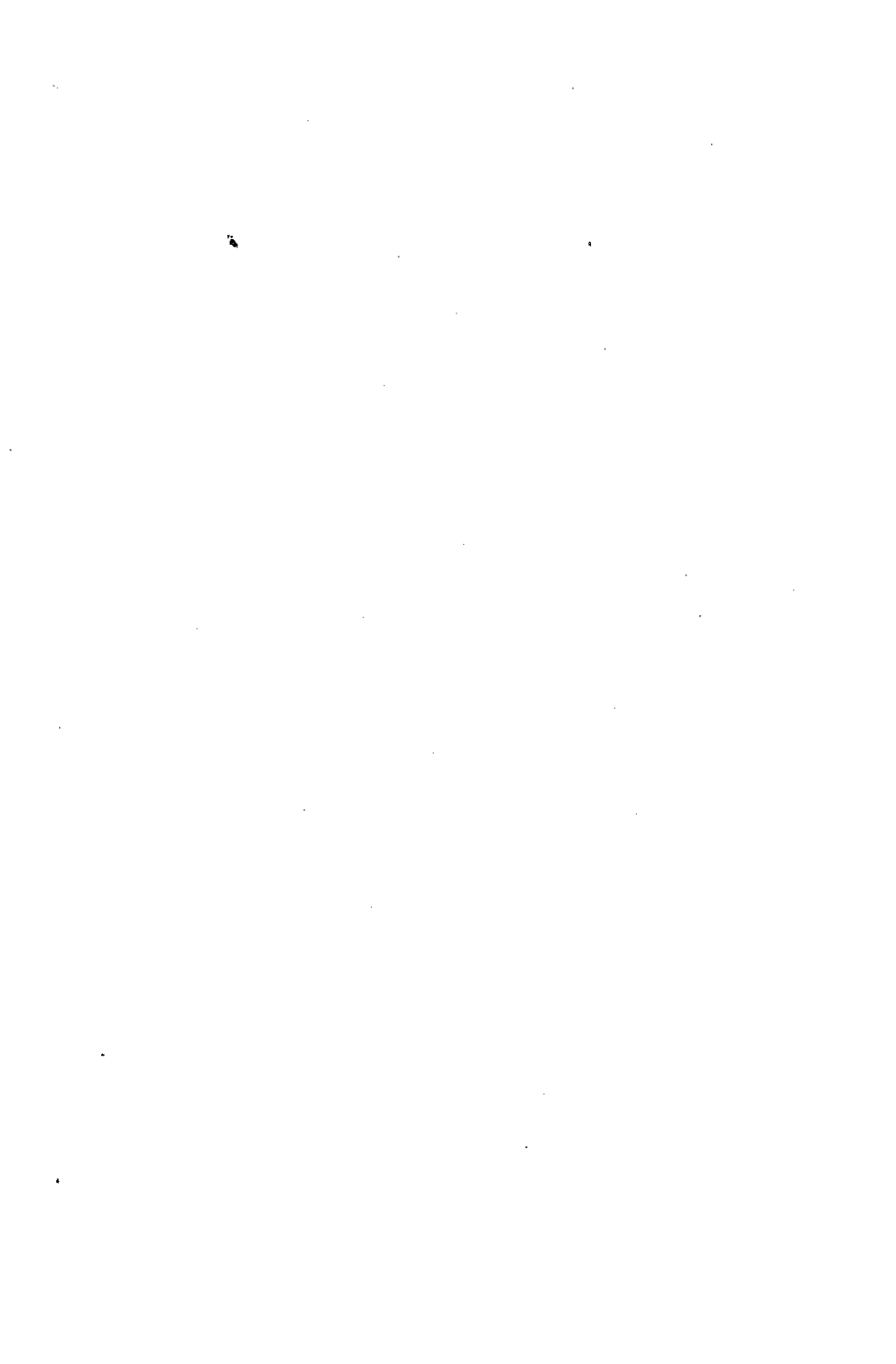


ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ ΚΑΙ ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ

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THE EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCH TODAY: ONE IN MANY

By

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Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to provide an introduction to the history and fundamental theological teachings of what is historically known as the Eastern or Greek Orthodox Church*. The term Eastern has been used to designate the Christian Church which originally developed and prospered in Eastern Europe and the Near East in contrast to Western Christendom, which emerged and developed in Western Europe. The term Greek has been used in contrast to Latin or Roman. Both epithets have been employed to speak of the Greek speaking East and the Latin speaking West of the Roman Empire and the middle centuries.¹ The Christian religion emerged in a world which had achieved its cultural unity under the Greeks and its political unity under the Romans.²

* Most of the text of the present article appeared in the volume *Religious Issues and Interreligious Dialogues*, edited by Charles Wei-hsun Fu and Gerhard E. Spiegler (Greenwood Press, New York - London, 1989) pp. 369-411. It appears here slightly revised.

1. There is no systematic and in-depth study of the world-wide Eastern Orthodox Church, but there are several mostly introductory surveys by Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike, such as Chrysostom Papadopoulos, *E Orthodoxos Anatolike Ecclesia*, ed. by Gregorios Papamichael (Athens, 1954); Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (Baltimore, 1963); John Meyendorff, *The Orthodox Church* (London, 1962); Ernst Benz, *The Eastern Orthodox Church* (New York, 1963); R.M. French, *The Eastern Orthodox Church* (London, 1951); Stefan Zankov, *The Eastern Orthodox Church* (Milwaukee, Wisc. 1929), dated but still a book with some excellent insights.

2. For English surveys of Christianity's religious, philosophical, political and cultural background see S. Angus, *The Religious Quests of the Graeco-Roman World* (New York, 1967); F.E. Peters, *The Harvest of Hellenism* (New York, 1970); Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism* (Philadelphia, 1973).

D. Constantelos

In speaking of Christianity in today's world, we usually speak of Eastern (Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox) and Western (Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant or Reformed).

The Eastern Orthodox is one church in fifteen independent jurisdictions or administrative units.³ The following Patriarchates, autocephalous and autonomous churches are in full sacramental communion and compose the One Holy Catholic Orthodox and Apostolic Church. 1. *The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople* with a jurisdiction over Orthodox Christians living in Turkey, parts of Greece, Northern and Western Europe, North and South America, Australia and New Zealand. 2. *The Patriarchate of Alexandria and all Africa*. 3. *The Patriarchate of Antioch* with Christians in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran and other parts of the world. 4. *The Patriarchate of Jerusalem* with authority over Orthodox Christians in Palestine – including Israel, Jordan, Arabia, and Mt. Sinai. 5. *The Patriarchate of Russia*, includes the greatest number of Orthodox Christians in Russia proper and other states. 6. *The Patriarchate of the Serbians* serving Orthodox Christians in Yugoslavia and abroad. 7. *The Patriarchate of Romania* administers the needs of the Orthodox in Romania and Romanian Orthodox Christians abroad. 8. *The Patriarchate of Bulgaria's* authority extends over the faithful of that country. 9. *The Patriarchate of Georgia* in the Caucasus administers the needs of Orthodox Christians in Georgia and Southern Russia.

In addition to the nine churches with the rank of Patriarchate, there are six more autocephalous and autonomous churches, namely: 10. *The Church of Cyprus*; 11. *The Church of Greece*; 12. *The Church of Poland*; 13. *The Church of Albania*; 14. *The Church of Czechoslovakia*; and 15. *The Church of Finland*. The Orthodox church in America has not been recognized yet by all Orthodox jurisdictions. Its canonical status as an autocephalous church has been in dispute for several years but it is expected that the canonical matter will be settled soon by a Pan-Orthodox Synod, proclaiming it the 16th self-governed Church.

There are no official statistics about the number of Eastern Orthodox Christians the world over. Estimates vary widely. There are a few thousands in Japan, Korea and in other countries of the Far East but more than six million (6,000,000) in the Americas; more than one hundred million (100,000,000) in Russia but several hundred thousands in Syria and the Near East. A special issue of the *International Bulletin of Missionary Re-*

3. On the basis of *Hemerologion Tou Oikoumenikou Patriarcheiou Etous 1993* (Athens, 1993) pp. 293-459.

The Orthodox Church

search⁴ records 177,486,900 Orthodox Christians the world over for the year 1989. But with the collapse of Communism and the emergence of crypto-Christians in Russia, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria and elsewhere one may put the estimate to more than 225,000,000.

Notwithstanding the multiplicity of ecclesiastical jurisdictions, the Eastern Orthodox constitute one church. This is the case because the Orthodox conception of unity is doctrinal, sacramental, spiritual, and not administrative and personal. As the Pan-Orthodox Council, which met at Rhodes in 1961 put it: «our Church is not made of walls and roofs, but of faith and life... We believe that the sister Orthodox Churches, in maintaining the saving faith of our Fathers, are preserved in this unity whose divine archetype is the mystical and supernatural unity of the Holy Trinity... an inner unity which cannot fundamentally be troubled...»

It is important to emphasize that here are certain basic characteristics and similar interests among religious thinkers, theologians and spokesmen of all Orthodox jurisdictions. There is everywhere a renewed interest in identifying what is considered authentic theology – a theology which understands the content of revelation in divine and human terms. This revelation consists of dogma in Trinitarian theology, Christology and Pneumatology. Orthodox theologians today tend toward a biblical theology in the light of patristic exegesis, and the experience of the community in history. A «returning to the sources» has led to an emphasis on eucharistic ecclesiology, liturgical theology, the Fathers of the Church, and the theology of the Church Councils – all as interrelated aspects of the Church's faith and life.

As early as the late 1930's Orthodox theologians advocated a neo-patristic synthesis whose objective it was to make the being of God a personal experience achieved within worship – eucharistic worship in particular.⁵ Recent theological scholarship indicates that there are similar concerns but also a departure from the methods and academic styles which characterized theological research of previous decades. In contrast to past approaches, theology today is perceived as the mind but also the heart and the servant of the Community at large; theology is studied not for its own sake but for the edification of the faithful; it is understood not only as the guardian of religious knowledge but as a steward of the tradition in which

4. See *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (January 1989), p. 21

5. An excellent mirror of these trends in Eastern Orthodoxy of recent years is John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (New York, 1985); and N. Nissiotis, «La théologie de l'Église et sa réalisation», in *Procès-Verbaux du Deuxième Congrès de Théologie Orthodoxe*, ed. Savas Agourides (Athens, 1978), pp. 61-78.

D. Constantelos

that knowledge is applied for the good of the Church – indeed for the world. Thus, theology is less concerned with erudite intellectual exercises of the mind and much more with the broader tradition of the faithful. Orthodoxy's conception of «historical thinking» is at the heart of its theology.

To be sure, Orthodox theology is still concerned with theological questions but it is also interested in life issues; it is involved with the spiritual needs and anxieties of the church *pleroma*. The neo-patristic synthesis has revealed that the question that preoccupied the Church Fathers for many centuries was not to know about God, whether God exists or not, for God's existence was unquestioned, but how human beings were to know and have their being in God, the ultimate Being. In the light of this patristic experience, Orthodox theology today sees its role as a guide leading the faithful to a communion with God and with each other.

In order to understand these issues in Eastern Orthodox Christianity, one should study and comprehend how Orthodox religious thought perceives itself in relationship to the Community (the Church) which it serves. There are no theological or religious issues outside the concerns of the Community. And the Community as a historical reality, born in and conditioned by history, values its continuity and its relationship with the mind, the ethos, and the experience of the past. The awareness of the close relationship between past and present is kept alive through the written and the unwritten word, the holy Scriptures and the living faith and experience of the past known as Sacred Tradition.

The inheritance from the past expressed in belief, practices, values, and even forms is not an ossified and static relic but a vigorous force augmented and strengthened by the contributions of succeeding generations. It is like a huge river which follows its natural course even though, on its way, it breaks out into various rivulets or absorbs other rivers and streams. Thus, present day Orthodox theology is very old but always renewed and modern. Fidelity and commitment to continuity in doctrine, ethics, worship, and religious culture is a major characteristic of the Orthodox Church. The Orthodox preserve a dynamic historical consciousness which feeds but also conditions the mind and aspirations of the present. Thus, Orthodox theology today is inextricably related to the theology developed and codified in the course of nearly two millennia.

The religious concerns of contemporary Orthodox theology of the last fifty years have been addressed in several theological conferences but primarily in two major Pan-Orthodox Theological Conferences, both held in

The Orthodox Church

Athens in 1936 and 1976.⁶ Both brought together representative Orthodox theologians from many different countries of the world. The goal of the first Conference was to initiate a dialogue and a search for what was perceived as authentic Orthodoxy in agreement with the Scriptures and the experience of the Church in history, to achieve a purity from external influences, to elucidate the relations between the Orthodox Churches and the other confessions, and to elevate Orthodoxy to a spiritual and social force able to solve contemporary problems. The Conference stressed that the reformulation of the faith was to be pursued «within the Church». The second theological Conference emphasized that theology's academic concerns should be oriented toward a theology which would assist the Church in confronting its internal problems, its pastoral concerns and those problems raised by its encounter with the modern world. The second theological Conference included several leading Orthodox theologians from Western Europe and the United States. Both Conferences emphasized that doctrines and beliefs concerning metaphysics, human nature and destiny, ethical and social philosophy, soteriology and eschatology have been established even though both acknowledged that all need more elaboration and updating.

Given the high respect for and inviolability of several doctrines of the early and medieval Church, it should not surprise us that both Conferences stressed the need for a rediscovery and a restatement of the theology of the early and undivided Church; to purify Orthodox theology from foreign influences whether of western European Christian origins or of rational religion – philosophical humanistic background.

It is to be understood that the present essay provides only the basics of history and beliefs including teachings on theology, soteriology, anthropology, eschatology, ethics and related topics. Every theme discussed here is meant to be representative rather than exhaustive.

1. AN UNCOMMON HISTORY OF A COMMON CHURCH.

The Eastern Orthodox Church, though composed of people of different ethnic origins, sees its history and evolution historically for it accepts that, as a historical religion, Christianity cannot be understood outside of time and space, the religious and cultural environment, the political and social circumstances in which it emerged. Judaism, Hellenism, and Roman im-

6. Hamilcar Alivisatos, «Discours d' Ouverture du President du Congrès» in *Procès-Verbaux du Premier Congrès de Théologie Orthodoxe* (Athens, 1939), pp. 42-54, esp. pp. 49-54. Savas Agourides, «Proclamation des travaux du Congrès par le Présidium du Congrès» in *Deuxième Congrès de Théologie Orthodoxe*, *ibid.* pp. 44-56, esp. pp. 45-7.

D. Constantelos

perialism were three important forces that contributed to the genesis, growth, and universality of Christianity.

Jewish monotheism and messianic expectations, Greek cultural unity through language and thought, and Roman political unity, constitute a tripod upon which the Christian edifice was built.⁷ The founder of Christianity, Jesus of Nazareth, was received as the Messiah, the Christos, the anointed one, the fulfillment of prophecies and expectations for a Redeemer of Jews, Greeks, Romans and all people of the world. As an early Christian author of Jewish background put it:

In diverse ways and various manners God spoke to our Fathers in years past, now God has spoken to us through his Son» (Hebrews 1:1)

Christianity accepted ancient Hebrew religion, its cosmology and anthropology, its ethics and prophesy as preparatory leading to a fulfillment and culmination in the person, teachings, sacrifice and ultimate triumph of Jesus the Christ. The Christ event was received as the completion of a covenant between the Creator God and the human being and later renewed between God and Noah and God and Abraham.

However the Christ event was perceived as something more than the Jewish Messiah – Christ was received as the pre-existent Logos of the Greeks, the very incarnation of the Logos. «*In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God» (Jo 1:1)* in the words of the beloved Gospel of Eastern Orthodoxy. As God made his commandments through ancient Israel, the people who struggled with God, likewise God «*did not leave himself without witness (amartyron)*» (Acts 14:18) – in the rest of the world, in the world in which Christ appeared.

At the time when Christ was born, the peoples of the Mediterranean world were under Roman rule. But long before the establishment of political unity under Roman authority, the Greeks had achieved the cultural, including linguistic, unity of the Mediterranean world and beyond it in the East. Christianity was born in a Hellenistic Judaism and it achieved its propagation and formulation in the Greek world as it had evolved after the conquests of Alexander the Great.

The Eastern Orthodox possess a strong historical conscience and a sense of continuity which is explained in terms of both history and theology. The founder of Christianity is never the historical Jesus of Nazareth but always the theological Jesus, the Christ. Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea, but the principal theater of his life and teaching was the region

7. The bibliography on the subject is extensive. For a good general survey see Joseph B. Tyson, *A History of Early Christianity* (New York and London, 1973), pp. 33-121, and Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich. 1987), pp. 1-314

The Orthodox Church

of Galilee. Eleven of his twelve apostles were also natives of the same province. But at the time of Jesus, Galilee was heavily Hellenized: its inhabitants were viewed with disdain and their district was called «*the land of the gentiles*» (John 1:46; Mat. 4:25). For more than three hundred years Galilee was subject to influences of Greek ideas, customs and culture. This mixed and heavily Hellenized population of Galilee received Jesus as the Anointed One, the Christ. As Jesus the Christ, the founder of Christianity was accepted as the fulfillment of Hebrew messianism and Hellenic expectation, and as the point of convergence between Hebraism and Hellenism, the Jewish Messiah and the Greek Logos.

The Gospel of Matthew is the clearest source of the Hebraic understanding of Jesus while the Gospel of John reveals Christ as the Logos, the pre-existent God who in time and space assumed flesh and walked among human beings as God-human, as *Θεοῦθρῶνος*. The Gospel of John more than any other New Testament book is in the heart of Orthodoxy.

Thus for Orthodox Christians – whether Greek speaking, Slavic, Arabic, or English – Jesus, the Hebrew fulfillment of Messianic expectations, becomes the Christ whom the Greeks, the representatives of the *Ἑθνη*, sought to see in Jerusalem (John 12:20-23). The long search of the Greeks culminated in the discovery of Jesus the Christ.

Theologically the coming of the Greeks to see Jesus is most significant. The Greeks represented the world outside Judaism, and their conversion to Christ secured Christianity's universalism. When Jesus exclaimed that «the hour has come for the Son of God to be glorified» he understood the ecumenical implication of the first Gentiles meeting with Him. But this was more than a meeting between Jesus of Nazareth and the Greeks – symbolically it was a meeting between Christianity and the Greek inquisitive mind, between ethical Judaism and philosophical Hellenism.⁸

In the person of Jesus the Christ, the Orthodox see the fulfillment of God's promise to all humankind. Early Christianity is as much Hebrew as it is Hellenic. The Orthodox are conscious of the fact that Christianity was born and raised in the Greek speaking and Hellenized Eastern part of the Roman Empire. In his excellent volume *The Spirituality of the Christian East*, Tomáš Špidlík, a Roman catholic scholar, member of the Society of Jesus and Professor at the Oriental Institute in Rome, has summarized what the Orthodox consider a principle of great significance. He writes: «We must stress one principle and stress it hard, that the Latin church originated from the Greek church as a branch grows from a tree trunk. The

8. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*. The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY, 1966), pp. 466-470

D. Constantelos

*Church was implanted by the Greeks and expressed itself in the Greek language».*⁹

The Church continued to deliberate in Greek and every one of the ecumenical councils of united medieval Christendom (Nicaea 325, Constantinople 381, Ephesus 431, Chalcedon 451, Constantinople 553, Constantinople 681, Nicaea 787) was held in the Greek East, recorded in the Greek language and with the assistance of Greek theological terminology. This emphasis is to make us understand why the Orthodox see their Church in unbroken continuity with the undivided Church. The theological disagreements which arose between the Greek Christian East and the Latin Christian West can be understood when we bear in mind that the Greek East spoke from a position of intellectual and cultural superiority which rightly or wrongly had been imbedded in their psyche for many centuries. Rome, on the other hand, was conscious of its past political power and spoke from a tradition of political – monarchical superiority.

The Eastern Orthodox Church has always seen itself as the genuine Christian Church whose history, teachings, ethos and eucharistic worship are in unbroken continuity with the Apostolic Church. The centers of early Christianity were in the Greek speaking Eastern Mediterranean. Antioch, Ephesus, Philippi, Thessaloniki, Corinth and other cities and districts in which early Christianity found fertile ground to be planted and grow were Greek cities for many centuries.

The literature of the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers and Apologists of the early Church, the writings of many of the major Church Fathers and teachers of Christianity, and the deliberations and teachings of every one of the ecumenical councils of the Undivided Church were recorded in Greek and formulated by the Greek Fathers. Only ignorance of the history of Christianity would try to minimize Christianity's debt to the Greek Church of the first ten or eleven centuries.

Most of the Orthodox Christians today can trace their roots to the missionary activities of the Greek speaking Church from Apostolic times to the 12th century. Later on the torch of missionary activity in the Eastern Orthodox world passed on to Russians, and other people. Armenians, Georgians, Bulgarians, a variety of Slavic tribes, Russians, Ukrainians and people of several ethnic or linguistic backgrounds received the Christian Gospel through the missionary activities of churches such as Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Constantinople and Thessaloniki. Much missionary

9. Tomaš Špidlik, *The Spirituality of the Christian East* (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1986), p.

The Orthodox Church

activity was conducted between the 15th and 19th centuries under the initiative and guidance of Moscow and Saint Petersburg.

The Greek historical background has provided the Greek speaking people with a sense of pride but it has also strengthened their commitment to tradition – linguistic and intellectual. Even though this historical reality can be distorted to serve nationalistic aspirations, the fact is that it has contributed to some minor differences between Orthodox Christians of Greek background and Orthodox Christians of different origins. The Greeks have maintained a strong commitment to their classical heritage and have been taught to honor both heritage and faith. Russian and Serbian theologians, philosophers, historians, for example have complained that while the Greeks gave them their religion, they failed to give them their classical literature, philosophy and culture. Slavic and Russian primary sources reveal how *«the Greeks took them to their churches»* and introduced them to the Christian gospel, and the role the Greek Church played in the early organization of Churches in Eastern Europe and the Near East.¹⁰

Following the Christianization of new tribes and the secure establishment of Church organization, several nations were able to achieve ecclesiastical independence from the mother Greek Church and become autocephalous or autonomous. For example, though Greece received Christianity from Saint Paul, the Church of Constantinople claims apostolicity that can be traced to the missionary work of Saint Andrew, for historical circumstances and reasons that cannot be discussed here, the Church of Greece became autocephalous in 1850 and long before the Church of Constantinople was officially proclaimed a Patriarchate in 451.

Chronologically speaking, the present administrative structure of the Eastern Orthodox Church was the work of many centuries. For historical reasons, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, with headquarters in Constantinople, present day Istanbul, Turkey, enjoys a primacy of honor and its Patriarch is considered first among equals. The Apostolic Church of Alexandria, Egypt, was founded by St. Mark and evolved into a Patriarchate in 325. The Church of Antioch, where the early followers of Christ became known as Christians, was founded by St. Peter in 37, and it was elevated to the rank of Patriarchate in 325. St. James the Younger, one of the twelve is considered by tradition as the founder of the Church in Jerusalem in the

10. See Demetrios J. Constantelos *«Greek Precursor Missions to Russia's Conversion to Christianity»*, in *The Legacy of Saints Cyril and Methodius to Kiev and Moscow*, ed. Antony-Emil N. Tachiaos, Hellenic Association for Slavic Studies (Thessaloniki, 1992), pp. 247-266, esp. 263-265

D. Constantelos

year 55 AD. These four Patriarchates, along with the Patriarchate of Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire before 284 AD, became known as the Pentarchy and, for political, cultural and religious reasons, enjoyed primacy of honor among all churches of undivided Christendom – down to the middle of the eleventh century.

For several centuries, the Church of Russia was under the tutelage of the Constantinopolitan church but in 1448 it became autonomous and in 1589 it was elevated to the rank of Patriarchate. Even though tradition has it that St. Andrew visited and preached in what is today Ukraine, the Christianization of Ukrainians, Russians, Bulgarians, Serbians, Moravians, Slovenes and others should be attributed to Greek Christian missionary activities between the seventh and eleventh centuries.

The Church of Serbia considers Saints Kyrillos and Methodios, the two brothers of Thessaloniki, as its patron saints. The two brothers and their disciples conducted intensive mission work among the Slavic peoples in the second half of the ninth century. The Church of Serbia became autonomous in 1219 and, following a series of vicissitudes, it was once more proclaimed autonomous in 1879, and achieved the rank of Patriarchate in 1920.

According to tradition, Christianity was introduced in seaports of present day Romania as early as the first century and the organized Church there for many centuries was under the tutelage of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. It was proclaimed autocephalous in 1885, and it was granted the status of Patriarchate in 1925.

Christianity was accepted by some Bulgarians as early as the seventh century but the official Christianization of Bulgaria took place in the ninth century during the reign of Tsar Boris and the missionary activities of Patriarch Photios of Constantinople and the two «Apostles to the Slavs» Kyrillos and Methodios. For several centuries the Church of Bulgaria was under the canonical jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate but ultimately it became autocephalous in 1945 and raised to the rank of Patriarchate in 1961.

The Church of Georgia and all Iberia traces its origins to missionary activity of St. Andrew and later it came under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Antioch and subsequently under Constantinople and in the 19th century under Moscow. In 1917 it was proclaimed an autocephalous Catholicate and in 1990 a Patriarchate.

The autocephalous churches of Cyprus and Greece owe their origins to the missionary work of the apostles Paul and Barnabas. The Church of Cyprus was for a while under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Antioch but it achieved its independence in 431 and it has remained autocephalous

The Orthodox Church

ever since. The Church of Greece, where St. Paul made several visits and founded the Churches of Philippi, Thessaloniki, Berroia, Athens, Corinth and perhaps Nikopolis, in 732/3 came under the jurisdiction of the Church of Constantinople and it remained under its tutelage for nearly all the centuries of the Greek Byzantine and the Ottoman Turkish Empires. For political and historical circumstances, and practical reasons it became autocephalous in 1850.

The Church of Czechoslovakia considers Saints Kyrillos (Cyril) and Methodios as its founders. For several centuries it was under the jurisdiction of the Church of Serbia, then of Constantinople, achieving its autonomy in 1923. The Orthodox Churches of Poland and Finland were founded in the high middle ages by Orthodox missionary monks originating from Moscow. For this reason both Churches were for many years under the canonical jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Moscow with the exception of a few years when both churches had placed themselves under the tutelage of Constantinople. The Church of Finland became autonomous in 1923 and that of Poland became autocephalous in 1924.

Though there is evidence that people became Christians in present day Albania in St. Paul's times, when Albania was part of the Illiricum prefecture, much of the Christianization of the area is attributed to the missionary work of the Greek Church. For many centuries it was under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Constantinople which granted its autocephalous status in 1937.

This general historical account confirms the close relationship between all Orthodox Churches but also the leading role that the Ecumenical Patriarchate has played in the propagation of the Christian gospel to many nations and the establishment of organized churches. In brief, when we speak about the Eastern Orthodox Churches we speak of Sisterhood, or even a confederation of independent churches whose central authority is their common faith and a Pan-Orthodox Council of Patriarchs, Archbishops, Metropolitans and bishops. A distinct feature of Eastern Orthodoxy is that the Pan-Orthodox Synod is its supreme administrative and doctrinal authority while an Ecumenical Council is acknowledged as the only supreme authority over all Christian Churches and Denominations. No one person has the right to exercise supreme authority over any or all churches.

More than administrative considerations and canonical issues, it is the dogma, the faith that make many churches into One, the apostolic faith, the faith of scripture as understood, interpreted and experienced throughout the centuries, especially the doctrinal faith of the undivided church.

2. COMMON FAITH

a. *Theos- Theology*

Theology seeks to define and understand what is ultimately real. As an answer to the question raised by the early Greek philosophers «ti to on» (what is there that exists?), Orthodox theology affirms that God, as the first principle, exists. It takes a Realist metaphysics for granted. God (no matter what name is given to the first principle) exists and theology seeks to explain the nature of God's being or reality in apophatic and cataphatic, negative and affirmative terms, and in terms of natural and supernatural revelation.

For the Eastern Orthodox natural theology, as a way of knowledge of God but also as a preparation (*propaideia*) to the new age introduced by the Incarnation, has been a persistent and permanent category.¹¹ Viewing Christianity as a historical religion it cannot be otherwise. Reason and reasoning are not antithetical to faith and revelation. Much of faith is based on revelation which has been given in history through actual persons and has been conditioned by historical circumstances. Thus, Orthodox theology treats the created and the uncreated, the transcendent and the immanent, and the finite and infinite, as interrelated entities. There is a distinction however. While transcendental metaphysics as ontology, as it concerns «being», is approached apophatically (negatively), immanent metaphysics as experiential reality is treated cataphatically (positively), as an affirmation of and subject to experience.

Natural theology is more than the dictates of human conscience, it is the cosmos itself, nature as the celebration of the Creator's presence. Because of its participation in man's fallen condition, nature, too, «groans and travails» hoping to free itself «from the shackles of mortality and enter upon the liberty of... God» (Rom. 8.21-2). Nevertheless it maintains a faithfulness to the Creator, the laws of harmony, order, silence, patience, peace, and strength. Natural theology proclaims the mystery of the Creator while supernatural, or revealed, theology is ultimate and proclaims the fullness of God manifest. For this reason Jesus, as the «the fullness of time», is never only the historical man from Nazareth but always Jesus the Messiah and Christ, the Christ in whom the «fullness of the Deity dwells bodily» (Col. 2.9). He is the God-man (*theanthropos*). The limited and clouded knowledge of God provided by natural theology is illuminated and completed by supernatural theology. God no longer is an uncreated abstraction but a living God who invites for a dialogue in terms of «I and

11. See Demetrios J. Constantelos, *Understanding the Greek Orthodox Church*, 2nd edition (Brookline, Mass., 1990), pp. 1-37

The Orthodox Church

Thou». As transcendental and immanent, God is both outside the world (exokosmos) and within the world (endokosmos).

What God is we do not know; what God is not we know. We do not know God's essence but we do know that God is not what our mind and thought can perceive and our eyes can observe. But we also know that God is one unchanging, incomprehensible essence but in three hypostases, or persons, in a coinherence, or mutual interexistence *περιχώρησις* (perichoresis). As in the early Christian centuries, likewise Orthodox theology today rejects all monistic efforts and tendencies; Patromonism which makes God-the-Father not of the same essence with God-the-Logos and God-the-Spirit. It also rejects Christomonism which identifies Christ with God but sees Christ as God's only revelation. Furthermore, it rejects Pneumatomonism which sees God only as a Spirit and Christ as the man from Nazareth.¹²

As already indicated, belief in the reality of God is based on natural revelation and supernatural apocalypse. The very existence of the cosmos and man's perpetual quest to find an answer whether or not God exists is indication of God's existence and is common to all humanity. Orthodox theology does not reject arguments of ancient Greek and other philosophers who spoke of God either as the «perfect Being», the Logos, the Absolute Good, the Unmoved Mover. It is in full agreement with the ancient Greek poet Philimon who wrote:

Believe in and be pious toward God but seek not
to discover what God is. You possess no more than
the desire to search. What or what not God is
don't try to learn. Accept God as existing and
always worship him. Remember that you are human
and you shall remain human.¹³

Philemon's apophatic approach to God's existence is an integral part of Orthodox theology. God is absolute transcendence, and inaccessibility but a reality that makes his existence known through his energies, activities, and creative manifestations. While the transcendence of God is a quality intrinsic to God and his essence, his existence becomes known through «various ways and diverse manners» (Heb 1.1). The Christian understanding of natural theology owes much to Christianity's Greek intellectual and cultural background. Greek thought was received as *propaideia* to Chris-

12. Nikos A. Nissiotis, «The Importance of the Doctrine of the Trinity for Church Life and Theology», *The Orthodox Ethos*, ed A.J. Philippou (Oxford, 1964), pp. 32-69.

13: Philemon, *Fragments*, no. 112 in *Fragments Comicorum Graecorum*, ed A. Meineke (Berlin, 1847), p. 847

D. Constantelos

tianity. The Greek doctrine about the pre-existence of the Logos and the teaching concerning «the unknown God», who made himself progressively known, culminated in monotheism, the belief in a supernatural power («in whom we live, move, and have our existence») as the Greek poet Aratos put it and Saint Paul quoted in his address to the Athenians. Greek philosophical tradition provided the necessary conditions for a clearer affirmation not only of God but also of the divinity of Jesus the Christ and the universality of God's self-revelation in the person of Christ.

However, for the idea of God, Orthodox theology depends more on revelation than philosophical speculation. It depends on the biblical affirmation and the formulas developed by the Christian Community in ecumenical synods. It is on the basis of the biblical testimony that the Orthodox believe that God is one in essence but three co-existent persons. God as a transcendent being hidden from human knowledge is revealed through the incarnation of God's Logos and the activity of God's Holy Spirit. Belief in a Triune God is interrelated with Christology and pneumatology. «All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him» (Lk 10.22), and «I will pray to the Father and he will give you another Paraclete, to be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth» (Jn 14.16-7 see also Jn 14.26 Jn 15.26 Jn 16.13-5).

The Orthodox church holds dear the theology of the Ecumenical Synods of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381) which emphasized a theology of one Divine essence in three persons, roughly corresponding to creation, redemption, and sanctification of humanity and the cosmos.

Orthodox theology has not experienced a «new theology» movement, or trends indicating a break with the theology of the Church-in-history, with tradition and continuity. It avoids compartmentalizations and dichotomies, distinctions between physical and metaphysical knowledge of God, between «nature» and «grace», «faith» and «works»; «merit» and «good deeds» because it sees more continuity between natural and supernatural truth, the presence of God in the Incarnation; the «unknown God» of Greek philosophy and the «named» God of the Scriptures. Orthodox theology today is engaged more in affirming old truths in new categories than in searching for new dogmas. The skin is new yet the wine is old. It returns to the sources and attempts to restate the old beliefs in more convincing ways. The ontological proofs have never been absent from Orthodox theology but it insists on speaking rather in apophatic and biblical categories. Thus «God is infinite and incomprehensible; and all that is comprehensi-

The Orthodox Church

ble about God is his infinity and incomprehensibility». ¹⁴ But at the same time God is an unchanging essence in three persons – as God Creator, God Redeemer, and God Sanctifier. As Gregory the Theologian put it: «When I say God, I mean Father, Son, and Holy Spirit... No sooner do I conceive of the one that I am illumined by the splendor of the three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the one. When I think of any one of the three, I think of him as a whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking escapes». ¹⁵

The biblical account which declares that Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father through the Son are one, formulated by the synods of Nicaea and Constantinople, remains a fundamental doctrine of Orthodoxy. Soteriology necessitates belief in God-in-Trinity because it proclaims not only the fullness of divinity in Christ and the reality of the Incarnation but also his humanity and humanity's elevation to the divinity. ¹⁶ Nevertheless it must be understood that the doctrine of God-in-Trinity is a divine mystery rather than a philosophical notion subject to metaphysical speculation, a mystery proclaimed with certainty. Is not the world a mystery? Is not light a mystery? Together with John the Evangelist, Dionysios the Aeropagite speaks of God in terms of light, light as paradox. ¹⁷

The doctrine of Triune God is inextricably related to Christology and soteriology. The incarnation of God in Christ was necessary for man's salvation and Christ's double nature as God-made-man is the only way to restore man to God's presence. In the last analysis soteriology is nothing but the story of Christ the Logos presence in humanity from the beginning of his incarnation to the end of time. God's presence among men is perceived as a necessary prescription for man's salvation. God is indeed utterly unseen and transcendent; unknowable yet present in all things seen and unseen. God is not what exists yet at the same time he is the cause of everything including humanity's salvation which is made possible because God assumed human flesh and form. The incarnation of God's Logos is central in Orthodox theology. ¹⁸

14. John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 1. 4

15. Gregory Nazianzenos, *Oratio* 45. 4 in PG 33.628C; *Oratio* 40.41 in PG 36.417 BC

16. Nikos A. Nissiotis, «The Importance of the Doctrine of the Trinity», pp. 40-45, John Meyendorff, «The Holy Trinity in Palamite Theology» in *Trinitarian Theology East and West*, by Michael A. Fahey and John Meyendorff (Brookline, Mass. 1979), p. 38.

17. Dionysios the Aeropagite, *On the Divine Name*, 825A.

18. See Dionysios the Aeropagite, *Eccles. Hier.*, 872A; cf. Dom Denys Rutledge, *Cosmic theology* (London, 1964), p. 10.

D. Constantelos

b. *The God-Made-Man Event – Jesus the Christ – Christology*

In its effort to recover authentic theology and the spirit of undivided Christianity, Orthodox theology today insists on a theology of the living God who became incarnate. Thus for Orthodox theology, Jesus of Nazareth is always Christ the Logos because «the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God» (Jn 1.2). As a religion, and not as a system of ethical commandments, Christianity stands or falls on the basis of its belief in the incarnate love of God which in the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of the God-man (theanthropos) reveal the true nature and destiny of man and all that is authentically human.

Theology as the knowledge of God rather than as knowledge about God; theology, as the responsive thinking of man's quest for eternal salvation, finds its fullest meaning in Christology: «No one has ever seen God; the only Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known» (Jn 1.28). In the Incarnation we not only have god descending and becoming human but, through God's Logos, humanity's elevation and sanctification as well. In his divinity the Logos is the consubstantial image of the Father and in his humanity he is the creature made in the image and the likeness of God. The God who «emptied himself, taking the form of a servant» (Phil 2.7) who became flesh and dwelt among us... (we) beheld his glory...» (Jn 1.14). The emphasis on Christology is viewed as of paramount significance because without the event of the Incarnation Christian anthropology is reduced to zoology, and soteriology becomes an unrealized yearning.¹⁹ Indeed, in the words of the first Christian theologian, the theology of Christology is intended that we «may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing (we) may have life in his name» (Jn 20.31).

Far from any reductionisms, Orthodox theology reiterates that Christ «reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature» (Heb. 1.13) and that through the God-man Christ men can become «partakers of the divine nature» (2 Pet 1.4). Christology has always been of extraordinary importance to Eastern Orthodox Christianity whether in the fifth, the eighth, the fourteenth or the twentieth century. Without the Logos-made-man event the transcendent and the immanent, the separation of faith from knowledge could not have been reconciled. Without the incarnation of God's Logos, God would be banished into the realm of the empirically inaccessible.²⁰

19. Cf. Demetrios Trakatellis, «He theologia mas chthes kai aurion». *Theologia, Aletheia kai Zoe*, ed. Zoe, Brotherhood of Theologians (Athens, 1962), pp. 229-32.

20. Cf. Christos Yannaras, «The Distinction Between Essence and Energies and its Importance for Theology» in *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 19 (1975) 244.

The Orthodox Church

The re-study of Christology in the last fifty years was initiated by the revival of interest in the theology of Gregory Palamas, a fourteenth century theologian and archbishop of Thessaloniki. «The initial and most decisive motivation which pushed Palamas to the formulation of his theology was his concern to affirm the possibility and, indeed, the reality of communion with God himself».²¹ The incarnation of the Logos has made this possibility a reality. The transcendent God «so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son» (Jn 3.16) to assume human nature, to change. to walk among men that men may become participants in God's life. «Changing in his person, the Logos bestows upon us the unchanging life proper to him as God».²²

Revival of interest in Christology as well as other classical formulas of Christian theology resulted from Orthodoxy's experience in the ecumenical movement. The trend among some Western theologians to reduce theology to sociology, to compromise and see the Christian Church only as an agent of social issues and political reforms, prompted Orthodox theologians to reassert the importance of historical theology. Thus, there was a return to the mind and experience of the ancient and medieval Church and its study in modern terms and categories but always in terms of the historical content of theological thought and religious experience.

Contemporary Orthodox Christology has even deeper roots than the theology of Palamas whose theology was indeed an elaboration and a reaffirmation of ancient Greek patristic Christology. Irenaios (c. 130-22) a native of Smyrna, who spent his natural life as bishop of Lyons in Gaul, pronounced the now famous words: «Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Logos of God, of his boundless love, became what we are that he might make us what he himself is.»²³ His Christology finds an echo in the theology of Athanasios (c. 296-373) who insists that there is no remedy and no possibility for the restoration of man to the original state of being except through the Incarnation. The Logos's union with the human being restored to fallen humanity the image of God in which man had been created. By his death and resurrection, the Logos of God met and destroyed death, the consequence of humanity's rebellion against the Creator. «Christ, being God, became man, in order to deify us»²⁴. *Theosis*, eternal life of the human being in God, is the ultimate gift of the Incarnate Logos to humanity.

21. John Meyendorff, «The Holy Trinity in Palamite Theology» in *Trinitarian Theology East and West*, p. 30.

22. *Ibid.*, 34

23. Irenaios, *Against Heresies*, 5, praef.

24. Athanasios, *Against the Arians*, 1.39

D. Constantelos

The theology of the Logos's incarnation remains of absolute significance for Orthodoxy's anthropology.

One of the central issues of Orthodox theology is the human being and his becoming and ultimate destiny. Man is an evolutionary being and becomes truly human when he conforms to the image of the God-man (the *theanthropos*) Christ. Orthodox theology studies man as a historical being, an endocösmic being destined for an exocösmic existence, a physical and metaphysical being. Its major concern is the man of nature and of the scriptures, the man of natural revelation and law, but also the man of revealed love and the man of supernatural destiny.

Orthodoxy's theological anthropology examines man from within but also from without the Christian scriptures. Man and God are not placed at opposite poles but on the two ends of the same pole. Each moves toward a meeting with the other. Man searches and God responds and moves forward to seek. The two meet in the person of the Logos, the eternal God who appears among men as the Emmanuel. Thus, Christ is the end of an old dispensation and the beginning of a new one. He recapitulates and redeems the old humanity and introduces the new redeemed era. The unredeemed, alienated somatic being of the pre-Christian era becomes the «pneumatic the spirit filled being without rejecting somatic qualities. But the physical qualities are guided and ruled by the enlightened, the strengthened, the illuminated spiritual person. Ultimately, it is the total person that is saved, not only the spirit, psyche, or soma».

As already indicated, humanity's disobedience introduced death and alienation of the creature from the Creator. Along with Saint Paul, every man raises the question: «Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?» (Rom 7.24). But man's sarkic or carnal nature and sin's power over a man's inmost self did not destroy man's capacity for progress and evolution toward spiritual freedom from the bondage of sin. God's image in man was not totally destroyed after the act of disobedience thus the possibility for progress and discovery. But throughout his moral and spiritual evolution man was threatened by utter defeat in his struggle with the enemy within.

The reverse, the defeat of sin, and the recovery of eternal life was secured through the God-made-man event. Man's real freedom and recapitulation, and his growth toward what he was meant to be, was made possible because of the Incarnation which enabled man to rediscover his godly nature. Christ is not only God manifest but also man, as man was ordained to become from the moment of his creation. The victory of the God-man Christ over sin and death can become the property of every person who sees Christ as the prototype and pursues a life after him. Freedom from sin

The Orthodox Church

and death, and eternal life in God are the products of God-made-man in the person of Christ.

It is this patristic theological background which makes modern Orthodox theologians optimistic and more attached to Greek patristic theology than other theologies, or to any humanistic anthropology.²⁵ Orthodox theologians find both Christology and anthropology more appealing to modern man. In the opinion of some Orthodox theologians, the alienation of Western Christian theology from its Eastern sources introduced theories which ultimately led to distortions and misunderstandings.

Saint Augustine, one of the most influential Church Fathers of the medieval Western Church is found lacking when compared to some Greek theologians and Church fathers such as Origen and Gregory of Nyssa. Augustine's doctrine of predestination and grace in effect rejected the existence of free will; his views on the two cities, the City of God and the City of man, contributed to the denial of the possibility of historical progress and the possibility of improvement of the secular order. Augustine's anthropology is seen as rather static, for it sees man as totally corrupt and predestined.²⁶

Greek Fathers such as Irenaios, Eusebios of Caesarea, Athanasios, Gregory of Nyssa, to mention only a few, who were widely read in the Greek classical tradition developed a theology which defended free will and advanced a more humanistic and rational view of history. Their theology allowed for growth and implied that the social order as well as the human being could be improved and reformed. *The likeness to God was a likeness to be pursued and achieved.* Man as the image or icon of God is a microcosm of all creation. In such a theology, every human being is infinitely precious before God. Man is God's collaborator, *synergos Theou*, not a thing or a slave. God knocks but man must respond. The confrontation is mutual. But man cannot confront God without the Incarnation which is God's act of love and an act for ultimate salvation. Christ is true God and true man, one person in two natures without separation, and without confusion, a single person with two wills and two natures. As complete *theanthropos*, Christ is the link that unites God and man. But Christ's divinity should not lead to a Christomonism, as an emphasis on God the Father should not be misunderstood as Patromonism. Any discussion of Father and Son leads to Orthodox theology's position on pneumatology – the Holy Spirit as God.

25. Mayendorff, «The Holy Trinity», p. 42

26. See John S. Romanides, «Critical Examination of the Applications of Theology» in *Deuxième Congrès de Théologie Orthodoxe*, pp. 413-41, esp. pp. 432-34.

c. *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier*

Any theology of Christian Orthodox metaphysics is bound to discuss a consubstantial Trinity which includes the Spirit.²⁷ And the Spirit appears as a person with personal qualifications and energies. In Saint Paul's theology the function of the spirit is *koinonia*, the communion that develops, between divinity and humanity: «The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit» (2 Cor 13.14). But it also is personal communication and experience. The Spirit speaks personally to Apostle Philip (Acts 8.29) to Peter (Acts 10.19); to the Christian Community of Antioch (Acts 13.12), to the synod of Jerusalem (Acts 15.25), and to the community of believers today.

The Spirit is identified with «the Paraclete (the Counselor) the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father... who will guide... into all the truth...» (Jn 14.16; 15.26; 16.7). The theology of the Spirit takes for granted that the Spirit is consubstantial with Father and Son; that it «proceeds from the essence of the Father through a movement inseparably bound with Him... proceeding eternally from the Father, being sent in time by the Son.»²⁸ The Spirit's role is his continual presence in the Church in the form of uncreated energies of the Triune God.

Upholding long-standing doctrines of the undivided Church, Orthodox theology distinguishes the incomprehensible essence of God (*ousia*), identical in the three *hypostaseis* or persons, proclaims their oneness, teaching that the Trinity's energies though incomprehensible are communicated to the community through the every-present Holy Spirit. It is through the Holy Spirit that a person is re-created and achieves salvation which ultimately is theosis. Orthodox theology relies more on biblical revelation than on philosophical speculation for its teaching on the Holy Spirit. Its theology permits no objectivization, and the Orthodox doctrine of God-in-Trinity remains a mystery and a paradox. Nevertheless, the reality is revealed by the Incarnate Logos and it is expressed as a loving experience of the Father through the Spirit.

In brief, reductionist theologies of recent years – minimization of the paradox and the mysterion, rationalization and demythologization of Scriptures which have plagued the Christian world in the last fifty years – have prompted Orthodox theologians to re-examine traditional theology.

27. Nissiotis, «The Importance of the Doctrine of the Trinity», pp. 40-3; J. Meyendorff, «The Holy Spirit as God», in *The Holy Spirit*, ed. D. Kirkpatrick (Nashville, 1974), pp. 76-89; P.N. Trempeles, *Dogmatike tes Orthodoxou Katholikes Ekklesias*, 3 vols. (Athens, 1959-61), I, pp. 257-68.

28. Nissiotis, «The Importance of the Doctrine of the Trinity», pp. 41-42.

The Orthodox Church

The trend is to emphasize and appreciate more biblical theology as it was interpreted and defined by the Church Fathers and the experience of the Church-in-history. God is a living God who creates, who redeems through Christ, and who sanctifies and perpetuates through the Holy Spirit. Belief in a Trinitarian God is viewed as basic to the idea of the salvation of man. Belief in the divinity of Christ and the ontological communication of the Spirit with God and the human being are necessary qualifications for an understanding of humanity in terms of anthropology and soteriology. As in the case of metaphysics, likewise in other branches of religious thought, Orthodox theology today is linked with biblical and patristic tradition. Its anthropology and soteriology are developed in classical terms of the ecumenical and the experience of the Church-in-history.

3. ORTHODOX ANTHROPOLOGY AND SOTERIOLOGY

Following scriptural evidence and early patristic interpretation, Orthodox theological anthropology seeks to make the human more human, i.e.: to guide feelings, desires, and activities to their true end, guiding it from the external manifestation of things to the reality behind them. Is it not written that the Incarnate Logos through the Holy Spirit gave the faithful divine power «to become partakers of the divine nature» (2 Pet 1.4)? But is this a realistic expectation?

What is the Human Being?

The human being (the *anthropos*), no less than God is accepted as a mystery but a mystery partially revealed or greatly revealed.²⁹ The human being seen in itself is a living organism and also a divine being. As such the human is not «the measure of all things» as the ancient Greek philosopher Protagoras taught and modern humanists emphasize, but a being limited by sin whatever its definition. Notwithstanding sinful limitations, humanity's destiny is determined by God's presence in it restored by the Incarnation and saving work of God's Logos. The fallen human being did not lose the totality of God's image in itself. Long before the Incarnation the human being was a searching being. Full restoration to its pristine condition is accrued by the God-made-human.

Thus, as already suggested, Orthodox theology sees humanity in terms of both natural and supernatural revelation. It includes faith in the human being as a searching and involving being throughout history. *Threskeia* (religion) as instinctive worship of and the quest for the divine amply de-

29. Ibid. pp. 44-45; P.K. Chrestou, *To Mysterion tou anthropou* (Thessalonike, 1983), pp. 13-20

D. Constantelos

scribes the background of Christian Orthodox anthropology. Men «seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him» (Acts 17.27). There is faith in the freedom of the human spirit and its inalienable rights; faith in its ability to evolve but not absolute faith. Orthodox theology's faith in the human being is conditioned by the belief that man is a dependent being.

The religious humanism that we observe in the ancient Greco-Roman world is fully realized following the Incarnation. The greatness and holiness of the God-man is *ipso facto* the greatness and the potential greatness of man. The human being is perceived as a microcosmic form of the world. Its essence is the divine aspect of its own being dressed in a material form. When man severed his connection with his Creator, he carried along the whole creation to pain, agony, and search for salvation. It is through the God-made-man event that restoration became possible (Eph 1.4). In his incarnation the Logos of God enclosed humanity and its world in himself uniting it once again to the Creator. The human being in himself, cut off from the source of his Being, remains only a biological entity, less than what he was meant to be. It is through the God-man Christ, the *theanthropos*, that humanity discovers and ultimately achieves its true destiny. The human being is a theocentric being. «The perfect man consists in the comingling and the union of the soul receiving the Spirit of the Father, and the mixture of that fleshy nature which also was molded after the image of God» in the words of Saint Irenaios.³⁰ The presence of God's Spirit in man provides an openness «to the Absolute, to immortality, to creativity in the image of openness when he created man and that, therefore, communion and participation in divine life and glory is, for man his natural element.»³¹ Closely related to the teaching about man's nature and mind is the theology of soteriology.

The Theosis of Man

The incarnation of God's Logos and the deification of the human being is central in Orthodox theology. Deification, or theosis, a very dear term in Orthodox theology, is synonymous with salvation (*soteria*). The yearning for salvation is universal and it includes humanity as well as nature. The whole of creation seeks «to be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God» (Rom 8.23).

On the basis of this background, Orthodox theology sees the divine economy in cosmic terms, an economy by which the visible world is part

30. Irenaios, *Against Heresies* 5.6, 1; cf. J. Meyendorff, «Orthodox Theology Today», *Sobornost*, 6(1970) 17

31. Meyendorff, «Orthodox Theology Today», p. 17

The Orthodox Church

of the invisible; it emerges from the invisible and seeks to be saved along with the invisible. There is no absolute dichotomy between the metaphysical and the physical which are interrelated and interdependent. Both constitute two aspects of the whole creation.

The Church, as the visible Christ, serves as the indispensable *syndesmos*, the link between the metaphysical and eternal and the physical and the transient. Through the Incarnation, the Church, or the community of people who have died and risen in Christ and have received the indwelling Spirit, offers man and the world the means for an entry into the invisible and eternal world of God. And life is God is what Orthodox theology calls *theosis*. Theosis however, is both a process and an end. Through the sacramental life, a life of prayer, spirituality, and acts of love, the faithful person is invited to a progressive withdrawal from things temporal, material, and visible, to the process of theosis, to a world eternal and invisible. The moment of «death» is a kiss between the temporal and the eternal. It is in the realm of the external that the full reward of theosis is achieved. Theosis becomes synonymous to Paradise and eternal life.

The conception of salvation as theosis, or deification was common in ancient religious Greek thought, especially in the Orphic mysteries. But while in ancient Greek thought theosis meant apotheosis and pantheism, in Christian theology theosis meant immortality of the human person in the presence of God's energies. The theosis teaching goes back to the early Christian theologians. For example, Theophilus of Antioch writes that «man, by keeping the commandment of God, may receive from God immortality as a reward, and become God». Clement of Alexandria adds that «to be imperishable is to share in Divinity». And Hippolytos is even more explicit. He writes: «Your body shall be immortal and incorruptible as well as your soul. For you shall have become God. All the things that follow upon the Divine nature God has promised to supply to you, for you were deified in being born to immortality».³²

The early Christian tradition was accepted by the later Greek Fathers such as the Cappadocians, Apollinarios, Ephraim the Syrian, Epiphanius of Cyprus, and others. In explaining the Christian understanding of theosis as immortality and eternal life in the realm of the energies of God, the Greek Fathers emphasized that theosis is no pantheistic merging of the human being in the Deity, but rather a renovation of the human person after the model of pristine or original human being. This transformation of hu-

32. Theophilus of Antioch, *Pros Autolykon*, 2.27; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, 5.10.63; Hippolytos, *Kata Pason Haireseon Elenchos*, 10.34.

D. Constantelos

man nature is the highest result of the incarnation of the Logos.³³

Renewed interest in the theology of the Fathers and in pneumatology in particular has contributed in recent years to the publication of several important studies on theosis. In modern Orthodox theology theosis is described not as participation of or a life in the essence of God but as a taste and a vision, or a life in the energies of God.³⁴ The ultimate purpose of man's existence is to achieve this eternal glory and salvation in the realm of God's glory.

4. ETHICAL AND SOCIAL THEOLOGY

One who is accustomed to thinking about Eastern Orthodox Christianity in terms of liturgy, iconography, mysticism, prayer, and other-worldliness may be surprised to read that historically Orthodoxy possesses a powerful social consciousness. While many recent works have addressed questions of liturgical theology, patristics, canon law, and biblical exegesis; there are many studies and books revealing the social character and ethical concerns of Orthodox theology. Leader in this area of theological concern is Greek Orthodox theology proper. Since 1945 serious scholarly efforts have been made to study ethics and social thought in the context of the theology and experience of the Church-in-history.³⁵

Ethics and Theology

For Eastern Orthodox Christianity there is no compartmentalization of theological concerns. There is no separation between doctrine and ethics,

33. Meyendorff, «The Holy Spirit as God», pp. 158-60; Idem, *Byzantine Theology*, pp. 163-65

34. P.K. Chrestou, *To Mysterion tou anthropou*, pp. 73-75; G.I. Mantzarides, *Methexis Theou* (Thessalonike, 1979), pp. 242-45; Panteleimon, Metropolitan of Corinth, «Theosis», *Christianikon Symposion* (Athens, 1967), pp. 54-59; A. Theodorou, *He peri theoseos tou anthropou didaskalia ton Hellenon Pateron tes Ekklesias* (Athens, 1956); Elias Moutsoulas, *He sarkosis tou Logou Kai e theosis tou anthropou* (Athens, 1965); R.G. Stephanopoulos, «The Orthodox Doctrine of Theosis», in *The New Man: An Orthodox and Reformed Dialogue*, ed J. Meyendorff and J. McLelland (New Brunswick, NJ 1973), pp. 149-61; G. Patronas, «He Theosis tou anthropou hypo to phos ton eschatologikon antilepseon tes Orthodoxou theologias» *Theologia*, 51 (1980) pp. 348-378, 443-514, 800-831; Panayotis I. Bratsiotis, «He peri theoseos tou anthropou didaskalia ton Hellenon Pateron tes Ekklesias»; *ibid* (1971) 30-42.

35. Here are some leading studies on ethics and social thought in Orthodox Christianity. All include detailed bibliographies. B. Ch. Ioannides, *To Evangelion kai to Koinonikon problema* (Thessalonike, 1950); P. Ch. Demetropoulos, *He pistis tes Archaia Ekklesias os Kanon zoes kai ho kosmos* (Athens, 1959); G.I. Mantzarides, *He Christianike koinonia kai ho kosmos* (Thessalonike, 1967); N.Th. Mpougatsos, *Koinonike didaskalia Hellenon Pateron*, 3 vol. (Athens, 1980); Antonie Plamadeala, *Biserica Shjitoare* (Bucuresti, 1972). Works in Eng-

The Orthodox Church

spiritual life and social concern. It is only for practical and pedagogical reasons that we separate ethics from doctrine. The ethical teachings and the social philosophy of Orthodox Christianity are derivations rather than deviations from the doctrinal teaching.

The ethical system of Orthodox Christianity is based on the foundations of both natural law and biblical revelation. It assumes belief that the human being is God's masterpiece – sinful but not totally depraved; that the human being is subject to evolution and capable of moral growth which with the help of God has the capacity to increase in stature and ultimately to realize the innate «image» and «likeness» of God.

Even though several Orthodox theologians today tend to consider liturgical theology and eucharistic ecclesiology as being the most important aspects of Orthodox theology, there are many others, perhaps more unsung than their colleagues, who maintain that Orthodoxy's social character has not received the theological attention it deserves. Through many studies they have rediscovered the social and ethical dimensions of the Church's life in history, both in theory and in practice, and appeal for a more balanced presentation of the Church's theological concerns. They insist for example that it is un-Orthodox to over-emphasize liturgical theology and under-emphasize ethical and social thought.³⁶ Save for hermits and anchorites, the life of the individual believer cannot be understood apart from the life of the other members of the Christian Community – indeed apart from humanity. Man is a social being and Christianity is a social religion.

Ethical theology and social philosophy in Eastern Orthodox Christianity today seeks to structure a coherent system which takes into account natural law, the thought and mind of the ancient masters who labored with similar issues, biblical commandments, the teachings of the Greek Fathers,

lish include Demetrios J. Constantelos, *Byzantine Philanthropy and Social Welfare* (New Brunswick, NJ 1968; 2nd ed. New York, 1991); Idem, *Poverty Society and Philanthropy in the late Medieval Greek World* (New York, 1992). More from a theological perspective are the works of Stanley S. Harakas, *Toward Transfigured Life* (Minneapolis, Minn. 1983); Idem, *Let Mercy Abound* (Brookline, Mass. 1983). Several important articles have been published in the last twenty-five years including Jerome Kotsonis, «Fundamental Principles of Orthodox Morality» in A.J. Philipou, ed. *The Orthodox Ethos*; Savas Agourides, «The Social Character of Orthodoxy», in Philippou, ed. *The Orthodox Ethos*; N.A. Nissiotis, «Church and Society in Greek Orthodox Theology», in *Christian Social Ethics in a Changing World*, ed. John C. Benett (New York, 1966) 78-104; G. Florovsky, «The Social Problem in the Eastern Orthodox Church», in *The Journal of Religious Thought* (1050-51). Relevant is also *The Orthodox Approach to Diaconia*, ed. World Council of Churches (Geneva, 1980).

36. See Harakas, *Toward Transfigured Life*, pp. 1-4. In addition to his books cited above, he has written several relevant studies.

D. Constantelos

and the historical experience of the Community as well as modern schools of thought as long as they do not contradict defined doctrines and truths of the Church. Ethical issues and social concerns include social justice, human rights, medical ethics, and philanthropy toward the elderly, the unemployed, the handicapped, and others in want.

The fundamental principle that underlies Orthodox ethics is the principle of *agape*, *philanthropia*, love as a divine attribute manifested not only to show God's love for the Creation but for man to emulate and express himself toward fellow human beings. *Philanthropia* (*philein ton anthropon* = to love the human being) has determined the social ethos of the Orthodox Church in history. *Philanthropia* is synonymous to *agape*, the new commandment of Christ (Jn 13.34). God manifested his *agape* in the God-made-man event of the incarnation of the eternal Logos. And *agape* among human beings is the imitation of God's love for all persons.

The Theological Background of Social Ethics

From a theological point of view and from a historical perspective, the social character of the Church is the application of the doctrinal teaching concerning God and human beings, and human beings with respect to their social relations. Ethical and social thought is solidly based on theological presuppositions.

Orthodox tradition emphasizes that one communes with God by possessing love for the Divine Being and by expressing a similar sense of love for God and human persons that one can enter into a state of theosis, «possessing the love and knowledge of God».³⁷

The earthly activity of the God-man Christ, becomes the inspiration of the social activity of the individual believer as well as for the social response of the Christian Church (*Ecclesia*) as an institution. There is no justice proper, no virtue, except Christocentric virtue. «Love one another as I have loved you» or «A New Commandment I give to you – to love one another as I have loved you.»³⁸

Thus, the Christian community is charged with the responsibility and the task of applied *agape* because its founder was the personification of *agape*, and he was deeply concerned with the lowly, the unloved, and the disregarded members of society. What Christ did, the Church must do.

37. Maximos the Confessor, «Kephalaia Agapes» 1.23-27», PG 90.965AC: Photios «Homily 33.8», ed. S. Aristarches, *Photiou logoi kai homiliai* (Constantinople, 1900), I, p. 227. What follows on the social theological thought of Eastern Orthodox Christianity is a slightly revised version of an article which first appeared in *God and Charity*, ed. Francis D. Costa, S.S.S. (Brookline, Mass., 1979).

38. John 13.34; cf. John 15.12

The Orthodox Church

The Ecclesia is an extension and the perpetuation of the person and the work of Christ here on earth. All people must be drawn to God, and it is through vigorous activity that all people, rich and poor, wise and foolish, young and old, will unite in the presence of God. The practice of love becomes a universal unitive force for God and humans. «To turn your back against one poor individual is to show contempt toward all humanity. To refuse assistance to one indigent person is to commit injustice to all humanity because man is a microcosm and the convergence of all humanity», as Patriarch Gennadios Scholarios wrote in the fifteenth century.³⁹

The Eternal Logos divested himself of supernatural glory in order to reach out and direct the earthly to eternal glory. God walked among humans that human beings may walk with God. Or in the classic words of Irenaios and Athanasios, who emphasized that: «the Lord... came to us not as he could, but as we could see him,» and that the Lord «being God, later he became man, in order that we may become gods.»⁴⁰ This kind of patristic thought has contributed immensely to the formation of social ethics. Notwithstanding the ultimate supernatural destiny of the Ecclesia, the Christian Community cannot divorce itself from this world but, as Christ did, it too must invade and penetrate into the present world «doing good». The Logos became human in order to announce release to the captives, to bring sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who have been enslaved, to proclaim that the time of God has arrived.⁴¹ God became human, thus nothing human should be foreign to the Church.

On this basis then, the Church, as an organism and organization of Christ and through its affinity with Christ's earthly ministry, emulates the work of its Lord. Thus, the social thought of Orthodoxy assumes a theanthropic character which is based furthermore not only on Christology but on the theological teaching of the Fatherhood of God. «God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life».⁴² Christ called God the Father and fulfilled God's will. On account of man's relationship to Christ the man, those who supplicate the same God and acknowledge God as common Father, the Creator of the Cosmos and of all humans, become automatically charged with social obligations to their fellow humans. In their faith in God they accept also God's paternity over the entire oecumene. To par-

39. George Scholarios, «Peri ellemosynēs», ed. L. Petit, X.A. Siderides, and Martin Jugie, *Oeuvres Complètes de Georges Scholarios* (Paris, 1928), I, p. 100.

40. Irenaios, *Against Heresies*, 4.38.1.; Athanasios, *Against the Arians*, 1.39.

41. Luke 4.18

42. John 3.16

D. Constantelos

aphrase Saint Gregory the Theologian, the paternity of God obliges all – healthy and sick, slaves and free, blacks and whites, kings and soldiers, civilized and barbarians to effect an earthly kingdom of God.⁴³

Such a creed energizes an impulse for social action, whose immediate objective is the betterment of human society here on earth as a dim reflection of the perfect *koinonia* in Heaven. Because of God's philanthropy and concern for man, God's plan (divine economy), for man's redemption, is defined by the Greek theologian Nicholas Kabasilas as compassion or mercy.⁴⁴ Man's earthly activity then must be one of continuous compassion toward all men.

In imitation of God's two-way involvement in human history, humans must also manifest their concern for their fellow humans in two manners which correspond to humanity's dual nature, the physical and the spiritual. One imitates God's philanthropy when one feeds the hungry, gives a drink to the stranger, visits the sick, redeems the prisoners, and buries the dead who have no one to bury them. To these seven physical activities correspond seven spiritual concerns: to console those in sorrow, to give advice to the timid and undecided, to teach the ignorant, to guide the sinner and to forgive the fallen, to be patient with the rude and insolent, and lastly to pray for all, in the words of Gennadios Scholarios.⁴⁵

The social thought of the Greek Fathers, who laid the groundwork and who expressed the life and creed of today's Orthodox theology, is linked with the social aspects of soteriology since their ultimate concern was the salvation of the individual being within the redemption of the Christian Community. In the history of the Orthodox, the Church has performed a double function; it has concerned itself with the eternal salvation of human persons, but it has also served as the agency of social improvement and physical survival. Its social posture has often given meaning and direction to the social thought and action of the individual as well as to that of the state. This, in particular, is evident in the life of many Orthodox during centuries of captivity under the Ottoman Empire. It is on this basis that one can understand the reason an archbishop can serve as leader of a nation or people (*ethnarch*) or get involved in secular aspects of his people's life.

It is not only the principle of humanitarian social obligations toward the indigent that Orthodox theology teaches but also the theological con-

43. Gregory Nazianzenos, «Homily 14.14» PG 35. 1., 876.

44. Nicholas Kabasilas *Eis ten theian leitourgian*, 17.4, ed. S. Savlaville 2nd ed. by R. Bornett et. al., Sources Chretiennes (Paris 1967), p. 134.

45. George Scholarios, «Peri ton kat' areten ergon», *Oeuvres Completes*, 3, 419-20

The Orthodox Church

cept that one is called by the Creator to become a collaborator (*synergos*) with God for the completion of God's work, both in one's own person, and in the persons united in Christ's body – the Church. And God's work is not only spiritual, it embraces all aspects of human life.

It is impossible to disassociate anthropology from a discussion concerning social thought in Orthodox theology. As already indicated, humans are viewed as the image and likeness of God, whose ultimate goal is eternal life in God (*theosis*) because they are children of God. Nevertheless, holiness and moral perfection are evolutionary elements, not achievements per se to be accomplished here on earth. Cultivation and moral development are pursued through spiritual exercise, prayer, and contemplation, but also through the creative use of man's will and freedom in the service of God and God's people through «faith active in love»⁴⁶ (*agape in diakonia*).

Orthodox theology sees dynamic love as one's immediate goal here on earth. The moral perfection of the human being commences from the earthly and is to be pursued in association with and in service to God's people, while our terminal *theosis* will be achieved in the kingdom to come. The human person occupies a central position in the thought and social concern of the Church. The entire social thought or Orthodoxy is based on the recognition of one's worth, on the respect, love, consideration, and anxiety for one's destiny whatsoever one's social standing, state position, origins, or race may be. As the object of the love of God, each person must be the most important objects of anxiety and service for the Church for he or she is a microcosm of all humanity.

John Chrysostom's view of the human being has exerted a telling influence on Orthodox moral theology. Chrysostom writes: «I have no contempt for any person because every person is most worthy of attention as one of God's creatures. Even if one is a slave one is not despicable for I am not looking neither for a master nor for a slave but for the human person for whom the heavens opened, the sun shines, the moon races on, the air fills all, the fountains give their water, the sea spreads out, for whom, indeed, the only begotten Son of God became man. My master was slaughtered and shed his blood for man and who am I to overlook man? How could I be forgiven.»⁴⁷

God's creation constitutes a single and whole entity. There is no drastic separation between the visible *Ecclesia*, or Community, and the invisible *Ecclesia*, the Church triumphant, because both constitute the whole of

46. Galatians 5.6.

47. John Chrysostom, «Eis ton seismon kai eis ton plousion kai eis ton Lazaron, kai pot-
hen he douleia egeneto», PG 48.1029.

D. Constantelos

God's creation. God's creation is all-encompassing, and the physical is linked with the metaphysical. It is for this reason that in Orthodox theology, the supernatural aspect of the Church, is not treated in isolation from the physical or visible Church; and that the saints, the fathers, the martyrs, and other holy persons of the past are in fact contemporaries. The present incorporates the past and anticipates the future. Their Church is our Church and our Church is a direct historical continuity with their Church.

The unity and continuity of the social ethos of present day Orthodoxy with that of the past is real. Orthodoxy's conception of history is linear and recognizes no major disruptions. History and theology are mutually determined and conditioned. It is for this reason that the Orthodox have high regard for ethical decisions, examples, and illustrations from history. It is because of their historical conscience that the Orthodox appeal to the authority of tradition, the mind of the Fathers, the decisions of ecumenical councils – the holiness and the experience of the past. The past lives in the present and will continue as long as human beings live.

The ecclesiological concept concerning the Church as the Household or Family of God presupposes that church members accept agape or philanthropia as a common denominator, freely flowing, expecting nothing in return. It is this type of unmerited philanthropy that made Christianity very attractive among the less fortunate members of the Roman Empire's society. It transformed an anthropocentric and limited humanism into a theocentric and ecumenical philanthropy. Of course not all Christians, either clergy or laity, respond to this model of social thought and concern, but overwhelming evidence confirms that there were and there are numerous believers who have adopted and transmitted this ideal in their daily life. To help the poor, visit the sick, guide the lost, receive the stranger, look after the lepers, protect the orphans, and stand publicly for social justice are examples of the love leading to ultimate sanctification.⁴⁸ Whether wealthy or poor, prominent or humble, healthy or sick, they receive communion from the same chalice – a social event in itself which confirms and seals their fellowship in God and their social and mutual reconciliation. Receiving from the same chalice makes public association feasible, easy to sympathize with and be of assistance to others.

Eucharistic communion as actual union with Christ becomes a foundation stone and a springboard of social interest and welfare preparing for an eternal fellowship.⁴⁹ This thought of the Church was expressed centuries ago by John of Damascus who wrote of holy Communion as a union of the

48. See my *Byzantine Philanthropy and Social Welfare*, pp. 18-28, 88-110.

49. Matthew 26.26-29; John 6.32-59; I Corinthians 11.20-34.

The Orthodox Church

faithful with the divinity of Christ: «an actual communion because through it we share in His flesh and his divinity. «Yes», he wrote, «we have communion and we are united with one another through it. For since we partake of one bread, we all become one body of Christ and one blood, and members one of another, being of one body with Christ.»⁵⁰

The social ethos of the Orthodox Community derives much of its strength from eucharistic theology because it views in the act of holy Communion not only participation in the body of Christ but also a dynamic symbol of the unity and spiritual reciprocity of Christ's disciples. This unity signalizes mutual opportunities and responsibilities. As the common chalice becomes a public spiritual feast, likewise all are summoned to respond to the call for the betterment of the social order here and its perfection in the hereafter. The Church stresses the importance of values for this life which will be fully realized in the life to come. It is the continuum that exists between time and eternity, between the physical and the metaphysical, between the Church militant and the Church triumphant that makes eschatology a great source for the development of social thought in Christian Orthodoxy. They are intricately related. On account of this mutuality the social ethos of Orthodoxy is greatly determined by the vivid eschatological expectations and apocalyptic tendencies. The study of every major Greek Father reveals that his social thought was determined by an eschatological creed.

The frequent eschatological sermons which we find in the writings of the Church Fathers are of dual significance. They reveal prevailing social conditions but also the concern and the invitation to all the faithful for moral and social self-improvement through the practice of good works. Charity, alms, and virtuous deeds were very popular themes for sermons as they are today. The same virtues, however, give the faithful the characteristic tone of their daily existence. Great churchmen such as Basil, who washed the feet of lepers in his own hospital in Caesarea, or John the Merciful (Eleimon), who built seven hospitals in Alexandria, or Patriarch Athanasios I of Constantinople, who organized food distribution and common meals in the early fourteenth century, or Theoleptos of Philadelphia, who took up the defence of his city against the enemy, interpreted their lives in terms of the ethical teachings and life of Christ.⁵¹ The Church Fathers who

50. John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, PG 94.1153A; cf. John Chrysostom, «Homily 46», PG 59.260.

51. See my *Byzantine Philanthropy*, pp. 154-55; 74-5; also my article «Life and Social Welfare Activity of Patriarch Athanasios I of Constantinople», *Theologia*, 46 (1975) 611-25. For Theoleptos, see my article «Mysticism and Social Involvement in the Late Byzantine Church...» in *Byzantine Studies*, 6 (1979) 83-94

D. Constantelos

set the example and laid the foundations of the Church's moral theology saw theology and life as two interrelated halves of a single whole.

Being in Christ means an everyday life which expresses the application of the commandments of love and sacrifice and a reflection of divine philanthropia toward all Christians and non-Christians alike. The Church is the new Ark in which every person can find assistance. The Church is not a community of saints for the service of saints, but a tender mother who invites all to her breasts to feed and receive strength for the great pilgrimage to eternity. Furthermore, the Church is viewed not as a museum of saints but as the great hospital open to all in need of healing. As the eternal Kingdom of God is opened and prepared to receive all creation in an ultimate unity, the earthly kingdom, that is, the Ecclesia, is available to those exerting their efforts to serve and embrace all. Thus the ministry of love becomes the hallmark of the Church.

In Christ's earthly kingdom one becomes a new creation. The new creation evolves here on earth and follows a process of perfection which will reach its apogee in the kingdom to come. In the earthly kingdom one joins «a society in the process of deification» as Saint Gregory Palamas phrased it.⁵² This process is a social one because deification is intended for all who join the new creation. Thus, in the long history of the Church there were many who developed a deep community interest and who believed that ultimate moral perfection begins in our social relations.

The tendency of Christian theology to emphasize the values of the eternal Kingdom did not dissipate devotion to social obligations. The Church stressed the interrelationship between duties to others with the apocalyptic expectations of the other world. One's earthly life must be regulated according to the relations one wants to establish with God in God's eternal kingdom. To make an adjustment after departure is humanly uncertain. Thus, reminding us of the value of time and the limitation of our knowledge concerning our earthly existence, as well as of God's final judgment has been a popular topic for sermons and admonitions. As Saint Photios, the great patriarch and scholar of the ninth century admonished: «Let us study death before death so that we may live after death».⁵³ The event of death becomes central to ethics because it shows that humanity to eternal life and provides hope for betterment on earth as well as assurance for

52. Gregory Palamas, *Logoi apodeiktikoi duo-Logos deuterios*, 78, ed. P.K. Christou et al., I, p. 149.

53. Photios, «Homily 2.3» ed. B. Laourdas, *Photiou homiliai* (Thessalonike, 1959), p. 15

The Orthodox Church

eternity. Long before Photios, Saint Irenaios wrote that «the task of the Christian is nothing but to study how to die».⁵⁴

Historically speaking, very frequently the Church has served as the champion of social justice, and the protector of the needy and the oppressed. There have been many remarkable churchmen who have expressed a deep interest for the fate of the poor and the persecuted; who have championed social justice; and who have castigated the abuse of wealth and the exploitation of the poor. Personal property is not strictly personal but a trust which God has given to the owner. Social involvement rather than an eremitic or monastic life provides greater opportunities for the realization of the Christian ideal.

In speaking of social ethics, the Church does not mean merely the contribution of money or goods to those in need. Under the term social ethics, all services that can be rendered freely to anyone in need of assistance are included, from what is called «charity» to the professional services of physicians, lawyers, civil servants, and especially public hospitality and relief. The Church urges all those who can to give their money, their goods, their talents, their knowledge, their advice, and their services generally to all who stand in need of them – all poor are Christ's and as long as they do it for them they do it to Christ.

The Church, as the conscience of Christ's Gospel, plays an important role in bringing the two extremes of rich and poor together by emphasizing the significance of religious values. Thus, religion is not isolated into a department of the state or a compartment of society's life but is accepted as an all-encompassing way of life. The Church is both the Kingdom of God and a nationhood (a *politeuma*), an indivisible entity which has its feet firmly planted on earth and its hands stretched out like an anchor of hope to God's eternal kingdom. As a *politeuma*, the Church is concerned with political as well as social problems.

The Church emphasizes the application of social philanthropy and private charity on other than religious grounds. Poverty and distress are often the result of our inhumanity to one another. Thus, the Church appeals for the practice of public philanthropy not simply for the salvation of one's soul, nor to please God, but in order to fulfill an act of natural justice because many poor people are victims of the tyranny and the exploitation of others. As Saint Photios wrote:

Do not overlook the poor and let not his tattered
rags incite you to contempt, but let them rather

54. Irenaios, *Fragments*, no. 10, in *Library of the Greek Fathers and Ecclesiastical Writers* (Athens, 1955), 5, p. 175

D. Constantelos

move you to pity your fellow-creatures. For he is also a man, a creature of God, clothed in flesh like yourself, and perchance in his spiritual virtue mirroring the common Creator more than you do. Nature has not made him indigent in this way, but it is the tyranny of this neighbors that has reduced either him or his parents to indigence while our lack of pity and compassion has maintained or even aggravated his poverty.⁵⁵

Admittedly there are Orthodox theologians today who seldom make specific proposals in the realm of social action, to change the social structure and to remedy the evils of their society. Their most frequent call against social injustices is a call to repentance, an indication that the Church expects the unjust and wealthy to initiate action by themselves without coercion from the state or other authorities. But Orthodox theology views human nature as a synthetic whole in which all drives and impulses of the human person must become subject to the control of higher values, all of which derive from God and must serve God's people.⁵⁶ It is through the renewal of the inner life of each individual person that the moral life of society is transformed. And a renewed society possesses the potential of renewing the whole state and the whole world for «a little leaven leavens all the dough».⁵⁷ A great number of Orthodox theologians today believe in the close relationship between spirituality and social involvement.

In brief then, one of the major concerns of Orthodox religious thought today is how to maintain a balance between faith and works, doctrine and ethics. The thought speaks of Christianity as God's direct intervention in history but also as a social religion. The Gospel needs to be interpreted vertically as God's saving power and involvement in the life of individuals but also horizontally as it concerns human relationships in the community and in the world.⁵⁸

5. ESCHATOLOGY

For Orthodox theology history is linear. It has a beginning and it looks forward to an end. Man's destiny and the destiny of all creation are orient-

55. Photios, «Homily 2.4», ed Laourdas, *Photiou homiliai*, p. 17.

56. Nicholas Kabasilas, *Peri tes en Christo zoes*, ed. W. Gass, *Die Mystik des Nikolaus Cabasilas vom Leben in Christo*, pp. 153-56, 160-62, 165-67.

57. I Corinthians 5.5

58. See G.I. Mantzarides, *Methexis Theou*, pp. 11-129

The Orthodox Church

ed toward the *eschaton* (end; last things). But the term eschatology is not identified exclusively with the last things. It is used in a biblical sense which means that the *eschaton* is both present and future, an end and a beginning. The incarnation of the Logos (Jn 1.2-5; Heb 1.2; Pet 1.20) is both an end and a beginning. In the life of the early Christian Community the *eschaton* was their own present (Acts 2.17) as well as an expectation of the last day (Rev 15.1; 21.9). History and eschatology are not unconnected nor are they independent of each other.

An Orthodox Understanding of History

Etymologically speaking, history (from the Greek *historia*) means an inquiry into the nature and destiny of things; a quest into finding out the truth about events and the ultimate purpose of why things happen. History is one and continuous. The periodization into past, present, and future history is done for practical and pedagogical reasons.

The Christian understanding of history sees the event of the Incarnation as central. Cosmology, anthropology, hamartiology, soteriology, acquire meaning in the Christ event. Thus, past, present, and future are interrelated depending upon each other.⁵⁹ They are one because they are God's and God is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and Omega of history. The reality of God, the author of time and space, is ever present and in God there is neither a beginning nor an end. Thus, the whole realm of history is in an eschatological state. Creation, redemption, and theosis are ever present realities. Creation has never ceased, redemption is an ever present gift, and theosis is a process looking toward a completion.

The relationship between time and space – past, present, and future – is better understood when we consider the Orthodox theological understanding of tradition as a living experience and as an ontology with diachronic dimensions. As such it proclaims the unity of time, persons, ideas, and practices. Even though God-in-Christ invaded history in time and space, God has always been the great paradox of history. The B.C., A.D., and the *eschaton* constitute a continuum. Thus, we have the Orthodox emphasis on the importance of tradition.

The Eastern Orthodox appreciation and use of tradition is not easily understood by people who do not possess a long standing historical consciousness. The «remote» past, whether Hebraic, Greek, or of Roman origins, is ever present in the Christian Community. The person of Jesus the Messiah is the Logos of the Greeks. He is the point of convergence between Hebrew messianic expectations and the Greco-Roman quest. It is for

59. Cf. Nikos A. Nissiotis, «Our History: A Limitation or Creative Power?» in *Orthodoxy: Life and Freedom*, ed. A.J. Philippou (Oxford 1973) pp. 59-72, esp. p. 68

D. Constantelos

this reason that in Christian Orthodox worship, past, present, and future are brought together. Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Daniel, Peter and Paul, Basil and John Chrysostom, Barbara and Irene, fathers, martyrs, hermits, intellectual theologians, and simple folk commemorated in the Liturgy are not remote names but rather elder contemporaries.

The apostles of Christ, the Apostolic Fathers and the early Church in general did not simply adjust to the Hellenic cultural and intellectual milieu but also adopted, consecrated, and absorbed the past heritage as God's providential work – not as corrupted man's failures. «Profane» history is viewed as part of «sacred» history. Christianity was born in Hellenic Judaism and it matured in the Greek linguistic and intellectual tradition. Divine revelation was not limited to the Old Testament times but encompassed God's world. Christianity brought together the best of the ancient world's traditions. It is not a paradox that Christian theologians, from as early as Justin the Martyr down to the present day, cite not only the Scriptures and the Fathers of the Church for interpretation but also the wisdom of other non-biblical thinkers. Pindar, Epikouros, Herakleitos, Sophokles, Sokrates, Plato, and Plutarch spoke «revealed» truths. Early Christian theologians and religious thinkers discerned an affinity between «natural» and «revealed» teachings, Old Testament commandments, and Greek ethical teachings. The tradition established by thinkers such as Justin the Martyr, Clement and Origen of Alexandria, Synesios of Cyrene, and Basil of Caesarea survived throughout the Byzantine millennium. The Greek Fathers discerned patterns of «apocalyptic» or «revelation history» outside of ancient Israel. The eleventh-century theologian and bishop John Mavropous expressed the above mentality in the following prayer. He wrote:

If, my Christ, you should wish to exempt any of the pagans from punishment, choose for me Plato and Plutarch. For both were very close to your laws in both teaching and way of life. They may not have known that you are the God of all, but this is only a further claim to save all men...»⁶⁰

To deny the «syncretistic» nature of Christian theology is to overlook the fact that Christianity is a historical religion. As a religion born in and shaped by history, Christianity assimilated much of the form and even some of the content of the Greek classics. History is the domain of God which he has visited through various ways and manners. Thus, the chasm between «profane» and «sacred» history should not be overemphasized. But there is no unanimity among Orthodox theologians as to the relation-

60. John Mavropous, Poems, no 43, ed. P. de Lagarde, *Iohannis Euchaitorum metropolitae quae in codice vaticano graeca 676 supersunt* (Göttingen, 1881).

The Orthodox Church

ship between sacred and profane history. Traditionally, there were theologians who were cautious about Hellenic thought and Christian theology; however, there were others who accepted the achievement of ancient Greek philosophy and religious thought as less antagonistic to Christian theology; and there were others, members of the monastic world, who minimized the importance of the classical heritage for Christian theology. This type of polarization exists to the present day.

Nevertheless, this pluralistic approach to the meaning of history and tradition has survived because it has become a subject of constant questioning. It is very natural and self-evident that defined and inherited heritage, being placed in question, has its continuity assured. Without ignoring the value of personal theological questioning, it is collective solidarity and theological consensus that appear more important in Orthodox theology than the expression of individual conscience. There is solidarity on theological doctrines adopted by the Community in the course of history but freedom of theological investigation and opinion on non-essential matters – on what Orthodox theology calls *theologoumena*.

The Eschaton

In theological eschatology, too, we observe a close relationship between past, present, and future.⁶¹ The whole realm of Christian history is in an eschatological state. The best illustration of this «realized eschatology» is found in Christian Orthodox worship – the Matins (*Orthros*) service and the Divine Liturgy in particular. From the moment the celebrant enters the sanctuary and begins the act of worship, the whole of God's creative and providential activity in history is celebrated in word, song, movement, and symbolism. From the moment he invokes the name of God by proclaiming: «Blessed is our God, now and forever and to the ages of ages», until the dismissal prayer «through the prayers of our holy Fathers», he makes an affirmation of the *eschaton's* existence in the present. The first part of the Liturgy, the Liturgy of the Word, commemorates the *eschaton* as present.⁶²

The eucharistic celebration provides the clues of the nature of the *eschaton* which is no less than communion with God, *koinonia*. Sacramental union in the Eucharist prefigures external communion with God which will be completed in the Last Day, known also as the Parousia of the Lord (*Kyrios*). Parousia refers to a spiritual appearance not in the sense of a return but of circumstance which will lead to full *koinonia* with God

61. Trempeles, *Dogmatike*, 3, pp 364-525.

62. Nissiotis, «The Importance of the Doctrine of the Trinity», pp. 65-9; Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, pp. 218-23

D. Constantelos

or to a total eclipse of God's presence. Thus, Paradise is identified with eternal life in God, and the absence of life in God is called Hell.

The Second Coming of which the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed speaks is not only a historical event to take place in the future but also an event already realized. The faithful, as members of the Body of the Living Christ, enjoy God's presence in the reading or hearing the word of God, in the Eucharist, in the practice of love, in the prayer life of the Community – indeed, in the ever present awareness of God's existence and life in it. The last Day (*Eschaton*) is the point where God masters and rules over all. The eucharistic prayer of *Anamnesis* summarizes the eschatological teaching of the Orthodox Church. It calls to mind the past, makes vivid the present, and brings forward the future. The faithful possess a conscious thinking of God's involvement in past, present, and future history. The Kingdom of God «is to come, yet it is in the midst of you». Time becomes eternally present.⁶³ Mortal and sinful man becomes eternally «alive into God» (cf. Rom 6.11). Creation, anthropology, and soteriology are brought together in eschatology. The guilt of sin in man's life is followed by the exultation of forgiveness felt after *metanoia*; the sense of loneliness and isolation is mitigated by the individual's participation in the Eucharist; the evil and the fear of the encounter with death is destroyed by the affirmation of the resurrection of Christ which made man's resurrection possible. The ultimate end of eschatology is the resurrection of the human person into a transformed, new being in communion with the Being of the Triune God.⁶⁴

6. INTERFAITH DIALOGUES

Some of the most important events in the last fifty years related to Eastern Orthodox Christianity have been interorthodox conferences, interfaith dialogues, and interreligious conversations.

Inter-Orthodox Conferences

The Bolshevik Revolution and its consequences for the Orthodox Church in the Soviet Union and the devastating results of the Second World War did not allow a closer cooperation among the Orthodox Churches for many years. It was due to the initiative of Patriarch Athenas-

63. Paul Evdokimov, «Eschatological Transcendence», in *Orthodoxy: Life and Freedom*, ed. A.J. Philippon (Oxford, 1973), 31-38; Nikos A. Nissiotis, «Our History: A Limitation or Creative Power?» Idem, «The Importance of the Doctrine of the Trinity», pp. 65-69

64. A. Theodorou, *He peri theoseos tou anthropou didaskalia*, pp. 171-78; cf. Moutsoulas, «He sarkosis tou Logou», pp. 219-20; Ioannis N. Karmiris, *He pankosmiotis tes en Christo soterias* (Athens, 1981), pp. 78-83

The Orthodox Church

goras of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (present day Istanbul) that the Orthodox have drawn closer and in the last twenty-five years they have held several important conferences.

The first Pan-Orthodox Conference was held at Rhodes in 1961 and it was followed by three additional ones in 1963, 1964, and 1968. Each one was attended by representatives from most Orthodox patriarchates, autocephalous and independent Churches. Out of these preparatory conferences came plans for a major Pan Orthodox Council which would address various theological issues such as sources of revelation, Church and society, the role of laity in the Church, impediments of marriage, Church life and worship, and several more of a pastoral nature. A precounciliar conference held in Chambesy, Switzerland in 1976 reconsidered the original agenda, and theoretical topics such as sources of revelation were dropped from the agenda. Emphasis was placed on problems of a pastoral nature.⁶⁵ One of the major results of these meetings was that all Orthodox Churches agreed to the importance of their participation in the ecumenical movement and the need to cooperate with other Christian churches and religions in order to serve mankind through mutual understanding, peace, and social justice.

The second Pan-Orthodox Theological Conference held in Athens in 1976 was of great importance for theology and the Orthodox Church in general. It was devoted to the theme «The Theology of the Church and its Application Today» and was subdivided into three interrelated topics: «Theology as an Expression of the Life and Consciousness of the Church»; «Theology as an Expression of the Presence of the Church in the World»; and «Theology in the Renewal of the Life of the Church.» All three reflected current trends and present concerns of Orthodox theology. Differing theological views were expressed on various theological issues but a consensus emerged concerning the spirit of faithfulness to the essence of Orthodoxy.

The following are the highlights of the theological positions and religious issues discussed in the conference. It was agreed that the genuine nature of Orthodox theology consists not only in the scientific examination of sources and movements, in the formulation of dogmas and their philosophical development, but also in incarnating them as principles of life. The doctrine of the Church is not an ideology, it is the spelling out of the faith of the Church. Based on revelation, developed by Tradition, theology is the mind of the Church. Theological work proper, that of the Apostles,

65. Stanley S. Haraḱas, *Something is stirring in World Orthodoxy* (Minneapolis, 1978); also Aimilianos Timiadis, *Themata en opsi tes Synodou*, vol 1 (Athens, 1968)

Fathers, doctors and thinkers up to the present time, is its first manifestation, the fruit of the intellect as well as of the heart. In addition, it was acknowledged that theology is also embodied in the liturgy, expressing through prayer the creed of the faithful. Prayer is theology in action. Theology as the content of thought and worship, as an expression of the life and consciousness of the Church is also an essential part of the Community's memory. As such, the history of the Church is wholly theological and theology proper is historical.

With regard to theology as an expression of the Church's presence in the world, it was reaffirmed that one of the main functions of theology is to show that Church and the world mutually belong together. The Church is not a community set apart from the world. It is the world engaged in the process of transfiguration. And the world does not lie outside the Church as a realm separated from the Lordship of the Personal God revealed in Christ. The witness of Orthodox theology in the world concerns both a restoration of the world to God, and also the culture and the problems of local situations.

The primary function of theology is to contribute to the renewal of the life of the Church. In other words, theology primarily has a practical utility. As such, it should engage in a continuous conversation with itself, in self-criticism, in *metanoia* and rejuvenation. It was agreed that Orthodox theology should continue to express the thought and life of the one, catholic, and apostolic Church with conviction but not in polemic tones, and always with a commitment to an ecumenical dialogue. Orthodox theology is ecumenical by its very nature.⁶⁶

Notwithstanding differing opinions on several topics, certain chief characteristics unite Orthodox theological thought today such as a distrust of centralized church government; a synthesis of apophatic and cataphatic principles in theological thought and religious experience; pluralism in *theologoumena* and unity in established doctrine; emphasis on God's presence rather than on God's command – thus inner religious experience in preference to legalistic requirement; and a less exacting view of doctrinal specificity and more worship and glorification of the Divine presence.

66. See the draft of N. Nissiotis and C. Andronikoff in *Procès-Verbaux du Deuxième Congrès de Théologie Orthodoxe* ed. Savas Chr. Agourides, pp. 60-1. The general introduction on the subject of the Congress of Professor Nissiotis is especially recommended. It set not only the tone of the whole conference but it also expressed the dynamics as well as the problems of contemporary Orthodox theology and religious thought. For a brief evaluation of problems facing Orthodox theology today see also A.J. Delikostopoulos, «A brief evaluation of Problems, concerning Contemporary Orthodox Theology», in *Epistemonike Epeteris*, 19 (Thessalonike, 1974), pp. 163-73

The Orthodox Church

Some serious theological and ecclesiastical problems remain unresolved. The question, what is purely Orthodox and what is not still persists. It does not matter whether or not they constitute an Orthodox minority, some have raised the question as to whether the ecumenically minded are truly Orthodox – the problem of «Orthodoxomania», which tends to overlook or ignore the fact of syncretism, historical relativism, and the inevitable influences of «non-Orthodox» influences. While some considered «foreign» influences as an anathema, others do not consider them to be a problem because the early and the historic Church itself became subject to such «foreign» influence which, however, it was able to transform and make its own. The role of the Orthodox in the ecumenical movement, the reconciliation between religious faith and ethnocentricism, and various canonical problems continue to challenge Orthodox theological thinking.

Interfaith Dialogues

Interfaith dialogues include Eastern Orthodoxy's theological contacts with the non-Chalcedonian, known also as the Lesser Orthodox or Orient Orthodox Churches, with the Old Catholics, the Roman Catholic, the Anglican-Episcopal, and the major churches of the Reformation, or Protestant Churches.⁶⁷

Ironing out doctrinal differences with non-Chalcedonian Churches of the Near East, including the churches of the Copts in Egypt, the Ethiopians, the Armenians, and others, has been a major concern of Eastern Orthodox theology of the last twenty-five years. These churches rejected the doctrinal definitions of the natures of Christ, formulated at the great Council of Chalcedon in 451. Contacts between the two families of churches have not been rare but only in recent years have major theological meetings been held. Three theological dialogues have been conducted between their representatives in 1964, 1967 and 1971. There is a consensus that the doctrinal differences between the two theologies have been narrowed down and the dialogues have resumed with more determination and vigor. There is a strong opinion on both sides that the possibilities for a reunion between the two ancient Churches are more encouraging.⁶⁸

67. For official statements and documents pertaining to the Orthodox Church's concern with interreligious dialogues see Constantine G. Patelos, ed. *The Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement: Documents and Statements 1902-1975* (Geneva, 1978). For a balanced evaluation of Orthodoxy and the Ecumenical movement see E.D. Theodorou, *Orthodoxia kai oikoumenike kinesis* (Athens, 1973).

68. The proceedings of all three conferences have been published in the *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 10 (1964-65); 13 (1968); and 16 (1971). See also I.N. Karmiris, *Eisegeseis enopion ton diaskepsen Orthodoxon kai antichalkedonion theologon* (Athens, 1970)

D. Constantelos

Eastern Orthodox and Old Catholics have been in contact since 1874, nearly four years after the First Vatican Council (1870) which proclaimed the doctrine of papal infallibility *ex cathedra*. Since then several theological dialogues have been held in four phases (1874-1875; 1893-1913; 1931-1961). Four important meetings in the last ten years have discussed topics such as the Trinity, revelation, canon of scripture, ecclesiology, Church councils, authority and infallibility of the Church, and several other important issues. An encouraging consensus has been reached on the authority of the Christian Church before the schism of the eleventh century.⁶⁹ There are many more theological principles that unite rather than divide the Old Catholics with the Eastern Orthodox.

The event that served as a catalyst in the relations between the Eastern Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches, which have been in schism since the thirteenth (if not the eleventh) century, was the January 1964 meeting in Jerusalem between Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I. Not only did the two leaders lift the anathema of 1054 but they decided to further improve the relations between their respective Churches. They agreed to inaugurate regular contacts between their hierarchies and also between their theologians.

In 1967 Pope Paul visited Patriarch Athenagoras in Constantinople, the New Rome (Istanbul) and later the Patriarch reciprocated by visiting the Pope in Old Rome. International, national, and local theological commissions were established to conduct regular theological dialogues which occasioned the publication of a great number of studies – theological, historical, canonical. «More and more (Old) Rome uses the term sister church to describe Orthodoxy; Constantinople is called affectionately the 'New Rome'». ⁷⁰ On the other hand, Constantinople continues to consider Rome as having preeminence (*prokathemene*) or as being the elder (*presbyteria*) Rome and to accord it the honor of primacy (*primus inter pares* – first among equals). The problem of authority and the theology of the Holy Spirit remain the two major issues that separate the two Churches.

While socially the relations between the Anglican-Episcopal communion of churches and the Eastern Orthodox have been amicable for centur-

69. For a comprehensive and authoritative survey of Eastern Orthodox-Old Catholics relations see Ioannes N. Karmiris, «Homilia peri tes anelixeos tou Orthodoxou Palaikatholikou Theologikou Dialogou», *Theologia*, 46 (1975) 23-40; *Episkepsis* 173 (1977) 10-5; 215 (1979) 12-5; 259 (1981) 10-6; *Journal of Moscow Patriarchate*, 3 (1978) 58-62; 4 (1980) 46-8; 6 (1982) 10-5

70. For a precise and fully documented survey of these relations see Michael A. Fahey, S.J., «Current Theology», *Theological Studies*, 39 (1978) 455-60; 44 (1983) 644-54.

The Orthodox Church

ies, theological rapprochement has remained at a stand still. The question among the Orthodox persists: Is the Anglican-Episcopal Church of the catholic or protestant tradition? Though the Orthodox and the Anglicans have enjoyed cordial relations since the sixteenth century and several theological conferences between the two have been held, no major theological problem, including the validity of Anglican orders, has been resolved.⁷¹ The recent decision of the Anglican-Episcopal Church to admit women to ordination has further strained their relations with the Orthodox. Nevertheless, international and national theological commissions exist and serious dialogues between the two have resumed.

It was through the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the *primus inter pares* church in Eastern Orthodoxy, that theological dialogues between the Orthodox and churches of the Reformation (Lutheran, Reformed, Baptist) have been held. In 1920 the Ecumenical Patriarchate issued an encyclical addressed to the Christian world with an appeal for close cooperation and for the establishment of a type of Christian «League of Nations». It was the starting point of the Ecumenical movement. As members of the World Council of Churches, the Orthodox have had dialogues with many theologians of the Protestant tradition. It has been acknowledged that Orthodox theology has had a considerable impact on the World Council of Churches formulation of declarations, especially in the General Assemblies held in Upsala, Nairobi, New Delhi, and Lima.⁷² The best example is the three statements on Baptism, Eucharist, and the Ministry adopted by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches at Lima in 1982.

Concerning theological dialogues with individual churches of the Protestant world, mention must be made of the meetings between theologians of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and the Church of Romania with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany, and the Lutheran Churches in the United States. Historical, biblical, eucharistic, and ecclesiological issues have been studied rather exhaustively in dialogues held in the last twenty years. The differences between Eastern Orthodox and Lutheran theologies are greater and more numerous than those between Orthodoxy and the churches of the catholic tradition.⁷³ Fewer but equally important

71. For Anglican-Orthodox relations see Methodios Fouyas, *Anglicanism-Orthodoxy-Roman Catholicism* (Brookline, Mass., 1984), esp. pp. 35-50, 64-8, 85-8 Also V. Istavridis *Orthodoxia kai Anglicanismos* (Athens, 1963)

72. For brief but comprehensive surveys see Michael Fahey, «Current Theology», pp. 654-60

73. *The Orthodox Church and the Churches of the Reformation: A Survey of Orthodox-*

D. Constantelos

meetings on an international and national level have been held between Eastern Orthodoxy and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.⁷⁴

There is little doubt that the Christian world has been involved in serious theological dialogue. Much progress has been achieved but differences accumulated in the course of centuries and historical circumstances cannot be resolved in the course of less than fifty years. Ecumenical dialogues should continue with renewed commitment and vigor.

7. THAT THE CHURCH MAY LIVE AND PROSPER – EPILOGUE

Eastern Orthodoxy today manifests considerable pluralism. The boundaries of Orthodoxy are broad enough to allow freedom of movement, change and renewal. Nevertheless, Orthodoxy reiterates the validity of Christian truths as they are stated in the Scriptures, accepted, defined, and lived by the Christian Community in history. Unity in diversity is a major characteristic of Orthodoxy.

Theological issues should be seen in the light of faith and life. Orthodox thought is cautious in making changes and less worried about the secular world that surrounds it. While it insists on preserving the content of the Faith, it has no difficulty in seeking new forms.

Maintaining a balance between antiquity and modernity, and preserving a historical theological consciousness is of absolute importance to the Orthodox Church. Church leaders are skeptical of reductionisms and relativisms and they insist on loyalty to the experience of the Church in history.

Loyalty to Tradition is not static but dynamic in the sense that it permits dialogue and renewal. Orthodox theology is committed to preserving the theology of undivided Christianity and indeed its identity but also to sharing its convictions and its perceptions with other Christian creeds and religious beliefs.

The present essay, however, was written by someone who has served and observed closely the work and problems of the Church in the United States for nearly forty years. And to live and serve in a multi-sectarian and pluralistic society, like the United States of America, is not like serving in a

Protestant Dialogues, ed. The World Council of Churches, Father and Order Paper no 76 (Geneva, 1975). For complete bibliography see Fahey, «Current Theology», pp. 656-59.

74. *Episkepsis*, 247 (1981), 7-15; T.F. Torrance «World Alliance of Reformed Churches: Official WARC Delegation to the Ecumenical Patriarchate» *Ekklesia kai Theologia*, 1 (1980) 197-211. For Orthodox-Reformed dialogues in America held in 1968 and 1970 see John Meyendorff and Joseph McLelland (eds.), *The New Man; An Orthodox and Reformed Dialogue*.

The Orthodox Church

religiously homogeneous state. And every state around the globe is becoming more and more multi-religious. Orthodox theologians in America have experiences which theologians and clergymen in more homogeneous nations cannot comprehend. The leadership of the Eastern Orthodox Churches the world over must take seriously into account the observations of theologians and churchmen serving in the United States, Canada, Australia, and elsewhere. What follows is a synopsis of concerns, ideas, and hopes to be realized, conveyed to this writer in a questionnaire he sent to several leading theologians, both laymen and clergymen, representing every ecclesiastical jurisdiction in North America.⁷⁵

Orthodox theologians in North America unanimously insist that we need frequent and in-depth inter-Orthodox dialogues, studies, cooperation, and theological education, more positive affirmations and less excuses and apologetics. Theological agendas must take into account the training of lay people not only for the administrative structure but the *diakonia* of the church in general, catechetical instruction, social services, music and other needs of the church in a world which is becoming more and more secularized.

Simple survival by way of tradition is far from enough. The future of Orthodoxy lies with people who are enlightened and convinced of the truth they possess in an uninterrupted and authentic historical Christianity.

Theological reconsiderations and ecclesiastical reforms are necessary in the sense that what was right for one age in the life of the Church is not necessarily right for another. The Church, not as clergy and monastics, but as ordinary people living in modern multisectarian and pluralistic societies. It is not infrequent that we find clergy of all ranks living in a world of their own. «Ecclesiastical conscience» is the conscience of the totality of believers. Thus the need for a practical interpretation of the church's theology and its relation to the rapidly changing world.

In the light of the problems that the Church faces today, the sacraments of matrimony and holy orders, the election of bishops, elevation of qualified married presbyters to the episcopal orders, post-ordination marriage, anachronistic canons, are subjects for study and reform. Neither younger theologians nor educated lay people today are impressed by triumphatisms and formalism, by the decision-making leadership who control and lord over the life of the Church's pleroma.

75. For specific names of Eastern Orthodox theologians in North America and their ideas and visions about the future of the Church see my essay in *Religious Issues and Interreligious Dialogues*, op cit; pp. 399-405.

D. Constantelos

Careful attention to liturgical reforms is necessary. The calendar issue has been unnecessarily divisive. The Sunday Scriptural readings can be rearranged so that the pericopes designated for each day of the week may be read in Sundays of a seven year cycle. Year in and year out the same Gospel and apostolic reading while with a change the faithful will listen to the same pericope every seven years and the priest will be given the opportunity for a variety of homilies and sermons.

Prayers in the Sacraments of Baptism and Marriage no longer relevant can be officially deleted instead of leaving it to the discretion of every priest. Neither bishops nor priests are consistent in their reading of exorcisms and prayers. The Sacrament of Holy Unction very seldom is performed by seven priests. With one celebrant of the sacrament, one set of prayers and pericopes suffice. Reconsiderations and reforms should be consistent with the scriptural and patristic tradition which has never been static and monolithic.

To be sure, there are theologians and others who believe that any reconsideration and reform would imply lack of faith in Orthodoxy. Reforms would encourage skepticism, relativism and doubts. But we would not be honest with ourselves if we insist that everything is perfect in Orthodoxy and that there is no need for reforms in several areas of our ecclesiastical and religious life. Rethinking was in the heart of Orthodoxy for many centuries. It is not survival that we should think about but the transmission of a vigorous and dynamic message – the affirmation of the Gospel of Christ, His teachings and creed as expounded in the Scriptures, the patristic and liturgical tradition, the experience of the Community of believers in history – the tested and living traditions of the past in the present.