# A MEANINGFUL STORM
## Some Reflections on Autocephaly, Tradition and Ecclesiology

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*"Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another"* (Eph. 4:25).

1.

The storm provoked by the "autocephaly" of the Orthodox Church in America is probably one of the most meaningful crises in several centuries of Orthodox ecclesiastical history. Or rather it could become meaningful if those who are involved in it were to accept it as an unique opportunity for facing and solving an ecclesiastical confusion which for too long a time was simply ignored by the Orthodox. For if America has all of a sudden become the focus of Orthodox attention and passions, it is because the situation of Orthodoxy here, being the most obvious result of that confusion, was bound to reveal sooner or later the true nature and scope of, indeed, a "pan-Orthodox" crisis.

Not many words are needed to describe the American "situation"; by 1970, Orthodoxy in America existed in the form of: one Greek jurisdiction, three Russian, two Serbian, two Antiochian, two Romanian, two Bulgarian, two Albanian, three Ukrainian, one Carpatho-Russian and some smaller groups which we omit here for the sake of simplicity. Within every national subdivision each group claimed to be the only "canonical" one and denied recognition to others. As to criteria of this "canonicity," they were also quite diversified. Some groups saw it in their jurisdictional dependence

on their "Mother Churches," some, which—like the Carpatho-Russian Diocese—could not claim any identifiable Mother Church, on their "recognition" by the Ecumenical Patriarch, some on some other kind of "continuity" and "validity." Several of these "jurisdictions" did—while others did not—belong to the "Standing Conference of Orthodox Bishops," a non-official voluntary association established to promote the unification of Orthodoxy in the New World, but which in ten years of its existence could not agree even on general principles of such an unification. This unique and quite unprecedented situation existed for many decades. But what makes it even more appalling is the fact that at no time did it provoke any noticeable alarm in the Church at large, at least in her "officialdom." Indeed, no one seemed either to see or to admit that American Orthodoxy had in fact become a blatant denial of all that which learned Orthodox delegates to ecumenical gatherings were at the same time proclaiming to be the "essence" of Orthodoxy as the True Church and the Una Sancta. I am convinced that to future historians this "American situation" made up of progressive fragmentation, court trials, passionate polemics and mutual suspicion, will be a source of endless amazement.

The storm began early in 1970 when one of the largest and oldest "jurisdictions" brought to an end its long quarrel with its Mother Church by asking for and receiving a status of total administrative independence ("autocephaly"), dropped from her name a qualification ("Russian") which after 175 years of unbroken continuity on this continent was obviously obsolete and adopted a geographical definition ("in America") corresponding both to its location and vocation. Yet if some fifty years of chaos and divisions, confusion and progressive deterioration, left the Church at large perfectly indifferent, this simple fact—the emergence of an Orthodox Church in America based on equally simple and empirical presuppositions, that the Church here, after almost two centuries of existence, might be *independent* and could be *American*—raised a storm which keeps gaining momentum and has by now involved the entire Orthodox Church.

The purpose of this article is not to defend the "autocephaly." It is rather to investigate the nature and the causes of the storm it ignited, the deep and probably almost unconscious motivations behind these passionate reactions. That "autocephaly" was met at first with insults, inuendos and interpretations *ad malem partem* was probably to be expected. But insults never prove or solve anything. And I am convinced that beneath them there is an immense and truly tragic misunderstanding. My only goal in writing this article is to try to locate and to assess it. Above all we need today a clarification. Only then may a more constructive and meaningful discussion, a search for common solutions, become possible.

## 2.

The natural and essential "term of reference" in Orthodoxy is always *Tradition.* That the present controversy takes the form of "appeals" to Tradition, of argumentation *ex traditione,* is therefore perfectly normal. What is less normal but deeply revealing of the present state of Orthodoxy is the fact that these "appeals" and arguments seem to result in openly contradicting and mutually exclusive claims and affirmations. It is as if we were either "reading" different Traditions or the same one differently. It certainly would be unfair to explain these contradictions merely by ill-will, ignorance or emotions. If to some the coming into existence of an "Orthodox Church in America" is a first step towards genuine Tradition, while to some others it is the beginning of a canonical collapse, the reason for this must be a deeper one; not only, indeed, do we differently read the same Tradition, but we also appeal to different traditions. And it is this fact that we have to understand and to explain.

Let us remember first of all that the Orthodox concept of Tradition cannot be reduced to that of texts and regulations which every one who wants to prove anything has merely to quote. Thus the "Holy Canons," i.e. that collection of canonical texts which is common to all Orthodox Churches, does not exhaust the canonical tradition. This observation is especially important in view of the fact that the key words of our present debates—"autocephaly," "jurisdiction," etc.—are virtually absent from the Holy Canons and current "appeals," and references are made almost exclusively to various "precedents" of the past. Now, such appeals to the past and to "precedents" have always been considered as perfectly legitimate from the Orthodox point of view, for Tradition most certainly includes *facts* as well as *texts.* It is also clear, however, that not all "past," in virtue of being "past," is to be identified with Tradition. In the XVIIIth century the Ecumenical Throne "abolished" the Serbian "autocephaly." More recently it "recognized" the heretical "Living Church" in Russia. Muscovite bishops used to reconsecrate the bishop elected to the Patriarchal office. At some time or another virtually all Orthodox Churches established their "jurisdiction" in America. Are all these facts "canonical precedents" simply because they occurred in the past and were "institutionalized?" Is it not obvious, therefore, that "past" itself always needs evaluation and that the criterion of such an evaluation is not "factual" ("it happened") but *ecclesiological,* that, in other words, it consists in a reference to the permanent and unchanging doctrine of the Church, to her "essence?" If the forms of the Church's life and organization change, it is in order precisely to preserve unchanged the "essence" of the Church; for otherwise the Church would cease to be a Divine institution and become a mere product of historical forces and developments. And the function of Tradition

is always to assure and to reveal this essential and unchanging "identity" of the Church, her "sameness" in space and time. To "read" Tradition is therefore not to "quote" but to *refer* all facts, texts, institutions and forms to the ultimate essence of the Church, to understand their meaning and value in the light of the Church's unchanging "esse." But then the question is: What is the basic principle and the inner criterion of such a "reading," of our appeals to Tradition?

## 3.

All Orthodox canonists and theologians have always agreed that for the canonical tradition such an inner criterion is to be found in the Holy Canons, i.e., that *corpus* which includes the Apostolic Canons, the decisions of Ecumenical and some local Councils, and rules extracted from various patristic writings. This *corpus* has been always and everywhere considered as *normative,* not only because it constitutes the earliest "layer" of our canonical tradition, but because its primary content and term of reference is precisely the "essence" of the Church, her basic structure and constitution rather than the historically contingent forms of her existence. This layer is thus the norm of any subsequent canonical development, the inner measure of its "canonicity," the very context within which everything else in the history of the Church, be it past, present or future, is to be evaluated.

If this is true, and until now it has always been held as true by the consensus of Orthodox canonists and theologians, we have a first methodological "clue" to our present controversy, one principle by which to evaluate the various "appeals" to Tradition. It is indeed quite significant then that references to this "essential" canonical tradition are very scarce, not to say non-existent, in the storm originated by "autocephaly." The reason for this is simple and I already mentioned it: the Holy Canons virtually ignore the terms which are at the heart of the debate: "autocephaly," "jurisdiction," etc. One is naturally tempted then to refer directly to those "layers" of the past and to those "traditions" which seem to be of greater help in providing "proofs" and "precedents." But it is here precisely that we must "locate" the initial weakness and the fundamental deficiency of this entire method of arguing. For on the one hand, it is probably possible with some know-how to find a "precedent" and a canonical "justification" for almost anything. Yet on the other hand, the whole point is that no "precedent" as such constitutes a sufficient canonical justification. If the notion of "autocephaly" went into existence after the fixation of the *normative* tradition, this does not mean that the former does

not need to be "referred" to the latter, understood and evaluated in its ecclesiological context. One cannot meaningfully debate the question of who has the "right to grant autocephaly" unless one first agrees on the basic ecclesiological meaning of that "right" and of "autocephaly." One cannot speak of "autocephaly" as "canonical" or "uncanonical" unless one first sees and understands it in the light of the canons, i.e. the essential and universal canonical tradition. If "autocephaly"—and here everyone will agree—is one particular mode or expression of the Churches' relationship to one another, where, if not in the *essential* tradition, is the fundamental nature of that relationship to be found?

## 4.

My first conclusion is a simple one. If notions such as "autocephaly" or "jurisdiction" are absent from the canonical tradition which everyone accepts as normative, this very absence is a tremendously important factor for the proper understanding and evaluation of these notions. In the first place this absence cannot be termed "accidental"; if it were accidental, we would have of necessity been able to find an equivalent notion. It cannot furthermore be ascribed to, let us say, the "underdeveloped" character of earlier ecclesiology, for it would mean that for several centuries the Church existed without something essential for her very life. But then this absence can be explained by only one fact: a significant difference in the very approach to the Church between the *essential* tradition and the one which appeared at a later date. It is this difference that we must understand if we are to grasp the true ecclesiological meaning of "autocephaly."

Even a superficial reading of the Canons shows that the Church they depict is not, as it is today for us, a network of "sovereign" and "independent" entities called Patriarchates or Autocephalous or Autonomous Churches each having "under" itself (in its "jurisdiction") smaller and subordinated units such as "dioceses," "exarchates," "parishes," etc. This "jurisdictional" or "subordinationist" dimension is absent here because, when dealing with the Church, the early ecclesiological tradition has its starting point and its basic term of reference in the *local church.* This early tradition has been analysed and studied so many times in recent years that no detailed elaboration is needed here. What is important for us is that this local Church, i.e. a community gathered around its bishop and "clerus," is a *full* Church. It is the manifestation and the presence in a given place of the Church of Christ. And thus the main aim and purpose of the canonical tradition is precisely to "protect" this fulness, to "guarantee," so

to speak, that this local Church fully manifests the oneness, holiness, apostolicity and catholicity of the Church of Christ. It is in function of this fulness, therefore, that the canonical tradition regulates the relation of each Church with other Churches, their unity and interdependence. The fulness of the local Church, its very nature as the Church of Christ in a particular place depends primarily on her unity in faith, tradition and life, with the Church everywhere; on her being ultimately the *same* Church. This unity is assured essentially by the bishop whose office or "leitourgia" is to maintain and to preserve, in constant union with other bishops, the continuity and the identity in space and time of the universal and catholic faith and life of the one Church of Christ. For us the main point, however, is that although *dependent* on all other Churches, the local Church is not "subordinate" to any of them. No Church is "under" any other Church and no bishop is "under" any other bishop. The very nature of this dependence and, therefore, of unity among Churches, is not "jurisdictional." It is the unity of faith and life, the unbroken continuity of Tradition, of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that is expressed, fulfilled and preserved in the consecration of one bishop by other bishops, in their regular Synods, and, in brief, in the organic unity of the Episcopate which all bishops hold *in solidum* (St. Cyprian).

The absence of "jurisdictional" subordination of one Church to another, of one bishop to another, does not mean absence of hierarchy and order. This order in the early canonical tradition is maintained by the various levels of *primacies,* i.e. episcopal and ecclesiastical centers or focuses of unity. But again primacy is not a "jurisdictional" principle. If, according to the famous Apostolic Canon 34, the Bishops everywhere must know the *first* among them—the same canon "refers" this primacy to the Holy Trinity which has "order" but certainly no "subordination." The function of primacy is to express the unity of all, to be its organ and mouthpiece. The first level of primacy is usually that of a "province," i.e. a region in which all bishops, together with the Metropolitan, take part in the consecration of the bishop of that region, and meet twice a year as Synod. If we had to apply the notion of "autocephaly" to the early Church it should be properly applied to this provincial level, for the main mark of "autocephaly" is precisely the right to elect and to consecrate bishops within a given region. The second level of primacy is that of a wider geographical area: "Orient" with Antioch, Asia with Ephesus, Gaul with Lyons, etc. The "content" of this primacy is primarily doctrinal and moral. The Churches of any given area usually "look up" to the Church from which they received their tradition and in times of crisis and uncertainty gather around her in order to find under her leadership a common solution to their problems. Finally, there is also from the very beginning a universal "center of unity," a universal

primacy: that of the Mother Church of Jerusalem at first, then that of the Church of Rome, a primacy which even modern Roman theologians define, at least in that early period, in terms of "sollicitude" rather than in those of any formal "power" or "jurisdiction."

Such is the *essential* canonical tradition of the Church. And it is only in its light that we can understand the real significance of those subsequent "layers" which were added to it and complicated it during the long earthly pilgrimage of the Church.

## 5.

The early structure of the Church was substantially changed and "complicated," as everyone knows, by the event which still remains the most important single event in the history of the Church: the Church's reconciliation with the Empire, and an alliance between them within the framework of a Christian "ecumene," a Christian "universe." Ecclesiologically this event meant, above all, a progressive organizational integration of the Church's structures into the administrative system of the Empire.

Let me stress immediately that this integration, and the entire second "layer" of our canonical tradition which is derived from it and which can be termed "imperial," cannot be considered from an Orthodox point of view as a passing "accident," or, as some Western historians think, a result of a "surrender" of the Church to the Empire. No, it is an integral part of our tradition and the Orthodox Church cannot reject Byzantium without rejecting something belonging to her very substance. But it must be understood that this layer is a *different* one, based on different presuppositions and having therefore different implications for Orthodox ecclesiology. For if the first layer is both the expression and the norm of the unchanging *essence* of the Church, the fundamental meaning of this second, "imperial" level is that it expresses and regulates the *historicity* of the Church, i.e. her equally essential relation to the world in which she is called to fulfill her vocation and mission. It belongs indeed to the very nature of the Church that she is always and everywhere *not of this world* and receives her being and life from above, not from beneath, and that, at the same time, she always *accepts* the world to which she is sent and adjusts herself to its forms, needs and structures. If the first layer of our canonical tradition refers to the Church in herself, to those structures which, expressing her essence, do not depend on the "world," the second one has as its very object her "acceptance" of the world, the norms by which she is related to it. The first deals with the "unchanging," the second with the "changing." Thus, for example,

the Church is a permanent reality of the Christian faith and experience whereas the Christian Empire is not. But inasmuch and as long as this Empire, this "Christian world," is a reality, the Church not only accepts it *de facto* but enters into a positive and in a sense even an organic relationship with it. The essential aspect, the "canonical" meaning of that relationship, however, is that it does not bestow on anything in this world the same essential value as the one the Church possesses. For the Church the "image of the world always fades away" (I Cor. 7:31), and this applies to all forms and institutions of the world. Within the framework of the "Christian ecumene" the Church may easily accept the right of the Christian Basileus to convoke Ecumenical Councils or to nominate bishops or even to change the territorial boundaries and privileges of the Churches. All this does not make the Emperor an essential category of the Church's life. In this sense the second canonical layer is essentially *relative,* for its very object is precisely the Church's life within relative realities of "this world." Its function is to *relate* the unchanging essence of the Church to an ever changing world.

Now it is obvious that what could be termed the *jurisdictional* dimension of the Church and of her life had its roots precisely in this second, "imperial" layer of our tradition. But it must be stressed immediately that this jurisdictional level did neither *replace* the earlier, "essential" one, nor merely *develop* it. Even today, after centuries of an almost complete triumph of "jurisdictional" ecclesiology, we say, for example, that all bishops are "equal in grace" denying thus that distinctions in rank (e.g. patriarch, archbishop, bishop) have any "ontological" content. It is absolutely important to understand that this "jurisdictional" layer, although perfectly justified and even necessary in its own sphere of application, is a *different* layer, not to be confused with the "essential" one. The source of that difference lies in the fact that the jurisdictional "power" comes to the Church not from her *essence,* which is not "of this world," and is, therefore, beyond any *jus,* but from her being "in the world" and thus in a mutual relationship with it. Essentially the Church is the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the Bride of Christ; but empirically she is also a *society* and as such a part of "this world" and in "relation" with it. And if any attempt to separate and to oppose to one another those two realities leads to a heretical disincarnation of the Church, her reduction to a human, all too human "institution," a confusion between the two is equally heretical for it ultimately subordinates grace to *jus,* making Christ, in the terms of St. Paul "die in vain." The heart of the matter is that the "essence" of the Church–which is not "jurisdictional"–can and even must have "in this world" an inevitable "jurisdictional" projection and expression. Thus, for example, when the canon says that a bishop is to be consecrated

by "two or three" bishops, this in itself is not a "juridical" norm but the expression of the very essence of the Church as an organic unity of faith and life. The full "reading" and understanding of this canon implies, therefore, of necessity its reference to the "essential" ecclesiology. Yet at the same time this canon is obviously a rule, a practical and objective norm, a first and essential criterion for discerning a "canonical" from a "non-canonical" consecration. As "rule," as *jus* it is neither self-sufficient nor self-explanatory, and the essence of the Episcopate cannot evidently be reduced to it. Yet it is that rule which—properly understood within the context of ecclesiology—maintains precisely the identity of the Church's "essence" in space and in time.

During the first centuries of her existence the Church was denied any "legal" status, and "jurisdiction" by "this world" which persecuted her. But within the new situation—that of a "Christian ecumene"—it was normal and inevitable for the Church to receive and to acquire such a status. Remaining "essentially" what she was, what she always is and always will be— in any "situation," "society" and "culture," the Church received within a given situation a "jurisdiction" which she did not possess before and which is not "essential," although beneficial, for her to possess. The state, even a Christian state, is entirely "of this world," i.e. of the order of *jus,* and it cannot express its relationship with the Church in any but a "jurisdictional" manner. In the world's categories the Church is also primarily a "jurisdiction"—a society, a structure, an institution with rights and obligations, privileges and rules, etc. All that the Church can require from the State is that this "jurisdictional" understanding not mutilate and reform her "essential" being, that it be not contrary to her essential ecclesiology. It is therefore within this new "situation" and, in fact, *from* the Christian Empire that the Church received in addition, so to speak, to her "essential" structure a *jurisdictional* one, meant to express primarily her place and function within the Byzantine "symphony": the organic alliance in one "ecumene" of the State and Church. The most important aspect of that jurisdictional aspect is that organizationally, institutionally the Church "followed" the State, i.e., integrated itself into its own organizational structure.

The best example, indeed the "focus" of that integration and of the new "jurisdictional" order is, without any doubt, the place and function of the Patriarch of Constantinople within the Byzantine "ecumene." No historian would deny today that the quick rise of the see of Constantinople was due exclusively to the new "imperial" situation of the Church. The ideal of "symphony" between the *Imperium* and the *Sacerdotium*—the very basis of Byzantine "ideology"—required an ecclesiastical "counterpart" to the Emperor, a personal "focus" of the Church corresponding to the personal "focus" of the Empire. In this sense the "jurisdiction" of the Bishop of Constantinople as

the Ecumenical (i.e. "imperial") Patriarch is an *imperial* jurisdiction, whose true context and term of reference is, above all, the Byzantine theocratic ideology. And it is very interesting to note that there is an obvious difference between the imperial legislation concerning the role and the function of the Patriarch and the canonical tradition of the same period. Canonically, i.e. in reference to "essential" ecclesiology, the Patriarch of Constantinople, in spite of his unique "imperial" position, remained the Primate of the Eastern Church, although even this primacy was given him because his city was that of the "Emperor and the Senate" (IV Ecum. 28), and also the primate of his own "diocese." "Imperially," however, he became the head of the Church, her "spokesman" to the Empire and her link to it, the "focus" not only of the Church's unity and agreement, but also of her "jurisdictional" government.

We know also that this "imperial" logic was not accepted easily and without resistance by the Church: the fight against Constantinople of the old "centers of unity" or "primacies"—those of Alexandria and Antioch, is here to witness it. The historical tragedy which transformed these once flourishing Churches into mere remnants put an end to that resistance; and for several centuries the New Rome became the center, the heart and the head of one "Imperial" Church—the religious projection of the one Universal Christian Empire. The "jurisdictional" principle, although in theory still distinct from the essential ecclesiology, occupied the center of the stage. Local bishops like civil governors became more and more the representatives and even the "delegates" of a "central power": the Patriarch and his by now permanent Synod. Psychologically, in virtue of the same imperial and "jurisdictional" logic, they became even his "subordinates," as well as the subordinates of the Emperor. What was primarily a *mode* of the Church's relationship to a particular "world" began to permeate the Church's mentality itself and to be confused with the Church's "essence." And this, as we shall see later, is the main source of our present confusion and disagreements.

## 6.

We are coming now to the third historical "layer" of our tradition, a layer whose formative principle and content is neither the local Church, as in the early tradition, nor the Empire, as in the "imperial" tradition, but a new reality which emerged from the progressive dislocation of Byzantium: the *Christian nation.* Accordingly we shall define this third layer as *national.* Its appearance added a new dimension, but also a new complexity, to Orthodox ecclesiology.

Byzantium thought of itself, at least in theory, in universal and not national terms. Even on the eve of its final collapse a Byzantine Patriarch wrote to a Russian prince a long letter explaining to him that there can be but one Emperor and one Empire under heaven, just as there is but one God in heaven. Ideologically and ideally the Empire was *universal* (incidentally "Roman" and not "Greek" according to official imperial language), and it was this universality that was the main "basis" for its acceptance by and alliance with the Church.

But we know today that this Byzantine universalism began, and this at a relatively early date, to dissolve itself into a rather narrow "nationalism" and exclusivism which were naturally fed by the tragic events of Byzantine history: the Arab conquest of its provinces, the unceasing advance of the Turks, the Latin invasion of 1204, the appearance of the Slavic challenge in the North, etc. In theory nothing changed; in practice Byzantium was becoming a relatively small and weak *Greek* state whose universal claims were less and less comprehensible to the nations brought into her political, religious and cultural orbit: Bulgars, Serbs and later, Russians. Or rather these very claims, this very Byzantine ideology was to become, in a truly paradoxical fashion, the main source of a new Orthodox nationalism. (The second source being the later transformation of this nationalism under the influence of the "secular nationalism" of 1789.) Less and less impressed by the ailing Empire, more and more impatient with its religio-political claims, these "nations" which were born of Byzantine ideology, began to apply this very ideology to themselves. From that complex process there emerged the idea of a *Christian nation*—with a national vocation, a kind of corporate "identity" before God. What is important for us here is that only at this stage in the history of the Eastern Church there appeared the notion of *"autocephaly"*—which, if not in its origin (it was used in various senses before but always "occasionally"), at least in its application, is a product not of ecclesiology, but of a *national* phenomenon. Its fundamental historical connotation is thus neither purely ecclesiological, nor "jurisdictional," but *national.* To a universal Empire corresponds an "imperial" Church with its center in Constantinople: such is the axiom of the Byzantine "imperial" ideology. There can therefore be no political independence from the Empire without its ecclesiastical counterpart or "autocephaly": such becomes the axiom of the new Orthodox "theocracies." "Autocephaly," i.e. ecclesiastical independence, becomes thus the very basis of national and political independence, the very status-symbol of a new "Christian nation." And it is very significant that all negotiations concerning the various "autocephalies" were conducted not by Churches, but by States: the most typical example here being the process of negotiating the autocephaly of the Russian

Church in the sixteenth century, a process in which the Russian Church herself took virtually no part.

We must stress once more that this new "autocephalous" Church, as it appears in Bulgaria and later in Russia and in Serbia, is not a mere "jurisdictional" entity. Its main implication is not so much "independence" (for in fact it is usually totally dependent on the state) but precisely the *national* Church, or, in other words, the Church as the religious expression and projection of a nation, as indeed the bearer of a *national identity*. And again there is no need to think of this as a "deviation"—in merely negative and disparaging terms. In the history of the Orthodox East, the "Orthodox nation" is not only a reality, but in many ways a "success"; for in spite of all their deficiencies, tragedies and betrayals, there indeed were such "realities" as "Holy Serbia" or "Holy Russia," there truly took place a national birth in Christ, there appeared a national Christian vocation—and, historically, the emergence of the national church, at a time when the ideal and the reality of the universal Christian Empire and its counterpart, the "imperial" Church, were wearing themselves off, was perfectly justified. What is not justified, however, is to confuse this historical development with the essential ecclesiology and, in fact, to subordinate the latter to the former. It is when the very essence of the Church began to be viewed in terms of this nationalism and reduced to it, that something which in itself was quite compatible with that "essence," became the beginning of an alarming ecclesiological deterioration.

## 7.

It may be clearer now what I meant when, at the beginning of this article, I stated that in our present canonical and ecclesiastical controversies we appeal in fact to different "traditions." It is an obvious fact indeed that these appeals are made to one of the three "layers" briefly analysed above as if each one of them were a self-sufficient embodiment of the entire canonical tradition. And it is another obvious fact that at no time was an effort made within the Orthodox theological and canonical consciousness to give these three layers and especially their interrelation inside Tradition a serious ecclesiological evaluation. It is this strange fact that constitutes the main source of our present tragic misunderstandings. Now, the historical reason for that total lack of ecclesiological "reflection" and clarification is again a rather simple one. Virtually until our very time and in spite of the progressive disappearance of the various "Orthodox worlds," the Orthodox Churches lived within the spiritual, structural and psychological

context of these organic "worlds"—and this means by the logic of either the "imperial" or the "national" traditions, or else a combination of both. And the plain fact is that for several centuries there was in Orthodoxy an almost total atrophy of ecclesiological thinking, of any real interest in ecclesiology.

The collapse of Byzantium in 1453 provoked no such ecclesiological reaction and we know why: the Islamic concept of a "religion-nation" (*milet*) assured for the entire Byzantine world, now under Turkish domination, the continuity of the "imperial" tradition. In virtue of this principle the Ecumenical Patriarch assumed not only *de facto,* but even *de jure,* the function of the *head* of all Christians; he became, so to speak, their "Emperor." This even led at one time to the liquidation of former "autocephalies" (Serbian, Bulgarian), which had never really become an integral part of the Byzantine system (the Greeks even today rarely use the term "autocephaly" as a clearly defined ecclesiastical concept) and were always granted "reluctantly" and under political pressure. One can say that this Byzantine "imperial" system was indeed reinforced by the Turkish religious system, for it made the Greek "imperio-ethnic" self-consciousness even greater. As to the "Church-nations" born before the downfall of the Empire, they were either absorbed by the monarchy of the Ecumenical Throne or, as in the case of Russia, made this very downfall the basis of a new national and religious ideology with messianic overtones ("the Third Rome"). Both developments clearly excluded any serious ecclesiological reflection, a common reevaluation of the universal structures in the light of the radically new situation. Finally the impact on post-patristic Orthodox theology of Western thought forms and categories shifted the ecclesiological attention from the Church as the Body of Christ to the Church as "means of sanctification," from the canonical Tradition to the various systems of "Canon Law," or, more sharply, from the *Church* to ecclesiastical *government.*

All this explains why for many centuries the Orthodox churches lived in a variety of *status quos* without even trying to relate these to one another or to evaluate them within a consistent ecclesiological Tradition. One must add that these centuries were also the time of an almost total lack of communications between the Churches, of their mutual alienation from one another and of growth, consequently, of mutual mistrust, suspicion—and let us admit it—sometimes even hatred! The Greeks, weakened and humiliated by the Turkish dominion, became accustomed—and not always without reason—to see in every Russian move a threat to their ecclesiastical independence, a "Slavic" threat to "Hellenism"; the various Slavic groups, while antagonistic to one another, developed a common hatred for the Greek ecclesiastical "dominion." The fate of Orthodoxy became an integral part of the famous "oriental question" in which, as everyone knows, the Western "powers" and their

Christian "establishments" took a great and by no means a disinterested part. Where, in all this, was any place left for an ecclesiological reflection, for a serious and common search for canonical clarification? There are not many darker pages in "pan-Orthodox" history than the ones dealing with the "modern age," the age which for Orthodoxy was—with a few remarkable exceptions—that of divisions, provincialism, theological sclerosis, and, last but not least—a *nationalism* which by then was almost completely "secularized" and therefore "paganized." It is not surprising then that any challenge to *status quo,* to the tragically unnoticed and normalized fragmentation, was inescapably to take the form of an explosion . . .

8.

That America became both the cause and the focal point of such an "explosion" is only too natural. Chances for an open crisis were indeed very small as long as Orthodox Churches lived in their respective "worlds" in almost total isolation from one another. What happened to one Church hardly mattered to others. Thus the peculiar Greek "autocephaly" of 1850 was viewed as an internal Greek affair, not as an event with ecclesiological implications for all Churches. The same attitude prevailed towards the complex ecclesiastical developments within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the "Bulgarian Schism," the purely administrative "liquidation" by the Russian government—not the Church—of the venerable Georgian "autocephaly," etc. All this was politics, not ecclesiology. And indeed the Russian Foreign Office, the Western embassies in Istanbul and Athens, the Imperial court of Vienna, the obscure interests and intrigues of the Phanariot families, were at that time a greater factor in the life of the Orthodox Church than the lonely meditations on her nature and essence by a Khomiakov.

In America, however, this situation was bound to reach a "moment of truth." Here in the main center of Orthodox *diaspora,* of Orthodox mission and witness to the West, *the* ecclesiological question—that of the *nature* and *unity* of the Church, that of the relationship within her between her canonical order and her life, that ultimately of the true meaning and true implications of the very term *Orthodox* was finally revealed as an existential, not academic, question. Here the tragic discrepancy between the various "layers" of the Orthodox past, the multisecular lack of any serious ecclesiological reflection, the absence of a "common mind," were revealed in their truly tragic evidence.

In the first place the American situation revealed the hypertrophy of the *national* principle, its virtually total disconnection from the

"essential" ecclesiology. The national principle which, in a different ecclesiological context and in continuity with the genuine canonical tradition, had been indeed a principle of unity and thus a valid form of the Church's self fulfillment ("one Church in one place"), became in America exactly the opposite: a principle of division, the very expression of the Church's subordination to the divisions of "this world." If in the past the Church *united* and even *made* a nation, here nationalism *divided* the Church and became thus a real denial, a caricature of its own initial function. This *reductio ad absurdum* of a formerly positive and acceptable principle can best be shown by the example of Churches which in the "old world" were virtually free from "nationalism." Take, for instance, the Patriarchate of Antioch which never had any nationalistic "identity" comparable to that of the Russian or Serbian Churches. Paradoxically enough it is this Patriarchate's almost sporadic "extension" into "new worlds" that created little by little a "nationalism" *sui generis,* that at least of a "jurisdictional identity."

In America the national principle resulted in something totally new and unprecedented: each "national" Church claimed now a *de facto* universal jurisdiction on the basis of national "belonging." In the "old world" even at the height of ecclesiastical nationalism, the rich and powerful Russian monasteries on Mount Athos never questioned the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarch, or the very numerous Greek parishes in southern Russia that of the Russian Church; and as to the Russian parish in Athens, it is still in the jurisdiction of the Church of Greece. Whatever their inner nationalism, all Churches knew their *boundaries.* The idea that these boundaries are exclusively national, that each Russian, Greek, Serb or Romanian *belongs* to his Church wherever he may live, and that *ipso facto* each national Church has canonical rights everywhere is therefore a new idea, truly the result of a *reductio ad absurdum.* There appeared even "Churches-in-Exile" with "territorial" titles of their bishop and diocese; there appeared national extensions of non-existent Churches; there appeared finally a hierarchy, a theology, even a spirituality defending all this as something perfectly normal, positive and desirable.

If in the early and essential tradition the territorial principle of the Church's organization (one Church, one bishop in one place) was so central and so important, it is because it was indeed the essential condition for the Church's freedom from "this world," from everything temporary, accidental and non-essential. The Church knew herself to be simultaneously at home and in exile everywhere, she knew that she was primarily and essentially a new people and that her very "structure" was the expression of all this. The rejection of this principle in the diaspora inescapably led to a progressive enslavement of the Church to, and her identification with, that which is precisely accidental—be it politics or nationalism.

The incompatibility between this mentality and the very idea of an American "autocephaly" is so evident that it does not need to be explained or elaborated. It is thus in the "national" layer of our tradition, a layer, however, almost completely detached from the essential tradition of the Church and even "self-sufficient," that we find the first *locus,* cause and expression of our present ecclesiastical crisis.

## 9.

The first but not the only one. If nearly all Orthodox Churches are in various degrees victims of hypertrophied nationalism and "appeal" almost exclusively to the national "precedent" in the Orthodox past, the moment of truth which descended upon us concerns also the "layer" which we termed *imperial.* It is here indeed that we find the deep root of the syndrome which is at the very heart of the specifically *Greek* reaction to the present storm.

It is not a mere "accident," of course, that the most violently negative reaction to "autocephaly" has been that of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. This reaction, however, is at such variance with the entire personal "image" of Patriarch Athenagoras, an image made up of ecumenical generosity, universal understanding and compassion, opposition to narrow-mindedness in all its forms, openness to dialogues and reevaluations, that it certainly cannot be explained by anything petty and personal. Neither can this reaction be ascribed to a lust for power, a desire to rule the Orthodox Church in the "papist" fashion, to subjugate *under* Constantinople all Orthodox Christians in the diaspora. Indeed, during several decades of jurisdictional and national pluralism in America and elsewhere, the Ecumenical Patriarch neither condemned it as "uncanonical," nor made any direct and consistent claims on all these lands as belonging to his jurisdiction. Even in the most recent documents issued by the Patriarchate the main theme is the defense of the *status quo* and not a direct jurisdictional claim. The idea to charge the Ecumenical Throne with the solution of the canonical problems of the *diaspora* was in fact developed some twenty years ago by a group of Russian theologians (including this writer) but met, on the part of the Greek and Phanariot circles, with total indifference. All this means that the real motivations behind the Greek "reaction" must be sought elsewhere. But where?

The answer to this question lies, I am convinced, in the developments analysed in the preceding pages. It is indeed in the *imperial* layer of that development that we must seek the explanation of something essential in the Greek religious mentality: its almost

total inability to understand and therefore to *accept* the post-Byzantine development of the Orthodox world. If for virtually all other Orthodox the basic "term of reference" of their ecclesiastical mentality is simply national, the nationalism of the Greek mentality is precisely *not simple.* The roots of this nationalism are not, as in the case of other Orthodox, in the reality and experience of "Church-nation," but primarily in those of the Byzantine *ecumene,* and this means in that layer of the past which we termed *imperial.* Thus, for example, the Churches of Greece or of Cyprus or even the Patriarchate of Alexandria and Jerusalem are, technically speaking, *autocephalous* Churches; but to them this "autocephaly" has a meaning deeply different from the one attached to it by Russians, Bulgarians or Romanians and, in fact, they very seldom, if at all, use that term. For whatever their jurisdictional status or arrangement, in their consciousness, or shall we rather say–subconsciousness, they are still organic parts of a greater whole; and this "whole" is not the Church Universal but precisely the Byzantine "world" with Constantinople as its sacred center and focus.

Indeed the central and the decisive fact in the post-Byzantine religious history of the Greeks is this almost unconscious yet obvious *transformation* of the "imperial" layer of the Orthodox tradition into an *essential* one, the transformation of Byzantium into a permanent, essential and normative dimension or *nota* of Orthodoxy itself. The reasons for that paradoxical process are too numerous and too complex to be even enumerated here. Some have their roots in Byzantium itself, some in the long Turkish captivity, some in more recent layers of Greek history. But the fact is here: the tradition which we described earlier as conditioned by the fundamental *historicity* of the Church, i.e. the "acceptance" of the contingent and relative "worlds" to which she is "related" during her long earthly pilgrimage, resulted in its very opposite: the equally fundamental *anti-historical* or *a-historical* character of the Greek religious world view. Byzantium for the Greek is not a chapter, however central, important and in many ways decisive, in the history of the Church in her unending "pilgrimage," but the fulfillment of this history, its permanent *terminus ad quem* beyond which nothing significant can "happen" and which therefore can only be preserved. The *reality* of this unique and ultimate "world" does not depend on history. The historical collapse of the Empire in 1453 not only did not destroy it but, on the contrary, by depriving it of all that which is merely "historical," i.e. temporary and contingent, transformed in a truly supra-historical reality an "essence" no longer subject to historical contingencies. "Historically" the Imperial City may have been called Istanbul for half a millenium, for the Greek it *is* Constantinople, the New Rome, the heart, the center and the symbol of a "reality" which is beyond all "history."

But the truly paradoxical character of that "reality" is that it cannot be easily identified with either a "form" or a "content." It is certainly not the Byzantine Empire as such, not the "political" dream of its eventual restoration. Greeks are too practical not to understand the illusory nature of such a dream. In fact they expatriate themselves more easily than many other Orthodox, their "adjustment" to any new situation is usually more successful and they certainly have not transferred any Byzantine and "theocratic" mystique to the modern Greek state. But it is not "content" either– in the sense, for example, of a particular faithfulness to or interest in the doctrinal, theological, spiritual and cultural traditions of Byzantium, that "Orthodox Byzantinism" which constitutes indeed an essential part of the Orthodox tradition. Greek academic theology has been not less, if not more, "Westernized" than the theology of other Orthodox Churches; and the great patristic, liturgical, iconographic revival of our time, the new and passionate rediscovery of the Byzantine "sources" of Orthodoxy, did not originate in Greece or among Greeks. Thus the "Byzantine world" which consciously or mainly unconsciously constitutes the essential "term of reference" for the Greek religious mentality is neither the *historical* Byzantium nor the *spiritual* Byzantium. But then what is it? The answer–of decisive importance for the unlerstanding of the Greek religious and ecclesiastical "world view"–is: Byzantium as both the foundation and the justification of Greek *religious nationalism*. It is indeed this unique and truly paradoxical amalgamation of two distinct, if not contradictory, layers in the historical development of the Orthodox world that is at the very heart of that immense and tragic misunderstanding which, in turn, determines in many ways our present ecclesiastical crisis.

I call it paradoxical because, as I have said already, the very "essence" of the Byzantine "imperial" tradition was not national, but *universal*. And it is only this *universality,* however theoretical and imperfect, that made it possible for the Church to "accept" the Empire itself and to make it her earthly "habitation." The Byzantines called themselves Romans, not Greeks; because Rome, not Greece, was the symbol of universality, and for this reason the new capital could only be a "new Rome." Until the seventh century the official language of the Byzantine chanceries was Latin, not Greek, and finally the Church Fathers would have been horrified if someone were to call them "Greeks." It is here indeed that lies the first and deepest misunderstanding. For when a Fr. Florovsky speaks of "Christian Hellenism" as a permanent and essential dimension of Christianity, when a Philaret of Moscow puts in his "Catechism" the definition of the Orthodox Church as "Greek-Catholic," they obviously do not refer to something "ethnic" or "national." For them this "Christian Hellenism"–that of theology, liturgy, iconog-

raphy—is not only not identical with the "Greek" but, in fact, is in many ways its very "antidote," the fruit of a long and sometimes painful and critical "transformation" of the Greek categories. The fight between the "Greek" and the "Christian" is indeed the very content of the great and eternally normative Patristic age, its real "theme." And it is the "Greek" revival, the appearance of a Greek nationalism, no longer "referred" to Christian Hellenism, which, in the last years of Byzantinum, was one of the essential factors in the tragedy of Florence.

What happened in the Greek mentality was the result thus not of an evolution or development but of a metamorphosis. The tragic events in the history of the Empire, the bitter experience of the Turkish domination, the fight for survival and liberation transformed the Byzantine "imperial" tradition, gave it a meaning exactly opposite to the one it had at the beginning and which justified its acceptance by the Church. The universal was replaced with the "national," "Christian Hellenism" with "Hellenism," Byzantium with Greece. The unique and universal Christian value of Byzantium was transferred on the Greeks themselves, on the Greek nation which, because of its exclusive identification with "Hellenism,' acquired now a new and unique value. It is very characteristic, however, that when even Greek hierarchs speak of "Hellenism" they refer not so much to "Christian Hellenism" of Byzantium, but to "ancient Greek civilization," to Plato and Pythagoras, to Homer and the "Athenian democracy" as if being "Greek" makes one in an almost exclusive sense an "heir" and a "bearer" of that "Hellenism."

But in reality this "Hellenism" is the Greek expression of the secular nationalism common to all modern nations and whose roots are in the French Revolution of 1789 and in European Romanticism. As every nationalism of that type it is built upon a mythology partly "secular" and partly "religious." On the secular level the myth is that of a unique relationship between the Greeks and that "Hellenism" which constitutes the common source and foundation of the entire Western civilization. On the religious level the myth is that of a unique relationship to Byzantium, the Christian "ecumene," which is the common foundation of all Orthodox Churches. And it is this double mythology or rather its impact on Greek ecclesiastical thinking that makes the ecclesiological dialogue with the Greeks so difficult.

## 10.

The first difficulty lies in the different understanding of the place and function within the Orthodox Church of the Ecumenical

Patriarch. All Orthodox Churches without any exception assent to his primacy. There is, however, a substantial difference in the understanding of that primacy between the Greek Churches and all others.

For the non-Greek Churches the basic term of reference for this primacy is the "essential" ecclesiology which has always and from the very beginning known a universal center of unity and agreement and therefore a "taxis," an order of seniority and honor among Churches. This universal primacy is thus both *essential,* in the sense that it always exists in the Church, and *historical,* in the sense that its "location" may vary and indeed has varied; for it depends on the historical situation of the Church at a given time. The primacy of Constantinople was established by Ecumenical Councils, by the "consensus" of all Churches; this makes it "essential" for it is truly the expression of the Churches' agreement, of their unity. It is equally true, however, that it was established within a particular historical context, as an ecclesiological response to a particular situation:—the emergence of a universal Christian Empire. And although no one today in the whole Orthodox Church feels and expresses the need for any change in the Churches' *taxis,* such changes took place before and, at least theoretically, may happen tomorrow. Thus, for example, in the case of a "conversion" to Orthodoxy of the Roman Catholic Church, the "universal primacy" may—or may not—return to the first Rome. Such is in its simplest form the ecclesiological stand of all non-Greek Orthodox Churches. The fully accepted primacy of the Patriarch of Constantinople does not imply here either any "national" implication, nor that of some Divinely instituted and therefore eternal *taxis* of the Churches. The "consensus" of the Churches expressed through an Ecumenical Council may, if necessary, change this *taxis,* as it did before—in the case of Antioch and Jerusalem, of Ephesus and Cyprus, and of Constantinople itself.

This theory, however, is "anathema" to the Greeks and it is here that the fundamental ambiguity of contemporary Orthodox ecclesiology becomes obvious. For the Greeks the "term of reference" for the primacy of the Ecumenical Throne lies not in any particular ecclesiological tradition, be it "essential" or "imperial," but in the unique position held by the Ecumenical Patriarch within that "Hellenism" which, as we have just seen, constitutes the "essence" of their religious "world-view." For if the "secular" center of that "Hellenism" is in Athens, its religious focus and symbol is most certainly in Constantinople. For long centuries of the Turkish dominion the Patriarch was the *religious ethnarch* of the Greek nation, the focus and the symbol of its survival and identity. And this the Ecumenical Throne remains for the Greeks today a reality not so much of an ecclesiological and canonical, but primarily of a spiritual and psychological order. "Canonically," the

Greeks may or may not "belong" to the Patriarchate. Thus the Church of Greece is independent from the Patriarchate, whereas every Greek in Australia or Latin America is in the latter's "jurisdiction." But whatever their "jurisdictional" status they are all *under* Constantinople. Here it is not Constantinople as the universal center of unity and agreement that is essential, it is Constantinople as such, the Ecumenical Throne as the bearer and guardian of "Hellenism." The primacy of Constantinople is ascribed now to the very *esse* of the Church, becomes in itself a "nota Ecclesiae." The ecclesiological formula: "there *is* Constantinople, to which the Church has entrusted the universal primacy" becomes: "there *must* be Constantinople." But the tragic ambiguity of this situation is precisely that the Primate, whose function is to assure the *universality of the Church,* to be guardian of that "Christian Hellenism" which preserves every Church from a total identification with "nationalism," is at the same time for one particular nation the bearer and the symbol of its very *nationalism.* The ecumenical primacy becomes the primacy of the "Greek."

It is this ambiguity in the Greek religious and national mentality that made—and still makes it—so difficult for Greeks to understand the true meaning of the post-Byzantine Orthodox world, of its real problems, of its unity as well as diversity. Essentially they failed to understand that the collapse of the Byzantine Empire was not necessarily the end of Orthodox unity based on the common acceptance of Orthodox Byzantium, i.e. "Christian Hellenism." For the whole point is that the Slavs, for example, who sought their independence from the Empire were, in fact, not less "Byzantine" than the Greeks, and were seeking independence from the Greeks but not from "Christian Hellenism." The first Bulgarian Empire—that of Boris and Symeon—was truly "Byzantine" in its entire ethos, culture and, of course, religious tradition. Father Florovsky in his *Ways of Russian Theology* speaks of the "early Russian Byzantinism." All these new nations had no cultural tradition comparable to the one the Greeks had in Ancient Greece and their initial and formative tradition, the one that gave them their national "birth" and made them into Orthodox nations was the Christian Byzantine tradition. And in spite of all conflicts, misunderstandings and mutual isolation, this unity in the Byzantine tradition has been never really broken or forgotten, but has always constituted the common foundation, the very form of unity, of the entire Orthodox East.

But for the Greeks, imprisoned as they progressively became by the identification of the "Byzantine" with the "Greek," of the national and even ethnic reduction of Byzantinism, any attempt to establish political and ecclesiastical independence from the Empire—on the part of Slavs, or Arabs, or Romanians—meant almost automatically a threat to "Hellenism," an attempt to

destroy the "Greeks" and their birthright within Orthodoxy. They never understood that the essential unity of the Orthodox world is neither national, nor political nor even jurisdictional, but the unity precisely of "Christian Hellenism," the Orthodox embodiment of the essential Christian tradition. And they did not understand it because they identified this "Christian Hellenism" with "Hellenism," i.e. with the Greek national and ethnic "identity." The Slavs in this perspective were viewed as an alien and essentially "barbarian" force aimed at the destruction of "Hellenism." And since the Slavs were strong and the Greek weak this view took sometimes almost paranoic forms. After the liberation of Greece in the 19th century and the emergence of new "Western" Greek nationalism, "Pan-slavism" became—not without the help of Western powers—a real catchword, the synonym of *the* Threat and *the* Enemy. One must add here that the Russian imperial policy in the "Oriental question" was not always of great help in alleviating these fears, and was certainly guilty of many a tasteless tactic, but it is equally true that at the very height of Russia's own messianic and imperialistic nationalism never did the Russian Orthodox consciousness question the primacy of Constantinople and of the venerable Eastern Patriarchates or press for a change in the "taxis" of Orthodox Churches. On the contrary, the 19th century in Russia was marked by a revival of precisely "Byzantine" interests, by a return to "Christian Hellenism" as the source of Orthodoxy, by a return to a truly universal Orthodox ecclesiology, by the progressive liberation from the narrow, pseudo-messianic nationalism of the "Third Rome." Whatever the various "diplomatic" difficulties, ecclesiologically the real obstacle to a recovery by the Orthodox Church of her essential unity lay, at that time, not in any mythological "Pan-slavism" but in the narrowly nationalistic reduction, by the Greeks, of "Christian Hellenism" to "Hellenism."

All this explains why the Greek ecclesiastical "officialdom" (we do not speak here of the popular feelings which have always somehow preserved the intuition of Orthodox unity) never really *accepted* the post-Byzantine ecclesiological development, never integrated it into its own "worldview." The various "autocephalies" granted during and after the Byzantine period were "concessions" and "accommodations," not the acknowledgement of something normal, something as "adequate" to the new situation as the acknowledgement of the "Imperial Church" was "adequate" to the previous situation—that of a Christian Empire. For that new situation had really no room within the Greek religious mentality, and was viewed indeed as accidental and temporary. For this reason no "autocephaly" has ever been granted freely but has always been the result of fight and "negotiation." For this reason also, even today the principle of "autocephaly" which constitutes the basic principle of the Church's present organization, is never quite understood by

the Greek "officialdom," whether in its "principium" (the "right to grant autocephaly") or in its "modality" (its implications for "inter-Church relations).

One thing is clear, however, and constitutes probably the ultimate paradox of this entire development. Having reluctantly recognized this principle *de facto,* the Greek "officialdom" seems to justify it by that very reasoning which in the past made the Greeks reject and fight it: the idea of an *essential* difference between the Hellenic and the various non-Hellenic "Orthodoxies." If in the past they fought "autocephalies" because they rejected the idea that "Christian Hellenism"—as essence of Orthodoxy—may have any other ecclesiological expression than that of one "Imperial Church" which is Greek, today they accept them because, having in fact replaced "Christian Hellenism" with "Hellenism," they believe that the other "Orthodoxies" must necessarily be the expression of some other "essences": "Russian Orthodoxy," "Serbian Orthodoxy," etc. And just as the vocation of "Greek Orthodoxy" is to preserve Hellenism, the vocation of other Churches is to preserve their own—ultimately "national"—essences. Having completed thus its full circle the "imperial" mentality joined the "national" one. And this was inevitable if one remembers that the real source of modern "nationalism" lies not in Christianity but in the ideas of the French Revolution of 1789, the true "mother" of the petty, fanatical and negativistic "nationalisms" of the 19th and 20th centuries. What makes, however, this new (not Byzantine but *modern*) Greek nationalism distinct from other Orthodox "nationalisms" is the certitude, surviving in it from its "imperial" antecedents, that within all these Orthodox "essences" the Greek "essence" has a primacy, occupies, *jure divino,* the first place. Having forgotten that it is not "Hellenism" as such but "Christian Hellenism" that constitutes the real unity of Orthodoxy and truly has a spiritual and eternal "primacy" over all other "expressions," having identified this "Hellenism" with themselves, the Greeks claim a "primacy" which indeed might have been theirs but on entirely different presuppositions. This is today the fundamental ambiguity of the "universal primacy" in the Orthodox Church. Does it belong to the first among bishops, the one whom the "consesus" of all churches respects, loves and venerates in the person of the Ecumenical Patriarch, or does it belong to the spiritual head and bearer of "Hellenism" whose Christian value and affiliation is as questionable as that of any modern and half pagan nationalism?

## 11.

We can interrupt here our reflections on the true nature and causes of our present ecclesiastical storm. I am convinced that as

long as the questions raised in this article are not answered all our polemics and controversies about the new "autocephaly" will remain superficial, non-essential, and ultimately–meaningless. To answer them, however, means necessarily to achieve a deep and constructive clarification of Orthodox ecclesiology itself.

What happened or rather what happens in America can indeed be reduced to a simple formula: it is an almost *forced* return to the *essential* Orthodox ecclesiology, to its very roots, to those fundamental norms and presuppositions to which the Church always *returns* when she finds herself in a new situation in "this world" whose "fashion" is passing. I use the term "forced" because this return is the fruit not of abstract "academic" thinking but of life itself, of the circumstances in which the Church discovers–painfully and not without torments and sufferings–that the only way of survival for her is precisely to be the *Church,* to be that which eternally shines and illumines us in the primordial and essential ecclesiology in which the unique and eternal experience, form and consciousness–the very being–of the Church, have found their expression.

That only one "part" of the Orthodox Church in America has up to now been "forced" into that return because its own situation made it inevitable; that this has provoked passions, fears, suspicions; that some of the external "factors" make some of these fears understandable, all this is natural, all this was probably inevitable. Fear, however, is a bad counsellor. Only if we are able to raise our questions to that level which alone can make them answerable and which is that of "essential" ecclesiology, only if we are able to see and to evaluate facts in this essential perspective–will the storm be revealed as meaningful, will it lead to a common victory.

Sooner or later it will become clear to all that it is not by concentrating on the preservation of "Hellenism," "Russianism" or "Serbianism" that we will preserve Orthodoxy; but, on the contrary, by preserving and fulfilling the demands of the Church we will salvage all that which is essential in all incarnations of the Christian faith and life. If Father Florovsky, a Russian theologian living and working "in exile," had the courage (in his *Ways of Russian Theology*) to denounce and to condemn the deviations of "Russianism" from the "Christian Hellenism" and to liberate thus an entire generation of Russian theologians from the last hangups of any pseudo-messianism and religious nationalism, is it not time for, be it only one, a Greek to perform the same painful yet necessary and liberating operation with the ambiguities of "Hellenism"?

Sooner or later it will become clear to all that the Ecumenical Patriarch, if he is to fulfill his "universal primacy," will achieve it not by defensive and negative reactions, not by questionable

"appeals" to equally questionable and inapplicable "precedents" and "traditions" but by constructive leadership towards the fulfillment by the Church of her essence in every place of God's dominion. Personally I have spent too much of my theological life "defending" the universal primacy of the Patriach of Constantinople to be accused of any "anti-Constantinopolitanism." This primacy, its necessity for the Church, its tremendous potential for Orthodoxy, I once more solemnly confess and affirm here. This primacy, however, to become again "what it is" must be purified of all ambiguities, of all non-essential "contexts," of all nationalistic connotations, of the dependence on anything–in the past, present and future–which is not the Church and only the Church. It is maybe the most urgent task of the universal primacy today–to liberate us from pagan and heretical nationalisms which choke the universal and saving vocation of the Orthodox Church. We should cease to speak of our "glories." For *glory*–in the essential tradition of the Church belongs to God alone and it is for the glorification of God, not of herself, that the Church was established. Once we have realized this, things impossible with men become possible with God.

Forgiveness Sunday, 1971.