

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this book is to serve as an introduction to the thought of Christos Yannaras,¹ one of the most important Orthodox thinkers of the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the present millennium.

His role has been – and still is – extraordinarily significant in Greece, where he has radically renewed the cultural perception of religious discourse by the force and novelty of his thinking and by the style of his linguistic expression.² He has an imposing presence on the Greek cultural scene. It is no exaggeration to say that one can easily distinguish between pre-Yannaras and post-Yannaras theology in Greece, between theology as an academic discipline and theology as a passion for the fullness of life, for victory over death.

Briefly, his work has had vast repercussions in Orthodoxy as a whole, in the various Orthodox national churches. His works have been translated into Russian, Romanian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Ukrainian and Finnish; and a great number of them also into English, Italian, French and German.

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1. The author's name and surname (in transliteration *Chrēstos Giannaras*) are given here in the form by which they are known internationally. The same principle is adopted with regard to all the names of Greek authors. In every other case, however, I transcribe the Greek text in Latin characters. With regard to pronunciation, the accentuation is thus: Christos Yannarás.
 2. Yannaras was the first Greek theologian to use *dimotiki* or popular Greek as his normal language, abandoning the *katharevousa* or 'purified' Greek that was the official language of academic theology, of the Church and of the state.

On the international and ecumenical levels Yannaras is considered to be among the most eminent representatives of Orthodox thought, sometimes the subject of controversy and debate, but, nonetheless, always listened to with attention, respect and gratitude. For about ten years he was a member of the editorial board of the well-known international theological journal, *Concilium*.

As a result, one might think that the value and importance of Yannaras' work is more theological and ecclesial than philosophical. In fact, that is not the case. Indeed, in Yannaras, as to a very large extent in the rest of Orthodox thinking in the twentieth century, it is not easy to distinguish between theological and philosophical thought. From the beginning of his reflection the ontological question has been fundamental, that is to say, what has been most important has been an essentially philosophical problem,³ a problem that nevertheless for Yannaras not only does not separate philosophy from theological thought but constitutes a point of contact between the two fields of knowledge, especially in the case of Christian theological thought because in its Christian form salvation has an ontological content and structure.⁴

As a theologian and also a philosopher Yannaras therefore constitutes a special way of entering into Greek Orthodox self-consciousness and its specific capacity for responding to the challenges of modernity and post-modernity. The Greek character of this self-consciousness should be emphasised because the whole of Yannaras' thought constitutes a powerful intellectual force for maintaining the idea of Hellenism's role in Christianity and of Hellenism itself as an adequate cultural container because through it Christianity has the possibility of expressing the truth of God and of Man in Christ in a fitting manner.

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3. The accusation that Yannaras is a theologian and not a philosopher was at the centre of the controversy that arose from his success in the competition for the chair in philosophy at the Panteion University of Athens. He has responded to this accusation on various occasions, noting that 'the *ontological* content of a concept (from whatever cognitive object such a concept derives) is a philosophical problem, because ontology constitutes a heading or a branch of systematic philosophy which is not to be identified with any heading or branch even of systematic theology' (Christos Yannaras, *Kritikes Parembaseis* [Critical Interventions] [Athens: Domos, 1983], p. 96).
 4. It is not by chance that the international congress on Christos Yannaras, organised by ORTF (Orthodox Theological Research Forum) at St Edmund's Hall, Oxford, England (2-5 September 2013), bore the title, *Christos Yannaras: Philosophy, Theology, Culture*.