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Who are the Orthodox Christians?

A historical introduction

MARY B. CUNNINGHAM
and ELIZABETH THEOKRITOFF

The Orthodox Church consists historically of the local Churches of the Eastern Roman empire, including Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem, as well as the Churches that came into being as a result of their missions. During the first millennium of Christianity, this communion included the Church of Rome. It is important to remember that the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, as well as Rome's Protestant offshoots, all share a common ancestry in the one, universal Christian communion of the early centuries.

The Christian mission, as it is described by Luke in Acts and in Paul's Epistles, spread rapidly through the territories of the Roman empire. Orthodox tradition holds that it spread beyond the Roman world even in the apostolic period, with St Thomas travelling as far as southern India, converting many people along the way. Most of the more distant missions, such as Georgia, Armenia and Ethiopia, however, were probably achieved in the fourth or fifth centuries after the Roman empire had finally adopted Christianity as its state religion, following the conversion of Constantine I. By this time, the Church, which had earlier been an illegal, minority organisation within a predominantly pagan society, was slowly becoming the dominant force in shaping government laws and social traditions. The Roman empire, consisting of its Eastern and Western halves, became a fully Christian state: it was believed to be sanctioned by God, with its emperors or kings fulfilling special duties as God's representatives in the secular realm.

It is important at the beginning of any discussion of the Christian Church to ask what in fact this body represents. Was Jesus Christ's vision of the Church, when he told his disciples to go forth and baptise in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19), the same as that of a believer of later centuries? The Eastern Orthodox response would be that the Church was then, and remains now, above all a eucharistic community. Because all participate in the one bread of the Eucharist, the Church is one

body (cf. 1 Cor 10:16–17): it is not simply a collection of individuals united to Jesus. A body needs a structure, and this is provided by a threefold hierarchy of bishops, presbyters or priests, and deacons. Such a structure appears to have been in place by the beginning of the second century.

In the Orthodox understanding, the Church has always existed as ‘Churches’ in the plural, as in the Christian East today. This is a source of confusion to many Western Christians for whom ‘a Church’ means a denomination, confessionally defined. In ancient and Orthodox usage, a Church is defined by geography, referring originally to a community gathered around a bishop. In the third to fourth centuries, dioceses were grouped into metropolitan areas; the metropolitan bishop was first among equals, charged with preserving unity. In the fifth century, these areas in turn were organised into the five Churches of Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem – the so-called pentarchy – and their bishops later came to be known as patriarchs. Rome enjoyed a recognised primacy among the local Churches, although the understanding of this primacy varied over the centuries and developed very differently in Rome and in the East.

DEFINING CHRISTIAN FAITH

Controversies concerning fundamental issues of faith and doctrine arose at a very early period. Orthodox Christianity developed its apologetic and dogmatic defence of the faith in response to an atmosphere of sophisticated intellectual debate, especially in the first eight centuries after Christ. In the late first and second centuries, diverse views concerning God’s relationship with creation, cosmology and authority within the Church prompted a more formal definition of ‘orthodoxy’, led by bishops such as St Irenaeus of Lyons. The affirmations of this period on creation, scripture and the Church provide the foundations for all later discussions of doctrine and discipline within the Christian Church.

The first three centuries of Christianity were dominated not only by internal intellectual challenges, but also by persecution at the hands of a pagan, largely hostile, state. Persecution was in fact sporadic and varied in its force region by region, but this did not prevent it from having a profound effect on the Christian community. Martyrs, venerated for their steadfast faith, remain important members of the ‘communion of saints’ until the present day. In the early fourth century, the persecution of Christians ended after the Edict of Milan in AD 313. Although Constantine’s personal conversion to the new religion may have been slow, the effects on the position of the Church were dramatic. The court

historian Eusebius chronicled these developments, also articulating the role of the Christian emperor as one who 'by bringing those whom he rules on earth to the only begotten and saving Word, renders them fit subjects for his Kingdom'.¹

The Christianisation of the Roman empire took place slowly. Nevertheless, the process, once started, was unstoppable; it was characterised by the gradual introduction of laws such as the ban on commerce and official business on Sundays, the building of churches and other Christian monuments, imperial supervision of ecclesiastical councils to settle doctrinal disputes and, on occasion, state enforcement of doctrinal decisions, whether orthodox or heterodox. By the reign of Justinian (AD 527–65), the Church had become fully integrated into imperial life. Court ceremonial included elaborate liturgical celebrations based in the Great Church of Hagia Sophia with the emperor playing a prominent, although always non-clerical, role. This nicely illustrates the Byzantine doctrine of 'symphony': Church and state were seen as aspects of one organism, the Christian empire, each with its own proper sphere. Many in East and West today would have reservations about this way of thinking. We should recognise, however, that it builds on the belief that the incarnation of God has saved *all* that is human: culture and polity too can be 'baptised'.²

Trinitarian and christological doctrine was defined in the universal Church with the help of the ecumenical councils, which are recognised in the East as beginning with the first council of Nicaea in AD 325 and finishing with the seventh in 787. The councils were called in response to continuing controversy concerning the nature of the Trinity and, from the beginning of the fifth century, the manner in which two natures come together in the person of Christ. As the term 'ecumenical' or 'universal' indicates, these councils included representatives from both Eastern and Western Churches. Tragically, substantial parts of the Church were unable to agree with the decisions of various ecumenical councils. Thus, the Church of the East (now known as 'Assyrian'), based in Mesopotamia, refused to accept the decisions of the third ecumenical council at Ephesus (431) and has thus remained out of communion with mainstream Christianity ever since. A substantial part of the Alexandrian and Syrian Churches could not accept the formula 'in two natures' adopted at the fourth council at Chalcedon (451), and broke away to form the 'monophysite' or 'miaphysite' Churches, now usually called 'Oriental Orthodox'. This group is represented today by the Coptic, Ethiopian and Armenian Churches, the Syrian or 'Jacobite' Church of Antioch, and the Syrian Church of India. The Eastern (i.e. Chalcedonian) and Oriental

Orthodox Churches have actually remained remarkably close in theology and ethos, and today there is widespread recognition that their differences are terminological rather than substantive.

The schism over Chalcedon greatly diminished the Churches of Alexandria and Antioch. After the Arab conquests in the first half of the seventh century, these territories were lost to the empire; for most of the ancient Christian world, the brief interlude of Christian empire was over. Antioch continued to show theological vitality, mainly in the form of Christian apologetics countering Islamic teachings, but Constantinople was now the undisputed centre of Eastern Christianity.

DIVISION BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

The estrangement between the Eastern and Western Churches culminated in the mutual excommunications of AD 1054, but it is difficult to pinpoint exactly when this process began. As early as the third and fourth centuries of Christian history, a cultural divide is perceptible between the Latin-speaking territories of Italy and points west, and the largely Greek-speaking Eastern Mediterranean. Later Roman emperors, beginning with Diocletian, in fact divided the empire into two halves for more effective governance. In AD 476, the Ostragothic general Odoacer deposed the last Western Roman emperor and the resulting power vacuum gave the Roman Church a political prestige which it retains to the present day. But the 'fall' of the West was not mirrored in the East, where the Roman empire continued until 1453.

Although tensions between East and West were developing in the course of the fifth and sixth centuries, it is in the middle of the seventh century that a real rupture between the Roman pope and the ecumenical patriarch in Constantinople took place. The arrest of Pope Martin in 653 by the Byzantine emperor, followed by his trial and condemnation ostensibly for treason but in reality for his opposition to Monothelite doctrine, represents a low point in East–West Church relations. Tension increased in the ninth and tenth centuries with the dispute between East and West over the *filioque*, the controversial addition to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed which has implications for the status of both Son and Spirit in the Trinity. The excommunications of 1054 thus represent a stage in a process of growing distrust between the Eastern and Western Churches; at the time it was probably believed that the schism would soon be healed. But then came the Crusades. The indigenous Christian population found themselves second-class citizens in the Crusader states of Antioch and Jerusalem, and the establishment of

Latin patriarchs in those cities sent an unambiguous message: Rome no longer recognised the local Churches. Many historians in fact view the sack of Constantinople by the Latins in 1204, in the course of the Fourth Crusade, as the seal of division between Rome and Constantinople. This invasion, followed by over sixty years of Latin occupation, inspired a continuing distrust of the West on the part of Orthodox Christians. Two major attempts at reunion with Rome (the Council of Lyons in 1274 and that of Florence–Ferrara in 1438–9) ultimately failed because of this tension, along with diverging views not only on the *filioque*, but also on Western doctrine concerning purgatory and disciplinary matters such as the use of leavened or unleavened bread in the Eucharist.

BYZANTINE MISSIONS

Another aspect of Byzantine religious policy with far-reaching implications was the missionary activity that took place in Slavic and Balkan territories from about the middle of the ninth century onwards. Photius, patriarch of Constantinople (AD 858–67, 878–86), was responsible for initiating these missions and for deciding to translate scripture and liturgical books into Slavonic with the help of two brothers, Sts Cyril (Constantine) and Methodius. Although the first mission to Moravia failed, subsequent efforts among the Bulgars, Serbs, and finally the Rus', who were in this period based in the region around Kiev, succeeded in converting these Slavic nations to Christianity within the Byzantine sphere of influence. Tensions between Latin and Greek missionaries working in the same areas added to the growing distrust between Eastern and Western Christendom. The results of these missions can still be observed in the configuration of Orthodox and Roman Catholic populations today: Russia, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia remain largely Orthodox, whereas Poland and Hungary possess a majority of Roman Catholics. In the thirteenth century, Constantinople recognised the Churches of both Serbia and Bulgaria as self-governing – an acknowledgement of the new reality of dealing with territories outside the administrative framework of the empire. While the West moved increasingly towards a centralised structure, in the East a new community of local Churches began to counterbalance the dominance of the imperial city.

THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF MONASTICISM

Theological developments between approximately the seventh and the fifteenth centuries were complex and cannot be treated in detail

here.³ It is important to note that the seventh council of Nicaea (AD 787), which defended the theology of images against Iconoclasm, was the last episcopal gathering to be universally recognised as an ecumenical council. Further local councils did of course take place. However, the definition of Orthodox doctrine was in its essentials complete by the end of the eighth century, with further statements offering refinements rather than addressing fundamental doctrinal issues.

This does not mean that theology stagnated, but it was principally in the monastic milieu that its vitality was preserved. Notable is the figure of St Symeon the New Theologian, who flourished in a Constantinopolitan monastery in the early eleventh century and left an indelible mark on Orthodox Christianity with his experience of the divine light. Personal spiritual experience is fundamental to this theology, and to the elaborate science of spiritual life developed by monastic writers. A resurgence of monastic life, evidenced in the foundation of new houses throughout the Byzantine empire, helped to drive the Orthodox vision of theology as a living encounter with God. Of particular significance was the foundation in the tenth century of the first monasteries on Mt Athos: the Holy Mountain brought together monks from various parts of the Christian world, including, at least at the beginning, Latins.

The monastic revival culminated in the theological contributions of St Gregory Palamas (c. 1296–1359). While on Mount Athos, Gregory became immersed in the Hesychast tradition of contemplative prayer. His experience of divine light through prayer led him to develop the ancient distinction between the essence and energies of God: whereas the divine essence remains unknowable, the uncreated energies permeate all things. This affirmation of a holistic theology, which maintains the presence of God throughout creation and the ability of human beings to experience him, has its foundation in Chalcedonian theology.

Hesychasm inspired a spiritual and cultural renewal whose influence spread far beyond the walls of the monasteries. The 'Hesychast International', as it has been called, centred on Paroria in Bulgaria, where St Gregory of Sinai had settled, and on Mount Athos. St Sava, founder of Hilandar monastery and founding archbishop of the Serbian Church, is emblematic of this movement in his international vision and his rootedness in spiritual values even while skilfully managing affairs of Church and state. Something of the spirit of this revival can be glimpsed in the churches and monasteries of Peć (in modern Kosovo) – although some of these monuments have tragically been destroyed since the Kosovo Force (KFOR) occupation of the region. Bulgarians and Serbs were responsible for the dissemination of this spiritual revival through Romania and

Russia, where the same spirit inspired the monastic founder St Sergius of Radonezh and the missionary St Stephen of Perm.

THE CHURCH IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

The last flowering of Byzantine culture and spiritual life was short-lived. Most of Serbia was reduced to vassalage after defeat by the Turks at the battle of Kosovo in 1389. Bulgaria fell to the Turks in 1396, and the fall of the imperial capital in 1453 completed the loss to Muslim rule of the ancient heartlands of Christianity. As had been true in the Middle East for some centuries, so now in Asia Minor and the Balkans the Church's main focus became survival.

The conquering Turks recognised no distinction between religion and nation: the Christians were therefore treated as a subject people with the Patriarch of Constantinople as its 'ethnarch'. This enabled Constantinople to claim an authority over all the other Churches within the empire, which in practice entrenched Greek domination of other local Churches, including the other ancient patriarchates.

Five centuries of Turkish domination have left a mark on the Greek and Balkan peoples that is still evident today. The subject Christians enjoyed freedom of worship and a measure of tolerance most of the time, but at the price of being second-class citizens. The poll-tax, the child levy and humiliating social restrictions kept up a relentless pressure, resulting in a steady haemorrhage of conversions; public attempts to revitalise and strengthen the faith of the Christian population were liable to end in death. Yet the demoralised state of hierarchy and the general low level of education did not prevent the appearance of many who would be revered as 'new martyrs' – often people who had converted to Islam, in some cases as children, and then recanted.

THE CHURCH IN RUSSIA

The Russian Church alone remained free of the Turkish yoke, a circumstance which led some Russian churchmen to see it as the 'Third Rome'. The fall of Constantinople was widely viewed as divine retribution for the compromise of Orthodox faith at the council of Florence–Ferrara (1438–9), in a futile attempt to gain Western assistance against the Turks. When the head of the Russian Church, the Greek Metropolitan Isidore of Kiev, returned home after signing the act of union, he was summarily arrested. In due course, the Russians elected their own Metropolitan of Moscow to lead the Church, without the assent of

Constantinople. So began Russia's de facto autonomy from Constantinople, although a patriarchate was established, with the blessing of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, only in 1589. It should be made clear that this was a matter of order, not a split in the Church. Russia would go on to play an important role as protector of the Christians in the Ottoman empire.

Russia at this time was beginning to emerge from its own period of servitude to the Tartars. A key figure in the resurgence of ecclesial and cultural life was St Sergius of Radonezh, a Hesychast monk who also gave advice and moral support to the Prince of Moscow. Sergius's dedication of his monastery to the Holy Trinity (Sergiev Posad or Zagorsk) would be seen as a sermon in action, a call to unity in love.⁴

The controversies in the Russian Church generally concerned church life and ritual rather than theology; but one fifteenth-century controversy had important implications for the place of the Church in society. The 'Possessors', whose protagonist was Joseph of Volokolamsk, stood for a Church with influence in society, deferential to the Tsar's authority and possessing the means to organise practical works of charity. Nil Sorsky and the 'Non-Possessors' stood for simplicity, prayer and inner freedom. Given the climate of the times throughout Europe, Joseph's enthusiasm for the coercion of heretics is less remarkable than Nil's advocacy of religious toleration. The party of the 'Possessors' achieved dominance, but both men were canonised.

By contrast, Patriarch Nikon's reforms, begun in 1652, led to a schism that persists to this day, the tragic consequence of a preoccupation with ritual (on both sides) and an obsession with uniformity. Nikon's heavy-handed attempts to bring liturgical practice into line with contemporary Greek usage provoked a violent backlash. The 'Old Believer' schism exemplifies a recurring pattern: schisms in Orthodox Christianity typically reflect conservative rather than reforming tendencies.

Nikon was also a vehement proponent of the superiority of spiritual power over secular authority, but the tide of history was against him. Inspired by Protestant models of Church-state relations in Western Europe, Peter the Great abolished the patriarchate (1721), ignoring the protests of the other Orthodox patriarchs; it was replaced with a 'holy synod'. The Church effectively became a department of state. Despite repeated attempts on the part of the Church to extricate itself, this anomalous arrangement, with its stultifying effect on the hierarchy and church structures, was to continue until 1917. This synodal period was also characterised by a marked Westernisation in approaches to theology, iconography and church singing. Nevertheless, the body of the Church was

able to show some remarkable signs of life, especially in the nineteenth century – a subject to which we will return.

ORTHODOXY AND THE WEST

The fall of Constantinople put an end to plans for union with Rome in exchange for Western support against the Turks, but it did not end contact with the West. Christians from the Ottoman empire seeking higher education had little alternative but to turn to the Roman Catholic (or later Protestant) schools of the West. In 1581, Pope Gregory XIII obliged by founding the College of St Athanasius in Rome, with the purpose of converting Orthodox young men and sending them home to promote union with Rome. Lacking the resources and education to give adequate pastoral care, hierarchs and clergy in Greece and the Levant frequently welcomed Jesuit missionaries as preachers and confessors; presumably they were unaware that the Jesuits were making many secret converts.⁵ The success of Jesuit tactics became apparent in 1724, when one such convert became Patriarch of Antioch and led a section of his Church into union with Rome (the group now known as 'Melkites'). As a result, Christians in the Ottoman empire came to regard Rome with much the same suspicion as did the Orthodox in other parts of Europe, where 'unions' had been established among Orthodox who found themselves under Roman Catholic rulers (Unions of Brest-Litovsk (1596) in Ukraine and Alba Iulia (1698) in Transylvania). In the former case especially, the Union accepted by the hierarchy met with vigorous opposition from a substantial group of laity.

The turmoil of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation in the West affected the Orthodox world indirectly but drastically. In their argument with Rome, the Reformers had an understandable interest in trying to enlist the support of the rest of the ancient Churches for their interpretation of authentic Christianity. In 1573 a group of Lutheran scholars from Tübingen sent Patriarch Jeremias II a copy of the Augsburg Confession, to which he responded with a detailed critique affirming the Orthodox understanding; amicable correspondence continued for some years until it became clear that there would be no meeting of minds. Later hierarchs, however, would find themselves swept into the vortex of Western arguments. The most famous instance is Patriarch Cyril Loukaris of Constantinople. Cyril's work in Poland in the immediate aftermath of the Union of Brest-Litovsk had left him with considerable sympathy with the Protestants; his 1629 'Confession' was strongly influenced by Calvinism. With the aid of the Catholic powers of France

and Austria, Loukaris was deposed and murdered. The 'Confession' was subsequently condemned by six councils in succession. But this was not the last attempt to adapt for the defence of Orthodoxy the ill-assorted toolbox of Western theology. Peter Mogila, Metropolitan of Kiev (1632–47), took the opposite approach from Loukaris; hoping to use Rome's own weapons to counteract Rome's influence, he drew directly and uncritically on Roman Catholic manuals. After judicious removal of some of the most egregious Latinisms, Mogila's *Confession* was approved by the council of Jassy in 1642. Mogila's Latinising theology and adoption of Jesuit educational models proved tremendously influential, and came to dominate theological education also in Russia. The rash of 'Orthodox confessions' culminated in that of Patriarch Dositheus, approved by the council of Jerusalem in 1672; Dositheus too resorts to a Latin framework, despite his mistrust of Roman influence.

RETURN TO THE SOURCES

Characteristic of these 'Confessions' is 'a marked inferiority complex towards the formularies of the Counter-Reformation',⁶ a complex that has bedevilled Orthodox theology into the twentieth century. The history of modern Orthodox theology is the story of a prolonged and erratic progress towards rediscovering an authentic voice: a process of learning to use Western thought and research as a tool, not a straitjacket, and acquiring the confidence to draw on Eastern resources to avoid Western impasses.

Despite the apparently parlous state of the entire Church, a spiritual and theological revival began in the eighteenth century. It came from the traditional source, the monastic tradition, in creative engagement with the spirit of the age. The intellectual and political ferment of eighteenth-century Western Europe had reverberations in Ottoman territory too, in the so-called 'Greek Enlightenment'. For some, this meant adopting the ideas and rehearsing the arguments of the Western 'Enlightenment', as their predecessors had done with the Western Reformation. For others, however, the new ideas coming from the West provided an impetus to look more deeply into their own tradition. Churchmen were prominent in both parties: but none can match the lasting influence of a representative of the latter tendency, St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain,⁷ best known today for his collection of spiritual and ascetic writings entitled the *Philokalia*. This was soon translated into Slavonic by Paisius Velichkovsky, who had fled from the sterile scholasticism of the Kiev Academy to learn the spiritual life on the

Holy Mountain. In this way, its influence spread to Russia and to Moldavia, where Paisius spent the latter part of his life.

The effects of this spiritual renewal were felt first in Russia, where the nineteenth century saw a blossoming of monastic life and particularly of the institution of spiritual fatherhood. St Seraphim of Sarov and the Elders of the Optina monastery are the best-known examples. This revitalisation at the heart of church life produced no immediate transformation, but it strengthened the Church for the firestorm that was to come. The witness of contemplative prayer, and the 'golden chain' of spiritual fatherhood or motherhood exercised by people of holiness, would prove vital in preserving Christian faith when church structures were wiped out or rendered powerless.

The long-term theological importance of this spiritual rejuvenation was enormous, for it succeeded in bridging the gap between the church tradition and the religious revival of the intelligentsia.⁸ That revival began as a movement of religious philosophy rather than of theology, but its legacy was to be fundamental to the theology of the Russian emigration and, through it, to the entire Orthodox world today.

The Russian intelligentsia of the nineteenth century were profoundly influenced by Western and especially German philosophy, and some engaged with these influences in a creative way. Key figures include Alexei Khomiakov (1804–60), an early representative of the 'Slavophile' movement which was convinced of the unique vocation of Russia as an Orthodox culture. It is to him that we owe the notion of 'sobornost' (unity in freedom, the unity of an interdependent living body), which was to become such an important concept for Orthodox theology and beyond. It has profound implications for both the Church and human society, and continues to be seen as a vital corrective to the equation of 'freedom' with individualism. We see here the roots of the interest in social thought characteristic of the Russian emigration, and now re-emerging within Russia itself.⁹

Wholeness and unity are leitmotifs of nineteenth-century Russian thought. Often this takes a more mystical turn, as in the thought of the highly influential Vladimir Soloviev (1853–1900). Influenced by Boehme's mysticism and Schelling's 'pantheism', Soloviev saw a primordial 'Godmanhood' as key to the union of God with his creation. But he further attempted to express the unity of all things in terms of 'Sophia', or divine Wisdom personified; his speculations on this mysterious figure took him well beyond the traditional bounds of Orthodox theology. His thinking on the subject was developed in various ways by Pavel Florensky and Sergius Bulgakov, among others. 'Sophiology' in the

narrow sense remains very much a fringe interest. Yet the vision that it strives to express, of the oneness of created being and the ultimate union of creation with God, has become one of the hallmarks of modern Orthodox theology.

Even though the rediscovery of Orthodox tradition had begun with Greek scholars such as Nikodimos, it was slow to bear fruit in Greece. Where Russia had its Slavophiles, Greece had only Philhellenes. Despite a few dissenting voices, the emergent Greek nation preferred to define itself according to what 'enlightened Europe' valued, namely, its pre-Christian Classical past. The position of the Church in the Greek state was established with an eye on Protestant models, and theology was envisaged as an academic discipline. Not until the 1960s would Greek theology experience its own renaissance.

THE CHANGING FACE OF THE ORTHODOX WORLD

The Ottoman conquest had concentrated the 'Byzantine commonwealth' of diverse peoples and nations into the 'Rum millet' led by the Greek patriarch. So it was not entirely surprising that, as the various peoples gained liberation, they should seek 'independence' also from the ecclesiastical authorities in Constantinople. If Constantinople itself had been liberated, history might have been different. But what actually happened in the wake of the Greek war of independence (1821) was the establishment of national Churches in the new nation states. These included ancient patriarchates that had been suppressed (Serbia, Bulgaria), but also new independent Churches (Greece, Romania, Albania). The establishment of self-governing Churches in sovereign territories can be seen as a natural evolution of early Christian practice (thus Georgia and Armenia had their own Churches from an early date), but the definition of a local Church in ethnic or nationalistic terms clearly is not. This issue arose late in the nineteenth century when Bulgarian bishops sought to establish jurisdiction over their compatriots regardless of locality: the attempt was formally condemned as 'phyletism' or nationalism. The condemnation of the Bulgarian attempt established an important point of principle, but failed to go to the root of the problem. Ecclesiastical separatism is sometimes motivated by naked nationalism; but it is often a reaction to ethnic and cultural bias within a local Church.

As the Churches in the Balkans were emerging from Turkish domination, new Churches were growing up outside Europe. The revival in Russian Church life had led to a revival in mission, both in the Russian Far East and in China, Japan and Korea. Drawing on the

tradition of Sts Cyril and Methodius, the Russian missionaries attached great importance to use of the vernacular and the formation of a truly indigenous Church.

Notable among the Russian missions was Alaska. Significant numbers were evangelised by the gentle monk Herman and the energetic polymath John Veniaminov (later Metropolitan Innocent of Moscow). Orthodox clergy were a strong voice in defence of the native peoples against abuses by the Russian trading companies, and later by the American authorities. Despite aggressive Protestant proselytism following the sale of the territory to the United States, a substantial Orthodox population remains.

In the 1870s, the Russian missionary diocese in North America moved from Alaska to San Francisco to serve growing numbers of Orthodox emigrants across the continent. For some fifty years, the Orthodox Church in North America approximated to a model of canonical order: most parishes recognised the Russian bishop, who made strenuous efforts to find suitable clergy and bishops to serve the pastoral needs of the various ethnic groups. But increasing numbers of Greek communities were making their own arrangements; in 1921 Ecumenical Patriarch Meletios (Metaxakis) brought them under his jurisdiction, and in the chaos following the Russian revolution many other ethnic communities made similar moves back to their original mother Churches.

The political upheavals of the twentieth century have resulted in a significant Orthodox 'diaspora' in Western Europe as well as the Americas and Australia. This unsatisfactory term is used to denote communities started by groups of migrant Orthodox rather than by missions; nevertheless, most of these communities are now well established and include many indigenous Westerners, despite a disinclination to proselytise among other Christians. Orthodox emigration to Western Europe presents new problems of church order: it would run counter to Orthodox ecclesiological sensibilities to establish another autocephalous Church within what is historically the territory of Rome. Most communities are still under the jurisdiction of their original mother Churches; but in several places there is close cooperation at episcopal level and a real desire to work towards functioning as a local Church.¹⁰

The ancient Churches of the Middle East continue to decline in numbers, due both to emigration and to proselytism by other Christian groups. The picture is not uniform, however. The vitality of the Church of Antioch in Lebanon and Syria contrasts with the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, where the Palestinian Orthodox population has suffered drastic attrition: the overwhelming pressures that they share with their

Muslim compatriots are often compounded by inadequate pastoral care on the part of the Greek hierarchy.¹¹ Alexandria, on the other hand, has been given a new lease of life by the emergence of new Churches in sub-Saharan Africa, notably Uganda, Ghana and Kenya. The origins of these communities go back to the African independent Churches founded in the 1920s and 1930s in an effort to reclaim an ancient Christian tradition not associated with colonial rule.

CONVERGENCE AND RENEWAL

The Russian revolution was the decisive event for modern Orthodoxy, ushering in a new 'age of martyrs' for most of the Orthodox Church. Furthermore, the emigration following the revolution meant that the heirs to the intellectual ferment of the nineteenth century were largely scattered abroad. Many Russians fled to the Baltic states, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. But the centre of the emigration was Paris, where the St Sergius Institute of Orthodox Theology (founded 1926) and the Russian YMCA Press would remain key centres for the dissemination of Orthodox theological thought.

Many émigrés came to see a providential meaning in the catastrophe that had engulfed their country; indeed, this resulted in an unprecedented mutual encounter between Orthodoxy and the West. Through the ecumenical efforts of the émigrés, Western Christians were able to hear for the first time the voices of highly articulate and thoughtful Orthodox theologians from various traditions.

Adversarial encounters between Orthodoxy and the West in earlier centuries had led to superficial attempts to 'package' Orthodoxy in Western terms. This new encounter, however, elicited a more creative response: an awareness of the need first to 'possess what is "one's own" in order to benefit from what is "the other's"'.¹² This set in train a profound rediscovery of the Orthodox tradition which included recognising where it was present in the Christian West. The logic of the Russian émigrés' understanding of the Church and its mission required a rediscovery of the universality of Orthodoxy across national cultural boundaries, but it was ecumenical contacts that allowed this to happen. Through the good offices of the enormously influential Russian Student Christian Movement, the YMCA was able to set up organisations of specifically Orthodox character in the Balkans, so as to promote spiritual renewal without raising suspicions of proselytism. The period between the two world wars saw a welter of meetings and conferences bringing together youth and theologians from Greece, the Balkans and the Russian

emigration. These included the 1936 conference of Orthodox theologians in Athens, which agreed on the task of freeing Orthodox theology from scholastic influences and reconnecting with the Church Fathers.

Within ten years, however, almost the whole of Orthodox Europe had fallen to Communism. Yet, remarkably, this did not altogether derail the project of theological renewal. That project is well exemplified in one of the great theologians of the twentieth century, Fr Dumitru Stăniloae (1900–93), whose continued teaching and writing transformed the character of theology in Romania. Having studied in Athens and Paris in the 1920s, Stăniloae was profoundly influenced by the theology of the Russian emigration, and had a keen sense of Romania's place as meeting-point of the Greek and Slav worlds. Serbia followed a somewhat different path: the dominant figure was Iustin Popović (1894–1979), a pioneer of patristic scholarship and spiritual renewal who reached out to the Greek and Russian traditions but was deeply suspicious of Ecumenism. A similar orientation can be seen in some of his prominent disciples such as Bishop Atanasije Jevtić and Bishop Amfilohije Radović, patristic scholars trained in Athens and closely involved with the current revival in Greek theology.

Communities outside Eastern Europe have acquired an increasingly prominent role in world Orthodoxy. In 1942, a chance encounter with Russian émigré theological writings inspired a group of young Orthodox Lebanese and Syrians to found the Orthodox Youth Movement, which was to make Antioch one of the foremost heirs to the Paris renewal. Paris itself continues to be an important theological centre: the tradition of the émigré thinkers has been carried on by such figures as Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, Fr Cyrille Argenti, Olivier Clément and Fr Boris Bobrinskoy, and by a younger generation of theologians from Russian, Greek and French backgrounds. In Britain, the spirit of the renewal had been represented since the 1920s mainly through the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius and its leaders such as Nicolas and Militza Zernov and Nadejda Gorodetzky. It gained momentum after the Second World War through the ministry of Metropolitan Anthony (Bloom) at the head of the Russian diocese, and Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov), whose unconventional monastery in Essex is both a meeting place for pilgrims from all over the world and a strong presence in the Anglo-Greek community. The Orthodox presence in Britain includes such internationally known theologians as Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, who during his years as lecturer at Oxford supervised large numbers of graduate students from around the world. The journals *Sobornost* and, more recently, *Sourozh* (1980–2006) have been an important source of theological writing in

English, along with *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* and the *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* in America.

In 1948, Fr Georges Florovsky and other leading theologians from Paris left for America, to be followed shortly by Alexander Schmemmann and John Meyendorff. All of these figures were to have a great impact on Orthodoxy in North America, and especially on St Vladimir's Seminary in New York (founded 1938). The seminary's publishing house has become the leading source of Orthodox books in English, many of which have subsequently been translated into the languages of other Orthodox countries.

Even during the Communist period, contacts and interchange among Orthodox Christians continued on the level of theological education. The World Council of Churches, too, provided valuable opportunities for representatives of the various Orthodox Churches to meet. It was also instrumental in re-establishing contact between the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches, leading in the 1960s to an official Dialogue. The sense of *de facto* unity between the two families of Churches is strong, and indeed Oriental Orthodox such as Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios, Abba Matta el-Meskin or Vigen Guroian are important figures for contemporary Eastern Orthodox theology.

Perhaps the most vital instrument of contact and renewal has been the Orthodox youth fellowship *Syndesmos*, founded in Paris in 1953. *Syndesmos* has formed generations of hierarchs and lay leaders with a profound sense of shared responsibility for the Church, and first-hand experience of the unity of Orthodoxy across national and cultural borders. Its early leaders included John Meyendorff, later Dean of St Vladimir's Seminary; Georges Khodr, now Metropolitan of Mount Lebanon; and ecumenical theologian Nikos Nissiotis. *Syndesmos* broke new ground in 1961 by establishing an inter-Orthodox missionary centre; its first director, Anastasios Yannoulatos, is now Archbishop of Tirana, where he has presided over the dramatic rebirth of the Albanian Church following the fall of Communism.

A remarkable aspect of Orthodox renewal in the later twentieth century has been the resurgence of monasticism. Mount Athos, widely given up for dead in the 1960s, now has some 1,600 monks, many highly educated; several of the monasteries are quite international in composition.¹³ A similar renewal can be seen in men's and women's monasticism throughout the Orthodox world. Monasticism has traditionally been a prime source of authentic theology, understood as 'praying in truth';¹⁴ now we once again see the monastic experience re-invigorating theological life. The teaching of St Silouan of Mount Athos has reached a global audience through his disciple Fr Sophrony, while architects of the Athonite

revival such as Archimandrite Vasileios of Iviron and Archimandrite Aimilianos of Simonopetra have been greatly influential in Greece and beyond. This is not an influence readily discernible from footnotes or bibliographies. But many Orthodox who write about theology today have been marked by their encounters with people of holiness who know at first hand the realities that doctrines seek to describe.¹⁵

The fall of Communism in Eastern Europe has had an impact on the Orthodox world comparable to that of its advent. Suddenly, almost all Orthodox are faced with the same challenges, those of an increasingly globalised world dominated by an economic ideology. Some Churches find themselves ill prepared for the rapid changes in society; the advent of foreign missionaries of assorted denominations only fuels suspicion of 'the West' and hinders constructive exchange. On the other hand, many more theologians from Orthodox countries are now studying and indeed teaching abroad, greatly increasing the opportunities for contact both among Orthodox and between Orthodox and Christians of Western traditions. The accession of several Orthodox countries to the European Union gives new opportunities for inter-Orthodox discussion of contemporary challenges, as well as increasing the visibility in Western Europe of Orthodox traditions. There is hope that Orthodox theological thinking will continue to develop in dialogue with the West, and that the process will increasingly be reciprocal.

Further reading

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Notes

1. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Oration on the Tricennialia of Constantine II.2*.
2. See further J. McGuckin, 'The legacy of the thirteenth Apostle', *SVTQ* 47:3-4 (2003), 251-88.

3. See A. Casiday, 'Church Fathers and the shaping of Orthodox theology', below.
4. N. Zernov, *The Russians and Their Church* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 3rd edn, 1978), pp. 36–41, 51.
5. See K. T. Ware (new Metropolitan of Diokleia), 'Orthodox and Catholics in the seventeenth century: schism or intercommunion?' in D. Baker (ed.), *Schism, Heresy and Religious Protest* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 259–76.
6. J. Meyendorff, *The Orthodox Church: Its Past and Its Role in the World Today* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1962), p. 95.
7. See A. Louth, 'The patristic revival and its protagonists' and A. N. Papathanasiou, 'Some key themes and figures in Greek theological thought', below.
8. J. Meyendorff, *Rome, Constantinople, Moscow: Historical and Theological Studies* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1996), p. 180.
9. See L. Kishkovsky, 'Russian theology after totalitarianism', below.
10. See M. Sollogoub, 'Orthodox Christians in Western Europe move towards a local Church', *Sourozh* 92 (May 2003), 8–32.
11. See further T. Pulcini, 'Tensions between the hierarchy and the laity of the Jerusalem patriarchate: historical perspectives on the present situation', *SVTQ* 36.3 (1992), 273–98.
12. Basil Zenkovsky, quoted in H. Bos, 'Orthodox youth and Orthodox culture: the genesis of Syndesmos, 1923–1953', available on www.syndesmos.org.
13. See further G. Speake, *Mount Athos. Renewal in Paradise* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002).
14. Cf. Evagrius, *Chapters on Prayer* 60.
15. See further A. Golitzin, 'Spirituality: Eastern Christian' in *Encyclopedia of Monasticism*, vol. II (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2000).