possible at all historical periods and in all human societies (Florovsky, 1972; Lossky, 1974; Ware, 1993; McGuckin, 2011). However, the Orthodox claim of continuity (and even identity) with the message delivered by Jesus Christ and with the apostolic practice of the faith, believed to be confirmed through the mystical experience of the saints and actualized constantly in the life of the Church, has attracted a great deal of criticism against the Orthodox institutions as allegedly stagnant and petrified. Non-Orthodox observers and contemporary social-scientific, cultural-historical critics acknowledge incomprehension and perplexity at the Orthodox reflex to turn to the past in order to find solutions and inspiration for contemporary issues.

Their critique is epistemologically rooted in a linear perspective on history and the concomitant presupposition that humanity is engaged in endless progress, made possible by breaking with (or at least critically revising) what

has preceded (Hann, 2011; Makrides, 2012). Modernity has an indisputable proclivity to discontinuity and change, which is at odds with the Orthodox insistence on continuity and embeddedness of the present in the past.

Makrides (2012) and Roudometof (2013a, 2013b) have demonstrated that the Orthodox world has actually innovated all along history: they happily accepted the nationalist movement (a secular ideology) in the 19th century; iconography was for long influenced by the Renaissance and later by Realism; the Slavonic tradition of Church music found inspiration in Western polyphony; some local Churches implemented the “new calendar” in 1924; some places in Greece used organs to accompany liturgical chanting in religious services; in early 20th century, many local Orthodox Churches were happy to join the Ecumenical Movement, etc. However, innovation here is not equated necessarily with the contemporary acceptance of the word, as a relentless search for novelty and originality, through differentiation with past practices and meanings. Novelties or adaptations have always been presented rather as revival or deepening of *tradition*. To put this in the language of the gift theory, Orthodoxy has recoded novelty (potentially a peril to the gift) into a form of reaffirming or reinforcing *tradition*, i.e. a way of perpetuating the gift by absorbing and transforming the threat. The above-mentioned innovations have not aimed at the “solid” Tradition, but operated rather at the level of “liquid” tradition(s).

I would like to complement Makrides’s and Roudometof’s demonstration with the remark that the changes discussed above did not impact Tradition, i.e. the solid aspect, but rather the way it was distilled in culture and carried into practice, in the daily life of the Church, individuals and communities. The authority of Tradition, as “perennially modern” (bishop Hilarion, quoted in Makrides, 2012), remained quasi-unchallenged.

However, we should not remain with the impression of some monolithic Orthodox attachment to Tradition. There are also Orthodox theologians and thinkers (e.g. those gathered around intellectual *fora* such as the Volos Academy of Theological Studies in Greece, or the online platform publicorthodoxy.org of the Orthodox Christian Study Center at Fordham University in the United States) who, while not denying the importance of Tradition for the Orthodox Church, argue that a pristine understanding of it commands a *critical examination of its “solids”* that would consider (and incorporate) productions of the human spirit and reason over the past centuries (e.g. findings from humanities, psychiatry, sociology, etc.). This would be more *authentic* because it would be in line with the liquid characteristics of *tradition*, i.e. its plasticity and adaptability to context, which make it a dynamic, living reality. Paradoxically, the scholars who advocate the “deparentification” of Orthodoxy from “the heavy heritage of the Church Fathers” (Makrides, 2012), justify the need for Orthodoxy to distance itself from the “solid” aspect of Tradition as a means to reinforce Tradition. This shows that even the most daring proposals of innovation are presented under the protective veil of *tradition*, pointing to the fact that the latter remains a highly normative authority in the Orthodox system of the gift.

In the future, such attempts might multiply and possibly have a larger impact, given the fact that many students of Orthodox theology in Orthodox countries complete doctoral degrees in Western universities, where they are exposed to new methods of theological investigation, such as source criticism, contextual theology, or to the Religious Studies approach. Upon return to their home countries, they teach and preach according to these new ways of thinking theologically, and impact the next generations of clergy and of believers.

To conclude this section, I argue that at the root of the tension between the classical Orthodox understanding of Tradition and modernity, one can read different ways of relating to time: in Orthodoxy, the past *appears* unchangeable because it is set by the reception of a divine gift, which is believed to be perfect and whole. However, it is not the past *per se* that seems to be at stake, because in the past, things would have been allegedly better, but rather the divine gift that was granted at some point in the past. In other words, the divine gift is located in history, but its content is believed to be ahistorical and timeless, while its enculturation in tradition(s) can be context-dependent. Whatever attempts to change, amend or rework the initial gift (attempts that did happen also in the past) out of contingent, human considerations, are regarded as a denial of the perfection of the initial divine gift, which is equalled with a denial of Orthodoxy itself. It is thus not the past *in and of itself* that is cherished and absolutized, but the vertical gift, which happens to be historically situated in the past. The timeless vertical gift is supposed to inspire and command all stages of human existence at all stages of history. It is the faithful perpetuation of that gift that is aimed at, and not continuity with an idealized past. However, as Tradition and tradition(s) are so closely intertwined and easily confused with one another, the Church and whole Orthodox societies have often institutionalized this entanglement, carried it into practice and coded it in ecclesiastic and social life.

Back to the perception of time in Orthodoxy, the future is experienced rather as an amorphous mass of potentialities, to which Orthodoxy prefers eternity. The present thus is meaningful only in close relationship with the past and in the prospect of the eternal future. Ivana Noble (2015) argues that Orthodox theology views Tradition as coming not from the past, but from the eschatological future, which “further strengthened its (i.e. Tradition’s) unchangeability” (Noble, 2015).

In early modernity, time was understood as progress from a particular state toward a fixed, utopian state in the future. The emphasis being on the future, the past appeared as malleable and re-interpretable, in light of the utopian horizon; the present acquired enhanced meaning to the extent it contributed to the achievement of the forthcoming utopian prospect (Hammer, 2010: 105). This perception of time changed in late modernity, when the conception of time “liquefied”: instantaneity of fulfillment enabled by technological and digital progress, led to the loss of value and meaning of time, which became an accumulation of moments without dimension (Bauman, 2000).

The speed of change being increasingly higher, the idea of “past” is situated already very close to the present and ceases to be relevant, since over a short period of, let’s say five years, things have already taken another direction. The more distant the past, the more irrelevant it is for the present.²

As Guy Debord famously put it, ‘Men resemble their times more than their fathers’. And present-day men and women differ from their fathers and mothers by living in a present ‘which wants to forget the past and no longer seems to believe in the future’.

(Bauman, 2000: 128)

Since the future appears to be a chimera, so uncertain and insecure, that it is unable to sustain the horizon of any durable project, the only stable and graspable “moment of time” is the present. Infinity and eternity are bound to the present moment:

It is the way you live-through-the-moment that makes that moment into an ‘immortal experience’. If ‘infinity’ survives the transmutation, it is only as a measure of the depth and intensity of the *Erlebnis*....if infinity, like time, is instantaneous, meant to be used on the spot and disposed of immediately, then ‘more time’ can add little to what the moment has already offered.

(Bauman, 2000: 124–125)

This understanding of the modern way of relating to time is part of the “conditions of belief” (Taylor, 2007) in which contemporary Orthodox Churches and believers, especially in the context of migration,³ live out their religious identity and attempt to perpetuate their *tradition*. The difference in relation to time, temporality and history is an important key element we need to consider when analyzing the relationship Orthodoxy has with tradition(s) and Tradition. In the following section, I will discuss examples from my field-work, which indicate how the Orthodox people in the West try to accommodate a religious identity that nourishes itself from continuity with its *tradition* (which it also uses as a source of authenticity), with their host cultures and religious landscapes that favor discontinuity and break with whatever does not suit the present, making change the supreme evidence of authenticity.

8.2 Tradition and tradition(s) on the field

As I wrote in previous chapters, neither the theological discourse nor the interviewees manage to provide a precise definition of *tradition*. The distinction between Tradition and tradition(s), which converts or theologically literate cradles are able to make, is one of the few certain and clearly formulated statements. However, *tradition* is a very strong element of self-identification and the yardstick by which all things *modern* are evaluated (a more or less

conscious process), and consequently integrated or evinced from the religious system.

The above-mentioned distinction between Tradition and tradition(s) finds a different echo with Orthodox migrants on the one hand, and Western converts and cradles on the other. The latter category of Orthodox believers generally supports the idea that Tradition should be kept separate from tradition(s) or at least not mistaken for it. Most converts I interviewed decided to join the Orthodox Church as a consequence of their discovery of and attraction to Tradition (theology, iconography, liturgy, monasticism, etc.). Conversion was neither preceded nor followed by the experience of Tradition “at work” in a large-scale cultural and social background, as it has developed in Orthodox countries. Most converts express suspicion about tradition(s), which they often equate with ethnic customs, or with decadent expressions of Tradition that might end up corrupting and distorting the purity of Tradition if given too much place in the life of the Church:

the problem of Orthodox migrants is that they have no idea about Orthodoxy, they practice empty rituals, wrapped in traditions. They behave as if the Church were there to provide a place to exalt traditions and national food, not to follow a theological line.

(Convert man, French-speaking part of Switzerland)

it is important that people understand that it is not traditions that will save them and that will help their children remain Orthodox. If you come to church just to meet your friends and eat your ethnic food at the end of the liturgy, then this will not help keep the Church. Such attitudes are very pernicious.

(Convert clergy, French-speaking part of Switzerland)

Converts perceive the coupling of Tradition and tradition(s) as a hindrance to “authentic” knowledge of the faith and personal relation to Christ (maybe an influence from Protestantism can be detected here): the practice of Orthodoxy “by tradition” can only lead to automatic performances of customs and traditions, which become like a barrier between the believer and Christ. At this point, some of the actors brought in their discourse the idea of sincerity: one needs to be personally involved in the faith and actively adhere to the beliefs professed by religion in order to be an “authentic” Orthodox. Insistence on belief and inner states as constitutive of religious orthodoxy (Tradition), which my actors oppose to orthopraxy (timely performance of rituals, according to local traditions), is considered by anthropological scholarship as a specificity of Western Christianity (Asad, 1993, Hann and Goltz, 2010, Luehrmann, 2017). Research findings from the anthropology of Eastern Christianity state that “Orthodox Christianity values rather liturgical participation at the expense of doctrinal explication” because “pious subjects

constitute themselves through correct and timely performances rather than right belief and individual commitment” (Luehrmann, 2017: 166).

Indeed, migrant cradle Orthodox have inherited their religious identity “by birth” and got familiar with it by immersion in their own culture and not by personal investigation and choice from a wide range of available religious repertoire.⁴ The distinction between Tradition and tradition(s) or the process by which Tradition came to be distilled into tradition(s) is an object of scholarly reflection rather than a preoccupation of the majority of Orthodox people. When I asked my interviewees about their reasons to fast, commemorate their deceased family or friends, baptize their children, marry in the Church, etc., I rarely received theologically elaborate answers. More often than not, it was “because it is good to do so”, “because this is what we learned from our parents and grand-parents”, “because this is how we found ourselves in the world”.

Most of my informants who migrated over the last thirty years felt compelled to perpetuate their culture and religion as a form of debt to their family/ancestors and to God. One’s existence being part of a chain of human and celestial beings, each individual has the duty to contribute to maintaining this chain. In a migration context, where individuals are dispersed in a non-Orthodox society, it is all the more important to recreate the “conditions of belief” that allow them to reproduce a small-scale, temporary community (the Sunday parish gathering) that sustains tradition(s) embedded in Tradition.

Though to most converts having access to Tradition through tradition(s) appears more like a twisted way of practicing Orthodoxy, a few converts find it appealing to belong to a religion historically interwoven in the fabric of large-scale culture. Parallel to the religious conversion, they engage also in something similar to “cultural conversion”, by learning the language of an ethnic parish (Greek, Romanian, but mostly Russian, at least in my field), making regular trips to the respective country, adopting cultural practices along religion, etc. Some of my informants acknowledged a great debt to the simple people they met in ethnic parishes, whom they perceived as “living incarnations of Tradition”, from whom they learnt “faith in action”:

I love old babouschkas. They were my best teachers in Orthodoxy. Because just knowing about theology is not enough. One needs to see living examples of Orthodoxy, of people who breathe, move, speak, relate to you and to the world in an Orthodox way.

(Convert man, French speaking part of Switzerland)

Apart from the encounter with Father Sophrony, which had a very strong impact on my becoming Orthodox, the frequent contact with the simple people in Russian parishes helped me understand more about what it meant to acquire the ‘Orthodox mind’.

(Convert man, French speaking part of Switzerland)

It could be argued that if Orthodoxy gets more deeply rooted in the West, it will give rise to the construction of a Western Orthodox tradition and locally anchored embodiments of Tradition that will not seem so alien as the current Eastern European ones. The one-century history of Orthodox migrations to Western Europe seems to provide evidence in this sense. Uprooted by the vicissitudes of history from their original land, where Orthodoxy was about a continuous body of believers who shared in a social and spiritual lineage, and where this continuity was perpetuated through time-wrought social and religious mechanisms, early Russian emigration to Western Europe (later joined by waves of migrations from other Eastern European countries) initiated a process of religious identity reconstruction. The survival of the gift had to be organized in a different setting, which commanded recompositions and adaptations. The broken continuity at the visible level gave a strong impetus for searching and restoring continuity at the invisible level.

Tradition and tradition are not independent of the actors that make it, because something is passed on in a relationship and in a context. The subjectivity of those who pass it on and of those who receive it and the socio-cultural context in which transmission takes place are factors that impact the modalities and content (selected from the great repertoire of Tradition and tradition) of transmission. The “human factor” in this process is not held incompatible with the divine nature of Tradition as long as it does not affect the “spirit of Tradition”. Though much more could be said about the “making” of Tradition and tradition and about the beliefs and experiences “stocked” by Tradition, I will move on to analyze the modalities of validation of these beliefs and experiences as *traditional*. For the purpose of the present research topic, I selected two such examples, namely filiation and translation.

Filiation refers to the fact that Tradition operates within the relationship between spiritual fathers and spiritual children, where transmission is a matter of fidelity of the descendants toward the legacy of their predecessors, in an uninterrupted chain of mediated knowledge that coexists with revealed, direct knowledge.⁵ In order to qualify as *traditional*, the teachings of a spiritual father have to be embedded into and in continuity with earlier fathers that have already been recognized as “bearers of the Holy Spirit”.

Translation is a process connected to Tradition because the latter needs to be constantly reworded in order to make sense in changing socio-cultural realities. Translation has a linguistic dimension (it refers to a process of rendering liturgical and spiritual texts in other languages, such as English and French, for example), but also a cultural one (the process of making the “Orthodox mindset” accessible and meaningful in new cultural settings). A successful *traditional* translation is simultaneously literal (faithful to the original) and intelligible (to the ones that receive it), yet it is not supposed to be neither purely literal, nor purely intelligible, so as to avoid turning into a copy-paste of the past into the present, or conversely, totally fusing into contemporary philosophical concepts and ideological trends.

8.2.1 *Filiation*

Two filiations emerged among Orthodox migrants: first, a creative journey to the roots and the revival of patristic theology (the so-called “Neo-Patristic synthesis” shaped in the West by theologians like Florovsky, Schmemmann and Meyendorff). The second filiation consists in the making of a sacred Orthodox history in the West, through drawing to the early Christian heritage of the West (until the Great Schism, which officially marked the separation between Eastern and Western Christianity in 1054) and the reappropriation of the Western saints of that period. The Neo-Patristic synthesis proposed and developed by George Florovsky in the 1920s, which advocated a revival of Orthodox theology through a return to patristic roots, has been the main source of Orthodox theological reflection in the 20th century in the West, and since the fall of communism, also in the Orthodox heartland. The main idea of the Neo-Patristic School, which started in Paris (in two theological seminaries – Saint Sergius and Saint Denis) and was continued in the United States (at Saint Vladimir’s Seminary), consisted in affirming the perennial nature of the teachings of the Greek Church Fathers of the 2nd and 3rd centuries, who were not to be adapted, “but rather we are to adapt to be able to enter into their experience” (Noble, 2015). This has contributed to reasserting the Orthodox unwavering commitment to Tradition, which the Orthodox claim as a point of superiority over Western theology. In their opinion, the latter has deviated from the apostolic and patristic legacy (the vertical gift) in order to develop in line with secular philosophy (a human factor that alters the vertical gift). Despite this critical approach, Orthodox émigré theologians engaged in a vibrant dialogue with Western theology (within platforms for debate such as *Confrérie de Saint Photius*⁶ in France, and the *Fellowship of Saint Alban and Saint Sergius*⁷ in Great Britain), which helped them better identify the specifics of Orthodox theology and figure out a direction for building an Orthodox identity in the West.

One of the outcomes of this intense reflection among the members of the *Confrérie de Saint Photius* was the initiation of a new thread of filiation for the Orthodox in France:

Français de nationalité ou de langue, nous nous sentons liés à l’ancienne tradition « orthodoxe » de la France, à la France « très chrétienne » des siècles où l’Orient et l’Occident n’étaient pas séparés. Saint Irénée (qui fut le trait d’union entre l’orient et l’occident), les martyrs de Lyon et de Vienne, Saint Denys, Saint Martin de Tours, Sainte Geneviève: tels sont quelques uns des grands noms auxquels nous voulons nous rattacher.

(First issue of the journal *La Voie*, quoted in Behr-Sigel, 1993: 199–201)

People who were close to the founder of the *Confrérie*, Eugraph Kovalevsky, recount the narrative of his divinely received mission: upon his arrival in France, while praying at the tomb of Saint Radegonde, the latter mystically

entrusted him the mission to reveal to the world the “Orthodox past” of France. Reconnecting to an imagined Orthodox past of the West, roughly speaking the first millennium of the “undivided church”, and becoming heirs of forgotten spiritual forebears, this is ultimately a duty derived from a vertical gift.

In his analysis of the Orthodox settlement in Ireland, James Kapalò (2014) noted:

The arrival of Orthodoxy and Orthodox migrants in the West has given rise to a process of reinterpretation of the West’s religious past as prototypically Orthodox. This discourse, and the practices that flow from it, can serve to strengthen a sense of belonging amongst migrant Orthodox, who have a means of conceptualising themselves as representatives of the ancient past of their new homeland, tapping into a local ‘Orthodox memory’ and ‘imaginary’, and at the same time can also operate to legitimise the religious choices and identities of local Western converts to Orthodoxy.

(Kapolò, 2014: 242–243)

Kapolò further calls this “autochtonist discursive practice”, a means by which the Orthodox bridge past and present. The historical religious traditions of the West “become assimilated into a contemporary Orthodox *habitus* and landscape, a case of ‘*your* past is *our* perpetual present” (Kapolò, 2014: 243).

Orthodox filiation making takes on material, visual and ritual forms in contemporary Western Europe. Various practices stem from the discourse of Orthodox autochthony: first, naming parishes after local saints (Saints Columba, Patrick and Brigit in Ireland; Saints Alban, Bede and Chad in Great Britain; Saints Geneviève, Germain and Cloud in France; Saints Maurice and Maire in Switzerland; Saints Killian, Kolonat and Totnan in Germany, etc.). Second, producing aesthetic worship objects such as icons depicting the respective saints (several websites present rich collections of such productions), which are often initiated by convert iconographers.⁸ Apart from representations of individual saints, there are also icons presenting the “synaxis of all Orthodox saints” in the Americas, Britain, Belgium, Switzerland, etc., imitating an iconographic practice in Orthodox countries, where national Churches have instituted feasts, rituals and visual representations of their “national” saints.

Third, the proper Orthodox veneration of local saints calls also for composing hymns and prayers addressed to these saints. The synaxis of the local saints are usually celebrated the second or third Sunday after Pentecost.⁹ The composer of the “Hymn to All Saints that Flourished in the Land of the Swiss”, late Bishop Ambroise of the ROCOR, established this feast on a date that has a symbolic meaning in Switzerland, namely the Federal Day of Thanksgiving, Repentance and Prayer (*Jour du Jéune federal* in the French-speaking part of Switzerland or *Bettag* in the German-speaking part), observed on the third

Sunday of September. He also kept an embroidered Swiss Orthodox flag, which imitates the traditional Orthodox cross with Monogramma Christi (IS XR = Jesus Christ) and the Greek verb NIKÁ (which means “conquers”) placed between the arms of the cross.

The fourth practice that contributes to endorse filiation of contemporary Orthodox believers with the Western Christian past and consequently to “indigenize” Orthodoxy in the West (Kapalò, 2014) is the visiting of ancient religious sights, especially of places where relics of local saints are preserved (e.g. Saint Maurice in Switzerland, Saints Geneviève, Radegonde and Martin in France, Saint Alban in Britain, Saint Columba, Patrick and Brigit in Ireland, Saint Boniface in Germany, etc.).

One of the most important manifestations of the new filiation to Western saints that I came across in Switzerland was the introduction of the patron saints of the city of Zürich (Felix, Regula and Exuperantius) in the liturgical practice of the Orthodox communities in the canton (both Eastern and Oriental Orthodox). The feast, celebrated on the 11th of September, gathers twelve local Orthodox communities, as well as other Christian denominations (mainly Catholic and Protestant) and official authorities invited to participate in a religious service followed by a procession to the place where the three saints are believed to have been beheaded, i.e. on the banks of the Limmat River, where now lays the Wasserkirche.

Informal conversations with some Orthodox migrants in the procession indicated that this ritual making of a local sacred memory constituted an element that helped them reconnect their religious identity to their host country’s culture. This was especially the case of an Egyptian Coptic Orthodox man participating in the event, who told me he was very proud to honor the three saints, who are believed to be of Egyptian origin, and that he was moved to find such deep religious roots in Switzerland. Apart from helping create a collective Orthodox memory in Switzerland, the worship of the Zürich city patrons has elicited also the integration of individuals in their host country’s cultural and religious patrimony and the integration of the religious community in the Christian landscape of the canton.

The “discovery” and veneration of Orthodox saints in the West started with the research work of enthusiastic individual believers, converts and first-generation Russian Orthodox intelligentsia. The first hierarch that supported and promoted this quest of a new filiation was bishop John of Shanghai and San Francisco (†1966, canonized as saint in 1994 by the ROCOR). At the end of the 20th century, the practice of venerating local Western saints started to spread in Orthodox parishes and among the hierarchy. It even reached the Orthodox heartland, as testifies the addition of Saint Patrick of Ireland to the Russian Orthodox Calendar, a decision announced by the Moscow Patriarchate in March 2017.¹⁰

The filiation to the Western Christian past is, however, not an indiscriminate *en bloc* appropriation of saints. Before instituting them as “forebears in the faith”, the lives of the respective saints are subject to careful research and

selection according to criteria of orthodoxy of their faith. Claude Laporte, Orthodox blogger and author of an extensive calendar of all Orthodox saints (Laporte, 2008) explains that his calendar compiles saints who lived and died “in the communion of the Orthodox Church” (Laporte, 2008: 7), in accordance with the theological, spiritual and liturgical teachings of the Orthodox Church. While the author expresses full confidence about the Orthodoxy confessed and practiced by saints who lived before the 8th century, a period during which the Eastern and the Western theological professions converged, he urges historians and hagiographers to be cautious with regard to saints who lived after the 8th century (and until the Great Schism). Laporte argues that this is so because it was in the 8th century that Latin Christendom started introducing theological deviations from the initial Orthodox faith (e.g. *filioque*) and practice (e.g. flagellation). Though the author seems to be non judgemental about the real holiness of some persons canonized as saints during that period of history, he prefers not to include them in an Orthodox calendar, so as not to promote as examples of Orthodoxy persons who have confessed deviations from the faith or were engaged in polemical works against the Eastern Church and rite.

This cautious filiation indicates that the recomposition of the gift on the longitudinal axis is performed in line with the vertical axis: by verifying the orthodoxy of the saints’ faith and life before including them in the Church calendar, the Orthodox actors who participate in the building of the filiation to Western saints make sure that the latter are true bearers and continuators of the initial vertical gift that instituted Tradition.

New filiations emerge also in post-communist Orthodox countries, where a process of canonization of “new martyrs” is under way. Various clergy and lay intellectuals persecuted under communism because of their public profession and witness of the Christian faith are being promoted as saintly figures, especially at lay people’s initiatives. For example, Nikolaj Velimirovic and Justin Popovic in Serbia, two thousand “New martyrs and confessors” in Russia have already been introduced in the sacred memory of the Church, and the “Saints of the prisons”¹¹ are a project submitted to the BOR and supported by some clerics, but not yet officially by the Church. By responding to the lay people’s initiatives, the Church proposes a way of overcoming the recent traumatic past, a new model of morality (Rousselet, 2011) that could provide inspiration to Orthodox Christians also in modern times, believed to be returning to secularization. This process of memory-making has also generated iconographic and hymnographic embodiments of this memory. The veneration of the new martyrs and saints has spilt over the national borders, extending also in the “diaspora”: the veneration of the Romanov royal family is common in many ROCOR parishes, especially because it was at the incitement of ROCOR that the Moscow Patriarchate proceeded to the canonization (Rousselet, 2011); a recently founded Serbian monastery in Germany chose Justin Popovic as its protector and patron saint.

Before concluding this section, I would like to mention that the introduction of Western saints in the calendar and liturgical practice of the Orthodox communities in the West does not diminish the veneration of the national saints or the ones traditionally listed in Orthodox *synaxaria*. New filiations do not compete nor displace old ones. Parallel to the revival of the ancient Western saints, Orthodox priests and lay people tend to honor and pray to recent 20th century saints, who are believed to be familiar with the difficulties specific to contemporary life and therefore their intercession is believed to be more efficient. Filiation is thus not only a matter of the distant past, but also of recent history: the former serves to take roots into new territories and to build a local Orthodox memory and identity, whereas the latter constitutes a resource for coping with the complexities of late modernity. Contemporary spiritual figures, whether alive or recently glorified by the Church as saints, are understood as a synthesis of Tradition, tradition and modernity: they provide solutions to contemporary life situations based on the “mind of the Fathers” or “the mind of the Church”, which they have acquired and managed to translate in new contexts.

8.2.2 *Translation*

Migration to the West occasioned the need for Orthodox communities to reproduce as faithfully as possible their religious gift system. The new socio-religious contexts, however, did not allow for a reproduction in the sense of identical replication, one of the reasons being the fact that Orthodoxy has marked very deeply the cultures in which it was implanted and has generated an “Orthodox ethos” that became context-dependent.

As I argued all through the pages of this book, in a migration situation, the Orthodox system of the gift has been going through various recompositions, more or less faithful to the “original”, so as to ensure the survival of the gift. The adaptations to a new “soil” and the ensuing project to “indigenize” Orthodoxy in the West presupposed a process of translation, both of liturgical and spiritual texts and of religious and cultural practices.

Let us first discuss the translation of Orthodox texts. There is no doubt that the liturgy is the central text and act of worship in Eastern Christianity because it contains the main Orthodox theological assumptions, and provides indications about the appropriate way to relate to God and the appropriate worship He ought to be given. We could say that the liturgy is a combination of *lex credendi* and *lex orandi*, which contains creedal statements that command and orient collective and private devotional practices (Serban, 2005). Translating the liturgy¹² in new languages¹³ is thus a very complex task, which requires extensive knowledge of theology, of the source language (Koiné Greek or Slavonic) and a perfect command of the rhetorical and poetical potential of the target language (Nun Nectaria).¹⁴ It is rarely the work of a single person, but rather of a group of Orthodox specialists in theology and linguistics, who moreover need to have the blessing of a bishop and his

approval of the final “product”. Though the translation of the liturgy implies much erudition, it is not an academic kind of endeavor, but has to remain an ecclesial act, accepted and validated by the Church, both in its hierarchical and institutional aspects, and by the audience to whom the translation is intended.

Liturgical translation is therefore an act that has to comply with the requirements of the vertical gift (it has to render faithfully the dogmatic content), and with those of the longitudinal gift (it has to produce a text that is intelligible to new generations born outside the Orthodox heartland, who may not be familiar with the language of their parents and grandparents any longer). The ideal translator is thus called to combine a source-oriented approach, which seeks formal equivalence of the text, both at the level of vocabulary and of style, and a target-oriented approach, which advocates more dynamic engagement with the text and considers the needs of the audience to which it is addressed (Serban, 2005).

Translations are not only *cult* (i.e. worship)-related productions intended for ecclesiastical use, but also *cultural* productions that serve at the creation of a new Orthodox culture, (for example, a French-speaking or an English-speaking one). Consequently, translators are normative actors that contribute to the creation of an Orthodox identity in the respective languages and its enculturation (Dumas, 2013). I will illustrate this with a little digression: in a brief conversation with a group of translators of liturgical texts into German, I learnt about their difficulty to translate the texts in the *Lenten Triodion*¹⁵ that are read during the Easter period, because they contain what the respective translators qualify as anti-Semitic allusions (the respective texts deplore the fact that Jesus Christ was crucified with the support of the Jewish hierarchy of the time). In post-WWII and post-Holocaust Germany, expressing negative insinuations about the Jewish community, even with regard to a distant and debatable past, is simply inconceivable. The translators were in search of a solution¹⁶ that would allow them to create a German Orthodox identity purified from suspicion of anti-Semitism.

In the following, I will give a brief account of my observations of French and English 20th-century liturgical translations.¹⁷ Upon arrival in France, young Russian émigré Eugraph Kovalevsky devoted his life to carrying out the divine mandate he is said to have received regarding the revival of Orthodoxy in France. In 1927, he established the first French-speaking Orthodox parish, which was pastored by the recently converted priest Lev Gillet, later known as “a monk of the Church of the East” (Behr-Sigel, 1993).

Father Lev undertook the translation of Saint John Chrysostom’s liturgy, the first one that has been preserved and that was performed with a liturgical and ritual aim.¹⁸ Starting with the 1960s, other theologians provided more or less official translations or adaptations of existing translations, which circulated in small self-printed leaflets, parallel to the Slavonic, Greek and more recently Romanian and Serbian texts. These translations were not intended for an all-French liturgy, but rather as support texts for French-speaking

members or visitors of ethnic parishes, in order to help them situate the sequences of a liturgy celebrated in a foreign language.

Two erudite convert Orthodox monks, Father Placide Déseille and Father Denis Guillaume,¹⁹ both very well trained in ancient Greek as well as gifted writers, enriched the French-speaking Orthodox liturgical resources with translations that are estimated as high quality and trustworthy with regard to their respect for both the source language and the target language. Father Denis Guillaume has additionally provided translations of all Orthodox liturgical services (the Great and the Little *Pannychidas*, the *Great Euchologion*, the *Archieratikon*, the services related to monastic tonsure, the *Lenten Triodion* and even a part of the Russian, Romanian, Greek and Serbian *Meneion*). He also composed hymns to French saints.

Three new translations have been produced in France since the beginning of the 21st century, two of which are the work of monastics: one was made by the monks at the monastery of Cantauque, the other by Father Placide at his Athonite monastery of Saint Anthony the Great.²⁰ The latter enjoys a certain popularity, because of the respect Father Placide has earned among the French-speaking Orthodox in the West as one of the greatest spiritual figures of the 20th century. My assumption is that the authority that translations enjoy in the Orthodox world, especially at the grassroots level, depends on the personal, theological and spiritual qualities attributed to the translator. This explains why Father Placide's work is preferred over the third translation that exists and was carried out by a group of laymen and clergy involved in the *Fraternité orthodoxe*, under the supervision of the Liturgical Committee of the Asemblée des Evêques Orthodoxes en France (AEOF) and with the latter's blessing. Despite the high ecclesiastical authority under which it was done, and its ambition to move beyond jurisdictional fragmentation and provide a universally accepted version of the liturgy in French, this translation seems to be less successful (Dumas, 2013).

One of the major changes brought by the monastic translations (Cantauque and Saint Anthony) are related to the qualifier "immaculate" attributed to the Mother of God (Dumas, 2013). "*Toute immaculée*" (all immaculate) is a term that has theological connotations that bring to mind the Roman Catholic dogma about the Immaculate Conception, which the Orthodox reject. In order to avoid dogmatic and theological confusion, the monastic translations have preferred the use of a more neutral term – "*toute irréprochable*" (all irreproachable).

The same attempt to affirm the specificity of Orthodox theological identity by making sure to clearly distinguish key concepts from existing Western Christian ones is to be found also in the case of the translation of the word referring to the death of the Virgin Mary: Dormition (English and French) and Mariä Entschlafung (German) are preferred to Assumption (English), Assomption (French) and Mariä Himmelfahrt (German). As *cult* and *cultural* productions, translations are intended for ecclesiastical use, but they also serve the creation of a French/English/German-speaking Orthodox culture, with

its own vocabulary and theological terminology. The challenge is to render Orthodox concepts in languages whose theological vocabulary was wrought by Roman Catholicism or Protestantism.

Translations into English are more numerous and diverse, because of demographic reasons (Orthodox migrations in the United States, Great Britain and Ireland, as well as the number of converts in these countries outnumber the Orthodox presence in Western Europe), historic reasons (the Orthodox presence in the United States is older than its Western European counterpart) and cultural reasons (the proclivity to multiculturalism specific to the American society). Each diocese or each jurisdiction has produced its own translation of the liturgy, which they keep improving. There is a non-conflictual coexistence of these multiple versions.

After a very brief inspection of some French and English translations, one can notice that there is more variety of translation styles in English than in French. It could be argued that this is so because Orthodox translators of the liturgy have the choice of an archaic linguistic register (due to the uninterrupted use of the “Common Book of Prayer” or of the King James’ Bible), as well as that of contemporary English. As Serban (2005) noticed, English translations of the Orthodox Liturgy comprise two categories: archaizing and modernizing ones. The former tendency refers to the deliberate use of archaisms in order to convey “remoteness of time and place through the use of a mock antique language” (Bassnett, quoted in Serban, 2005), to strengthen historic associations and heighten the mystery of religious expression. It is believed also to have a greater power to grasp the divine and signal reverence. The modernizing strategy, on the other hand, involves the use of contemporary language, sometimes even of everyday language and slang, and finally, as Serban noticed, of inclusive language (e.g. “male and female” instead of “man”).

A brief overlooking of posts about liturgical translation on the Orthodox blogosphere²¹ confirms Serban’s findings. On the one hand, there are opinions that support the idea that the “language we use in prayer must be different from the ordinary language of everyday usage” so as to “avoid lowering the level of our communication with God”. One blog post even mentions Elder Sophrony (a widely appreciated Orthodox spiritual figure in Western Europe), arguing that:

ordinary language carries meanings and images from our daily reality that usually lack the element of holiness and purity. On the other hand, when we address ourselves to God in a language that has, as it were, an exclusive usage within the boundaries of the Ecclesia, the very words and sounds of that language evoke sacred feelings and images that facilitate communication with God....and carries greater spiritual force.²²

On the other hand, there are opinions in favor of the use of contemporary vernacular English, which can be more easily comprehensive to converts and new generations of young Orthodox people born and raised in the West.

Archaic and poetic English could be as great an obstacle to comprehension as ancient Greek or Slavonic. The defenders of this kind of liturgical language further argue that Koiné Greek or what today is known as Slavonic were vernacular languages at the time they were written and they express confidence that common linguistic register can well capture the complexity of theological concepts encapsulated in the liturgy. They privilege the possibility that people fully understand the text over criteria of stylistic aestheticism, and describe the intellectual understanding of the text as the key condition for Orthodox converts and young people to strengthen their religious identity.

Apart from the importance of liturgy in Orthodox worship and ritual, the construction of a French-speaking or English-speaking Orthodox identity is also enhanced with translations of spiritual texts produced by great spiritual figures in the Orthodox heartland. The choice of editors tends to favor recent saints or spiritual figures: in the French-speaking world, the publishing house *L'Âge d'Homme*²³ is well known for its collection *Grands spirituels orthodoxes du 20ème siècle*, led by convert theologian Jean-Claude Larchet and rich of twenty-five volumes. But there are other publishing houses that engage in issuing Orthodox literature, such as *Les Editions du Cerf*, with the collections *Orthodoxie* and *Catéchèse orthodoxe*, *Les Editions des Syrtes*, etc. Orthodox publishers are numerous enough in France to organize a biannual French-speaking Orthodox book fair (*Salon du livre orthodoxe*).

Translations of liturgical and spiritual texts testify of an effort to create an Orthodox vocabulary and culture in the West. This is, however, not an easy process, because the actors involved in it aim not (exclusively) at equivalent translations, but also, and more importantly, at translations that grasp the Orthodox theological content in a meaningful and comprehensible way. Whenever the target language lacks the necessary lexical tools to designate Orthodox theological notions, cult objects or forms of worship, translators draw on Greek and Slavonic vocabulary, which they “naturalize” in the target language.²⁴

This indicates that the circulation of the gift on the longitudinal axis (transmitting Tradition in a Western context by translating major texts in Western languages) is filtered through the vertical gift: translations have to remain faithful to the Orthodox dogma, while conveying the same “spirit” and “flavor” of the original texts, so as to be able to recreate and induce the specific Orthodox disposition of the mind and spirit in the target language as well.

Here we touch upon the second aspect of translation, as a modality of transmitting Tradition and creating a new Western Orthodox tradition, through the adaptation of the Orthodox ethos in new cultural settings. Since I illustrated my argument with translations of the liturgy in the previous paragraphs, I would like to stick to this example to further discuss how liturgical worship and ritual are transposed into practice in the context of migration.

The translation of texts also called for musical adaptations: music is of utmost importance in an Orthodox celebration, in which everything is sung, according to a very complex system of tones that vary on a cyclical basis.

Parishes that perform religious services in the local language have the choice between the Russian polyphonic style of chanting, which is closer to the Western sensitivity because it was inspired from Western music, or Greek Byzantine style, which is much more complicated and sounds incorrect to a musically educated Western listener.

I met a French musician who devoted her life to arranging French translations of the liturgical services into Byzantine music. She insisted on the complexity of her task, which had to deal with two great constraints: the text is unchangeable, and the musical canon is fixed, having been set historically in Greek and adapted to the sound and phonetics of the Greek language. To add a layer of complexity, the musical arrangements need to be written with the help of Western musical notation system, which is unequipped to capture the variety of sounds specific to Oriental musical genres. The execution of this work requires multiple skills and talents, an excellent command of the local language, of its phonetics, poetics and syntax, but also of Western music, Byzantine music, as well as pedagogical skills to teach choir directors and their members.

With regard to the cultural aspect of the translation process, advocates of the enculturation of Orthodoxy and its institutions in the West argue that one of the indicators of success would be the capacity to recruit clergy (priests, deacons and especially bishops) from among local converts. Orthodox communities in Great Britain, France and the United States have already made progress in this sense. Convert clergy are believed to be the best “translators” of Orthodoxy to the Western sensitivity, because they have the cultural and religious skills to explain Tradition to people who are not familiar with it in a way that is meaningful to them. Generally speaking, theologically literate people, clergy and laity alike, put a lot of effort into explaining the similarities with Western Christian theology (so as to make it sound less exotic), but also the differences (so as to underline its specificities).

In most parishes that use the local language and have local clergy, one can notice greater emphasis on catechetical activities, as tools that empower believers to circumscribe the vertical gift, distinguish and differentiate it from the Western Christian tradition, which is believed to have deviated from the initial vertical gift. They also tend to stress the universal vocation of Orthodoxy, its relevance for “our modern times” and its capacity to provide answers and solutions to contemporary human life. As such, it is argued that Orthodoxy should not be reduced to being just a ritual Sunday church attendance or to aesthetic and intellectual appreciation of the rituals and sacred art.

One relevant example of the intelligible translation approach is the project of creating a “Western rite” Orthodoxy, i.e. a liturgical form that is conceived in continuity with the rites practiced in the West before the Great Schism. Jean-François Mayer, who documented the issue of the Western rite Orthodoxy, notes that “there is a surprising variety of liturgical forms compared to the small number of canonical Western rite communities” (Mayer, 2014: 283), and quotes research that inventoried three types of Western rites: “‘historical’

(Mensbrugge), ‘modern-pragmatic’ (pre-Vatican II Roman rite with some adaptations) and ‘personal-eclectic’”. Mayer further argues that this diversity “reveals the different backgrounds of people involved in Western rite efforts” (Mayer, 2014: 283), who aspire to recover the fullness of Christianity or the “true” Christian identity of the West by reviving liturgical forms that have fallen out of use or were simply lost.²⁵ This kind of work resulted in the revival or construction of the Roman rite, the Sarum rite, the Gallican rite, etc. that are celebrated sporadically in Western Europe (e.g. France, Switzerland, Germany, Great Britain) and mostly in the United States.

Bishops who have jurisdiction over Western European countries are rather reluctant to the practice of liturgical pluralism. In a Lausanne-based meeting between advocates of the practice of the Gallican rite and a bishop, the former group conveyed the importance for converts to practice Orthodoxy in *continuity* with their former Christian background, cast within musical and linguistic forms as well as bodily gestures fitting their spiritual sensitivity. The argument was also about the authenticity of the Western rite for Western converts, compared with the imported Byzantine rite, which they assumed had never been celebrated in the West.

However, while the Western rite is intended to help converts engage in liturgical forms that are more in tune with their local heritage, these liturgies differ significantly from what converts from Roman Catholicism are familiar with since Vatican II. Moreover, they constitute an utter innovation, which is the “child of a context of globalization and individualization” and, in the French-speaking Orthodox circles, an outcome of migration:

it is unlikely that the Gallican liturgy would have ever seen the light of the day if it had not been for the vision of bright young Russians²⁶ who felt that the personal tragedy of exile should be invested with a meaning and mission.

(Mayer, 2014: 286)

Apart from intelligible translation, some Orthodox opt for a literal translation approach, which consists in an attempt to reproduce, in a migration context, Tradition and its relation to tradition(s) as they were lived and practiced in the homeland. For example, first-generation migrants in early stages of their migration trajectory generally tend to believe that they can retain their religious identity only if they can practice in a familiar setting shaped by the use of their national Church language, by laying emphasis on specific religious feasts (e.g. celebrating the *slava* in the Serbian tradition), or by continuing to venerate their national saints. They insist on having liturgical services in their original language, even when the liturgical language is incomprehensible to them (e.g. Church Slavonic or Koiné Greek).

The Greek parish in Lausanne and the Russian parish in Geneva, though the oldest Orthodox parishes in the French-speaking part of Switzerland (dating back to 1925 and 1874 respectively), never adopted French as

their liturgical language. Despite some priests' readiness to adopt the local language in religious services, the parishioners themselves categorically reject this idea. The discourse of the most enthusiastic advocates of the preservation of the original language despite its quasi-opacity overlaps the approach of the source-centered liturgical translations: liturgical language or the linguistic register one uses to address God has to differ from everyday vocabulary. Church Slavonic or Koiné Greek are idioms used exclusively for liturgical celebration and therefore are perceived as more adequate to evoke feelings of and awake intimations about the sacred. For many of my informants, French is the language they use at work and for daily business, contemporary Russian or Greek are languages used for family talk, while ancient languages are set apart for worshipping God. Some of the interviewees reported they did not bother with the exact understanding of each and every word as a necessary condition to have access to the fullness and beauty of the service. They believe that participation in God's grace does not depend on the believer's intellectual understanding of the prayer and that the human-divine communion can be achieved notwithstanding semantic accuracy.

This category of actors therefore strongly supports the idea that Tradition can be preserved and passed on only if cast in historically tested and sanctioned cultural forms. This approach overemphasizes the local (i.e. ethnic and national) dimension of Orthodoxy, at the expense of its universality. This literal translation approach, though in reality never perfectly literal, can be realized only at small-scale communities of first-generation migrants. Interestingly, there are also some converts who endorse this position. They believe that one who is new to Orthodoxy cannot fully engage with the Orthodox ethos by simply attending religious services in Western languages, because the latter lack the necessary theological depth to render Orthodox subtleties.

Generally speaking, I did not come across any case of parishes or monasteries who switched the language of liturgical celebration (from a traditionally Orthodox one to a Western language) or changed its approach to translating the Orthodox Tradition and traditions (from a literal translation to an intelligible translation). Rather, French-speaking or English-speaking parishes/monasteries were such from the outset and their linguistic choice was an explicit proclamation of the founders' preference for the universal dimension of Orthodoxy and the possibility to enculturate it in new settings.

However, the fact of celebrating in a Western language is not always correlated with the "Westernization" of parish life. The Orthodox ethos of the respective parish has Greek or Russian influences, depending on the origin and cultural preference of the founders or the community members. I will quote here the example of a French-speaking parish in Switzerland, which follows the Russian tradition, honors Russian saints more easily than others and has more Russian-style of post-liturgical socialization (food, drinks, etc.) and the example of two French-speaking monasteries in France, which follow Greek tradition (the men's monastery follows the Athonite tradition)

because of their founder's attachment to Greek spirituality and language and their jurisdictional anchorage in the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

In parishes and monasteries with ethnically mixed populations, the community opts for a mix of languages for its liturgical celebrations (French and Russian, French and Romanian, German and Russian, German and Serbian, etc.). The most impressive mix of languages I came across was at the Monastery of Saint John the Baptist in Essex, England: the monastic community is multicultural and uses Greek, Russian, French and English simultaneously in all its services. All monastics are multilingual as well.

This is an innovation, which, to my knowledge, does not have a historical record. The advantage of this practice is that most members of the community feel they are linguistically represented in the liturgical celebration and that its identity is being recognized. However, the use of multiple languages in a religious service does not seem to be a solution that satisfies everyone, as this occasional visitor in a mixed language parish acknowledged:

I understand the principle very well and it is really nice to have prayers uttered in so many languages, to switch from one language to the other...a true Pentecost I would say. But it also sounds like the Babel Tower. I mean the rhythm of prayer is broken every five minutes, because the musicality and rhythm of the language is different. And suddenly it is in a language you no longer understand. It is disturbing and, at the end of the day, not really... beautiful, not unified.

(Convert American visiting a European parish during a multilingual celebration)

This seems to resonate with Zygmunt Bauman's affirmation of the limits of a multicultural approach: "A mixing of cultural inspirations is a source of enrichment and an engine of creativity. At the same time, only a thin line separates enrichment from a loss of identity" (Bauman, 2007: 182).

To conclude this section on translation, I would like to add that the process of translation, in its linguistic and practical aspects, is lengthy and painstaking. The enculturation of Orthodoxy in the West seems to be rather a long-term process, which still requires a great deal of adaptation, experimenting and creativity. The firmness and immutability of the solid part of the gift (dogma) is balanced by the possibility to apply its canons in a milder and less rigorous form, at least temporarily and in specific situations. The tool Orthodox Churches and people have at their disposal in order to perform these adaptations is the practice of a specific modality of applying rules and canons, i.e. *oikonomia* – a temporary loosening of norms and ideal-types, as opposed to the strict application of rules, which is defined as *akrivia*. *Oikonomia* confers the longitudinal gift its liquidity, making possible arrangements such as those I have quoted in this chapter and the previous ones. This prevents the Church from coding "waivers" into official rules and from complicating its system of norms and canons. Though intended as a temporal relaxing of a specific rule,

oikonomia practiced in the long term can become coded in the ecclesiastical practice as the norm. If, at some point, individuals or priests become aware, they are continuing a practice that was not in line with Tradition, but was a contingent adaptation or “deviation”, they might claim to restore the pristine Tradition. This explains periodical revivalist movements in the Orthodox Church (Pop, 2018). In this way, the solid part of *tradition* balances and regulates the liquid dimension, emerging again and again in discourses and practices and reminding the centrality of the vertical axis in the Orthodox system of the gift.

8.2.3 *Transmission of tradition and tradition(s) through catechism and youth religious socialization*

Catechism is the most common way of circulating the gift on the longitudinal axis, in the direction of future generations, and it consists in handing down a set of beliefs, rituals, practices, worship style, symbols, meanings, etc. As I argued in previous chapters, catechism is a form of making religion something explicit. While in Orthodox countries religion has been rather implicit, passed on by socialization in a culture that has developed for centuries under the influence of or in some accord with religion, in the context of migration, the Orthodox identity is sustained by no external social or cultural support. It is the full responsibility and choice of the community itself to organize their religious life and institutions. Likewise, it is the responsibility of these communities to actively transmit religion to the new generations. The question of the content that should be the object of religious instruction arose. In other words, what elements of Tradition should be passed on to children and in what relationship with tradition(s)?

Generally speaking, all parishes I visited offered some kind of religious education program for children, though the word “program” might be an excessive description of Orthodox catechism in Switzerland as well as in the few parishes I visited in France, Great Britain, Germany, Italy and the United States. Most of the time, it is a monthly activity in which children participate during liturgy, under the supervision of a theologically literate person in the parish (usually a woman). While in most ethnic parishes religious instruction is performed in the national language and wrapped in national traditions and folklore, parishes that celebrate in the local language focus rather on the religious content. The former tap into the reservoir of traditions as containers of Tradition and transmit the connection between culture and cult; the latter prefer the reverse approach, i.e. Tradition in and for itself, stripped of traditions and customs.

I did not notice any specific pedagogical line in the catechetical activity, which seems rather an improvisation based on a compilation of several sources, including Catholic or Protestant ones, but also catechetical material produced in Orthodox countries or even in the United States. Orthodox dioceses in Western Europe address the lack of proper Orthodox catechetical

material and literature and are working on producing pedagogical material adapted for the needs of the children who grow up in the West (e.g. the Romanian diocese for Western and Southern Europe established the publishing house *Apostolia*). The Orthodox Fellowship in Western Europe has also taken action in this sense and published a series of books for children in French, which were translated by other dioceses (e.g. the Romanian one) into their national languages. The series is entitled *Une catéchèse par l'icône* and it counts four books explaining Pentecost, Christmas, Easter and the *Theotokos's* life as well as the feasts connected to her life events. The visual illustration is made exclusively with icons. The booklet *Un dimanche à l'église orthodoxe* was reportedly very successful because it provided a tool adapted to children guiding them through the complex sequence of the liturgy. The book is an icon-like illustration of the major stages of the liturgy, which is intended to help children to visually situate themselves in the progression of the service. Other publications intended for Orthodox children are illustrated stories and comics that narrate saints' lives, mostly in French and English (the life and teachings of Saint Silouan, John Maximovitch of Shanghai, Saint Seraphim of Sarov, etc.).

Children and youth camps are another modality to help new generations get instructed in the specifics of their religion, while also proposing leisure, sports and cultural activities. In Switzerland, the Romanian and the Serbian communities are the most active in this sense. Youth international organizations, such as *Syndesmos* and *Nepsis* contribute to young people's inter-Orthodox socialization and the deepening of theological and spiritual knowledge through conferences, workshops, retreats and pilgrimages.

Apart from ecclesiastically organized teaching about the faith, many parents express preoccupation with how to transmit Orthodox values to their children in the family. Many choose to build connections with monasteries, where monks and nuns are often available for families and strive to offer a children-friendly environment. For instance, at the Monastery of Saint John the Baptist in Essex (England), Mother Magdalene became a well-known and trusted figure of Orthodox parenting counselor. The Monastery of the Protection of the *Theotokos* in Solan (France) is also a home for many families, with its yearly camp for families.

Let us note two innovations at this point: first, the revival of the pedagogical purpose of icons. In an age in which the visual plays a highly important role in any teaching and educational situation, the Orthodox use their sacred art not only for spiritual and aesthetic purposes, but also as a didactical tool. As icons are painted so as to incorporate theological norms (and not according to the personal taste and inspiration of the artist), they prove to be an efficient tool to speak about Tradition in a very condensed and yet theologically accurate manner.

The second innovation is the increasing role of monastics in religious education, not only with regard to theological content, but more importantly with regard to the transmission of the Orthodox ethos. This explains

why celibate monastics who do not raise children of their own, can become popular educator figures and parenting counselors who provide inspiration and spiritual guidelines for parents and children in navigating their way through maintaining their religious identity in the context of “diaspora”.

8.3 Conclusions

Given the importance of the past for the Orthodox ethos, it seemed natural to the first migration waves to Western Europe to look back to the past in order to figure out the future. This is what contributed to the rediscovery of the Church Fathers and the Neo-Patristic movement, which produced a vision for the future of Orthodoxy in Western Europe and, after the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, paved the way for theological renewal in Orthodox countries. The same paradoxical movement toward the future through the lens of the past provided the impulse to establish the veneration of Western saints as a practice that is intended to help the building of a Western Orthodox identity for the future. Reasserting themselves as heirs of the Church Fathers and continuators of the first Christians that inhabited their host-countries, the Orthodox created new filiations and adopted devotional practices that derived from these filiations. However, the filiation process was filtered through the compatibility of the respective saints’ lives, teachings and professions of faith with the dogmatic content of the vertical gift.

But the reconnection to the past called for the projection of the latter into the future: this heritage needed to be passed on to new generations, be they descendants of the migrants or local converts. This heritage, a mixture of solid Tradition and liquid tradition(s), was made more widely available through translation of both texts and practices. Though translations of sacred texts are usually a top-down enterprise (they are organized and approved by the Church and its hierarchs), with the translators assuming an authoritative and normative role, it is their reception at the grassroots level that grants them final authority and validates them in practice. This is possible because, despite the commonly described rigid hierarchical order in the Orthodox Church, authority is not the monopoly of the clergy, but is more diffuse and allows the possibility of instituting authority from the bottom. Likewise, it is the general appreciation of the spiritual and theological qualities of the translator that makes a specific translation of the liturgy more popular (e.g. Father Placide’s translations into French). The determining role played by the theological and the spiritual qualities indicates over again the privileged place the vertical gift holds in the Orthodox system of the gift and its impact on the circulation of the gift on the other axes.

The translation of the Orthodox ethos into new contexts appears as well to be subject to negotiation: between clergy and their congregations (though many priests in ethnic parishes may be in favor of liturgical celebrations in the local language, they cannot engage in such a change because their parish congregation is not willing to do it) or between two approaches to the relation

between Tradition and tradition(s) – a literal one and an intelligible one. The first approach is predicated on the trust that traditions have correctly encapsulated Tradition and that they can be a good medium to transmit the latter to new generations, by simply socializing them in ethnic parishes and communities and keeping alive the language and religious customs of their parents. The second approach is rather skeptical about the capacity of culture to correctly absorb Tradition. The advocates of this approach focus rather on the possibility of transmitting Tradition disembedded from its former national and ethnic forms and to mold it in new contexts, to make it meaningful for generations born and raised in the West and to converts.

These are further expressed in the way catechism is performed: religious content mixed with language and culture courses or religious content in and for itself. The two, however, find a point of convergence in a series of innovations, such as the revival of the pedagogical role of icons and the tapping into the monastic tradition to find new resources for an Orthodox education of children.

Notes

- 1 I will limit the use of Bauman's pair of opposites "liquid" and "solid", as he described them in his book "Liquid Modernity" (2000), but not as concepts and analyzing tools, but rather as metaphors that describe change as opposed to the fact of staying the same.
- 2 In modernity, there is, however, an interest in the past as a reservoir of rituals and practices, as it may be used in New-Age type of spiritualities. But that does not usually lead to a positive assessment of the past, it is rather a selective revival of past practices invested with new meanings.
- 3 Orthodox countries are experiencing changes in the conditions of belief too, which explains why the discourse of secularization as a major threat is so present in these places too.
- 4 Religious affiliation is rarely a choice in the case of Orthodox people in historically Orthodox countries. However, in the case of highly practicing people, who embrace Orthodoxy as a set of life-orienting beliefs and practices, being Orthodox and living an Orthodox way of life does become a matter of personal choice.
- 5 In Orthodoxy, there is no separation or opposition between Scripture (revelation), Tradition (embodied and mediated experience of revelation) and Church (institutionalized revealed and mediated knowledge), which are considered expressions of the same source.
- 6 Initiated in Paris in 1924 by Russian émigré theologians, intellectuals and artists, the brotherhood included such people as: the theologian Vladimir Lossky, the canonist Eugraph Kovalevsky, the liturgist Vsevolod Palashkovsky, the choir director Maxim Kovalevsky, Nikolai Poltoratsky and the iconographers Gregory Krug and Leonid Ouspensky.
- 7 This is an ecumenical society founded in 1928 to foster dialogue between Western and Eastern Christianity, especially between the Anglicans (represented by Saint Alban, the Christian protomartyr of Great Britain) and the Orthodox (represented by patron Saint of Russia Sergius of Radonezh).
- 8 For example: <https://aidanharticons.com/category/western-saints/> http://www.oodegr.com/english/istorika/europe/orthodox_evangelists_west_europe.htm).

- 9 The Pentecost is considered the feast that marks the beginning of the Church, with the synaxis (gathering) of all the apostles. The Sunday following the Pentecost is dedicated to “all the saints of Orthodoxy”. National Churches introduced a feast dedicated to the synaxis of their local saints, celebrated the second Sunday after Pentecost. Similarly, the Orthodox in the West celebrate the Western local saints the second or the third Sunday after Pentecost.
- 10 <http://www.interfax.ru/russia/552937>
- 11 This project has generated some controversy when the *Elie Wiesel Foundation* has contested the possibility to sanctify people who had been active in the Legionary Movement, most of whom were imprisoned and treated particularly harsh by the newly established communist regime.
- 12 I refer here to Saint John Chrysostom’s liturgy, which dates back to the 4th century. The Liturgy was not composed by Saint John himself, but it is attributed to him because of the final additions and form he provided for the use of the Byzantine Empire, where it became the standard liturgy and remained so until today in all Eastern Christianity. Other liturgies existed in parallel, but they have been dropped out of practice, many texts were lost or simply did not remain alive in the Church. Two other liturgies are celebrated in the Orthodox Church on specific occasions: the Liturgy of Saint Basil (used only ten times a year) and the Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts (performed only on the weekdays of the Great Lent).
- 13 The original is in Koine Greek and the first translation – into what we call today Slavonic – was carried out by Saints Cyril and Methodius in the 9th century, when they evangelized the Slavs.
- 14 <http://orthochristian.com/47599.html>
- 15 The names of the liturgical books are explained in Chapter 5.
- 16 I did not follow up on this issue and therefore I do not have further information about the translation process and the final solution the respective group found to their dilemma.
- 17 Translations into French date back to the 19th century with Irénée Winnaert’s work. A convert and priest as well, Winnaert translated the liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom for his own use, but his work seems to have been lost (Dumas, 2013).
- 18 The second known French translation of the liturgical text belongs to Dom Placide de Meester who did not intend it for celebration, but as an academic work destined to scholars of Byzantine texts.
- 19 Denis Guillaume converted in 1994. He did most of his translations as an Eastern rite Roman Catholic monk in Chevetogne, Belgium. His translations, intended to the Roman Catholics that adopted the Byzantine rite, are one of the most used liturgical resources for French-speaking Orthodox.
- 20 As Saint Anthony the Great is a dependency of the Athonite Monastery of Simonos Petra, it uses the liturgical *typikon* of Mount Athos. Therefore, Father Placide’s translations are based on the Athonite source text.
- 21 <http://orthochristian.com>, www.pemptousia.com, <http://orthodoxethos.com>, to quote a few of those websites and blogs where I found direct references to liturgical translations.
- 22 (<https://pravoslavie.ru/47599.html>)
- 23 *L’Age d’Homme* was founded in Lausanne in 1966 by a Serbian Orthodox immigrant, Vladimir Dimitrijevic, and extended in France.
- 24 For example, in French: acathiste, acédie, kondakion, épitrachilion, épitaphios.
- 25 At times, this amounts to archaeological work that consists in compiling fragments of liturgical texts that were preserved here and there in other contexts.
- 26 The Kovalevsky brothers (Eugraph, Maxime and Pierre), Vladimir Lossky, etc. sought new liturgical forms which could come out of the apostolic tradition and at the same time be incarnated in the local culture.

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Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to look back at the research findings from the perspective of the methodology used in order to produce them and the theoretical framework mobilized to this effect, which seem to me to constitute the originality of this book and which have the potential to be replicated for further research on Orthodox Christianity.

I tend to believe, with Tomka (2006) and contrary to Flere (2008), Hann (2011) and Makrides (2017), that we do need to adapt our methodological framework in order to capture the specificities of Eastern Christianity. This does not amount to essentializing Orthodoxy, by suggesting it would be a special case on the stage of religious studies, characterized by a set of atemporal, immutable mystical features, nor an unchanged, static “chain of memory” that traverses the centuries untouched by external political, philosophical and cultural developments. But, since Orthodoxy is new in the field of social scientific inquiry, it appears to me cautious to approach it in a way that allows for identifying its specificities, even if that means adapting the conventional sociological methodological apparatus in a creative way.

Though the aim of the present research was not to test such possibilities, it could be claimed that, to a certain extent, it did stretch the methodological limits of the discipline in the attempt to understand the Orthodox migrants’ feeling of threat in the face of modern secularity. The fact of overstepping the initially defined geographical area of the field (Switzerland), by enlarging the picture to the level of the Orthodox diaspora in Western Europe and bringing into the discussion also the situation in the Orthodox heartland, had a two-fold advantage: first, it helped situate the Orthodox communities in Switzerland in the greater picture of the Orthodox diaspora and its challenges; second, it indicated the connection Orthodoxy in the West has with the Mother Churches and their respective national culture and politics, avoiding the pitfalls of methodological nationalism. Moreover, it brought to attention the fact that the issue of secularization is not specific only to the diaspora, but has become a major narrative in the Orthodox heartland as well, despite the rather well-off situation of the Orthodox Church in countries like Russia, Greece and Romania.

The major achievement of this research with regard to methodological exploration is three-fold: first, looking at Eastern Christians in their own terms (as suggested by Hann and Goltz, 2010 and Carroll, 2017) and *integrating Orthodox theology as field data* in the analysis. As I discussed this in the Introduction, I will not linger on the benefits of this methodological choice anymore.

The second methodological achievement consists in considering *the interplay between discourses, practices and the theological ideal-types* that informs the actors' worldview, definition of religion and, correlatively, of secularization. My field experience indicated that relying uniquely on discourses could be treacherous, as many actors delivered a somewhat artificial speech, ready-made to appease the curiosity of an external observer. Had I not balanced that with data from long observation of practices and had I also not interrogated their underlying worldview (which in this case consisted in theological ideal-types), I believe I would have ended up with a more stereotypical image of the Orthodox community.

Last, I would mention the utility of applying the triple focus on discourses/practices/theological ideal-types to *both ecclesiastical institutions and individual actors*, which revealed that the interplay between the institutional and individual levels of religious experience is rather strong in Eastern Christianity (as compared with Western Christianity) and therefore it needs to be addressed more systematically. Most of the scholarship on Orthodoxy focuses on either the ecclesiastical institution (especially with regard to its interaction with politics, nationalism, globalization, etc.) or lived religion (prayer, conversion, pilgrimage, morality, etc.).

A shared notion of discourses, practices and theological ideal-types is that of the *gift*. I translated this theologically embedded notion into social scientific language with the help of the Mauss-inspired gift paradigm. The latter has the advantage to give precedence to the actors' discourses and practices, without, however, taking them at face value: it does not naively attribute all meaning to a gratuitous form of a completely free gift, but shows how *interest* and *obligation* activate and maintain the circulation of the gift.

The application of Tarot's definition of religion as a triaxial system of the gift (vertical, horizontal and longitudinal) helps overcome the dilemma of theistic vs non-theistic, agnostic epistemological approaches to religion, because it situates the actors' belief in a divine transcendent Being within a system of gift circulation, allowing for the equal treatment and consideration of both theological and empirical type of data.

The gift paradigm has also the merit of moving the analysis beyond a series of oppositions classically entrenched in social science, such as individual vs. community, lived religion vs. institutional forms of religiosity and authority, providing a framework in which these various levels of analysis are integrated in a way that privileges the object of research in its multi-faceted existence in reality.

The gift approach to religion transcends also the ever-problematic opposition between functional vs substantive definitions of religion, and correlatively, definitions of secularization as a process of general disenchantment

of society, as the disappearance of religion from the public sphere, etc. A definition of religion as a triaxial system of the gift makes room for more variegated notions of religion, and for secularization as a change in the gift regime.

But most importantly, Tarot's approach allowed for grasping the specificities of Orthodoxy, without, however, falling into the pitfalls of essentializing, of orientalizing or of exoticizing this religious tradition. The first specificity of the Orthodox system of the gift is the centrality of the vertical axis and its importance in defining and regulating the gift exchange on the other axes. This is so because the vertical axis defines Orthodox anthropology, which further determines Man's place in the Creation and his relation to it (the horizontal axis), Man's place in history and beyond time (the longitudinal axis) and identifies the locus of salvation (the Church, where the individual and the collective dimensions of existence are supposed to find their fullness).

At the level of the vertical gift circulation, Orthodox anthropology helps explain the centrality of three religious practices, namely liturgical worship, fasting and monasticism, as forms of self-offering to God in response to His gifts (at the individual level), as well as the prominence of the ecclesiastical institution, based on belief about its divine origin, its eschatological mission and its status of guardian and guarantor of the divine gift.

On the horizontal axis, the influence of the vertical gift is felt in the fact that interpersonal relations and the Church's social action (*diakonia*) are commanded by the imitation of divine love and compassion. The gift cycle is triggered by the obligation to give instituted in Orthodox anthropology through the definition of Man as a bearer of the image of God, who is the giver *par excellence*. The horizontal gift appears to be meaningful only to the extent it is referred to the vertical dimension. This explains why the Orthodox Churches' *diakonia* and other Orthodox charity services are closely intertwined with the preaching of the religious message that triggered the gift, with religious services, catechism, distribution of Orthodox literature or objects (icons, candles, incense, prayer ropes, etc.) together with concrete objects such as food, money, clothing, etc. Despite some similarities with the modern gift (it is addressed to strangers and to precise categories of social problems), the horizontal gift in the Orthodox system of the gift differs from the latter, in that it remains embedded in the vertical dimension.

The authority of the vertical axis is most reflected in the longitudinal gift, with regard to the Orthodox strong commitment to Tradition and to traditions (as popular instantiations of Tradition, more or less coherent with the latter). The application of the gift approach to the relationship Orthodox Churches and people have with Tradition showed that it can be neither equated nor reduced to an idealization of the past *per se* and provided a more nuanced explanation: the gift of divine revelation through dogma (i.e. vertical gift) is located in a moment in history, which belongs to the past, but its content is believed to be timeless and perfect. Hence the obligation of the receivers of this gift to pass it on to the next generations in its wholeness and fullness.

The normative role of the vertical axis affects not only the system of the gift, but also its interaction with everything that is exterior to the system. This further explains why innovations have to be proven as Tradition-compatible and why even attempts to de-construct Tradition are justified as actions that have the potential to reinforce Tradition.

The second characteristic of the Orthodox system of the gift derives from the first one (i.e. the centrality of the vertical axis) and consists in the fact that the axes are neither wholly separate nor self-sufficient, but rather interlocked and interdependent. The circulation of gift on a particular axis reaches its fullness to the extent that what is circulated is related to the other two axes, so that the act of giving reaches beyond the concrete framework in which it is performed. The gift activated on any of the axes calls for its symbolic reproduction on another axis, or on all three of them, involving thus the whole gift system.

If Orthodoxy is a system of the gift ruled by the omnipresent normative reference to the divine and the belief that ultimate meaning comes from reconnecting the world, the past and the future to the divine, then the evacuation of transcendent references from human and social life – the chief aspect of secularization according to the Orthodox point of view – implies the denial of the normative role of the vertical gift in regulating social and political organization (i.e. the horizontal circulation of the gift), as well as cultural and religious reproduction and memory (i.e. the longitudinal axis of the gift). Hence the feeling of threat and the pessimistic perspective that Orthodox societies and communities are doomed to lose their identity if people adopt secular lifestyles and worldviews. Hence the feeling of loss or lack of “something” (“subtraction stories”), which arises in the context of migration to the West, i.e. in societies that have adopted different regimes of the gift, in which individuals affirm themselves as autonomous beings, disembedded from a prescribed system of relations and obligations, and can choose both the gift relations in which they engage and the debt thereof.

The gift approach allows for a more serene interpretation of the Orthodox critique of secularity, other than in terms of “hermeneutics of suspicion”, such as the alleged difficulty of the Orthodox Church to cope with the separation of Church and State (which would reduce privileges of the Church), with the autonomy of the individual, with human rights and other achievements of modernity. Rather, it points to the fact that the secular evacuation of the divine from public life (i.e. politics, economics, law, etc.) challenges the Orthodox system of the gift in its core characteristic, namely the all-encompassing role of the vertical axis.

The book showed that the Orthodox criticism of secularization emanates primarily from the ecclesial institution, from theologically knowledgeable individuals and from highly practicing members of the Church. I assume that this is connected to their increased awareness about the content of the vertical gift and the obligations it entails. The majority of practitioners, regular attendees with no special theological background, seem to succeed combining both a secular lifestyle and an Orthodox identity, without experiencing

much contradiction between the two. Their experience of Tradition is filtered through traditions, which are more context-sensitive and adaptable. However, paradoxically, proposals of innovation that have to do with the vertical gift come from high clergy and theologians as well (e.g. the restoration of female diaconate, the “deparentification” of Tradition, the extension of the notion of “Church” to other Christian denominations, etc.). The Orthodox concept of *oikonomia* (provisional lenient application of canon law in order to alleviate a particular situation in the life of an individual or of the Church) provides the mechanism that allows the whole system of the gift to adapt itself to special conditions and to pave the way to innovation, even at the level of the vertical gift. More research about the role of *oikonomia* in the Orthodox system of the gift is needed, especially from a historic perspective, in order to identify adaptations diachronically.

The book also highlights the ambivalence of Orthodox individuals and institutions alike, both in “diaspora” and in the homeland, with regard to their attitude toward secularization and modernity. While emphasizing the peril it represents for the future of their religious identity, they participate in modernity and are skilled users of its achievements: mushrooming of orthodox media, applications, spiritual direction at distance via email and means of instant communication, publications, digitalization of evangelization, bureaucratization of the Church, separation of administrative and spiritual aspects of the parish life, development of the economic activity of Churches, etc. are just a few examples of the interaction of Orthodoxy with modernity or of the integration of aspects of modernity in the functioning of the Church and in the practice of individuals.

I also showed that the Orthodox representations about secularization as a peril to its system of the gift does not entail a generalized negative attitude, but that reactions are much more complex than that, including an attempt to “tame” modernity and secularization by entering a profound dialogue with its major philosophical presuppositions, scientific findings and technological realizations. Additional data and research would be needed about this kind of response to modernity, so as to compare and contrast it with the findings of the present book, which gave precedence to explaining the subjective perception of threat.

But what happens when external factors and/or actors from within the gift system advocate the introduction and the implementation of values or practices that are incompatible with the established norms of the gift circulation or even with one of the characteristics of the system? What happens when resistance to such challenges is not possible? Hénaff’s writings indicated that gift-based societies tend to preserve the gift by recoding the external elements that are hostile to the gift system in such a way as to incorporate them into it.

I discussed a series of gift recompositions on each of the axes of the Orthodox system of the gift, such as the following: the separation of the worldly administrative tasks from the spiritual aspects of a parish life, the transformation of the meaning of fasting from an individual ascetic practice to an

ecological and medical measure, the adaptation of individual prayer through the introduction of new technologies that facilitate prayer while performing other tasks (vertical axis); the proposal of a form of primacy as *primus sine paribus* that would define relations among Orthodox primates and local Churches, the shifting (or revival?) of the understanding of consensus as democratic voting in the process of inter-Orthodox decision-making, the “sacrament of the brother” (horizontal axis); filiation to recent saints as well as to ancient Western Christian saints, the emergence of intelligible translations of liturgical texts, adapted to contemporary language and cultural sensitivities (such as anti-Semitism or gender-inclusive language), and of liturgical practices, such as the construction of a Western rite (longitudinal axis).

How do recompositions work? As I explained, most of the time recompositions consist in integrating new realities into the system of the gift by selecting those aspects that can be reconnected to the vertical gift. For example, consensus as democratic voting is presented as an accelerated way of manifesting the Holy Spirit’s presence in the Church; parish administrative management separated from the spiritual authority is described as an advanced way of dealing with contemporary complex organization, so as to prevent the “worldly” matters from hindering the “spiritual” activity of the parish; the “global neighbor” and the “sacrament of the neighbor” are ways to manifest and to witness to the world of the “sacrament of the altar”. Also, when economic integration and social status enhancement allow Orthodox migrants to adopt consumer practices such as buying expensive cars, they reconnect this material aspect with a spiritual dimension by asking the priest to bless the cars. In this way, the purchased object does not remain strictly material but is invested with grace through the priest’s blessing.

Conversely, there are recompositions that consist in fostering new immanent meanings of practices commonly associated with otherworldly values. For example, fasting, an ascetic exercise and a form of self-offering to God, has been invested with ecological and medical significance, being increasingly promoted as the Orthodox response to the global ecological crisis or as a healthy nutrition strategy.

What factors trigger gift recompositions? In my analysis, I focused mainly on external factors: increased participation in ecumenical dialogue challenges Orthodox Churches to acknowledge the fact that other Christian denominations share in the fullness of the Truth; institutional integration, especially at the European level brings the Churches to act as human institutions, suspending their claim to be of divine origin in order to be able to establish a relationship with political actors; similarly, the increased collaboration between Churches and State in the Orthodox countries and attempts to get State recognition in the “diaspora” (e.g. in Italy, Belgium, Switzerland), leads to the bureaucratization of the ecclesial institution and to new forms of organization that reproduce the model of secular institutions.

However, the internal factors should not be neglected (e.g. nationalism, cultural integration of migrants, the globalization of consumer culture and its

generalization in Orthodox countries, etc.). The present research has not given enough emphasis on this, but future research could bring surprising findings about the outcome of Orthodox migrants' cultural integration in the long term, combined with the rise of new generations born and educated in the West.

Recompositions are not (always) the result of consensus nor of open debate, but emerge sometimes spontaneously, as pragmatic responses to contextual challenge. They do not meet unanimous positive reactions from all members of the Church, but often create lines of division among cradle and convert Orthodox and among long-term integrated migrants and recent or newly arrived ones.

Hénaff's idea of gift recompositions was very useful for accounting for the processes through which deviations from the ideal-type of the gift as well as innovations and pragmatic responses to external and internal pressure are invested with new meaning, or divested from those aspects that are incompatible with the specificity of the gift system and finally reintegrated into the whole.

For all the reasons mentioned above, I believe the gift paradigm has a great potential for future research in the field of Eastern Christianity, not only with respect to grasping its specificities without the suspicion of essentialization, but also with regard to the possibility of describing the Orthodox in their own terms, without being confined to theological categories.

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