

RALEIGH LECTURE ON HISTORY

Byzantium and the Limits of Orthodoxy

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THE LIST OF RALEIGH LECTURES since the series began in 1919 includes many that have become classics, including Norman Baynes's 'Constantine the Great and the Christian Church' (1929) and more recently the lecture by Peter Brown on 'The Problems of Christianisation' (1992).¹ The only Raleigh lecture that has been on an unequivocally 'Byzantine' subject is that by Dimitri Obolensky on 'Italy, Mount Athos and Muscovy: the Three Worlds of Maximos the Greek' given in 1981. But perhaps it is no accident that if one takes the lectures by Norman Baynes and Peter Brown as at least touching on Byzantium, even if only concerned with its earliest history, all three have been on religious topics. The question is why this should be the case.

Certainly the Byzantines themselves had a high understanding of Orthodoxy. A fourteenth-century patriarch grandly stated that he had been given the 'care of all the world'.² They certainly give the impression of having what modern political theorists call a 'comprehensive doctrine', and they undoubtedly aspired to such an ideal.³ In the sixth century the

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¹ See Norman H. Baynes, *Constantine the Great and the Christian Church*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1972); Peter Brown, *Authority and the Sacred* (Cambridge, 1995), chap. 1.

² See D. Obolensky, 'Late Byzantine culture and the Slavs: a study in acculturation', in id., *The Byzantine Inheritance of Eastern Europe* (Aldershot, 1982), 17. 13.

³ For the tension between modern liberal pluralist political theory and 'comprehensive doctrines' such as religious systems, see Raymond Plant, *Politics, Theology and History* (Cambridge, 2001); John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: a Restatement* (Cambridge, MA, 2001).

poet Paul the Silentiary presented the emperor and the patriarch as the twin poles of the Byzantine state, in harmonious agreement.⁴ But within only a few years of the composition of Paul's poem the emperor in question deposed the patriarch for not agreeing with him.⁵ It was well known that emperors did their best to place in position patriarchs whose views suited their own, and Justinian acted in this way throughout his reign. In the ninth century a similarly disingenuous view of the complementary roles of the emperor and patriarch is ascribed to the patriarch Photius.⁶ But Photius also had an agenda, and was himself at the centre of a famous schism; Byzantine authors, patriarchs and others who expounded these religious theories were often writing in order to justify a position, or to convey a lofty sense of order. They constructed Byzantium as a 'virtual reality', or an 'empire of the mind'.⁷ Yet books published almost in successive years by two distinguished Byzantinists, Hélène Ahrweiler and Steven Runciman,⁸ both point out how very often Byzantium fell short of this ideal, and on how many occasions the hoped-for internal order under God gave way to succession coups, the murder of actual and would-be emperors, and the deposition, exile and imprisonment of patriarchs. The Princes Islands were a favourite destination: the sixth-century patriarch Eutychius was kept there for a while, the future iconophile patriarch Methodius in the ninth century was imprisoned there, and also in the ninth century, the patriarchs Ignatius and Photius were both deposed and exiled, Ignatius with considerable suffering. It is time to ask how far the

⁴ Paul the Silentiary, *Ekphrasis on S. Sophia*, ll. 921–66, 978–1029, ed. P. Friedländer, *Johannes von Gaza und Paulus Silentiarius: Kunstbeschreibungen justinianischer Zeit* (Leipzig and Berlin, 1912); the poem was recited in the Epiphany season of AD 563 to celebrate the restoration of the church, partly in the imperial palace and partly in the patriarchal palace adjoining the church, and the emperor and the patriarch are each separately praised: see Mary Whitby, 'The occasion of Paul the Silentiary's *Ekphrasis* of S. Sophia', *Classical Quarterly*, 35 (1985), 215–28, at 217–18.

⁵ Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History*, IV. 38; Eustratius, *V. Eutych.* 1015–1146, ed. C. Laga, *CCSG* 25 (Turnhout, 1992). Eutychius was deposed in AD 565, and five years later Justinian's successor Justin II also deposed Anastasius, the patriarch of Antioch (Evagrius, V. 5); both were reinstated later under different emperors.

⁶ Preface to the *Epanagoge* (titles II and III), J. and P. Zepos (eds.), *Ius Graecoromanum*, 8 vols. (Athens, 1931), 2. 229–368, 410–27; for the complex relationship between emperor and patriarch, and the larger claims made for the latter in the Palaeologan period, see E. Patlagean, 'Théologie politique de Byzance. L'empereur, le Christ, le patriarche', in G. Firolamo (ed.), *Teologie politiche: Modelli a confronto* (Brescia, 2005), pp. 149–61, especially pp. 158–61.

⁷ Jonathan Shepard, 'The Byzantine commonwealth 1000–1550', in M. Angold (ed.), *Cambridge History of Christianity V* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 3–52, at p. 45.

⁸ H. Ahrweiler, *L'Idéologie politique de l'empire byzantin* (Paris, 1975); Steven Runciman, *The Byzantine Theocracy* (Cambridge, 1977), given as a series of lectures on church and state in Byzantium at the Weil Institute in Cincinnati in 1973.

common equation of Byzantium with Orthodoxy is justified, and what the Byzantine notion of 'Orthodoxy' amounted to.

We can see the Byzantine habit of self-conscious theorising about Orthodoxy again in the twelfth century when the commentator Theodore Balsamon and others debate in detail the respective positions and privileges of the patriarch and the emperor.⁹ Two centuries earlier the patriarch Nicholas Mystikos justified as an imitation of divine mercy in action the very Byzantine notion of *oikonomia* ('economy', or as his translators have it, 'dispensation'), namely the flexibility to temper strict correctness with what we might now see rather as creative interpretation.¹⁰ By this means it was possible to maintain the theory that God was directing the Byzantine world order, even if the Byzantines themselves sometimes bent the rules. But again, the words of the patriarch, which are apparently about the religious and political order, are in fact highly partisan; they are part of a passionate argument directed at the wrong use of such dispensation by the Pope in the intense battle over whether or not the Emperor Leo VI was allowed to marry for a fourth time. Nicholas Mystikos himself had become patriarch with the Emperor Leo's blessing. He had himself been willing to use this 'dispensation' to justify baptising the child of this contested fourth marriage (no less than the future Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus); but there he drew the line. He barred the door of St Sophia to the emperor at Christmas and was forced to abdicate as a result.¹¹

Nicholas's letter was written after these events and is full of his indignation on hearing that Rome had been willing to give the emperor a let-out.¹² Nicholas was reinstated after the emperor's death and even became regent for the young Constantine VII, only to be ousted again by the very Zoe whose marriage to the emperor Leo VI he had violently opposed. Yet despite such a series of events (which was by no means uncommon in the history of Byzantium), both Runciman and Ahrweiler were willing to agree that Byzantium was in fact governed by a strong sense of order and

⁹ G. Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: the Imperial Office in Byzantium*, Eng. trans., Past and Present Publications (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 256–64.

¹⁰ Ahrweiler, *L'Idéologie politique*, p. 146; cf. *Ep. 32*, ed. R. J. H. Jenkins and L. G. Westerink, *Nicholas I, Patriarch of Constantinople: Letters*, CFHB 6 (Washington, DC, 1973), pp. 215–37, at p. 236 (AD 912). On 'economy' see G. Dagron, 'La règle et l'exception: analyse de la notion d'économie', in D. Simon (ed.), *Religieuse Devianz: Untersuchungen zu sozialen, rechtlichen und theologischen Reaktionen auf religiöse Abweichung im westlichen und östlichen Mittelalter* (Frankfurt am Main, 1990), pp. 1–18.

¹¹ Runciman, *The Byzantine Theocracy*, p. 101.

¹² *Ep. 32*, p. 234.

divine guidance.¹³ One might more reasonably say that in writing Byzantine history there is a particularly acute problem in reconciling the 'is' and the 'ought' in the written sources, that is, there is such a wealth of normative and 'official' discourse that historians should immediately assume a gap between that and what actually happened. Orthodoxy, in other words, might be used to justify dubious actions, but did not necessarily govern what actually happened in practice. Members of the secular and ecclesiastical elite such as the patriarch Nicholas Mystikos may have found ways of explaining away the discrepancy, but we should not be fooled in the same way. We should not take Byzantine Orthodoxy at face value.

The real theme of this lecture is Byzantine exceptionalism. For a variety of reasons having to do both with its historic reception and its relative inaccessibility, Byzantium is not an easy subject,¹⁴ and in terms of its historiography Byzantine Orthodoxy has proved particularly awkward, at least for those outside the Orthodox tradition.¹⁵ On the one hand the available material for Byzantium, art historical and textual, is heavily skewed towards religious history, and thus risks giving a false impression. On the other, from the viewpoint of western liberal pluralism, as from that of the frequent unfavourable comparisons made of Byzantium with western Europe, Byzantine Orthodoxy even now often gives the impres-

¹³ Ahrweiler, *L'Idéologie politique*, pp. 146 f.; Runciman, *The Byzantine Theocracy*, pp. 161–2. Both emphasise the Platonising roots of the bland Eusebian political theory which continued to be voiced throughout Byzantine history.

¹⁴ For this see Averil Cameron, *The Byzantines* (Oxford, 2006), pp. viii–xi.

¹⁵ It is noteworthy that most historians use terms such as 'the church', Christianity, or 'Orthodoxy' rather than 'religion' to indicate their subject matter: for instance A. Ducellier (ed.), *Byzance et le monde orthodoxe* (Paris, 1986), a book which covers many areas of Byzantine life, but which uses Orthodoxy as a very strong framing device; Michael Angold, *Byzantium. The Bridge from Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (London, 2001), chap. 7, pp. 122–45, 'The triumph of Orthodoxy'; G. Dagron, 'L'iconoclasme et l'établissement de l'Orthodoxie (726–847)', in G. Dagron, P. Riché and A. Vauchez (eds.), *Evêques, moines et empereurs (610–1054)*, J.-M. Mayeur, et al. (eds.), *Histoire du christianisme des origines à nos jours IV* (Paris, 1993), pp. 93–165; D. M. Nicol, *Church and Society in the Last Centuries of the Byzantine Empire 1261–1453* (Cambridge, 1979); Joan Hussey, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire*, Oxford History of the Christian Church (Oxford, 1986); Rosemary Morris (ed.), *Church and People in Byzantium* (Birmingham, Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies, 1990); A. Ducellier, *L'Église byzantine. Entre pouvoir et esprit (313–1204)*, Bibliothèque de l'Histoire du Christianisme (Paris, 1990); Michael Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni, 1081–1261* (Cambridge, 1995); id. (ed.), *Eastern Christianity*, Cambridge History of Christianity, 5 (Cambridge, 2006); Derek Krueger (ed.), *Byzantine Christianity*, People's History of Christianity, 3 (Minneapolis, 2006).

sion of being a not wholly welcome comprehensive system with little room for individual choice.

The use of the term 'Orthodoxy' in my title is deliberate. In today's world Orthodoxy is again raising its head, and in its modern sense it is often consciously or unconsciously elided with 'Byzantine Orthodoxy' or with the idea of the Byzantine 'inheritance' or 'legacy'. There are an estimated three million Orthodox in the world today according to the official website of the ecumenical patriarchate, and while this may be an exaggeration other common estimates put the figure at between 220 and 300 million. At least thirteen countries have majority Orthodox populations and many others have large Orthodox minorities. The timeliness of my topic is clear if we reflect on the degree to which as a result of the changes since 1991 Byzantine Orthodoxy is being drawn into sometimes highly contentious agendas about contemporary national identity.

Orthodoxy has also been given a place since 1991 in the clash of civilisations rhetoric, notably in the 1996 book of that title by Samuel Huntington.¹⁶ Here the term is used (very questionably) to denote a whole 'civilisation', distinct both from western Christendom and from the Islamic world. There are eight entries for Byzantium in the index of Huntington's book, and the references are always to distinguish Byzantium from the west and to align it with the east, or with an essentialist Orthodox civilisation. He writes of 'the great historical line' dividing east and west, and provides a map with a heavy line drawn on it, marking 'the end of Europe'. In the Huntington rhetoric there is no space for the actual diversity of Byzantium, the mixed ethnic range in the population at different times, the shifting borders or any questioning of the role of religion as a defining characteristic of a 'civilisation' as a whole. Such views raise questions as to how Byzantium fits into the related theme of the Crusades, where its place is uneasily ambiguous; but most importantly, the idea of an 'Orthodox civilisation' depends on a highly contestable essentialism, applied by extension also to Byzantium, but which, for example, ignores the severe problems of Orthodox ecclesiology which existed in Byzantine times as much as today.¹⁷ 'Orthodoxy' is also

¹⁶ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, 1996).

¹⁷ Both Macedonia and Montenegro have local Orthodox churches whose legitimacy is keenly disputed; Byzantium allowed local ecclesiastical autonomy at an early date in Bulgaria (though for the complexities see C. Hannick, 'Les nouvelles chrétientés du monde byzantin: Russes, Bulgares et Serbes', in Dagon, Riché and Vauchez (eds.), *Evêques, moines et empereurs*, pp. 909–39, at pp. 921–37).

having a revival as a theme in current scholarship on Byzantium. Thus a book by Mark Whittow on the history of Byzantium from the seventh to the tenth century is called *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium*;¹⁸ a recent collection of essays is entitled *Byzantine Orthodoxies*;¹⁹ one of the eight major themes at the 2006 International Byzantine Congress in London was Orthodoxy, and one of the most interesting plenary papers, given under the theme of 'Empire', memorably concluded that Byzantium's 'soft power' rested on the force of its religion.²⁰ The Orthodoxy of Byzantium was a central theme of Dimitri Obolensky's classic book, *The Byzantine Commonwealth*,²¹ which argued for the use of Orthodoxy by Byzantium as a means of developing wider spheres of influence in neighbouring states. While there may have been some questioning of specific parts of the argument, the book's central theme of medieval Byzantium as what Jonathan Shepard now calls a 'force-field' remains potent and is still very much bound up with its Orthodoxy.²² In his Congress paper Shepard cautiously concludes that 'commonwealth' is a justifiable term, basing himself on the idea of 'acquisitional societies' and 'superordinate centres'. After positing three circles of influence—the Byzantine commonwealth, the Christian and Islamic Orient, and Latin Christendom—in which Byzantium exerted a 'force-field', he concludes that Byzantium should be seen 'less as a state than as a politico-cultural sphere', with its presence in the three circles having a 'protean quality'. He returns to the idea of a Byzantine 'commonwealth', arguing that its strength came not least from the fact that the message was 'multi-channelled', Byzantium

¹⁸ Mark Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium, 660–1025* (London, 1996).

¹⁹ Andrew Louth and Augustine Casiday, eds., *Byzantine Orthodoxies* (Aldershot, 2006).

²⁰ Jonathan Shepard, 'Byzantium's overlapping circles', in Elizabeth Jeffreys (ed.), *Proceedings of the 21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies, London, 21–26 August, 2006* (Aldershot, 2006), I, *Plenary Papers*, 15–55; for the idea of 'soft power' (culture, religion, values, in contrast with the use of force or economic pressure) see Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power. The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York, 2004).

²¹ Dimitri Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe 500 to 1453* (Oxford, 1971); cf. also Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, 1993).

²² See Shepard, 'The Byzantine commonwealth, 1000–1550', pp. 49–52. For some reservations about Byzantine 'mission' see the contributions by S. Ivanov and V. Vavrinek, in Jeffreys (ed.), *21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies, II, Abstract of Panel Papers*, pp. 32–3, 34–5, with C. Raffensperger, 'Revisiting the idea of the Byzantine Commonwealth', *Byzantinische Forschungen*, 28 (2004), pp. 159–74; on the anachronism of the term 'commonwealth': E. Patlagean, *Un Moyen Âge grec. Byzance, IX^e–XV^e siècle* (Paris, 2007), p. 387. The title of the paper by S. Averintsev, 'Some constant characteristics of Byzantine Orthodoxy', in Louth and Casiday (eds.), *Byzantine Orthodoxies*, pp. 215–28, speaks for itself in terms of essentialist approaches.

offering not just one but a broad spectrum of models.²³ All the same, he tellingly echoes Obolensky's view that Byzantium's soft power derived from 'its credible show of majesty and piety'. The language of circles and 'spheres of influence' is in fact the language of Huntington; so is Shepard's language of 'order'. It surely cannot be an accident that Shepard also cites the book by Mary Helms from which Huntington derived his model of centres and circles.²⁴

What strategies can historians adopt in order to deal with this problem? First of all, I want to argue that Byzantine Orthodoxy was not at all something fixed and easily identifiable. It is far from being agreed, for instance, when Byzantine Orthodoxy can be said to have been fully established. Given the fact that, unlike the western medieval kingdoms, the Byzantine state grew directly out of the Roman empire, even to the extent that the Byzantines considered themselves to be 'Romans', this is connected with the perennial question of when 'Byzantium' can be seen as being established. If 'Byzantium' begins with Constantine's dedication of the city of Constantinople in AD 330, a settled 'Orthodoxy' was still a long way in the future; even if a later date is chosen for the start of the Byzantine empire, say the seventh century, it remains impossible to separate Byzantine religion from the religious struggles of the earlier period.²⁵ A common answer to the question as to when Orthodoxy was established in relation to the Byzantine period proper follows the propaganda of the Byzantines themselves and makes the key period the ending of the Iconoclastic controversy in the ninth century.²⁶ But important as this was, the 'event' itself was carefully stage-managed;²⁷ nor, contrary to the official propaganda of the time, did it mean the end of challenges and contests. I will return to this point below.

²³ Shepard, 'Byzantium's overlapping circles', pp. 27, 53–5.

²⁴ Shepard, 'The Byzantine commonwealth, 1000–1550', p. 12.

²⁵ For this see Averil Cameron, 'Enforcing Orthodoxy in Byzantium', in Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory (eds.), *Discipline and Diversity*, Studies in Church History, 43 (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 1–24.

²⁶ Cf. Dagron, 'L'iconoclisme et l'établissement de l'Orthodoxie (726–847)'. That is certainly the view enshrined in the document known as the Synodikon of Orthodoxy (J. Gouillard (ed.), 'Le Synodikon d'orthodoxie', *Travaux et Mémoires*, 2 (1967), 1–313), produced at the time, and in the fifteenth-century 'Triumph of Orthodoxy' icon in the British Museum (on which see D. Kotoula, 'The British Museum Triumph of Orthodoxy icon', in Louth and Casiday (eds.), pp. 121–8).

²⁷ P. Karlin-Hayter, 'Methodios and his synod', in Louth and Casiday (eds.), *Byzantine Orthodoxies*, pp. 55–74.

We also have to be careful not to simplify Byzantium's religious message to other peoples. To take only one example, even at the height of their medieval state, the Serbs, seen now as quintessentially Orthodox, had a far from straightforward relationship with Byzantine Orthodoxy. Their rulers may have married Byzantine wives, but they were also liable to put them aside in favour of Catholic ones; they were courted by the pope and themselves gave Rome grounds to hope for success. Nor were the Serbs the only people whose rulers were presented with a choice between Rome and Byzantium; some, like Hungary, eventually opted for Rome.²⁸ In medieval Serbia, religious affiliations were in practice divided, with Catholic dioceses on the Adriatic coast and Orthodox ones further inland, and Stephen the First-Crowned, brother of the famous S. Sava, the co-founder with their father Stefan Nemanja of the Hilandar monastery on Mt Athos, actually received his crown from the pope.²⁹ We can hardly hope to recapture real religious inclination in such matters, but one can see clearly enough that it was not obvious that Orthodoxy was universal or that it would prevail.

Emphasis on the Orthodoxy of Byzantium is traditional in the subject, and its revival as a topic (if that is not too strong a term) is not surprising. But a different and major strand in recent scholarship on earlier periods of Christianity (admitted in the title of Louth and Casiday's book, *Byzantine Orthodoxies*, even if not fully expressed in it), has been to question essentialist views of religion, 'Orthodoxy' and the like from a constructivist position. A mass of recent scholarship on the early Christian and late antique periods has shown the extent to which Christian orthodoxy was in fact constructed by the labelling and identification of heterodoxy. Its definition was fought over, using a range of tactics from polemic against other groups to exhortations addressed to Christians to separate themselves from heretics.³⁰ Just as in the related

²⁸ In sharp contrast to the unquestioning emphasis on the Orthodoxy of medieval Serbia in Ducellier, *Byzance et le monde orthodoxe*, especially chap. 8, see E. Patlagean, 'Les états d'Europe centrale et Byzance, ou l'oscillation des confins', *Revue historique*, 302. 4 (2000), 827–68; also ead., *Un Moyen Âge grec*, p. 69.

²⁹ The tensions between the Catholic dioceses on the Adriatic littoral and the more central Orthodox areas, as well as the pressures exerted by neighbouring Catholic powers, are well brought out by L. Maksimović, 'La Serbie et les contrées voisines avant et après la IV^e croisade', in Angeliki E. Laiou (ed.), *Urbs Capta. The Fourth Crusade and its Consequences*, *Réalités byzantines*, 10 (Paris, 2005), pp. 269–82.

³⁰ See Cameron, 'Enforcing Orthodoxy in Byzantium', pp. 6–7; for the industry that went into producing handbooks against all kinds of heresy see Averil Cameron, 'How to read heresiology', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 33/3 (2003), 471–92.

debates on Hellenism and Romanisation, the categories ‘Greek’ and ‘Roman’ are nowadays seen as constructed, rather than as absolutes, so the term ‘Orthodox’ was not a given, but a focus of contestation.³¹ It is time for the same ‘hermeneutic of suspicion’ to be applied to the later Byzantine source material as well. There is a gap to be addressed not only between the ‘is’ and the ‘ought’ within Byzantine society itself, that is, between the normative texts and the rest,³² but also within our own historical methodology.

Titles containing the words ‘limits of’ have been used before. The subtitle of Arnaldo Momigliano’s *Alien Wisdom*, published in 1975, was *The Limits of Hellenization*.³³ Benjamin Isaac’s book on the Roman army in the east was called *The Limits of Empire*. Closer to today’s subject, Steven Runciman gave one of the chapters in his *Byzantine Theocracy* the title ‘The limits of imperial control’.³⁴ Such titles usually convey the wish to overturn, or at least to question, a familiar view, and my title is no exception. I wish to move the study of Byzantium away from Orthodoxy as a given into consideration of the sociology of Byzantine ‘religion’; away from western secularist and pluralist agendas and assumptions based on ideas about the desirability of a separation of church and state; and from a focus on Orthodox faith and spirituality, and ‘the Orthodox legacy’, to some simpler but perhaps more basic questions about the place of religion in the working of Byzantine society, questions which might rescue Byzantium from its constant relegation to the ‘eastern’ and ‘non-Enlightenment’ sphere of autocracy and religious conservatism.³⁵

³¹ For the debates on ‘Romanisation’, especially vigorous among archaeologists; see for example (from a large literature) D. Mattingly, ‘Vulgar and weak “Romanization”, or time for a paradigm shift?’, *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, 15 (2002), 536–40; G. A. Cecconi, ‘Romanizzazione, diversità culturale, politicamente corretto’, *Mélanges de l’École française de Rome, antiquité*, 118.1 (2006), 81–94.

³² For similar methodological issues in a different culture see Sarah Foot, *Monastic Life in Anglo-Saxon England, c.600–900* (Cambridge, 2006).

³³ Arnaldo Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom: the Limits of Hellenization* (Cambridge, 1975), rev. Italian edn., *Saggezza straniera. L’Ellenismo e le altre culture* (Torino, 1980); cf. also J.-C. Cheynet, ‘Les limites de pouvoir à Byzance: une forme de tolérance?’, in K. Nikolaou (ed.), *Toleration and Repression in the Middle Ages* (Athens, 2002), pp. 15–28.

³⁴ Cf. B. Isaac, *The Limits of Empire. The Roman Army in the East*, rev. edn. (Oxford, 1992); see also William E. Klingshirm and Mark Vessey (eds.), *The Limits of Christianization. Essays on Late Antique Thought and Culture in Honor of R. A. Markus* (Ann Arbor, 1999).

³⁵ On the alleged ‘Caesaropapism’ of Byzantium see in particular Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, pp. 282–312.

The latter assumption about Byzantium is still very much alive. I was startled a while ago to be sent copies of *Awake* and *The Watchtower*, both carrying articles about Byzantium; it was taken as read that the Byzantine church was subordinated to political ends, and this was held up as ‘an unholy mix’ . . . and no part of ‘true religion’.³⁶ We clearly need to start from the beginning. I wish to begin here, therefore, by arguing rather simply against the view that ‘Orthodoxy’ is the ‘best frame of reference’ within which to study and write the history of Byzantium culture.³⁷

* * *

How religious was Byzantium? Was Orthodoxy really as dominant as it seems? One question faced by modern sociologists of religion is how to measure the depth of religion in a given society, an endeavour which is difficult even in contemporary circumstances, and even more so when dealing with medieval source material which is itself highly ideological.³⁸ Phenomenological approaches to the sociology of religion, followed by many historians of Byzantium, stress the element of religious experience, and the sense of the sacred or the holy,³⁹ and certainly Byzantine art and Byzantine spirituality offer much material for this. To all appearances Byzantium certainly had most of the trappings associated with modern Orthodox societies if not more: its ruler played a quasi-sacral role⁴⁰ and intervened in ecclesiastical affairs (a striking example was Manuel I Komnenos’s *Novel* or ‘Conciliar Edict’ of 1166, by which the emperor unashamedly imposed his own views against ecclesiastical opposition);⁴¹ the great religious controversies (Christology, iconoclasm, union with Rome, hesychasm) were at once political and ecclesiastical; public ceremony was intertwined with religious processions and liturgies; the num-

³⁶ *Awake*, 8 Oct. 2001, 12–15; *The Watchtower*, 15 Feb. 2002, 8–12, citing Norman Davies, *Europe: a History* (Oxford, 1997), p. 246, ‘The Empire defended the Orthodox Church, and the Church praised the Empire. This “Caesaropapism” had no equal in the West, where secular rule and papal authority had never been joined.’

³⁷ As argued by Paul Magdalino, unpub. plenary paper given at the 21st International Byzantine Congress, 2006.

³⁸ For the perils inherent in hagiographic sources see P. Odorico and P. Agapitos (eds.), *Les vies des saints à Byzance: genre littéraire ou biographie historique?* (Paris, 2004).

³⁹ Lawrence A. Young, ‘Phenomenological images of religion and rational choice theory’, in Lawrence A. Young (ed.), *Rational Choice Theory and Religion: Summary and Assessment* (New York, 1997), pp. 133–46.

⁴⁰ For this see Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*.

⁴¹ Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, pp. 287–8.

ber of clergy, church buildings and monasteries was extremely large, and accounted for a major part of Byzantine economic activity;⁴² church law, in the shape of the canons,⁴³ applied equally with public law; and the art of Byzantium was dominated by religious production and religious patronage, exemplified by icons, church architecture, decoration and equipment, such as gospel books.⁴⁴ For all these reasons western critics from the sixteenth century to modern times have depicted Byzantium as a society in which there was no separation between church and state, and no civil society, thereby denigrating it by an unfavourable comparison with the Protestant, Catholic or enlightened west.⁴⁵

Among modern sociological theories of religion, a dominant view holds that secularisation goes hand in hand with modernity, and tends to regard pre-modern societies as highly religious more or less by definition, without questioning what that embeddedness actually meant in practice. A similar assumption is also made by advocates of the competing rational-choice theory of religion, who emphasise faith and individual choice in modern religion and see medieval societies not as an 'age of faith' but as a time when religion was a simply part of the fabric of life.⁴⁶ In each case pre-modern religion suffers as a topic in its own right.

⁴² There is no dedicated chapter on the economics of Orthodoxy in the 3-vol. *Economic History of Byzantium*, ed. Angeliki E. Laiou (Washington, DC, 2002), but see E. Papagianni, 'Legal institutions and practice in matters of ecclesiastical property', *ibid.*, 3. 1059–69 with bibliography; Papagianni demonstrates very clearly how often the economic and financial interests of the state and the church were at odds and how often emperors were unsuccessful in their attempts at control. A useful outline of the property and financial issues relating to Byzantine monasteries and of the organisation and emoluments of the clergy, can be found in B. Caseau-Chevalier, *Byzance: économie et société. Du milieu du VIII^e siècle à 1204* (Paris, 2007), pp. 195–260.

⁴³ For a good introduction to the issues see Ruth Macrides, 'Nomos and kanon on paper and in court', in Rosemary Morris (ed.), *Church and People in Byzantium* (Birmingham, 1990), pp. 61–86, and see her papers in Macrides, *Kinship and Justice in Byzantium, 11–15th centuries*, Variorum Collected Studies Series, 642 (Aldershot, 1999).

⁴⁴ Paul Magdalino, *L'Orthodoxie des astrologues: La science entre le dogme et la divination à Byzance (VII^e–XIV^e siècle)*, Réalités byzantines, 12 (Paris, 2006), p. 12, argues that the interpenetration of religion and culture at some periods of Byzantium was conspicuously greater than anything in the west or the Islamic world; on the other hand the book argues for the continuing importance of astrology in Byzantium, and the attachment of emperors to horoscopes even in late Byzantium; Manuel I even wrote a treatise defending astrology (*ibid.*, pp. 114–22).

⁴⁵ For discussion see Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, pp. 282–312; for the modern secularisation thesis, according to which secularisation is assumed to go hand in hand with modernism and rationalism: e.g. Bryan Wilson, *Religion in a Secular Society: a Sociological Comment* (London, 1966); for discussion and criticism see S. Bruce (ed.), *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis* (Oxford, 1992).

⁴⁶ So I. R. Iannacone, 'Rational choice: framework for the scientific study of religion', in Young (ed.), *Rational Choice Theory*, pp. 25–45.

Given what seems to be a lack of critical overall analysis, it is simply too dangerous for historians to be taken in too easily by Byzantine appearances of Orthodoxy; the interpretation of Byzantium suffers, in fact, from an overdose of the wrong sort of religion. The danger inherent in the acceptance of Orthodoxy as the obvious framework of analysis is that it risks obscuring the actual complexities, and while the place of secular as well as religious elements in late antique and Byzantine culture is beginning to receive more attention,⁴⁷ using the framework of ‘Orthodoxy’ brings with it the clear risk of conflating the religion and the society.

Orthodoxy in Byzantium is and was hard to define, and for that very reason it was at all times contested and fought over. Yet even a scholar like Paul Magdalino writes, in the context of a highly original argument about the lively continuation of astrology, of ‘the Orthodoxy’ of different Byzantine periods, thus raising the question of what this objectified ‘Orthodoxy’ might have been.⁴⁸ Like any process of religious ethnography, describing or writing a history of Byzantine Orthodoxy also risks importing the assumptions of the individual investigator—especially if those who write on it do so from within the Orthodox tradition. Finally, and of course very importantly, many Byzantines were not in fact Orthodox.

The word ‘orthodoxy’ seems simple enough: it means in Greek ‘right opinion’.⁴⁹ In the fifth century AD a north Syrian bishop could compose in Greek a dialogue between an imaginary ‘orthodox’ and a spokesman

⁴⁷ For Byzantine art see Eunice Dauterman Maguire and Henry Maguire, *Other Icons: Art and Power in Byzantine Secular Culture* (Princeton, 2007); Henry Maguire, *Earth and Ocean: The Terrestrial World in Early Byzantine Art* (University Park, Pa., 1987); the spectacular mosaic floors known from Jordan in the sixth to eighth centuries continued to display a lively knowledge of the themes of Greek mythology and poetry, for which see M. Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan* (Amman, 1993). Other attempts to get round the problem have focused on ‘daily life’; for the secular in relation to late antiquity see D. M. Gwynn and S. Bangert (eds.), *Religious Diversity in Late Antiquity*, *Late Antique Archaeology* 6 (Leiden, forthcoming); E. Rebillard and C. Sotinel (eds.), *Frontières du profane IV: Les activités économiques: une sphère profane par excellence?*, *Antiquité tardive*, 14 (2006), 15–116.

⁴⁸ Magdalino, *L’Orthodoxie des astrologues*, e.g. p. 132. It is very hard to avoid such language: see e.g. Dagron, ‘Le temps des changements’, p. 318, ‘the Church’ called to order those who defended classical tradition; Magdalino, *op. cit.*, p. 40, George of Pisidia (7c) as representative of ‘the official thought of the Church’, p. 135, opposition to Manuel I’s treatise on astrology as ‘la réaction orthodoxe’.

⁴⁹ But for the complex steps by which ‘orthodoxy’ came to be defined and legally enforced and heterodoxy punished see Caroline Humfress, *Orthodoxy and the Courts in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2007), especially pp. 217–42.

for heterodoxy;⁵⁰ and this is far from being the only such set-piece text.⁵¹ In one of the recently much-studied highly stylised Greek apologetic disputations designed to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity over Judaism we also find a so-called 'orthodox' interlocutor, identified as an abbot; yet just how contrived such a character is can be seen from the fact that such dialogues usually end with the discomfiture, defeat and conversion of his opponents, the Jews.⁵² Other sets of questions and answers in both Greek and Syriac put together in the early Byzantine period vividly demonstrate the anxiety felt on all sides as to what was or what was not orthodox.⁵³

Indeed it will rightly be objected that religion, Christianity or other, is not just about doctrine. 'Lived Orthodoxy',⁵⁴ spirituality, liturgy and lay piety are just some of the elements that went up to make Byzantine Orthodoxy.⁵⁵ In theoretical terms religion has been seen variously as: a system of belief, whether or not including an actual reference to God or a divine entity; a way of ordering meaning; a system of symbols; or a bundle of practices.⁵⁶ In one discussion, no less than eight dimensions have been identified in a religion,⁵⁷ all of which certainly applied in one form or another in Byzantium. Spirituality and prayer were central characteristics of Byzantine religion, and while this paper concentrates on doctrinal, political and structural matters, Andrew Louth has memorably emphasised the importance of liturgical life, religious sensibility and

⁵⁰ Theodoret, *Eranistes*, ed. G. H. Ettlinger (Oxford, 1975); *Eranistes*, the name given to the interlocutor, seems to mean a 'collector' of divergent views (Ettlinger, p. 5, n. 2).

⁵¹ Cf. A. Alexakis, 'The dialogue of the monk and recluse Moschos concerning the holy icons, an early iconophile text', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 52 (1998), 187–224, also dated by its editor to the fifth century, though see 209–10.

⁵² See I. Aulisa and C. Schiavo, *Dialogo di Papisco d Filone giudei con un monaco* (Bari, 2005).

⁵³ See e.g. Y. Papadoyannakis, 'Defining orthodoxy in Pseudo-Justin's *Quaestiones et responsiones ad Orthodoxos*', in Eduard Iricinschi and Holger Zellentin (eds.), *Heresy and Identity in Late Antiquity* (Tübingen, 2008), pp. 115–27.

⁵⁴ For this term in relation to the historiography of medieval and later Russian Orthodoxy see Stella Rock, 'Russian piety and Orthodox culture 1380–1589', in Angold (ed.), *Eastern Christianity*, pp. 253–75, at p. 255.

⁵⁵ For lay piety in Byzantium see Sharon E. J. Gerstel, 'The layperson in church', in Krueger (ed.), *Byzantine Christianity*, pp. 103–23 and Alice-Mary Talbot, 'The devotional life of lay-women', *ibid.*, pp. 201–20; Sharon E. J. Gerstel and Alice-Mary Talbot, 'The culture of lay piety in medieval Byzantium 1054–1453', in Angold (ed.), *Eastern Christianity*, pp. 79–100.

⁵⁶ Defining religion: Alan Aldridge, *Religion in the Contemporary World: a Sociological Introduction* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 22–32.

⁵⁷ On definitions, see also F. Bowie, *The Anthropology of Religion, an Introduction* (Oxford, 2000, 2006), pp. 18–22, cf. N. Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred: an Anatomy of the World's Beliefs* (London, 1996).

prayer, and described, from an Orthodox viewpoint, the great councils as ‘simply [seeking] to preserve the integrity of such prayer and worship by ruling out misunderstanding’.⁵⁸ Religious behaviour, as opposed to doctrine, was also certainly important: some disputed issues in Byzantine religion, as in the hate literature directed against the Latins, were not about belief at all but about matters such as the use of unleavened or leavened bread, or the wearing or non-wearing of beards.⁵⁹

The nature of the available source material is a major problem. A case has been made recently for an Orthodox ‘mentality’ or *habitus* as the binding factor in the eighteenth-century Balkans.⁶⁰ Such a view is perhaps somewhat idealistic. But quite apart from the danger of projecting later conditions back into earlier periods, it is a methodological problem for historians that while Byzantine history is rich in written sources it does not in general have the more personal materials on which this kind of case could rest.

* * *

What Byzantium did have was a coercive and interventionist state. As part of its religious development Byzantium inherited from early Christianity an intense focus on doctrinal formulations (‘right belief’),

⁵⁸ Andrew Louth, *St John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (Oxford, 2002), p. 156. This book presents an original and sympathetic analysis of the theological writings of John of Damascus (eighth century) as a summing up and handing on of Orthodox tradition.

⁵⁹ For the themes in this anti-Latin literature see Tia M. Kolbaba, *The Byzantine Lists: Errors of the Latins* (Urbana, IL, 2000); ead., ‘Byzantine perceptions of Latin “religious errors”: themes and changes from 850 to 1350’, in Angeliki E. Laiou and R. P. Mottahadeh (eds.), *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World* (Washington, DC, 2001), pp. 117–43; ead., ‘The Orthodoxy of the Latins in the twelfth century’, in Louth and Casiday (eds.), *Byzantine Orthodoxies*, pp. 199–214.

⁶⁰ Paschalis M. Kitromilides, ‘“Balkan mentality”: history, legend, imagination’, *Nations and Nationalism*, 2 (1996), 163–91; id., ‘Orthodox culture and collective identity in the Ottoman Balkans during the eighteenth century’, in Kate Fleet (ed.), *The Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century, Oriente Moderno*, NS 18.1 (1999), 131–45.

⁶¹ See Peter Brown, ‘Christianization and religious conflict’, in Averil Cameron and Peter Garnsey (eds.), *The Late Empire, AD 337–425*, Cambridge Ancient History XIII (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 632–64, esp. pp. 647–50; Michael Gaddis, *There Is No Crime For Those Who Have Christ: Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire* (Berkeley, 2005); Michael Whitby, ‘Factions, bishops, violence and urban decline’, in Jens-Uwe Krause and Christian Witschel (eds.), *Die Stadt in der Spätantike—Niedergang oder Wandel?*, *Historia Einzelschrift*, 190 (Stuttgart, 2006), pp. 441–62; for the symbolic violence of the attempt to impose doctrinal orthodoxy see Averil Cameron, ‘The violence of orthodoxy’, in Iricinschi and Zellentin (eds.), *Heresy and Identity in Late Antiquity*, pp. 102–14.

which could at times even give rise to actual violence.⁶¹ The height of this violence, sometimes led by bishops or monks, was reached in the early Byzantine period, but it is a mistake to think that the matter was somehow settled, either with the ending of the iconoclast episode in the ninth century or at any other time. It may also have suited ecclesiastical commentators to claim to leave physical punishments to the state,⁶² but suffering imposed by the state in the name of religion sometimes reached considerable lengths. A quite enormous amount of effort also had to be put at all periods into ‘selling’ and enforcing the Orthodoxy of the day, and recent scholarship has revealed in dramatic relief just how far this might go at times of specially intense effort, as during the Monothelete and iconoclastic controversies of the seventh to ninth centuries.⁶³ Byzantine ‘Orthodoxy’ was in fact characterised, as I have suggested, not only by personal struggles between emperors, patriarchs and others, but also by a sustained propagandistic output of heresiological and apologetic writing, by the blatant manipulation or even forgery and falsification of texts (the ‘hard sell’), and by continual battles between individuals and party groups, for instance in local synods; the subject at stake was the very definition and control of what was to count as Orthodox. The ‘lists’ of names so characteristic of coercive systems were produced in plenty in Byzantium.⁶⁴ Tellingly, even if the conclusion to Runciman’s *The Byzantine Theocracy* stressed the apparently unchanging influence of the hopeful, even complacent, Christian political theory first enunciated by Eusebius of Caesarea in the fourth century, it is these struggles, and the instability which they represent, which are in fact the central subject of the book.

Against this evidence an attempt has been made recently by some historians to argue for actual toleration, both in late antiquity and Byzantium. But in fact the principle of coercion started early and was

⁶² So Theodore Balsamon in the late twelfth century: see Macrides, ‘Nomos and kanon’, 84; see also E. Patlagean, ‘Byzance et le blason pénal du corps’, in *Du châtement dans la cité: Supplices corporels et peine de mort dans le monde antique*, Table ronde organisé par l’École française de Rome avec le concours du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Rome, 9–11 novembre 1982 (Paris, 1984), pp. 405–26.

⁶³ For an introduction to the issues and an indication of the intensity of effort, see Maijastina Kahlos, *Debate and Dialogue: Christian and Pagan Cultures c.360–430* (Aldershot, 2007); Richard Lim, ‘Christian triumph and controversy’, in G. W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar (eds.), *Late Antiquity: a Guide to the Post-Classical World* (Cambridge, MA, 1999), pp. 196–217; Averil Cameron, ‘Texts as weapons. Polemic in the Byzantine dark ages’, in Alan K. Bowman and Greg Woolf (eds.), *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 198–215, at pp. 208–10; S. Wessel, ‘Literary forgery and the Monothelete controversy: some scrupulous uses of deception’, *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*, 42 (2001), 201–20.

⁶⁴ See Cameron, ‘How to read heresiology’; Adam Michnik, ‘The ultras of moral revolution’, *Daedalus* (winter, 2007), 67–83, at 69.

inherited without question by Byzantium. As I have argued elsewhere, various forms of direct and indirect enforcement were practised throughout the Byzantine period, including anathematisation, deposition, expunging of names from the records, burning of heretical books.⁶⁵ In legal terms, a pattern was set by the pagan Emperor Diocletian's legislation against the Manichaeans, and the same approach was already evident in the way that Constantine dealt with allegedly deviant Christians; it acquired the full weight of the law through the legislation of Theodosius I at the end of the fourth century and Justinian in the sixth, when not only paganism but also Christian heterodoxy became theoretically illegal.⁶⁶ This was taken to its limits by Justinian before the Second Council of Constantinople in 553, when dissenting bishops were summoned to Constantinople and harangued, with large-scale depositions following.⁶⁷ Like many other rulers in their attempts to deal with recalcitrant problems, Justinian alternated between persuasion and force, sometimes employing both simultaneously. But there were also passionate divisions at many other points in Byzantine history, not least for instance when after his carefully stage-managed return to Constantinople in 1261 Michael VIII Palaiologos was willing to contemplate union with Rome. A bitter divide had already arisen over Michael's blinding of the heir to the throne, John IV Laskaris, and the same patriarch who had crowned him excommunicated him and was himself deposed in turn.

As part of this process, Orthodoxy whenever or however defined was also put constantly on display; in the liturgy, in art, in official documents, in writing. It was constantly necessary to repeat, to demonstrate and to reinforce, simply because nothing could be taken for granted. A good example is the official and visible process for the reception back into the community of recanting heretics. We see this happening during the ebb and flow of the iconoclastic controversy and examples survive from

⁶⁵ Cameron, 'The enforcement of Orthodoxy in Byzantium'; for the burning of mathematical books by local bishops see also CJ I.4.10.

⁶⁶ For the precedent set by Diocletian's edict and the legal framework for imposing Christian Orthodoxy see Cameron, 'Enforcing Orthodoxy in Byzantium', pp. 2–3; cf. K. L. Noethlichs, *Die Gesetzgeberischen Massnahmen der christlicher Kaiser des vierten Jahrhunderts gegen Häretiker, Heiden und Juden* (Cologne, 1971); C. Humfress, 'Roman law, forensic argument and the formation of Christian orthodoxy (III–VI centuries)', in S. Elm, E. Rebillard, A. Romano (eds.), *Orthodoxie, christianisme, histoire* (Paris, 2000), pp. 125–47; ead., *Orthodoxy and the Courts*, pp. 243–68.

⁶⁷ For the background see now Celia Chazelle and Catherine Cubitt (eds.), *The Crisis of the Oikoumene. The Three Chapters and the Failed Quest for Unity in the Sixth-Century Mediterranean* (Turnhout, 2007).

widely differing periods in Byzantine history; it was always regarded as essential that this should be a public event, with the formal signing of documents; private repentance was not enough.⁶⁸ Not surprisingly, some, perhaps even many, were prepared to toe the line: as the religious kaleidoscope changed, bishops were required at times to recant formally, and our sources permit us to see some of their changing allegiances in the eighth and ninth centuries as the balance shifted from one side to the other during the iconoclast controversy.⁶⁹ When icons were restored there was a clean-out of existing personnel. Methodius was enthroned as patriarch while his iconoclast predecessor was still in place; he justified his authority by terming himself an apostle, and some two or three thousand on one estimate, or possibly even more, iconoclasts were removed and replacements quickly found and ordained.⁷⁰ Characteristically—and this should act as a caution—the historical sources for this crucial episode are, to quote Patricia Karlin-Hayter, not only ‘biased, cryptic and incoherent’, but also ‘evasive’: ‘where there is an awkward question they evade it’.⁷¹ Yet if the reality has been distorted in the telling, the intention was clear enough.

These efforts at control were it would seem less successful than might appear. Historians often say that the Byzantine state aspired to define and control Orthodoxy. But the ‘state’, the central platform of Byzantine specificity according to many historians,⁷² is not easy to define. At most periods of Byzantine history it might seem obvious that a complex bureaucracy administered law, taxation and governance, not to mention the army. However, even this impression may mislead. In a recent book Evelyne Patlagean argues for a strong ‘public’ realm even in late Byzantium, defining this as consisting of three elements: the imperial

⁶⁸ See e.g. P. Eleuteri and A. Rigo, *Eretici, dissidenti, musulmani e ebrei a Bisanzio: una raccolta eresologica del XII secolo* (Venice, 1993); abjuration formulae for Muslim converts: PG 140.124–36.

⁶⁹ Karlin-Hayter, ‘Methodios and his synod’, 56–8; nor were the monks of this period by any means as clearly opposed to the iconoclasts as was later claimed: see M.-F. Auzépy, ‘Les monastères’, in B. Geyer and J. Lefort (eds.), *La Bithynie au Moyen Âge, Réalités byzantines*, 9 (Paris, 2003), pp. 431–58, at pp. 436–9.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 63, 73.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁷² For discussion of ‘Byzantine specificity’ in relation to the economic history of Byzantium see Angeliki E. Laiou, ‘Methodological questions regarding the economic history of Byzantium’, *Recueil des travaux de l’Institut d’études byzantines*, 29 (2001/2), 9–22, at 16–17, 20; central role of the state: N. Oikonomides, ‘The role of the Byzantine state in the economy’, in Angeliki E. Laiou (ed.), *Economic History of Byzantium* (Washington, DC, 2002), 3. 973–1058.

power, the church and the *demosion* or fiscal apparatus.⁷³ But even if one accepts this general proposition, it seems to me that the argument (which admittedly has other objectives) works only if it passes over the constant and plentiful evidence of contest and struggle between emperors, would-be emperors and leading churchmen. ‘The imperial power’ and ‘the church’ are abstract concepts, whereas emperors and patriarchs in Byzantine history were all too human. Both emperors and patriarchs aimed at achieving control, but very often the effectiveness of this control was in fact extremely limited.

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It is probably correct to say that Byzantium was trying to be an autocracy. Certainly some former Soviet Byzantinists, including Alexander Kazhdan, have seen it in that light,⁷⁴ and the Byzantine legacy features repeatedly in the historiography of Russia as an explanation for the latter’s political conservatism and absolutism.⁷⁵ A mass of canon law in Byzantium aimed at regulating daily and personal life, and coexisted with imperial lawcodes, still based heavily on Roman imperial law. Here again, late antique historiography⁷⁶ can help the historian of Byzantium to see that repeated and elaborate laws do not in themselves prove that society actually ran according to their prescriptions. This mass of legislation required complex interpretation and commentary, and frequent excep-

⁷³ Patlagean, *Un Moyen Âge grec*.

⁷⁴ See Alexander Kazhdan and Giles Constable, *People and Power in Byzantium: an Introduction to Modern Byzantine Studies* (Washington, DC, 1982), p. 34: ‘the average Byzantine . . . felt alone and solitary in a dangerous world, naked before an incomprehensible, metaphysical authority’; Aaron Gurevich, ‘Why I am not a Byzantinist’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 46 (1992), 89–96, for example at 93: ‘The closer I studied Byzantine history, the more I came to suspect that I was studying something already familiar to me: that in another place and at another time, with different names and in a different language, this was the same history that had been endured and was still being endured in my own country’, and 95: ‘can one imagine a Magna Carta in Byzantium or in Rus? Is it conceivable that a Byzantine emperor or a Russian tsar could view himself, or might be viewed by others, as *primus inter pares*?’

⁷⁵ See e.g. Richard Pipes, *Russian Conservatism and its Critics: a Study in Political Culture* (New Haven, CT, 2005), with examples of Russian appeals to the Byzantine tradition, including Byzantine Orthodoxy, though with a limited understanding of the actual issues surrounding Byzantium.

⁷⁶ See e.g. Jill Harries and Ian Wood (eds.), *The Theodosian Code: Studies in the Imperial Law of Late Antiquity* (London, 1993); Jill Harries, *Law and Empire in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1999), esp. at pp. 77–98, ‘the efficacy of law’.

tions in the name of ‘economy’ or ‘flexibility’. In the provinces the interaction of religious and secular law was complex and personal issues equally so. The task of judges was difficult and, surprisingly perhaps, legal knowledge was not necessarily considered to be the only basis for a good judgement.⁷⁷ We are fortunate to have detailed material about actual cases from Constantinople and the provinces, and this gives an impression very far from that of a successful autocracy at work. In the Soviet system in Russia, so-called ‘informal’ mechanisms, local variety, flexibility, and ways round the system worked alongside state control,⁷⁸ and I would suggest that the same can be seen at many levels in Byzantium when ecclesiastical or legal rules clashed with other interests, as for instance over ordination at ages younger than the age prescribed. The Byzantine bureaucracy depended on a delicate balance of imperial control, personal interest and connections and payment for offices and titles,⁷⁹ and the working of ecclesiastical law and the ecclesiastical hierarchy is not likely to have been very different.

This complex interplay of interests is especially obvious in the dealings in matters of imperial marriage and family negotiations on the part of emperors of the eleventh century and later, who were themselves members of a family-based aristocracy and shared its objectives in wishing to evade and manipulate the legal restrictions on marriage on which they nevertheless publicly insisted.⁸⁰ It would be simplistic to interpret the imperial and ecclesiastical legislation which sought to prohibit marriage to the sixth or even seventh degree of relationship either as totally effective or merely as a product of Orthodoxy. Indeed, as has been pointed out, this issue became one of the main fields in which the famous

⁷⁷ See Leonora Neville, *Authority in Byzantine Provincial Society, 950–1100* (Cambridge, 2004); Cameron, *The Byzantines*, pp. 92–4; I. Ševčenko, ‘Was there totalitarianism in Byzantium? Constantinople’s control over its Asiatic hinterland in the early ninth century’, in Cyril Mango and Gilbert Dagron (eds.), *Constantinople and its Hinterland* (Aldershot, 1995), pp. 91–105.

⁷⁸ See for this debate in relation to the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia, e.g. Alena V. Ledeneva, *How Russia Really Works: the Informal Practices That Shaped Post-Soviet Politics and Business* (Ithaca, NY, 2006).

⁷⁹ See for instance N. Oikonomides, ‘The role of the Byzantine state in the economy’, in Angeliki Laiou (ed.), 2002, *The Economic History of Byzantium*, 3 (Washington, DC, 2002), pp. 973–1058.

⁸⁰ The restrictions on marriage culminated with the *Tomos* of Sisinnios (AD 997); see Angeliki E. Laiou, *Mariage, amour et parenté à Byzance aux XI^e–XIII^e siècles*, Travaux et Mémoires du Centre de recherche d’histoire et civilisation de Byzance. Monographies, 7 (Paris, 1992); Patlagean, *Un Moyen Âge grec*, pp. 84–92; for the complexities and ambiguities surrounding such prohibitions in the fourth century AD, and for the difficulties and the opportunities for control involved in their application (which affected the west as well as the east) see J. Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 83–156.

Byzantine ‘economy’ had to be invoked.⁸¹ Another example of the complex and shifting interplay between the religious and the secular is provided by the intermingling within individual families in the same period of holders of secular official posts and ecclesiastics; the same family often produced both, and the membership of synods of the twelfth century was drawn from the imperial family and secular officials as well as ecclesiastics. Magdalino, who is in this also followed by Angold, refers to this composite secular and ecclesiastical class as ‘the Guardians of Orthodoxy’.⁸² Taking up the same idea, Angold qualifies the term by saying that Orthodoxy here must be understood in the ‘political’, as opposed to ‘ritual’ sense, according to the dual formula proposed by Hans-Georg Beck in 1978.⁸³ But this is not very helpful in that it still rests on a basically secularist or reductionist view of Byzantine Orthodoxy as politically driven or state-controlled. It fails to do justice to the reality of Byzantine Orthodoxy as a shifting and complex mass of competing drives, motivations and interests. In the same contribution Angold admits that this hoped-for alliance did not in fact deliver social cohesion in the crucial period before the Fourth Crusade, not least because there was no clear succession procedure for emperors and because the vital relation between emperor and patriarch depended heavily on these family relationships and the individuals concerned.⁸⁴ The only possibility for regime change in such circumstances, as he points out, was to resort to a coup, when the very parties who were supposed to present a united front (and in so doing to ensure the smooth functioning of the system) might be on opposite sides.

A case can be made on many other fronts for the actual lack of a settled Orthodox framework in Byzantium, not least in the case of Byzantine monasteries and monasticism, so much a feature of Byzantine life and society, yet so individual and differentiated in character and practice. In fact monks and ascetics were often sources of tension and in some

⁸¹ See Dagron, ‘Le temps des changements (fin Xe–milieu XI^e siècle)’, in Dagron *et al.* (eds.), *Evêques, moines et empereurs*, pp. 297–337, at pp. 310–15.

⁸² Paul Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–1180* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 316–412, cf. *id.*, *L’Orthodoxie des astrologues*, p. 12; Dagron, ‘Le temps des changements’, p. 317 on the idea of the ‘religion des philosophes’, a term taken from J. Gouillard, ‘La religion des philosophes’, *Travaux et Mémoires*, 6 (1976), pp. 305–24; Michael Angold, ‘Byzantine politics vis-à-vis the Fourth Crusade’, in Laiou (ed.), *Urbs Capta*, pp. 55–68, at p. 56.

⁸³ Hans-Georg Beck, *Das byzantinische Jahrtausend* (Munich, 1978), pp. 87–108.

⁸⁴ Angold, ‘Byzantine politics’, especially pp. 57–67, cf. p. 57 ‘imperial authority was brittle and vulnerable’; see also Magdalino, *L’Orthodoxie des astrologues*, p. 70.

periods attracted sharp criticism.⁸⁵ We have seen that monks were as likely to follow changing religious trends as others. Byzantine monasteries fulfilled a variety of important functions, but many of them had little to do with ‘religion’ as such.

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Finally, as has been increasingly emphasised in recent scholarship, just as it was not uniformly Greek, Byzantium was very far from being uniformly Orthodox. As a friend and colleague once remarked, the Byzantine empire was ‘like a concertina’—its boundaries (insofar as they existed) went in and out all the time.⁸⁶ Even within those boundaries, populations were moved about, sometimes on religious grounds;⁸⁷ some of this would certainly fall within the much-studied modern phenomenon of forced migration. Slaves and prisoners were also a substantial element in the population at different times.⁸⁸ Byzantium was certainly diverse, even

⁸⁵ See Michael Angold, ‘Monastic satire and the Evergetine monastic tradition in the twelfth century’, in Margaret Mullett and Anthony Kirby (eds.), *The Theotokos Evergetis and Eleventh-Century Monasticism* (Belfast, 1994), pp. 86–102.

⁸⁶ Frontiers and boundaries are not concepts that can be readily applied to the Byzantine empire, whose inhabitants in any case claimed universal rule: G. Dagron, ‘Byzance et la frontière: idéologie et réalité’, in O. Merisalo (ed.), with the collaboration of P. Pahta, *Frontiers: Proceedings of the Third European Congress of Medieval Studies (Jyväskylä, 10–14 June, 2003)* (Louvain-la Neuve, 2006), pp. 303–18; J. Shepard, ‘Emperors and expansionism: from Rome to Middle Byzantium’, in David Abulafia and Nora Berend (eds.), *Medieval Frontiers: Concepts and Practices* (Aldershot, 2002), pp. 55–82.

⁸⁷ C. Morrisson, ‘Peuplement, économie et société de l’Orient byzantin’, in C. Morrisson (ed.), *Le monde byzantin I: L’Empire romain d’Orient (330–641)* (Paris, 2004), pp. 193–220, at pp. 198–9; the spread of languages: B. Flusin, ‘La culture écrite’, *ibid.*, pp. 255–76, at pp. 259–60; G. Dagron, ‘Formes et fonctions du pluralisme linguistique à Byzance (IX^e–XII^e siècle)’, *Travaux et Mémoires*, 12 (1994), 219–40; minorities, including Jews: G. Dagron, ‘L’Église et l’État (milieu IX^e–fin X^e siècle)’, in Dagron *et al.* (eds.), *Evêques, moines et empereurs*, pp. 167–240, at pp. 226–34, with Dagron, ‘Le temps des changements’, *ibid.*, pp. 333–7; P. Charanis, ‘Ethnic changes in the Byzantine empire in the 7th century’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 13 (1959), 25–44; G. Dagron, ‘Minorités ethniques et religieuses dans l’orient byzantin à la fin du X^e et au XI^e siècle: l’immigration syrienne’, *Travaux et Mémoires*, 6 (1972), 177–216; V. Tapkova-Zaïmova, ‘Migrations frontalières en Bulgarie médiévale’, in M. Balard and A. Ducellier (eds.), *Migrations et Diasporas Méditerranéennes (X^e–XVI^e siècles)* (Paris, 2002), pp. 125–31; H. Ahrweiler and Angeliki E. Laiou (eds.), *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire* (Washington, DC, 1998).

⁸⁸ Michael McCormick, *The Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce AD 300–900* (Cambridge, 2001), esp. pp. 733–77 (particularly pp. 744–5, 760, 773); *id.*, ‘The imperial edge. Italo-Byzantine identity, movement and integration, AD 650–950’, in Ahrweiler and Laiou (eds.), *Studies in the Internal Diaspora*, pp. 17–52, at pp. 34–36; Stephen W. Reinert,

if not exactly multicultural. The patriarch Nicholas Mystikos mentioned earlier wrote to the Caliph al-Muqtadir in AD 922, addressing him as the ruler of the Saracens ‘chosen by God’, and reassuring him that Muslims in Constantinople had been free to repair the mosque in the city and that there had been no attempts at enforced conversion; it had always been the policy of Roman emperors, he says, to treat prisoners well and especially to guarantee their religious freedom.⁸⁹ Again surely a disingenuous argument, but one that shows that there was a Muslim presence, like the Jewish one, in Constantinople itself.⁹⁰ Byzantine interests in the Balkans meant dealing with Slav populations not yet Christianised, and when the Byzantines recovered Bulgaria in the early eleventh century their new ecclesiastical organisation was faced with the task of integrating Greek and Slav elements. When Byzantine fortunes improved in Anatolia in the tenth century both Muslim and heterodox populations were brought within the empire’s sphere.⁹¹ Non-Chalcedonian Armenians were to be found all over the empire and in the army.⁹² The use of foreign mercenaries in the armies was another source of diversity. Equally, many Byzantine Christians found themselves living under Arab or Turkish rule, and this posed difficult problems for the canonists.⁹³ The continued production of anti-heresy manuals, disputations designed to show the superiority of orthodoxy over Jews and Muslims, and anti-Latin texts demonstrates that Orthodoxy still had to be renewed and defended, if anything even more vigorously.⁹⁴ Many Latins were living in Byzantine territory both before and, of course, after 1204, when its population and religious composition

‘The Muslim presence in Constantinople, 9th–15th centuries: some preliminary observations’, *ibid.*, pp. 125–50, at pp. 126–30.

⁸⁹ Nicholas Mystikos, *Ep.* 102, ed. Jenkins and Westerink, pp. 373–83.

⁹⁰ The mosque was later closed, then restored, and a second one built: Reinert, *art. cit.*, 138–43; after destruction by the Crusaders in 1204, a further mosque was built after 1261: A.-M. Talbot, ‘The restoration of Constantinople under Michael VIII’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 47 (1993), 252–3.

⁹¹ M. Tahar Mansouri, ‘Déplacement forcé et déportation de populations sur les frontières orientales entre Byzance et l’Islam (VII^e–X^e siècles)’, in Balard and Ducellier (eds.), *Migrations et Diasporas*, pp. 107–14.

⁹² See G. Dédéyan, ‘Reconquête territoriale et immigration arménienne dans l’aire cilicienne sous les empereurs macédoniens (de 867 à 1028)’, *ibid.*, pp. 11–32; S. Peter Cowe, ‘The Armenians in the era of the Crusades 1050–1350’, in Angold (ed.), *Eastern Christianities*, pp. 404–29; for Byzantine attempts to suppress the Armenian church structure in the eleventh century, see 406–7; also N. Garsoian, ‘The problem of Armenian integration in to the Byzantine empire’, in Ahrweiler and Laiou (eds.), *Studies on the Internal Diaspora*, pp. 53–124.

⁹³ See Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, p. 257.

⁹⁴ See Cameron, ‘Enforcing Orthodoxy in Byzantium’, at p. 16.

became much more mixed and more complex;⁹⁵ as a result simple definitions of Byzantine identity become less and less adequate, as has become sharply evident in the methodological dilemmas facing the Prosopography of the Byzantine World project⁹⁶ as it moves into the post-1204 period.

Under the severe external and internal pressures experienced in late Byzantium the divisions within Byzantine Orthodoxy became even sharper.⁹⁷ As their numbers and their lands contracted, and their populations became more diverse, the Byzantines had to contend with missions from the Catholic west and with a growing awareness of Latin writers including Augustine and Aquinas. Fierce arguments as to the rival merits of Plato and Aristotle formed a backdrop to periods of civil war and vassalage to the Ottomans. In the fourteenth century Byzantium was deeply split over hesychasm, finally declared official and its opponents excommunicated after a series of church councils in 1351. The victorious hesychasts then wrote the story for posterity just as the iconophiles had done in the ninth century.⁹⁸ Soon after, the higher echelons at least were split again over Union with Rome, and John VIII and an entourage of hundreds, including Gemistos Plethon, whose lectures in Florence made a great stir, George Scholarios and the future Cardinal Bessarion, spent many months in Italy at the Council of Ferrara/Florence in 1438–9. Among the Orthodox delegation the fall-out after the Council was considerable: Scholarios and Mark Eugenikos became passionate anti-unionists, while Plethon's last work, the *Book of the Laws*, was to be burned by Scholarios after the latter had been appointed patriarch by Mehmet II; Bessarion left Orthodoxy for the Roman church, and Isidore of Kiev followed the same route.⁹⁹

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⁹⁵ J.-C. Cheynet, 'L'implantation des Latins en Asie Mineure avant la Première Croisade', in Balard and Ducellier (eds.), *Migrations et Diasporas*, pp. 115–24; after 1204, see the discussion by David Jacoby, 'The economy of Latin Constantinople, 1204–61', in Laiou (ed.), *Urbs Capta*, pp. 195–214.

⁹⁶ <<http://www.pbw.kcl.ac.uk>>.

⁹⁷ Magdalino, *L'Orthodoxie des astrologues*, p. 140.

⁹⁸ So Dirk Krausmueller, 'The rise of hesychasm', in Angold (ed.), *Eastern Christianity*, pp. 101–26, at p. 102.

⁹⁹ Michael Angold, 'Byzantium and the west, 1204–1453', in Angold (ed.), *Eastern Christianity*, pp. 53–78, at pp. 73–8.

The ideal of Orthodoxy as a comprehensive doctrine undeniably provided Byzantium as a society with an abiding ideology which contributed to its longevity. Yet no society—let alone a whole civilisation—can be reduced to its religion. Nor should the self-interested assertions of contemporaries be allowed to mislead. I have argued that there are distinct dangers for the historian in the tempting and familiar strategy of approaching Byzantium through its Orthodoxy. For the Byzantines, the idea of ‘Orthodoxy’ was a highly useful watchword and rallying point, but it was also a field of contestation. Nor is it the only framework through which Byzantine society can be understood.

I would argue in conclusion for the need to normalise Byzantium, to remove it, in historiographical terms, from its habitual exceptionalism. At the same time, given our contemporary concerns about pluralism and religious systems, about religion and democracy, and about political theory, it seems exactly the right moment to return to the subject of the political theory and religion of Byzantium.