

Greek Orthodox Perceptions of Communication Technology: Past and Present

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Abstract: Over the last two decades, the engagement of various Orthodox Christian groups with digital communication technology increased significantly in Greece. The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic not only reinforced the existing trend of using technology to support religious activities and outreach, but also brought to light previous pastoral and ecclesial concerns about worship and the dissemination of the Gospel message. The present paper explores the attitude of various Greek Orthodox circles towards digital communication expressed in representative periodicals and websites, before and during the pandemic. To understand this attitude, it provides an overview of how these groups have perceived communication technology since the 1950s, especially the use of radio and television for liturgical purposes. This paper shows that certain pastoral and ecclesial concerns regarding worship, the dissemination of the Gospel message, and the nature of the church have persisted over time, conditioning the attitude of some Greek Orthodox Christians towards contemporary digital media.

Keywords: communication technology; digital communication; Greek Orthodox Christian circles; radio; television

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During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Greek government took measures to control the spread of the virus. On 23 March 2020, they announced a nationwide lockdown, which lasted until 4 May 2020 (then repeated in November for three weeks). During the lockdown, the performance of any religious activities and rites in places of worship was temporarily prohibited. All religious institutions had to suspend their regular activities and gatherings to comply with health and safety measures. To support the government's efforts to contain the pandemic, the Orthodox Church of Greece¹ adhered to these restrictions and ceased conducting divine services.

The restrictions imposed by the Coronavirus pandemic impacted religious practices. The use of online platforms for conveying religious content soared, and social networks became instrumental in broadcasting divine services. For instance, the Cathedral in Athens utilised YouTube and several parishes used Facebook to livestream their services. This shift to online broadcasting allowed believers to experience church life in a different way, though online activity was not entirely novel. The interest in utilising modern technology within the Church of Greece had seen significant growth and development, particularly over the last two decades. This period had witnessed a sustained effort, especially by the younger metropolitans and priests who were more technologically savvy, to utilise digital platforms to connect with their congregations. Various religious entities, such as parishes, monasteries, ecclesiastical organisations, religious educational institutions, religious bookstores, periodicals, and newspapers had promptly acknowledged the importance of digital media in engaging a wider audience.²

1 Orthodox Christianity has historically been the dominant religion in Greece. The Greek Constitution recognises it as the "prevailing religion" of the country. The Church of Greece is autocephalous (self-ruled). The primate of the Church of Greece is the Archbishop of Athens and All Greece. On another note, unless otherwise stated, all translations from Greek are my own.

2 For example, the International Association of Digital Media and Orthodox Pastoral Care (<https://dmopc.org/>) organised two international conferences on Digital Media and Orthodox Pastoral Care. These were held in Athens (2015) and in Kolymbari, Hania (2018) under the auspices of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. The conferences addressed the challenges posed by the internet and explored both the benefits and the dangers of using digital media in the

The pandemic accelerated the integration of digital media as a means of communication by a range of Greek Orthodox organisations, reinforcing the existing trend of utilising technology to support religious activities and outreach. At the same time, it brought to light older pastoral and ecclesiological concerns in regard to the use of communication technology for the purposes of worship and dissemination of the Gospel message, but with a significant difference. Thus, during the pandemic, the concerns about whether digital broadcasting of the Divine Liturgy could adequately replace the experience of attending the service in person became more immediate. The main focus for concern was the suspension of the service of Holy Communion, central to the Orthodox ethos, which was an unprecedented situation.

In the following, I consider the way various Greek Orthodox circles³ perceive communication technology and its relationship with

mission of the Orthodox Church.

- 3 By “Greek Orthodox circles” I mean entities such as the official Church of Greece, with its hierarchy, clergy, monastics, academic theologians, and laity, as well as members of “para-” or “extra-ecclesiastical” organisations. The latter emerged in Greece in the late nineteenth century, being at their peak from the 1940s to the 1960s. These organisations resemble the pietistic movements of the Protestant tradition. For them, the Bible has an objective, absolute authority; what matters above all are individual faith and moral purity. Their publications focus on apologetics, promoting the cultural value of religion. Overall, they cultivate a simplistic and popularising version of Orthodox Christian theology. These organisations maintain close association with likeminded clergy, and sometimes direct communication with the officialdom of the Orthodox Church of Greece. For the para-ecclesiastical organisations in Greece, see Apostolos Alexandridis, “Ένα φαινόμενο της νεοελληνικής θρησκευτικής ζωής: Οι χριστιανικές οργανώσεις” (A phenomenon of Neo-Hellenic religious life: Christian organisations), *Synoro* 39 (September–November 1966): 163–246; Vasileios Gioultzis, “Κοινωνιολογική θεώρησης των θρησκευτικών αδελφοτήτων” (A social view of religious brotherhoods), in *Θέματα Κοινωνιολογίας της Ορθοδοξίας* (Issues in Orthodox sociology), ed. George Mantzaridis (Thessaloniki: Pournaras, 1975), 169–203; Alexander Gousidis, *Οι χριστιανικές οργανώσεις—Η περίπτωση της Αδελφότητας Θεολόγων ‘Η Ζωή’: Κοινωνιολογική προσέγγιση* (Christian organisations—the case of the “Zōē” Brotherhood of theologians: A sociological approach) (Thessaloniki: Pournaras, 1993); Polykarpos Karamouzis, “Κράτος, Εκκλησία και Εθνική ιδεολογία στην νεώτερη Ελλάδα: Κλήρος, Θεολόγοι και θρησκευτικές οργανώσεις στο μεσοπόλεμο” (State, church, and national ideology in modern Greece: Clergy, theologians, and religious organisations between the [world] wars), PhD diss. (Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, 2004), 301–350; Christos Yannaras, *Orthodoxy and the West*, trans. Peter Chamberas and Norman Russell (Brookline, MA: Holly Cross Orthodox Press,

the Orthodox ethos. To that end, I examine the stances of a range of organisations, made public in representative Greek Orthodox periodicals and websites. To gain a comprehensive understanding of their attitude towards communication technology, I explore the evolution of their perception of technology since the 1950s, focusing on responses to previous advances in communication technology, such as radio and television, and their use for liturgical purposes. By examining these antecedents in recent history, I hope to uncover valuable insights into how certain pastoral and ecclesial concerns over worship, the dissemination of the Gospel message, and the nature of the church shaped the perception of communication technology as an expression of modernity's impact upon Christian life *within* these organisations.

As we shall discover soon, evidence shows that, for some entities, the current negative stance on communication technology does not differ from previous attitudes to using radio and television for liturgical purposes. In particular, the brotherhoods of both clergy and laypeople tend to emphasise, as in the past, a pietistic and moral viewpoint when it comes to the Orthodox assessment of communication technology. Usually, these groups consider communication technology as of one piece with Western secularism and dismiss its usefulness. No wonder many voices from within these groups urge the official church leadership and the clergy to use communication media in moderation even for the purposes of promoting the Christian faith, and to educate the congregations in working towards a safe integration of communication technology in their religious activities. Very often, these groups highlight the harmful social and psychological consequences of internet use. They also contest the appropriateness of broadcasting the liturgy, their concerns revolving around the apophatic dimension of worship.

They have not, however, produced in-depth analyses of the impact of digitisation upon Orthodox worship. Even when their own use of communication technology intensified due to the pandemic, their

2006), 217–250; Amaryllis Logotheti, “The Brotherhood of Theologians Zoe and Its Influence on Twentieth-Century Greece,” in *Orthodox Christian Renewal Movements in Eastern Europe*, ed. Aleksandra Djurić Milovanović and Radmila Radić (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan and Springer Nature, 2017), 285–302.

primary motivation was to inform the congregations in simple language and to emphasise what aligns with Orthodox dogma. Notably, during the temporary suspension of the Eucharist for health and safety reasons, these groups did not focus on the use of communication technology for liturgical purposes, instead discussing the proper practice of Holy Communion and raising significant questions about the impact of pandemic-related restrictions on the Orthodox ethos. In what follows, I detail and substantiate my above claims. I begin by mapping the spread of perceptions regarding the online space and its use for liturgical and pastoral purposes during the pandemic.

Religion Online, Online Religion, and the Orthodox Liturgical Life

As mentioned earlier, the engagement with digital media has undergone significant development in Greek Orthodoxy over the last two decades. Although this progress demonstrates willingness to embrace and adapt to the new online environment, it is uncertain whether, or to what degree, this adaptation has affected the perception of the groups involved when it comes to communication technology and its relation to Orthodox Christianity.

According to Christopher Helland's distinction, there are two aspects about religion in the online realm: "religion online" and "online religion."⁴ The former refers to the circulation of religious information—such as theological articles and programs of activity—through

4 See Christopher Helland, "Online-Religion/Religion-Online and Virtual Communities," in *Religion on the Internet: Research Prospects and Promises*, ed. Jeffrey K. Hadden and Douglas E. Cowan, Religion and the Social Order 8 (Amsterdam, London, and New York: JAI Press, 2000), 205–224; Christopher Helland, "Online Religion as Lived Religion: Methodological Issues in the Study of Religious Participation on the Internet," *Online - Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 1:1 (2005): 1–16, DOI: 10.11588/heidok.00005823. For the relationship of religion and digital media, see Jay Kinney, "Net Worth? Religion, Cyberspace, and the Future," *Futures* 27:7 (1995): 763–776, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-3287\(95\)80007-V](https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-3287(95)80007-V); Simone Heidbrink, "Exploring the Religious Frameworks of the Digital Realm: Offline–Online–Offline Transfers of Ritual Performance," *Masaryk University Journal of Law and Technology* 1:2 (2007): 175–184.

websites and social media platforms, with the main goal of communicating with the relevant audiences. In the case of the website of the Church of Greece, it displays, for example, the church's hierarchical structure and institutional roles.⁵ This type of religious communication does not affect in-person participation in religious activities; instead, it complements existing religious practices like ceremonies and sermons offered in physical places of worship.

Within this context, websites and social media platforms are usually perceived by Greek Orthodox circles as valuable tools for pastoral care and information dissemination, as well as a new form of catechism that is better suited to engage with young people.⁶ In addition, the use of the new media is credited with raising the religious literacy of believers and their acquaintance with the Orthodox heritage.⁷ This approach aligns with the mission of the Communication and Educational Service of the Church of Greece, established in 1999 by the Holy Synod. This service is dedicated to advancing the Orthodox ecclesial tradition and Greek national identity, while also embracing the practice of contemporary pastoral care through a diverse range of communication channels.⁸ Digital media and the internet as mass pastoral tools for the dissemination of the Gospel message are said to follow the example of Apostle Paul who, according to Sotirios Despotis, did not hesitate to employ the communication means of his time, such as

5 See <https://www.ecclesia.gr/English/EnIndex.html> (accessed 15 September 2023).

6 Eva Halabi (Nun Sarah), “Η χρήση του διαδικτύου στην ποιμαντική πράξη της Εκκλησίας” (The use of the internet in the pastoral practice of the Church), PhD diss. (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2012), 64–66; Anastasios G. Maras, “Η θεολογία της πληροφορικής και του διαδικτύου” (Theology of informatics and the internet), in *Επιστημονική Επιθεώρηση του Μεταπτυχιακού Προγράμματος “Σπουδές στην Ορθόδοξη Θεολογία”* (Scientific review of the postgraduate programme “Studies in Orthodox Theology”), vol. 6 (Patra: EAP, 2015), 359–379.

7 Elena Apostolidou, “Η χρήση των social media από την εκκλησία στην εποχή του Covid-19” (The church's use of social media in the age of Covid-19), *Makedonia* (15 April, 2021), available at <https://www.makthes.gr/h-khrisi-ton-social-media-apo-tin-ekklisia-stin-epokhi-toy-covid-19-377283> (accessed 1 October 2023).

8 <https://www.e-nomothesia.gr/kat-ekklisia-thriskeia/kanonismo-ieras-sunodou/kanonismos-ieras-sunodou-ekklisias-114-1999.html> (accessed 22 November 2023).

epistles, to be in contact with various Christian communities.⁹ As Stavros Yangazoglou notices, the church always “adapted her course within history according to the local cultural conditions so that her living tradition can contribute to culture.”¹⁰

The usefulness of digital communication tools for pastoral needs became increasingly apparent during the Covid pandemic, as highlighted by Gabriel, Metropolitan of Nea Ionias, Philadelphia, Heraklion, and Chalcedon:

[The internet] serves as a powerful “weapon” at our disposal, which can be wielded either positively for our benefit or negatively, leading to problems. Throughout my life, I have consistently prioritised the former, a choice I believe should be embraced by every individual and institution. Since my initial call to minister to the Metropolis, I have sought to enhance communication with people. This interaction naturally occurs on a personal level through the church, divine liturgies, services, worship activities, and general contact with individuals of all ages. Additionally, whenever possible, I leverage new technologies such as social media. I view social media as a direct and genuine mode of communication, particularly given its potential to counteract any spreading of fake news related to Orthodox Christian life, a challenge that the pandemic has notably underscored. Consequently, in our local church, especially during this pandemic, I felt it imperative to place greater emphasis on utilising social media. Through our website and Facebook, we have initiated activities with the sole purpose of supporting people, ensuring they feel the embrace and care of the church and remain resilient.¹¹

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- 9 Sotirios Despotis, “Παύλος και ηθική του Διαδικτύου στον παγκοσμιοποιημένο κόσμο του 1ου μ.Χ. αι. και το μετανεωτερικό 21 αι. μ.Χ.” (Paul and internet ethics in the globalised world of the 1st century AD and the postmodern 21st century AD), 2nd International Conference on Digital Media and Orthodox Pastoralism, Orthodox Academy of Crete, 18–21 June 2018. See <https://www.pemptousia.gr/video/pavlos-ke-ithiki-tou-diadiktiou-ston-pagkosmiopiimeno-kosmo-tou-lou-m-ch-e-ke-to-metaneoteriko-21-e-m-ch/> (accessed 1 November 2023).
- 10 Stavros Yangazoglou, *Το μετώπιμο της θεολογίας: Δοκίμια για τον διάλογο θεολογίας και πολιτισμού* (The edge of theology: Essays on the dialogue between theology and culture) (Athens: Domos, 2018), 491.
- 11 See Apostolidou, “Η χρήση των social media.” See further the website of the Metropolis: <https://www.nif.gr>.

The positive appraisal of communication technology does not stop here. The internet and social media shared something of the vibrant nature of the Orthodox liturgical life when churches remained closed because of the pandemic. As Christos Tsironis explains:

The implementation of new technologies by the Orthodox Church serves two primary functions. First, these technologies serve as a bridge to lived experiences. Believers use them to maintain a connection to ritual activities which they may be unable to participate in physically, for the time being. This enables them to invest their emotional and social needs visually, preserving a sense of normality in their lives. Second, the adoption of new media holds the quality of “symbolic performativity” (συμβολική επιτελεστικότητα)¹² within a world dominated by images and data. Orthodox liturgical life is open and expressed in public space. The use of the internet and social media maintains this character even when churches remain closed due to a pandemic.¹³

In the same vein, according to the website of the International Association of Digital Media and Orthodox Pastoral Care, the digital world presents opportunities for reiterating the Pentecost experience. At Pentecost, the Christian faith was communicated via a plethora of languages called to celebrate the unity of Christians in the Holy Spirit. This experience is taken to provide the Orthodox Church with a pattern for communicating with users globally, and for discussing matters of faith with them.¹⁴

This optimistic attitude runs alongside the hesitancy of others. There are members of the hierarchy who stress the harmful psychological and social effects of the internet, which outmatch those of television:

12 By “symbolic performativity” (συμβολική επιτελεστικότητα), Tsironis refers to the ability of the new media (communication technologies) to contribute to enacting liturgical life and communication with the congregation.

13 See Apostolidou, “Η χρήση των social media.”

14 See https://dmopc.org/?page_id=700 (accessed 20 April 2023).

The use of television, the “ancient” ancestor of the internet, has already led us, after so many decades, to the conclusion that it has alienated people from traditional, genuine communication of persons with each other ... The new reality of the internet is a continuation of the “reality” created by television, unfortunately having the same or worse effects on various social structures...¹⁵

No wonder warnings such as the following, by Simeon Venetsianos (Archimandrite, Director of the Youth Foundation of the Holy Archdiocese of Athens):

... our church advocates a path of discerning use. This involves avoiding the extremes of outright rejection and the tendency to demonise aspects of the digital landscape, on the one hand, and unrestrained enthusiastic acceptance, on the other hand. Instead, our approach underscores the importance of acknowledging the inherent dangers and temptations associated with excessive attachment to matters temporal and perishable.¹⁶

This stance is balanced, but a note of caution remains at the end of the passage. In fact, many voices have recently levelled criticisms at the internet and digital media as an unsafe space where reductionist views of Orthodox life and distorted representations of ecclesiastical rites are left unchecked. Digital platforms of unknown origin allegedly distract the believers from the true nature of church life, which revolves around the sacraments, prayer, and the practice of fellowship, while drawing attention to sensationalist thinking, miracles of saints, and opinions of elders. This undermines the personal pursuit of fellowship with God

15 Chrysostomos Nasis (Archdeacon of the Holy Metropolis of Trikki and Stagi), “Μια εκκλησιολογική προσέγγιση του Διαδικτύου” (An ecclesiological approach to the internet). See <https://www.romfea.gr/katigories/10-apopseis/273-mia-ekklesiologiki-proseggisi-tou-diadiktuou>, accessed 20 September 2023).

16 Simeon Venetsianos (Archimandrite), “Το Διαδίκτυο στην υπηρετική υπιστολή της Εκκλησίας: Από τον ζήλο της ιεραποστολής μέχρι και την ευθύνη της ισορροπίας” (The internet in the church’s ministerial service: From missionary zeal to responsibility and balance). Available at <https://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/press/venetsianos.htm> (accessed 10 September 2023).

and people, it is further alleged. Critics also point out that this kind of outreach encourages self-promotion and fosters insensitivity to real issues, including suffering, while the users seek exciting information or indulge, for example, in speculations about dubious prophecies. For various reasons, not exclusively related to the above situation, concerns have been raised about the suitability of digital media for communication with believers. Rather, preference should be given to direct, personal communication. An encyclical of the Church of Greece (2015), issued an order to clarify the limits of using digital media by Orthodox Christian clergy and congregations, stating the following:

The attempt of online pastoral practice on the part of pastors, however well-meant, cannot replace the living, experiential relationship of the faithful with each other and with the pastor within the context of the parish as an active cell of ecclesial life.¹⁷

In the same vein, two Orthodox clergymen authored an article where they assert that the use of communication technology erodes the principle of mutual trust and “face-to-face” communication between the priest and the congregation, and that, moreover, it allows a bishop to exceed his ecclesiastical boundaries, influencing matters beyond his local jurisdiction in terms of teaching or conducting services.¹⁸

The resistance becomes more substantial when it comes to adopting what Helland refers to as “online religion.” This is evident in the design of diocesan websites,¹⁹ which lack open and interactive areas that would allow users to engage in religious rituals and activ-

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- 17 Orthodox Church of Greece, “Λειτουργία ιστοσελίδων εκ μέρους εκκλησιαστικῶν φορέων καί εκ μέρους κληρικῶν καί μοναχῶν” (The function of websites belonging to ecclesiastical institutions, clergy, and monks), available at https://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/egyklloi.asp?id=1946&what_sub=egyklloi (accessed 13 October 2023).
- 18 Vasileios Kalliakmanis and Chrysostomos-Grigorios Tympas, “Orthodox Worship and Indoctrination in Digital Media: Ecclesiological Principles and Modern Reality,” *Theologia* 90:3 (2019): 77–99.
- 19 For example, see the following diocesan websites: <https://www.imchalkidos.gr/Site/wSite/Site.asp?Lang=1>; <https://imd.gr/>; <https://imverias.gr/>; <http://i-matron.gr/>; <https://www.imml.gr/#>.

ities freely. Even during the restrictive health measures imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, when the clergy and the congregations were left yearning for the church as a eucharistic community, the Church of Greece opted to confine religious practice only to online, non-interactive broadcasting of divine services and sermons. Online broadcasting, as an extension of the existing radio and television broadcasts of the Divine Liturgy, was considered a legitimate form of ecclesial “economy” (dispensation), meant to meet a unique and unprecedented challenge. This was in line with the aforementioned encyclical:

... under no circumstances should the operation of such websites give a false impression, even to those who visit them with sincere interest, that visiting such websites is a substitute for participation in liturgical life or that it is a kind of manifestation of faith. In the past, it has been observed that websites ... have been imitating piety, but verged on the ridiculous (e.g., online candle lighting on a website).²⁰

The comment quoted just above highlights the reasons the Church of Greece has never ventured into the realm of “online religion.” It has never explored practices such as virtual lighting of candles, virtual confession, or virtual Eucharist, primarily due to the belief that the level of interactivity required for virtual religious activities is inconsistent with the framework of the Orthodox tradition. It has been argued that if the Orthodox Church becomes captive to the conveniences of digital technology, it may risk diluting the essence of its identity, its Eucharistic and ascetic ethos. As we read elsewhere,

The digital age, characterised by a tendency towards dematerialisation, depersonalisation, and the devaluation of physical meditation and presence, represents a striking contrast to the incarnation of the Son and Word of God. The Orthodox Church and its understanding of human nature face a new widespread reality—

20 Orthodox Church of Greece, *Λειτουργία ιστοσελίδων*.

digital religiosity—that appears to be moving in a direction that opposes the traditional values.²¹

Orthodox Christians perceive the sacrament of the Eucharist as the space where the gathered community unites with Christ through the Holy Spirit, being transformed into the Body of Christ and becoming integral to the “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.” Any attempt to separate the Holy Communion from the church is seen as an indicator of weak faith and of lack of understanding of Orthodoxy’s liturgical and sacramental traditions.²² Historically, for the Orthodox, the

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- 21 Alexandros Katsiaras, “The Orthodox Anthropology before a New ‘Normality’ (‘New Normal’) or a New ‘Religiosity,’” *Theologia* 92:1 (2021): 301–306, here 305.
- 22 Ioannis K. Angelopoulos, “Η Ορθοδοξία στο Διαδίκτυο” (Orthodoxy on the internet), *Aktines* 64:620 (April 2001): 131–132; Ioannis Tsoukalas, “Η διήθηση του προσώπου στις σύγχρονες κοινωνίες της πληροφορικής” (The condition of the person within the modern information theology society), in *Ιμάτια Φωτός Αρρήτου: Διεπιστημονική προσέγγιση του προσώπου* (The garments of ineffable light: Interdisciplinary approaches to the person), Philosophical and Theological Series 51, ed. Christos L. Siasos (Thessaloniki: Pournaras, 2002), 213–214; Philip Kariatlis, “Affirming *Koinonia* Ecclesiology: An Orthodox Perspective,” *Phronēma* 27:1 (2012): 51–66; Philip Kariatlis, “The Significance and Meaning of the Liturgy for Our Daily Lives,” *Voice of Orthodoxy* 36:4–6 (2014): 4–5 and 36:6–9 (2014): 20–21; Stavros Yangazoglou, “Εκκλησία και Διαδίκτυο” (The church and the internet), *Theologia* 87:2 (2016): 3–5, esp. 4; Vasileios Kalliakmanis, “Ορθόδοξη χριστιανική λατρεία και ψηφιακή τεχνολογία” (Orthodox Christian worship and digital technology), in the 2nd International Conference on Digital Media and Orthodox Christianity, Orthodox Academy of Crete, 18–21 June 2018, available at <http://www.dmopec18.com/el/program-2/> (accessed 16 September 2023); Thanasis Papathanasiou, “Θεία Λειτουργία: Η Εκκλησία στη νέα ψηφιακή εποχή” (Divine Liturgy: The church in the new digital era), *Municipality and State*, December 8, 2020, available at <https://dimoskaipoliteia.gr/2020/12/08/h-ekklisisti-nea-psifiki-epoxi/> (accessed 20 September 2023); Nikolaos Papaioannou, “Η ψηφιακή αναμετάδοση της Θείας Λειτουργίας: Όροι και Προϋποθέσεις” (The digital transmission of the divine liturgy: terms and conditions), *Pemptousia*, September 19, 2022, available at <https://www.pemptousia.gr/2022/09/i-psifiki-anametadosi-tis-litourgias-ori-ke-proipotesis/> (accessed 22 September 2023); Panhellenic Union of Theologians (ΠΕΘ), “Δεν διαχωρίστηκε ποτέ ο εκκλησιασμός από τη Θεία Κοινωνία: Αναφορά στο περιστατικό της Θείας Κοινωνίας μαθητών στο Ηράκλειο” (Church worship has never been separated from holy communion: Report on the incident with the Holy Communion of students in Heraklion), *Dogma*, February 11, 2022, available at <https://www.dogma.gr/ellada/peth-den-diachoristike-pote-o-ekklisiasmos-apo-ti-theia-koinonia-anafora-sto-peristatiko-tis-theias-koinonias-mathiton-sto-irakleio/132528/> (accessed 25 September 2023).

unity of “Christ’s body” is achieved within a temple: “the temple represents the mystagogical place and time of worship, and preserves the apophatic character of worship, something that the internet cannot replicate.”²³

Many clergy and theologians agree that while the internet and social media can help believers feel connected to the “Body of Christ,” this experience is seen as merely a sign, lacking substance. Nikolaos Papaioannou notes the following:

So, the possibility of online attendance gives comfort. It is somehow a breath of fresh air in the restricted atmosphere of the pandemic. The believer feels a restriction that until recently was probably felt only by the immobile and the bedridden. However, it is crucial to view online attendance not as a comprehensive replacement but as a pointer to real experiences. In other words, it does not serve as a substitute for the physical encounter; it is not its equivalent. Rather, it constitutes a reminder that these experiences are still pending.²⁴

Online liturgical life is perceived as being deprived of crucial components that are intrinsic to the Orthodox Christian ethos. These components include the language of communication, both verbal and non-verbal, and the language of symbols, such as lighting candles or venerating holy icons. These elements play a vital role in the Orthodox tradition, and their absence in the virtual setting is seen as compromising the authenticity and fullness of the religious experience. Most importantly, the Divine Liturgy is viewed as a deeply participatory event where believers actively and personally engage in the company of others. For Tsironis,

23 Kalliakmanis and Tympas, “Orthodox Worship,” 89. The term “mystagogical” signifies the symbolic nature of the church building, which constitutes an implicit form of initiation in the ecclesial life.

24 Nikolaos Papaioannou, “Online λειτουργική ζωή και πράξη” (Online liturgical life and practice), *Pemptousia*, March 14, 2022. Available at <https://www.pemptousia.gr/2022/03/online-litourgiki-zoi-ke-praxi-2/> (accessed 2 September 2023).

The Divine Liturgy *de facto* relies on presence, encounter, participation, and communication ... The evident risk [of digital transmission] lies in the potential reduction of sacred practices to the consumer-oriented norms of society due to excessive exposure to electronic media.²⁵

The Divine Liturgy is not to be treated as a mere spectacle or a product to be consumed passively. In the same vein, John Zizioulas, Metropolitan of Pergamos, points out,

I do not agree with the broadcasting of the Divine Liturgy on television or the internet ... I consider this an expression of irreverence. It is irreverent to sit and watch the Liturgy. The Divine Liturgy is not a spectacle. It is a gathering and a “supper,” and requires physical presence.²⁶

This point could explain the hesitation expressed in a statistical assessment among students of Social Theology and the Study of Religions at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens during the first general pandemic lockdown. Specifically, most respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the televised and online broadcasting of worship services.²⁷

Thus, while online participation in the liturgy or watching the liturgy online may offer some consolation, it is believed to be an incomplete experience primarily due to the absence of Holy Communion. As a result, the idea of virtual Eucharist is firmly rejected by the Church of Greece. As shown below, the Eucharist, which is at the core

25 Apostolidou, “Η χρήση των social media.”

26 John Zizioulas, Metropolitan of Pergamos, “Η Εκκλησία χωρίς την Ευχαριστία δεν είναι πλέον Εκκλησία: Μια συνέντευξη” (The church without the Eucharist is not complete: An interview), in *Καιρός του ποιήσαι: Η Ορθοδοξία ενώπιον της πανδημίας του κορωνοϊού* (The time is to work: Orthodoxy in the face of the coronavirus pandemic), ed. Nikolaos Asproulis and Nathaniel Wood (Volos: Ekdotiki Dimitriadis, 2020), 19–28, here 20.

27 Sotirios Despotis and Vasileios Fanaras, “Ο ρόλος της πανδημίας κατά την εμφάνιση και διάδοση του Χριστιανισμού τον 2^ο αι. μ.Χ. κι η επίδραση του COVID-19 στη θρησκευτικότητα του 21^{ου} αι.” (The role of the pandemic in the emergence and spread of Christianity in the 2nd century AD and the impact of Covid-19 on 21st-century religiosity), *Theologia* 92:1 (2021): 179–216, esp. 205.

of the church's life for Orthodox Christians, has always been regarded as irreplaceable and inseparable from the church's sacramental tradition and life.

Greek Orthodox Perceptions of Technology: An Historical Overview

To understand the contemporary attitude of Greek Orthodox circles towards innovation in communication technology, it is important to explore the evolution of their relevant views in modern times. By analysing Greek Orthodox sources such as articles, books, and websites, one can discern how technology has been discussed, praised, criticised, and questioned against the backdrop of Orthodox beliefs and values.

From the late 1950s and the 1960s, as radio, cinema, and television became increasingly prominent in everyday life in Greece, and throughout the 1970s, a complex interplay of fear of the perceived negative effects of technology and the recognition of its potential to improve various aspects of human life became apparent. These contrasting views shaped the current divergent perceptions of various Greek Orthodox entities regarding the impact of technology on society and the individual believer.

From the outset, conservative groups approached technology with scepticism. They viewed technology with suspicion, considering it spiritually detrimental and a contributor to moral corruption. The gradual rise of modern technology made some of these groups believe that technological advances led to an overwhelming sense of isolation and estrangement among people, a profound sense of hopelessness and despair, and the transformation of humans into materialistic consumers, driven solely by their desires and wants. The prevailing sentiment of these groups was that modernity and technology posed a threat to the so-called "traditional Greek Orthodox way of life."²⁸ In response, they

28 The phrase "traditional Greek Orthodox way of life" entails the ethnotheological and cultural assumption that Greek Orthodoxy is the unique outcome of crossbreeding Hellenism and Christianity. For ethnophyletism and ethnotheology, see Pantelis Kalaitzidis, "Orthodox Theology Challenged

felt compelled to denounce the entire Western tradition, of which technology was an integral part. This view stemmed from concerns that Western values, including technological progress, eroded the spiritual and the moral fabric of society, leading people away from the traditional Orthodox values.²⁹ In this context, it was emphasised that while the clergy may choose to modernise their pastoral methods by incorporating certain technological innovations, they must always be mindful not to compromise the essence of their pastoral work by indulging secular pursuits or by conforming to the prevailing spirit of the time.³⁰

Examples of caution towards such use of technology were noticeable. For instance, Savvas Aggouridis explored the relationship between Orthodox Christianity and technology in the 1960s. He argued that while Western Christianity often represented the Christian faith and scientific or technological advances as conflicting, Orthodoxy has historically maintained a more neutral position. However, as technological progress has outpaced intellectual progress, it has become evident that, while machines themselves might be neutral, their impact

by Balkan and East European Ethnotheologies,” in *Politics, Society and Culture in Orthodox Theology in a Global Age*, ed. Hans-Peter Grosshans and Pantelis Kalaitzidis (Paderborn: Brill, 2022), 108–159, https://doi.org/10.30965/9783657793792_009.

- 29 H. M. Enisleidis, “Ραδιόφωνο και Πιστοί” (Radio and the believers), *Anaplasis* 3 (March 1953): 41–43; I. H. Konstadinidis, “Ἡ θρησκευτική ζωὴ εἰς τὴν σύγχρονον ἐλληνικὴν κοινωνίαν” (Religious life in the modern Greek society), *Anaplasis* 14 (February 1954): 209–210; Spiros Moschonas, “Ἡ Ἐκκλησία καὶ τὸ πρόβλημα τῆς ψυχαγωγίας” (The church and the problem of entertainment), *Anaplasis* 61 (March 1958): 45–46; Germanos Polyzoidis, “Ἡ Ἐκκλησία ἐνώπιον τῆς σημερινῆς τεχνολογίας” (The church facing contemporary technology), *Anaplasis* 135 (May 1965): 4; Ioannis M. Konstantellis, “Τὸ φάσμα τῆς προόδου καὶ ἡ πραγματικότητα” (The spectrum of progress and reality), *Deltion Hē Hodos tou Kyriou* 3:22 (January 1969): 12–14; Eirinaios Galanakis (archimandrite), “Ὁ χριστιανὸς καὶ ἡ ἐποχὴς μας” (The Christian and our times), *Christos Kosmos* 96 (May 1969): 65–66, and 97 (June 1969): 81–83; Giannis Palaiologos, “Οἱ ἠθικὲς ἀξίες στὸν αὐριανὸ κόσμο” (Moral values in the world of tomorrow), *Deltion Hē Hodos tou Kyriou* 3:33 (December 1969): 186–188; Daniel G. Aerakis (archimandrite), “Ὁ ἠθικὸς βίος τῶν Χριστιανῶν τῆς συγχρόνου ἐποχῆς” (The moral life of Christians in modern times), *Salpinx* 48 (August 1972): 212–214, here 213; anonymous, “Ἡ λυτρωτικὴ κοινωνία” (The redemptive society), *Koinōnia* 17:1 (January–February 1974): 4.
- 30 I. K., “Ὅροι ἐκσυγχρονισμοῦ τῆς ποιμαντικῆς μεθόδου” (Terms of modernisation of the pastoral method), *Ephēmeros* 25:2 (January 1976): 53–54.

on people's soul can be negative, even as improvements in living standards occur.³¹ In the same vein, Alexandros, Metropolitan of Philippi, Neapolis, and Thasos, points out that “creators, who invent and discover, are not always able to control the outcomes of their intellect and skill. Consequently, creations produced by their abilities ... are not necessarily directed towards the good, causing unintended harm.”³² More serious warnings were issued. Thus, Spyros Kyriazopoulos presents technology as a substitute for religion and as something that empowers human beings to overcome their limitations.³³ He adds the following:

Technology does not appear in our time as the exclusive province of its makers; it is [inherent in] the attitude of human beings towards the world. Whereas once it was limited to specific areas of practical expression, today it defines behaviour and thought, aspirations and criteria, practice and theory ... The discourse on technology refers to human beings, not things—it is not a discourse on technological power; it is on the technical spirit [of our age].³⁴

According to him, the main concern of modern people is not about technological applications, but the “technical spirit,” the new ontological situation inaugurated by our modern technological civilisation. This situation boils down to humankind being eliminated by the achievements of technology it has developed.³⁵

Further, in 1974, Megas Farantos discussed the prominent role of technological culture. He emphasised that this culture is rooted in the

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- 31 Savvas Agouridis, “Ο Χριστιανισμός και η τεχνική πρόοδος” (Christianity and technical progress), *Ekklēsia* 38:11 (15 May 1961): 182–184; 38:11 (1 June 1961): 200–201; 38:12 (15 June 1961): 221–222; 38:14 (15 July 1961): 266–268. *Ekklēsia* is the Official Bulletin of the Church of Greece.
- 32 Alexandros, Metropolitan of Philippi, Neapolis, and Thasos, “Σκέψεις τινές περί τηλεόρασεως” (Some thoughts on television), *To Phōs* 3:26 (February 1971): 17–18, here 17.
- 33 Spyros Kyriazopoulos, *The origins of the technical spirit* (Athens: self-publication, 1965), 16.
- 34 Kyriazopoulos, *The origins*, 15.
- 35 Dimitrios I. Bekridakis, “Homo Ex Machina: Η Θεολογία, η Επιστήμη και το πρόβλημα της Τεχνικής” (Homo Ex Machina: Theology, science, and the problem of technology), *Theologia* 91:1 (2020): 65–119, esp. 66–67.

innate human desire for power and dominion over the world. While acknowledging that it would be unwarranted to focus solely on the negative impact of technology, such as weapons, warfare, isolation, and pollution, he noted that, when misused, technology can have a potentially sinister aspect. Farantos spoke of the concept of “technical eschatology,” by which he suggested that the outcome of unrestrained technological advancement has detrimental consequences for society. While technology was initially meant for the service and benefit of humanity, it had been misused for the violation, slavery, and oppression of people.³⁶

Amid these concerns, other more optimistic viewpoints surfaced.³⁷ For instance, in the 1950s, an article published in the periodical *Ioannēs ho Baptistēs* highlights how the revolutionary device of the telephone brings people together, regardless of the physical distance that separates them. The anonymous author likens prayer to a spiritual telephone that enables direct communication with God.³⁸ The metaphor was picked up by another author.³⁹ In the 1960s, yet another author presented technology as what inspires people with optimism in regard to scientific progress.⁴⁰ In the same journal, someone else recognised the development of technology as inherent to the human psyche, pointing out that God created human beings with the innate

36 Megas L. Farantos, “Πίστις και Τεχνικός Πολιτισμός” (Faith and the technological culture), *Koinōnia* 17:1 (July–August 1974): 234–248. *Koinōnia* is published by the Pan-Hellenic Union of Theologians.

37 George Kostadimas (trans.), “Η τεχνική πρόοδος και το παιδί” (The technical progress and the children), *Hellenochristianikē Agogē* 18:94 (May 1959): 141–145; Christos Kouris, “Η τεχνική πρόοδος και ο άνθρωπος” (The technical progress and humanity), *Aktines* 27:274 (July–September 1964): 263–265; anonymous, “Η τεχνική και η κοινωνική πρόοδος” (The technical and social progress), *Hellenochristianikē Agogē* 12:141 (October 1964): 196–198.

38 Anonymous, “Εικόνες και πραγματικότητες: Έχετε τηλέφωνο;” (Images and realities: Do you have a telephone?), *Ioannēs ho Baptistēs* 5:57 (November 1953): 7. *Ioannēs ho Baptistēs* was published by the Orthodox Christian Association “John the Baptist.”

39 George Galanakis, “Η Πίστις” (Faith), *Metamorphosis* 2:19–20 (July–August 1974): 21–22. *Metamorphosis* was published by the Christian Solidarity Fraternity.

40 A. Alexandridis, “Χριστιανισμός και Επιστήμη (γύρω από μερικές σκέψεις του Hans Urs v. Balthasar)” (Christianity and science: Some thoughts of Hans Urs v. Balthasar), *Aktines* 24:220 (April 1961): 140–5. *Aktines* is published by the (Hellenic) Christian Union of Scientists.

desire and ability to build and create. Thus, the development of technology is a manifestation of God's diverse gifts to humanity, to explore and thrive on Earth.⁴¹ In the 1970s, furthermore, technological progress was praised for making possible the Moon landings. This achievement was taken to exemplify a well-organised and peaceful initiative to free humanity from the confines of our planet and to embark on a journey into outer space.⁴²

The Church of Greece was the first Orthodox Church to recognise the importance of technology and to feel the need to adapt to advances in communication technology in the 1960s. In the periodical *Ephēmeros*⁴³ of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece, several articles were published, mostly authored by Georgios S. Ferousis, a journalist with a background in law and theology. Ferousis brought the views of the Church of Greece to public attention, fostering awareness and understanding of its stance on technology in general and especially on the significance of communication technology, then represented by radio and television. He discussed the potential benefits of technology for humankind, showing that technology leads to higher living standards, contributes to better working conditions, and increases educational opportunities, particularly for the lower social classes. He also argued that by embracing modern communication technologies, the church aims to address a broader audience and to share its message of faith, hope, and love with the wider society.⁴⁴

41 Kouris, “Η τεχνική πρόοδος,” 263–265. Kouris’ account is largely based on the book *Technique et conscience religieuse* (1961), by François R. Munsch and S. J. Russo.

42 A. F., “Η επιστήμη του διαστήματος” (The science of space), *Anapalmoi* 1:4 (1971): 62–64; A. F., “Ο άνθρωπος στην Σελήνη” (People on the Moon), *Anapalmoi* 1:6 (1971): 94–95; A. H. Fragos, “Διαστημικές έρευνες μετά την κατάκτηση της Σελήνης” (Space explorations after the conquest of the Moon), *Anapalmoi* 3:30 (1973): 132–135. *Anapalmoi* was published by the Christian Youth Club of Panagia Chrysokastriotissas’ church in Athens.

43 *Ephēmeros* (The parish priest) was first published in 1952 as an appendix to the official bulletin *Ekklesia*. The primary purpose of this periodical was to guide and to support the clergy in their pastoral work, keeping them informed and connected to the central teachings of the church.

44 Dimitrios S. Ferousis, “Νέα μέσα ποιμαντικής” (New pastoral means), *Ephēmeros* 15:9 (May 1966): 372–374; Dimitrios S. Ferousis, “Οι κλειστές

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the “Neo-Orthodox movement,” representing a blend of Orthodox theology, traditionalism, and left-wing politics, persisted in its criticism of the secular Western world and highlighted the negative implications of technological development.⁴⁵ Moderate theological voices also expressed concerns about the way modern technology, particularly informatics and cybernetics, directly impacted the understanding of human nature and the self-awareness of individuals as beings capable of free moral choices and spiritual pursuits. For them, the issue was not solely technology but rather the way human beings responded to the challenges posed by progress. They observed that, as everyday life and moral choices became increasingly complex due to the influence of technology, humanity faced a significant test. They contemplated the implications of living in a world where the boundaries between the physical and virtual realms were blurring, leading to questions about the authenticity of human experiences and ethical decision-making in this new technologically-infused landscape.⁴⁶

During Christodoulos’ tenure as Archbishop of Athens and All Greece from 1998 to 2008, there was a notable emphasis on fostering dialogue between science and religion. The church’s acknowledgment of the importance of this dialogue became evident when the archbishop established the Special Synodical Committee for Bioethics in 1998. The committee was dedicated to addressing theological and ethical

πόρτες!” (Closed doors!), *Ephēmeros* 15:10 (May 1966): 424–425; Dimitrios S. Ferousis, “Επικοινωνία ιδεών, η αμεσότητα του ραδιοφώνου” (Communication of ideas: The directness of radio transmissions), *Ephēmeros* 15:11 (June 1966): 477–478; Dimitrios S. Ferousis, “Ραδιόφωνο και Ορθοδοξία: ιστορία και δεοντολογία” (Radio and Orthodoxy: History and ethics), *Ephēmeros* 15:15–16 (August 1966): 417–422.

45 The ethos of this movement was shaped by the writings of Ioannis Romanidis (1927–2001) and Christos Yannaras (born 1935) on the origins of modern secularism, the continuity of the Greek nation, and the idea of a sharp division between “Western Christianity” and “Eastern Christianity.” See, for instance, Vasileios Makrides, “Byzantium in Contemporary Greece: The Neo-Orthodox Current of Ideas,” in *Byzantium and the Modern Greek Identity*, ed. David Ricks and Paul Magdalino (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 75–90.

46 Tsoukalas, “Η διήθηση του προσώπου,” 214; Dimos Theos, “Μέσα μαζικής ενημέρωσης και ατομική ευθύνη” (Mass media and individual responsibility), *Synaxē* 50 (April–June 1994): 27–31.

considerations arising from advances in science and technology.⁴⁷ The Church leadership encouraged this dialogue further with various conferences and symposia aimed at exploring the relationship between scientific progress and the Orthodox Christian faith. One such notable event took place in 2000 when the Holy Synod, in collaboration with the National (Hellenic) Centre for Scientific Research “Demokritos,” organised an international scientific conference. The primary objective of this conference was to showcase significant scientific and technological achievements, and to engage in discussions about their implications for Orthodox Christian faith and practice.⁴⁸

During that period many priests and theologians held a conciliatory approach towards technology. But the advent of the internet and its integration into everyday life posed new practical challenges for the clergy. To connect with the younger generation and foster their interest in Orthodox Christianity, the Church of Greece had to be attentive and to adapt its pastoral ministry to this new reality. However, the objective was to achieve this adjustment without abandoning tradition. Technology was still viewed as ambiguous, as it could be put to good use and also misused. Technological progress was seen as having introduced new societal challenges, possibly obstructing the path to deification, which entails spiritual transformation and union with God. Accordingly, Christians were encouraged to adopt an ascetic approach to technological means and to be discerning in their usage. That said, the Church of Greece was interested in staying up to date with scientific discoveries and technological innovations, encouraging familiarisation with them—just as it had done in the past, throughout Late Antiquity, when it incorporated Greek philosophical concepts and methods

47 See Sandy Sakorrafou, “Science, Religion and Bioethical Issues in Greek Orthodox Journals (1998 to the present),” in *Orthodox Christianity and Modern Science: Past, Present and Future*, ed. Kostas Tampakis and Haralambos Ventis (Turnhout: Brepols, 2022), 63–82.

48 See vol. Διεθνές επιστημονικό συνέδριο “Επιστήμες, τεχνολογίες αιχμή και Ορθοδοξία,” 4–8 Οκτωβρίου 2000 (International scientific conference “Sciences, Cutting-Edge Technologies, and Orthodoxy,” 4–8 October 2000) (Athens: Holy Synod of the Church of Greece, 2002).

into Christian theology. Against this backdrop, the church was considering the scientific and technical advances positively.⁴⁹

Such discussion about the intersection of scientific and technological achievements with the Orthodox Christian faith are ongoing within various Greek Orthodox circles. The debate places the “modernist” and the “neo-traditional” approaches in opposition.⁵⁰ The “modernists” delve into the relationship between science and religion, seeking to find “harmony,” “complementarity,” and a plausible “synthesis”⁵¹ between the two territories. What makes necessary this relationship is the legitimate desire to deepen our understanding of the nature of beings and their relationship with God. “Modernists” believe that scientific discoveries and progress can be integrated into the framework of the Orthodox faith. For them, pastoral work must adapt to new realities, including the online environment. The canonical expression of these convictions is the formal statement on the social doctrine of the Orthodox Church written by a special commission of Orthodox scholars (among them Theodoros Yianguou, Professor of Canon Law, from Greece), appointed by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, and published in 2020. There we read that the church should not “fail to take advantage of the resources of the sciences for her own pastoral ministry, as well as the technological advances of the internet and social media for her pastoral mission.”⁵² The theological justification for the use of technology is traditionally sought in the work of Greek Church

49 See “Χαιρετισμός-Ευλογία του Μακ. Αρχιεπισκόπου Αθηνών και πάσης Ελλάδος κ.κ. Χριστόδουλου” (Greeting-Blessing of His Beatitude Archbishop Christodoulos of Athens and All Greece), in *Διεθνές επιστημονικό συνέδριο*, 17–21. See also Anastasios (Archbishop of Tirana and All Albania), “Η Ορθοδοξία προ της ραγδαίας εξελίξεως των θετικών επιστημών” (Orthodoxy in the face of the rapid development of the sciences), in *Διεθνές επιστημονικό συνέδριο*, 33–43.

50 For more on the distinction between the “modernist” and “neo-traditionalist” movements in Greek Orthodox theology, see Paul Ladouceur, *Modern Orthodox Theology: Behold, I Make All Things New (Rev 21:5)* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2019), 123–156.

51 For the “synthesis” of theology and science, see Sandy Sakorrafou, “Science and Orthodox Christianity: Perceptions of Their Relationship in Greek Christian Journals (1980–2010),” *The Journal of Religion* 100:2 (2020): 232–267.

52 *For the life of the world: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church*, available at <https://www.goarch.org/social-ethos> (accessed 18 August 2023).

Fathers. They talk about *technē* either as a cure for the defects of nature and an aid for the human need to survive and to use nature (Basil the Great) or a gift of the divine providence endowed with pedagogical meaning, since the salvation of our technological world is possible in Christ (Maximus the Confessor).⁵³

Nevertheless, concerns persist regarding the adverse aspects of technology. It is noteworthy that in 2018, Bartholomew, the Ecumenical Patriarch, drew attention to the negative dimensions accompanying technological advances:

Today, technology is not simply a use of scientific knowledge, but rather it has become the focus of human existence—the perspective in which all the aspects of civilization receive meaning ... In our lives today, we experience the uncontrollable dominance of machines ... “information” is glorified and thus acquires a metaphysical status. The computer leads us to evaluate everything as “data,” as something to be processed, hence, making fast and measurable effectiveness the chief aim of human thought and action. The almighty means of electronic communication do not simply transmit information; they shape our views regarding life and its meaning, they steer our desires and needs, and they influence the ranking of our values. Consequently, age-old traditions are weakened, symbols erode and progress itself ends up being identified with technological progress.⁵⁴

Technological development is viewed in its negative impact, as it compromises the essence of the human person and challenges freedom. This impact threatens what is upheld as the pinnacle of the Christian

53 See Halabi, “Η χρήση του διαδικτύου,” 50–51; Alexis Torrance, “Ουδέν καινόν υπό τον ήλιον: Αρχές μιας Ορθόδοξης προσέγγισης της τεχνολογίας και της καινοτομίας” (Nothing new under the sun: Principles of an Orthodox approach to technology and innovation), trans. Nikos Manolopoulos, *Synaxē* 147 (July–September 2018): 16–29.

54 Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, “Dilemma of the Century: Technology vs. Politics. Beyond Dilemmas,” addressed during the 21st Eurasian Economic Summit, Istanbul. Available at <https://www.ecupatria.org/2018/04/16/ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew-at-the-21st-eurasian-economic-summit/> (accessed 25 September 2023).

scale of values—the safeguarding of the human person from every conceivable threat.⁵⁵

The adherents of the “neo-traditional” current, however, harden this stance towards technology. Although they acknowledge the advantages brought by Western science and technology, they heavily criticise them. “Neo-traditionalists” consider the Orthodox tradition sacred, immutable, coherent, and consistent—a set of beliefs, precepts, and practices deeply rooted in the past golden age of Orthodoxy, namely, the Byzantine era.⁵⁶ Their reservations about technological advances draw upon a sense of urgency in preserving the sanctity of religious practices and the authenticity of the Orthodox doctrine.

These contradictory attitudes towards communication technology within Greek Orthodox circles are not impossible to harmonise. They boil down to the conclusion that, while technology is not in principle unfit for church life, a measured approach to utilising the potential of its benefits should be maintained. This conclusion arises from the fact that, while the practice of “religion online” is embraced to various degrees, “online religion” is judged to be inappropriate and inadequate. As I have pointed out already, this situation is not new. The same ambivalence is obvious in the earlier responses of these groups to technological advances such as radio and television for liturgical purposes. An overview of the earlier attitudes of these circles to communication technology puts their current views on technological innovation into proper perspective.

Blasts from the Past

The Case of Radio Broadcasts

In 1938, Chrysanthos, the then Archbishop of Athens and All Greece, marked the beginning of radio broadcasting in the country by an inaugural address. On that occasion, he emphasised the immense significance of the radio as an invention that, like other technological advances, would boost the progress and development of the nation.

55 Bartholomew, “Dilemma of the Century.”

56 See also Bekridakis, “Homo Ex Machina,” 93–109.

He also noted that while Greece experienced a delay in adopting this invention, radio was to play a pivotal role in educating and guiding the Greek people. He added his conviction that radio was not merely about entertainment; he envisioned its potential to become a powerful tool for transmitting knowledge and guidance for life, thus beneficial to the overall wellbeing of the people.⁵⁷

Radio broadcasting in Greece officially began in 1938 and it remained strictly state-owned until the late 1980s.⁵⁸ During the 1950s to 1970s, as church membership was growing, the Church of Greece sought to establish its own radio station, to facilitate communication and contact.⁵⁹ Initially, in 1959, the church was given only one weekly broadcast of the Divine Liturgy (that took place in different churches throughout the country) on the radio station of the Greek Armed Forces. Thirty years later, following the liberalisation of radio frequencies, a license was granted for the official broadcast of the church's radio station. This marked a significant milestone, as it allowed the church to reach a broader audience and have a more regular presence on the airwaves.

The challenges faced by the Church of Greece in its radio broadcasting endeavours are evident in a letter sent in 1952 to the periodical *Ephēmeros*, mentioned above. In this letter, a young priest expressed his concerns and complaints about the use of a radio transmitter inside the church. The intention, of course, was to facilitate the broadcast of the Divine Liturgy across the country. But the young priest raised serious concerns about the unintended consequences of this development. He observed that as a result of broadcasting the church services via radio, the church's life is being transferred to less appropriate plac-

57 “Ο Μακ. Αρχιεπίσκοπος Αθηνών προς τον ελληνικό λαόν” (The Archbishop of Athens to the Greek nation), *Treis Hierarchai* 29:901 (June 1938): 81–82. The periodical *Treis Hierarchai* was published by the Religious Association “Three Hierarchs.”

58 For a history of Greek radio and television broadcasting, see George N. Carter, *Ελληνική Ραδιοφωνία Τηλεόραση: Ιστορία και Ιστορίες* (Hellenic Radio and Television: History and Stories) (Athens: Kastaniotis, 2004).

59 Georgios A. Karsanis, “Τα σύγχρονα τεχνικά μέσα επικοινωνίας με τον λαό στην υπηρεσία της ποιμαντικής” (Modern technical means of communication with the people in the service of pastoral care), *Ephēmeros* 13:17–18 (September 1964): 767–771.

es, such as coffeeshops and taverns. And he further argued that fewer people would feel the need to attend the physical church services in person.⁶⁰ This comment was hardly new. As early as 1939, another periodical, the *Christianiko Phōs*, discussed similar concerns about radio transmissions. The author of the article pointed out the absence of reverence, devotion, evocativeness, and sanctifying grace in those broadcasts. He then proposed to discontinue the transmission of the Divine Liturgy, particularly on Sundays, and especially the part where the sacrament of the Eucharist is celebrated. In turn, he encouraged the transmission of significant religious celebrations so long as religious nostalgia and enthusiasm were evoked.⁶¹

In 1952, the editor's response to the young priest's complaint in *Ephēmerios*, representing the official position of the Church of Greece, is clear and unwavering: radio transmission of the liturgy is important for individuals who are unable to attend a church physically, such as the sick, travellers on Sunday mornings, and Greek expatriates living in areas without Orthodox churches. The use of radio for this purpose is justified, compassionate, and in line with Christian principles.

Following this response, the periodical received numerous letters expressing varying viewpoints.⁶² Certain priests considered radio broadcasting a useful means of evangelism, not only among believers but also among nonbelievers. They acknowledged the potential of using this new technology to spread the message of the church to a wider audience. But other priests believed that church attendance should be enforced through police assistance, for example by closing coffeeshops on Sunday mornings. These views highlighted the concern that radio broadcasts may contribute to a decline in the physical attendance of churchgoers. The debate concluded with the periodical's editor standing firm on the benefits of radio technology for liturgical purposes, ac-

60 See the editorial of Dimitrios Paraskevoopoulos, "Ἡ Ραδιοφωνικὴ Μετάδοσις τῶν Ἱερῶν Ακολουθιῶν" (Radio broadcasting of holy services), *Ephēmerios* 1:3 (February 1952): 24.

61 Editorial, "Γεγονότα καὶ Κρίσεις. Ἡ ἐκπομπὴ τῶν Ἱερῶν Ακολουθιῶν" (Facts and Judgements: Broadcasting the holy services), *Christianiko Phōs* 1:4 (1939): 22.

62 Editorial, "Ἡ Ραδιοφωνικὴ Μετάδοσις," 25–26.

knowledging that participation in the Divine Liturgy should be a matter of free will, and it is the responsibility of priests to encourage the congregation to attend the church while also explaining the inadequacy of individual prayer compared to communal worship.⁶³

The April editorial of the same year examined more deeply the last remark on the significance of attending holy services in person. It emphasised that nothing can fully replace the experience of being physically present in church during liturgical gatherings. To support this argument, the editorial proceeded with an analysis of what constitutes the essence of the church, the inadequacy of individual prayer, and what the believer gains from praying together with the rest of the congregation in church. Central to this argument is the understanding of the synodical character of the church, drawing from the wisdom of St John Chrysostom, who stressed that “the church is a system and a synod.” Here, “synod” refers to a gathering of people—in this case, believers—who come together under Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The ultimate purpose of this assembly is said to be twofold: first, to enable Christians to commune with God, and second, for God to approach them through various means, such as Scripture, the mysteries (sacraments), and his grace.⁶⁴

The following June editorial drew further upon Chrysostom’s words, stating that in liturgical gatherings the entire church is present, with believers supporting and encouraging one another in the journey of prayer. The weak and the strong are united in this shared experience;

63 Editorial, “Η Ραδιοφωνική Μετάδοση της Θείας Λειτουργίας, Β’” (Radio broadcasting of the Divine Liturgy, part two), *Ephēmerios* 1:8–9 (April 1952): 41–43; editorial, “Δι’αυτό Χειροτονήθημεν” (That is why we were ordained), *Ephēmerios* 1:11 (June 1952): 105–107. The periodical *Orpēx* offers an alternative perspective on the decrease in the number of churchgoers, suggesting that the lack of attendance may be attributed to specific factors within the church itself. For example, skilled and talented chanters who would improve the quality of liturgical music, as well as educated priests who would deliver compelling and inspiring sermons, could potentially impact the overall experience and engagement of the congregation during worship services. See editorial, “Διατί οι ναοί δεν πληρούνται εκκλησιασμός;” (Why aren’t the churches filled with churchgoers?), *Orpēx* 83–84 (June 1961): 260.

64 Editorial, “Ο Ναός και η Χριστιανική Κοινότητα” (The church and Christian fellowship), *Ephēmerios* 1:10 (May 1952): 57–59.

through their collective prayers, they find strength and solace. Church assembly is described as a family and a community. The Divine Liturgy demonstrates the unity that exists among the believers in this *synaxis* (gathering). All the members of the congregation come together in one physical place, partaking of the Holy Communion, and experiencing a profound spiritual and moral solidarity. The editorial further noticed that the public character of worship arises from an inherent need to pray collectively, acknowledging that prayer together with others holds greater strength and significance than individual prayers.⁶⁵

By 1966, regular radio broadcasting of the holy services from the Metropolitan Cathedral in Athens was established. In the periodical *Ephēmeros* radio was once again acknowledged as a valued pastoral aid and another kind of pulpit, amounting to a significant catechetical tool that provides faith education to the listeners. Radio is a newfound opportunity that God provides for missionary purposes—a powerful medium that transcends geographical boundaries and underlines the ecumenical mission of the Orthodox Church that, as Ferousis points out, had, regrettably, been overlooked. In this context, the desire of the Church of Greece to own a radio station appeared as a necessity arising from the need to evolve and to adapt creatively to contemporary conditions. Traditional means, such as the church building, the pulpit, the bells, and Sunday school, had been essential in disseminating faith teaching, but the introduction of a radio station was in tune with the changing times and a way of reaching a broader audience more dynamically. Finally, radio was regarded as a means of countering isolation and neglect since isolated listeners could connect with the larger church community and feel a sense of belonging even from afar. It could further contribute to the nurturing of faith among the audience, addressing spiritual doubts, and serving as an avenue for people to seek solace, guidance, and reassurance during times of uncertainty.⁶⁶

65 Editorial, “Ἡ Κοινὴ ἐν τῷ Ναῷ Προσευχὴ” (Collective prayer in the church), *Ephēmeros* 1:11 (May 1952): 73–75. See also Georgios Kapsanis (archimandrite), “Ἡ Ἐκκλησία ὡς θεανθρώπινη κοινωνία” (The church as a divine-human fellowship), *Koinōnia* 17:2 (March–April 1974): 90–101.

66 Dimitrios S. Ferousis, “Νέα Μέσα Ποιμαντικής” (New means of pastoral

It comes as a surprise, in this light, that in the late 1960s and during the 1970s despite the church's undertaking to legitimise the use of the radio for liturgical purposes,⁶⁷ there were still voices among Greek Orthodox circles who considered these changes with reservation. What was questioned is not only the potential of the radio to convey divine grace,⁶⁸ but also its capacity to foster fellowship beyond giving a broader access to information. Radio was regarded as unable to convey the fullness of liturgical or pastoral communication, such as the emotions of the priest, the expressiveness of the liturgy, or the sacred atmosphere inside the church. There were also concerns over the nature of the audience, regarded as anonymous, passive, unreflective, and indifferent—the very opposite of what a church congregation should be. Radio listeners were seen as distant and disengaged, lacking the active participation and interpersonal connections experienced in a traditional church setting. This argument raised doubts about whether the radio audience could truly be identified with the “Body of Christ,” the community of believers. The “ecclesiology of the radio” appeared to have serious limitations, particularly in terms of sacramental participation. Allegedly listeners to the radio could not partake in the sacrament of the Eucharist, which entails a mystical communion with each other and God through Christ and the Holy Spirit.⁶⁹

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- ministry), *Ephēmerios* 15:9 (May 1966): 372–374; Dimitrios S. Ferousis, “Επικοινωνία Ιδεών (Η αμεσότητα του ραδιοφώνου)” (The communication of ideas: The immediacy of the radio), *Ephēmerios* 15:11 (June 1966): 477–478; Dimitrios S. Ferousis, “Ραδιοφωνία και Ορθοδοξία” (Radio Broadcasting and Orthodoxy), *Ephēmerios* 15:15–16 (August 1966): 717–721; Dimitrios S. Ferousis, “Μια Νέα Ευθύνη Επικοινωνίας” (A new responsibility in communication), *Ephēmerios* 15:20 (October 1966): 908–912; editorial, “Το ραδιόφωνο και η θεία λειτουργία” (Radio and divine liturgy), *Ho Sôtēr* 9:357 (1968): 173–174, here 173.
- 67 Interestingly, lay people, members of various para-ecclesiastical organisations, shared this positive attitude towards radio and, later, television. See, e.g., Ioannis Kaltekis, *Πρωινά Ραδιοφωνικά Μηνύματα* (Morning radio messages) (Athens, 1971); Konstantinos Kourkoula, *Πνευματικοί Αντίλαλοι. Αι από τηλεοράσεως και ραδιοφώνου ομιλίες του εκπαιδευτικού συμβούλου Κ. Κούρκουλα* (Spiritual echoes: The televised and radio speeches of Mr. K. Kourkoulas, educational advisor) (Athens, 1972).
- 68 Editorial, “Το ραδιόφωνο και η θεία λειτουργία,” 174.
- 69 Spyros M. Kalliafas, “Ο κινηματογράφος, το ραδιόφωνο και η διαπαιδαγώγησις της νεολαίας” (Cinema, radio, and youth education), *Anaplis* 190 (December

The Case of Television Broadcasts

As a means of communication, compared to radio, television faced greater resistance among various Greek Orthodox groups, especially from the pietistic brotherhoods, which opposed it on moral grounds. For them, television had a greater potential for misuse than radio, given the power of imagery. Visual stimuli were believed to have a significant impact on human behaviour, and television, with its captivating images, was considered capable of shaping habits and influencing the audience more profoundly than the radio. As we read in one editorial, “the technical successes and advances of humankind are undoubtedly good, provided that they are always used in a good and beneficial way, not for causing material and spiritual harm and damage.” But television, we read further, hurts people’s mental health, amounting to “an insidious death” and “a school of crime.”⁷⁰ Similar criticisms were directed at the cinema.⁷¹

Televised broadcasts of the Divine Liturgy were taken to offer the illusion of being present in a physical church instead of eliciting active participation. It enticed the viewers to engage with religious content from the comfort of their homes, not to foster a true fellowship of believers. In addition, the same circles accused television of promoting secular Western values, such as consumerism, materialism, and individualism, undermining critical thinking and the Orthodox values.⁷²

Television broadcasting in Greece commenced in 1966, but it was not until 1968 that the two new government channels began proper operations, offering a mix of news and entertainment programs. The Church of Greece recognised the potential of television as a powerful tool for communication and evangelism, aligning with the church’s

1970): 7, 12–13; Antonios K. Papantoniou, “Εκκλησία και Επικοινωνία” (Church and Communication), *Ephēmeros* 20:20 (May 1971): 351–355.

70 Editorial, “Ο απαραίτητος όρος” (The qualifying condition), *Ho Sōtēr* 9:386 (1968): 633.

71 Editorial, “Τηλεόραση” (Television), *Ho Sōtēr* 10:406 (1969): 217; 429 (1969): 584, 587–588.

72 Kostantinos Argyrothalmides, “Τηλεόρασις και Κινηματογράφος” (Television and cinema), *Pavlos, the Apostle of Greece* 5:52 (June–July 1973): 105–106.

continuous efforts to adapt and to reach out to a broader audience with the message of Christ. Television broadcasting was regarded as an extension of radio broadcasting. This may explain the absence of articles dedicated to television in the periodicals published by the Holy Synod. For the Church of Greece, television was yet another kind of technological pulpit that could aid in pastoral care and catechism, aiming to reach even more people and fulfil the church's missionary goals. Drawing inspiration from the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:22, "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some,"⁷³ the church regarded the arrival of television—as they had with radio before—as an opportunity to enter the private sphere and to bring the message of Christ into every household. Television, it was hoped, had a greater capability than radio to transcend the physical boundaries of the church building and to connect with people in their own homes, making it a powerful tool for spreading the teaching of the church and for nurturing the faith of the viewers.⁷⁴

Nevertheless, despite the church's desire to have its own television channel, this long-standing request never materialised. During the 1980s, the Church of Greece restricted its television presence to broadcasting the Divine Liturgy on Sunday mornings and a few religious-themed shows through the public television broadcaster. These limitations were partly a result of strong objections from certain segments within the Greek Orthodox Church—certain members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the brotherhoods—who continued to view television as a significant threat to Orthodox Christianity. According to them, television was a medium that devalued and trivialised the importance of spiritual life, disregarding the Christian ethos, and emphasizing instead Western materialistic needs and consumerism.⁷⁵

73 Translation: New King James Version.

74 Kapsanis, "Τα σύγχρονα τεχνικά," 768.

75 Editorial, "Τηλεόραση, μια ψεύτικη θεότητα" (Television, a false deity), *Enoriakos Logos* 3:89 (October 1972): 3; editorial, "Απόψεις και Κρίσεις: Και πάλιν η τηλεόρασις..." (Views and judgments: And once more, television...), *Ho Sōtēr* 583, (February 1973): 88; anonymous, "Σοβαρός κίνδυνος (τηλεόραση)" (A serious danger: Television) *Ho Sōtēr* 631 (February 1974): 137.

It is of note, however, that although most Greek Orthodox groups did not share such radical ideas, they did not view radio and television as morally neutral media.⁷⁶ Rather, they considered these technologies embodiments of secular values and ideologies. Therefore, it is no wonder that the church worked hard to affirm the importance of appropriating these technologies for pastoral needs, while seeking to infuse them with Christian moral values and significance. In the same vein, the church argued that leveraging these technological means of communication could help counteract their malevolent use for spreading harmful or immoral content.⁷⁷

Nevertheless, the perception of television as a demonic tool, antagonistic to genuine spiritual growth, persists to this day. This sentiment has endured despite the gradual development of regional ecclesiastical television stations. Noteworthy is the attitude of some contemporary Mount Athos monastics who emphasise the many harmful effects of television. Archimandrite Ephraim, Abbot of the Holy and Great Monastery of Vatopaidi, for instance, portrays television as a tool of dominance wielded by the powerful in the context of globalisation. In his words,

[Television] fosters the abolition of moral values, diverting individuals from their spiritual traditions and national ideals. The aim appears to be the depersonalisation of humanity, urging people to stop being persons ... Instead of presenting a spiritually enriching reality, contemporary television often showcases a vivid portrayal of sin. If it were to emphasise a living spiritual reality, television could potentially serve as a powerful tool for human spiritual development. Unfortunately, finding channels dedicated to such spiritual content is a challenge.⁷⁸

76 Alexandros, “Σκέψεις τινές περί τηλεόρασεως.”

77 Georges S. Ferousis, “Μια Νέα Ευθύνη Επικοινωνίας” (A new responsibility in communication), *Ephēmeros* 15:20 (October 1966): 908–12.

78 Virgilius Vlaescu, *Διάλογοι περί τηλεόρασεως και πνευματικής ζωής με Αγιορείτες Πατέρες* (Dialogues on television and spiritual life with Athonite Fathers) (Thessaloniki: Orthodoxos Kypseli, 2011), 121–130.

Closing Remarks

The relationship between Orthodoxy and communication technology has developed for some time, but the Covid-19 pandemic brought its inevitability to the forefront for many Greek Orthodox Christians. During the health crisis, various Greek Orthodox circles had to adapt to the circumstances by utilising technology to sustain their activities.

As was described above, these circles have historically displayed ambivalence towards technological advances. There has been hesitation and fear that communication technology may either alter the sacred rituals or distort the Orthodox Christian faith. Nevertheless, in the past, many within these circles have acknowledged the immense potential of radio and television as valuable tools that can be used for enlightenment and outreach—not only for believers but also for the religiously indifferent or unengaged. But there has always been a tendency towards limiting the use of technological progress, especially given its perceived threat to the core tenets of the Christian faith, and questions as to whether it enhances or diminishes the spiritual experience. Accordingly, in regard to digital communication technology, “religion online” has been almost generally embraced, while the shift towards “online religion” has been met with scepticism and resistance. The denial of virtual liturgical life should not be interpreted as digital illiteracy or a naive perception of the digital space as an extension of radio and television. The reluctance of the respective groups stems from a belief that digital technology—like any technological device—is not the most satisfactory way to mediate the beliefs and practices of the Orthodox faith and life.

This suspicion is closely related to the way certain Greek Orthodox circles perceive their religious identity. As shown above, they firmly believe in the collective character of their faith, viewing the church as the *synaxis* where believers come together in one physical space and where the Eucharist takes place, as described in 1 Corinthians 11:20 (συνερχομένων ... ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό, “when you gather together”). From this perspective, the church is intrinsically connected to the Eucharist, and

true communion and participation in the sacred rituals can only occur in the physical presence of believers gathered together. It is this strong emphasis on the collective and embodied nature of the Orthodox Christian ethos that has shaped hesitancy towards earlier technological advances, such as radio and television broadcasting in the service of the church, or later to embrace virtual liturgical experiences fully.⁷⁹

We have seen above that these contradictory stances on the function of technological means of communication are not irreconcilable. While the present analysis does not claim to have reached a compelling conclusion, it seems to me that the challenge lies in finding ways to integrate technology in a manner that complements, rather than supplants, the traditional communal, or relational, aspect of Orthodox worship. The future of the relationship between Greek Orthodoxy and technology will depend on how these concerns are addressed, and whether technological progress can align with the values and ecclesiological convictions of the Orthodox community.

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79 In some cases, this attitude has been nurtured by the relational ontology of the person promoted by John Zizioulas, which, supposedly, does not allow for remote participation in the liturgy as a way of constituting the church. This line of thought has never been explicitly explored in the context of the present discussion though. For the outlines of this line of theological thinking, see Douglas H. Knight (ed.), *The Theology of John Zizioulas: Personhood and the Church* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007); Miroslav Volf, *After our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998); John D. Zizioulas, *Communion & Otherness* (Edinburg: T&T Clark, 2006); John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997).