

ORTHODOXY AND CULTURE

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Abstract. The theological imagination investigates what society and social theology might mean and it is deeply imprinted now on American consciousness far beyond its original Puritan founders. This was also stretched out into a subconscious axiom for many thinkers, even Christian theorists. Therefore, in that light to ask what would be the premisses of an Orthodox theological consideration of the Social issue? How does Orthodoxy, on its own terms, stand in relation to the question of the Church's relation to the issue of society and civilisation building? It has never believed that Church is merely an apocalyptic reality, or that it is a hopelessly corrupted concept. It has never thought that the Gospel is not a power to rebuild society, or the core of the issue of forming a civilisation. It could not imagine (if left to itself) the wisdom of building a wall between Church and State. Does this mean it is necessarily left to the vagaries of theocracy?

Key words: theological imagination, the Puritan founders, Orthodoxy, society and civilisation

Many aspects of contemporary American culture are imbued with a deep Protestant sense, prevalent in the founders of the Constitution, that not only should there be 'no law passed regarding an establishment of Religion' (First Amendment) but even that a 'wall of separation' between church and state should be built and maintained. It was not only the fear of wars of religion, or persecutions of supposed sectaries, that gave rise to that lively awareness of the 'problem' of religion in the minds of the American Protestant foundation, but at a deeper and more psychically primed level, the rooted Puritan sense that somehow or other society and the Christian religion are meant to be concepts at variance with one another. Protestantism's intimate foundation myths imagined the Church of the Empire (whether Constantinian, Byzantine or Papal) as one of the most profound 'corruptions' that the Reformation was meant to correct. It nailed its colours to the wall in the form of a straightforward belief that its own polity was that of a return to New Testament simplicities where 'the world' on the one side, and 'the kingdom' on the other were deeply at variance. And in such a dichotomous structure of thought, even the idea of 'Church' itself, was dubiously placed: many preferring to afford it no solid earthly validity, only an apocalyptic or eschatological significance ('Church' could only exist here among us as part of the corruptible realities of the world that needed constant reformation). In the light of this metaphysics of polity, it is hardly surprising that Protestantism, by and

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