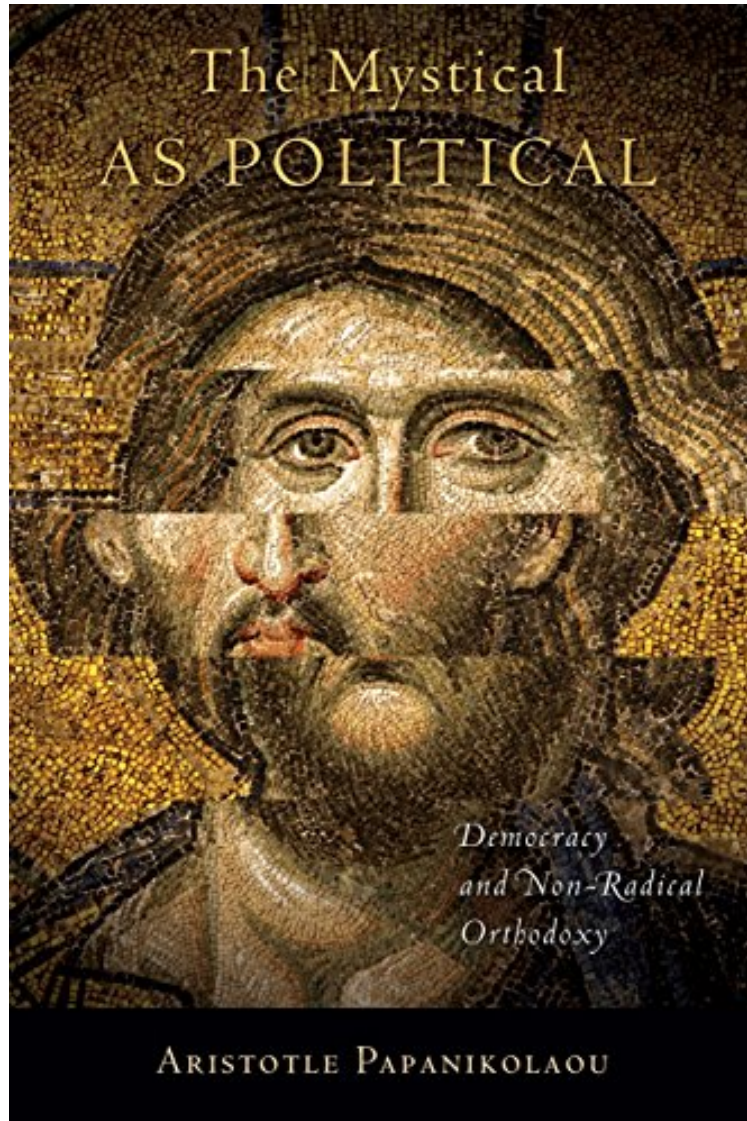


[PDF] The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy

The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy

Aristotle Papanikolaou

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Aristotle Papanikolaou : The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy:

1 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Anthony B. BradleyThis is wonderful introduction especially for those of us who are new to learning about the orthodox tradition.4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Asbury Journal Book ReviewBy First Fruits PressThis Review was originally Published in the Asbury

Journal 69:1 and was written by Nathan Crawford. <http://place.asburyseminary.edu/asburyjournal/vol69/iss1/17/>In his *The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy*, Aristotle Papanikolaou argues for a more positive attitude on the part of Christian theology in relation to liberalism and the liberal project. Papanikolaou wants to counter the critiques of liberalism put forward by those in the theological camps of Postliberalism (namely Stanley Hauerwas) and Radical Orthodoxy (namely John Milbank), while also critiquing those Eastern Orthodox theologians that have been critical of Western liberalism. Instead, Papanikolaou mines his own Eastern Orthodox tradition to put forward an understanding of the political through a theology of divine-human communion. The driving force behind *The Mystical as Political* is the doctrine of theosis. As Papanikolaou makes clear, this is a doctrine that is central to the Eastern Orthodox understanding of Christianity. However, he reorients the idea from becoming divine to the communion that takes place between the divine and human. With this in mind, he understands politics as the place that ensures the possibility of making a choice for divine-human communion to take place, as well as the choice to reject it. Interestingly, the political has to keep open the possibility of the non-church in order for the church to rightly complete its task of witnessing to the Kingdom of God. The community that is distinct from the church, though, is still created by God and so contains a good internal within itself. It is with this goodness that the church and Christian theology seeks to build connections, living out the aspects of the good internal to the secular community. By working together on those things that both communities hold as good like freedom of speech and religion, certain human rights, a commitment to democracy, etc. the church and secular community can accomplish the work of both communities. This position that works from the divine-human communion means that Christian theology must engage in a nonviolent approach to all things, including the secular society. This nonviolence includes the threat and use of physical violence, along with violent rhetoric and intellectual violence (146). In making the argument that he does, Papanikolaou offers a distinctive critique of two major streams of Christian theology in the contemporary world: Postliberalism and Radical Orthodoxy. These two theological approaches have dominated much in the realm of political theology and Papanikolaou offers his position as a corrective. In regards to both, he posits the idea of the necessity for a secular world to exist so that divine-human communion can take place. Challenging the ontology of participation that Radical Orthodoxy utilizes, Papanikolaou talks of an ontological realism that acknowledges God as Creator of all things, but that also takes into account that there is that which is separate from God and the church. Against the work of the Postliberal school, Papanikolaou argues that theology cannot conflate the work of the church with the work of the secular world. While the two intertwine at times, they do have separate agendas and, in order for divine-human communion to take place, must stay separate. With these critiques, Papanikolaou can put forward a vision for the political as the place that gives the ability for divine-human communion to take place. From the divine-human communion that takes place in the church, the body of Christ can then begin to enter the political fray in a way that brings the secular into contact with the Kingdom of God. Through this interaction, the church can accomplish its mission of bringing the Kingdom of God to the whole world. Four aspects of *The Mystical as Political* strike me as noteworthy. First, the text is a major contribution to the ongoing discussion between Christian theology and the political arena; however, Papanikolaou makes a significant contribution by giving an Eastern Orthodox voice to the conversation. Second, Papanikolaou gives a theological critique and embrace of the liberal project, offering criticism where necessary while acknowledging the positives. Third, he develops a distinctively Eastern Orthodox perspective on divine-human communion (theosis) that brings the doctrine to a place of relevancy in the contemporary world. Fourth, for Methodist and Wesleyan theologians, Papanikolaou's approach to divine-human communion presents a great deal of insight for our own understandings of sanctification and Christian perfection, most notably how it functions in a political context. In all, while an academic theologian writes *The Mystical as Political*, the text is lucid, clear, and will be a great help to many people who are struggling with the place of the Christian church in our contemporary world. Anyone that is familiar with church history, discussions of Christian theology, and semi-aware of the political climate of the West will find many valuable contributions. 0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By nicki Great read. Very creative.

Theosis, or the principle of divine-human communion, sparks the theological imagination of Orthodox Christians and has been historically important to questions of political theology. In *The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy*, Aristotle Papanikolaou argues that a political theology grounded in the principle of divine-human communion must be one that unequivocally endorses a political community that is democratic in a way that structures itself around the modern liberal principles of freedom of religion, the protection of human rights, and church-state separation. Papanikolaou hopes to forge a non-radical Orthodox political theology that extends beyond a reflexive opposition to the West and a nostalgic return to a Byzantine-like unified political-religious culture. His exploration is prompted by two trends: the fall of communism in traditionally Orthodox countries has revealed an unpreparedness on the part of Orthodox Christianity to address the question of political theology in a way that is consistent with its core axiom of theosis; and recent Christian political theology, some of it evoking the notion of deification, has been critical of liberal democracy, implying a mutual incompatibility between a Christian world view and that of modern liberal democracy. The first comprehensive treatment from an Orthodox theological perspective of the issue of the

compatibility between Orthodoxy and liberal democracy, Papanikolaou is an affirmation that Orthodox support for liberal forms of democracy is justified within the framework of Orthodox understandings of God and the human person. His overtly theological approach shows that the basic principles of liberal democracy are not tied exclusively to the language and categories of Enlightenment philosophy and, so, are not inherently secular. "Aristotle Papanikolaou's *The Mystical as Political* is a stellar contribution to the analysis of Orthodox thought and also to current debates about theology and politics. For too long scholars in the Western academy have failed to engage the resources and insights of Orthodox theology. This book aptly shows those resources and insights in a way that marks a genuine advance in thought. *The Mystical as Political* rewards its reader with fresh insight into the complex relation between faith and politics. Papanikolaou is a rising star on the theological scene. This book deserves wide readership as a crucial theological contribution to debates about our political and personal lives." William Schweiker, University of Chicago "In *The Mystical as Political*, Papanikolaou not only guides readers through the rich legacy of Eastern Orthodox political thought, from the formative struggles of the pre-Constantinian era to the post-Enlightenment, post-Ottoman, and post-Communist challenges encountered today, but also presents a compelling argument that Orthodoxy's goal of 'divine-human communion' cannot and should not include core elements of modern liberal democracy and the human rights tradition. This study signals a new phase in political theology for Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike, and it secures Papanikolaou's place as one of today's leading Orthodox thinkers and theological bridge-builders." Perry T. Hamalis, North Central College Aristotle Papanikolaou's *The Mystical as Political* will be the standard Eastern Orthodox text in classes on theology and politics. It evinces a thorough engagement with the current debates in theology and politics, a rich awareness of the theological issues at stake, and a crisply distinctive position of its own. It will be enormously educational for classroom use, as well as being an immense contribution to the scholarly conversations on these matters. Charles Mathewes, University of Virginia

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