

A. THE INFANT CHURCH by Aristeides Papadakis, Ph.D.

The Apostolic Era

This said, our brief survey of the long evolution of Orthodox Christianity begins with the first Pentecost in Jerusalem and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Christ's small circle of disciples. It is then that the Orthodox Church was born – today the second largest organized body of Christians in the world. The Apostles, it is true, had been historic witnesses to Christ's messianic ministry and resurrection before the Spirit of God descended on them. Still, it was with this event that they felt authorized to preach the Gospel to the world. Only then were they able to fully understand the mystery of Easter, that God had raised Jesus from the dead, and begin their mission. The expansion of the early Christian movement, however, was not without problems, nor was it spontaneous. Persecution and martyrdom awaited most of its initial members. The aggressive new missionary community, nevertheless, was destined to survive and grow in numbers. By the third century it had become a “mass phenomenon.” Though unevenly scattered, it constituted possibly as much as ten percent of the total population of the Roman Empire. As such, it was sufficiently strong to compel the Roman emperors to end the persecutions. The Church, arguably, could no longer be ignored – numerically or ideologically; hence the legal recognition of Christianity by the Emperor Constantine at the beginning of the fourth century (312), and its subsequent recognition as the official religion of the empire by the end, under Theodosius (392).

Persecution and Success

The causes of this success are understandably complex. The disciplined close-knit structure of the Church, its social solidarity and internal cohesion, its care for the poor and the deprived did not go unnoticed. Both the hostile critic and the ordinary pagan observer were aware of these advantages. Furthermore, the persecution and martyrdom of Christians – despite the streak of cruelty in some who observed these punishments – could not but raise doubts and questions for many individuals. Nor did Christianity's message of equality before God fail to make its impression on the stratified urban population of the ancient world. Finally, Christianity's exclusiveness, the intimate sense of belonging, as well as its universality attracted new adherents. Ultimately and at a deeper level, however, it was the saving message of the Gospel that was the principal cause of Christian expansion. This message promised not only reconciliation and forgiveness of sin, but liberation from the bondage of death and corruption. “Christians were Christians,” as one scholar has put it, “only because Christianity brought to them liberation from death.” Above all, through Christ's own resurrection, man's own incorruptibility, his own future physical resurrection and deification was assured. To be in Christ, as St. Paul says, is to be a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). It is to the simple appeal of the primitive proclamation of the Gospel, in sum, that we must turn for the more probable cause of Christian expansion.

The Impact of Christian Victory

In a very real sense, the first four centuries of the Christian era were among the most creative. The Christian victory was undeniably revolutionary both for the Roman Empire and the European civilization that followed. From the perspective of the Church itself the period was even more significant. It is then that the Church achieved a certain self-identity, even self-awareness, which has since remained normative for Orthodoxy. Two developments which affected its self-understanding — one institutional and the other doctrinal — will suffice to

illustrate this truism. The Church was initially without a New Testament. “Scripture” invariably simply meant the Old Testament. Increasingly, however, the Church saw the need to bring together all the writings of apostolic origin or inspiration into a single canon. This collection of twenty-seven books still constitutes the total apostolic witness for the Church and is identical with our present New Testament. In sum, one of the most significant events in the history of Christianity during this period was its transformation, to borrow Harnack’s phrase, into a religion of two Testaments. These writings, it is worth pointing out, were received and acknowledged by the community of the Church because they coincided with its own Tradition and the witness of the Holy Spirit indwelling in its midst since Pentecost. Strictly speaking, Christians lived solely by this Tradition decades before the content of the New Testament was determined. In the circumstances, Scripture in the Orthodox Church is routinely interpreted within the context of Tradition. As Father Georges Florovsky famously argued, it is within this larger setting of the Church’s living memory (Tradition) that Scripture discloses its authentic message.

Early Administrative Structure

Equally crucial for the life of the Church was the formation of its administrative structure. As a rule, the ministry of the Apostles was itinerant, not stationary. After founding a community the Apostles would depart for another mission, leaving behind others to administer the new congregation and preside over the Eucharist and Baptism. In effect, a local hierarchy developed whose functions were stationary, administrative, and sacramental in contrast with the mobile authority of the Apostles. The presiding officer of each community, especially at each Sunday eucharistic meal, was the episcopos, or bishop, who was assisted by priests and deacons. By the early second century, this settled system with its threefold pattern of bishop, priest, deacon was already in place in many areas. There was nothing unusual in this development. After all, the Last Supper — the first liturgy — could not have taken place without the Lord’s presiding presence. Indeed, from the beginning, the existence of a presiding head was taken for granted by the Church. This establishment of a local “monarchical” episcopate is still at the very centre of

Orthodox ecclesiology.

B. THE BYZANTINE CHURCH

The Medieval Period

If the early fourth century marks the end of the period of persecutions and the Church’s formative age, it also marks the dawn of the medieval period. With the fourth century we are standing on the threshold of a new civilization — the Christian empire of medieval Byzantium. Clearly, Constantine’s recognition of Christianity was decisive. Equally momentous doubtless was his decision to transfer the imperial residence — the centre of Roman government — to Constantinople in 330. The importance of this event in the history of Eastern Christianity can hardly be exaggerated. This capital situated in the old Greek city of Byzantium, soon became the focus of the new emerging Orthodox civilization. Historical opinion remains divided on the question of Byzantium’s contribution to civilization. Still, its lasting legacy lies arguably in the area of religion and art; it is these which give Byzantine culture much of its unity and cohesion. The new cultural synthesis that developed was at any rate clearly Christian, dominated by the Christian vision of life, rather than the pagan. We need only turn to Justinian’s (532) “Great Church” of the Holy Wisdom — the Hagia Sophia

in Constantinople — to understand this. But if Constantinople, the “New Rome” became the setting for this new civilization, it also became the unrivalled centre of Orthodox Christianity. It is during this pivotal period in the history of the Church that the city’s bishop assumed the title of “ecumenical patriarch.”

Heresies and Ecumenical Councils

Space does not permit us to elaborate on this period in detail. It is, as it turns out, the single longest chapter in the history of the Church. The Byzantine Empire was characterized by a remarkable endurance: it survived for over a millennium until its fall to the Ottoman Turks in 1453. We will therefore limit ourselves to an outline of this age, to the events and developments which exercised the greatest influence on the life of the Church. The seven ecumenical councils with their doctrinal formulations are of particular importance. Specifically, these assemblies were responsible for the formulation of Christian doctrine. As such, they constitute a permanent standard for an Orthodox understanding of the Trinity, the persons of Christ, the incarnation. The mystery of the divine reality was evidently not exhausted by these verbal definitions. All the same, they constitute an authoritative norm against which all subsequent speculative theology is measured. Their decisions remain binding for the whole Church; non-acceptance constitutes exclusion from the communion of the Church. This explains the separation from the body of the Church of such groups as the Jacobites, Armenians, Copts, and Nestorians. Ultimately, acceptance of these councils by the entire community of the Church is what gave them validity and authority. By and large, however, their reception was also due to the great theologians of the age; their literary defence of the theology of these councils was decisive. As we should expect, the writings of such Fathers and saints as Basil, Athanasius, Chrysostom, Gregory of Nazianzus, Cyril, and Gregory of Nyssa, still constitute an inexhaustible theological source for the contemporary Orthodox Christian.

But the seven ecumenical councils are significant for another reason. The visible threefold ministerial structure of the Church was already a reality in many communities by the post-apostolic period, as we have had occasion to observe. Each of these self-contained local churches, with its own independent hierarchical structure, was a self-governing unit. However, precise standards governing the relations of these churches with each other had not been defined. Still, a certain “power structure” modelled in the main upon the organization of the Roman Empire eventually emerged; even before the fourth century a provincial system had developed in which churches were grouped in provinces. In such cases it was customary to give greater honour to the “metropolitan” or bishop of the capital city (metropolis) of each province. Similarly, given the importance of certain cities in the Roman administration, special precedence was accorded the presiding bishop of the three largest cities in the empire: Rome, Alexandria, Antioch. All the same, such developments in which a church was ranked according to its civil importance in the administrative divisions of the Roman state, had evolved by common consensus without any ecclesiastical legislation to support it. This problem was eventually addressed by the ecumenical councils. For example, the Fathers of the first council (325) formally recognized the status of the three dioceses of Rome, Alexandria and Antioch. With the emergence of Constantinople as the new capital of the empire, this patriarchal system was further modified. After all, the change wrought in the civil administration by Constantinople’s new status could not but affect ecclesiastical structure. A rearrangement of the existing pattern was obviously necessary. At the council of 381, Constantinople, as the “New Rome,” was accordingly given second place after the old Rome, while Alexandria was assigned third place. This legislation received further

confirmation at the fourth council of Chalcedon (451), when Constantinople, along with Jerusalem, was granted patriarchal status.

The Pentarchy

To sum up, by the fifth century, a “pentarchy” or system of five sees (patriarchates), with a settled order of precedence, had been established. Rome, as the ancient centre and largest city of the empire, was understandably given the presidency or primacy of honour within the pentarchy into which Christendom was now divided. Plainly, this system of patriarchs and metropolitans was exclusively the result of ecclesiastical legislation; there was nothing inherently divine in its origin. None of the five sees, in short, possessed its authority by divine right. Had this been so, Alexandria could not have been demoted to third rank in order to have Constantinople exalted to second place. The determining factor was simply their secular status as the most important cities in the empire. Typically, each of the five patriarchs was totally sovereign within his sphere of jurisdiction. The primacy of Rome, as such, did not entail universal jurisdictional power over the others. On the contrary, all bishops, whether patriarchs or not, were equal. No one bishop, however exalted his see or diocese, could claim supremacy over the others. The bishop of Rome was simply vested with the presidency, as the senior bishop – the first among equals.

The Iconoclastic Crisis

In view of the prominent part played by the visual arts in Orthodox piety and liturgical life, a brief explanation is necessary of Byzantine iconoclasm and the seventh ecumenical council (787) which condemned it. It is a commonplace, but one worth repeating, that Byzantine religious art is among the empire’s most enduring legacies. An iconoclast victory arguably decisively would have altered the course of Byzantine painting. Overall, iconoclasm is often viewed apart from the christological debates with which the earlier ecumenical councils were concerned. Be that as it may; the issue, to an unusual degree, was christological in nature. To illustrate this point we need to begin with the fundamental iconoclast objection to images. How could the divinity of Christ — suggested the iconoclasts — be depicted or represented without lapsing into idolatry? Plainly, the veneration of the Lord’s icon was nothing less than idolatrous worship of inanimate wood and paint; and that expressly was forbidden by Scripture to the Christian. This seemingly cogent argument, however, did not convince the Fathers of the Seventh Council.

A material image, it is true, is made of wood and paint, but it is only a symbol. More to the point, it is not an object of absolute veneration or worship. On the contrary, icons are only relatively venerated since the true object of veneration is ultimately the person imaged or depicted in the icon, not the image itself. A clear distinction must indeed be drawn between veneration (*proskynesis timetike*) by which an icon should be honoured, and worship (*latreia*) which belongs alone to God. In sum, it is altogether unlawful to worship icons, for God alone is worshipped and adored; they could and should be venerated, however. This insistence that icons should be honoured brings us to the Church’s second crucial argument — the christological. This argument maintains that a representation of the Lord or of the saints is entirely permissible and in fact necessary because of the incarnation. That is to say, in other words, the Son of God, the image of the Father, can be depicted pictorially precisely because he became visible and describable by assuming human nature and by becoming man. Any repudiation of the Lord’s image is tantamount to a denial of the mystery of the incarnation. Fittingly enough, the defeat of iconoclasm is celebrated annually by the Orthodox Church on

the first Sunday of Lent. This “Feast of Orthodoxy” commemorates the final restoration of images (11 March 843).

The Byzantinization

But if Orthodox devotional art received its definitive form during the Byzantine period, so did the liturgical life of the Church. That the see of Constantinople should have played the crucial and determining role in this “process of Byzantinization” is not surprising. Historically, before its rise to political prominence in the fourth century, Constantinople was only a minor bishopric without any liturgical tradition of its own. Its liturgical life was gradually formed from other local liturgical elements and traditions. Older centers such as Antioch and Jerusalem made major contributions to this process. Also involved in the building up of this “Byzantine rite” was the city’s resident imperial court with its own elaborate ceremonial. By the ninth century, given Constantinople’s growing importance in the Church, this new liturgical synthesis became the standard and eventually replaced all other local rites within the Church. The liturgy and the whole cycle of services, such as compline, vespers, etc., used today in the Orthodox world, is substantially identical with the original Byzantine rite of Constantinople.

The Influence of Monasticism

The two areas just described – liturgy and iconography – would be inconceivable without the contribution of Byzantine monasticism. The victory of the Church against iconoclasm was by and large the work of Byzantine monks, as are liturgical regulations governing the cycle of Orthodox services today. Indeed, the impact of monasticism on Orthodox Christianity was all encompassing and far-reaching. Monasticism as a permanent institution did not exist before the fourth century. Its institutional origins will not be found in any single specific directive of the Lord or in any particular passage of the New Testament. Its foundations, all the same, are rooted in the totality of the Gospel message – the source of both its creativity and strength. Behind the physical withdrawal into the desert or a monastery lies the renunciation of the world and of Satan to which every Christian commits himself at baptism. This renunciation is a basic condition to being a Christian. The monastic vocation, in sum, is intimately bound to the baptismal vow. Entering a monastery is simply another means by which some have chosen to live the absolute ideal of the Gospel. This may seem an extreme way to follow Christ, and yet all Christians, whether in or outside the monastery, are ultimately called to the same renunciation, the same perfection, the same fulfilment of the Gospel. The personal search for holiness is not the monk’s special preserve.

It is because of its essentially Christian goals that asceticism spread and influenced Orthodox spirituality, prayer, piety, and general Church life. Besides, the Church itself sponsored and promoted it, having intuitively recognized its unique charismatic ministry, usefulness, and potential for holiness. We have already noted its contributions to the Church in two areas. Less well known, perhaps, is the fact that the Church often recruited its episcopate from the countless monastic communities dotting the Byzantine countryside. One monastery on Mt. Athos, in addition to producing 144 bishops, provided the Church with 26 patriarchs. Indeed, virtually two thirds of the patriarchs of Constantinople between the ninth and the thirteenth centuries were monastic's. But the charismatic and eschatological witness of monasticism was crucial. As the established faith of the Byzantine Empire, the Church was often in danger of identifying itself with the state, of becoming worldly and thus losing its eschatological dimension. The monastic presence was always there to remind the Church of its true nature

and identity with another Kingdom. Its fierce opposition to any compromise of the Christian vision was crucial in the Church's survival and independence.

Church and State

The Byzantine Church has often been described as a "state" or "national" Church. This observation, however, is misleading, not to say offensive. True, the Byzantine world became more Greek linguistically and geographically as a result of the defection of the non-Greek speaking areas of Syria and Egypt during the period of the ecumenical councils. Additionally, the schism between Eastern and Western Christendom further isolated and confined Christian Byzantium. These losses were considerable and tragic, both for the Church and the empire. As a matter of fact, however, although the Church is "eastern" by virtue of its geography, in its theology and tradition it is Catholic and Orthodox. Historically, the Byzantine Church itself was never so confined or isolated as the Byzantine Empire. The vigour of its missionary drive in Eastern Europe and the Slavic world, shortly after the iconoclastic controversy, is eloquent evidence to the contrary.

The Conversion of the Slavs

This evangelization, or christianization, of the Slavs was initiated by one of Byzantium's most learned churchmen – the Patriarch Photius. His choice of the brothers Cyril and Methodius for the mission was a stroke of genius and missionary insight, for both spoke the Slavic dialect then in use among the Slavic settlers near their native city of Thessalonica. Having received their commission, they immediately set about creating an alphabet, the so-called Cyrillic; they then translated the Scripture and the liturgy. Hence, the origins of Church Slavonic, the common liturgical language still used by the Russian Orthodox Church and other Slavic Orthodox Christians. Although their first mission to Moravia was unsuccessful (they were forced to flee by German missionaries and the changing political situation), their work was not in vain. Before long Byzantine missionaries, including the exiled disciples of the two brothers, turned to other areas. By the beginning of the eleventh century most of the pagan Slavic world, including Russia, Bulgaria and Serbia, had been won for Byzantine Christianity. Bulgaria was officially recognized as a patriarchate by Constantinople in 945, Serbia in 1346, and Russia in 1589. All these nations, however, had been converted long before these dates. The conversion of Russia actually began with the baptism of Vladimir of Kiev in 989, on which occasion he was also married to the Byzantine princess Anna, the sister of the Byzantine

Emperor Basil II.

The Orthodox Commonwealth

But this expansion into the Slavic world also created an Orthodox "Commonwealth." Byzantine art, literature, and culture were no longer confined within Byzantium's own political frontiers, but extended far beyond into the Balkans and the north of Russia to create a single Byzantine Orthodox commonwealth. The Slavic nations, in sum, were not only christianized, but civilized by the Byzantines. The saving message of the New Testament was also accompanied by the gift of civilization. This was a major factor in the formation and future development of Slavic culture. But if the conversion of the Slavs was pivotal in the destiny of the young Slavic nations it was equally decisive for the future of the Church. It was in the main this missionary vigour which preserved Byzantine Christianity's universality. The

inclusion of Slavic Orthodoxy into the Orthodox fold permanently enlarged the Church's area of geographic distribution. Equally, the Slavic element brought immense riches into the Church's midst. Few people, perhaps, have embraced the Orthodox faith with such ardour and devotion as the Slavs.

East and West

Finally, this chapter of Church history also serves to demonstrate another major point. Whereas Western Christianity at this time was zealously imposing a uniform Latin liturgical language on converts, Byzantine Christianity refused to do so. Generally, Greek was seldom used as a missionary language among the Slavs. The principle of a single liturgical language was avoided. Hence, the Cyrillic alphabet and liturgy, which employed the vernacular language of the peoples, created native-speaking Churches in the Balkans and elsewhere. Orthodox Christianity, in brief, insisted on preaching the Gospel in the ordinary language of the people so as to be directly and immediately understood by the new converts. And that, after all, is the goal of Christian mission. In the history of Orthodoxy, this legacy of the "Apostles to the Slavs," Saints Cyril and Methodius, is among the most precious.

The preceding section has provided a survey, not exhaustive but sufficient for our purposes, of the Church's Byzantine period. Before examining the long Turkish domination that followed the fall of Constantinople, we need to explore one final event in the life of the medieval Church – the schism between Eastern and Western Christianity. To begin with, this tragic division was not an event, but a prolonged process stretching over centuries. The cracks and fissures in Christian unity are arguably visible as early as the fourth century. As such, 1054, the traditional date marking the beginning of the schism and the excommunication of patriarch Michael Cerularius by papal legates, is inaccurate.

There is, in fact, no precise date. What really happened was a complex chain of events whose climax was only reached in the thirteenth century with the sack of Constantinople by western Crusaders (1204). Equally, we need to remember that the events leading to schism were not always exclusively theological in nature. Cultural, political, and linguistic differences were often mixed with the theological. Any narrative of the schism which emphasizes one at the expense of the other will be fragmentary. Unlike the Copts or Armenians who broke from the Church in the fifth century and established ethnic churches at the cost of their universality and catholicity, the eastern and western parts of the Church remained loyal to the faith and authority of the seven ecumenical councils. They were united, by virtue of their common faith and tradition, in one Church. Still, the transfer of the Roman capital to the Bosphorus inevitably brought mistrust, rivalry, and even jealousy to the relations of the two great sees, Rome and Constantinople. It was easy for Rome to be jealous of Constantinople at a time when it was rapidly losing its political prominence. In fact, Rome refused to recognize the conciliar legislation which promoted Constantinople to second rank. But the estrangement was also helped along by the German invasions in the West, which effectively weakened contacts. The rise of Islam with its conquest of most of the Mediterranean coastline (not to mention the arrival of the pagan Slavs in the Balkans at the same time) further intensified this separation by driving a physical wedge between the two worlds. The once homogenous unified world of the Mediterranean was fast vanishing. Communication between the Greek East and the Latin West by the 600s had become dangerous and practically ceased.

The Photian Schism

The gap widened further in the ninth century when the missionary ambitions of the two communions clashed over the Christianization of Bulgaria and Moravia. The election of Patriarch Photius even caused a temporary division, known as the “Photian Schism.” But it is the coronation of Charlemagne as emperor by the pope and the revival in 800 of a western “Roman” Empire which best illustrate how far the gulf had widened. For the East, the West was acting as if the Roman Empire, with its legitimate emperor in Constantinople, had ceased to exist. The Byzantine Empire’s claims to world sovereignty were being ignored. Charlemagne’s new “empire” was usurping the legitimate role of the Roman Empire in Constantinople. Such a declaration of independence and emancipation from Byzantium was a threat to the unity of Christendom and, indirectly, the shared faith of the one Church. Subsequent developments, such as the Norman conquest of southern Italy, the Crusades, the commercial penetration of the Bosphorus and the Black Sea by Italian merchants, were to add to the already lengthy list of disagreements. They suffice to demonstrate how deep the alienation had become. In fact, they have been judged time and again as the cause of the schism.

And yet, popular as these causes are in conventional historical analysis, they do not alone explain the breach. Today these historical factors no longer exist, yet the schism continues. We must, in the event, search for the ultimate root cause of schism in the intellectual and theological differences rather than in the political, geographical or historical factors. Two basic problems — the primacy of the bishop of Rome and the procession of the Holy Spirit — were involved. These doctrinal novelties were first openly discussed in Photius’s patriarchate. By the fifth century, to repeat, Christendom was divided into five sees with Rome holding the primacy. This was determined by canonical decision and did not entail hegemony of any one local church or patriarchate over the others. For all that, during the progressive alienation noted above, Rome began to interpret her primacy in terms of sovereignty, as a God-given right involving universal jurisdiction in the Church. The collegial and conciliar nature of the Church, in effect, was gradually abandoned in favour of a supremacy of unlimited papal power over the entire Church. These ideas were finally given systematic expression in the West during the Gregorian Reform movement of the eleventh century. Enough has been said about early ecclesiology to realize how much Rome’s understanding of the nature of episcopal power was in direct violation of the Church’s essentially conciliar structure. The two ecclesiologies were mutually antithetical. No wonder subsequent attempts to heal the schism and bridge the divisions would fail. Characteristically, Rome insisted on basing her monarchical claims to “true and proper jurisdiction” (as the Vatican Council of 1870 put it) on St. Peter. This “Roman” exegesis of Mathew 16:18, however, was unknown to the Fathers who had ruled on the Church’s organization. For them, specifically, St. Peter’s primacy could never be the exclusive prerogative of any one bishop. All bishops must, like St. Peter, confess Jesus as the Christ and, as such, all are St. Peter’s successors. In short, to believe otherwise would be to violate the bishops’ charismatic equality; no one can hold a position superior to that of the others.

Equally disturbing to the Christian East was the western interpretation of the procession of the Holy Spirit. Like the primacy, this too developed gradually and entered the Creed in the West almost unnoticed. This theologically complex issue involved the addition by the West of the Latin phrase *filioque* (“and from the Son”) to the Creed. The original Creed sanctioned by the councils and still used by the Orthodox Church did not contain this phrase; the text simply states “the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, proceeds from the Father.” Theologically, the Latin interpolation was unacceptable to the Byzantines since it implied that the Spirit now had two sources of procession, the Father and the Son, rather than the

Father alone. In short, the balance between the three persons of the Trinity was altered. The result, the Orthodox Church believed, then and now, was theologically indefensible. But in addition to the dogmatic issue raised by the filioque, the Byzantines argued that the phrase had been added unilaterally and, therefore, illegitimately, since the East had never been consulted. In the final analysis, only another ecumenical council could introduce such an alteration. Indeed the councils, which drew up the original Creed, had expressly forbidden any subtraction or addition to the text. The West's tampering with the major creedal formula of the Church was, all in all, inadmissible.

C. THE CAPTIVE CHURCH

The Ottoman Conquest

In general, the fall of Constantinople in 1453 was a great misfortune for Christianity. For Eastern Christendom it was nothing less than an unqualified disaster. As a result of the Ottoman conquest, the entire Orthodox communion of the Balkans and the Near East was suddenly isolated from the West. For the next four hundred years it would instead be confined within a hostile Islamic world, with which it had little in common religiously or culturally. Orthodox Russia alone escaped this fate. It is this geographical and intellectual confinement which, in part, explains Orthodoxy's silence during the Reformation in sixteenth century Europe. That this important theological debate should often seem distorted to the Orthodox is not surprising: they never took part in it. And yet, it is not the isolation alone, but the consequences of Ottoman rule that make these pages of Church history so bleak from virtually every point of view.

Religious Rights Under Islam

The new Ottoman government that arose from the ashes of Byzantine civilization was neither primitive nor barbaric. Islam not only recognized Jesus as a great prophet, but tolerated Christians as another People of the Book. As such, the Church was not extinguished nor was its canonical and hierarchical organization significantly disrupted. Its administration continued to function. One of the first things that Mehmet the Conqueror did was to allow the Church to elect a new patriarch, Gennadius Scholarius. The Hagia Sophia and the Parthenon, which had been Christian churches for nearly a millennium were, admittedly, converted into mosques, yet countless other churches, both in Constantinople and elsewhere, remained in Christian hands. Moreover, it is striking that the patriarch's and the hierarchy's position was considerably strengthened and their power increased. They were endowed with civil as well as ecclesiastical power over all Christians in Ottoman territories. Because Islamic law makes no distinction between nationality and religion, all Christians, regardless of their language or nationality, were viewed as a single millet, or nation. The patriarch, as the highest ranking hierarch, was thus invested with civil and religious authority and made ethnarch, head of the entire Christian Orthodox population. Practically, this meant that all Orthodox Churches within Ottoman territory were under Constantinople. The authority and jurisdictional frontiers of the patriarch, in short, were enormously enlarged.

Still, on balance, all these rights and privileges, including freedom of worship and religious organization, seldom corresponded to reality. The legal privileges of the patriarch and the Church depended, in fact, on the whim and mercy of the Sultan and the Sublime Porte, while all Christians were viewed as little more than second-class citizens. Moreover, Turkish corruption and brutality were not a myth. That it was the "infidel" Christian who experienced this more than anyone else is not in doubt. Nor were pogroms of Christians in these centuries

unknown. Devastating, too, for the Church was the fact that it could not bear witness to Christ. Missionary work among Moslems was dangerous and indeed impossible, whereas conversion to Islam was entirely legal and permissible. On the other hand, converts to Islam who returned to Orthodoxy were put to death. Of a piece with this grim situation was the fact that new churches could not be built and even the ringing of church bells was not allowed. Finally, the education of the clergy and the Christian population fared no better – it either ceased or was of a rudimentary kind.

The Results of Corruption

It was likewise the Church's fate to be affected by the Turkish system of corruption. The patriarchal throne was frequently sold to the highest bidder, while new patriarchal investiture was accompanied by heavy payment to the government. In order to recoup their losses, patriarchs and bishops taxed the local parishes and their clergy. Nor was the patriarchal throne ever secure. Few patriarchs between the fifteenth and the nineteenth centuries died a natural death while in office. The forced abdications, exiles, hangings, drownings, and poisonings of patriarchs are well documented. But if the patriarch's position was precarious so was the hierarchy's. The hanging of patriarch Gregory V from the gate of the patriarchate on Easter Sunday 1821 was accompanied by the execution of two metropolitans and twelve bishops. (The gate still remains closed in St. Gregory's memory.) The above summary – stark and short as it is – is sufficient to convey the persecution, decay, and humiliation that Eastern Christendom suffered under Ottoman rule. If we add to this tragic fate the militant communist atheism under which most Orthodox lived after 1917, we get some sense of the dislocation and suffering of Eastern Christianity in the last five hundred years. The grave problems that western Christians had to face as a result of the French Revolution and the secularization of western society in general might be said to pale against these facts.

Papacy and Orthodoxy

Along with these conditions, mention should finally be made of Rome's proselytizing pressure. Evidence for this phenomenon is appallingly plentiful. Missionaries were prepared in special schools such as the College of St. Athanasius in Rome (opened in 1577) and then sent to the East in order to engage in direct proselytizing of the Orthodox. This network of Roman propaganda also embraced the Orthodox Slavic world. The pressure of the Catholic Polish monarchy and Jesuits in Poland and Lithuania on Orthodox dioceses canonically dependent on Constantinople is well enough known. The Uniat Ukrainian Church was, in part, the result of such pressure through the Union of Brest-Litovsk in 1596. There was, of course, little that the Orthodox Church could do to counter this aggressive Romanization, given the historical situation.

Such, then, were the humiliating restrictions under which the Church was forced to live until the early nineteenth century. The part played by the ecumenical patriarchate in this and the preceding chapter of its history was decisive. This was due, as we have seen, to the preeminent position of the city of Constantinople in the Byzantine period, when its bishop acquired a rank second only to Rome. But it was also a result of the schism with Rome. Rome's defection left Constantinople with undisputed primacy among the other eastern patriarchates. This is how Constantinople became the primary see of Orthodoxy. Finally, under the Ottoman ethnarchic system its geographic frontiers were enlarged, with the result that most of the Orthodox community came under its jurisdiction. How the patriarch of Constantinople became the senior bishop in Orthodoxy is understandably a major theme of

Orthodox church history. Nineteenth century militant nationalism, however, was to introduce vast changes. Although the patriarchate's primatial status has never been in question – it is, and remains, the first see of Orthodoxy – its geographical frontiers were considerably reduced as a result of the struggle for freedom undertaken by the various Orthodox nationalities under Ottoman rule. The new independent nation states could not remain ecclesiastically under the jurisdiction of a patriarch who was still within the orbit of the foreign and hostile Ottoman state.

Constantinople and Modern National Churches

One of the earliest nations to be influenced by the French Revolution's explosive ideas was Greece; it was the first to break the Turkish yoke, winning its independence early in the century. Before long, a synod of bishops declared the Church of the new Kingdom of Greece autocephalous. The new Greek nation, in short, could not be headed by the patriarch. Indeed, Greece's autocephalous status, recognized by Constantinople in 1850, meant that it could elect its own head or kephale. The Church of Greece is today governed by a Holy Synod presided over by the Archbishop of Athens. Mt. Athos and the semiautonomous Church of Crete alone remain under the patriarch's jurisdiction. The island of Cyprus, however, is independent of both Constantinople and the Church of Greece. Its autonomous status dates from the third ecumenical council (431) which accorded it this unique position. Up to that time, it had been subject to the patriarchate of Antioch. Like Greece, this ancient Church is governed by a synod of bishops and a presiding archbishop.

As we have seen, the ethnarchic system introduced by the Ottomans brought most of the autocephalous and patriarchal Slavic Churches under the jurisdiction of Constantinople. This subjection, with its loss of patriarchal status, was never popular. As a result, several independent national Churches came into being once political freedom was achieved. The Church of Serbia, which had lost its patriarchate in the Turkish period, became autocephalous in 1879, and its primate was recognized as patriarch by Constantinople in 1922. Romania, today the largest self-governing Church after Russia, was declared autocephalous in 1885 and became a patriarchate in 1925. Finally, the Church of Bulgaria declared itself autocephalous in 1860, but it was not until 1945 that Constantinople recognized it; its metropolitan in Sofia assumed the title of patriarch in 1953. Russia, which was outside the Turkish fold, was recognized a patriarchate by Constantinople in 1589. Nevertheless, this too, was eventually abolished, but not by Constantinople. Peter the Great replaced it by a governing Synod in 1721. The Synodal Period that followed lasted until the Bolshevik Revolution, when the patriarchate was once again restored (1917). Today, Russia ranks fifth after the four ancient patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem.

The Ancient Patriarchates

But the ancient sees of the Near East also achieved greater freedom as a result of the breakup of the Ottoman Empire. For these, too, were often under the influence of Constantinople during the period of Turkish captivity. Despite the defection of Egypt in the fifth century (it refused to accept the fourth ecumenical council and created a national Coptic Church) the patriarchate of Alexandria continued to survive. The ancient title of the patriarch is still "pope and patriarch" an eloquent illustration that the designation of "pope" was never the exclusive privilege of the bishop of Rome in the Church. Today, the patriarch and the clergy of this see are Greek. Significantly, its jurisdiction extends over all Orthodox on the African continent. A flourishing Orthodox Church now exists in Uganda. Antioch, which was one of the largest

cities of the Roman Empire, now ranks third after Constantinople. It consists of Arabic-speaking Orthodox Christians living in Syria and Lebanon. Until the late nineteenth century its patriarch and bishops were Greek, but since 1899 they have been Arabs. Jerusalem has been an independent patriarchate since the fifth century. Unlike Antioch, its patriarch is Greek although its faithful are for the most part Arabs. This venerable see is the guardian and protector of the Holy Places. On the whole, the strength of these ancient sees has been sapped under Islam.

The New Structure

It is plain from what has been said about nineteenth century developments that the authority enjoyed by Constantinople today is no longer based on any vast ecclesiastical jurisdiction. In the last century and a half it has been stripped both of its former territories and most of its flock. Greece and the Balkans are no longer under its jurisdiction. Inside Turkey itself, moreover, the Orthodox Christian communities of Asia Minor have disappeared. The patriarch's immediate flock today is, in the main, composed of those Orthodox still living in Constantinople. The patriarchate's position, therefore, rests on its primatial status, rather than on any wide territorial jurisdiction. No less striking is the fact that world Orthodoxy, like the ancient Church, is essentially a decentralized body consisting of four ancient patriarchates and numerous local or national Churches, most of which enjoy full self-governing status. The Orthodox community of Churches is decidedly not a monolithic structure. Despite the lack of a centralized authority, however, all members of this living body are bound together by a common canonical and liturgical tradition, by a single doctrinal and sacramental unity, and by a common faith stretching back to the original Christian nucleus of Apostolic times. Behind historical reality lies the true Catholic and universal Church. In Christian history, catholicity has never been coextensive with organizational or institutional uniformity.

D. THE MODERN CHURCH

Orthodoxy and Modern Ideology

The tragedy of the Orthodox Church for much of the twentieth century has been to live for a good portion of its flock, at least – under the new political framework of atheistic totalitarianism. The dislocation of communism is the latest in a long series of misfortunes – Arabic, Seljuk, Crusader, Mongol, Ottoman – with which it has had to cope in the last millennium and a half. As St. Paul observes, “it was given to us not only to believe in Christ but also to suffer for him” (Phil. 1:29). There is, however, one significant difference between this latest crisis and those of the past: the previous non-Christian political regimes under which the Church had to live were rarely deliberately anti-Christian. In plain English, there has never been an exact precedent for the communist catastrophe. None of the past regimes were ever as insistent as communism in its belief that religion must not be tolerated. According to Lenin, a communist regime cannot remain neutral on the question of religion but must show itself to be merciless towards it. There was no place for the church in Lenin's classless society.

Confrontation with Atheistic Regimes

The result of this militant atheism has been to transform the Church into a persecuted and martyred Church. Thousands of bishops, monks, clergy, and faithful died as martyrs for Christ, both in Russia and in the other communist nations. Their numbers may well exceed

the Christians who perished under the Roman Empire. Equally frightening for the Church was communism's indirect, but systematic, strangulation policy. In the Soviet Union, in addition to the methodical closing, desecration and destruction of churches, ecclesiastical authorities were not allowed to carry on any charitable or social work. Nor for that matter, could the Church own property. The few places of worship left to the Church were legally viewed as state property which the government permitted the church to use. More devastating still was the fact that the Church was not permitted to carry on educational or instructional activity of any kind. Outside of sermons during the celebration of the divine liturgy it could not instruct the faithful or its youth. Catechism classes, religious schools, study groups, Sunday schools and religious publications were all illegal.

Orthodoxy and Immigration

One of the most striking developments in modern historical Orthodoxy is the dispersion of Orthodox Christians to the West. Emigration from Greece and the Near East in the last hundred years has, in fact, created a sizable Orthodox diaspora in Western Europe, North and South America, and Australia. In addition, the Bolshevik Revolution forced thousands of Russian exiles westward. As a result, Orthodoxy's traditional frontiers have been profoundly modified. Millions of Orthodox are no longer "eastern" since they live permanently in their newly adopted countries in the West. Virtually all the Orthodox nationalities – Greek, Arab, Russian, Serbian, Albanian, Ukrainian, Romanian, Bulgarian – are represented in the United States. To describe them all is beyond the scope of this short survey. Rather, only the largest of these diaspora groups will be mentioned, namely, the Greek Archdiocese of America, with two million faithful. Under the guidance of several dedicated archbishops, this diaspora has matured into a vital and active Church and plays a dominant role in the lives of millions of Greek Orthodox Christians. The Archdiocese is under the ecclesiastical and spiritual jurisdiction of the ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. Indeed, the senior see in Orthodoxy possesses jurisdiction over a large portion of the Orthodox diaspora. Besides the Archdiocese, there is also the Exarchate of Western Europe, centred in London (with numerous parishes and bishops on the continent), and Australia. Smaller groups in the United States, such as the Carpatho-Russian and Ukrainian dioceses, are likewise under the ecumenical patriarchate.

The Orthodox Church in the West.

Historically, 1768 marks the arrival of the first Greek Orthodox to the New World. These pioneers founded the colony of New Smyrna some forty miles south of St. Augustine, Florida. A small group of New Orleans Greek merchants built the first church in 1864. The Greek Archdiocese of North and South America itself was officially incorporated by the State of New York in 1921. The complicated and difficult task of organizing and consolidating the Greek communities into a centralized Archdiocese was the work of three far-sighted leaders: Archbishop Athenagoras, who was elected to the ecumenical throne of Constantinople in 1948; Archbishop Michael, the former bishop of Corinth; and his successor, Archbishop Iakovos. In addition to its diverse philanthropic work, the Archdiocese maintains numerous day-schools, a home for the aged, and an academy for deprived and orphaned children. Candidates for the priesthood are trained at the Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Boston. Mention should also be made of the second largest group, the Russian. It, too, trains its own clergy at its St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, which also receives candidates from all the Orthodox jurisdictions. Both of these institutions maintain their own press and publish their own theological quarterly; they issue a large number of

useful and important books in English on various aspects of Orthodox theology, history and spirituality. Both seminaries possess a distinguished faculty with an international reputation.

Historical circumstances, then, have provided Orthodoxy in the West with the unique opportunity to bear witness to its universality. To repeat, despite its historical eastern homeland, the Orthodox church has never claimed to be anything less than the universal Orthodox Catholic Church of Christ. True, the segregation and self-sufficiency of some Orthodox frequently give the opposite impression. All the same, the Orthodox are becoming increasingly aware that they must overcome both their isolation and segregation. The subordination of national ambitions and local loyalties is desirable and necessary. Archbishop Iakovos' observations on this point are on target:

“We rarely give the impression of united orthodoxy as we should, and as others expect of us. They think (and not wrongly) that we are first Greeks, Russians, Serbs, Romanians, Bulgarians, Arabs or Ukrainians and then Orthodox. We often deny ourselves the honour to speak as Orthodox and to demonstrate our theological and ecclesiastical unity and identity.” (Orthodox Observer, 21 Sept. 1983, p. 3)

These remarks were in reference to Orthodoxy's relationship and participation in the ecumenical movement and the World Council of Churches. It is a timely subject with which to draw the threads of this summary survey together.

Orthodoxy and the Ecumenical Movement

Orthodoxy believes that it possesses both the unity and the faith which alone will produce the reunion all Christians seek. It is also at the same time fully aware of the scandal of Christian division. These simple facts explain the active role it has played since the 1920s in the ecumenical movement and in the later World Council of Churches founded in Amsterdam in 1948. From the movement's very inception it was the ecumenical Patriarchate that took the initiative and leadership by supporting a policy of full participation. Before long, numerous other Orthodox jurisdictions followed suit, thanks to the encouragement of Constantinople.

Not all Orthodox, it is true, are of one mind about this policy. Some, understandably, believe that the Orthodox idea of the Church is incompatible with the confessional ecclesiology that often dominates the World Council. Doubtless the Protestant notion that the historic aggregation of separated churches are separations in the Church itself is unacceptable to the Orthodox. As one distinguished Orthodox theologian notes, this line of Protestant reasoning negates all that the Orthodox hold about the unity and sacramental fullness of the Church. For all that, the Church has chosen to participate in the ecumenical movement because of the command to love all humanity whether divided or not. Besides, participation does not imply equality with our Protestant brethren, or compromise on our part. On the contrary, we are there as members for dialogue and to bear witness to the only common ground on which all genuine Christian unity must be founded. As the Orthodox statement at the Evanston Assembly of 1954 states, it is to “the faith of the ancient, united and indivisible Church of the seven ecumenical councils, namely, to the pure and unchanged and common heritage of the forefathers of all divided Christians” that we bear witness. The late Georges Florovsky never ceased stressing that the search for Christian unity is a “noble and blessed endeavour.”