

**THE RISE AND FALL OF CHRISTIAN ROME**

**Vladimir Moss**

**© Copyright. All Rights Reserved. Vladimir Moss, 2021.**

INTRODUCTION	4
<b><u>I. THE BIRTH OF NEW ROME (FOURTH CENTURY)</u></b>	5
1. ST. CONSTANTINE AND THE TRIUMPH OF THE CROSS	6
2. ST. CONSTANTINE AND THE NEW ROME	11
3. THE CONSTANTINIAN REVOLUTION: (1) THE HIERARCHICAL PRINCIPLE	20
4. THE CONSTANTINIAN REVOLUTION: (2) THE EMPEROR IN THE CHURCH	24
5. THE CONSTANTINIAN REVOLUTION: (3) THE STATE, CULTURE AND MONASTICISM	41
6. THE HERETICAL AND PAGAN REACTIONS	51
7. EMPEROR THEODOSIUS THE GREAT	58
8. THE CONSTANTINIAN REVOLUTION: (4) RELIGIOUS TOLERATION	62
<b><u>II. THE CHALLENGERS TO NEW ROME (FIFTH TO EIGHTH CENTURIES)</u></b>	70
9. THE FALL OF OLD ROME	71
10. JUSTINIAN THE GREAT AND THE UNITY OF THE FAITH	85
11. JUSTINIAN AND THE SYMPHONY OF POWERS	90
12. THE POSITION OF THE ROMAN PAPACY	97
13. THE SYMPHONY OF NATIONS	103
14. THE JEWS, THE PERSIANS AND ISLAM	109
15. THE DISSONANCE OF POWERS: (1) MONOTHELITISM	124
16. THE DISSONANCE OF POWERS: (2) ICONOCLASM	128
17. NEW ROME, OLD ROME AND THE FRANKS	132
<b><u>III. THE ZENITH OF NEW ROME (NINTH TO ELEVENTH CENTURIES)</u></b>	144
18. ST. PHOTIUS THE GREAT AND CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS	145
19. MIGHT AND RIGHT IN NEW ROME	152
20. NEW ROME AND THE BULGARIANS	160
21. NEW ROME, OLD ROME AND THE GERMANS	165
22. NEW ROME AND THE RUSSIANS	173
23. THE TRIUMPH OF BYZANTINISM	183

<b>24. THE RIGHTS OF THE ORTHODOX AUTOCRAT</b>	<b>189</b>
<b>25. THE SCHISM OF 1054 AND THE NORMANS</b>	<b>193</b>
<b><u>IV. THE DECLINE AND FALL OF NEW ROME (TWELFTH TO FIFTEENTH CENTURIES)</u></b>	<b>203</b>
<b>26. THE SLIDE TOWARDS ABSOLUTISM</b>	<b>204</b>
<b>27. THE FIRST FALL OF THE CITY</b>	<b>213</b>
<b>28. NEW ROME AND THE GEORGIANS</b>	<b>225</b>
<b>29. NEW ROME AND THE SERBS</b>	<b>230</b>
<b>30. NEW ROME AND THE UNIA</b>	<b>233</b>
<b>31. THE SERBIAN REBELLION</b>	<b>242</b>
<b>32. ST. GREGORY PALAMAS AND THE HESYCHAST CONTROVERSY</b>	<b>251</b>
<b>33. ST. SERGIUS OF RADONEZH AND THE RISE OF MUSCOVY</b>	<b>254</b>
<b>34. THE CRISIS OF NEW ROMAN STATEHOOD</b>	<b>264</b>
<b>35. THE COUNCIL OF FLORENCE</b>	<b>275</b>
<b>36. ST. MARK OF EPHESUS AND THE ANTI-UNIATES</b>	<b>279</b>
<b>37. RUSSIA AND THE COUNCIL OF FLORENCE</b>	<b>283</b>
<b>38. THE FALL OF CONSTANTINOPLE</b>	<b>287</b>
<b><u>APPENDIX. THE GREAT IDEA</u></b>	<b>298</b>

## INTRODUCTION

The foundational culture and civilization of Europe is *Christian Rome*, otherwise known as Constantinople, New Rome or Byzantium. All the nations of Europe that received the faith in the first millennium received it either directly from Christian Rome or from one of its offshoots. They inherited from Christian Rome their faith - Orthodox Christianity, their statehood - the Byzantine "symphony of powers", and their earliest music, art and architecture. This is as true of Western Europe as of Eastern Europe, although the Christian nations of Western Europe underwent a certain corruption of their Byzantine inheritance towards the end of the first Christian millennium, and fell away from the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church in the second half of the eleventh century. Although the West, following through on the "illogical logic" of its corruption of its Byzantine heritage, now constitutes a quite different civilization from that of the East, it is impossible to understand it without examining its Orthodox Christian roots.

This book is a study of the origins of Christian Rome in the fourth century, its zenith in the early Middle Ages, and its final decline and fall through the Muslim conquest of Constantinople in 1453. In an appendix the "great idea" of the revival of Christian Rome during the nineteenth-century Greek revolution is examined.

*October 12/25, 2020.*

*Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the Seven Ecumenical Councils.*

*I. THE BIRTH OF NEW ROME (FOURTH CENTURY)*

## 1. ST. CONSTANTINE AND THE TRIUMPH OF THE CROSS

In spite of its paganism, Christ had recognized Roman power as legitimate, as established by God. However, when He brought Constantine the Great to the throne, He gave it rebirth, raised it to a new and much higher spiritual level, and enabled it to become an instrument of His will in a much broader and more direct way.

After the abdication of Diocletian and Maximian, the empire was ruled by the former Caesars, now Augusti, Galerius in the East and Constantius Chlorus in the West with Maximinus Daia and Severus as their Caesars.

The first task of Constantius, the father of Constantine, as Caesar had been, as Nigel Rodgers writes, “to remove the separatist Carausius from Boulogne in AD 293 and then invaded Britain in AD 296. His troops reached London in time to stop Frankish mercenaries sacking it, which so pleased Londoners that they struck a medal hailing Constantius as the ‘restorer of light’. A restoration of the whole province followed, ushering in a prosperous half century. Nine years later, Constantius, now a full Augustus, returned to Britain and led a campaign to crush the Picts, before returning to York to die of illness in July 306. Constantius was notably tolerant in religious matters, ignoring the great persecution of Christians started by Galerius and Diocletian. He was a worshipper of the *Sol Invictus* (the Unconquered Sun), a form of solar monotheism popular in the army of the time.”<sup>1</sup>

After Constantius’ death, on July 25, the Roman troops in York proclaimed his son Constantine emperor.<sup>2</sup> Yet another rebellion from the empire by the Roman army in Britain? Not this time: Constantine was a legal emperor, or at any rate, Caesar. He now made his capital Trier in Gaul.

Meanwhile, in the East, “orders were given,” writes Arthur Mason, “to inflict the sentence of death more sparingly; but the humanity which dictated this decree betrayed itself by prescribing that dreadful mutilations should take the place of death, and hundreds of unfortunate Christians were condemned to lose an eye or a foot, and in this miserable condition were set to work in the mines and quarries, as slaves of the imperial treasury. At last, in 311, when Galerius lay dying of a terrible disease, he published a strange edict of toleration, in which he began by explaining why the persecution had been undertaken, then confessed that it had completely failed of its object, and ended by requesting the Christians to pray for him.”<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Rodgers, *The Rise and Fall of Ancient Rome*, London: Lorenz Books, 2004, p. 74.

<sup>2</sup> The place, under York Minster, where Constantine was proclaimed emperor, and the Christian Roman Empire began has now been excavated by archaeologists.

<sup>3</sup> Mason, *The Historic Martyrs of the Primitive Church*, London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1900, p. 323. Galerius declared his faith in Christ after witnessing a miracle of the Martyrs Cosmas and Damian (Gilbert Dagron, *Empereur et Prêtre* (Emperor and Priest), Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1996, pp. 142-143)

In 312, after consolidating his power in Western Europe outside Italy, Constantine defeated Maxentius' forces in northern Italy and then marched on Rome to fight Maxentius himself. Just before the fateful battle of the Milvian Bridge, outside Rome, he had a vision, which was described slightly differently by Eusebius, his religious advisor, and Lactantius, the tutor of his sons. Although the two accounts differ, Peter Leithart has convincingly shown that they can both be accepted as true, referring as they probably did to two different events following one after the other...<sup>4</sup>

As Marta Sordi writes, while Constantine is praying, "he calls on his father's god, begging him to reveal himself and to stretch out his right hand to help him. While he is praying, an extraordinary vision appears to him, a vision – says Eusebius – that 'had it been told me by anyone else than Constantine himself, I would not have believed'. As the day was on the wane, he saw above the sun a trophy in the form of a cross made of light, and writing which said 'With this, conquer'. He was utterly amazed, as was the whole army which was marching with him and which – it is still Constantine speaking – had also seen the vision. Full of doubts, he asked himself what this vision could possibly mean. Night came, and God's Christ appeared to him in a dream with the same sign as had appeared in the sky, exhorting him to make a similar one and to use it as defence against his enemies. The next day, Constantine discussed the affair with all his friends, had the sign constructed (Chapter 31 gives a description of the famous *labarum*) and took the decision to 'honour no other god than the One he had seen'... He then called for the 'initiates of that doctrine' – the Greek word here is *mystai*, and the allusion may be to Ossius of Cordoba – and asked them who this God was and what was the meaning of the words of the vision. They answered that he had seen the only begotten Son of the one and only God and that the sign was a sign of immortality and a trophy of victory over death..."<sup>5</sup>

Constantine had the pagan standards removed and the Christian one with the *chi-rho*, the so-called *Labarum*, put in their place. The result was an easy victory over the much larger army of Maxentius. The next day, October 29, Constantine entered Rome and was hailed as Emperor of the West.<sup>6</sup> Breaking with tradition, on entering Rome Constantine refused to offer sacrifice to the pagan gods, and in particular to Jupiter in the Capitol. By this controversial and courageous act, he demonstrated for all those with eyes of see that his conversion to Christianity was completely sincere.

---

<sup>4</sup> Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2010, chapter 4; Eusebius, *On the Life of Constantine*, I, 28; quoted in John Julius Norwich, *Byzantium: The Early Centuries*, London: Penguin, 1990, p. 39. See Jan Bremmer, "The Vision of Constantine", <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal/files/9899550/Bremmer-CONSTANTINE.pdf>. Much later, in the reign of Julian the Apostate, the Martyrs Eusebius and Artemius confirmed the truth of this vision, having been witnesses of it themselves.

<sup>5</sup> Sordi, *The Christians and the Roman Empire*, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 140.

<sup>6</sup> Timothy D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, London & Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981, p. 43.

“And because Constantine made no supplication to evil spirits,” wrote St. Augustine, “but worshipped only the true God, he enjoyed a life more favoured by marks of worldly prosperity than anyone would have dared imagine was possible.”<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, he was not slow to ascribe his victory to Christ and the Cross: “In the royal city he raised this sacred standard and inscribed definitely and indelibly that this saving sign is the preserver of the Roman Empire and the whole kingdom. But when in the most crowded place of Rome they raised a statue to him, he immediately ordered that a long spear in the shape of a cross be put in the hand of his representation and that the following inscription be written word for word in Latin: ‘By this saving and famous sign, the true witness of courage, I saved and liberated your city from the yoke of tyranny, and on liberating it, returned to the Roman senate and people its freedom, its former glory and its celebrity.’”<sup>8</sup>

He continued to experience the power of the Cross throughout his reign. Thus “wherever the sign of the cross was shown, enemies were turned to flight, while the victors pursued them. When the Emperor heard about this, he ordered the saving sign, as being the most genuine means of victory, to be transferred to the place where he saw one of his regiments weakening. Immediately victory was restored to it, because the warriors at the sight of it were strengthened by a vigour and a power sent from on high.”<sup>9</sup>

In 313 St. Constantine met the new emperor of the East, Licinius, at Milan, and with him proclaimed an Edict of religious toleration: “Our purpose is to grant both to the Christians and to all others full authority to follow whatever worship each man has desired; whereby whatsoever divinity dwells in heaven may be benevolent and propitious to us, and to all who are placed under our authority”.<sup>10</sup>

As Fr. Alexis Nikolin writes: “The Edict of Milan decisively rejected many traditions of antiquity. St. Constantine clearly proclaimed that Christianity is not the property of any particular people, but is a universal religion, the religion of the whole of humanity. If formerly it was thought that a given religion belongs to a given people and for that reason it is sacred and untouchable, now the lawgiver affirmed a new principle: that the sacred and untouchable religion was that religion which belonged to all peoples – Christianity. It was obviously not an attempt to bring Christianity under the usual (pagan) juridical forms, but a principled change in those forms.”<sup>11</sup>

As a result, as Eusebius of Caesarea wrote: “Divine joy blossomed in all hearts as we saw that every place which a little while before had been reduced

---

<sup>7</sup> St. Augustine, *The City of God*, 5.25.

<sup>8</sup> Eusebius, *On the Life of Constantine*, I, 40.

<sup>9</sup> Eusebius, *On the Life of Constantine*, II, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Lactantius, *On the Deaths of the Persecutors*, 48. 2-12.

<sup>11</sup> Nikolin, *Tserkov' i Gosudarstvo* (Church and State), Moscow, 1997, p. 27.

to dust by the tyrants' wickedness was now, as if from a prolonged and deadly stranglehold, coming back to life; and that cathedrals were again rising from their foundations high into the air, and far surpassing in magnitude those previously destroyed by the enemy. Emperors, too, the most exalted (Constantine and Licinius) by a succession of ordinances in favour of the Christians, confirmed still further and more surely the blessings God showered upon us; and a stream of personal letters from the emperor reached the bishops, accompanied by honours and gifts of money. Old troubles were forgotten, and all irreligion passed into oblivion; good things present were enjoyed, those yet to come eagerly awaited. In every city the victorious emperor published decrees full of humanity and laws that gave proof of munificence and true piety. Thus all tyranny had been purged away, and the kingdom that was theirs was preserved securely and without question for Constantine and his sons alone."<sup>12</sup>

However, persecution of Christians did not immediately cease in the East. After Galerius' death in 311, persecution continued under Maximinus Daia; and Licinius, in spite of signing the Edict of Milan, was still a pagan devoted to Jupiter. So when Licinius turned from toleration to persecution of Christians, beheading St. Basil, Bishop of Amasea, in 322, Constantine declared war and defeated him at Chrysopolis, opposite Byzantium, in 324. Now the whole of the East as far as the borders of Persia came within Constantine's dominion, and all persecution of the faith came to an end...

And yet the Triumph of the Cross under St. Constantine proved, paradoxically, that God does not need Christian kings in order to save the world. They help – they help greatly. But for almost three centuries from the Resurrection of Christ the Church had survived and grown in the teeth of everything that Jewish and pagan fury could hurl against her, and without the help of any earthly forces.

For, as Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow wrote: "there is benefit in the union of the altar and the throne, but it is not mutual benefit that is the first foundation of their union, but independent truth, which supports both the one and the other. May the king, the protector of the altar, be blessed; but the altar does not fear the fall of this protection. The priest is right who preaches that the king should be honoured, but not by right of mutuality, but by pure obligation, even if this took place without the hope of mutuality... Constantine the Great came to the altar of Christ when it already stood on the expanses of Asia, Europe and Africa: he came, not in order to support it with his strength, but in order to submit himself with his majesty before its Holiness. He Who dwells in the heavens laughed at those who later thought of lowering His Divine religion to dependence on human assistance. In order to make their sophistry laughable, He waited for three centuries before calling the wise king to the altar of Christ. Meanwhile, from day to day king, peoples, wise men, power, art, cupidity, cunning and rage rose up to destroy this altar. And what happened in the end?

---

<sup>12</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, X, 2, 10.

All this has disappeared, while the Church of Christ stands – but not because it is supported by human power...”<sup>13</sup>

Tertullian had said in the third century, “The world may need its Caesars. But the Emperor can never be a Christian, nor a Christian ever be an Emperor.”<sup>14</sup> How wrong he was! In response to the patience and prayer and martyric sacrifices of the Christians, the most powerful, secular and pagan element in Old Roman society, the very apex of its antichristian system, was transfigured into an instrument of the Grace of God.

“The kingdom of this world”, it seemed, had become “the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ” (Revelation 11.15).

---

<sup>13</sup> Metropolitan Philaret, in Lev Regelson, *Tragedia Russkoj Tserkvi, 1917-1945* (The Tragedy of the Russian Church, 1917-1945), Paris: YMCA Press, 1977, p. 23.

<sup>14</sup> Tertullian, in Peter de Rosa, *Vicars of Christ*, London: Bantam Press, 1988, p. 155.

## 2. ST. CONSTANTINE AND THE NEW ROME

“It would be no exaggeration,” writes Protopresbyter James Thornton, “to call the reign of Saint Constantine a genuine revolution, particularly from the standpoint of religion. The *Synaxarion* for May 21, the day of his commemoration, states that the Church was ‘able to inspire governors and profoundly transform the lives of men and states with the inbreathing of evangelical principles’. However, the Christian revolution was a peaceful revolution, a revolution from above, one that retained all that was wholesome from pagan antiquity – for example art, architecture, literature, and law -, while slowly extinguishing that which was spiritually noxious, unworthy, or morally debilitating. It wisely left essentially untouched the Roman societal structure and the economic system, anticipating their gradual evolution towards the good, under the influence of Christian teaching. Yet, it was a revolution that imbued the Empire with renewed life...”<sup>15</sup>

It was indeed a renewal, a *Renovatio Imperii*. In this respect, it can be compared with the reign of the first Roman emperor, Augustus. Both Augustus and Constantine aimed at a renewal of the empire through *a reformation of faith, morals and politics*. However, Constantine’s renewal was more radical, more long-lasting and less hypocritical. From a purely political and administrative point of view, their aims were very similar: both wanted to restore *one-man rule* and consolidate the boundaries of the empire rather than expand them; but Constantine was much more open about the nature of his autocracy, with less reverence for the senate and the established elites, and without any of the pretence of democracy that Augustus employed. In morals, both emperors came down hard on family members who violated their strict rules of sexual morality. Both emphasized that they were peace-makers, but Constantine, after destroying the enemies of peace within the empire, brought not only peace on earth, but peace (for Christians) with heaven. Augustus boasted that he had found Rome a city built of brick, and left it built of marble, but Constantine built a completely new capital while adorning Old Rome with beautiful churches instead of pagan temples. Augustus revived paganism, being ignorant of the True God Who was born in his realm in his time, while Constantine, condemned pagan sacrifices to the demons, protected Christianity through many laws and the convening of church councils, and placed the True God at the head of the corner of the whole of political life.

Fr. George Florovsky writes: “The Age of Constantine is commonly regarded as a turning point of Christian history. After a protracted struggle with the Church, the Roman Empire at last capitulated. The Caesar himself was converted, and humbly applied for admission into the Church. Religious freedom was formally promulgated, and was emphatically extended to Christians. The confiscated property was returned to Christian communities. Those Christians who suffered disability and deportation in the years of

---

<sup>15</sup> Thornton, *Pious Kings and Right-Believing Queens*, Belmont, Mass.: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 2013, p. 97.

persecution were now ordered back, and were received with honors. In fact, Constantine was offering to the Church not only peace and freedom, but also protection and close cooperation. Indeed, he was urging the Church and her leaders to join with him in the 'Renovation' of the Empire... Constantine was firmly convinced that, by Divine Providence, he was entrusted with a high and holy mission, that he was chosen to re-establish the Empire, and to re-establish it on a Christian foundation. This conviction, more than any particular theory, was the decisive factor in his policy, and in his actual mode of ruling."<sup>16</sup>

Justly, then, did Fr. John Meyendorff say of St. Constantine that "no single human being in history has contributed, directly or indirectly, to the conversion of so many to the Christian faith..."<sup>17</sup> It is paradoxical, therefore, that in spite of his vast - indeed, unprecedented - achievements, St. Constantine has received a remarkably bad press. He has been accused of being the originator of "Caesaropapism", of causing the fall of the very Church that he saved from destruction, even of a supposed "heresy of Constantinianism"...<sup>18</sup>

Constantine not only renewed the empire from within through the power of the Cross: he transformed the very ideology of empire, and the relationship of Rome to other kingdoms and empires. He presented a new ideal of kingship which, even if rarely realized in later centuries, nevertheless changed the nature and language of politics forever. Some Christian kings would still act like pagans, but they could no longer appeal to pagan ideals.

The pagan Roman empire was founded on the familiar fallen passions of love of glory and love of power. Excuses were neither given nor sought for invading neighbouring territories, killing thousands of innocent "barbarians", and seizing their lands and property. Nations that resisted Roman power, such as the Carthaginians and the Jews and the Britons, were treated with vengeful cruelty. Julius Caesar's extraordinarily bloody conquest of Gaul is a typical example of how the Roman empire was enlarged. Glory was the aim; that needed no justification. A British chieftain had summed up the Romans' "achievement" at least until Augustus tried to civilize them: "They are the robbers of the world... If their enemy is opulent, they are greedy for wealth; if he is poverty-stricken, they are eager for glory... They alone out of everyone lust for wealth and war with equal passion. They call plunder, murder and rape by the spurious names of 'empire', and where they make a desert they call it 'peace'."<sup>19</sup>

Constantine tried to change this bloody tradition, which was, of course, dominant throughout the pagan world. Although an experienced and highly successful soldier himself, who did not flinch from extreme measures when he

---

<sup>16</sup> Florovsky, "Antinomies of Christian History: Empire and Desert", *Christianity and Culture*, Belmont, Mass.: Nordland, 1974, pp. 72, 74.

<sup>17</sup> Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989, p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> Peter Leithart, *op. cit.* p. 250, note 61.

<sup>19</sup> Tacitus, *Agricola*, 30.4, in Kershaw, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

considered them necessary, he glorified true peace rather than war, the glory of Christ rather than his own or Rome's, and while defending the boundaries of the empire, undertook no offensive campaigns beyond them. The one apparent exception to this rule proved it; it only went to prove that the imperial ideology really had changed.

The one apparent exception was *Persia*, the age-old rival of Rome in the East, which had deeply humiliated Rome by defeating, capturing and humiliating the Emperor Valerian before killing him in 260.

Constantine had been preparing an expedition against Persia just before he died in 337. At first sight, writes Leithart, "Constantine's abortive Persian conquest looks like another Roman adventure driven by sacrificial frenzy, vengeance and a desire to keep enemies in their subordinate place. Yet there are hints that between 306 and the 330s something had changed. Sometime before, Constantine had written a 'tactful, allusive, and indirect' letter in his own hand to Shapur. Addressing the Persian king as a 'brother', he summarized the 'most holy religion' that had given him 'deeper acquaintance with the most holy God'. Finding common ground with nonsacrificial Persian Zoroastrian practice, Constantine emphasized that the 'God I invoke with bended knees' is horrified by 'the blood of sacrifices' and recoils from 'their foul and detestable odors.' The sacrifice he craves is 'purity of mind and an undefiled spirit' that manifests itself in 'works of moderation and gentleness'. 'He loves the meek,' Constantine continued, 'and hates the turbulent spirit.... While the arrogant and haughty are utterly overthrown, he requites the humble and forgiving with deserved rewards.'

"The purpose of the letter was to advise Shapur about how to deal with the sizable Christian community in his own realm. [He exhorted him to "cherish them with your customary humanity and kindness; for by this proof of faith you will secure an immeasurable benefit both to yourself and us".] Constantine was an eyewitness of 'the end of those who lately harassed the worshippers of God by their impious edicts,' and he warned Shapur not to follow their example. Everything is 'best and safest' when men follow God's laws and recognize that God is at work through the church, endeavouring to 'gather all men to himself'. He expressed his joy at hearing that Persia was full of Christians, and he closed the letter with a prayer that 'you and they may enjoy abundant prosperity, and that your blessings and theirs may be in equal measure,' so that 'you will experience the mercy and favor of that God who is the Lord and Father of all.'

"Constantine's letter has been called a 'veiled warning' and has been interpreted as a provocation, a threat and a sign of his belief that as Roman emperor he had responsibility for all Christians. Constantine's Persian policies certainly backfired. He initiated his final campaign when a delegation from Armenia visited Constantinople in 336 to ask him for assistance against a Persian coup. Since the conversion of the Armenian king Trdat (Tiridates) in 314, Armenia had been officially Christian, more explicitly so than was the

Roman Empire under Constantine. In the 330s, Persians under Shapur II had invaded, captured and blinded the Armenian King Tirhan, and placed Shapur's brother Narseh on the Armenian throne. Constantine responded swiftly. He designated his nephew Hannibalianus as 'king of kings' and gave him authority over Armenia and Pontus. Like his letter, his preparations for war with Persia were intended, among other things, to defend a Christian people. When Constantine died before the campaign could be launched, Shapur, apparently suspicious that the Christians of Persia were allied with Rome, initiated a violent persecution. Persian Christians, in response, kept themselves aloof from the dominant orthodoxy of the West.

"Yet I cannot agree that the letter to Shapur was intended as a provocation. Constantine warned Shapur, but he warned him of divine judgement, not that he would personally take vengeance if Shapur were to attack Christians. In the closing section Constantine issued an altar call, inviting Shapur to protect Christians and to join him in worship of the high God, the God of the Christians. Hermann Dorries summarizes the message of the letter as an invitation to share in the blessing of Christianization: 'what the true faith had done for the Roman Empire,' Constantine urged, 'it would do also for the Persian.' It was an unprecedented diplomatic move - a Roman emperor who 'attributed his success to heavenly assistance... invited his only formidable enemy to share in this aid.' More broadly, the letter reveals how far Constantine had moved from tetrarchic political theology. For Diocletian 'religion and nation meant the same thing,' but for Constantine there was a potential unity, even between East and West, even between Persia and Rome, that transcended boundaries and national interests..."<sup>20</sup>

This is an insightful and true remark, and if anything underestimates the revolutionary character of Constantine's new imperial ideology. Pagan religion and politics were irredeemably *particularist*. The pagan gods protected particular men and cities or states against other men, cities and states that were protected by other gods. And if pagan Rome had a policy of including as many local gods as possible into its "pantheon" (which means "all gods"), this did not alter the fundamentally particularist nature of Roman paganism. Christianity was difficult to absorb within this structure not only because the Christians refused to sacrifice to the pagan gods, but also because their God was of a totally different kind - universal, completely all-encompassing, and infinitely above everything that can be called "god", "far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come" (Ephesians 1.21). Moreover, this God claimed dominion not only over Rome but also over all the kingdoms of men...

When Constantine came to power, being a sincere, determined and deeply thoughtful Christian, he sought to adapt the Roman political theology to its new God, making it truly *universalist*. Scornfully rejecting all divine honours

---

<sup>20</sup> Leithart, *op. cit.*, pp. 246-247.

for himself, he sought to subdue himself and all his subjects to the true King of kings. But this also transformed his relationship with other kings, such as Shapur of Persia. For Shapur, too, had been given his dominion by God, making him and Constantine no longer rivals, but “brothers”, as Constantine himself put it – if not in Christ, at any rate in kingship, as political rulers established by God. But this had the further consequence that extension of the empire by the former bloody and rapacious methods was no longer acceptable. Only if Shapur maltreated his Christian subjects or other Christians, such as the Armenians, could Constantine intervene on the assumption that Shapur had now ceased to be his brother in kingship, having “disestablished” himself from God. Now Christian love compelled Constantine to go to war to defend his brothers in Christ. The Gospel, not glory or *realpolitik*, would now govern his actions.

\*

But where did this leave the Roman Empire? No longer unique, but just one kingdom among many? Not quite. If all legitimate political authorities have been established as such by God, and there is no genuine authority that has not been thus established (Romans 13.1), this would appear to place all authorities essentially on the same level. But the Roman Empire remained unique in that Christ had been born in it and God had chosen the empire also to be the birthplace and seed-plot of His Church. This gave it a certain uniqueness, seniority and prestige in the eyes of all Christians, even those who lived in other polities and therefore owed obedience to other authorities. In this sense, therefore, it became *the universal empire*. But this did not mean that the empire was destined to become *the ruler of all nations*, as some later Byzantines tended to think: it meant that the Roman Empire would be, as long as it lasted, the “first among equals” among Christian states, and therefore the object of *universal veneration* by the Christians of all nations.

Another consequence was that the Roman Empire now had a special obligation to spread the Gospel to other kingdoms. And Constantine was fully alive to his missionary calling. As Leithart writes, he “had a deep sense of historical destiny, and as a result his foreign policy was guided in part by the desire to extend the church’s reach. He envisioned a universal empire united in confession of the Nicene Creed, an empire that would have a symbolic center in the Church on Golgotha in Jerusalem and that would stretch to India and Ethiopia and someday include even Persia. But Constantine did not necessarily regard annexation into the Roman empire as an essential element of that vision. He seems instead to have envisioned a Christian commonwealth. Perhaps the empire would have remained dominant, but in Constantine’s cosmopolitan mind it would not have been coextensive with ‘Christ’s dominion’.

“Though he probably did not impose Christianity on conquered Goths, his triumphs among the Goths assisted the spread of Christianity. After his victory in 332, Bishop Ulfila was consecrated and sent as a missionary in Gothic territory. Churches were also established in the ‘Mountain Arena’, the Arab

territories that served as a buffer between the empire and Persia. Eusebius mentions Arab Christian communities, and there was an Arab bishop at the council of Nicaea. Further east in Iberia (Georgia) there were Christians, and to the south Ethiopia (Aksum) also became Christian under Ezana... Armenia became officially Christian shortly after Constantine defeated Maxentius. By the time he died, Constantine had left behind a 'universal Christian commonwealth embracing Armenians, Iberians, Arabs, and Aksumites that continued to take form under his Byzantine successors. This was *not*, it should be noted, an extension of Roman governance; it is rather that Roman imperial order had been reshaped, to some degree, by the demands of Christian mission..."<sup>21</sup>

The demands of Christian mission in the East, and the need to protect Eastern Christians from pagan Persia, necessitated moving the capital of the empire further east. Thus "Colchis [Western Georgia]." Writes Bettany Hughes, "only returned to the Hellenic world when Emperor Constantine moved his capital to Byzantium-Constantinople."<sup>22</sup> Let us look briefly at this missionary land.

"The Christian history of Georgia begins at the time of our Lord's Crucifixion. The Jewish community in the old capital of Mtskheta - which had taken refuge in Georgia during the time of Nebuchadnezzar - sent two of its rabbis, Elioiz and Longinos, to pass judgement on the Savior. When the Jewish leaders returned, they brought back the Lord's robe, one of the most sacred relics of the Church. Today it rests beneath the Svetitskhoveli Cathedral in Mtskheta.

"In the decades that followed, the Apostles Andrew, Simon the Zealot and Matthias proclaimed the Gospel in Georgia. Although the seeds of Christianity were planted in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, it was not until the 4<sup>th</sup> century that the conversion of Georgia occurred. In 323 the virgin Nino (Nina) arrived from Jerusalem, having been sent by the Mother of God to evangelize the country. Through her labors King Mirian (265-342) and Queen Nana accepted baptism and proclaimed Christianity as the state religion in 326. The Byzantine held dominion in the region, and Emperor Constantine the Great (306-337) sent a bishop and priests to baptize Georgia along with architects to construct churches. Shortly thereafter the first bishop of Georgia was consecrated at Antioch, signaling the birth of the Georgian Church under the See of Antioch."<sup>23</sup>

\*

---

<sup>21</sup> Leithart, *op. cit.*, p. 288.

<sup>22</sup> Donald Rayfield, *Edge of Empires: A History of Georgia*, London: Reaktion, 2012, p. 36.

<sup>23</sup> Riassophor Monk Adrian, in Archpriest Zakaria Machitadze, *Lives of the Georgian Saints*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2006, p. 18.

Let us now look at Constantine's most ambitious project, his transfer of his capital from Old Rome in Italy to the New Rome of Constantinople... While his *renovatio imperii* had some precedent in Augustus' reign, the *translatio imperii* that Constantine effected in 324 was absolutely unprecedented – and elicited predictable hostility from the old capital of the world. For “as an open patron of the Christians,” writes St. Dmitri of Rostov, “Constantine was little loved in Rome, where many pagan rituals and customs were still entrenched. Nor did he himself love Rome, with its pantheon of gods, where almost automatically the heathen gods of all subject peoples were gathered, and he rarely visited the old capital. The Romans, though grateful to the one who had delivered them from the tyranny of Maxentius, did not understand and were not able properly to appreciate the accomplishments of the Emperor; in him they saw a destroyer of their old national order, an enemy of their religion, which was closely bound up with the political majesty of Rome.

“Their displeasure and complaints, their plots and even at times open revolts, were the reason why Constantine conceived the idea of founding a new capital for himself, a Christian city which would in nowise be bound up with paganism.”<sup>24</sup>

The site he chose (after a Divine revelation) was the old Greek colony of Byzantium on the European side of the Bosphorus, opposite the site of his victory over Licinius at Chrysopolis in 324. He called the new city Constantinople. The future glory of Constantinople had been foreshadowed already in the reign of Septimius Severus, who, while beautifying the city, had constructed a monument in it called the Milion, from which all distances in the Roman Empire were measured.<sup>25</sup>

Now, as Hughes writes, Constantine built “a new palace tumbling down the hillside to the sea, he extended the hippodrome, introduced a grid-system of streets, a circular forum, a Senate house [with 300 senators], at least two churches, a new mint, a series of splendid private houses, inviting in high-ranking Romans from across the empire to occupy them... And protecting all this he reinforced the city walls. St. John might have described Old Rome as ‘Babylon’, but the New Rome was a vigorous start for a new kind of Christian metropolis...

“This city that Constantine had called Constantinoupolis was, simply, God-given – or, as the Emperor put it, ‘given to him by the command of God’.”<sup>26</sup>

Constantinople was strategically situated to unite East and West, embracing both like the arms of the Cross. Protected towards the west by huge fortifications, and to the east by the Bosphorus, it also protected all the wealthy and populous eastern provinces of the empire from invaders coming across the

---

<sup>24</sup> *The Menology of St. Demetrius of Rostov*, 1908, vol. 10, May 21.

<sup>25</sup> Hughes, *Istanbul. A Tale of Three Cities*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2017, pp. 66-67.

<sup>26</sup> Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

Danube from the north. Constantinople, then, was to be, as St. Gregory the Theologian said, “a bond of union between East and West to which the most distant extremes from all sides are to come together, and to which they look up as the common centre and emporium of their faith.”<sup>27</sup>

At the same time, Constantine tried hard to transform the old capital into a Christian city: the two oldest and greatest churches, St. Peter’s on the Vatican Hill and St. John’s by the Lateran Palace, were his foundations. But Old Rome, in contrast to many of her individual citizens, had never been baptized. There was a pagan rottenness at her heart that even its Christian head, the Emperor, was not able to cut out.<sup>28</sup> By making a fresh start for the newly Christianized empire in his New Rome, St. Constantine implicitly declared that Old Rome was irredeemable.

The symbolism of his act was clear: if the state, like the individual man, was to be redeemed and enjoy a long and spiritually fruitful life, it, too, had to make a complete break with the past, renounce the demonic sacrifices and pagan gods and philosophies that it had loved, and receive a new birth by water and the Spirit. In fact, New Rome quickly filled up with pagan statues and monuments to serve the needs of its pagan citizens. But this did not change the aim and the symbol, and the blood sacrifices to the demons remained banned.<sup>29</sup>

But the crowning glory of Constantine’s reign was his mother St. Helena’s finding of the True Cross, which led him to build the Church of the Holy Sepulchre over both Golgotha and the site of the Resurrection of Christ. The church was dedicated with great splendour and a great concourse of bishops in 336. And a new church feast, the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, was established to commemorate the event, to celebrate the victory of the Cross that Constantine had seen in the heavens, and its triumph over the darkness of the pagan Roman empire. The date of the feast was appointed as September 14. It is one of the twelve feasts of the Orthodox Church year, and the only one that does not commemorate a major event in the life of Christ or the Mother of God...

\*

St. Constantine died at midday on Pentecost, 337 shortly after receiving Holy Baptism, according to Eusebius<sup>30</sup>, and was buried in the church of the Holy

---

<sup>27</sup> St. Gregory, in Michael Grant, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, London: Phoenix, 1997, p. 198.

<sup>28</sup> Dirk Bennett, “Ecstasy in Late Imperial Rome”, *History Today*, vol. 48 (10), October, 1998, pp. 27-32.

<sup>29</sup> Judith Herrin, *Women in Purple: Rulers of Medieval Byzantium*, London: Phoenix Press, 2001, p. 11. “Let superstition cease,” decreed Constantine’s successor Constantius. “Let the madness of the sacrifices be exterminated, for if anyone should dare to celebrate sacrifices in violation of our father, the deified Emperor [i.e., Constantine], and of this decree of Our Clemency, let an appropriate punishment and sentence immediately be inflicted on him” (in Kershaw, *op. cit.*, p. 320).

<sup>30</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea writes that Constantine was baptized by Eusebius of Nicomedia, who was an Arian (albeit a secret one at that time). However, this has been disputed from early

Apostles amidst the sepulchres of the twelve apostles. For in his person the Church had indeed found an "equal to the apostles"; he came to power when about 10% of the empire was Christian: at his death the figure was about 30%.<sup>31</sup> In his reign the process of converting the world that began at the first Pentecost reached its first climax...

Why did he leave his baptism so late? Was it because ruling the empire involved committing so much violence that he had to put off baptism until as late as possible? This violence had included executing his own wife Fausta and son Crispus for adultery... Or perhaps he had to repent of still more serious sins – sins against the faith that his position as Roman emperor had made almost inevitable... Thus Florovsky writes that one of the reasons why he delayed his baptism "was precisely his dim feeling that it was inconvenient to be 'Christian' and 'Caesar' at the same time. Constantine's personal conversion constituted no problem. But as Emperor he was committed. He had to carry the burden of his exalted position in the Empire. He was still a 'Divine Caesar'. As Emperor, he was heavily involved in the traditions of the Empire, as much as he actually endeavoured to disentangle himself. The transfer of the Imperial residence to a new City, away from the memories of the old pagan Rome, was a spectacular symbol of this noble effort."<sup>32</sup>...

Constantine's actions at the very end can also be seen as a kind of final sermon and testament in symbolical language. After his baptism he put off the imperial purple, never to put it on again – for the kingdoms of this world pass away, never to return. But then he put on the shining white baptismal robe, never to take it off again – for the Kingdom of God, which is not of this world, abides forever...

---

times. Thus the *Chronicle* of St. Theophanes dismisses the claims of Eusebius of Caesarea as Arian lies. The sixth-century author John Malalas says he was baptized by St. Sylvester, Pope of Rome. And the *Life of St. Sylvester of Rome* written in the early 400s says that St. Sylvester baptized St. Constantine. This theory can also be found in the liturgical texts for St. Constantine's feast in the *Menaion* (Hieromonk Enoch).

<sup>31</sup> Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

<sup>32</sup> Florovsky, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

### 3. THE CONSTANTINIAN REVOLUTION: (1) THE HIERARCHICAL PRINCIPLE

The Constantinian revolution was multifaceted and gradual, continuing for centuries after Constantine's death. But it changed by no means everything. The hierarchical principle that was so characteristic of Old Rome, both republican and imperial, according to which "individuals might rise to greatness, ancient families might decline, yet through it all the faith in hierarchy endured unchanging"<sup>33</sup>, remained unchanged in the New Rome. Constantine was no democrat, and by abolishing the tetrarchy he reasserted one-man-rule, while society as a whole remained patriarchal. The real change was in the idea that the State and its prosperity were no longer the highest values. For above the State was the Church, and the State existed in order to serve the Church, not vice-versa.

The hierarchical principle remained unchanged because it was fully in accordance with Christian teaching. For the Apostles did not only preach obedience to the emperor: they extended the hierarchical principle to every level of society. Thus "be subject for the Lord's sake," says St. Peter, "to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and praise those who do right..." (I Peter 2.13).

This included even the institution of slavery: "Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the forward" (I Peter 2.18). St. Paul told his disciple, Onesimus, a slave, to return to his master, and said: "Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and His doctrine be not blasphemed. And those who have believing masters must not despise them because they are brethren, but rather do them service" (I Timothy 6.1-2). True, the freeing of slaves was considered a good deed, and St. Gregory of Nyssa said to his flock, several of whom were slave-owners: "If God does not enslave what is free, then who is he that sets his own power above God's?"<sup>34</sup> But Christians never aimed at social revolution, but rather the gradual and peaceful renewal of the social fabric from within.

Following the Apostles, the Holy Fathers asserted that the hierarchical principle is natural, God-given and superior to any other principle of government. In developing this thought, they adopted the originally pagan idea that the earthly king is the image of the Heavenly King, purifying it of the tendency, so natural to pagan thought, of *identifying* the earthly and the Heavenly, the image and its archetype. Earthly kings could and should be icons of the Heavenly King, and were to be venerated as such; but they were not god-kings, not objects of worship.

---

<sup>33</sup> Holland, *Rubicon*, London: Abacus, 2003, p. 25.

<sup>34</sup> St. Gregory, *Fourth Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, in Tom Holland, *In the Shadow of the Sword*, London: Abacus, 2012, p. 436.

Thus Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea wrote of St. Constantine: "The kingdom with which he is invested is an image of the heavenly one. He looks up to see the archetypal pattern and guides those whom he rules below in accordance with that pattern." "The ruler of the whole world is the Word of God, Who is in everything visible and invisible. From this all-embracing Reason the Emperor is rational, from this Wisdom he is wise, from participation in this Divinity he is good, from communion with this Righteousness he is righteous, in accordance with the idea of this Moderation he is moderate, from the reception of this highest Power he is courageous. In all justice one must call a true Emperor him who has formed his soul with royal virtues, according to the image of the Highest Kingdom".<sup>35</sup> "Bearing the image of the heavenly empire, with his eyes fixed on high, he rules the lives of mortals after that original pattern with the strength draw from an imitation of God's monarchy. The example of monarchical rule there is a source of strength to him. This is something granted to man alone of the creatures of the earth by the universal King. The basic principle of kingly authority is the establishment of a single source of authority to which everything is subject. Monarchy is superior to every other constitution and form of government. For polyarchy, where everyone competes on equal terms, is really anarchy and discord. This is why there is one God, not two or three or even more. Polytheism is strictly atheism. There is one King, and His Word and royal law are one."<sup>36</sup>

This idea was supported by the fourth-century Fathers. Thus St. Basil the Great wrote: "Even the king of the birds is not elected by the majority because the temerity of the people often nominates for leader the worst one; nor does it receive its power by lot, because the unwise chance of the lot frequently hands over power to the last; nor in accordance with hereditary succession, because those living in luxury and flattery are also less competent and untaught in any virtue; but according to nature one holds the first place over all, both in its size and appearance and meek disposition."<sup>37</sup>

And St. Gregory the Theologian wrote: "The three most ancient opinions about God are atheism (or anarchy), polytheism (or polyarchy), and monotheism (or monarchy). The children of Greece played with the first two; let us leave them to their games. For anarchy is disorder: and polyarchy implies factious division, and therefore anarchy and disorder. Both these lead in the same direction - to disorder; and disorder leads to disintegration; for disorder is the prelude to disintegration. *What we honour is monarchy...*"<sup>38</sup>

Again, St. John Chrysostom wrote: "Equality is known to produce strife. Therefore God allowed the human race to be a monarchy, not a democracy. But

---

<sup>35</sup> Eusebius, *Oration in Honour of Constantine*.

<sup>36</sup> Eusebius, *Oration in Honour of Constantine*.

<sup>37</sup> St. Basil the Great, *Hexaemeron* 8. In accordance with Roman conceptions, St. Basil did not believe that monarchical power had to be hereditary. The concept of the virtue of hereditary succession was developed later.

<sup>38</sup> St. Gregory, *Sermon 29*, 2. Cf. *Sermon 3*, 2.

the family is constructed in a similar way to an army, with the husband holding the rank of monarch, the wife as general and the children also given stations of command."<sup>39</sup>

And St. Isidore of Pelusium wrote: "After pointing to the order of submission of some to others established everywhere by God in the lives or rational and irrational creatures, concludes therefrom: 'Therefore we are entitled to say that... power, that is, royal leadership and authority, is established by God.'"<sup>40</sup>

Over four centuries later St. Theodore the Studite generalized the principle as follows: "There is one Lord and Giver of the Law, as it is written: one authority and one Divine principle over all. This single principle is the source of all wisdom, goodness and good order. It extends over every creature that has received its beginning from the goodness of God... It is given to one man only... to construct rules of life in accordance with the likeness of God. For the divine Moses in his description of the origin of the world that comes from the mouth of God, cites the word: 'Let us create man in accordance with Our image and likeness' (Genesis 1.26). Hence the establishment among men of every dominion and every authority, especially in the Churches of God: one patriarch in a patriarchate, one metropolitan in a metropolia, one bishop in a bishopric, one abbot in a monastery, and in secular life, if you want to listen, one king, one regimental commander, one captain on a ship. And if one will did not rule in all this, there would be no law and order in anything, and it would not be for the best, for a multiplicity of wills destroys everything."<sup>41</sup>

The principle of one-man rule was greatly strengthened by the idea that the fount of all secular law in the empire was *the emperor himself*. This did not mean, however, that the emperor's rule was completely arbitrary. He had to obey both the Church and his own laws.

Thus St. Ambrose of Milan told the Emperor Theodosius the Great that he had to respect and bind himself by the laws he himself promulgated, or he risked great dangers in the civil sphere: "And how, O Emperor, are we to settle a matter on which you have already declared your judgment, and have even promulgated laws, so that it is not open to any one to judge otherwise? But when you laid down this law for others, you laid it down for yourself as well. For the Emperor is the first to keep the laws which he passes..."<sup>42</sup>

From the time of Justinian in the sixth century we come across the idea that the emperor is "the living law", *the law personified*. This, as we shall see, did *not*

---

<sup>39</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 34 on I Corinthians*, 7.

<sup>40</sup> St. Isidore, in Archbishop Theophan of Poltava, in Richard Betts and Vyacheslav Marchenko, *Dukhovnik Tsarskoj Sem'i: Svyatitel' Feofan Poltavskij* (The Spiritual Father of the Royal Family: Holy Hierarch Theophan of Poltava), Moscow: Balaam Society of America, 1994, p. 213.

<sup>41</sup> St. Theodore, *The Philokalia*, volume IV, p. 93; in Archbishop Seraphim (Sobolev), *Russkaia Ideologia* (The Russian Ideology), St. Petersburg, 1992, pp. 46-47.

<sup>42</sup> St. Ambrose, *Epistle 21*, 9.

mean that the emperor was also to govern the Church. But it did mean that in Greco-Roman antiquity and the Middle Ages, right down to the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the idea was firmly established that all true power, whether in Church or State, came from above, from God, being mediated through either the one-man ruler of the Empire or the collegial leadership of the Church. And this idea was passed down without distortion to the Third Rome, Russia. Thus Professor I.M. Andreyev has characterized the three forms of statehood as follows: "Of the three forms of state power - monarchy, democracy and despotism - strictly speaking, only the first (monarchy) is based on a religious-ethical principle, the second (democracy) is based on an a-religious-ethical principle, and the third (despotism) is based on an anti-religious (satanic) principle."<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> Andreyev, "Pomazannik Bozhij" ("The Anointed of God"), *Pravoslavniy Put'* (The Orthodox Way), 1951, p. 129.

## 4. THE CONSTANTINIAN REVOLUTION: (2) THE EMPEROR IN THE CHURCH

Rome was now, not the persecutor, but the protector, of the Christian people. So Constantine tried to conform his legislation to Christian principles, introducing several decrees protecting Christian piety, such as: “on the abolition of pagan games (314), on the liberation of the Christian clergy from civil obligations and church lands from additional taxes (313-315), on the abolition of crucifixion as a means of capital punishment (315), on the abolition of the branding of criminals (315), against the Jews who rose up against the Church (315), on the liberation of slaves at church gatherings without special formalities (316), on forbidding private persons from offering sacrifices to idols and divining at home (319), on the annulment of laws against celibacy (320), on the celebration of Sunday throughout the Empire (321), on the right of bishops to be appeal judges (321), on banning the forcible compulsion of Christians to take part in pagan festivals (322), on the banning of gladiatorial games (325), on allowing Christians to take up senior government posts (325), on the building of Christian churches and the banning in them of statues and images of the emperor (325).”<sup>44</sup>

The decree on absolving the clergy from holding civic office is particularly interesting: “[The clergy] shall not be drawn away by any deviation and sacrifice from the worship that is due to the Divinity, but shall devote themselves without interference to their own law... for it seems that rendering the greatest possible service to the Deity, they most benefit the state.”<sup>45</sup> Some would see in this a cynical attempt to exploit the Deity in the interests of the emperor. But a more reasonable interpretation is that he was already feeling his way to a doctrine of the symphony of powers, in which the emperor helps the Church as her defender and “the bishop of those outside the Church”, while the Church helps the emperor through her prayers and advice.

“What must have really shocked traditional Romans,” writes Peter Salway, “was Constantine’s transfer to the Church of certain powers that had always been the prerogative of Roman magistrates. Even Constantine’s own praetorian prefect, himself a Christian, was not sure that he had understood the emperor correctly when Constantine decided that either party in a legal action could have the case transferred out of the ordinary courts to the local bishop – and that, if necessary, the secular authorities were required to enforce the judgement. This extraordinary ecclesiastical privilege did not, admittedly, last, but it sheds an interesting light on how revolutionary Constantine was prepared to be.”<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Nikolin, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Charles Freeman, “The Emperor’s State of Grace”, *History Today*, vol. 51 (1), January, 2001, p. 11.

<sup>46</sup> Salway, *A History of Roman Britain*, Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 249-250.

Apart from legislation, Constantine helped to standardize certain important aspects of Christian life. Thus at the First Ecumenical Council in 325 the principles of the calculation of the date of Pascha were agreed, an issue that had caused much controversy in the past and would continue to do so in the future.

Again, Daniel F. Lieuwen writes: "Emperor Constantine's order for fifty copies of the Scripture may have been important in the process of finalizing the form of the New Testament canon. While their exact content is not certain, some surmise that these copies may have contained the 27 books of the final New Testament canon. The canons of the council of Laodicea (c. 363) accepted all the books of the final canon except the Apocalypse. The final list of canonical books of the New Testament that exactly matches our own, having neither more nor fewer books, was contained in St. Athanasius' Paschal Epistle of 367."<sup>47</sup>

Constantine gave to the Church the full honour due her as an institution founded by the One True God and the Body of the God-Man Himself. The Church was understood to be higher than any human institution, not excluding the Empire itself. Constantine understood that the Christian faith was not to be honoured for the sake of the empire, or in submission to the empire, but that the empire existed for the sake of the faith and was to be submitted to it. One of the most powerful rulers in history, who exercised absolute political control over the whole of the ancient Roman empire, and did not shrink from waging war against, and executing, his political opponents, Constantine nevertheless deferred to the Church in all things spiritual. That deferral, that recognition that there were limits to his power laid down by God and His Holy Church, made Constantine a true autocrat rather than a despot or tyrant.

As Edward Cutts writes: "The merit of Constantine's relations with the Church lies in what he abstained from doing, as much as in what he did. It was a proof of the highest genius in the Emperor... to realize as he did the position of the Church as an *imperium in imperio*; to appreciate as he did the true relations of the Emperor to the Church; and to take his line as he did, not shrinking from initiative and intervention, yet so rarely overstepping the due limits of his prerogative. It is not pretended, indeed, that Constantine's history is free from infringements of these right relations, but such exceptions are very few; and it is, on the whole, very remarkable that the true relations which ought to regulate the co-ordinate action of Church and State were so immediately and fully established, and on the whole so scrupulously observed, as they were by the first Christian Emperor."<sup>48</sup>

This was most clearly illustrated at the First Ecumenical Council in 325, when the emperor took part in the proceedings only at the request of the bishops (318 in number, the same number as the servants of Abraham in his

---

<sup>47</sup> Lieuwen, "The Holy Bible: Its Birth and Growth in the Church of Christ" *Living Orthodoxy*, May-June, 2003, p. 14.

<sup>48</sup> Cutts, *Constantine the Great*, London: SPCA, 1881, pp. 160-161.

battle against the Babylonian kings), and did not sit on a royal throne, but on a little stool somewhat apart from the bishops.<sup>49</sup> He did not vote with the bishops, let alone impose his will on them. As Leithart writes, “Constantine did not dominate the council. He did not formulate the final creed, nor did he sign off on it – being, again, an unbaptized nonbishop. It is difficult, however, to believe that the bishops could have come to such a thoroughgoing conclusion [the defeat of Arianism, with only two bishops rejecting the agreement] without his political skill and strength of personality...”<sup>50</sup>

When he addressed the Council Constantine demonstrated his sincere belief that the internal peace and prosperity of the Church was even more important than the external peace and prosperity of the Empire: “Now that we, with the help of God the Saviour, have destroyed the tyranny of the atheists who entered into open war with us, may the evil spirit not dare to attack our holy Faith with his cunning devices. I say to you from the depths of my heart: the internal differences in the Church of God that I see before my eyes have plunged me into profound sorrow... Servants of the God of peace, regenerate amidst us that spirit of love which it is your duty to instil in others, destroy the seeds of all quarrels.”<sup>51</sup> Again, to the Fathers who did not attend the Council he wrote: “That which has been established in accordance with the God-inspired decision of so many and such holy Bishops we shall accept with joy as the command of God; for everything that is established at the Holy Councils of Bishops must be ascribed to the Divine will.”

Indeed, so obedient was he to the Church that, as I.I. Sokolov writes, “at the First Ecumenical Council, according to the witness of the historian Rufinus, the Emperor Constantine said: ‘God has made you priests and given you the power to judge my peoples and me myself. Therefore it is just that I should submit to your verdict. The thought has never entered my mind to be judge over you.’”<sup>52</sup>

Constantine saw himself as the instrument whereby God replaced the false religions with the true: “With such impiety pervading the human race, and the State threatened with destruction, what relief did God devise?... I myself was the instrument He chose... Thus, beginning at the remote Ocean of Britain, where the sun sinks beneath the horizon in obedience to the law of nature, with God’s help I banished and eliminated every form of evil then prevailing, in the hope that the human race, enlightened through me, might be recalled to a proper observance of God’s holy laws.”<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky, “The First Ecumenical Council”, *Orthodox Life*, vol. 34, N 6, November-December, 1984, p. 9.

<sup>50</sup> Leithart, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

<sup>51</sup> St. Constantine, in Archbishop Seraphim (Sobolev), *Russkaia Ideologia* (The Russian Ideology), St. Petersburg, 1992, p. 71.

<sup>52</sup> Sokolov, *Lektsii po Istorii Greko-Vostochnoj tserkvi* (Lectures on the History of the Greek-Eastern Church), St. Petersburg, 1914, p. 15.

<sup>53</sup> Eusebius, *On the Life of Constantine*, II, 28.

It is necessary to emphasize that whatever Constantine did for the Church he did, not as arbitrary expressions of his imperial will, but *in obedience to the commission of the Church*. Thus the Fathers of the First Council welcomed the Emperor as follows: "Blessed is God, Who has chosen you as king of the earth, having by your hand destroyed the worship of idols and through you bestowed peace upon the hearts of the faithful... On this teaching of the Trinity, your Majesty, is established the greatness of your piety. Preserve it for us whole and unshaken, so that none of the heretics, having penetrated into the Church, might subject our faith to mockery... Your Majesty, command that Arius should depart from his error and rise no longer against the apostolic teaching. Or if he remains obstinate in his impiety, drive him out of the Orthodox Church."

As Bishop Dionysius (Alferov) writes, "this is a clear recognition of the divine election of Constantine as the external defender of the Church, who is obliged to work with her in preserving the right faith, and in correspondence with the conciliar sentence is empowered to drive heretics out of the Church."<sup>54</sup>

This very hands-on approach to religion of St. Constantine was inherited by his successors. It was not always helpful, as during the reigns of the Arian and Iconoclast emperors; but the Orthodox Emperors played a vital role in helping the Church to uphold the true faith and eliminate heresy by convening the Ecumenical Councils and enforcing their decrees. They accepted the principle, most clearly expounded by the Gallic saint Vincent of Lerins, that the truth is "that which has always, everywhere and by all [Christians] been believed" since apostolic times; in other words, all *innovations* in faith or morality must be false and must be rejected in council.

The Orthodox Emperors, being sons of the Church, accepted this principle, and in general upheld it in their relations with the Church. In 381 the Second Ecumenical Council was convened at Constantinople during the reign of St. Theodosius the Great. The Creed drawn up at Nicaea was completed by the addition of articles on the Divinity of the Holy Spirit and the Church, becoming the official statement of faith of the True Church from henceforth. The Third Ecumenical Council at Ephesus in 431 forbade any addition to, or subtraction from, its wording. The later Councils did not change the Creed, but made further definitions to combat further heretical interpretations of its articles. Thus the Third Ecumenical Council anathematized Nestorianism, which alleged that the Divine and Human natures of Christ were united only by a moral, and not by a personal, bond, so that the Virgin Mary could be called the Mother of Christ only, and not the Mother of God as the Church maintains. Again, the Fourth and Fifth Ecumenical Councils of 451 and 553 condemned various varieties of Monophysitism, which alleged that Christ was not fully man (the opposite error to Arianism). Thus the Fourth Council, held at Chalcedon, declared that "our Lord Jesus Christ is one single and same Son, Who is perfect according to Divinity and perfect according to humanity, truly God and truly man, composed of a reasonable soul and a body, consubstantial

---

<sup>54</sup> A. Tuskarev, *Tserkov' o Gosudarstve* (The Church on the State), Staritsa, 1992, p. 75.

with the Father according to divinity and consubstantial with us according to humanity, completely like us except for sin. He was begotten by the Father before all ages according to His divinity and, in these latter days, He was born for us and for our salvation of Mary the Virgin, the Mother of God, according to His humanity; one single and same Christ, Lord, only begotten, known in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the division of natures is in no way suppressed by their union, but rather the properties of each are retained and united in one single person and single hypostasis. He is neither separated nor divided in two persons, but He is a single and same only-begotten Son, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ."

The Sixth Ecumenical Council of 680-81 condemned Monothelitism, which alleged that Christ had only one will. And the Seventh Ecumenical Council of 787 condemned Iconoclasm, which forbade the veneration of icons as if they were idols. The Seventh Council forms a fitting conclusion to the series of Councils concerned with Christological and Trinitarian heresies insofar as Iconoclasm attacked the Incarnation of Christ by denying the ability of Spirit to penetrate and sanctify matter (specifically, the matter of icons, but by inference also the matter of Christ's Body).

The Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787) are the seven pillars upon which the Church is built (cf. Proverbs 9.1), and every Orthodox Christian is obliged to accept their Divine authority. In them, and in the Local Councils held until the fall of the Empire, all the main dogmas of the Church - on the Holy Trinity, on the two Natures and Wills of Christ, on the Holy Spirit, and on the Divine Energies - were elaborated. Their significance was indicated by the Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs in 1848: "Our faith received its beginning not from men or through a man, but through the revelation of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1.12), which the divine Apostles preached, which the Ecumenical Councils confirmed, which great and wise teachers passed on by succession to the whole inhabited world, and which the martyrs sealed with their own blood. We will hold to this confession, which we have received in purity from so many men, and will reject every innovation as an inspiration of the devil."

\*

The most famous definition of the relationship between Constantine and the Church is to be found in two passages from Eusebius' *Life*, which speak of him as "like a common bishop" and "like a bishop of those outside".

The first passage is as follows: "Like a common bishop established by God, he reunited the ministers of God in synods. He did not disdain to be present at their activities and to sit with them, participating in their episcopal deliberations, and arbitrating for everyone the peace of God... Then, he did not fail to give his support to those whom he saw were bending to the better opinion and leaning towards equilibrium and consensus, showing how much joy the common accord of all gave him, while he turned away from the indocile..."

In the second passage the emperor receives the bishops and says that he, too, is a bishop: "But you, you are bishops whose jurisdiction is within the Church: I also am a bishop, ordained by God to oversee those outside the Church." Eusebius immediately explains that Constantine's "bishopric" here consisted, not in liturgical priestly acts, but in "overseeing all the subjects of the empire" and leading them towards piety.<sup>55</sup>

The word translated "overseeing" [επεσκοπει] here has the same root as the word for "bishop" [επισκοπος], thereby underlining the commonality of functions. So the emperor was not *really* a bishop, but only *like* a bishop - in both his missionary and in his supervisory roles. And he excelled in both. Thus, on the one hand, he responded vigorously to St. Nina's request that he send bishops and priests to help her missionary work in Georgia. Again, on hearing that the Christians were being persecuted in Persia he threatened to go to war with that state. On the other hand, he convened numerous councils of bishops to settle doctrinal disputes throughout the empire - in particular, those caused by the Donatists in Africa and the Meletians in Egypt and, above all, the empire-wide contagion caused by Arius.

The emperor's quasi-episcopal role can perhaps be best described as that of *the focus of unity* for the Church on earth. Not that having this role *within* the Church meant that he thought himself to have power *over* the Church. When the Donatists appealed to him against the judgement of the bishops, he said: "What mad presumption! They turn heavenly things into earthly, appealing to me as if the matter was of a civic nature." And on the decision of the Council of Arles (314) he said: "The bishops' decision should be looked upon as though the Lord Himself had been sitting in judgement."

Constantine cared desperately that the bishops should achieve unity, and was deeply frustrated at every sign of disunity. Thus on hearing of the Donatist heresy he said: "Until now I cannot be completely calm until all my subjects are united in brotherly unity and offer to the All-holy God the true worship that is prescribed by the Catholic Church". And at the opening of the First Ecumenical Council, convened to judge the heresy of Arius, he said: "I hold any sedition within the Church of Christ to be as formidable as any war or battle, and even more difficult to bring to an end. I am consequently more opposed to it than to anything else..."

The bishops understood Constantine's sincere veneration for the Church; so when St. Athanasius was condemned by a council at Tyre, and appealed to the emperor, he was not asking the secular power to overthrow the decision of the ecclesiastical power, as the Donatists thought earlier in the reign, but was rather calling on a son of the Church (albeit not yet baptized) to defend the decision of the Holy Fathers against heretics. Even his most important and valuable contribution to the Council of Nicaea, his suggestion of the term *homoousios*,

---

<sup>55</sup> Eusebius, *The Life of Constantine*, I, 44; IV, 24.

“consubstantial”, to describe the relationship between the Father and the Son was probably made in collaboration with Bishops Ossius and Alexander.<sup>56</sup>

The emperor as focus of unity was especially needed when the Church was afflicted by problems affecting the whole Church. Such, for example, were the problems of Arianism and the Church calendar, both of which were resolved at the First Ecumenical Council, but which continued to be contested. Since the Church herself, contrary to the assertions of the Roman Catholics, lacks a “bishop of bishops” with ecumenical jurisdiction, only the emperor can carry out this coordinating function. He alone can compel bishops from all parts of the empire to meet in Synods, and remain there until decisions are agreed upon. And he alone can then see that these decisions are put into practice...

As Meyendorff writes, “unity, universality and order, these essential elements of the *pax romana*, were now inseparable from the interests and responsibilities of the universal Christian Church. The Roman emperor could not care any longer for the Empire without also being concerned with the unity, universality and good order of the Church as well: a divided Church would also mean a divided Empire. Of course, the internal affairs of the Church were cared for by the bishop... but each bishop was in charge of his local community only: the early Church did not have a central administration preoccupied, in a permanent and institutional way, with universal unity. The emperor’s responsibility was recognized immediately, precisely on this universal level. This implied, in particular, his competence in organizing provincial groupings of bishops, granting them facilities to gather in synods and to resolve issues of common concern.”<sup>57</sup>

The pagan absolutist system of government had concentrated power in both the political and the religious spheres in the hands of one man. Thus in Rome the emperor was also the first priest, the *pontifex maximus*. Constantine did not renounce this title (the Emperor Gratian did that towards the end of the fourth century.) As we have seen, however, he renounced any claims to lord it over the Church, as did the Emperor Theodosius the Great, who decreed that bishops should be tried only in ecclesiastical courts. And the fourth-century Fathers vigorously opposed any such attempt on the part of his successors.

And yet this did not mean that they wished the emperor to play no part at all in Church affairs. On the contrary: they expected him to pass laws that would benefit the Church, convene Church Councils to resolve disputes and condemn heretics, and give the force of secular law to the decisions of those Councils. Such a role was clearly incompatible with the complete separation of Church and State as that is understood today; in fact, it inevitably gave the emperor a considerable importance and influence in Church affairs. The question, then, arises: did the emperor exercise any priestly functions?

---

<sup>56</sup> Leithart, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

<sup>57</sup> Meyendorff, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

The emperor was certainly set above the rest of the laity. As Paul Stephenson writes, he “was permitted to pass between the realms of the secular and the sacred. In later centuries, when the Byzantine emperor entered the cathedral church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople on the major feasts of the Christian calendar, he removed his crown, signifying his earthly dominion. Once and briefly during the liturgical entrance, unlike any other layman, the emperor was permitted to enter the sanctuary, led by the patriarch, to kiss the altar cloth. Afterwards, this area was off limits to him...”<sup>58</sup>

Nevertheless, the emperor was set above other laymen in the sacrament of royal anointing. Now the visible sacrament of anointing did not exist in Constantine’s time. However, the Church has always believed that he received the invisible anointing of the Holy Spirit: “Thou wast the image of a new David, receiving the horn of royal anointing over thy head; for with the oil of the Spirit hath the transcendent Word and Lord anointed thee, O glorious one.”<sup>59</sup>

In time the emperor came to exercise a more than purely administrative role in the Church. The increase in power of the emperor in Church life was necessitated, in the fifth century, by the decline in quality of the Church hierarchy, and the increasing influence of heretical teachings such as Nestorianism and Monophysitism. As the century wore on, and the chaos caused by the heretics increased, the emperors were called upon to take a more active role in Church affairs. Nor did the Church have any objection to this – so long as the Emperor was Orthodox. Some “interference” by them was even sanctioned by Canon 93 (96) of the Council of Carthage in the year 419: “It behoves the gracious clemency of their Majesties to take measures that the Catholic Church, which has begotten them as worshippers of Christ in her womb, and has nourished them with the strong meat of the faith, should by their forethought be defended, lest violent men, taking advantage of the times of religious excitement, should by fear overcome a weak people, whom by arguments they were not able to pervert”.

As an ancient epitome of this canon puts it: “The Emperors who were born in the true religion and were educated in the faith, ought to stretch forth a helping hand to the Churches. For the military band overthrew the dire conspiracy which was threatening Paul.”<sup>60</sup>

That the Emperor, as well as the hierarchs, was required to defend the faith can be seen in the life of St. Hypatius of Rufinianus: “When Nestorius had left for Ephesus, and the [Third Ecumenical] Council had assembled, on the day when he should be deposed, Saint Hypatius saw in a vision that an angel of the Lord took hold of Saint John the Apostle, and led him to the most pious Emperor [Theodosius II] and said to him, ‘Say to the Emperor: “Pronounce

---

<sup>58</sup> Stephenson, *Constantine. Unconquered Emperor, Christian Victor*, London: Quercus, 2009, p. 255.

<sup>59</sup> *Menaion*, May 21, Mattins for the feast of St. Constantine, sedalen.

<sup>60</sup> *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, Eerdmans edition, pp. 488, 489.

your sentence against Nestorius". And he, having heard this, pronounced it. Saint Hypatius made note of this day, and it was verified that Nestorius was deposed on that very day..."<sup>61</sup>

Emperors had to intervene especially when heretics became violent – as when the Monophysite heretic Dioscurus murdered St. Flavian, Patriarch of Constantinople. Thus the officials of Emperor Theodosius II played a major role in the Third Ecumenical Council. And it was the decisive intervention of the Emperors Marcian and Pulcheria that made possible the convening of the Fourth Ecumenical Council in 451 that anathematized the Monophysite heresy. For, as Marcian said at the Council: "When by the decree of God we were elected to the kingdom, then amidst the very many needs of the State, there was no matter that occupied us more than that the true and Orthodox faith, which is holy and pure, should remain in the souls of all without doubts".<sup>62</sup>

St. Isidore of Pelusium believed that some interference by the emperors was needed in view of the sorry state of the priesthood: "The present hierarchs, by not acting in the same way as their predecessors, do not receive the same as they; but undertaking the opposite to them, they themselves experience the opposite. It would be surprising if, while doing nothing similar to their ancestors, they enjoyed the same honour as they. In those days, when the kings fell into sin they became chaste again, but now this does not happen even with laymen. In ancient times the priesthood corrected the royal power when it sinned, but now it awaits instructions from it; not because it has lost its own dignity, but because that dignity has been entrusted to those who are not similar to those who lived in the time of our ancestors. Formerly, when those who had lived an evangelical and apostolic life were crowned with the priesthood, the priesthood was fearful by right for the royal power; but now the royal power is fearful to the priesthood. However, it is better to say, not 'priesthood', but those who have the appearance of doing the priestly work, while by their actions they insult the priesthood. That is why it seems to me that the royal power is acting justly."<sup>63</sup> It was acting justly, in Isidore's view, because "although there is a very great difference between the priesthood and the kingdom (the former is the soul, the latter – the body), nevertheless they strive for one and the same goal, that is, the salvation of citizens".<sup>64</sup>

St. Leo, Pope of Rome, welcomed the interference of the emperors. Thus to the Emperor Theodosius II he wrote that he had "not only the soul of an Emperor, but also the soul of a priest". And to the Emperor Marcian he wished "the palm of the priesthood as well as the emperor's crown".<sup>65</sup> Again he wrote to Emperor Leo I: "You must unceasingly remember that Royal power has been

---

<sup>61</sup> Holy Transfiguration Monastery, "The Seat of Moses", quoted in *The Life of our Holy Father Maximus the Confessor*, Boston, 1982, p. 65.

<sup>62</sup> St. Marcian, quoted in Archbishop Seraphim, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

<sup>63</sup> St. Isidore, *Tvorenia (Works)*, Moscow, 1860, vol. 3, pp. 400, 410.

<sup>64</sup> St. Isidore, quoted in M.V. Zzyzkin, *Patriarkh Nikon*, Warsaw, 1931, vol. I, p. 244.

<sup>65</sup> J. Meyendorff, *Rome, Constantinople, Moscow*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996, p. 11.

entrusted to you, not only for administering the world, but also and in particular to rule the Church".<sup>66</sup> However, St. Leo, one of the most powerful hierarchs in the Church's history, could not have meant this "rule" over the Church to be understood literally, but rather in the sense of active interference. (When the emperors fell into heresy, the popes reverted to a more assertive posture in relation to them, as we shall see.) At such times, when the majority of bishops were betraying the truth, the pious emperors stood out as the representatives of the laity, which, as the Eastern Patriarchs were to declare in their encyclical of the year 1848, is the guardian of the truth of the Church. At such times they were indeed higher than the clergy, if not by the grace they had received, at any rate in view of the fact that the clergy had forsaken their vocation and trampled on the grace they had received. At such times, they were images of the Heavenly King, their vocation being, like His, to witness to the truth. For as the King of kings said to Pilate: "You say that I am a king. For that I was born, and for that I came into the world, to witness to the truth" (John 18.37).

For, as Gilbert Dagron points out, "the emperor could not remain neutral. He was the guarantor and often the principal architect of the unity of the Church. Thus the Orthodox or heretical council unanimously celebrated the sovereign 'guarded by God' by giving him without niggardliness the title of 'teacher of the faith', 'new Paul', 'equal to the apostles, illumined like the bishops by the Holy Spirit'. At the end of the fourth session of the council held in Constantinople in 536, the bishops expressed the conviction of all in declaring that, 'under an Orthodox emperor', the Empire had nothing and nobody to fear; and Patriarch Menas concluded: 'It is fitting that nothing of that which is debated in the holy Church should be decided against the advice and order [of the emperor]'.<sup>67</sup>

It is in this context that one has to understand the highly rhetorical expressions applied to the rulers. "The distinction between the two powers was never as clearly formulated as when there was a disagreement between them. When there was concord or the hope of harmony, the celebration or hope of unity carried the day. Nobody found anything wrong when the synod that condemned the heretic Eutyches in Constantinople in 448 acclaimed Theodosius II with the words: 'Great is the faith of the emperors! Many years to the guardians of the faith! Many years to the pious emperor, the emperor-bishop (τω αρχιερει βασιλει).' The whole world is equally agreed, a little later at the Council of Chalcedon, in acclaiming Marcian as 'priest and emperor', at the same time as 'restorer of the Church, teacher of the faith, New Constantine, New Paul and New David'. At the same time Pope Leo congratulated Theodosius II, and then Marcian, on the *sacerdotalis industria*, on the *sacerdotalis anima*, and on the *sacerdotalis palma* with which God had rewarded them, and he declared to Leo I that he was inspired by the Holy Spirit in matters of the faith. Except during periods of tension, the adjective *sacerdotalis* was part of the

---

<sup>66</sup> St. Leo, in Fomin and Fomina, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

<sup>67</sup> Dagron, *Empereur et Prêtre* (Emperor and Priest), Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1996.

formula of the pontifical chancellery for letters addressed to the emperors of Constantinople. The composers of elegies were not behindhand, in the West as in the East. Procopius of Gaza underlined that Anastasius had been elected to be a bishop before being named emperor, and that he reunited in himself 'that which is most precious among men, the apparatus of an emperor and the thought of a priest'; Ennodius of Pavia (473-521) proclaimed Theodoric to be 'prince and priest'; Venantius Fortunatus, in the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, called Childebert I '*Melchisedech noster, merito rex atque sacerdos*'; towards 645 an anonymous panegyric characterised Clotaire I as *quasi sacerdos*; Paulinus, bishop of Aquileia, in 794 encouraged Charlemagne to be '*Dominus et pater, rex et sacerdos*'. To justify the canonisation of a king, they said that he had been led during his reign *acsi bonus sacerdos*. We are in the domain of rhetoric, but that does not mean that they could say anything and break the taboos. Even if the words have a metaphorical and incantatory meaning, even if their association distilled a small dose of provocation, there was nothing abnormal in affirming that the ideal emperor was also a priest."<sup>68</sup>

The near-assimilation of the emperor to the priesthood can be seen in the evolution of the ceremony of coronation from pagan to Christian times. Thus Sir Steven Runciman writes: "When Diocletian instituted a coronation ceremony it was performed by the senior lay minister; and the first Christian Emperors continued the practice. Theodosius II, for example, was crowned by the prefect of the City of Constantinople. But at his successor Marcian's coronation the Patriarch was present<sup>69</sup>; and Marcian's successor Leo I was certainly crowned by the Patriarch. The Patriarch was by now the official with the highest precedence after the Emperor; but his intervention turned the coronation into a religious ceremony. In the course of it the Emperor underwent a sort of ordination; he received charismatic powers. Henceforward the Imperial Palace was known as the Sacred Palace. Its ceremonies were liturgical ceremonies, in which he placed the double role of God's representative on earth and representative of the People before God, a symbol both of God and of the Divine Incarnation. The acclamations to which he was entitled stressed his position. On Christmas Eve he was addressed in a prayer that begged Christ would 'move all nations throughout the universe to offer tribute to Your Majesty, as the Magi offered presents to Christ'. The Whitsun [Pentecost] hymns declare that the Holy Ghost descends in fiery tongues on to the Imperial head. At the same time the Emperor paid homage to God in the name of the Christian commonwealth. In the words of the Emperor Constantine Porphyrogennitus it was through the Palace ceremonies that 'the Imperial power can be exercised with due rhythm and order and the Empire can thus represent the harmony and movement of the universe as it stems from the Creator'. The Byzantines fervently believed in this interpretation of the Emperor's position. It did not prevent them from seeking to depose an Emperor

---

<sup>68</sup> Dagron, *op. cit.*, pp. 314-315.

<sup>69</sup> According to Alexander Dvorkin, the crowning of Marcian and Pulcheria "was the first in history to be carried out in church" (*Ocherki po Istorii Vselenskoj Pravoslavnoj Tserkvi* (Sketches on the History of the Universal Orthodox Church), Nizhni-Novgorod, 2006, p. 292).

whom they thought unworthy or ungodly. His sanctity then might not preserve him from a violent death. It was the symbol, not necessarily the person, that they revered..."<sup>70</sup>

Nevertheless, the Empire and the Priesthood remained separate principles in the Byzantine understanding; they were both from God, and were meant to work in "symphony" to the glory of God, as the Emperor Justinian proclaimed in his famous *Novella 6*. But the autonomy of the two realms continued. Moreover, so important was the independence of the Church seen that its violation was regarded as a sure sign of the coming of the Antichrist. For if the Orthodox Emperor is "he who restrains the coming" of the Antichrist, then the combining of the two principles in one person is the surest sign that he or his foretunner has already come....

In the last analysis, however, it is not the Church that depends on the Empire, but the Empire on the Church. For it is the Church that blesses the State, not the State the Church; for "without all contradiction, the less is blessed of the better" (Hebrews 7.7). And the Church depends on her hierarchs' preserving the correct confession of faith through the prayers of all the faithful in both the Heavenly and the Earthly Church.

We see an instructive illustration of this in the *Life* of St. Leo the Great, Pope of Rome: "In the course of the debates with the heretics [at the Council of Chalcedon in 451], doubts concerning the truth arose in the hearts of many; whereupon the holy fathers commanded that the Tome of Leo be read. This letter originally was sent by the Pope to Saint Flavian, the martyred Patriarch of Constantinople, when the latter convened a synod in the eastern capital to anathematize the unbelievers. It is said that the holy chief Apostle Peter himself edited the document. Thus, we read in *The Spiritual Meadow*, written by Saint Sophronius of Jerusalem: 'Abba Menas, superior of Salam, a coenobium near Alexandria, related that he heard this from Eulogius, Patriarch of Alexandria: "While staying in Constantinople, I was a guest in the house of my lord Gregory, archdeacon of the Church of Rome, a truly illustrious and virtuous man [St. Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome]. He told me a story recorded in the archives of the Roman Church about the most blessed and Most Holy Pope Leo. He said that Leo wrote a letter to Saint Flavian, Bishop of Constantinople, condemning the impious Eutyches and Nestorius, and put it on the tomb of Peter, the chief Apostle. Then he fasted, prayed, and kept vigils, begging the preeminent Apostle, "If I, as a man, have in this letter erred in any way or failed to explain the truth fully, do thou, to whom this Church and episcopal throne were entrusted, set it right." Forty days later the Apostle appeared while Leo was praying. He said, "I have read your letter and corrected it." The Pope took the epistle from the blessed Peter's tomb, opened it, and found that it had been amended by the Apostle's hand.'" ...

---

<sup>70</sup> Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity*, Cambridge University Press, 1968, pp. 58-59.

“While I was synkellos of Eulogius, the holy Patriarch of Alexandria, I saw in a dream a radiant man of venerable appearance. He commanded, “Announce me to Patriarch Eulogius.” “Who are you, my lord?” I asked. He replied, “I am Leo, Pope of Rome.” I told Eulogius, “The most blessed and Most Holy Leo, Primate of the Roman Church, wishes to pay his respects.” Patriarch Eulogius rushed to meet the saint. The two men prayed, then exchanged a kiss and sat. The divine Leo asked Eulogius, “Do you know why I am here?” “No,” answered the holy Patriarch. “I have come to thank you,” said Leo, “because you have stoutly defended the letter I wrote my brother, Patriarch Flavian of Constantinople, refuting the impious Nestorian and Eutychian heresies. You have understood my teaching well and proclaimed it fearlessly, thereby silencing the misbelievers. Know, brother, that you have gratified not me alone by your godly zeal and labor, but the chief Apostle Peter as well, for he read my epistle and corrected it. Above all you have pleased Christ our God, Who is Truth Itself, preached by us.” I had the dream not once or twice, but three times. Convinced by this, I related it to Saint Eulogius. He wept, stretched out his hands to heaven, and said, “I thank Thee, O Master Christ our God, that Thou hast vouchsafed me, the unworthy, to proclaim Thy truth. In Thy great and ineffable compassion and by the intercessions of Thy servants Peter and Leo, Thou has deigned to accept my feeble efforts as Thou didst the widow’s mites.””<sup>71</sup>

\*

An important issue in Church-State relations was the question whether, and in what circumstances, the Church could disobey the State. In general, obedience was considered not obligatory if the king was not a true king but a tyrant. But even a true king could be defied if he tried to enforce the transgression of God’s law.

The difference between a true king and a tyrant was defined by St. Basil the Great as follows: “If the heart of the king is in the hands of God (Proverbs 21.1), then he is saved, not by force of arms, but by the guidance of God. But not everyone is in the hands of God, but only he who is worthy of the name of king. Some have defined kingly power as lawful dominion or sovereignty over all, without being subject to sin.” And again: “The difference between a tyrant and a king is that the tyrant strives in every way to carry out his own will. But the king does good to those whom he rules.”<sup>72</sup>

This definition seems very strict. For what Roman emperor always did good to those whom he ruled? By this definition almost all the emperors were in fact tyrants... However, we can bring St. Basil’s definition more into line with how the Christians actually regarded the emperors if we make two important

---

<sup>71</sup> St. Dimitri of Rostov, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, volume VI: February, House Springs, Mo.: Chrysostom Press, 2003, pp. 207, 208.

<sup>72</sup> St. Basil, quoted in Fomin, S. & Fomina, T. *Rossia pered Vtorym Prishestviem* (Russia before the Second Coming), Moscow, 1998, pp. 66, 102.

distinctions. The first is between the personal evil of many of the emperors, on the one hand, and the goodness of the institution that they maintained and incarnated, on the other. And the second is between the status of the pagan emperors before Constantine, on the one hand, and the status of the pagan or heretical emperors after Constantine, on the other. As St. John Chrysostom said, commenting on Romans 13.1: "Is every ruler, then, elected by God? This I do not say, he [Paul] answers. Nor am I now speaking about individual rulers, but about the thing in itself. For that there should be rulers, and some rule and others be ruled, and that all things should not just be carried on in one confusion, the people swaying like waves in this direction and that; this, I say, is the work of God's wisdom. Hence he does not say, 'for there is no ruler but of God', but it is the thing [monarchical power as such] he speaks of, and says, 'there is no power but of God'."<sup>73</sup>

And again he writes: "Is every ruler elected by God to the throne he occupies? Is every emperor, king, and prince chosen by rule? If so, is every law and decree promulgated by a ruler to be regarded as good, and thus to be obeyed without question? The answer to all these questions is, no. God has ordained that every society should have rulers, whose task it is to maintain order, so that people may live in peace. God allows rulers to employ soldiers, whose task it is to capture and imprison those who violate social order. Thus God will bless and guide any ruler and any soldier who acts according to these principles. But many rulers abuse their authority by amassing huge wealth for themselves at the expense of their people, by unjustly punishing those who dare to speak against their evil, and by making unjust wars against neighbors. Such rulers have not been elected by God, but rather have usurped the position that a righteous ruler should occupy. And if their laws are wrong, we should not obey them. The supreme authority in all matters is not the law of the land, but the law of God; and if one conflicts with the other, we must obey God's law."<sup>74</sup>

Rulers like Julian the Apostate, according to the Fathers, were not established by God, but were allowed to ascend the throne by Him in order to punish the people. As St. Isidore of Pelusium wrote: "If some evildoer unlawfully seizes power, we do not say that he is established by God, but we say that he is *permitted*, either in order to spit out all his craftiness, or in order to chasten those for whom cruelty is necessary, as the king of Babylon chastened the Jews."<sup>75</sup> Again, St. Jerome said: "He often permits wicked kings to arise in order that they may in their wickedness punish the wicked."<sup>76</sup>

As for obedience to true rulers, the principle was the same in the post-Constantinian and post-Julian era as in the pre-Constantinian era. As St. Basil the Great put it: "It is right to submit to higher authority whenever a command

---

<sup>73</sup> St. Chrysostom, *Homily 23 on Romans*, 1.

<sup>74</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *On Living Simply*.

<sup>75</sup> St. Isidore, *Letter 6 to Dionysius*.

<sup>76</sup> St. Jerome, *Commentary on Daniel*, 2.21.

of God is not violated thereby.”<sup>77</sup> Again, Blessed Theodoret of Cyr wrote: “Paul does not incite us to obey even if we are being constrained to impiety...”<sup>78</sup>

Perhaps the most famous example of the Church refusing to obey the State was provided by St. John Chrysostom in his relations with the Empress Eudoxia. In 403 a silver statue of the empress was erected in Constantinople, before which the public games were performed. “These,” writes Socrates Scholasticus, “John regarded as an insult offered to the Church, and having regained his ordinary freedom and keenness of tongue [after his first exile], he employed his tongue against those who did these things... The empress once more applied his expression to herself as indicating marked contempt towards her own person: she therefore endeavoured to procure the convocation of another council of bishops against him. When John became aware of this, he delivered in the church that celebrated oration beginning with: ‘Again Herodias raves, again she is troubled, again she dances, and again she desires to receive John’s head on a platter’.”<sup>79</sup>

The Fathers opposed any emperor who transgressed the Law of God. For, as St. Basil wrote: “The Emperors must defend the decrees of God”.<sup>80</sup> And St. Gregory the Theologian wrote: “The law of Christ submits you to our power and our judgement. For we also rule, and our power is higher than yours. In fact, must the spirit bow before matter, the heavenly before the earthly?”<sup>81</sup> And St. John Chrysostom wrote: “The priesthood is as far above the kingdom as the spirit is above the body. The king rules the body, but the priest – the king, which is why the king bows his head before the finger of the priest.”<sup>82</sup> “The Church is not the sphere of Caesar, but of God. The decrees of the State authorities in matters of religion cannot have ecclesiastical significance. Only the will of God can be the source of Church law. He who bears the diadem is no better than the last citizen when he must be reproached and punished. Ecclesiastical authority must stand firmly for its rights if the State authorities interfere in its sphere. It must know that the boundaries of royal power do not coincide with those of the priesthood, and the latter is greater than the former.”<sup>83</sup>

This teaching came to be embodied in the canon law of the Church, as in the 30<sup>th</sup> Apostolic Canon, which defrocked any cleric who had obtained his post with the help of the secular authorities. Again, in the *Apostolic Constitutions* we read: “The king occupies himself only with military matters, worrying about war and peace, so as to preserve the body, while the bishop covers the priesthood of God, protecting both body and soul from danger. Thus the

---

<sup>77</sup> St. Basil, *The Morals, Rule 79* (Cap. 1).

<sup>78</sup> Blessed Theodoret, *P.G.* 66, col. 864, commenting on Romans 13.5.

<sup>79</sup> Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, VI, 18.

<sup>80</sup> St. Basil, *The Morals, Rule 79*.

<sup>81</sup> St. Gregory, *Sermon 17*.

<sup>82</sup> St. Chrysostom, *On the Priesthood*.

<sup>83</sup> St. John Chrysostom, quoted in M.V. Zyzykin, *Patriarkh Nikon*, Warsaw, 1931, p. 68.

priesthood surpasses the kingdom as much as the soul surpasses the body, for it binds and looses those worthy of punishment and forgiveness.”<sup>84</sup>

Perhaps the most striking and instructive example of the boldness of the fourth-century Christian hierarchs even against Orthodox emperors was provided by St. Ambrose of Milan. His views on Church-State relations were squarely in the tradition of the Eastern Fathers: “The Emperor is not above the Church, but *in* the Church,” he wrote. “If one reads the Scriptures, one sees that it is bishops who judge Emperors.”<sup>85</sup>

And again: “The tribute that belongs to Caesar is not to be denied. The Church, however, is God’s, and it must not be pledged to Caesar, for God’s temple cannot be a right of Caesar. That this is said with sentiments of respect for the emperor no man can deny. And what is there more full of respect than that the emperor be styled a son of the Church? And when he is called such, he is called such without sin, because it is a compliment to be called such. For the Emperor is in the Church, not above the Church, and far from refusing the Church’s help, a good emperor seeks it.”<sup>86</sup>

Now in 390, a riot took place in Thessalonica that led to the murder of several magistrates. In his anger on hearing the news, the Emperor Theodosius ordered the execution of the perpetrators. But there was no trial, and many innocents were killed, perhaps as many as seven thousand.

“News of this lamentable calamity,” writes Theodoret, “reached Ambrose. The emperor on his arrival at Milan wished according to custom to enter the church. Ambrose met him outside the outer porch and forbade him to step over the sacred threshold. ‘You seem, sir, not to know,’ said he, ‘the magnitude of the bloody deed that has been done. Your rage has subsided, but your reason has not yet recognized the character of the deed. Peradventure your Imperial power prevents your recognizing the sin, and power stands in the light of reason. We must however know how our nature passes away and is subject to death; we must know the ancestral dust from which we sprang, and to which we are swiftly returning. We must not because we are dazzled by the sheen of the purple fail to see the weakness of the body that it robes. You are a sovereign, sir; of men of like nature with your own, and who are in truth your fellow slaves; for there is one Lord and Sovereign of mankind, Creator of the universe. With what eyes then will you look on the temple of our common Lord – with what feet will you tread that holy threshold, how will you stretch forth your hands still dripping with the blood of unjust slaughter? How in such hands will you receive the all-holy Body of the Lord? How will you who in rage unrighteously poured forth so much blood lift to your lips the precious Blood? Begone. Attempt not to add another crime to that which you have committed.

---

<sup>84</sup> *Apostolic Constitutions*, XI, 34.

<sup>85</sup> St. Ambrose, in Michael Grant, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, London: Phoenix, 1997, p. 156.

<sup>86</sup> St. Ambrose, *Sermon against Auxentius*, 35, 36.

Submit to the restriction to which God the Lord of all agrees that you be sentenced. He will be your physician, He will give you health.'

"Educated as he had been in the sacred oracles, Theodosius knew clearly what belonged to priests and what to emperors. He therefore bowed to the rebuke of Ambrose, and retired sighing and weeping to the palace. After a considerable time, when eight months had passed, the festival of our Saviour's birth came round and the emperor sat in his palace shedding a storm of tears..."<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>87</sup> Theodoret, *Ecclesiastical History*, V, 17, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, pp. 143-144.

## 5. THE CONSTANTINIAN REVOLUTION: (3) THE STATE, CULTURE AND MONASTICISM

The early Christians ascribed to the Roman empire a vital eschatological role: that of postponing the coming of the Antichrist. The coming of the Antichrist was to take place shortly before the Second Coming of Christ, which many Christians thought would be very soon. But St. Paul wrote: "Do not be shaken or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the Day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means, for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself to be God" (II Thessalonians 2.2-4).

In other words, the Day of Christ is not just around the corner. Some important events have to take place first – specifically, the coming of the Antichrist. Moreover, the Antichrist will not come before another very important event takes place – the fall of the Roman empire, or monarchical power in general. For this is how the Holy Fathers interpreted the words: "He who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His Coming" (II Thessalonians 2.7-8). Roman, or monarchical power is that which "restrains" the coming of the Antichrist. When that is "removed", then the Antichrist will appear – and only then will Christ come in glory to destroy him and judge the living and the dead.

And so "there is also another and a greater necessity," writes Tertullian, "for our offering prayer on behalf of the emperors as also for the whole state of the empire, ... since we know that by the prosperity of the Roman empire the mighty power impending on the whole world and threatening the very close of the age with frightful calamities shall be delayed. And as we are loath to suffer these things, while we pray for their postponement we favour the stability of Rome - nay, we pray for the complete stability of the empire and for Roman interests in general. For we know that the mighty shock impending over the whole earth – in fact, the very end of all things threatening dreadful woes – is only retarded by the continued existence of the Roman empire."<sup>88</sup>

"The subject here," writes Sordi, "was the interpretation given to the famous passage from the second Epistle to the Thessalonians (2.6-7) on the obstacle, whether a person or an object, which impedes the coming of the Anti-Christ. Without attempting to interpret this mysterious passage, the fact remains that all Christian writers, up to and including Lactantius, Ambrose and Augustine, identified this restraining presence with the Roman empire, either as an institution or as an ideology. Through their conviction that the Roman empire would last as long as the world (*Tertullian Ad Scapulam 2*) the early Christians

---

<sup>88</sup> Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, 32.1.

actually renewed and appropriated as their own the concept of *Roma aeterna*. 'While we pray to delay the end' – it is Tertullian speaking (*Apologeticum* 32.1) – 'we are helping Rome to last forever'.<sup>89</sup>

St. John Chrysostom expressed the patristic consensus on "he that restraineth": "Some say that this is the grace of the Holy Spirit, but others the Roman rule, to which I much rather accede. Why? Because if he meant to say the Spirit, he would not have spoken obscurely, but plainly, that even now the grace of the Spirit, that is the gifts of grace, withhold him... If he were about come when the gifts of grace cease, he ought now to have come, for they have long ceased. But he said this of the Roman rule,... speaking covertly and darkly, not wishing to bring upon himself superfluous enmities and senseless danger."<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>89</sup> Sordi, *The Christians and the Roman Empire*, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 173. Tertullian also writes: "The Christian is hostile to nobody, least of all to the emperor, whom... he wishes well, with the whole Roman empire, so long as the world shall last, for so long as it shall last (*Ad Scapulum* 2). Again Lactantius writes: "It is apparent that the world is destined to end immediately. The only evidence to diminish our fear is the fact that the city of Rome continues to flourish. But once this city, which is the veritable capital of the world, falls and there is nothing in its place but ruins, as the Sibyls predict, who can doubt that the end will have arrived both for humanity and for the entire world?... The Sibyls openly speak of Rome being destined to perish. Hystaspes also, who was a very ancient king of the Medes,... predicted long before that the empire and name of Rome should be effaced from the globe... But how this shall come to pass I shall explain... In the first place, the empire shall be parceled out, and the supreme authority being dissipated and broken up shall be lessened,... until ten kings exist all together;... these... shall squander everything and impair and consume... The very fact proclaims the fall and destruction to be near, except that so long as Rome is safe it seems that nothing of this need be feared. But when indeed that head of the world shall fall and the assault begin that the Sibyls speak of coming to pass, who can doubt that the end has already come?... That is the city that has hitherto upheld all things, and we should pray and beseech the God of heaven, if indeed his decrees and mandates can be postponed, that that detested tyrant may not come sooner than we think" (*Institutes* VII, 15, 16, 25). And pseudo-Ephraim writes: "When the kingdom of the Romans shall begin to be consumed by the sword, then the advent of the evil one is at hand... And already is the kingdom of the Romans swept away, and the empire of the Christians is delivered unto God and the Father, and when the kingdom of the Romans shall begin to be consumed then shall come the consummation" (1, 5). See W. Bousset, *The Antichrist Legend*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999, pp. 124-125. St. Ambrose of Milan also believed that the fall of Rome would bring in the Antichrist.

<sup>90</sup> For he could have been accused of preparing the fall of Rome, *aeterna et invicta*, which would have given them an excuse for persecuting the Christians on the same basis as they persecuted the Jews – as political revolutionaries. (V.M.). Cf. Patriarch Nikon of Moscow: "It is necessary to investigate: who is he who restrains, and why does Paul speak about him unclearly? What hinders his appearance? Some say – the grace of the Holy Spirit, others – Roman power. I agree with the latter. For if Paul had meant the Holy Spirit, then he would have said so clearly. But he [the antichrist] was bound to come when the gifts of the Holy Spirit should become scarce, they have already become scarce a long time ago. But if he is speaking of Roman power, then he had a reason for concealment, for he did not want to draw from the Empire persecution on the Christians as if they were people living and working for the destruction of the Empire. That is why he does not speak so clearly, although he definitely indicates that he will be revealed at the fitting time. For 'the mystery of iniquity is already at work', he says. By this he understands Nero, as an image of the antichrist, for he wanted people to worship him as god. ... When he who restrains now will be taken away, that is, when Roman power will be destroyed, he will come, that is, as long as there is fear of this power nobody will introduce anarchy and will want to seize for himself all power, both human and Divine. For, just as earlier the Median power was destroyed by the Babylonian, and the Babylonian by the Persian, and the Persian by the

He says, 'Only there is the one who restraineth now, until he should be taken out of the midst'; that is, whenever the Roman empire is taken out of the way, then shall he come. For as long as there is fear of the empire, no one will willingly exalt himself. But when that is dissolved, he will attack the anarchy, and endeavour to seize upon the sovereignty both of man and of God."<sup>91</sup>

It follows that the early Christians, far from believing that political power and the fabric of Roman civilization was superfluous, were highly motivated to preserve it in being. For when that fabric collapsed, the Antichrist would come... So, while it was true that the Christians placed no ultimate, permanent value on Roman civilization, - "for here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Hebrews 13.14) - they were by no means its enemies. And this attitude did not change fundamentally after the Christianization of the empire. If the Christians had been loyal to the empire when it was pagan, so much the more were they loyal to it when it became Christian.

Fr. Georges Florovsky has described this antimony well. "The Early Christians," he writes, "were often suspected and accused of civic indifference, and even of morbid 'misanthropy', *odium generis humani*, - which should probably be contrasted with the alleged 'philanthropy' of the Roman Empire. The charge was not without substance. In his famous reply to Celsus, Origen was ready to admit the charge. Yet, what else could Christians have done, he asked. In every city, he explained, 'we have another system of allegiance', *allo systema tes patridos* (*Contra Celsum*, VIII.75). Along with the civil community there was in every city another community, the local Church. And she was for Christians their true home, or their 'fatherland', and not their actual 'native city'. The anonymous writer of the admirable 'Letter to Diognetus', written probably in the early years of the second century, elaborated this point with an elegant precision. Christians do not dwell in cities of their own, nor do they differ from the rest of men in speech and customs. 'Yet, while they dwell in the cities of Greeks and Barbarians, as the lot of each is cast, the structure of their own polity is peculiar and paradoxical... Every foreign land is a fatherland to them, and every fatherland is a foreign land... Their conversation is on the earth, but their citizenship is in heaven.' There was no passion in this attitude, no hostility, and no actual retirement from daily life. But there was a strong note of spiritual estrangement: '*and every fatherland is a foreign land.*' It was coupled, however, with an acute sense of responsibility. Christians were confined in the world, 'kept' there as in a prison; but they also 'kept the world together,' just as the soul holds the body together. Moreover, this was precisely the task allotted to Christians by God, 'which it is unlawful to decline' (*Ad Diognetum*, 5, 6). Christians might stay in their native cities, and faithfully perform their daily duties. But they were unable to give their full allegiance to any polity of this world, because their true commitment was elsewhere...."<sup>92</sup>

---

Macedonian, and the Macedonian by the Roman, so this last will be destroyed by the antichrist, and he by Christ..." (in Zyzykin, *Patriarkh Nikon*, Warsaw, 1931, part 2, pp. 48-49).

<sup>91</sup> St. Chrysostom, *Homily 4 on II Thessalonians*.

<sup>92</sup> Florovsky, "Antinomies of Christian History: Empire and Desert", *Christianity and Culture*, Belmont, Mass.: Nordland, 1974, pp. 68- 69.

\*

The other-worldliness of Christianity – the fact that is “in” the world without being “of” it – was especially emphasized by monasticism, which emerged as an organized institution in the fourth century that defied worldly conventions, choosing the uncultivated desert over Roman city life. The monks truly had no earthly fatherland; they lived wholly in anticipation of the Kingdom to come. However, though supremely unworldly, they were not revolutionaries in a political sense; they remained loyal to the Roman Empire and its Orthodox Christian emperors, and cared about its prosperity. Holy monks such as Anthony the Great or Sabbas the Sanctified would leave their deserts in order to defend the faith or give counsel to the emperors when the Empire was in spiritual or material danger.<sup>93</sup>

---

<sup>93</sup> ‘Never did Anthony associate with any schismatic sect, he was altogether wonderful in faith and religion, for he never held communion with the Meletian schismatics, knowing their wickedness and apostasy from the beginning; nor did he have any friendly dealings with the Manichaeans or any other heretics; or, if he did interact with them, it was only to offer advice to them that they should repent of their heresy and change to piety. For he thought and asserted that interactions with these heretics was harmful and destructive to the soul.

“In the same manner also he loathed the heresy of the Arians, and exhorted everyone to neither to approach them nor to hold their erroneous belief. And once, when certain Arian madmen came to him, when he had questioned them and learned their impiety, he drove them from the mountain, saying that their words were worse than the poison of serpents.

“And once also the Arians lyingly claimed that Anthony’s opinions were the same as theirs, and so he became displeased and angry against them. Then being summoned by the Bishops and all the brethren to return to Alexandria, Anthony descended from the mountain, and having entered the city, he denounced the Arians, declaring that their belief was the final heresy that would herald the coming of the Antichrist.

“And he taught the people that the Son of God was not a created being, neither had He come into being from non-existence, but that He was the Eternal Word and of the same essence of the Father. And therefore it was impious to say, ‘there was a time when He was not,’ for the Word was always co-eternal with the Father. Therefore, we should have no fellowship with the most impious Arians. For there is no communion between light and darkness. For you are good Christians, but they, when they say that the Son of the Father, the Word of God, is a created being, are no different than the Pagans, since they worship that which is created, rather than God the Creator. But believe that the creation itself is angry with them because they number the Creator, the Lord of all, by whom all things came into being, with those things which were created.

“It is impossible to convey the degree to which this great man’s words strengthened people’s faith. All of the people rejoiced when they heard this anti-Christian heresy being anathematized by such a Pillar of the Church. At that time no one, of any age or of either sex, remained at home. I am not speaking just of the Christians; but the Pagans as well, and even the priests of idols came rushing to the Church, saying, ‘We beg to see the man of God!’ This is how everyone referred to him. They crowded around him, eager just to touch the hem of his garment, in the belief that merely touching it would benefit them greatly.

“How many people were freed from the devil’s grip and from many different illnesses! How many spoils were snatched from the idols! How many people were saved from Pagan error and returned to Christ’s flock! The number of those who converted from the superstition of the idols was greater than the number of converts one would normally see in a year.

“And what is more, that when his attendants turned the crowd away as it surged forward, because they thought that he would find such a large number of people to be a nuisance, he told them calmly, ‘Surely this gathering is no larger than the hosts of demons? Surely this

Now the basic principles of monasticism were not new, being simply the uncompromising practice of the Gospel commandments. From the beginning, during the apostolic period, as during the pagan persecutions, there had been Christian men and women living essentially monastic lives. But as a large-scale, semi-institutionalized movement involving flight from the main inhabited centres into the desert, monasticism may be said to date from the fourth century, and in particular from the lives of the first well-known hermit, St. Anthony, and the first organizer of coenobia, St. Pachomius.<sup>94</sup> A similar role was played in the West by St. Martin of Tours...

The major centre of fourth-century monasticism was Egypt, and this location in itself tells us much about the nature of the movement. First, Egypt was, with Babylon, the world-centre of pagan religions and demonic enchantment of all kinds. However, there was a tradition that when Christ as a child had entered Egypt all the idols of the nation had fallen down, and the monks saw themselves as following in Christ's footsteps. Therefore they deliberately set out for the desert and the graveyards where the demons were thought to dwell in the greatest numbers, and there, having driven out the passions from their own souls first, they exorcised the demons by mighty feats of prayer and fasting.

Secondly, the climate and ecology of the Egyptian desert was extremely severe, and life was hard even for those who had no other purpose than to earn their living. But the monks drastically limited themselves even in those material consolations that were available. In this way they practised the Gospel commandments relating to poverty, chastity, obedience and self-denial in all things, translating them into the terse philosophy of the desert: "Give your blood, and receive the Spirit."

Thirdly, with a few exceptions (such as the Roman St. Arsenius), the Egyptian monks were of Coptic peasant stock, usually illiterate, with no part in that rich Greco-Roman civilization which the conversion of St. Constantine was opening up to Christian influence. And yet so striking were their spiritual attainments that well-educated Christians from the West, such as Saints John Cassian, Jerome and Melanie, as well as from the East, such as Saints Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom, came to them as to their teachers in Christian philosophy. In this way the Egyptian monks demonstrated both the possibilities of the royal priesthood of the laity (monasticism was essentially a lay movement), and reasserted a truth which was in danger of being lost as many wise and mighty men of the world entered the Church - the truth, namely, that lack of formal education is no barrier to the attainment of Christian wisdom, and that "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to

---

crowd of followers is no more numerous than the army of those of whom I wrestled with on the mountain?" (*The Life of St. Anthony*, by St. Athanasius the Great, Ch. 68-70)

<sup>94</sup> Even earlier than Pachomius, St. Chariton, who came to maturity in the third century, had organized three great lavras in the Judaeian wilderness. But Pachomius was the first to provide a rule of coenobitic life, given to him by an angel.

confound the things which are mighty,... that no flesh should glory in His presence" (I Corinthians 1.27-29).

Fourthly, these visitors from abroad took back with them the lessons they had learned in Egypt and applied them with astonishing success in their homelands, so that monasticism spread into the deserts of Palestine, Syria and Cappadocia, Gaul, Wales and Ireland. The Egyptian monks themselves rarely left their desert, but the reports of their exploits (especially St. Athanasius' *Life of Antony*) fired the imaginations of Christians with the desire to imitate them. Thus long after Egyptian monasticism had succumbed to Monophysitism and Islam, its principles were still being practised far to the west and north. Moreover, by the second half of the millenium the spiritual wisdom of the Egyptian monks had been combined in an exceedingly fruitful union with the more secular wisdom of the Greco-Roman world, so that the English monks in Germany and Scandinavia, or the Greek monks in the Balkans and Russia, brought with them not only the Faith but also the rudiments of education (in the case of Saints Cyril and Methodius' mission to the Slavs, even the alphabet). Thus monasticism became the major missionary and civilizing force throughout the rural areas of Europe and the Middle East, and even the urban households of the bishops were as often as not both monastic communities and schools of learning.

Fifthly, the Egyptian monks took a leading part in the doctrinal disputes, the most famous example being St. Anthony's journey to Alexandria to support St. Athanasius against the Arians. This demonstrated that the Faith was the concern not only of bishops and kings, but also of the humblest layman. This was a truth that towards the end of the first millennium began to be lost in the West, where the sacramental hierarchy of the clergy, led by the increasingly despotic papacy, was tending to replace completely the royal priesthood of the laity and the charismatic authority of the Spirit-bearing monks...

\*

How did the Church relate to the culture of the Roman Empire, both in the sense of the basic beliefs of the peoples of the empire, and in the sense of the material trappings of civilization?

As regards beliefs, the Christians made every effort to find common ground with the pagan philosophies around them while not sacrificing their own distinctive faith. The first example of this reaching out we see in St. Paul's dialogue with the Greek philosophers at the Areopagus in Athens, when he undertook to explain to them who was the "unknown god" they worshipped. The concepts of natural law and conscience (*συνειδήσις*) that he employed especially in Romans were Stoic in origin, although there were antecedents in the Jewish Scriptures – in, for example, Jeremiah's speaking of God implanting a law in men's minds and hearts that would be the basis of a new covenant (Jeremiah 31.33).

For the triumph of Constantine entailed not only a change of regime and religion, but also, in consequence of the latter, a change of culture. The new culture was a fusion of all that was best of the cultures of Greece, Rome and Israel. It would become in time the high culture of Byzantium, its art and music and architecture, the mother-culture of the whole of Christian Europe, whose imprint has not been erased even now, especially in Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

Now the Lord says nothing directly about culture. Indirectly, however, He makes it clear that high culture does not constitute part of “the one thing necessary” for salvation. For He was incarnate in one of the least cultured regions of the Roman empire, and deliberately chose uneducated fishermen to be His apostles. The Jews looked down on uncultured Galilee: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” ([John 1.46](#)). And yet it was from the fishermen of Galilee that true enlightenment came to the world...

The most educated of the apostles was St. Paul, who came from the Greek city of Tarsus and was trained in the law by great rabbinic teachers such as Gamaliel. And yet, while freely acknowledging his debt to Greek philosophy, he, too, says nothing directly about culture. Evidently, he felt that it was not essential for salvation, noting that not many highly cultured, educated or powerful people were being saved. “For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise,... that no flesh should glory in His presence” ([I Corinthians 1.26-27, 29](#)).

The fact that the treasures of faith were given to the uncultured fishermen and not to the cultured philosophers was celebrated in one of the highest works of Byzantine literary culture, the Akathist to the Mother of God:

*Rejoice, thou who showest philosophers to be fools!*  
*Rejoice, thou who exposest the learned as irrational!*  
*Rejoice, for the clever critics have made fools of themselves!*  
*Rejoice, for the writers of myths have withered away!*  
*Rejoice, thou who didst rend the webs of the Athenians!*  
*Rejoice, thou who didst fill the nets of the fisherman!*

The attitude of the Byzantines to pagan Hellenistic culture was ambiguous. On the one hand, they were proud of their Greek heritage, and delighted in seeing “seeds of the Word” in pagan culture. On the other hand, insofar as the roots of culture lie in religion, - the word “culture” comes from *cultus*, “religious worship”, - and insofar as the religion of the Greco-Roman world was pagan, and linked with such immoral activities as temple prostitution, the preachers of the Christian faith could not be simply indifferent to the culture around them.

As Fr. Georges Florovsky writes, we find a definitely negative attitude towards the music, painting and especially the rhetorical art of their time in

such early Christian writers as Tertullian and Origen. For “the whole of the culture of that time was built, defined and penetrated by a false faith. One has to recognize that some historical forms of culture are incompatible with the Christian attitude to life, and must be avoided or cast out.”<sup>95</sup> Thus Tertullian said: “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?”, and the martyrs destroyed the pagan temples because they were not “cultural monuments”, but witnessed to false religion. The modern attitude of valuing them for their aesthetic beauty or “cultural value” was unknown to the early Fathers.

Indeed, insofar as the old pagan culture had a demonic influence on backsliding Christians, it was not only not encouraged but even destroyed. We see this most clearly in the oldest and most tenacious of the pagan cultures, the Egyptian, which had survived more or less intact after being conquered by Persian, Greek and Roman rulers, but did not survive the coming of Christianity. The tenacity of the old faith is clearly seen in Cleopatra, the last of the Greek rulers of Egypt, who behaved like an old-fashioned pharaoh, building temples in the old style dedicated to the old gods, and suffering a thoroughly Egyptian death at the bite of an asp, the old Egyptian symbol of eternity. But when the Christians came to Egypt, the statues of the old gods were defaced and the hieroglyphs – the language of the ancient pagan priesthood – were destroyed. The last known pagan temple, which is found in the far south of the country, contains the last known hieroglyph dating to 394 AD...<sup>96</sup>

However, it is possible to dissociate a work of art’s original religious meaning from its aesthetic value and the elements of truth it contains. Indeed, this is part of what was involved in the fusion of Christianity and Hellenism that began in the fourth century. The forms of ancient Hellenistic culture – its philosophical concepts, artistic conventions and architectural shapes – were dissociated from their original content and context in the worship of false gods and turned to the service of the true God.

Thus St. Basil the Great wrote a work entitled *How one benefits from Greek knowledge*, which showed the spiritual benefits to be gained from reading, for example, Homer from a Christian point of view. Similarly, St. Gregory the Theologian wrote: “We have upheld from pagan education whatever constitutes an investigation and theory of what is true; but whatever leads to the demons, to deceit and the abyss of destruction, we have cast aside. Nevertheless, everything, even the deceptions, is useful for our piety, because by their weakness they help us to strengthen our own teaching. Knowledge, therefore, is not something that we must oppose because there are some who like to say so.”<sup>97</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup> Florovsky, “Vera i Kul’tura” (Faith and Culture) in *Vera i Kul’tura*, St. Petersburg, 2002, p. 664.

<sup>96</sup> Consequently, the understanding of the hieroglyph language was lost until the discovery of the Rosetta Stone in 1799.

<sup>97</sup> St. Gregory, *P.G.* 36: 508-509.

Again, the old forms could be transfigured by grace. Thus ancient Egyptian portraiture was transformed into the iconography that we see today in St. Catherine's monastery in Sinai; while the architecture of such buildings as the Pantheon in Old Rome was transfigured out of all recognition into such supremely beautiful buildings as the cathedral of Hagia Sophia in New Rome. The resulting synthesis was the glorious civilization of Byzantium, the cradle civilization and culture of the whole of Christendom, East and West, for the first millennium of Christian history. This creation of a Christian culture to replace the old pagan culture was not only *not* a matter of indifference to the Church, but a task of the greatest importance for her. For whether we understand "culture" in the narrow sense of "a position or orientation of individual people or human groups whereby we distinguish 'civilized' from 'primitive' society", or in the broader sense of "a system of values"<sup>98</sup>, all men living in society live in a culture of some kind, and this culture inescapably influences their thoughts and feelings for better or for worse.

Culture counts because it influences faith – just as faith influences culture. So the formation of the culture of Christian Byzantium was not, as Fr. George Florovsky writes, "what historians of the 19<sup>th</sup> century usually called 'the Hellenization of Christianity', but rather the conversion of Hellenism. And why should Hellenism not be converted? After all, the acceptance of Hellenism by Christians was not simply a servile perception of an undigested pagan heritage. It was the conversion of the Hellenistic mind and heart to Christ."

"In fact, this is what happened: Hellenism was cut through with the sword of the Christian Revelation and thereby completely polarized. We must call Origen and Augustine Hellenists. But it is completely obvious that this is another type of Hellenism than we find in Plotinus or Julian. Of all Julian's directives the Christians hated most of all was the one that forbade their preaching of the arts and sciences. This was in reality a belated attempt to exclude Christians from the building up of civilization, to separate ancient culture from Christian influence. In the eyes of the Cappadocian Fathers this was the main question. St. Gregory the Theologian lingered on it for a long time in his sermons against Julian. St. Basil the Great considered it necessary to write an address 'to young people about how they could draw benefit from Hellenistic literature'. Two centuries later, Justinian excluded all non-Christians from scholarly and educational activity and closed the pagan schools. There was no hostility to 'Hellenism' in this measure. Nor was it an interruption of tradition. The traditions were preserved, and even with love, but they were being drawn into a process of Christian reinterpretation. This is the essence of Byzantine culture. It was the acceptance of the postulates of culture and their re-evaluation. The majestic church of the Holy Wisdom, the pre-eternal Word, the great church of the Constantinopolitan Sophia, remains forever a living symbol of this cultural achievement."<sup>99</sup>

---

<sup>98</sup> Florovsky, *op. cit.*, p. 652.

<sup>99</sup> Florovsky, "Khrisianstvo i Tsvilizatsia" (Christianity and Civilization), in *Vera i Kul'tura*, pp. 642-643.

There is no obvious correlation between culture and sanctity. Many of the early Christians and martyrs were uneducated slaves, and there was very little specifically Christian art before the fourth century. Nevertheless, it is clear that the great culture of Byzantium, which built on and incorporated and transfigured the best of the earlier pagan Hellenistic culture, was necessary for the survival of Christianity down the ages. As we shall see, the beauty of Byzantine culture was a major factor in the conversion of St. Vladimir, the baptizer of Russia. In this sense Christian culture was necessary in the same way that Christian statehood was: as a necessary bulwark defending the Church from the outside. We see this most clearly in theology: the theological achievements of the Ecumenical Councils, and the refutation of the heresies that arose at that time, would have been very difficult without the sophisticated philosophical language and culture that the Greeks inherited from Plato and Aristotle. But nobody suggested that mastery of Byzantine art and philosophy was necessary to salvation.

In a general way, we can see that a decline in piety is accompanied by a decline in culture. This is particularly clear in Western culture, which declines sharply from the Carolingian period in the late eighth century. However, this is by no means a universal rule: some of the greatest products of Byzantine culture were produced in what Sir Steven Runciman called "the Last Byzantine Renaissance" - the period from 1261 to 1453 that was in general (and in spite of the hesychast saints) a period of religious decline.

## 6. THE HERETICAL AND PAGAN REACTIONS

“Under Emperor Constantine the Great,” writes St. Nikolai Velimirovič, “the Church acquired freedom, but the struggle did not come to an end. The Emperor Constantine’s edict brought joy to the whole Christian world, like a resurrection after a three-hundred-year-old crucifixion. Bishops and priests were released from prison, confessors were freed from their chains, those sentenced to death and condemned for the faith were pardoned, and the Gospel began to be preached, not in a whisper, but at full voice.

“But people met the joy of freedom in different ways. Some accepted it as a gift of God and a reason for a new glorification of God. Others understood freedom as the possibility of free thinking and lack of restraint of the tongue. And a third group - as general permissiveness in the expression of their carnal desires. And so a struggle broke out between the first and the second and third groups...”<sup>100</sup>

Unfortunately, the State that had given the Church freedom now, under Constantine’s successors, began to persecute her again...

As we have seen, the Church did not believe that the State should be obeyed in all circumstances. The Holy Apostles and Martyrs in the time of the pagan Roman empire believed, on the one hand, that the emperor’s power was established by God and should be obeyed whenever possible, and on the other hand, that he should be disobeyed if he commanded something contrary to God’s commandments. No authority, whether political or ecclesiastical, should be listened to if it contradicted the supreme authority, which is God. As the Apostles said to the Jewish Sanhedrin: “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge” (Acts 4.19).

According to Protestant writers, the triumph of the Cross under Constantine was not a real triumph, but a tragedy; for the Church entered into a union with the State that made her a slave of the Emperors. However, this is simply not true: the fourth-century Fathers showed a heroic independence even in relation to the most Christian of the Emperors when the purity of the faith was at stake. While entering willingly into a “symphony of powers” between Church and State for the sake of the huge benefits to the Church that that symphony afforded, they were uncompromisingly firm when the Emperors betrayed the faith.

And most of the emperors in the fifty-year period between St. Constantine the Great and St. Theodosius the Great did just that: they betrayed and persecuted the Orthodox Faith.

---

<sup>100</sup> Velimirovič,, “Zhatva Tret’ia” (The Third Harvest), in *Dusha Serbii* (The Soul of Serbia), Moscow, 2006, pp. 63-65.

Thus when St. Constantine's son Constantius apostasized from Orthodoxy and converted to "semi-Arianism", St. Athanasius, who had previously addressed him as "very pious", a "worshipper of God", "beloved of God" and a successor of David and Solomon, now denounced him as "patron of impiety and Emperor of heresy,... godless, unholy,.. this modern Ahab, this second Belshazzar", like Pharaoh, worse than Pilate and a forerunner of the Antichrist.<sup>101</sup> Again, St. Hilary of Poitiers wrote to Constantius: "You are fighting against God, you are raging against the Church, you are persecuting the saints, you hate the preachers of Christ, you are annulling religion; you are a tyrant no longer only in the human, but in the divine sphere... You lyingly declare yourself a Christian, but are a new enemy of Christ. You are a precursor of Antichrist, and you work the mysteries of his secrets."<sup>102</sup>

Constantius showed his despotic tendencies at the Council of Milan in 355, when he imposed the Arian bishop Auxentius on the Milanese, saying: "My will is law". To which St. Osius of Cordoba, replied: "Stop, I beseech you. Remember that you are a mortal man, fear the Day of Judgement, preserve yourself pure for that. Do not interfere in matters that are essentially ecclesiastical and do not give us orders about them, but rather accept teaching from us. God has entrusted you with the Empire, and to us He has entrusted the affairs of the Church. And just as one who seizes for himself your power contradicts the institution of God, so fear lest you, in taking into your own hands the affairs of the Church, do not become guilty of a serious offence. As it is written, give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. We are not permitted to exercise an earthly role; and you, Sire, are not authorised to burn incense."

At about this time, the Persian King Shapur started to kill the Christian clergy, confiscate church property and raze the churches to the ground. He told St. Simeon, Bishop of Seleucia and Ctesiphon, that if he worshipped the sun, he would receive every honour and gift. But if he refused, Christianity in Persia would be utterly destroyed. In reply, St. Simeon not only refused to worship the sun but also refused to recognize the king by bowing to him. This omission of his previous respect for the king's authority was noticed and questioned by the King. St. Simeon replied: "Before I bowed down to you, giving you honour as a king, but now I come being brought to deny my God and Faith. It is not good for me to bow before an enemy of my God!" The King then threatened to destroy the Church in his kingdom... He brought in about one hundred priests and about one thousand other Christians and killed them before the saint's eyes. The saint encouraged them to hope in eternal life. And after everyone had been killed, he himself was martyred.<sup>103</sup>

---

<sup>101</sup> St. Athanasius, in J. Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989, p. 36. In his *History of the Arians* (77) Athanasius also calls him "the abomination of desolation" spoken of by Daniel".

<sup>102</sup> F.W. Farrar, *The Lives of the Fathers*, Edinburgh, 1889, vol. I, p. 617.

<sup>103</sup> St. Demetrius of Rostov, *Lives of the Saints*, April 17.

This shows that the Fathers and Martyrs of the Church recognized the authority of kings and emperors only so long as they did not persecute the Church of God. At the same time, non-recognition – that is, recognition of the power as tyrannical – did not necessarily mean rebellion. Thus the Fathers did not counsel physical rebellion against heretical emperors such as Constantius, but only resistance against those of his laws that encroached on Christian piety.

“By the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century,” writes Riassophore Monk Adrian, “Persian power held sway once again in the Caucasus. Subjugated by the fire-worshipping Zoroastrians, the Orthodox inhabitants faced their first trial as a Christian nation – to convert to the religion of the conquerors or face persecution, torture, or even death. The Georgians remained steadfast in the Faith, producing their nation’s first martyrs during this period: the Protomartyr Razhden and the Royal Martyr Queen Shushanik.”<sup>104</sup>

\*

When Julian the Apostate (361-363) came to the throne, the passive resistance of Christians offered to his predecessors (as to the Persian kings) turned into active, if not physical, attempts to have him removed. For he was a uniquely evil phenomenon. A baptized Christian who had studied with Saints Basil the Great and Gregory the Theologian in Athens, in 351 he secretly renounced Christ, and when he became emperor immediately tried to turn the empire back to paganism.

“Ammianus Marcellinus gives us more details: ‘[He] directed in plain and unvarnished terms that the temples should be opened, sacrifices brought to the altars, and the worship of the old gods restored. To make this ordinance more effective, he summoned to the palace the Christian bishops who were far from being of one mind, together with their flocks, who were no less divided by schism, and warned them in polite terms to lay aside their differences and allow every man to practice his belief without hindrance.’

“Requiring the bishops to espouse religious toleration was a classic example of ‘divide and conquer’: ‘His motive in insisting on this was that he knew that toleration would intensify their divisions and henceforth he would no longer have to fear unanimous public opinion.’”<sup>105</sup>

Julian mocked the selfless behaviour of Christians during epidemics: He wrote that, “the recent Christian growth was caused by their ‘moral character, even if pretended’ and by their ‘benevolence toward strangers and care for the graves of the dead.’”

---

<sup>104</sup> Riassophore Monk Adrian, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>105</sup> Kershaw, *op. cit.*, pp. 334-335.

In a letter to another idolatrous priest, he wrote, "The impious Galileans (Christians) support not only their poor, but ours as well; everyone can see that our people lack aid from us."<sup>106</sup>

Another act of Julian's that elicited particular horror was his reversal of Emperor Hadrian's decree forbidding the Jews from returning to Jerusalem and, still worse, his helping the Jews to rebuild the Temple...

By a miracle of God the rebuilding of the Temple was miraculously stopped. St. Gregory the Theologian tells how the Jews enthusiastically set about the rebuilding. But "suddenly they were driven from their work by a violent earthquake and whirlwind, and they rushed together for refuge to a neighbouring church... There are some who say that the church doors were closed against them by an invisible hand although these doors had been wide open a moment before... It is, moreover, affirmed and believed by all that as they strove to force their way in by violence, the fire, which burst from the foundation of the Temple, met and stopped them; some it burnt and destroyed, others it injured seriously... But the most wonderful thing was that a light, as of a cross within a circle, appeared in the heavens... and the mark of the cross was impressed on their garments... a mark which in art and elegance surpassed all painting and embroidery."<sup>107</sup>

But if Julian had succeeded, then, wondered the Christians, what would have prevented him from sitting in the Temple as God – that is, from becoming the Antichrist himself? The Lord had prophesied that not one stone would be left on another in the Temple. That had not happened yet. But suppose Julian fulfilled the prophecy by rebuilding the Temple? Would he not be the Antichrist? And so it is from this time, as Gilbert Dagron points out, "that the face of each emperor or empress is scrutinized to try and recognize in it the characteristic traits of the Antichrist or of the sovereigns, good or bad, who precede his coming..."<sup>108</sup>

It is instructive to consider how Julian died... Julian had killed the envoys of the Persian king Shapur - Manuel, Savel and Ishmael - for their refusal to worship idols. The Persian king Alamundar prepared an army against Julian to avenge their death. So Julian set off for Mesopotamia to meet him.<sup>109</sup> On his way, he stopped in Ancyra, where St. Basil (not Basil the Great) defied him. "Basil was brought before him and the emperor tried to persuade him to abandon his faith in Christ, promising him honors and riches. Basil answered the emperor; 'I believe in my Christ, Whom you denied and Who gave you this earthly kingdom; but, that will be taken away from you, shortly. Have you no

---

<sup>106</sup> [https://asceticexperience.com/portfolio/christians-during-pandemic/?fbclid=IwAR1-7axYW0kFxFXHXeI7eKTS2RpGgJZgBWiD7qK2WdeBii4\\_VakAwJHFPK8](https://asceticexperience.com/portfolio/christians-during-pandemic/?fbclid=IwAR1-7axYW0kFxFXHXeI7eKTS2RpGgJZgBWiD7qK2WdeBii4_VakAwJHFPK8).

<sup>107</sup> St. Gregory, in Marjorie Strachey, *Saints and Sinners of the Fourth Century*, London: William Kimber, 1958, p. 78). St. Ambrose of Milan and the fifth-century Church historians Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret and Rufinus all confirm St. Gregory's story.

<sup>108</sup> Dagron, *Empereur et Prêtre* (Emperor and Priest), Paris : Gallimard, 1996, p. 167.

<sup>109</sup> St. Dmitri of Rostov, *Lives of the Saints*, June 17.

shame of the sacred altar under which you were saved when they sought to kill you as an eight year old child? That is why this temporary kingdom will be taken from you shortly and your body will not be buried when your soul is violently wrested from you in bitter pains.' Basil was tortured and killed for Christ."<sup>110</sup>

Julian went on to Antioch, where he reinstated paganism and killed more Christians. Then, as we read in the *Life of St. Julian the Hermit of Mesopotamia* (October 18), the believers asked St. Julian to pray that he should be overthrown. St. Julian prayed for this for ten days, and then heard a voice from heaven: "The unclean and abominable beast has perished." And it was true: the Apostate had perished in the war.<sup>111</sup>

A mysterious warrior had appeared to Julian and thrust him through; his last words were: "Galilean [Christ], you have conquered!" St. Basil's friend, St. Gregory the Theologian, rejoiced at the news of his death: "I call to spiritual rejoicing all those who constantly remained in fasting, in mourning and prayer, and by day and by night besought deliverance from the sorrows that surrounded us and found a reliable healing from the evils in unshakeable hope... What hoards of weapons, what myriads of men could have produced what our prayers and the will of God produced?"

---

<sup>110</sup> St. Dmitri of Rostov, *Lives of the Saints*, March 22.

<sup>111</sup> St. Dimitri of Rostov, *Lives of the Saints*, October 18. But it was not only St. Julian's prayers that effected it. The Mother of God, St. Basil the Great and St. Mercurius the Great Martyr were also involved in this critical moment of Church history. Thus when St. Basil heard that Julian's army was returning from the expedition against the Persians, "he gathered together the multitude of Christians, with women and children, and commanded them that they should keep a fast of three days. Afterward, with the faithful, he ascended the summit of the mountain of Caesarea [in Cappadocia] that is named Didymon (Twin), because it has two peaks. On that mountain was also the Church of the Most Holy Theotokos. It was there that the Christians betook themselves, entreating and beseeching with a contrite heart the only compassionate God and His most pure Mother, that the will of the impious emperor [Julian the Apostate] might be changed. While the saint stood with the people in prayer, he was counted worthy of a vision. He beheld a multitude of heavenly host encircling the mountain. In the midst of them, he beheld a certain Woman enthroned with great glory. She uttered to the angels standing by, 'Call Mercurius to me, so that he might go and slay Julian, the enemy of my Son.' It then was made manifest to Saint Basil that the Martyr Mercurius came. After he had taken up his weapons, he received his order from the Woman, who was the most holy Theotokos, and he quickly took leave..."

"After he beheld the vision, straightway, the saint descended with certain of the clergy into the city, where the Church of the holy Great Martyr Mercurius is situated. Within the church were to be found the precious relics of the martyr and his weapons, which were honored by the Christians. One hundred years had passed since the reigns of Decius, Gallus, Aemilianus, and Valerian, when the martyr lived and contested for Christ by his martyrdom in Caesarea. Upon entering those sacred precincts, Saint Basil could find neither the relics nor the martyr's weapons. He questioned the skevophylax [warden and keeper of the vessels] of the church to learn what happened to them. But he, not knowing the matter, solemnly replied that he knew nothing. The saint then came to know both that the vision was true, and that during that same night, the 26th of June, in the year 363, the ungodly emperor was slain." (*The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church*, January 1, Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista, 2003; Theodoret, *Ecclesiastical History*, III, 19)

Gregory called Julian not only an “apostate”, but also “universal enemy” and “general murderer”, a traitor to Romanity as well as to Christianity, explicitly denying that his was a power from God and therefore requiring obedience: “What demon instilled this thought in you? If every authority were acknowledged as sacred by the very fact of its existence, Christ the Savior would not have called Herod ‘that fox’. The Church would not hitherto have denounced ungodly rulers who defended heresies and persecuted Orthodoxy. Of course, if one judges an authority on the basis of its outward power, and not on its inner, moral worthiness, one may easily bow down to the beast, i.e. the Antichrist, ‘whose coming will be with all power and lying wonders’ (II Thessalonians 2.9), to whom ‘power was given... over all kindred, and tongues, and nations. And all that dwelt upon the earth shall worship him, whose names were not written in the book of life of the Lamb’ (Revelation 13.7-8).”<sup>112</sup>

\*

What made Julian the Apostate so terrible in the eyes of the Holy Fathers was precisely the fact that he was an apostate, a Christian emperor who then reverted to paganism. Moreover, Julian was the first – and last – of the Byzantine emperors who trampled on the memory and legitimacy of St. Constantine, declaring that he “insolently usurped the throne”. In this way he questioned the legitimacy of the Christian Empire as such – a revolutionary position very rare in Byzantine history. If, as Paul Magdalino suggests, “each emperor’s accession was a conscious act of renewal of the imperial order instituted by Constantine the Great,” and “the idea of each new ruler as a new Constantine was implicit in the dynastic succession established by the founder of Constantinople”<sup>113</sup>, then Julian’s rejection of Constantine was clearly a rejection of the imperial order as such. In this sense Julian was an *anti-emperor* as well as an *anti-christ*.

That this is how the Byzantines looked at it is suggested by what happened at the death of Julian and the accession of the Christian Emperor Jovian in 363: “Themistus assured the people of the city that what they were getting, after Constantine’s son Constantius and Constantine’s nephew Julian, was nothing less than a reincarnation of Constantine himself.”<sup>114</sup> Jovian’s being a “new Constantine” was a guarantee that he represented a return to the old order and the true, Christian Romanity (*Romanitas*, Ρωμαιοσύνη). From this time new Byzantine emperors were often hailed as new Constantines, as were the Christian kings of the junior members of the Christian commonwealth of nations from England to Georgia.

After Julian, nobody believed that *all* emperors were established by God. The principle of monarchical power was good and from God – that was what

---

<sup>112</sup> St. Gregory, *First Word against Julian*, 35; *Second Word against Julian*, 26.

<sup>113</sup> Magdalino (ed.), *New Constantines: the Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, Aldershot: Variorum, 1994, pp. 2, 3.

<sup>114</sup> Magdalino, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.

St. Paul meant when he said that “all authority is from God” in Romans 13.1. But St. Paul had specified what he meant by “power” by saying that the king was “a servant of God for good”, to reward the good and punish the evildoers. This could not apply to rulers such as Julian. They were not kings or authorities, but rebels and tyrants.

## 7. EMPEROR THEODOSIUS THE GREAT

The fifteen years or so after the death of the Emperor Jovian in 363 were a very difficult time for the Orthodox Church as Arian emperors persecuted the faith and suffered disastrous defeats at the hands of barbarians. Thus Valens, the Arian emperor of the East, offered the Goths land inside the Roman empire, but the deal was handled badly, war erupted and in 378 he was killed and his army overwhelmed at Adrianople, in accordance with the prophecy of St. Isaac of the Dalmatian monastery.

However, deliverance was on its way: in January, 379, the western emperor Gratian raised a Spanish general, Theodosius the Great, to the throne of the East. He restored order politically by making peace with the Persians, and signing a treaty with the Goths, giving them land in Illyricum and Thrace in exchange for military service (as a separate national contingent) in the Roman Army. This was later considered a fateful innovation in Roman policy in relation to the barbarians. But for the time being it worked...

However, Theodosius' most important actions related to the faith. In February, 380 he banned overt paganism, and in 381 he convened the Second Ecumenical Council at Constantinople under the presidency, first, of St. Meletius, Archbishop of Antioch, and then, after his death, of St. Gregory the Theologian, Archbishop of Constantinople. However, St. Gregory retired, and St. Nectarius took his place as archbishop and president of the Council. When Theodosius was not yet emperor, and had not yet Saint Meletius, we read in his *life*, "Meletius appeared to the General in a dream and invested him with the imperial mantle and crown. On awakening, Theodosius related everything to a servant and pondered on its meaning... [When the bishops arrived at the palace for the Council], the ruler studied their faces and at once recognized Meletius. Ignoring the others, Theodosius fell prostrate before the saint. Like a devoted son long separated from his father, the Emperor kissed Meletius' hands, shoulders, eyes, lips and head. He publicly related his dream and accorded the man of God greater honour than any other hierarch."<sup>115</sup>

The Council completed the Nicene Creed (it should really be called the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed), and clearly condemned, not only Arianism, which denied the Divinity of Christ, but also Macedonianism, which denied the Divinity of the Holy Spirit.

Meanwhile, Gratian, the *de facto* emperor of the West (the *de jure* emperor, Valentinian II, was his very young half-brother and under his guardianship) removed the altar to Victory from the Senate and renounced the office of *Pontifex Maximus*, thereby breaking the last link of the Orthodox empire with the pagan religion and senatorial establishment of Old Rome.

---

<sup>115</sup> St. Demetrius of Rostov, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, House Springs, Mo.: Chrysostom Press, 2003, vol. 6, February 12, p. 153

However, the enemies of the faith now made a last bid for power through political schism. It began, as Stephen Kershaw writes, when “the Roman army in Britain, which was manfully fighting off barbarian attacks from the north, rebelled and elevated Magnus Maximus (‘Great the Greatest’), who was probably the *Dux Britanniarum*, to the purple. In later times, he entered Welsh legend<sup>116</sup> in the story of *Mabinogion* and *The Dream of Macsen Wledig*, and prior to his departure to mainland Europe he seems to have minted coins at Londinium [London], which depicted a winged Victory hovering over the two Emperors (of which he was going to be the Western one). When he crossed over into Gaul, Gratian was deserted by his troops (led by his general Maerobaudes) at Paris (recently named as such after the Gallic Parisii tribe) and fled to Lugdunum [Lyons]. There he was betrayed by the governor and killed on 25 August.

“Magnus Maximus and Theodosius I had some things in common: both were Spaniards, and both were highly orthodox. Magnus Maximus assumed control over Britain, Gaul and Spain from his capital at Treveri [Trier] for the next five years, and began negotiations with Theodosius I and Valentinian II, who was currently at Mediolanum [Milan], to try to get them to recognize him as their colleague. Theodosius I did not recognize Magnus Maximus as co-Augustus, but Valentinian, or more correctly Bishop Ambrose, who was acting on Valentinian II’s behalf, dug his heels in. Magnus Maximus’ terms would have relegated Valentinian II to the junior side of a father/son relationship, and the arrangement was clearly unacceptable to his advisers. The only solution would be a military one.

“In 387 Magnus Maximus invaded northern Italy. His success forced Valentinian II, accompanied by his mother Justina and sister Gallia, to head east to Thessalonica. This presented Theodosius I with a dilemma he could not shirk. Should he keep faith with Magnus Maximus, who was stronger than Valentinian II, Nicene and Spanish, or should he support his family, despite the fact that Valentinian II was very much under the thumb of Justina, who was not just an Arian, but also even prepared to court pagans and African Donatists to bolster her son’s position? To some surprise, he chose the family option. Zosimus explained why: Theodosius I had recently lost his first wife Aelia Flacilla, who had been a model of Christian piety and charity. Justina now offered him her daughter Gallia, who was extremely attractive on two counts: (1) she was stunningly beautiful; (2) she was (convolutedly) related to Constantine the Great. Her double allure was too much for Theodosius I, particularly when Justina promised that her family would become orthodox. So he marched against Magnus Maximus. His onslaught was so unexpectedly swift that he caught Magnus Maximus completely unprepared. Having won victories in the Balkans, he descended on Apuleia, where Magnus Maximus was captured and executed on 27 August 388.

---

<sup>116</sup> He had a very pious Welsh wife, Helena, who is mentioned as serving St. Martin of Tours in Sulpicius Severus’ *Life of Martin*, and may be the titular saint of the church on Lundy island in the Bristol Channel.

“Theodosius I, who now ruled both East and West, installed himself at Mediolanum [Milan] until mid-391. Maximus’ family and close associates were duly put to the sword, but the defeated soldiers were integrated into Theodosius I’s armies. The obelisk of Theodosius I now in the Hippodrome at Istanbul partly celebrates his victory over Magnus Maximus and its base has relief carvings showing him, Valentinian II, and his two sons Arcadius and Honorius. For now, Arcadius represented him as Augustus of the East, while Valentinian II was reinstated at Treveri [Trier] under the watchful eye of the Frankish *Magister Militum* Arbogast...”<sup>117</sup>

But in 392 Valentinian was found hanged in Vienne.<sup>118</sup> “Arbogast said it was suicide, but others suspected foul play. Certainly the swift appointment of a Christian but pagan-sympathetic rhetorician called Flavius Eugenius as his successor has a whiff of conspiracy about it, and the new Augustus had the backing of many Senators. Theodosius I knew that this was not only a threat to him, but, by association, to Christianity itself. He rejected all of Eugenius’ efforts to secure his recognition, and made the situation clear by elevating his younger son Honorius to the rank of Augustus, before mobilizing a formidable army to take on the usurper in 392.”<sup>119</sup>

Thornton writes: “The sudden appearance of Eugenius and Arbogast in Italy sparked hopes for a pagan revival. Indeed, this is what was attempted. Eugenius permitted the pagan altar of Victory to be returned to the Senate chamber and ‘temples were rapidly restored and rededicated, festivals punctually celebrated, sacrifices correctly performed and the mystery cults revived... At Ostia the temple of Hercules was rebuilt. Furthermore, Arbogast boasted that he would soon stable his horses in the cathedral of the Christians.

“Saint Theodosios, at first reluctant to go to war over the elevation of Eugenius, could not ignore the implications of this direct challenge to his authority and to Christianity. Both sides prepared for war. Saint Theodosios accompanied his army on the march north-west, through Illyricum, to seize the Alpine passes. Then, at a river the Romans called ‘Frigidum’, now the Vipava in Slovenia, the two armies met. Prior to leaving, Saint Theodosios had

---

<sup>117</sup> Kershaw, *op. cit.*, pp. 356-358.

<sup>118</sup> The *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, in its entry on St. Ambrose, writes: “The [murder](#) of his youthful ward, [Valentinian II](#), which happened in [Gaul](#), May, 393, just as Ambrose was crossing the Alps to [baptize](#) him plunged the Saint into deep affliction. His eulogy delivered at [Milan](#) is singularly tender; he [courageously](#) described him as a martyr [baptized](#) in his own blood.” (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01383c.htm>) Again, he said: “I hear you lamenting because he had not received the sacrament of Baptism. Tell me, what else could we have, except the will to it, the asking for it? He too had just now this desire; and after he came into Italy it was begun, and a short time ago he signified that he wished to be baptized by me. Did he, then, not have the grace which he desired? Did he not have what he eagerly sought? Certainly, because he already sought it, he received it. What else does it mean: Whatever just man shall be overtaken by death, his soul shall be at rest ([Wisdom of Solomon](#) 4:7).” (*Sympathy at the Death of Valentinian*, 51)

<sup>119</sup> Kershaw, *op. cit.*, pp. 359-360.

consulted an Egyptian Monk, Saint John of Lycopolis, who prophesied that the Christian army would win a great victory after much bloodshed, but that Saint Theodosios would die in Italy.

“The battle commenced on September 5, 394, with a frenzied assault by the Christians. Huge numbers perished and, by the close of the day, the Christians were thrown back. Eugenius was delighted, assuming that he had won, while there was deep gloom in the Christian camp. Saint Theodosios spent the night in prayer, and had a vision of Saints John and Philip, ‘who bade him take courage’. The following day, the assault was renewed. However, this time Almighty God intervened. Accompanying the Christian army was a wind of cyclone strength, blowing towards the enemy. The forces of Eugenius and Arbogast were blinded by great clouds of dust and their arrows and spears were deflected back towards themselves. It became nearly impossible for the infantry to hold on to its shields in the fierce wind, which pushed them back, while the same wind, catching the backs of the shields of the Christians, pulled them forward into the fray. The enemy line broke and Eugenius was captured, and later executed for treason and apostasy. Arbogast fled into the mountains and, after a few days, overwhelmed with despair, committed suicide. Saint Theodosius entered Italy in triumph.

“Since the contest had been seen on both sides as a battle between the God of the Christians against the old gods of Rome, the effect on pagan opinion was devastating. Clearly the God of the Christians had decided the victor by direct intervention and many pagans, as a result, were immediately converted to the banner of Christ...”<sup>120</sup>

St. Theodosius died in Milan in 395, the last ruler of a united and Orthodox Roman empire extending from Britain to the borders of Persia... After him, the decline from this peak of piety and power would be steep...

---

<sup>120</sup> Thornton, *op. cit.*, pp. 400-401.

## 8. THE CONSTANTINIAN REVOLUTION: (4) RELIGIOUS TOLERATION

The pagan Roman emperors had been in general tolerant of religion. This was for reasons of political expediency – a multi-ethnic and multi-faith population is more easily controlled if all its faiths are respected and legalized. Another motive was superstition. After all, calculated the ruler, the god of this people is more likely to help me if I do not persecute his people... And so in Imperial Rome before Constantine periods of persecution were intermittent and generally short-lived, and directed exclusively at Christians. As Perez Zagorin writes, Rome “was tolerant in practice in permitting the existence of many diverse religious cults, provided their votaries also complied with the worship of the divine emperor as part of the state religion. Unlike Christianity and Judaism, Roman religion had no sacred scriptures and did not depend on any creed, dogmas, or ethical principles. It consisted very largely of participation in cult acts connected with the worship of various deities and spirits that protected the Roman state and were associated with public, family, and domestic life. At nearly all stages of their history the Romans were willing to accept foreign cults and practices; this de facto religious pluralism is entirely attributable to the polytheistic character of Roman religion and had nothing to do with principles of values sanctioning religious toleration, a concept unknown to Roman society or law and never debated by Roman philosophers or political writers.”<sup>121</sup>

Christianity introduced a new complexity to the question of religious toleration. On the one hand, the Christians, like the Jews, rejected the idea of a multiplicity of gods, and insisted that there was only one name by which men could be saved – that of the One True God, Jesus Christ. This position did not logically imply that Christians wanted to persecute people of other faiths. But the “exclusivism” of Christianity, then as now, was perceived by the pagan-ecumenist majority, whether sincerely or insincerely, as a threat to themselves. On the other hand, the Christians set no value on the forcible conversion of people to the Faith: man, being in the image of God, was free, and could come to God only by his own free will. As the Christian lawyer Tertullian put it: “It does not belong to religion to force people to religion, since it must be accepted voluntarily.”<sup>122</sup> In his *Barring of Heretics* (ca. 200) Tertullian insisted on the truth of Christianity and declared that heretics could not be called Christians. Nevertheless, he was “opposed to compulsion in religion and stated in other works that ‘to do away with freedom of religion [*libertas religionis*],’ was wrong. While Christians, he said, worship the one God and pagans worship demons, both ‘human and natural law’ ordain that ‘each person may worship whatever he wishes’.”<sup>123</sup>

---

<sup>121</sup> Zagorin, *How the Idea of Religious Toleration Came to the West*, Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 4.

<sup>122</sup> Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam*, 2.

<sup>123</sup> Zagorin, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

However, Tertullian was writing at a time when the Church, as a persecuted minority, clearly benefited from religious toleration. What if the Church herself were to gain political power? After all, the Old Testament Kings were *required* by God to defend the faith of the people *as their first duty*, and the prophets constantly reminded them that they would be judged by God in accordance with their fulfilment or non-fulfilment of this duty. This same duty was taken very seriously by the first Christian emperor, St. Constantine.

However, through the Edict of Milan of 312 and in accordance with the teaching of his tutor Lactantius, he professed and practiced a policy of religious toleration. For, as he declared: "It is one thing to undertake the contest for immortality voluntarily, another to compel others to do it likewise through fear of punishment."<sup>124</sup> While not hiding his Christianity, and characterizing paganism as "superstition", he did not ban it. Thus in 324, just after defeating Licinius and taking control of the Eastern provinces, he wrote: "I wish, for the common good of the empire and of all men, that Thy people should be in peace and remain exempt from troubles. May those who are in error joyfully receive the enjoyment of the same peace and tranquillity as the believers, for the sweetness of concord will have the power to correct them also and lead them on the right path." In addition to allowing the pagans to practise their religion, Constantine never excluded them "from the administration of the State: one finds them among the praetorian prefects, the prefects of Rome, the ministers and even the entourage of the Emperor."<sup>125</sup>

In his last years, however, Constantine steadily increased the pressure on the enemies of the faith: by 324 pagan sacrifices had been banned, heresy was illegal, homosexuals were burned at the stake, and the official religion of the Empire was Orthodoxy. Constantine also defended the Christians against the Jews. He released all slaves whom the Jews had dared to circumcise, and those Jews who killed their co-religionists for converting to Christianity were executed.<sup>126</sup>

Nevertheless, the bark of the earliest Christian emperors was worse than their bite, and many of their decrees were not executed by local governors. But

---

<sup>124</sup> Lactantius, in Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, London: Penguin Books, 1988, p. 637.

<sup>125</sup> Pierre Maraval, "La Louve et la Croix" (The She-Wolf and the Cross), *Histoire* (Le Figaro), 8, June-July, 2013, p. 63. Timothy Barnes writes: "Constantine allowed pagans to retain their beliefs, even to build new sacred edifices. But he allowed them to worship their traditional gods only in the Christian sense of that word, not according to the traditional forms hallowed by antiquity. The emperor made the distinction underlying his policy explicit when he answered a petition from the Umbrian town of Hispellum requesting permission to build a temple of the Gens Flavia. Constantine granted the request but specified that the shrine dedicated to the imperial family must never be 'polluted by the deceits of any contagious superstition'. From 324 onwards Constantine constantly evinced official disapproval of the sacrifices and other cultic acts which constituted the essence of Greco-Roman paganism: Christianity was now the established religion of the Roman Empire and its ruler, and paganism should now conform to Christian patterns of religious observance." (*op. cit.* pp. 212-213)

<sup>126</sup> L.A. Tikhomirov, *Religiozno-Filosofskie Osnovy Istorii* (The Religious-Philosophical Foundations of History), Moscow, 1997, p. 340.

they had a long-term effect. By the 350s pagan sacrifices were rare. “Heretics were exiled, and Arius’s books were burned, just as the anti-Christian treatise of Porphyry was destroyed by imperial order. Constantine’s religious policy created an ‘atmosphere’ of hostility to heresy as much as to paganism.”<sup>127</sup>

But Leithart raises the question: “If religion was a matter of free will, why did Constantine so vigorously oppose paganism in his decrees, letters and speeches, and how could he justify any restrictions on religion at all? If Constantine thought that religion should be free, what was he doing forbidding sacrifice?”

“Elizabeth Digeser offers terminology and categories that help make sense of Constantine’s policies. She distinguishes forbearance from toleration, and tolerance from ‘concord’. Forbearance is a pragmatic policy, not guided by moral or political principle. Forbearance might change to persecution if political conditions change. The periods of [pagan] Roman acceptance of Christianity were periods of forbearance. Toleration is ‘disapproval or disagreement coupled with an unwillingness to take action against those viewed with disfavor in the interest of some moral or political principle.’ This principle could arise, as for Lactantius, from a theory concerning the nature of religion, or, alternatively, from a theory about human nature or about the limits of state power. By this definition, toleration does not involve an idea of the equality of all viewpoints but the opposite. Toleration assumes *disapproval* of certain religious expressions but refrains for principled reasons from using state power to suppress the disapproved religion. Beyond toleration, Digeser introduces the category of ‘concord’: ‘(1) its attitude of forbearance is dictated by some moral, political, or even religious principle and (2) it expects that by treating its dissenters with forbearance it is creating conditions under which they will ultimately change their behavior to conform to what the state accepts.’ These three strategies of religious policy build on one another: toleration assumes forbearance on principle, it expects that the forbearance will have the ultimate outcome of unity if not complete uniformity.”<sup>128</sup>

After Constantine’s death, his successor Constantius redirected the state towards hostility against Orthodoxy, and Julian the Apostate tried forcibly to turn the clock back to paganism. However, Orthodoxy returned under the Emperor Jovian in 363, and by the end of the fourth century, all paganism and heresy had been outlawed by Theodosius I, who declared: “It is our pleasure that all nations that are governed by our clemency should steadfastly adhere to the religion which was taught by St. Peter to the Romans, which faithful tradition has preserved and which is not professed by the Pontiff Damasus and by Bishop Peter of Alexandria, a man of apostolic holiness. According to the discipline of the Apostles, and the doctrine of the Gospel, let us believe in the sole Deity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, under an equal majesty and a pious Trinity. We authorize the followers of this doctrine to assume the

---

<sup>127</sup> Leithart, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>128</sup> Liethart, *op. cit.*, pp. 139-140.

title of Catholic Christians; and as we judge that all others are extravagant madmen, we brand them with the infamous name of heretics, and declare that their conventicles shall no longer usurp the respectable appellation of churches: these are to be visited first by divine vengeance, and secondly by the stroke of our own authority, which we have received in accordance with the will of heaven."<sup>129</sup>

As Perez Zagorin writes, Theodosius "proscribed various heresies by name, ordered the confiscation of churches and private houses where heretics met for worship, and deprived them of the right to make wills or receive inheritances. In the case of certain heretical sects [the Manichaeans] he commanded that their members be hunted down and executed. In his attempt to enforce uniformity of belief he also instituted legislation against paganism, including a comprehensive enactment in 395 forbidding anyone of whatever rank of dignity to sacrifice to or worship 'senseless images' constructed 'by human hands', on pain of heavy fines and other penalties. He was likewise the first emperor to impose penalties on Christians who profaned their baptism by reverting to paganism.

"... All subjects were expected to be worshippers in this [the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic] Church; and in addition to the spiritual and political authority its bishops wielded, it had the power of the state at its disposal to enforce its faith against heretics. The practical toleration and religious pluralism that had formerly been the Roman custom no longer existed. The change that took place is epitomised in an appeal made in 384 by Quintus Aurelius Symmachus - a Roman senator, orator, and prefect of Rome, and a defender of paganism - to the emperors Theodosius I and Valentinian II to restore the altar of the goddess victory to the Senate House (it had been removed by imperial decree after standing there for over 350 years, since the reign of the emperor Augustus at the beginning of the first century). Speaking in the name of the proscribed ancient religion of Rome, Symmachus declared that 'each nation has its own gods and peculiar rites. The Great Mystery cannot be approached by one avenue alone... Leave us the symbol on which our oaths of allegiance have been sworn for so many generations. Leave us the system which has given prosperity to the State.' His plea was of no avail, however, for the cross of Christ had conquered the Roman Empire, and the altar of Victory remained banished and abandoned."<sup>130</sup>

"In practice," writes Protopresbyter James Thornton, "the religious edicts of Theodosios were never implemented in a comprehensive fashion, since, as historian A.H.M. Jones remarks, 'there were too many pagans or sympathizers with paganism for that', and pagans continued to hold to their religious beliefs, albeit with some measure of discretion to avoid unpleasantness.

---

<sup>129</sup> Norwich, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-118.

<sup>130</sup> Zagorin, *op. cit.*, pp. 23, 24. However, Hill argues that it was not Theodosius' measures but Justinian's persecution in the sixth century that was "the first really thorough attempt on the part of the Roman authorities to stamp out paganism, and the first time that the various laws against paganism were seriously enforced" (*op. cit.*, p. 301).

“Pagan belief, by itself, was not proscribed or persecuted, nor was the open profession of that belief. Paganism, in the cities especially, thenceforth became more a private philosophical outlook, without a public cult.... [It] remained a significant force for some time, continuing ‘overtly in some places for several generations, and secretly for some centuries.’ Yet, it clearly was a dying movement.”<sup>131</sup>

Fr. John Meyendorff agrees: “It is clear that practical considerations often dictated tolerance towards large and influential groups of heretics. This was the case of the Gothic troops, predominantly Arian, on which the emperor had frequently to rely for his security, and of the various Gothic rulers, who conquered the Western regions of the empire and were not only invested with imperial court title but also remained diplomatic partners until the reconquest of the West by Justinian. The empire was also forced to exercise moderation and use diplomacy with the opponents of the council of Chalcedon (451), who constituted at least half of the population of the East. The numerically small, but intellectually influential group of Nestorians was not as fortunate. After its condemnation by the council of 451, it began a long history of survival, and also missionary expansion throughout Asia.”<sup>132</sup>

Judaism was also given some toleration. As Meyendorff writes, “If Roman imperial law eventually [under Theodosius I] prohibited paganism, it continued to offer limited protection to the Jews. Not only was their cultic freedom guaranteed, but the disaffection of synagogues was forbidden and their personnel – like the Christian clergy – were exempt of civil and personal charges. Arbitrary violence against Jews was punishable by law. However, since the very beginning of the Christian empire, drastic measures had been taken against Jewish proselytizing among Christians, and baptism of Jews was encouraged. Conversion of Christians to Judaism was prohibited, and Jews molesting a convert to Christianity were to be burnt at the stake.... They were not to own Christian slaves, and were deprived of legal protection if they showed disrespect to Christianity. They were also excluded from the army, the civil services and the legal profession. It does not seem, however, that – before the reign of Heraclius (610-641) – forcible baptisms of Jews were practiced within the Empire, as they began to occur in the barbarian Christian states of the West after the fifth century. The sect of the Samaritans enjoyed a status similar to that of orthodox Jews until the big Samaritan rebellions in Palestine under Justinian, which led to their forcible suppression.”<sup>133</sup>

However, the Church remained implacably opposed to Talmudic Judaism as the religion most implacably opposed to Christianity and insofar as the Jews, being in possession of the Holy Scriptures, had less excuse than any for not

---

<sup>131</sup> Thornton, *op. cit.*, pp. 398-399.

<sup>132</sup> Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1989, pp. 16-17.

<sup>133</sup> Meyendorff, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.

believing in Christ. Thus St. John Chrysostom writes: "Since there are some who think of the synagogue as a holy place, I must say a few words to them. Why do you reverence that place? Must you not despise it, hold it in abomination, run away from it? They answer that the Law and the books of the prophets are kept there. What is this? Will any place where these books are be a holy place? By no means! This is the reason above all others why I hate the synagogue and abhor it. They have the prophets but do not believe them; they read the sacred writings but reject their witness-and this is a mark of men guilty of the greatest outrage."<sup>134</sup>

The early Christian emperors of the fourth century used the death penalty against very few categories of heretics. For example, in the late 340s the Donatist Marculus was executed, and in 384 Bishop Priscillian of Avila was executed on a charge of sorcery.<sup>135</sup> Following St. Paul's assertion that the emperor, as God's minister, does not wield the sword in vain (Romans 13.4), the Church never condemned the death penalty in all circumstances. However, from the early fifth century, and sometimes even earlier, Church writers rejected the idea of killing people for their faith. Thus the Church historian Socrates said: "It is not the custom of the Orthodox Church to persecute".<sup>136</sup> And St. Athanasius the Great said: "It is a characteristic of [true] religion not to force but to persuade."<sup>137</sup> "Christians are called to freedom (Galatians 5.13), and every religious act of conscious Christians must bear on itself the mark of freedom. The ancient Christian writer Lactantius demonstrated that religion exists only where there is freedom, and disappears where freedom has disappeared, and that it is necessary to defend the truth with words and not with blows (*verbis, non verberibus*).<sup>138</sup> 'The mystery of salvation,' writes St. Gregory the Theologian, 'is for those who desire it, not for those who are compelled'. The 108<sup>th</sup> canon of the Council of Carthage cites the law of Honorius that 'everyone accepts the exploit of Christianity by his free choice', and Zonaras in his interpretation of this canon writes: 'Virtue must be chosen, and not forced, not involuntary, but voluntary... for that which exists by necessity and violence is not firm and constant'."<sup>139</sup>

In practice, degrees of coercion were applied. Thus St. Amphilochius of Iconium, a close friend of St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory the Theologian, "begged the Emperor Theodosius to send impenitent Arians into exile. The Emperor refused – such an edict would be too severe. Shortly after this Theodosius raised his small son Arcadius to the imperial throne, and sat by his side to receive his court. Amphilochius was among those waiting on the Emperor. He approached the throne and saluted Theodosius, but ignored

---

<sup>134</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 5*, 5.2; *Against the Jews*.

<sup>135</sup> Jonathan Hill, *Christianity: The First 400 Years*, Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2013, pp. 233, 294.

<sup>136</sup> Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, VII, 3.

<sup>137</sup> St. Athanasius, *Against the Arians*, 67; P.G. 25, p. 773.

<sup>138</sup> Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, 19.

<sup>139</sup> S.V. Troitsky, *Khristianskaia Philosophia Braka* (The Christian Philosophy of Marriage), Paris: YMCA Press, p. 207.

Arcadius. 'The Emperor, thinking this neglect was due to forgetfulness, commanded Arcadius to approach and salute his son. "Sir," said he, "the honour I have paid to you is enough." Theodosius was indignant at this discourtesy, and said, "Dishonour done to my son is a rudeness done to me." "You see, sir," returned Amphilochius, "that you do not allow your son to be dishonoured, and are bitterly angry with those who are rude to him. God too abominates those who blaspheme the Only begotten Son, and hates them as ungrateful to their Saviour and Benefactor." Theodosius immediately saw the point of the analogy, and issued the Edict of Banishment forthwith."<sup>140</sup>

St. John Chrysostom (+407) preached non-violence to heretics: "Christians above all men are forbidden to correct the stumblings of sinners by force... It is necessary to make a man better not by force but by persuasion. We neither have authority granted us by law to restrain sinners, nor, if it were, should we know how to use it, since God gives the crown to those who are kept from evil, not by force, but by choice."<sup>141</sup>

St. John interpreted the parable of the wheat and the tares to mean that the heretics (the tares) should not be killed. But they were to be resisted in other ways. "As we can see from the many occurrences of the phrase 'stop the mouths of the heretics' in his writings, St. John showed not the slightest indulgence towards false teachings; indeed, much of his life as a preacher was devoted to combating such heretics as the Eunomians, the Judaizers, and the Manichaeans. However, he was resolutely opposed to the use of violence by the authorities to subdue heretics. And it is this reservation of his that must be carefully understood, if one is to grasp what may seem to be a contradictory view of heretics. He knew from pastoral experience that heretics were far more likely to be turned aside from their errors by prayer: 'And if you pray for the Heathens, you ought of course to pray for Heretics also, for we are to pray for all men, and not to persecute. And this is good also for another reason, as we are partakers of the same nature, and God commands and accepts benevolence towards one another' (*Homilies on the First Epistle to St. Timothy*, 7). Near the end of this homily on the dangers of anathematizing others, he says that 'we must anathematize heretical doctrines and refute impious teachings, from whomsoever we have received them, but show mercy to the men who advocate them and pray for their salvation.' In other words, we must love the heretic, but hate the heresy."<sup>142</sup>

However, it may be wondered whether St. John's words should be interpreted as an absolute ban on any kind of coercion in any circumstances. For there were other prominent and holy Christians contemporary with him who did approve of some measure of coercion in some circumstances. In

---

<sup>140</sup> Margaret Strachey, *Saints and Sinners of the Fourth Century*, London: William Kimber, 1958, pp. 151=152.

<sup>141</sup> St. John Chrysostom, quoted by Fr. Antonious Henein, orthodox-tradition@egroups.com, 8 August, 2000.

<sup>142</sup> Hieromonk Patapios, "On Caution regarding Anathematization", *Orthodox Tradition*, January, 2000, p. 22.

particular, there was the question of the rights of the Christian emperor. If the Church as an institution or individual Christians could only persuade, not coerce, was it not the task of the emperor to coerce, or at any rate limit the activity of those who refused to be persuaded?

Zeal against heretics was, of course, not the exclusive preserve of the emperors and bishops. The lay Christians of Alexandria and the monks of Egypt were famous (and, in some cases, notorious) for their zeal. In general, however, as we have seen, the Church was against the execution of heretics. And when some rare executions did take place, there was a negative reaction. Thus when St. Martin of Tours (+397) signed the decision of a Synod condemning the Spanish heretic Priscillian and handing him over to the Emperor for execution, he felt the reproaches of his conscience, and never again attended a Synod of Bishops. St. Ambrose of Milan and Pope Siricus of Rome also protested the execution.<sup>143</sup>

However, we cannot say that the execution of heretics is *absolutely* forbidden by Orthodoxy... In the *Lives of the Saints* we find a few instances of saints - even of saints who were not secular rulers - blessing the execution of heretics, even executing evildoers themselves. Thus in *The Acts of the Apostles* we read how the Apostle Peter in effect executed Ananias and Sapphira. Again, the Apostles Peter and Paul by their prayers brought about the death of Simon Magus. Again, as we have seen, St. Basil the Great prayed for, and obtained, the death of Julian the Apostate (by the sword of St. Mercurius the Great Martyr). And the holy hierarchs Patrick of Ireland and Leo of Catania in effect executed particularly stubborn perverters of the people.<sup>144</sup>

In a very few cases, therefore, coercion was employed, not in order to convert the heretics - for conviction is not born through coercion - but in order to prevent the young and the weak-minded from losing the saving confession of the faith through their machinations; for, as the Lord Himself said, "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18.6).

---

<sup>143</sup> Hill, *op. cit.*, pp. 294-295.

<sup>144</sup> See St. Leo's life in St. Dmitri of Rostov, *Lives of the Saints*, February 20.

II. THE CHALLENGERS TO NEW ROME (FIFTH TO  
EIGHTH CENTURIES)

## 9. THE FALL OF OLD ROME

St. Constantine's transfer of his capital from Old Rome to the New Rome of Constantinople marked the beginning of the end of the Western Empire. For the old capital, weighed down by its pagan past, was in no position to defend and unify the newly Christianized empire, and would soon prove incapable of defending even herself. As for the new capital, in the words of St. Gregory the Theologian, it was to be "a bond of union between East and West to which the most distant extremes from all sides were to come together, and to which they look up as the common centre and emporium of their faith."<sup>145</sup>

Hoping in this way to make a fresh start for the Christian empire, St. Constantine had not been welcomed warmly by the old capital after his great victory over Maxentius in 312, and now he implicitly admitted that it was irredeemable. The symbolism of his act was clear: if the state, like the individual man, was to be redeemed and enjoy a long and spiritually fruitful life, it, too, had to make a complete break with the past, renounce the demonic sacrifices and pagan gods and philosophies that it had loved, and receive a new birth by water and the Spirit. (The fact that New Rome quickly filled up with the statues and monuments of paganism did not change the aim and the symbol.)<sup>146</sup> For Old Rome, in contrast to many of her individual citizens, had never been baptized. There was a pagan rotteness at the heart of the western empire that even its Christian head, the Emperor, was not able to cut out.<sup>147</sup> And so its doom was sealed.

"As the Oxford historians Peter Heather and Bryan Ward-Perkins have argued, the final breakdown in the Western Roman Empire began in 406, when Germanic invaders poured across the Rhine into Gaul and then Italy. Rome itself was sacked by the Goths in 410. Co-opted by an enfeebled emperor, the Goths then fought the Vandals for control of Spain, but this merely shifted the problem south. Between 429 and 439, Genseric led the Vandals to victory after victory in North Africa, culminating in the fall of Carthage. Rome lost its southern Mediterranean bread-basket and, along with it, a huge source of tax revenue. Roman soldiers were just barely able to defeat Attila's Huns as they swept west from the Balkans. By 452, the Western Roman Empire had lost all of Britain, most of Spain, the richest provinces of North Africa, and southwestern and southeastern Gaul. Not much was left besides Italy. Basiliscus, brother-in-law of [the Eastern] Emperor Leo I, tried and failed to recapture Carthage in 468. Byzantium lived on, but the Western Roman Empire was dead. By 476, Rome was the fiefdom of Odoacer, king of the Goths.

---

<sup>145</sup> St. Gregory, in Michael Grant, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, London: Phoenix, 1997, p. 198.

<sup>146</sup> See Judith Herrin, *Women in Purple: Rulers of Medieval Byzantium*, London: Phoenix Press, 2001, p. 11.

<sup>147</sup> See Dirk Bennett, "Ecstasy in Late Imperial Rome", *History Today*, vol. 48 (10), October, 1998, pp. 27-32.

“What is most striking about this history,” writes Niall Ferguson, “is the speed of the Roman Empire’s collapse. In just five decades, the population of Rome itself fell by three-quarters. Archaeological evidence from the late fifth century – inferior housing, more primitive pottery, fewer coins, smaller cattle – shows that the benign influence of Rome diminished rapidly in the rest of western Europe. What Ward-Perkins calls ‘the end of civilization’ came within the span of a single generation.”<sup>148</sup>

\*

The fall of the city itself took seventy years, from Alaric’s invasion in 406 to the deposition of the last emperor, Romulus Augustulus, in 476, when a barbarian officer in the Roman army, Odovacar, killed the father and uncle of Romulus and sent Romulus himself into retirement. But then, instead of taking the imperial crown himself, he did a remarkable thing: he declared that “there was no need of a divided rule and that one, shared emperor was sufficient for both [Eastern and Western imperial] territories”. And then he sent the imperial cloak and diadem to the Eastern Emperor Zeno... The old empire of Old Rome was dead, long live the old empire of New Rome...<sup>149</sup>

The wrath of God first visited the corrupt old capital through Germanic tribes coming from the north. In 376 the Goths, fleeing from the Huns, crossed the River Danube into the Eastern Roman Empire. In 378, in accordance with a prophecy of St. Isaac of the Dalmatian monastery, they killed the Emperor Valens and destroyed his army at Hadrianopolis (Adrianople). However, Constantinople itself, its eastern provinces protected from invasion by the Bosphorus and the Roman navy, held out against the barbarians. Valens’s successor, St. Theodosius the Great, made peace with them, giving them what is now Bulgaria, with their own laws and rulers, in exchange for providing troops for the imperial army and a cash subsidy.

In 394, the Goths under their new leader Alaric joined with the imperial army led by St. Theodosius and his favourite general, the half-Vandal Stilicho, to defeat the pagan usurper Eugenius. Soon after, Theodosius died and Alaric proceeded to ravage central Greece. Then, in 401, he turned west. The next year, Stilicho managed to stop him at the battle of Pollenia near Turin. Alaric and his Goths then withdrew to Epirus in Greece, while the Western Emperor Honorius (393-423) moved his capital from Milan to Ravenna for greater security. But in 407 Alaric marched into Noricum (Austria), demanding a large tribute. Stilicho advised Honorius to pay part of the tribute. Honorius, however, killed Stilicho in 408, which was followed by a pogrom against the wives and children of the Goths in the Roman army, whom Stilicho had protected. This in turn led to thousands of Goths deserting the army for Alaric, who ravaged Italy, besieged Rome and demanded a vast tribute in gold and

---

<sup>148</sup> Ferguson, “Complexity and Collapse: Empires on the Edges of Chaos”, *Foreign Affairs*, March-April, 2010, pp. 27-28.

<sup>149</sup> Peter Heather, *The Restoration of Rome*, London: Pan Books, 2013, p. xiii.

silver, including the famous statue of Valour or Fortitude, the symbol of Roman might. "This being destroyed," writes Zosimas, "all that remained of the Roman valour and intrepidity was totally extinguished".

But Alaric was a reluctant avenger; he was not really disposed to destroy Rome. What he was still seeking was a settlement whereby the Goths would be the third main nation of the empire after the Romans and the Greeks. But Honorius, though completely at the mercy of the Goths, would not cooperate. So, on August 24, 410, Alaric entered Rome and sacked it. However, he "had given strict orders to limit bloodshed. Orosius, writing while the memory of the sack was still fresh, reported that Alaric 'gave orders that all those who had taken refuge in sacred places, especially in the basilica of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, should be permitted to remain inviolate and unmolested.' There were a few fires, but the city was hardly damaged."<sup>150</sup> As Simon Jenkins writes: "Despite gruesome reports of devastation, reliable sources speak of the Goths' 'remarkable clemency'. Wealth was certainly stolen, but few houses were destroyed."<sup>151</sup>

However, the psychological impact was great. Blessed Jerome wrote from Bethlehem: "At the news my speech failed me, and sobs choked the words that I was dictating. She has been captured – the City by whom the whole world had once been taken captive."<sup>152</sup>

Tertullian had said: "In the Emperor we reverence the judgement of God, Who has set him over the nations"<sup>153</sup>. It followed that the fall of the western emperor had to express the *reversal* of God's judgement, His guilty verdict against the Romans, at any rate in the West. (In the East, in Constantinople, while the Goths occupied many important posts in the army and in the government bureaucracy, their influence was better controlled. This may have due to the prayers of St. John Chrysostom, who until his death in 407, supported the Orthodox Goths while firmly opposing those Arian Goths who tried to take control of churches in the City.<sup>154</sup>) Indeed, for patriotic West Romans like Jerome, the fall of the City of Old Rome was equivalent to the fall of the whole of humanity: "The flame of the world has been extinguished and in the destruction of a single city, the whole human race has perished!"<sup>155</sup>

The emphasis was somewhat different among the Holy Fathers in the eastern half of the empire. They emphasised heavenly patriotism, the patriotism of the City whose "Builder and Maker is God" (Hebrews 10.10) over any earthly patriotism, even Roman patriotism; for "here we have no continuing city, but seek one to come" (Hebrews 13.14).

---

<sup>150</sup> Terry Jones and Alan Ereira, *Barbarians*, London: BBC Books, 2006, p. 145.

<sup>151</sup> Jenkins, *A Short History of Europe*, London: Viking, 2018, p. 40.

<sup>152</sup> St. Jerome, Letter 127, *P.L.* 22, col. 1094.

<sup>153</sup> Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, 32.

<sup>154</sup> A.S. Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1952, vol. 1, pp. 94-95.

<sup>155</sup> St. Jerome, *Commentary on Ezekiel*, prologue.

Thus St. John Chrysostom, archbishop of Constantinople, wrote: "If you are a Christian, no earthly city is yours...."

"Though we may gain possession of the whole world, we are withal but strangers and sojourners in it all.

"We are enrolled in heaven: our citizenship is there! Let us not, after the manner of little children, despise things that are great, and admire those which are little!

"Not our city's greatness, but virtue of soul is our ornament and defense.

"If you suppose dignity to belong to a city, think how many persons must partake in this dignity, who are whoremongers, effeminate, depraved and full of ten thousand evil things, and in the end despise such an honour!

"But that City above is not of this kind; for it is impossible that he can be a partaker of it, who has not exhibited every virtue."<sup>156</sup>

The pagans were quick to come forward with their own explanation of the fall of Rome: Rome had fallen because she had deserted her gods. They pointed out that it was precisely since the ban on pagan practices imposed by Theodosius the Great in 380 that the barbarians had begun to overwhelm the empire.

To refute this notion, and to show that the disasters suffered by the empire were allowed by God to chasten and purify His people, St. Augustine wrote the first five books of *The City of God*, written shortly after Alaric's sack of Rome. "God's providence," he wrote, "constantly uses war to correct and chasten the corrupt morals of mankind, as it also uses such afflictions to train men in a righteous and laudable way of life. It removes to a better state those whose life is approved, or keeps them in this world for further service."<sup>157</sup>

In the second part of the work, he describes the origin, history and final destiny of two Cities - the City of God, which is holy and destined for eternal bliss, and the City of Man, which is sinful and destined for the eternal fire. The Roman Empire, like the Church herself of which it is the ally, contains citizens of both Cities, both wheat and tares. When the state is ruled by a truly Christian ruler, like Theodosius, one can see "a faint shadowy resemblance between the Roman Empire and the Heavenly City"; which is why one must obey the law and render one's patriotic and civic duty to the State.

However, this view was juxtaposed, in Augustine's thought, with a more radical, apolitical and even anti-political view. Thus at one point he calls Rome

---

<sup>156</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *On the Statues*.

<sup>157</sup> St. Augustine, *The City of God*, I, 1.

a “second Babylon”.<sup>158</sup> He points out that there was always a demonic element at the heart of the Roman state, which has not been eliminated even now. Sin, fratricide – Romulus’ murder of Remus – lie at the very root of the Roman state, just as sin and fratricide – Cain’s murder of Abel – lie at the beginning of the history of fallen humanity.

Therefore it should not surprise us that the Roman Empire should decline and fall. “If heaven and earth are to pass away, why is it surprising if at some time the state is going to come to an end? If what God has made will one day vanish, then surely what Romulus made will disappear much sooner.” “As for this mortal life, which ends after a few days’ course, what does it matter under whose rule a man lives, being so soon to die, provided that the rulers do not force him to impious and wicked acts?”<sup>159</sup> For it is the Jerusalem above that is our *real* Fatherland, not Rome here below.

Augustine’s purpose was to wean men away from trust in political institutions and to trust in God alone. Christian rulers were, of course, better than pagan ones. But politics in general was suspect. The empire had been built up through a multitude of wars, many of them quite unjust. And yet “without justice what are governments but bands of brigands?”<sup>160</sup>

It was not that Augustine was not a loyal Roman citizen, but the fall of Old Rome contributed to an atmosphere of introspection and self-criticism that sought explanations for the fall in sin, both at the individual and at the collective level. Thus Augustine distanced himself from a too close identification of *Romanitas* (Romanness) and *Christianitas* (Christianity). As F. van der Meer interprets his thought: “Compared with Christianity, what significance was there in things, admittedly good in themselves, like the order, unity and authority of the Roman Empire?...”<sup>161</sup>

And yet the *Pax Romana* was of great value. Alaric recognized that, which is why he had tried to come to an accommodation with Rome, and, failing that, limit the damage he did to the eternal city. In 409, very late in the day, the city started to issue coins with the inscription INVICTA ROMA AETERNA (“Invincible, Eternal Rome”). Even more respectful was his brother-in-law, Ataulf: “To begin with, I ardently desired to efface the very name of the Romans and to transform the Roman Empire into a Gothic Empire. Romania, as it is commonly called, would have become Gothia; Ataulf would have replaced Caesar Augustus. But long experience taught me that the unruly barbarism of the Goths was incompatible with the laws. Now, without laws there is no state. I therefore decided rather to aspire to the glory of restoring the fame of Rome in all its integrity, and of increasing it by means of the Gothic

---

<sup>158</sup> St. Augustine, *The City of God*, XVIII, 2.

<sup>159</sup> St. Augustine, *The City of God*, V, 17.

<sup>160</sup> St. Augustine, *The City of God*, IV, 4.

<sup>161</sup> Van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, London: Sheed and Ward, 1961, p. 584.

strength. I hope to go down to posterity as the restorer of Rome, since it is not possible that I should be its supplanter.”<sup>162</sup>

Arnaulf’s respect for Roman law was widely shared. The Romans attached enormous importance to their *law* as the necessary instrument of the Roman peace. As Peter Heather writes, “Roman imperial state ideology had long since identified the existence of written law as the single factor which distinguished the Roman world as a higher order of divinely inspired human society, far superior to that of any known or conceivable neighbour.”<sup>163</sup>

Again, in the second preface to his *Judicial Code* the Emperor Justinian wrote: “The maintenance of the integrity of the government depends upon two things, namely, the force of arms and the observance of the laws: and, for this reason, the fortunate race of the Romans obtained power and precedence over all other nations in former times, and will do so forever, if God should be propitious; since each of these has ever required the aid of the other, for, as military affairs are rendered secure by the laws, so also are the laws preserved by force of arms.”

The Goths bought in to this vision, to the extent of seeing themselves as restorers, rather than supplanters, of Rome, and the upholders of her laws.

Nevertheless, Rome declined quickly after Alaric’s invasion. The devastation wrought by the Goths in Italy had been so great that Honorius was forced twice to remit four-fifths of the tax revenues from the devastated provinces, thereby weakening the empire still more. Moreover, more and more barbarian groups occupied more and more of the taxable agricultural land in other parts of the empire. Meanwhile Honorius faced rebellions by usurpers in Britain and Gaul (Constantine III and Jovinian), in Spain (Maximus) and in Africa (Heraclian), which weakened him still more.<sup>164</sup>

“In just five decades,” writes Niall Ferguson, “the population of Rome itself fell by three-quarters. Archaeological evidence from the late fifth century – inferior housing, more primitive pottery, fewer coins, smaller cattle – shows that the benign influence of Rome diminished rapidly in the rest of western Europe. What Ward-Perkins calls ‘the end of civilization’ came within the span of a single generation.”<sup>165</sup>

The last notable victory of the West Romans took place at the extremely bloody battle (as many as 300,000 may have died) of the Catalaunian Plains (near Châlons) in 451, when the fearsome Attila the Hun was defeated for the first time by a Roman-barbarian coalition led by the Roman general Aetius and the Visigothic King Theodoric. When, undaunted, Attila invaded Italy again

---

<sup>162</sup> Ataulf, in Grant, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

<sup>163</sup> Peter Heather, *The Restoration of Rome*, London: Pan Books, 2013, p. 118.

<sup>164</sup> Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome*, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 44.

<sup>165</sup> Ferguson, “Complexity and Collapse: Empires on the Edges of Chaos”, *Foreign Affairs*, March-April, 2010, pp. 27-28.

the next year, he was dissuaded from sacking Rome only by an eloquent embassy of Pope Leo I to him at Mantua in 452 and a vision of Saints Peter and Paul, who appeared in a vision with St. Leo and threatened the Hun with death. Having turned away from Rome, he died a sudden and ignoble death in 453.<sup>166</sup>

But that was the last victory of the Western empire. In 455 a Vandal fleet under Gaiseric captured and sacked Rome, taking the Emperor Valentinian's wife and daughters back to Carthage. The Eastern Emperor tried and failed to recapture Carthage from the Vandals in 468. Between 455 and 476 no less than eight men were raised to the throne of the Western Empire and then deposed by a Germanic commander called Ricimer. Finally, as Simon Jenkins writes, "in 475 a Roman official named Orestes, who had served in Attila's retinue, seized power in Ravenna, and appointed his fifteen-year-old son Romulus as emperor, giving the boy the impressive name of Romulus Augustulus ['little Augustus']. There seems no limit to the agonies fathers visit on their sons. The following year the boy was ousted by a Roman soldier of Germanic origin, Flavius Odoacer, who did not bother with emperors but took the title king of Italy with his capital in Ravenna."<sup>167</sup>

And yet most significant of all were Odoacer's words on refusing to take the imperial crown for himself in imitation of so many usurper-emperors before him: "there was no need of a divided rule," he said; "one, shared emperor was sufficient for both [Eastern and Western] territories". And then he sent the imperial cloak and diadem to the Eastern Emperor Zeno...

The old empire of Old Rome was dead, long live the new empire of New Rome!<sup>168</sup>

"Royalty," writes Edward Gibbon, "was familiar to the barbarians, and the submissive people of Italy was prepared to obey without a murmur, the authority which he [Odoacer] should condescend to exercise as the viceregent of the emperor of the West. But Odoacer had resolved to abolish that useless and expensive office, and such is the weight of antique prejudice, that it required some boldness and penetration to discover the extreme facility of the enterprise. The unfortunate Augustulus was made the instrument of his own disgrace; he signified his resignation to the senate; and that assembly, in their last act of obedience to a Roman prince, still affected the spirit of freedom and the forms of the constitution. An epistle was addressed, by their unanimous decree, to the emperor Zeno, the son-in-law and successor of Leo, who had lately been restored, after a short rebellion, to the Byzantine throne. They

---

<sup>166</sup> Patrick Howarth, *Attila*, London: Robinson, 2001, p. 132. After St. Leo had obtained all his requests from Attila, the Hun's followers asked him why he had surrendered to "a single, unarmed Roman". "Apparently, you could not see the two men from heaven, one standing to the right of the Pope, the other to the left. They held bared swords and threatened to kill me if I disobeyed God's prelate," replied Attila (in St. Demetrius of Rostov, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, House Springs, Mo.: Chrysostom Press, vol. 6, February 18, 2003, p. 2006).

<sup>167</sup> Jenkins, *A Short History of Europe*, p. 42.

<sup>168</sup> Heather, *op. cit.*, p. xiii.

solemnly disclaim 'the necessity, or even the wish, of continuing any longer the Imperial succession in Italy; since, in their opinion, the majesty of a sole monarch is sufficient to pervade and protect, at the same time, both the East and the West. In their own name, and in the name of the people, they consent that the seat of universal empire shall be transferred from Rome to Constantinople; and they basely renounce the right of choosing their master, the only vestige that yet remained of the authority that had given laws to the world. The republic' (they repeat the name without a blush) 'might safely confide in the civil and military virtues of Odoacer; and they humbly request that the emperor would invest him with the title of Patrician; and the administration of the *diocese* of Italy.' The deputies of the senate were received at Constantinople with some marks of displeasure and indignation: and when they were admitted to the audience of Zeno, he sorely reproached them with their treatment of the two emperor, Anthemius and Nepos, whom the East had successively granted to the prayers of Italy. 'The first' (continued he) 'you have murdered; the second you have expelled: but the second is still alive, and whilst he lives he is your lawful sovereign.' But the prudent Zeno soon deserted the hopeless cause of his abdicated colleague. His vanity was gratified by the title of sole emperor, and by the statues erected in his honour in the several quarters of Rome; he entertained a friendly, though ambiguous, correspondence with the *patrician* Odoacer; and he gratefully accepted the Imperial ensigns; the sacred ornaments of the throne and palace, which the barbarian was not unwilling to remove from the sight of the people."<sup>169</sup>

\*

St. Augustine believed Old Rome had not been destroyed, but only chastized. By this tribulation God was purifying the Roman nation, as He had purified Israel in Old Testament times; for "God's Providence constantly uses war to correct and chasten the corrupt morals of mankind".<sup>170</sup> Rome would emerge from this period of affliction cleansed and better able to carry out her civilising mission in the world...

But the catastrophe of 410 did not produce the regeneration of Rome that Augustine had hoped for; nor any of the later ones. If it was still true at the beginning of the century that Rome was being chastized, not destroyed, by the end it had to be admitted that the disease was more serious and chronic than Augustine had recognised... For the sad fact was that Old Rome was still not profiting from the opportunity presented by the conversion of St. Constantine to regenerate herself. She remained throughout the fifth century in a situation of spiritual and political crisis not dissimilar to that in the time of Diocletian.

It was not the Emperors that were to blame: although there were no really distinguished Emperors after Theodosius the Great, they remained Orthodox. The burdens they imposed on the people were not imposed willingly, but

---

<sup>169</sup> Gibbon, *op. cit.* pp. 282-283.

<sup>170</sup> St. Augustine, *The City of God*, I, 1.

because of the desperate situation of the empire. They failed because Roman society was divided both against itself and against her non-Roman subjects and *foederati* - and a divided house cannot stand...

The situation was especially grave in the army. "From the time of Constantine," according to Nigel Rodgers, "Germans came to dominate the best regiments, the *Palatini*. After the disaster at Adrianople in AD 478, whole peoples of dubious loyalty, like the Visigoths, were enrolled in the Roman armies. If barbarians never accepted Rome's draconian discipline, Roman troops also rejected it. Vegetius, writing c. AD 400, lamented the decline of the old discipline, which had once made the Roman soldier so effective. Even worse, Roman armies too often fought each other."<sup>171</sup>

The senatorial class had much to lose from the empire's fall. But, snobbish and immensely rich, they did little to defend it. As a visitor to Rome remarked, they did not want to serve the State, "preferring to enjoy their property at leisure".<sup>172</sup> Cicero once said that the two prerequisites for happiness were a good library and a fragrant garden. But he had been prepared to fight - and die - for what he saw was in the interests of the state. Such a sense of civic duty appears to have disappeared from his fifth-century successors.

"In spite of frequent lip-service to the romantic concept of Eternal Rome," writes Grant, "many noblemen were not prepared to lift a finger to save it... They also undermined the state in a very active fashion. For of all the obstacles to efficient and honest administration, they were the worst. They forcibly ejected collectors of taxes, harboured deserters and brigands, and repeatedly took the law into their own hands... They often remained hostile to the Emperor, and estranged from his advisers. For a long time many were pagans while their ruler was Christian."<sup>173</sup>

The free poor of Rome did not come far behind the senators in corruption, continually wanting "bread and circuses". The Christian Emperor Honorius had abolished the circuses and gladiatorial contests after witnessing the martyrdom of the Syrian monk Telemachus on January 1, 404. But in spite of that, writes Grant, "a hundred and seventy-five days of the year were given up to public shows, as opposed to a mere hundred and thirty-five two centuries earlier; moreover the fabric of the Colosseum was restored as late as 438. It is also true that in the mid-fourth century 300,000 Romans held bread tickets which entitled them to draw free rations from the government; and even a century later, when the population of the city had greatly diminished, there were still 120,000 recipients of these free supplies. Certainly the population of Rome was largely parasitic. However, the city proletariat played little active part in guiding the course of events which brought the later Roman Empire to a halt.

---

<sup>171</sup> Rodgers, *The Rise and Fall of Ancient Rome*, London: Lorenz Books, 2004, p. 248.

<sup>172</sup> Grant, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

<sup>173</sup> Grant, *op. cit.*, pp. 75, 76, 78.

“It was, on the other hand, the ‘free’ poor of the rural countryside upon whom the government, struggling to raise money for the army, imposed the full rigours and terrors of taxation. Although technically still distinguishable from slaves, they were no better off and perhaps worse off, since they often found themselves driven into total destitution. Between these rustic poor and the government, the relationship was that of oppressed and oppressor, of foe and foe.

“This is perhaps the greatest of all the disunities that afflicted the Western Empire. The state and the unprivileged bulk of its rural subjects were set against each other in a destructive and suicidal disharmony, which played a very large and direct part in the downfall that followed. It was because of this rift that the taxes that were needed to pay the army could not be raised. And because they could not be raised, the Empire failed to find defenders, and collapsed.”<sup>174</sup>

As Christopher Dawson writes: “It was literally Rome that killed Rome. The great cosmopolitan city of gold and marble, the successor of Alexandria and Antioch, had nothing in common with the old capital and rural Latin state. It served no social function, it was an end in itself, and its population drawn from every nation under heaven existed mainly to draw their Government doles, and to attend the free spectacles with which the Government provided them. It was a vast useless burden on the back of the empire which broke at last under the increasing strain.”<sup>175</sup>

It might reasonably be thought that nationalism would be one of the disunities that brought about the fall of Rome. But, as we have seen, the Romans had successfully created a kind of Roman imperial nationalism, which many of the nations of the empire imbibed, thanks to the generous bestowal of Roman citizenship and the extensive advantages that citizenship brought. Local nationalisms were simply destroyed first by cruelty (conquest) and then by kindness (the bestowal of Roman citizenship).

Professor Mary Beard has argued that the main cause of the rise of Rome to mastery over the ancient world was her ability to co-opt the conquered peoples as fellow citizens and then send them out to fight for an empire in which they now had a big stake. Rome won her empire, then, through sheer weight of numbers; she was simply able to put more men in the field at any one time than any of her rivals.<sup>176</sup> Only in Judaea and Britain did serious nationalist movements arise, leading to prolonged rebellion and bloodshed. But both rebellions were crushed by – “boots on the ground”. Indeed, as David Gilmour writes, “The empire collapsed in the fifth century for many reasons, both internal and external, but nationalistic opposition to Roman hegemony was not

---

<sup>174</sup> Grant, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>175</sup> Dawson, *Progress and Decay*.

<sup>176</sup> Beard, “Why Rome Ruled the World”, *BBC History Magazine*, April, 2016, pp. 32-36.

one of them. The subject people were not fighting for liberation or self-determination. Most of them, like the British, who had valued the *beata tranquillitas* of Roman peace, wanted the empire to survive..."<sup>177</sup>

If we accept this thesis, then we can put forward an analogous thesis for the *fall* of the empire – namely, that Rome fell when she began to stop respecting and co-opting her conquered peoples, but began to despise them, and so lost reliable, loyal “boots on the ground”. One of the greatest and most enduring legacies of Roman civilization was the principle that every citizen is equal before the law, whatever his nationality or faith. This was no empty principle, as we see as early as the career of St. Paul, who, though a member of the despised race of the Jews, was able to win a trial in Rome because he was a Roman citizen. But by the fifth century this principle was no longer being applied; universalism had given way to a new kind of tribalism, anti-Germanism. And this in spite of the fact that the official religion of Rome was now Christianity, the most universalist of faiths.

By the time of the first sack of Rome, the gulf between the Romans and the (mainly Germanic) barbarians was becoming too great. Not that the barbarians, who settled in the empire through necessity to escape the hordes that pressed on them from the east, were always resolved to destroy it. On the contrary, as we have seen, they came to admire and emulate it. But the Romans themselves were not interested in converting or integrating them. Empire had gone to their heads; they despised the German hordes. Thus the Christian poet Prudentius, who had once declared that the peoples of the empire were “equals and bound by a single name”, now despised the barbarians:

*As beasts from men, as dumb from those who speak,  
As from the good who God's commandments seek,  
Differ the foolish heathen, so Rome stands  
Alone in pride above barbarian lands.*<sup>178</sup>

In the last analysis it was this racial pride that destroyed Old Rome. It may be regarded as a compensatory mechanism making up for a sense of imperial and national failure. It was the less excusable in Old Rome in that several of Rome's greatest emperors, both pagan and Christian, had come from the provinces: insistence on racial “purity” was not in the Roman tradition.

Old Rome ceased to be the universal ruler when she abandoned her own tradition of universalism, transmuted now into a higher *Christian* universalism, in which there is “neither Greek nor Jew”. By refusing to come to terms with Alaric because he was a Goth, although he was a (heretical) Christian and was not seeking to destroy Rome but only find a place for his people within her empire, the Romans provoked the first sack of Rome in 410, making later, still more catastrophic sacks inevitable.

---

<sup>177</sup> Gilmour, *The Pursuit of Italy*, London: Penguin, 2012, p. 49.

<sup>178</sup> Prudentius, in Grant, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

Not all Romans were so proud, of course: churchmen such as the Italian St. Paulinus, Bishop of Nola, the priest Orosius of Braga (who fled to Hippo from the Vandals) and the Gallic priest Salvian of Marseilles, were hopeful that a new Romano-Germanic order could be constructed. After all, as St. Augustine and his disciple Prosper of Aquitaine also pointed out, the fall of Rome was the manifestation not only of God's wrath against the Romans, but also of His mercy towards the barbarians; it created an unprecedented opportunity for them to come to the Christian Faith. For as Orosius wrote: "It would seem that the mercy of God ought to be praised and glorified in that so many [barbarian] nations are receiving, even at the cost of our own weakening, a knowledge of the truth which they never could have had but for this opportunity."<sup>179</sup>

Again, Prosper of Aquitaine wrote: "The very armies that exhaust the world help on the work of Christian grace. How many indeed who in the quiet of peacetime delayed to receive the sacrament of baptism, were compelled by fear of close danger to hasten to the water of regeneration, and were suddenly forced by threatening terror to fulfil a duty which a peaceful exhortation failed to bring home to their slow and tepid souls? Some sons of the Church, made prisoners by the enemy, changed their masters into servants of the Gospel, and by teaching them the faith they became the superiors of their own wartime lords. Again, some foreign pagans, whilst serving in the Roman armies, were able to learn the faith in our country, when in their own lands they could not have known it; they returned to their homes instructed in the Christian religion. Thus nothing can prevent God's grace from accomplishing His will... For all who at any time will be called and will enter into the Kingdom of God, have been marked out in the adoption which preceded all times. And just as none of the infidels is counted among the elect, so none of the God-fearing is excluded from the blessed. For in fact God's prescience, which is infallible, cannot lose any of the members that make up the fullness of the Body of Christ."<sup>180</sup>

Unfortunately, most of the Goths and other barbarian tribes had been converted to Arianism rather than Orthodox Christianity, in spite of the intense efforts of St. John Chrysostom (+407) to draw them to the truth faith. However, they had the truly Orthodox examples of the Gothic Martyrs Sabbas (+372) and Nicetas (+378), and the very early translation of the Bible into the Gothic language by Ulfilas, to inspire and instruct them. This showed that a real conversion of the barbarians to the truth was possible; they had already shown a desire for *Romanitas*, and could be persuaded to accept true *Christianitas* also.<sup>181</sup>

And so, while the Western Empire died, Christian *Romanitas* itself did not die with it. Although the Antichrist took its place temporarily in the sense that pagan and heretical rulers took the place of Orthodox ones, under the rubble

---

<sup>179</sup> Orosius, *Seven Books of History against the Pagans*, VII, 41.

<sup>180</sup> Prosper, *The Call of the Nations*, II, 33.

<sup>181</sup> J.W.C. Wand, *A History of the Early Church to A.D.500*, London: Methuen, 1982, pp. 181-184.

of the old empire new kingdoms were arising that were to restore Orthodoxy and reincarnate the spirit of Christian Rome, uniting both Romans and barbarians in the One, Holy and Catholic Church. As Peter Heather writes, “new rulers at the head of politically reasonably coherent bodies of military manpower, which had within living memory originated from beyond the imperial frontier, were now masters of the bulk of the old Roman west. Alongside Odoacar [in Italy], Anglo-Saxon kings controlled most of central and southern Britain, their Frankish counterparts ran northern and eastern Gaul, Visigothic monarchs controlled south-western Gaul and Spain, Burgundian dynasts the Rhone valley, and the richest lands of Roman North Africa were in the hands of the Vandalic Hasding dynasty. Groups from the old north-central zone of Europe as it had stood at the birth of Christ thus generated a huge revolution on Roman soil, replacing the old monolithic empire with a series of successor states.”<sup>182</sup>

This post-Roman age, popularly called “dark”, was dark only in the sense of a sharp decline in the level of its material culture. From a spiritual, Christian point of view, however, it was an age of sanctity. For whole new peoples were brought to the light of the true faith. As Dawson writes, “To the secular historian, the early Middle Ages must inevitably still appear as the Dark Ages, as ages of barbarism, without secular culture or literature, given up to unintelligible disputes on incomprehensible dogmas... But to the Catholic [i.e. Orthodox] they are not dark as much as ages of dawn, for they witnessed the conversion of the West, the foundation of [Western] Christian civilization, and the creation of Christian art and Catholic [Orthodox] liturgy. Above all, they were the Age of the Monks...”<sup>183</sup>

\*

The memory of Old Rome and her achievement did not die; it was to remain profoundly influential for many centuries to come. And if she could no longer be called *aeterna et invicta*, there continued to be great native Romans, such as St. Gregory the Great, who remained passionately attached to bringing the glorious traditions of Rome – both Old and New – to the unenlightened barbarians. Even the twentieth-century atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell concluded: “The problem of a durable and satisfactory social order can only be solved by combining the solidity of the Roman Empire with the idealism of St. Augustine’s City of God...”<sup>184</sup>

Indeed, the influence of Rome may go still deeper. According to the Brazilian philosopher Olavo de Carvalho, “Western political history might be easily summarized as the history of the struggles for the right of succeeding the Roman Empire. ... The Roman Empire seems to float over the Western mind like the ghost of an illustrious departed who refuses to die; of someone who,

---

<sup>182</sup> Heather, *op. cit.*, p. xvii.

<sup>183</sup> Dawson, *The Making of Europe: An Introduction to the History of European Unity*, London, 1932, pp. xvii-xviii.

<sup>184</sup> Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, London: Allen Unwin, 1946, p. 515.

acting over the spirit of the living with a subconscious obsession, possesses their lives as if they were tools for his own resurrection..."<sup>185</sup>

---

<sup>185</sup> Carvalho, *O Jardim das Aflicoes* (The Garden of Afflictions), 3rd ed., Campinas, Brazil: VIDE Editorial, 2015, pp. 266, 269. T.S. Eliot said: "We are all, so far as we inherit the civilization of Europe, still citizens of the Roman Empire, and time has not yet proved Virgil wrong" ("Virgil and the Christian World", in *On Poetry and Poets*, London: Faber & Faber, 1959, p. 13).

## 10. JUSTINIAN THE GREAT AND THE UNITY OF THE FAITH

“In Byzantium,” writes Ivan Ilyin, “the monarchy was considered, theoretically and practically, *elective*. The right to the throne was possessed by *every free person*. The presupposition was that the king was elected by the senate and the people; but the senate had been turned into an empty sound, while the people was not organized. There could not be any law of succession to the throne. A plotter who succeeded in ensuring the cooperation of the army and getting possession of the palace was recognized by the officials, and the rebel turned out to be king. Thus Justinian the Great (527-565) was elected as the Byzantine emperor by the leaders of the king’s bodyguards.”<sup>186</sup>

When Justinian ascended the throne, he set about trying to reunite the Christian world. For his great dream, as Protopresbyter James Thornton writes, “was to restore the Empire’s lost Western provinces. Previous rulers had sacrificed these territories, when they became threatened by the onslaughts of barbarian tribes, for the sake of the defense of the far more important and far wealthier East. But Saint Justinian’s thoughts hearkened back to the time of Saint Constantine I and Theodosius I, when the Empire stretched from the British Isles to the Euphrates... That Roman lands should have fallen into the hands of heretics and barbarians was, to the Saint’s mind, an affront to God’s will. It is also true, as the historian Charles Diehl (1859-1944) writes, that in principle Byzantine Emperors never admitted to any loss of territory. It is true that lands were lost to various barbarian incursions; but, to the Byzantine way of thinking, these lands were simply being temporarily administered by another local ruler on behalf of the Emperor. It was Constantinople’s right to reassert outright control when it served the sovereign’s pleasure.”<sup>187</sup>

Now large parts of the Christian world had seceded from the Empire for religious as well as political or military reasons. Thus Old Rome was in schism from Constantinople because of the Monophysitism of the Emperor Anastasius; while most of the Semitic and Coptic parts of the Eastern Empire had fallen into Monophysitism or Nestorianism. And so Justinian pursued his aim in two ways: in the West, through war and a mixture of concessions and pressure on the papacy, and in the East, by intensive theological negotiations with the heretics (led by himself), including Church Councils.

In relation to Old Rome he was largely successful: in relation to the Monophysites in the East - less so. This was partly owing to the fact that his wife Theodora secretly supported the Monophysites. Thus when the great ascetic and wonderworker St. Sabbas of Palestine visited Constantinople, the following incident took place: -

---

<sup>186</sup> Ilyin, “O Monarkhii i Respublike” (On Monarchy and Republicanism), *Sobranie Sochinenij* (Collected Works), Moscow, 1994, p. 430.

<sup>187</sup> Thornton, *Pious Kings and Right-Believing Queens*, Belmont, Mass.: Institute, for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 2013, pp. 251-252.

“Justinian requested the elder to bless the Empress Theodora, who, when she saw the godly Sabbas, also bowed low before him, saying: ‘Pray, Father, that I may be granted to bear children!’

“‘May God the Master of all, preserve your empire,’ replied the elder.

“Said the Empress, ‘Pray to God for me, Father, that He loose the bonds of my barrenness and permit me to conceive a son.’

“The elder answered, ‘May the God of glory preserve the Empire in the Orthodox faith and grant you victory over adversaries.’

“The empress then asked the elder a third time to pray that she be loosed from barrenness, only to receive a similar answer. Because of this she was deeply troubled. As the godly one was leaving, the monks who were with him asked, ‘Father, why did you not show the Empress compassion and agree to pray as she asked?’

“‘Believe me, Fathers,’ replied the elder, ‘her womb shall never bear fruit. It is not the will of the Lord that she be permitted to nurse an heir on the teaching of [the Monophysite heretic] Severus, or that such a child should grow up to reign and trouble the Church of Christ even more than did [the heretical Emperor] Anastasius.’”<sup>188</sup>

Nevertheless, there was a union, albeit fleeting, between the five ancient patriarchates of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem; and this union in one Church under one right-believing Emperor was a great achievement. There can be little doubt that the person most instrumental in achieving this union was the emperor himself: if the five patriarchates represented the five senses of the Body of Christ on earth, then the head in which they all adhered *on earth* was the emperor. It was through him, therefore, that the ideal of “One Faith, One Church, One Empire” was achieved. At the Fifth Ecumenical Council (553) all the patriarchates except Rome agreed on condemning the heretical “Three Chapters”. (Also anathematized was Origen and his teaching that all will be saved.) Only Pope Vigilius of Rome refused, whereupon he (but not the Roman patriarchate as a whole) was excommunicated; and in its final definition the Council condemned the budding papist heresy that one bishop was above the judgement of his fellow bishops. Pope Vigilius repented of his opposition six months later and was restored to communion with the Church. This condemnation of papism was accepted by all subsequent popes until the eleventh century.<sup>189</sup>

---

<sup>188</sup> St. Dmitri of Rostov, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, House Springs, Mo.: Chrysostom Press, 2000, vol. IV: December, p. 121.

<sup>189</sup> “Condamnation de la papauté par le Ve Concile Œcuménique”, February 19, 2019, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_73BEFBJWPo&fbclid=IwAR2WFD0GA6sMIA1w9ZiETOqg2DzEkt2Q6bMph4Xduh7MkYdLH0lece9n12U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_73BEFBJWPo&fbclid=IwAR2WFD0GA6sMIA1w9ZiETOqg2DzEkt2Q6bMph4Xduh7MkYdLH0lece9n12U).

This unity was not achieved without some pressure, especially on the Roman patriarchate. Thus when the Orthodox Pope Agapetus arrived in Constantinople, Justinian said to him: "I shall either force you to agree with us, or else I shall send you into exile." Whereupon the Pope replied: "I wished to come to the most Christian of all emperors, Justinian, and I have found now a Diocletian; however, I fear not your threats."<sup>190</sup> Nevertheless, there could be no doubt that it was through the emperor that empire-wide (ecumenical) councils were convened, and that through these councils a genuine unity of faith was achieved.

As Fr. John Meyendorff writes: "Without denying the dangers and the abuses of imperial power, which occurred in particular instances, the system as such, which been created by Theodosius I and Justinian, did not deprive the Church of its ability to define dogma through conciliarity. But conciliarity presupposed the existence of a mechanism making consensus possible and effective. Local churches needed to be grouped into provinces and patriarchates, and patriarchates were to act together to reach an agreement valid for all. The empire provided the universal Church with such a mechanism..."<sup>191</sup>

More precisely, it was the person of the emperor that provided such a mechanism. For since Constantine's time, it was the emperor who acted as the focus of unity of quarrelling Christians. The importance of this function was recognized by all.

In consequence, as L.A. Tikhomirov points out, even when an emperor tried to impose heresy on the Church, "this was a struggle that did not besmirch the Church and State power as institutions. In this struggle he acted as a member of the Church, in the name of Church truth, albeit mistakenly understood. This battle was not about the relationship between the Church and the State and did not lead to its interruption, nor to the seeking of any other kind of principles of mutual relationship. As regards the direct conflicts between Church and State power, they arose only for particular reasons, only between given persons, and also did not relate to the principle of the mutual relationship itself."<sup>192</sup>

The emperor's role as focus of unity in the Church was also displayed in the initiatives he took to convert the barbarians in the Balkans and in Ethiopia, and create bishoprics for them. Thus through *Novella 11* (535) Justinian created a new autocephalous Church named Justiniana Prima to conduct missions among the Slavs who had recently invaded the Balkan Peninsula. This new Church subordinated the bishops of Sophia and Riparian Dacia, Preslav, Dardania, and upper Moesia under the new Archbishop in a territory that

---

<sup>190</sup> Pope Agapetus, in A.A. Vasiliev, *A History of the Byzantine Empire*, Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Press, 1958, p. 151.

<sup>191</sup> Meyendorff, *Rome, Constantinople, Moscow*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996, p. 291.

<sup>192</sup> L.A. Tikhomirov, *Monarkhicheskaia Gosudarstvennost'* (Monarchical Statehood), St. Petersburg, 1992, p. 162.

roughly comprised today's former Yugoslavia, Albania and Western Bulgaria. In *Novella 131* (545), however, Justiniana Prima's territories were put back under the jurisdiction of the Roman Church after the Pope protested that this new autocephaly was an infringement on his rights. Justiniana Prima was closed in the seventh century. Nevertheless, its Metropolitans (of Philippi, Thessalonica and Larisa) maintained their independence from Constantinople by forming new bishoprics for the Slavic Diaspora.<sup>193</sup>

Some historians have been highly critical of Justinian's western wars. Thus A.A. Vasiliev writes: "From Justinian's Roman point of view, his western campaigns are comprehensible and natural, but from the point of view of the welfare of the Empire they must be recognized as superfluous and pernicious. The gap between the East and the West in the sixth century was already so great that the mere idea of uniting the two was an anachronism. A real union was out of the question. The conquered provinces could be retained by force only, and for this the Empire had neither power nor means. Allured by his delusive dreams, Justinian failed to grasp the importance of the eastern border and the eastern provinces, which embodied the really vital interests of the Byzantine Empire. The western campaigns, displaying only the personal will of the Emperor, could not bring about lasting results, and the plan of restoring a united Roman Empire died with Justinian, though not forever. Meanwhile, his general external policy brought about an extremely severe internal economic crisis within the Empire."<sup>194</sup>

However, this view is based on a serious misconception concerning both the aim and the results of Justinian's western *Reconquista*. Not only from a "Roman" point of view, still less out of personal willfulness, but from a religious point of view first of all, Justinian's wars were fully justified. And their effects, though achieved at great cost, were long-lasting. For they achieved *the return of Italy to Orthodoxy – and through Italy, the rest of the West*. For after the wars, there could be no return of the West to the Arianism of the Italian Ostrogothic and Spanish Visigothic kings; Orthodox Gaul was confirmed in her Orthodoxy; from Italy and France (and Ireland) Anglo-Saxon England, too, would become Orthodox; and from England Germany and Scandinavia would become Orthodox. This meant that the whole of the West, until the Reformation at least, confessed that Jesus Christ is both God and Man in the full, Chalcedonian sense. As for the East, the majority of its population voluntarily rejected Chalcedon, and has to this day remained outside the unity of faith established by Justinian even in that part which did not accept Islam.

This is the triumph and the tragedy of Justinian's reign. The triumph of reuniting millions of lost souls to Christ in the West, and the tragedy of failing to unite further millions to him in the East. But we must salute the grim

---

<sup>193</sup> Alexander G. Dragas, "The Constantinople and Moscow Divide", *Theologia*, December, 2017.

<sup>194</sup> Vasiliev, *A History of the Byzantine Empire*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1952, vol. 1, p. 142.

determination of the emperor who put the souls of millions above his own empire's good, knowing that it profits a man nothing if he gains the whole world but loses his soul...

## 11. JUSTINIAN AND THE SYMPHONY OF POWERS

The other, no less enduring kind of unity created by Justinian was his *codification of Roman law*. As Tom Holland writes: “If it was true, as Justinian ringingly declared, that ‘what medicine is to disease, so laws are to public affairs’, then there was much that first needed to be done before the emperor’s prescription could be applied to the sickening world. The sheer scale and antiquity of the Roman people’s achievements in the field of law had resulted in a legacy that was intimidatingly chequered. Justinian, however, was hardly the man to duck such a challenge. His first step, only a few months into his reign, was the appointment of a commission to harmonise the various unwieldy collections of laws used by previous emperors, then, a year and a half later, he charged a second commission with the even more daunting task of collecting the entire stupendous body of private writings on Roman law. Complete constitutions had to be revised, almost two thousand individual books called in and minutely sifted; tens of thousands of excerpts made. The resulting codification, achieved in record time, was so staggering that it appeared to many something more than human. Justinian himself presented it proudly as a process of restoration; but there was something about it as well of a revolution. ‘We have by means of old laws not only brought matters into a better condition, but we have also promulgated new laws.’ The emperor saw no need to conceal the fact. He was himself, as he declared, *nomos empsychos* – the ‘living law’. Here, in this self-promotion, was the ultimate refinement of what generations of emperors had been working to achieve. Henceforward, the rules by which the Roman people lived and were bound were to have just the single fountainhead: the emperor himself, enthroned in his palatial citadel. No wonder, then, that Justinian should have sought, not merely to impose his stamp upon the long centuries of Roman legal achievement, but also prescribe where and how that achievement should be taught. Private law schools were definitively banned. No teachers were to be licensed, save for those directly sanctioned by the state. Now, more than ever, the whole world was to be administered from the centre, from the palace of Constantinople.”<sup>195</sup>

Justinian’s *Corpus iuris civilis* (527-534) consisted of the *Digest* (or *Pandects*), the *Institutes* and the *Code*, containing imperial constitutions which were supplemented by Justinian’s own, new constitutions, called *Novellae*. The *corpus* therefore united the old and new in one coherent body.

“The dominant political message of the *Corpus iuris*,” writes Joseph Canning, “is a theocratic one. The emperor derives his power from God: in the constitution *Deo auctore*, at the beginning of the *Digest* Justinian describes himself as ‘at God’s command governing our empire, which has been entrusted to us by heavenly majesty’. The divine source of imperial authority is constantly reiterated in the *Code* and *Novels*. ‘At divine command we took up the imperial insignia.’ The emperor’s laws are sacred (*sacrae* or *sanctissimae*), thus reflecting the Christianising of his pagan role as *pontifex maximus*. They

---

<sup>195</sup> Holland, *In the Shadow of the Sword*, London: Abacus, 2012, pp. 159-160.

are, furthermore, of everlasting effect: Justinian decreed that his codification was to be valid 'forever' (*in omne aevum*). It is, therefore, his will alone which constitutes law; 'what has pleased the *princeps* has the force of law' (*quod principi placuit legis habet vigorem*). He is thus no less than the living law' (*lex animata*), an application of the Hellenistic concept of the ruler as *nomos empsychos*: 'Let the imperial rank be exempted from all our provisions [in this constitution], because God has subjected the laws themselves to the emperor, by sending him as a living law to men'. He is in short not bound by the law, but 'freed from the laws' (*legibus solutus*). This famous phrase indicates that the emperor is above human law: he is not subjected to the laws which derive from his own universal authority. This formulation laid the foundations for the elaboration of the concept of absolute power in the late Middle Ages.

"On the other hand there are also in the *Corpus iuris* statements which indicate the possession of authority by the Roman people. The historical outline of Roman law in D.1.2.2 includes a brief sketch of the republican period, and republican sources of law are treated in D.1.1.17 and Inst. 1.2, 3-5. The most fundamental question, however, concerns the origin of the imperial power itself: reference is made to the so-called *lex regia* or 'royal law', whereby the Roman people transferred its power and authority to the emperor. The meaning of these references to the *lex regia* has been hotly debated by historians. One school of thought has seen it as an *ex post facto* legal construction to justify the transition from the republic to the empire. Such a law never in fact existed, but was postulated by later classical jurists to explain the transfer of sovereignty from the Roman people to the first *princeps*, Augustus, a device, in short, to legitimize the imperial power. The other view identifies the *lex regia* with the *legis de imperio* by which the popular assembly gave power to each emperor at the beginning of his reign... The most likely interpretation is that the *lex regia* was indeed a later and classical juristic construction adopted by Justinian himself as having been genuinely enacted as a law...

"Whatever the truth about the *lex regia*, its significance for political thought was that it expressed the idea that that the emperor's power derived from the people, and thus provided a model for the popular source of governmental power to be elaborated later in the Middle Ages and the early modern period. The *lex regia* raised a fundamental problem concerning the origins of authority, because its inclusion in the *Corpus iuris* meant that both divine and popular sources of rulership coexisted. These two sources could be seen as mutually exclusive, and the *Corpus iuris* itself does nothing to solve the problem. At the time of Justinian the conception of the divine origin of imperial power overwhelmed any idea that the people were in any meaningful sense the source of authority; the only echo of such an ultimately republican idea was to be found in the acclamation of a new emperor by the senate, army and people. Such acclamation either sufficed as a form of election after the death of an emperor or, as was more normal in Byzantine history, or confirmed the already co-opted choice of the previous incumbent. Either way, popular acclamation

only served to declare the divine choice of an emperor whose power came from God directly..."<sup>196</sup>

In this connection the famous *Sixth Novella* (535) is especially important: "The greatest gifts given by God to men by His supreme kindness are the priesthood and the empire, of which the first serves the things of God and the second rules the things of men and assumes the burden of care for them. Both proceed from one source and adorn the life of man. Nothing therefore will be so greatly desired by the emperors than the honour of the priests, since they always pray to God about both these very things. For if the first is without reproach and adorned with faithfulness to God, and the other adorns the state entrusted to it rightly and competently, a good symphony will exist, which will offer everything that is useful for the human race. We therefore have the greatest care concerning the true dogmas of God and concerning the honour of the priests..., because through this the greatest good things will be given by God – both those things that we already have will be made firm and those things which we do not have yet we shall acquire. Everything will go well if the principle of the matter is right and pleasing to God. We believe that this will come to pass if the holy canons are observed, which have been handed down to us by the apostles, those inspectors and ministers of God worthy of praise and veneration, and which have been preserved and explained."

It should be noted that in this formulation of the principle of the "symphony of powers" – that is, the symphony of the priesthood and the empire – both are said to "proceed from the same source", that is, God. This has the very important consequence that the normal and natural relationship between the two powers is one of harmony, not rivalry and division. If some of the early Fathers, in both East and West, tended to emphasize the separation and distinctness of the powers rather than their unity from and under God, this was a natural result of the friction between the Church and the pagan and heretical emperors in the early centuries. However, now that unity in Orthodoxy had been achieved the emphasis had to return to the common source and common end of the two institutions. The unity of the Christian world under the Christian emperor had as its foundation-stone this "symphony" between the emperor and the patriarch, this symphony being grounded in their common origin in God. As the coronation ceremony put it: "You were selected by divine decree for the security and exaltation of the universe; you were joined to the people by God's will. Almighty God has blessed you and crowned you with His own hand."<sup>197</sup>

The unity of the two powers was emphasized in the *Seventh Novella* (2, 1), according to which the goods of the Church, though in principle inalienable, could be the object of transactions with the emperor. "For the difference between the priesthood (ιερωσύνη) and the empire (βασιλεια) is small, as it is

---

<sup>196</sup> Canning, *A History of Medieval Political Thought 300-1450*, London: Routledge, 1996, pp. 7-8, 9.

<sup>197</sup> *De Ceremoniis Aulae Byzantinae*, 1:39; in Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

between the sacred goods and the goods that are common to the community.”<sup>198</sup>

Secondly, insofar as the symphony of powers existed, not only between two men, but between two *institutions*, the priesthood and the empire, it went beyond the relationship between emperor and patriarch. As Bishop Dionysius (Alferov) writes: “Symphonicity in Church administration only began at the level of the Emperor and Patriarch, and continued at the level of the bishop and eparch (who also received the blessing of the Church for his service) and was completed at the level of the parish priest and its founder. With such a deep ‘enchurchment’ from all sides of the life of the Orthodox Empire, and the symphonicity of all levels of the Church-State pyramid, the violations of symphony at the highest level were, while annoying, not especially dangerous. The most important thing still remained the service of ‘him who restrains’, which was carried out by the Orthodox Emperor in symphony with the whole Church, and not only personally with the Patriarch. The decisive factor was the personal self-consciousness of the Emperor and the activity based on that. Thus Justinian conceived of himself completely as a Christian sovereign, and strove throughout the whole of his life to make the whole world Christian. His symphony with the Patriarch was desirable as a useful means towards that end, but it was not an end-in-itself. During Justinian’s time five Patriarchates entered into the Empire, including the Roman, and the Emperor did not establish ‘symphonic’ relations with all of them personally (as, for example, with Pope Vigilius, who did not want to accept the decisions of the 5<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Council). But symphony with the whole Church did exist, and a proof of this is provided by the 5<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Council, which was convened through the efforts of Justinian and accepted the dogmatic definitions against the heresies that he presented; and by the multitude of saints who shone forth during his reign and who related completely ‘symphonically’ to him (for example, St. Sabbas the Sanctified); and by the general flourishing of Christian culture.”<sup>199</sup>

Thirdly, Justinian had in mind not any kind of harmony, but only a true “symphony” or meeting of minds that comes from God. As I.N. Andrushkevich points out, the word “symphony” [*consonantia*] here denotes much more than simple agreement or concord. Church and State can agree in an evil way, for evil ends. True symphony is possible only where both the Church “is without reproach and adorned with faithfulness to God” and the State is ruled “rightly and competently” - that is, in accordance with the commandments of God.<sup>200</sup> Where these conditions are not met, what we have, as A.V. Kartashev, the minister of religion under the Russian Provisional

---

<sup>198</sup> Gilbert Dagron, *Empereur et Prêtre* (Emperor and Priest), Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1996, p. 313.

<sup>199</sup> Alferov, “Ob uderzhanii i symphonii” (“On Restraining and Symphony”), <http://www.monarhist-spb.narod.ru/D-ST/Dionisy-1./htm>, pp. 9-10.

<sup>200</sup> Andrushkevich, “Doktrina sv. Imperatora Iustiniana Velikago” (“The Teaching of the holy Emperor Justinian the Great”), *Pravoslaonaiia Rus'* (Orthodox Russia), N 4 (1529), February 15/28, 1995, pp. 4-12.

Government, pointed out, “is no longer symphony, but *cacophony*”.<sup>201</sup> Or, preserving the Latin root of the words, we should call it the *dissonance* of powers...

Justinian himself, in his preface to the *Novella*, pointed out that, although he was an Autocrat, he could not exercise dominion over the priesthood; he was obliged to allow the priests to follow their own law, the Gospel and the Holy Canons. Thus did he qualify the absolutist principle of Roman power, namely, that *whatever is pleasing to the emperor has the force of law* with the words: *unless it contradicts the holy canons*. Again, in his *Novella 131* he decreed: “The Church canons have the same force in the State as the State laws: what is permitted or forbidden by the former is permitted or forbidden by the latter. Therefore crimes against the former cannot be tolerated in the State according to State legislation.” These Canons include those that forbid resort to the secular power in Church matters: Canon 12 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council; Canons 11 and 12 of Antioch; and (later) Canon 3 of the Seventh Ecumenical Council. Nevertheless, it needs to be pointed out that, as we have seen, Justinian did not always observe this restriction on his own power...

“As regards the judicial branch,” writes Fr. Alexis Nikolin, “coordinated action presupposed not simply mutual complementation of the spheres of administration of the ecclesiastical and secular courts, but, which is especially important, the introduction into the activity of the latter of the moral-educational content inherent in Christianity.

“In a single service to the work of God both the Church and the State constitute as it were one whole, one organism - ‘unconfused’, but also ‘undivided’. In this lay the fundamental difference between Orthodox ‘symphony’ and Latin ‘papocaesarism’ and Protestant ‘caesaropapism’.”<sup>202</sup>

Of course, the principle that the Church canons should automatically be considered as State laws was not always carried out in practice, even in Justinian’s reign; and in some spheres, as Nikolin points out, “The Christian Emperor received the ability to reveal the content of the canon in his own way (in the interests of the State). Justinian’s rule provides several confirmations of this. The rules for the election, conduct and inter-relations of bishops, clergy and monks, for the punishment of clergy, and for Church property were subjected to his reclamation. Bishops received broad powers in State affairs (more exactly, numerous State duties were imputed to them).

“Justinian’s rule was a rule in which the mutual relations of Church and State were inbuilt, and which later lasted in Byzantium right up to the days of her fall, and which were borrowed in the 10<sup>th</sup> century by Rus’. In the first place this related to the principle: ‘Ecclesiastical canons are State laws’. Moreover, the Christian direction of Justinian’s reforms told on the content of the majority of

---

<sup>201</sup> Kartashev, *Vossozdanie Svoytoj Rusi* (The Recreation of Holy Russia), Moscow, 1991, p. 83.

<sup>202</sup> Nikolin, *Tserkov’ i Gosudarstvo* (Church and State), Moscow, 1997, p. 17.

juridical norms. This was most vividly revealed in the resolutions of questions concerning the regulation of individual spheres of Church life. Church communities were now provided with the rights of a juridical person. In property questions they were given various privileges...

“A particular feature of Justinian’s reforms was that as a result of them State power was transformed into a defender of the faith. This was most clearly revealed in the establishment of restrictions on the juridical rights of citizens of the empire linked with their confession of faith:

- Pagans and Jews were deprived of the right to occupy posts in state or societal service, and were not able to possess Christian slaves;
- 
- Apostates, that is, people going over from Christianity to paganism or Judaism were deprived of the right to compose wills and inherit, and likewise were not able to be witnesses at trials;
- 
- Heretics were not able to occupy posts in state or societal service; they were deprived of the right of inheritance; they could make bequests... only to Orthodox. There were even stricter measures adopted in relation to certain sects.”<sup>203</sup>

Violations of the principle of the symphony of powers were rare if we exclude the pressure Justinian sometimes exerted on heretical hierarchs, and episcopal elections. In the latter, there was a contradiction between Justinian’s laws, which included the leading laymen of the locality in the electoral body – an enactment that gave an avenue for imperial influence on the elections through these laymen – and the custom of the Church, according to which only bishops took part in the election. (*De facto*, however, in all Orthodox kingdoms, there was one layman who took part in the election of bishops – the emperor or king.) Conversely, the recruitment of bishops to undertake secular duties was contrary to Apostolic Canon 81 insofar as it led to a secularization of the episcopal calling.<sup>204</sup>

\*

The principle of the symphony of powers defining the relationship between Church and State was so important, so fundamental, that when it clearly broke down in a more general way – for the first time in the late twelfth century, and again in the late fourteenth century – the City itself also fell...

Bishop Dionysius (Alferov) writes: “After the holy Emperor Justinian any Christian monarch must confess, and reverently and unhypocritically believe

---

<sup>203</sup> Nikolin, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-33, 34.

<sup>204</sup> See Bishop Pierre L’Huillier, “Episcopal Elections in the Byzantine East: a few comments”, *Eastern Churches Review*, vol. II, N 1, Spring, 1968, pp. 4-7, and *The Church of the Ancient Councils*, Crestwood, NY; St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1996, pp. 36-38, 40, 41.

that '*Christian piety is the foundation of the strength of the empire*'. For greater clarity let us indicate an example. The Emperor Justinian himself, while paying great attention to theology, Divine services and the building of churches, completely neglected the army and the navy, which under him came to a state of decline. But for his unfeigned piety and faith the Lord protected the empire from invasions and subjected to Justinian a part of the barbarians. After him the iconoclast emperors Leo the Isaurian and Constantine Copronymus were outstanding military commanders who reorganized the army and repelled opponents (the Arabs and Bulgars) far from the empire. But the heresy they introduced and their general impiety shook the foundations of Byzantium from within and brought it to the verge of extinction. Therefore amongst the qualities of an exemplary ruler *his faith and piety occupy the first place*. For the sake of these the Lord protects his kingdom from many woes. *His practical capabilities in raising national life are already secondary.*"<sup>205</sup>

The symbolic crown of Justinian's attempts to unify the world in Christ was his building of Hagia Sophia, the greatest church in Christendom and without a peer to this day, uniting the vast space under the extraordinary dome in a marvelous way: "Solomon, I have surpassed thee", he said on beholding the completed building. He was right – and it was the sheer celestial beauty of this building that converted the envoys of St. Vladimir, the baptizer of Russia, to recommend Orthodoxy to their ruler over five centuries later...

---

<sup>205</sup> Alferov, "Monarkhia i Khristianskoe Soznanie" ("The Monarchy and Christian Consciousness"), [http://catacomb.org.ua/rubr10/R10\\_11.htm](http://catacomb.org.ua/rubr10/R10_11.htm), p. 7.

## 12. THE POSITION OF THE ROMAN PAPACY

The question facing the Old Rome of the West after the collapse of the Western empire was: to what extent was she able, and willing, to integrate herself into the New Rome of the East? Odovacar had appeared to want that. But his Ostrogothic kingdom remained independent, and had to be subdued by force during the reign of Justinian in the next century. Was the destruction of the ancient institutions too thorough, and the dominance of the Germanic kings too great, to permit Old Rome to continue in a real, and not merely nominal union with New Rome? Or, even if the answer to that question was: no, would the jealousy of the old capital towards her younger supplanter hinder her, as the jealousy of the Jews towards the Christians had prevented their integration into the New Testament Church?

In order to answer these questions, let us return to the era of St. Leo the Great, Pope of Rome (440-461), who, as we have seen, was completely “eastern” in his respect for the East Roman Emperor. Following the teaching of St. Ambrose of Milan, that there is “one God, one empire, one emperor”<sup>206</sup>, he was both loyal to the Emperor and encouraged him to take a major part in Church affairs. While the prerogatives of the *Church* of Old Rome were jealously guarded, there was no jealousy in relation to the *Emperor* that ruled from New Rome, no attempt to exalt the weak western emperors in his place. Later Popes such as Gregory the Great (like Leo, the scion of an Old Roman aristocratic family) continued this tradition. They maintained close relations with the Empire of New Rome, and understood Church-State relations in essentially the same, “symphonic”, almost symbiotic way as in the East, with the Emperor being expected to play an important part in Church affairs, and the Pope – in political affairs. In fact, until at least the eighth century, the Popes were the most consistent upholders of *Romanitas*, the politico-ecclesiastical unity of Orthodox Christendom, in both East and West...

However, towards the end of the fifth century, and after the fall of the last western emperor, we see the beginnings of a characteristically “western” understanding of Church-State relations that placed particular emphasis on the independence of the Church from the State, and was reflected in a rejection of the comparison, common in the East, between the Emperor and Melchizedek. This comparison might be valid in some respects, said the Popes, but not if it meant that a mortal man could combine the roles of king and priest in the manner of Melchizedek. Thus “before the coming of Christ,” wrote Pope Gelasius (492-496), “there existed people... who were, according to what sacred history tells us, at the same time both kings and priests, such as Melchizedek. This example was followed in his domain by the devil, who always, in a tyrannical spirit, claims for his own that which is fitting for divine worship, to the extent that the pagan emperors were also called pontiffs. But when there came He Who was in truth both King and Priest, from that time the emperor

---

<sup>206</sup> St. Ambrose, quoted in Archimandrite Luke, “Church, Monastics, Empire”, *Orthodox Life*, vol. 56, N 4, p. 11.

ceased to give himself the name of pontiff and the pontiff to lay claim to the royal pomp. For, although we say that the members of Christ, the true King and Priest, have, by reason of their participation in the glorious nature, received both the one and the other dignity through the sacred generosity [of Christ], so that they are at the same time 'a royal and a priestly race', nevertheless Christ, remembering the weakness of men..., has divided the spheres of the two powers by means of a distinction of duties and callings..., desiring that His own [children] should be guarded by grace-filled humility and should not once again become victims of human pride. So that the Christian emperors need the pontiffs for eternal life and the pontiffs conform to the imperial laws as regards the course of temporal things. Thus spiritual activities have been separated from carnal activities.... He who is entrusted with secular matters should not appear to preside over divine things, so that the modesty of the two orders should be respected...."<sup>207</sup>

And so, as he wrote to the Emperor Anastasius, "there are two powers which for the most part control this world, the sacred authority of priests and the might of kings. Of these two the office of the priests is the greater inasmuch as they must give account even for kings to the Lord at the Divine Judgement. You know that although by your rank you stand at the head of the human race, you nevertheless bend your will before the leaders of Divine affairs, you turn to them in matters relating to your salvation, and you receive the heavenly sacraments from them. You know, consequently, that in matters of the faith you must submit to their lawful decisions and must not lord it over them – not submit them to your will, but be yourself guided by their judgements." But "in matters touching public order, the Church hierarchs know that the emperor's power has been sent down on you from above, and are themselves obedient to your laws, for they fear to be shown as opponents of your will in worldly affairs."<sup>208</sup>

However, as Dagron points out, this was very much a western perspective: the easterners continued to attach a quasi-priestly character to the figure of the emperor – but without the sacramental functions of the priesthood. The difference in perspective is explained partly by the fact that in the fifth century Rome had little support from Byzantium in her struggle with the barbarians, and the popes were often forced to fill the political vacuum themselves, as when Pope Leo the Great went to Attila and succeeded in turning him away from Rome.<sup>209</sup> The fall of Old Rome had created a vacuum in political authority

---

<sup>207</sup> Gelasius, *Tractatus IV*; translated from Dagron, *op. cit.*, pp. 190-191.

<sup>208</sup> Gelasius, quoted in Fomin S. and Fomina T., *Rossia pered Vtorym Prishestvoiem* (Russia before the Second Coming), Moscow, 1994, vol. I, p. 74.

<sup>209</sup> This was achieved through the miraculous intervention of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul. After St. Leo had obtained all his requests from Attila, the Hun's followers asked him why he had surrendered to "a single, unarmed Roman". "Apparently, you could not see the two men from heaven, one standing to the right of the Pope, the other to the left. They held bared swords and threatened to kill me if I disobeyed God's prelate," replied Attila (in St. Demetrius of Rostov, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, House Springs, Mo.: Chrysostom Press, vol. 6: February, 2003, p. 2006).

which the Eastern Emperors before Justinian were unable to fill and which the Germanic Arian kings only partially filled. Into this vacuum stepped the Popes, as a result of which, when the Popes argued for the independence of the Church from the State, they were speaking from the position of the first authority in *both Church and State* in the West.

The rejection of the comparison with Melchizedek was also influenced, as Dagron points out, by St. Augustine's *The City of God*, "in which, during his exegesis of Melchisedek, Augustine affirms that from now on Christ is the only Mediator between God and men, the only One to have put on the eternal priesthood. In the time of Israel, the earthly kingdom 'was a type of' the spiritual kingdom, but since the Incarnation the City of God has found its King once and for all. The break is a sharp one: before the coming of Christ a royal priesthood is possible whether by Divine economy (Melchisedek) or by diabolical counterfeit (the Roman *imperator-pontifex maximus*); after the coming of Christ this very notion is lanced with illegitimacy; the *regale sacerdotium* has devolved to the Son of God and by extension to the Christians as a whole... A true Christian emperor is not a Roman emperor converted or faithful to Christianity, or an emperor who could draw a new legitimacy from Old Testament models, but an emperor whose power has been in part confiscated by Christ and whose competence has been modified by the installation of Christianity, who will have to adopt the pose of humility before the new wielders of spiritual power, who will be constantly suspected of belonging to 'the earthly City', of remaining pagan or of identifying himself through pride with the Antichrist."<sup>210</sup>

And so Augustinian scepticism with regard to secular authority, together with the unparalleled prestige of the Popes in the West, combined to introduce a new, specifically western exaltation of ecclesiastical power.

\*

There was another source of this specifically western attitude: the quasi-mystical belief of the Popes that the Apostle Peter lived and spoke through them in a completely unique way simply as a result of the fact that he had died in Rome; so that just as the Apostle Peter had bestowed the episcopate on the Roman Church, so the Roman Popes, acting as the reincarnation, as it were, of Peter, were the source of the episcopate of the whole of the rest of the Church.

The Eastern bishops understood the phrase "the see of Peter" in a quite different way. For them, apostolic succession came, not from Peter alone, but from all the apostles. In any case, the Church of Antioch was also founded by SS. Peter and Paul, and the Church of Jerusalem – by the Lord Himself. So there was nothing extraordinary about the Church of Rome. "The remaining apostles," wrote St. Cyprian of Carthage, a western bishop, "were necessarily also that which Peter was, endowed with an equal partnership both of honour

---

<sup>210</sup> Dagron, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

and of power... The episcopate is one, an individual share in which individual bishops hold as owners of a common property."<sup>211</sup>

By the middle of the fifth century, the mystical attitude towards the papal see was entrenched even in the minds of the western emperors. Thus in 445 Emperor Valentinian III declared in his *Constitution*: "We are convinced that the only defence for us and for our Empire is in the favour of the God of heaven: and in order to deserve this favour it is our first care to support the Christian faith and its venerable religion. Therefore, inasmuch as the pre-eminence of the Apostolic See is assured by the merit of S. Peter, the first of the bishops, by the leading position of the city of Rome and also by the authority of the Holy Synod, let not presumption strive to attempt anything contrary to the authority of that See."<sup>212</sup>

Undoubtedly the man who gave this idea the most impetus was Pope Leo the Great. He believed that, just as the Empire was universal and ruled by a single man, so the Church, as a parallel institution to the Empire, was universal and should be ruled by a single man, which man had to be the Pope since he represented St. Peter. Thus St. Leo gave his legates to the Fourth Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon strict instructions that, as legates of the see of St. Peter, they should preside over the Council, and that his *Tome* should be read at the beginning and presented as the fully sufficient expression of the Orthodox position, without the need for any further discussion or debate.<sup>213</sup> (In fact, Leo's legates did not preside, and his *Tome* was read only at the end, when it was subjected to searching scrutiny.) Again, at the fourth session of the Council the Roman legate Paschalius spoke of Pope Leo as "the bishop of all the churches". And the legates refused to accept Canon 28 of the Council, which gave Constantinople second place after Old Rome on account of her position as the imperial city of the Empire. The legates considered this a "humiliation" of "the apostolic see" in their presence.<sup>214</sup>

St. Leo was too tactful, too Orthodox and too genuinely concerned for the welfare of the Church to make an issue of this.<sup>215</sup> However, as the see of Constantinople grew in power and influence, the Popes renewed their attacks

---

<sup>211</sup> St. Cyprian, *On the Unity of the Church*, 4, 5.

<sup>212</sup> Henry Bettenson and Christopher Maunder, *Documents of the Christian Church*, Oxford University Press, third edition, 1999, pp. 24-25.

<sup>213</sup> This is not as arrogant as it sounds. According to his *Life*, St. Leo wrote his *Tome* and then "put it on the tomb of Peter, the chief Apostle. Then he fasted, prayed, and kept vigil, begging the preeminent Apostle, 'if I, as a man, have in this letter erred in any way or failed to explain the truth fully, do thou, to whom this Church and episcopal throne were entrusted, set it right.' Forty days later the Apostle appeared while Leo was praying. He said, 'I have read your letter and corrected it.' The Pope took the epistle from the blessed Peter's tomb, opened it, and found that it had been amended by the Apostle's hand" (St. Demetrius of Rostov, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, vol. 6: February, House Springs, Mo.: Chrysostom Press, 2003, p. 207).

<sup>214</sup> See Dvorkin, *op. cit.*, pp. 299, 309.

<sup>215</sup> However, we should not forget his harsh treatment of St. Hilary, Archbishop of Arles, who disputed his jurisdiction over the Gallican see of Besancon and was thrown into prison in Rome for his protest. He died in 449 out of communion with Rome (Dvorkin, *op. cit.*, p. 369).

on Canon 28. Thus Pope Gelasius saw no reason why Constantinople should be exalted in this way. After all, he wrote to the bishops of Dardania, it was “not even a metropolis”!<sup>216</sup> Rome’s jealousy went so far as to break communion with Archbishop Acacius of Constantinople, although the East accepted him as Orthodox. The “Acacian schism” was finally overcome, but not before Pope Hormisdas had again anathematized Acacius. Moreover, he insisted that “the apostolic see has always kept the Orthodox faith unharmed”, and that “those who do not agree in everything with the apostolic see” should not be commemorated.

Patriarch John of Constantinople signed the *libellus*, but only after cunningly adding the phrase: “I proclaim that the see of the Apostle Peter and the see of this imperial city are one”, thereby witnessing to the truth of St. Cyprian’s words that “the episcopate is one” ...<sup>217</sup>

Rome’s pretensions were dealt a further blow by the Emperor Justinian nearly forty years later, when he forced Pope Vigilius to accept the condemnation, enshrined in the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553, of the so-called “Three Chapters”, although this led to some western councils – in Africa and Northern Italy (the so-called “Aquilean schism”) – breaking communion with Vigilius. However, the fact that these western councils, and some individual saints<sup>218</sup>, felt able to break with the Pope shows that they did not consider him to be infallible. Moreover, Vigilius’ penitential letter to Patriarch Eutyches of Constantinople was an admission of his fallibility...

\*

The tendency to papism was not only checked but crushed under perhaps the greatest of the Popes, Gregory I, towards the end of the sixth century. An Old Roman aristocrat and patriot, he believed in the primacy, but not universal sovereignty, of “the apostolic see”. He never tried to override the rights of Local Churches, still less proclaim an infallible headship over them.

---

<sup>216</sup> Abbé Vladimir Guettée, *The Papacy*, New York: Minos, 1866, p. 198.

<sup>217</sup> Dvorkin, *op. cit.*, pp. 398, 399.

<sup>218</sup> The Irish St. Columbanus of Luxeuil wrote to Pope Vigilius and suggested that he may have fallen into heresy. In that case, he continued, those “who have always kept the Orthodox Faith, whoever these may be, even if they seem to be your subordinates,... shall be your judges... And thus, even as your honour is great in proportion to the dignity of your see, so great care is mindful for you, lest you lose your dignity through some mistake. For power will be in your hands just so long as your principles remain sound; for he is the appointed keybearer of the Kingdom of Heaven, who opens by true knowledge to the worthy and shuts to the unworthy; otherwise if he does the opposite, he shall be able neither to open nor to shut.” “For all we Irish,” as he said to another Pope, “inhabitants of the world’s edge, are disciples of Saints Peter and Paul and of all the disciples who wrote the sacred canon by the Holy Spirit, and we accept nothing outside the evangelical and apostolic teaching; none has been a heretic, none a Judaizer, none a schismatic; but the Catholic Faith, as it was delivered by you first, who are the successors of the holy apostles, has been maintained unbroken.” (G.S.M. Walker, *Sancti Columbani Opera*, Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1970, pp. 47, 49, 51, 39)

Indeed, in his vehement opposition (following the example of his predecessor, Pelagius II) to the title of “universal bishop” first offered by the Emperor Maurice to St. John the Faster, Patriarch of Constantinople, St. Gregory provided an invaluable lesson to all subsequent Popes of the limits of their power and jurisdiction. For he accused St. John of pride, and wrote to him that in accepting this title he was “at enmity with that grace which was given to all [bishops] in common”. He reminded him that the Fourth Ecumenical Council had offered the title of “universal” to the Roman Pope as a mark of honour to St. Peter, but that none of the Popes had accepted it, “lest by assuming a special distinction in the dignity of the episcopate, we should seem to refuse it to all the brethren”.<sup>219</sup>

In a letter to the Emperor, St. Gregory wrote of St. Peter: “He received the keys of the celestial Kingdom; the power to bind and to loose was given to him; the care of all the Church and the primacy were committed to him; and yet he did not call himself *universal Apostle*. But that most holy man, John, my brother in the priesthood, would fain assume the title of *universal bishop*. I can but exclaim, *O tempora! O mores!*”<sup>220</sup> In another letter to Patriarchs Eulogius of Alexandria and Anastasius of Antioch, St. Gregory makes the point that “if a Patriarch be called universal, this takes from all the others the title of Patriarch”.<sup>221</sup>

After St. John the Faster’s death, St. Gregory wrote to his successor at Constantinople, Cyriacus: “You must not consider this same affair as unimportant; for, if we tolerate it, we *corrupt the faith of the whole Church*. You know how many, not heretics only but heresiarchs, have arisen in the Church of Constantinople. Not to speak of the injury done to your dignity, it cannot be denied that if any one bishop be called *universal*, all the Church *crumbles if that universal one fall!*”<sup>222</sup>

Finally, in another letter to the Emperor, St. Gregory wrote: “I pray your Imperial Piety to observe that there are some frivolous things that are inoffensive, but also some others that are very hurtful. When Antichrist shall come and call himself God, it will be in itself a perfectly frivolous thing, but a very pernicious one. If we only choose to consider the number of syllables in this word, we find but two (*De-us*); but if we conceive the weight of iniquity of this title, we shall find it enormous. I say it without the least hesitation: *whoever calls himself the universal bishop, or desires this title, is, by his pride, THE PRECURSOR OF ANTICHRIST*, because he thus attempts to raise himself above the others. The error into which he falls springs from pride equal to that of Antichrist; for as that wicked one wished to be regarded as exalted above other men, like a god, so likewise whoever would be called *sole bishop* exalteth himself above the other.”<sup>223</sup>

---

<sup>219</sup> Guettée, *op. cit.*, pp. 208, 211.

<sup>220</sup> Guettée, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

<sup>221</sup> Guettée, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

<sup>222</sup> Guettée, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

<sup>223</sup> Guettée, *op. cit.*, pp. 225-226.

And so we find the heresy of papism thoroughly refuted by one of the greatest of the Popes. St. Gregory reaffirms the doctrine taught by St. Cyprian and the Orthodox East, that all bishops are essentially equal in grace, because the grace of the episcopate is one, and the bishops receive their grace, not from one man or one see, but from the episcopate as a whole. Consequently, the heresy that attempts to create, as it were, a fourth level of the priesthood above that of bishop, in the form of a *universal* bishop having sovereignty over all the others, undermines the ecclesiology of the Church, and is like the heresy of the Antichrist, who will also exalt himself above all other men...

With the heresy of papism suppressed, at least temporarily, the West flourished and the papacy herself rose to the peak of its real and not vain glory and power.

The six centuries or so from the papacy of St. Gregory the Great to that of Gregory VII and the emergence of the new Papist Empire of the medieval Popes constitute a fascinating period in which the Orthodox Christian forms of political and ecclesiastical life gradually succumbed to the new, heretical forms – but only after a fierce struggle during which the Orthodox staged several “comebacks”.

In this struggle two forces were especially prominent: the papacy, and the new national kingdoms of Western Europe. Until the reign of Charlemagne at least, the relationship between these two forces was one of mutual respect and benefit. The Popes, with rare exceptions, were by no means “papist” and dictatorial in relation to the national kingdoms and their national synods of bishops, but provided a vital source of unity, stability and enlightenment for the embryonic new nation-states and Churches. In their turn, the kings and their bishops frequently travelled to Rome and worked closely with the Popes, receiving instruction, books, relics, icons, chanters and moral and spiritual support. It was a different matter, however, when it came to relations between the Popes and the Eastern Emperors, of whom they were the secular subjects for approximately two hundred years after Justinian’s reconquest of Rome in 540. On the one hand, as the first see in Christendom the papacy sought to be in “symphony” with the Emperor in Constantinople, and always saw herself as the “Imperial Church” (to the extent that her rival patriarchate in the New Rome allowed it). On the other hand, relations were often strained, especially when the Emperor tried to impose a heretical confession on the papacy.

### 13. THE SYMPHONY OF NATIONS

To what extent can we speak of *nations* in the modern sense in this period?

Francis Fukuyama has put forward the important thesis that the Church had a “devastating impact on tribal organization throughout Western Europe. The German, Norse, Magyar, and Slavic tribes saw their kinship structures dissolve

within two or three generations of their conversion to Christianity.”<sup>224</sup> This was in sharp contrast to China, India and the Middle East, where tribal bonds continued to be strong, and it made possible the emergence of the larger and more heterogeneous unit of *the nation*.

How did the Church effect this change? In the first place, of course, membership of the Church creates a higher and deeper unity than any ties based on kinship; and so to the extent that the Western peoples became truly Christian, the family of the Church replaced the family of the tribe, while the family of the nation became an intermediate link.

However, there were more specific ways in which Church law broke up the old bonds. Thus Larry Siedentop points out that “by transferring religious authority from the father to a separate priesthood, the Christian church removed the religious basis of the paterfamilias. It curtailed the claims to authority of the family head, relaxing the ties of subordination that had previously bound its members.”<sup>225</sup>

Again, building on the work of the social anthropologist Jack Goody, Fukuyama points out that the Church “took a strong stand against four practices: marriages between close kin, marriages to the widows of dead relatives (the so-called levirate), the adoption of children, and divorce. The Venerable Bede, reporting on the efforts of Pope Gregory I to convert the pagan Anglo-Saxons to Christianity in the sixth century, notes how Gregory explicitly condemned the tribe’s practices of marriage to close relatives and the levirate. Later church edicts forbade concubinage, and promoted an indissoluble, monogamous lifetime marriage bond between men and women...”

These practices that were banned by the Church were what Goody calls “‘strategies of heirship’ whereby kinship groups are able to keep property under the group’s control as it passed down from one generation to another. Life expectancy in Europe and the Mediterranean world of the time was less than thirty-five. The probability of a couple’s producing a male heir who survived into adulthood and who could carry on the ancestral line was quite low. As a result, societies legitimated a wide range of practices that allowed individuals to produce heirs. Concubinage has already been discussed...; divorce can be seen as a form of serial concubinage in monogamous societies. The levirate was practiced when a brother died before he produced children; his wife’s marriage to a younger brother ensured that his property would remain consolidated with that of his siblings. Cross-cousin marriage ensured that property would remain in the hands of close family members.”<sup>226</sup>

The Church’s rules also enhanced the status of women, who were now allowed to own property in their own names and dispose of it as they wished.

---

<sup>224</sup> Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order*, London: Profile, 2012, p. 239.

<sup>225</sup> Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual*, London: Penguin, 2014, p. 116.

<sup>226</sup> Fukuyama, *op. cit.*, pp. 237-238.

We see the change in Gaul, in the transition from Salic law (c. 510) to the Lex Ribuaria (c. 600). "Famously, the former prohibits any female inheritance of ancestral land, while the latter relaxes such restrictions."<sup>227</sup>

Fukuyama expresses the somewhat cynical thought that the Church thereby profited materially from these rules, because widows and property-owning Christians who died without heirs often gave their land to the Church. However, it made sense that a believing society should look to the Church rather than the tribe as its agent of social security and endow it accordingly. And the Church certainly carried out this role impressively in this period.

Not only at the social level, but also at the political level, the level of relationships between states, the impact of Christianization was profound... The pagan Roman empire had introduced the important idea that all Roman citizens, of whatever nationality, were in some sense equal under the law. Building on that, the Church proclaimed that all baptized Christians, of whatever nationality, were equal under the law of Christ. Similarly, just as the pagan Roman empire had proclaimed that Rome encompassed the whole *oikoumene* or "inhabited world", so Christian Rome now saw herself as encompassing the whole family of Christian nations under her paternal leadership. As Sir Steven Runciman writes, "Ideally, it [the Empire] should embrace all the peoples of the earth, who, ideally, should all be members of the one true Christian Church, its own Orthodox Church."<sup>228</sup>

"In Roman eyes," as Dominic Lieven writes, "the Roman Empire was a universal monarchy: it encompassed the whole globe, or at least all of it that was worth bothering about. The barbarians beyond the empire's wall they regarded in terms somewhat similar to nineteenth-century European colonists' view of 'natives'. Their only imperial neighbour, the Parthian empire, was considered by the Romans to be 'an oriental despotism, a barbarian, braggart and motley nation'. As in every other aspect of their culture, the Roman sense of universalism owed much to the Greeks. Alexander had conquered virtually the whole of the known world and although his empire was very short-lived the spread of Hellenistic culture was not. 'The Greek philosophers, in particular the Stoics, stressed the notion that all mankind formed one community, partaking of universal reason... it was, indeed, the Greeks who from the second century BC had regarded the Roman Empire and the universe (*oikoumene*) as one... Ideas such as these made a deep impression on the minds of the political and intellectual elite of Rome, and through their influence the two notions of *orbis terrarum* and *imperium* came to be regarded in the first century as identical: from then on no distinction was ever made between them.'

"The adoption in the fourth century of Christianity, a world religion which recognized no ethnic or cultural borders, could only increase the Roman imperial sense of universalism. In time Christian clergy undertook

---

<sup>227</sup> Siedentop, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

<sup>228</sup> Runciman, *The Byzantine Theocracy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, p. 1.

evangelizing missions outside their polities' borders, converting whole peoples to their religion and therefore, in the end, to a great extent to their culture. This the rulers of imperial [pagan] Rome had never conceived of..."<sup>229</sup>

And so, parallel to the concept of the symphony of *powers*, whose model was the relationship between the two natures of Christ, there emerged the concept of the symphony of *nations*, modeled on the father-son relationship. The Roman Emperor was the head and father of a family of Christian rulers united, not by a single political or ecclesiastical jurisdiction, but by common membership of the civilization of Christian Rome. If we restrict ourselves to speaking only of the Orthodox Christian States and peoples, then within this single commonwealth there was, strictly speaking, only one Christian people, the people of the Romans; and Greeks and Latins, Celts and Germans, Semites and Slavs were all equally *Romans*, all equally members of the Roman commonwealth of nations and sons of the Roman Emperor.

As it was developed in succeeding centuries, writes I.P. Medvedev, "this doctrine found practical expression in... a hierarchical system of States... The place of each sovereign in this official, hierarchical gradation of all the princes of the world in relation to the Byzantine Emperor was defined by kinship terms borrowed from the terminology of family law: father-son-brother, but also friend... The use of kinship terms by the Byzantine Emperor in addressing a foreign Sovereign was not a simple metaphor or rhetoric, but a definite title which was given on the basis of a mutual agreement, that is, bestowed by the Emperor... And so at the head of the *oikoumene* was the *Basileus Romanon*, the Byzantine Emperor, the father of 'the family of sovereigns and peoples'. Closest of all 'by kinship' among the politically independent sovereigns were certain Christian rulers of countries bordering on the Empire, for example Armenia, Alania and Bulgaria; they were spiritual sons of the Byzantine Emperor. Less close were the Christian masters of the Germans and French, who were included in this 'family of sovereigns and peoples' with the rights of spiritual brothers of the Emperor. After them came the friends, that is, independent sovereigns and peoples who received this title by dint of a special agreement – the emir of Egypt and the ruler of India, and later the Venetians, the king of England, etc. Finally, we must name a large group of princes who were ranked, not according to degree of 'kinship', but by dint of particularities of address and protocol – the small appanage principalities of Armenia, Iberia, Abkhazia, the Italian cities, Moravia and Serbia (group 1), and the appanage princes of Hungary and Rus', the Khazar and Pecheneg khans, etc. (group 2)..."<sup>230</sup>

And so from Britain in the West to Georgia in the East to Ethiopia in the south "a great number of peoples made up the autocracy but without any 'ethnic' differentiation between them. The whole racial amalgam lived and moved in a single civilization (apart from some particularities) - the Greek, and it had a single cohesive spiritual power – Orthodoxy, which was at the same

---

<sup>229</sup> Lieven, *Empire*, London: John Murray, 2000, pp. 9-10.

<sup>230</sup> Medvedev, in Fomin & Fomina, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 138-139.

time the ideology of the *oikoumene* - autocracy. The citizens of the autocracy were Romans politically, Greeks culturally and Orthodox Christians spiritually. Through Orthodoxy the old relationship of rulers and ruled was replaced by the sovereign bond of brotherhood. Thus the 'holy race' of the New Testament (I Peter 2.9) became a reality as the 'race of the Romans', that is, of the Orthodox citizens of the autocracy of the New Rome."<sup>231</sup> This internationalism was underlined by the Emperors' diverse nationalities. Thus Constantine was a Roman, Theodosius I - a Spaniard, Justinian I - an Illyrian or Thracian, Maurice and Heraclius - Armenians and Leo the iconoclast - a Syrian.

"Much suggests that for many centuries after the fall of the Western Roman empire, there persisted within the western consciousness a sentiment that just as Christians knew unity in the one body of Christ which was the universal *ecclesia*, so ideally they should know it also in one body politic, a universal *res publica*. If one reason why this did not find expression was the concrete reality of western political multiplicity, another was the impossibility of conceiving any polity but the Roman empire as having a legitimate claim to universality yet the impossibility also of recognizing in the empire as it actually existed the universal *res publica* of the western vision. This was a deadlock which could be broken only if the Roman empire were recast in a satisfactory western mould. The speed and strength with which the imperial idea came to be reasserted once western circumstances were propitious to such a recasting [in the time of Charlemagne] are themselves the strongest argument that it had never been banished but had simply lain dormant. Two things were necessary for its reinvigoration and realization: first, the emergence of a western *Grossreich* ... without which its entertainment would have been wholly utopian; second, the inclusion within this polity of Rome..."<sup>232</sup>

\*

In the seventh century all of the patriarchates fell, temporarily, into the heresy of Monothelism, and in the eighth century the East fell into iconoclasm. But while Orthodoxy faltered - although never in all places at the same time - the underlying unity of Orthodox Christian civilization throughout the Mediterranean area enabled unity of faith to be recovered before long. It was only in the first half of seventh century, with the rise of Islam in the East, and towards the end of the eighth century, with the rise of the Carolingian empire in the West, that the first more or less permanent cracks in the unity both of faith and civilization began to appear.

And so the idea of a symphony of nations, of a single Christian Roman Empire extending from the Atlantic to the Caspian, was a living spiritual reality, and one that endured also in the West until at least the reign of Charlemagne at the end of the eighth century. Indeed, so widely accepted was

---

<sup>231</sup> Fr. George Metallinos, "Apo ti Romaiki oikoumenikotita ston Ethnistiko Patriotismo" ("From Roman Universalism to Ethnic Patriotism"), *Exodos*, Athens, 1991, p. 38.

<sup>232</sup> P.D. King, "The barbarian kingdoms", in *Cambridge History of Medieval Thought*, c. 350 - c. 1450, Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 144-145, 146.

the ideal of "One Faith, One Church, One Empire" that when Charlemagne came to create his western rival to the Empire, he also spoke of "the Christian people of the Romans" without ethnic differentiation, and tried to introduce a single Roman law for all the constituent nations of his empire. As Agobard, Archbishop of Lyons, put it: "There is now neither Gentile nor Jew, Scythian nor Aquitanian, nor Lombard, nor Burgundian, nor Alaman, nor bond, nor free. All are one in Christ... Can it be accepted that, opposed to this unity which is the work of God, there should be an obstacle in the diversity of laws [used] in one and the same country, in one and the same city, and in one and the same house? It constantly happens that of five men walking or sitting side by side, no two have the same territorial law, although at root - on the eternal plan - they belong to Christ."<sup>233</sup>

---

<sup>233</sup> Agobard, quoted in R.H.C. Davis, *A History of Medieval Europe*, Harlow: Longman, 1988, p. 147.

## 14. THE JEWS, THE PERSIANS AND ISLAM

The degree of identity achieved by Justinian between the Orthodox Church and the Orthodox Empire was striking, but it was not, of course, complete. Not only were there Roman citizens who were not Orthodox – the Monophysite Copts and Syrians, for example: there were also large bodies of Orthodox that remained outside the bounds of the Empire – for example, the Celts in the West and the Georgians in the East. Moreover, friction continued between the nations of the Byzantine commonwealth; and although nationalism as such is usually considered to be a modern phenomenon stemming from the French Revolution, something similar to it is certainly evident in antiquity.

Perhaps the clearest example is that of Armenia, which can lay claim to having been the first Christian kingdom, having been converted by St. Gregory the Illuminator in the early fourth century. However, in the middle of the fifth century, in the wake of the Byzantine Emperor Marcian's refusal to support an Armenian revolt against Persia, the Armenian Church ignored and then rejected the Council of Chalcedon. From this time the Armenian Church was alienated from Orthodoxy, but not completely from Romanity. Thus in the council of Dvin in 506, they sided with the Monophysites who were being persecuted by the Persian government at the instigation of the Nestorians. After the Muslim conquest in the seventh century, the Armenian Church became more and more entrenched, not only in anti-Chalcedonian Monophysitism, but also in a kind of nationalism that made it the first national church in the negative sense of that phrase – that is, a church that was so identified with the nation as to lose its universalist claims. In this way the Armenian Church contrasts with other national Churches in the region, such as the Orthodox Georgian and the Monophysite Ethiopian.

Other cases in which national hatred has been suspected to lie beneath religious separatism are the Donatist Berbers, The Celts of Wales (with whom Justinian had relations<sup>234</sup>), the Monophysite Copts and Syrians – and, of course, the Jews...

\*

The hostility of the Jews towards Christianity and Christian Rome had not waned since apostolic times. Sergius and Tamara Fomin write: "To the prayer 'birkam za-minim' which was read everyday against heretics and apostates there was added the 'curse' against 'the proud state' (of Rome) and against all the enemies of Israel, in particular the Christians... [The Christians were also identified with] the scapegoat, on which the sins of the Jews were laid and

---

<sup>234</sup> There is intriguing evidence that in about 540 the Emperor Justinian was sending subsidies to the kingdom of Gwynedd in Wales. However, after the plague of 547, links between Britain and the East appear to have been cut off. See Michelle Ziegler, "Emperor Justinian and the British Kings, c. 540", Heavenfield, <https://hefenfelth.wordpress.com/2015/03/20/emperor-justinian-and-the-british-kings-c-540>.

which was then driven into the wilderness as a gift to the devil. According to rabbinic teaching, the goat signified Esau and his descendants, who at the present time were the Christians.”<sup>235</sup>

The Jews also called the Roman Empire “the kingdom of the Edomites”. Thus Rabbi David Kimchi writes in *Obadiah*: “What the Prophets foretold about the destruction of Edom in the last days was intended for Rome, as Isaiah explains (34.1)... For when Rome is destroyed, Israel shall be redeemed.” And Rabbi Abraham in his book *Tseror Hammor* writes: “Immediately after Rome is destroyed, we shall be redeemed.”<sup>236</sup>

The teaching of the Talmud incited the Jews to terrible crimes against Gentiles, especially Christians. Thus “under Theodosius II,” writes L.A. Tikhomirov, “it was discovered that the Jews, on the day of the feast of the execution of Haman [Purim], had introduced the practice of burning the Cross. The government had to undertake repressions against the blasphemy, but the Jews were not pacified. Under the same Theodosius II, in the city of Imma, the Jews during one of their feasts took hold of a Christian child, crucified him on a cross and with scourges cut him into pieces. The disturbed Christians took to arms, and a bloody battle took place. This incident, as they said, was not unique. The Christian historian Socrates relates that the Jews more than once crucified Christian children. At that time it was not a matter of ‘ritual killings’, and in such acts only the hatred of the Jews for Christians and mockery of them was seen. In the given case Theodosius II executed those guilty of the murder, but at the same time the government began to take measures to weaken Jewry. Theodosius destroyed the Jewish patriarchate in Palestine and confiscated the sums collected throughout Jewry for the patriarchate. But all these repressions did not quickly pacify the Jews. Under the same Theodosius II there took place in 415 the well-known brawl in Alexandria elicited by the killing of Christians by the Jews. All this boldness of the Jews in the face of a power that was evidently incomparably greater than theirs seems improbable. But we must bear in mind that this was an age of terrible Messianic fanaticism on the part of the Jews. It often drove them to acts that were senseless, in which pure psychosis was operating. Here, for example, is a purely internal incident having no relation to the Christians. At about the same time, in 432, on the island of Cyprus there took place an event which shows to what an inflamed condition the Jews of that time could come. On the island there appeared a man who was evidently mad, called Moses, the same who had led the people out of Egypt through the Red Sea. He declared that he now had an order from the Lord to lead the Jews out of Cyprus into Palestine through the Mediterranean Sea. His preaching attracted crowds of Jews who did not hesitate to follow the prophet. These hordes went to the sea and, at a sign from Moses, began to hurl themselves from a lofty cliff into the water. Many crashed against the rocks, others drowned, and only the forcible intervention of the Christians saved the

---

<sup>235</sup> Fomin and Fomina, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 201-202.

<sup>236</sup> Quoted in Rev. I.B. Pranaitis, *The Talmud Unmasked*, St. Petersburg, 1892, Bloomfield Books, Sudbury, Suffolk, pp. 43, 80, 81.

rest: fishermen dragged them from the water, while other inhabitants forcibly drove the Jews from the shore. This mass psychosis shows to what lengths the Jews could go in the name of the idea of the re-establishment of the Kingdom of Israel...

“The [Western] Church had already quite early, in the sixth century, begun to take measures to protect Christians from the influence of the Jews. Councils in Orleans in 538 and 545 decreed the suppression of relations between Christians and Jews and, moreover, forbade the Jews from publicly showing themselves during the Christian Pascha, doubtless to cut off the possibility of any blasphemous outrages. But we can understand why these measures could not be maintained, nor were they systematic, and relations inevitably continued, having two kinds of consequences: some they spiritually cut off from Christianity and drew them into heresy, and others they filled with hatred for the Jews.”<sup>237</sup>

In about 520, 4000 Christians were martyred by the Jewish ruler of the South Arabian land of Omir (or Himyar), Yusuf A’sar Yath’ar.<sup>238</sup> Again, in 555 the Jews supported the Samaritans in their rebellion against Byzantium.

\*

A new era began with the murder of the Emperor Maurice by the bloody tyrant Phocas in 602. Under Phocas, everything began to go wrong for Byzantium, and the resurgent Persian empire under Chosroes even reached Chalcedon, within sight of Constantinople. Sassanid Persia was the successor of the Parthian empire; the two empires had been the greatest enemy of Rome in the late pagan and early Christian periods, and had given *Roma invicta* her most massive and humiliating defeats. “Sassanid Persia,” writes Roberts, “was a religious as well as a political unity. Zoroastrianism had been formally restored by Ardashir [or Artaxerxes, the first Sassanid ruler], who gave important privileges to its priests, the magi. These led in due course to political power as well. Priests confirmed the divine nature of the kingship, had important judicial duties, and came, too, to supervise the collection of the land-tax which was the basis of Persian finances. The doctrines they taught seem to have varied considerably from the strict monotheism attributed to Zoroaster but focused on a creator, Ahura Mazda, whose viceroy on earth was the king. The Sassanids’ promotion of the state religion was closely connected with the assertion of their own authority.”<sup>239</sup>

Thus “ultimately,” as Tom Holland writes, “in the spiritual dimension as well as the earthly, one protagonist mattered more than any other: the

---

<sup>237</sup> Tikhomirov, *Religiozno-Filosofskie Osnovy Istorii*, Moscow, 1997, pp. 340-341, 350.

<sup>238</sup> See the life of the Holy Martyr Al-Harith, in St. Demetrius of Rostov, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, House Springs, MO; Chrysostom Press, 1995, vol. II, pp. 351-376; Mango, *op. cit.*, p. 92; Tikhomirov, *Religio-philosophskie Osnovy Istorii*, chapters 41 and 42; Tom Holland, *In the Shadow of the Sword*, London: Abacus, 2014, pp. 3-4.

<sup>239</sup> J.M Roberts, *History of the World*, Oxford: Helicon Publishing, 1992, pp. 252-253.

*Shahansha* himself. He alone could claim to have been touched by the divine. *Asha* – the supreme virtue of [the good god] Ohrmazd – could not possibly be maintained without him. Nor, indeed, could the privileges and pretensions of the priesthood. Ahrman [the bad god], in the malignancy of his cunning, had always been assiduous in his attempts to cultivate heresy and demon-worship. Not every corner of *Iranshahr* had been illumined by the light of Zoroaster’s teachings. While some of the Iranians’ ancient gods – the Lady Anahita pre-eminent among them – had come to be ranked by the Zoroastrian priesthood as loyal lieutenants of Ohrmazd, others, so Zoroaster himself had warned, were not gods at all, but demons. Their cults, idols and adherents all needed smashing. Only *Shahanshar*, in the final reckoning, was up to the job. If the religion of Zoroaster, instituted of Ohrmazd himself, self-evidently existed to serve as the protector of humanity, it was the function of kingship, in the opinion of the priesthood, to serve as ‘the protector of religion’.”<sup>240</sup>

However, Khodadad Rezakhani thinks the dominance of the Zoroastrian clergy has been exaggerated: “The existence of a Zoroastrian theocracy, presided over by a dominant priestly establishment, is based on fragments of evidence, some of which date back hundreds of years to around the sixth and seventh centuries. Apart from the absence of any ‘orthodox’ Zoroastrian doctrine in the Sasanian world, we have no evidence of the presence of a dominant clergy. Late Sasanian kings are known for making public overtures to their native Christian communities. Khosrow [Chosroes] II Aparviz (1. 591-628), the quintessential late-Sassanian king, married one, perhaps two, Christian wives and had a Christian chief minister. Likewise, in the course of mustering support for his campaigns against Byzantium, he supported the Nestorian Christian community within his domains, buttressed the Nestorians of Syria and, upon conquering and entering Jerusalem, moved the True Cross from Jerusalem to Khuzistan in south-west Iran in order to provide prestige for the Christians of his empire. The presence of a dominant Zoroastrian religious structure is unlikely to have allowed such relations with members of another religion.

“Christians, in fact, were the dominant population in the western regions of the Sassanian realm at this time. Mesopotamia, the heart of the Sasanian Empire (*dil-i Eranshahr*), was populated mainly by Aramaic-speaking Christians and Jews. South-West Mesopotamia was the realm of the Arab kingdom of Hita, the land of the Lakhmids, who ruled the Arab tribes of northern Arabia on behalf of the Sasanians. Eastern Arabia was also populated by Arabic-speaking peoples, who were controlled via the Sasanian administration of Bahrayn, which included all of eastern Arabia down to what is now Oman. Southern Arabia, the former kingdom of Himyar, had become part of the Sasanian Empire following its conquest around 570.”<sup>241</sup>

---

<sup>240</sup> Holland, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

<sup>241</sup> Rezakhani, “Arab Conquests and Sasanian Iran”, *History Today*, April, 2017, p. 33.

In 602 King Chosroes II defeated the Byzantine armies under Phocas and conquered Antioch and Jerusalem. Then he wrote to Phocas' successor, Heraclius: "Chosroes, greatest of gods, and master of the earth, to Heraclius, his vile and insensate slave. Why do you still call yourself a king?"<sup>242</sup> But Heraclius patiently reorganized the shattered empire; and in 622, the same year in which Mohammed fled to Medina, he embarked on one of the greatest feats of arms in Christian history, and by 629 had comprehensively defeated Chosroes, thereby finally bringing old-style pagan despotism to an end in the Middle East. In 630, the same year in which Mohammed conquered Mecca, Heraclius triumphantly returned the Holy Cross from Persia to Jerusalem. But the last ten years of his reign were miserable and tragic: disgraced by his marriage to his niece and his embracing of the Monothelite heresy, he saw all his conquests reversed by the new power of the Muslim Arabs...

In these wars, the Jews had taken the side of the enemies of Rome. This was partly because Phocas had persecuted them and compelled them to be baptised. But a long tradition of Jewish demonization of Rome also played its part. As David Keys writes: "The Jews viewed the apparently imminent collapse of the Roman Empire in the first quarter of the seventh century as evidence that the 'beast' (the formerly pagan but now Christian empire) was doomed, that the Devil in the guise of the last Roman emperor or Christian pope would be killed by the (imminently expected) Messiah. They saw the Persians (and a few years later, the Arabs) as the agents who would help destroy the 'Roman beast'. Violent and often Messianic Jewish revolutionary attitudes had been increasing throughout the second half of the sixth century and went into overdrive as the Empire began to totter in the first quarter of the seventh. In Antioch in AD 608, Christian attempts at forced conversion, as the Persians threatened the city, triggered a major revolt in the Jewish quarter. At first the Jewish rebels were successful, and their community's arch-enemy, the city's powerful Christian patriarch, Anastasius, was captured, killed and mutilated. But the revolt was soon put down – and the 800-year-old Antiochian Jewish community was almost totally extinguished."<sup>243</sup>

In the Holy Land, the Jews joined the Persians and killed the Bishop of Tiberias and 90,000 Christians. When the Persians conquered Jerusalem, and sent most of the Christians into captivity, "the Jews distinguished themselves at this point with a beastly cruelty unique in the history of the world. They spared no money to buy many Christians from the Persians with one purpose only – to gain enjoyment in killing them. They say that in this way they bought and destroyed 80,000 people. The Jewish historian G. Graetz glides silently over this terrible fact, saying only: 'Filled with rage, the Jews of course did not spare the Christians' and 'did not spare the holy things of the Christians'. Graetz reduces the number of Christians killed to 19,000..."<sup>244</sup>

---

<sup>242</sup> Chosroes, in Charles Oman, *The Dark Ages, AD 476-918*, London, 1919, p. 207.

<sup>243</sup> Keys, *Catastrophe*, London: Arrow books, 2000, pp. 91-92.

<sup>244</sup> Tikhomirov, *op. cit.*, p. 343.

Graetz admits that the Jews took a greater part in the destruction of Christian churches and monasteries than the Persians themselves...<sup>245</sup>

After he had defeated the Persians, the Emperor Heraclius turned his attention to the Jews of Jerusalem, banishing them to a distance of three miles from the city, and then repeated the error of his predecessor by decreeing that all the Jews of the empire should be baptized. But the pendulum swung again; in 638 the new power of the Islamic Arabs under Caliph Omar entered the Holy City<sup>246</sup>; and the Jews rejoiced, saying that Mohammed was a prophet who had come to prepare the way for the Messiah. And "even when the Messiah failed to arrive," writes Karen Armstrong, "Jews continued to look favourably on Islamic rule in Jerusalem. In a letter written in the eleventh century, the Jerusalem rabbis recalled the 'mercy' God had shown his people when he allowed the 'Kingdom of Ishmael' to conquer Palestine. They were glad to remember that when the Muslims arrived in Jerusalem, 'there were people from the children of Israel with them; they showed the spot of the Temple and they settled with them until this very day.'"<sup>247</sup>

Thus in spite of Heraclius' heroic campaigns against the Persians, the first half of the seventh century was a catastrophic period for the Roman empire. Vast areas of the East - Egypt, Syria, Palestine - were lost, first to the Persians, and then to the Muslim Arabs. Not only were the territories lost, but also the loyalty of most of the local populations, Semitic, Coptic and Armenian, whose religious differences with Roman Orthodoxy were compounded by anti-Roman nationalist feeling. And Heraclius' attempts to heal the wounds by adopting the heresy of Monothelism only made things worse. St. Anastasius of Sinai considered the defeats and defections that took place in his reign to be Divine punishment for his heresy...<sup>248</sup>

The Jews continued to be persecuted by the Byzantine emperors. Thus Cyril Mango writes that "Leo III ordered once again the baptism of Jews and those who complied were given the title of 'new citizens', but they did so in bad faith, while others, it seems, fled to the Arabs. The failure of this measure was acknowledged by the Council of 787 which decreed that insincere converts should not be accepted; it was preferable to let them live according to their customs while remaining subject to the old disabilities."<sup>249</sup> A fresh attempt was

---

<sup>245</sup> Graetz, *Istoria Evreev* (A History of the Jews), Odessa, 1908, vol. 1, pp. 28-32.

<sup>246</sup> Eliciting Patriarch Sophronius of Jerusalem's comment: "Surely this is the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the Prophet standing in the holy place."

<sup>247</sup> Armstrong, *A History of Jerusalem*, London: HarperCollins, 1996, p. 233.

<sup>248</sup> Dagon, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

<sup>249</sup> Thus the eighth canon of the Council states: "Inasmuch as some person who have been misled by their inferences from the religion of the Jews have seen fit to sneer at Christ our God while pretending to be Christians, secretly and clandestinely keep the Sabbath and do other Jewish acts, we decree that these persons shall not be admitted to communion, nor to prayer, nor to church, but shall be Jews openly in accordance with their religion; and that neither shall their children be baptized, nor shall they buy or acquire a slave. But if any one of them should be converted as a matter of sincere faith, and confess with all his heart, triumphantly repudiating their customs and affairs, with a view to censure and correction of others, we

made by Basil I: Jews were summoned to disputations and if they were unable to demonstrate the truth of their religion, they were to be baptized.<sup>250</sup> Remission of taxes and the grant of dignities were offered as rewards; even so, after the emperor's death, most of the converts 'returned like dogs to their own vomit'. The last recorded case of forced conversion was under Romanus I, but it only resulted in driving many Jews to the land of Khazaria north of the Black Sea. From then on such Jews as remained were left to live in relative peace; there was even a reverse migration of them from Egypt into the Empire in the late tenth and eleventh centuries..."<sup>251</sup>

\*

So what was this new power of Islam? St. John of Damascus (+749), an Arab monk who served in the Caliph's administration, writes: "There is also the superstition of the Ishmaelites which to this day prevails and keeps people in error, being a forerunner of the Antichrist. They are descended from Ishmael, [who] was born to Abraham of Agar, and for this reason they are called both Agarenes and Ishmaelites. They are also called Saracens, which is derived from Sarras kenoi, or destitute of Sara, because of what Agar said to the angel: 'Sara hath sent me away destitute.' These used to be idolaters and worshiped the morning star and Aphrodite, whom in their own language they called Khabár, which means great. And so down to the time of Heraclius they were very great idolaters. From that time to the present a false prophet named Mohammed has appeared in their midst. This man, after having chanced upon the Old and New Testaments and likewise, it seems, having conversed with an Arian monk, devised his own heresy. Then, having insinuated himself into the good graces of the people by a show of seeming piety, he gave out that a certain book had been sent down to him from heaven. He had set down some ridiculous compositions in this book of his and he gave it to them as an object of veneration."<sup>252</sup>

By the time of his death in 632, Mohammed had established the dominion of his new religion of Islam over the whole of Arabia. He did not proclaim himself a king, still less a Persian-style "king of kings", but a mere prophet - albeit the last and greatest of them. In fact, he was the prophet of one of the Arabian pagan demons, the moon-god Allah<sup>253</sup>, whom he proclaimed to be the

---

decree that he shall be accepted and his children shall be baptized, and that the latter shall be persuaded to hold themselves aloof from Jewish peculiarities..." (V.M.)

<sup>250</sup> Dagron writes: "In reply to Basil's initiative came a pamphlet from the best theologian and canonist of the day, Gregory Asbestos, who did not content himself with defending the dogmas and the canons, but preached rebellion and threatened the imperial power with anathema" (op. cit., p. 207). (V.M.)

<sup>251</sup> Mango, op. cit., pp 92-93.

<sup>252</sup> St. John, *The Fount of Knowledge*, Part 2: *Epitome of Heresies*.

<sup>253</sup> Nektarios Lignos writes: "Allah, worshipped in pre-Islamic Arabia, is the god Muhammad's Quraysh tribe worshipped, ... the moon god who was married to the sun goddess and they had three daughters - Al-Lat, Al-Uzza, and Manat. This is why we see the crescent moon symbol in conjunction with Islam."

one true God. In spite of the clearly pagan origins of his faith, Mohammed claimed to abhor every kind of man-worship and idolatry.

The contrast between the beginnings of Christianity and Islam is enormous. Christianity was spread by 12 defenceless men not enjoying any political or military support and using no power except the power of preaching and prayer; it is truly the religion of peace. However, although Mohammed himself fought only relatively small-scale wars for the control of Arabia, his successors, the early caliphs, went with fire and sword throughout the Middle East and North Africa<sup>254</sup>; and Islam in general has been the most violent religion in history.<sup>255</sup>

The despotic pagan civilizations place the rights of the collective over the rights of the individual, thereby giving the state a despotic power and discouraging freedom of thought. Orthodox Christian civilization, on the other hand, generally allows freedom of conscience and some autonomy to the religious sphere. Islam places religion above the state, and religious law above state law.

Roger Scruton has probed this difference in ideas.<sup>256</sup> Orthodox Christianity grew up in the context of the Roman empire, and from the beginning gave the state a certain autonomy. The Christian was obliged to obey the state in all its laws that did not directly contradict the commandment of God: "Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22.21). For although his ultimate loyalty was to God, the Christian was also a citizen of the state. He did not rebel against the State, but gradually worked on its crude *mores* until it became Christian itself. Then Church and State worked in harmony with each other in a "symphony of powers". The Church was universal, and had members in many different countries. The State, on the other hand, was territorial, being based on the feeling of a common destiny of all or most of the people on that territory, reinforced by commonalities of language, culture and religion.

Islam, however, did not encourage the growth of stable territorial nation-states or empires. There were tribes, and there was the universal religion, and very little of what we may call "political infrastructure" in between. There was *shariah*, the law of Allah, but very little in the way of state law, and certainly nothing comparable to the legal structures created by Constantine, Theodosius and Justinian. And so, while the Muslims considered "the People of the Book",

---

<sup>254</sup> In Africa, the Muslims reached as far south as Makuria (modern-day Sudan). "During the summer of 642 AD, the Orthodox Christian Kingdom of Makuria defeated a Muslim invasion at the First Battle of Dongola. Ten years later the Orthodox Makurians would defeat a second and larger invasion force by the Caliphate. This resulted in a peace that lasted for nearly 700 years." (Hieromonk Enoch, Facebook communication, July, 2016)

<sup>255</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, London: Simon & Schuster, 1996, pp. 254-258.

<sup>256</sup> Scruton, *The West and the Rest: Globalization and the Terrorist Threat*, London: Continuum, 2002.

the Jews and Christians, to be higher than pagans and therefore entitled to some respect, there was no such thing as equality under the law for all citizens, regardless of their faith, a typically Roman conception.

The promises of the Muslims to “the People of the Book” have counted for little in practice. Thus in 638, writes Bishop Dionysius (Alferov), “after a year-long siege [of Jerusalem], [Patriarch Sophronius] handed over the city to Caliph Omar on definite conditions. The churches at the holy places (first of all Golgotha and the Holy Sepulchre) remained in the possession of the Jerusalem Patriarchate, half of whose churches were turned into mosques. The preaching of Christianity to Muslims was forbidden, and the Christian churches into which Caliph Omar entered were seized by the Muslims and converted later into mosques. Later, this agreement was often broken by the Muslims, and the majority of the churches were destroyed. Even the very church of the Resurrection over the Holy Sepulchre was destroyed more than once. And yet the agreement with Omar created a certain basis for the further existence of the Jerusalem Patriarchate. It was recognized as a legal person, and the possessor of a series of churches and plots of land in Palestine. It was allowed to carry out Divine services, to look after the spiritual needs of Christians and even to judge the Christian population in civil cases. On the whole the Mohammedans did not interfere in the internal administration of the Jerusalem Patriarchate, although they often carried out external acts of violence and theft on the Christian population and clergy. The patriarch himself was elected by the Synod, although the Caliph confirmed him.

“The main feature of this agreement was the preservation of the earthly existence of the Jerusalem Church, the guarantee of its legal existence, possession of churches and property, the right to carry out open public services. The cost that had to be paid for this was not only complete loyalty to the Mohammedan authorities and prayers for the caliph and his army, but also – which is more important – the refusal to preach Christianity to the Muslims and their own children who had been seduced into Islam. But the Arabs by deceit and violence converted thousands of Christians to their faith – and the archpastors of the Church did not dare to protest against this, and did not dare openly to carry out anti-Islamic propaganda, which was punished by death at all times in Islamic countries.”<sup>257</sup>

\*

What was the nature of Islamic power? Bernard Lewis writes that “the power wielded by the early caliphs was very far from the despotism of their predecessors and successors. It was limited by the political ethics of Islam and by the anti-authoritarian habits and traditions of ancient Arabia. A verse attributed to the pre-Islamic Arabic poet ‘Abid ibn al-Abras speaks of his tribe as ‘laqah’, a word which, according to the ancient commentators and

---

<sup>257</sup> Alferov, “Vizantijskij servilizm i sovietskoe sergianstvo” (Byzantine servility and Soviet sergianism), <http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/print.php?act=news&id=63406>, pp. 5-6.

lexicographers, denotes a tribe that has never submitted to a king. 'Abid's proud description of his people makes his meaning clear:

*They refused to be servants of kings, and were never ruled by any.  
But when they were called on for help in war, they responded gladly.*

"The ancient Arabs, like the ancient Israelites depicted in the books of Judges and Samuel, mistrusted kings and the institution of kingship. They were, indeed, familiar with the institution of monarchy in the surrounding countries, and some were even led to adopt it. There were kings in the states of southern Arabia; there were kings in the border principalities of the north; but all these were in different degrees marginal to Arabia. The sedentary kingdoms of the south used a different language, and were part of a different culture. The border principalities of the north, though authentically Arab, were deeply influenced by Persian and Byzantine imperial practice, and represent a somewhat alien element in the Arab world...

"The early Muslims were well aware of the nature of imperial monarchy as practised in their own day in Byzantium and in Persia, and believed that the state founded by the Prophet and governed after him by his successors the caliphs represented something new and different..."<sup>258</sup>

However, the Ummayyad Caliphs in Damascus, and then the Abbasid Caliphs in Baghdad, fell under strong Byzantine and then Persian influence... Take the case of one of the best, and probably the most powerful, of the early caliphs, Muawiya, who in 661 became, as Simon Sebag Montefiore writes, "the Caliph of the vast empire that included Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Persia and Arabia... He ruled through Christian bureaucrats and tolerated Christians and Jews alike, seeing himself as something between Arab sheikh, Islamic caliph and Roman emperor. He was tolerant and pragmatic, following an early, looser version of Islam, happy to worship at Christian and Jewish sites, and share their shrine." However, despite his "tolerance", he continued to conquer Christian lands such as Rhodes and Cyprus, and almost took Constantinople. Later he expanded the empire into eastern Persia, central Asia, the Sahara and today's Libya and Algeria.

Living as he did in Syria, whose culture was Byzantine, Muawiya began to be influenced by Byzantine ideas and practices. "Byzantine influence on the emerging Islamic civilization, a tidal pull that now reached its high-water mark, went far beyond the caliph's assumption of royal ways. It covered virtually all areas of life..."<sup>259</sup> Thus he was criticised, writes Colin Wells, "for putting on royal airs. In defense he explained 'that Damascus was full of Greeks, and that none would believe in his power if he did not behave and look like an emperor.'"<sup>260</sup> And his public designation, before his death in 680, of his

---

<sup>258</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East*, London: Phoenix, 1995, pp. 140-141.

<sup>259</sup> Wells, *Sailing from Byzantium*, New York: Bantam Deli, 2006, pp. 129-130.

<sup>260</sup> Wells, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

son Yazid as his successor constituted a break with Islamic tradition and the adoption of the principle of dynastic succession.<sup>261</sup>

“Yazid failed to grasp the succession, facing rebellions in Arabia and Iraq. Muhammed’s grandson Hussein rebelled to avenge his father Ali’s death but was brutally murdered at Karbala in Iraq, his martyrdom creating the Shia, ‘the party’, a division that still splits Islam today. However, after Yazid’s early death, Muawiya’s old kinsman Marwan started to reconquer the empire, dying in 685 and leaving this troubled inheritance to his son Abd al-Malik, the second of the titanic Umayyad Caliphs. Abd al-Malik was less human and flexible but more ruthless and visionary than Muawiya. He first mercilessly crushed the rebellions, retaking Iraq and Arabia; in Jerusalem he built the Dome of the Rock...

“... Abd al-Malik saw himself as God’s shadow on earth: if Muawiya was Caesar of the Arabs, he was a mixture of St. Paul and Constantine the Great – he believed in the marriage of empire, state and god. As such it was Abd al-Malik who collated the book of Islam – the Koran – into its final form (the inscriptions in Jerusalem’s Dome of the Rock are the first examples of the final Koran text), who defined Islamic rituals and who unified Islam into a single religion recognizable today with the emphasis on Koran and Muhammed, expressed in the double *shahada*: “There is no God but God and Muhammed is the apostle of God’. Abd al-Malik and his son Caliph Walid expanded their empire to the borders of India and the coasts of Spain. Yet their dynasty remained part Islamic theocrats, part Roman emperors, often living in a distinctly unIslamic decadence. This led to the family’s downfall in the revolution of 750, when they were replaced by the Abbasid caliphs who ruled from Iraq and blackened the reputation of the Umayyads. To the Shia, they remained heretics and sinners because the Shia believed the real Caliphs were the twelve descendants from [Muhammed’s cousin] Ali and [his wife] Fatima: indeed the Shia of Iran still await the return of the Twelfth...”<sup>262</sup>

It was Abu Muslim, a manumitted Persian slave, who raised the standard of revolt, defeated the Umayyads and created the Abbasid dynasty. A few years later, Al-Mansur (754-775), having moved the capital of the empire to Baghdad, came under the influence of Persia with its strong despotic tradition. And so Muslim “democratism” soon passed into a despotism no less fierce than the monarchies that Islam had destroyed. The caliphs of the ninth century, particularly Mamun (813-833), believed their authority to be unlimited. (The Fatimid ruler Al-Hakim even believed he was god... Thus when Caliph Mutasim, Mamun’s brother and successor, conquered the Byzantine fortress town of Amorion, he executed forty-two prisoners who refused to renounce Christianity and embrace Islam.<sup>263</sup>

---

<sup>261</sup> Wells, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

<sup>262</sup> Montefiore, *Titans of History*, London: Quercus, 2012, pp. 98, 99-100.

<sup>263</sup> In Moorish Spain, too, we find an increase in Christian martyrdoms (and apostasies to Islam) at this time. See Richard Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe*, London: HarperCollins, 1997, pp. 308-312; Andrew Wheatcroft, *Infidels*, London: Penguin Books, 2004, pp. 80-88.

That Muslim statehood should become despotic was a natural consequence of the lack of a separation of Church and State, which gave an absolute, unchecked power to the Caliphs, embodying as they did both religious and political authority.

“The increasingly authoritarian character of government”, writes Lewis, “and the disappointment of successful revolutionaries is vividly expressed in a passage quoted by several classical authors. A certain Sudaif, a supporter of the Abbasids, is cited as complaining of the changes resulting from the fall of the Umayyads and the accession of the Abbasids to the caliphate: ‘By God, our booty, which was shared, has become a perquisite of the rich. Our leadership, which was consultative, has become arbitrary. Our succession, which was by the choice of the community, is now by inheritance.’”<sup>264</sup>

\*

There were differences between the Sunnis and the Shias on the nature of Islamic power. One of the questions dividing them was whether the caliphate should be elective or hereditary. “The Shia maintained that the caliphate should be hereditary in the line of the Prophet, and therefore that all the caliphs, except only for the brief rule of Ali and of his son Hasan, were usurpers. The more generally accepted view of the Sunni Muslims was that the caliphate was elective, and any member of the Prophet’s tribe, Quraysh, was eligible.”<sup>265</sup> Al-Mansur in Spain made the caliphate there hereditary, but thirty years after his death the people abolished it altogether.

Another of the differences between the Sunnis and the Shiites was that the latter believed in a certain separation, even antagonism between the imamate and the State. “The myth of the Hidden Imam... symbolized the impossibility of implementing a truly religious policy in this world, since the caliphs had destroyed Ali’s line and driven the *ilm* [the knowledge of what is right] from the earth. Henceforth the Shii *ulama* [learned men, guardians of the legal and religious traditions of Islam] became the representatives of the Hidden Imam, and used their own mystical and rational insights to apprehend his will. Twelver Shiis (who believe in the twelve *imams*) would take no further part in political life, since in the absence of the Hidden Imam, the true leader of the *ummah* [the Muslim community], no government could be legitimate.”<sup>266</sup>

The Sunnis, on the other hand, tended to conflate political and religious power. Thus according to T.P. Miloslavskaya and G.V. Miloslavsky, they believed that the caliphate's secular and spiritual powers (the sultanate and the imamate) were indivisible.<sup>267</sup> Again, Colin McEvedy writes that “the successors

---

<sup>264</sup> Lewis, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-144.

<sup>265</sup> Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

<sup>266</sup> Armstrong, *Islam*, New York: Modern Library, 2002, pp. 67, 68-69.

<sup>267</sup> Miloslavskaya and Miloslavsky, “Kontseptsia ‘Islamskogo Edinstva’ i Integratsionnie Protsessy v ‘Musulmanskome Mire’” (“The Conception of ‘Islamic Unity’ and Integrational

of Mohammed, the Caliphs, combined, as he had, the powers of Emperor and Pope".<sup>268</sup> Again, Ninian Smart writes that Islam "demands institutions which cover the whole life of the community. There is nothing in Islam... corresponding to the Church. There is no place for a special institution within society devoted to the ends of the faith. For it is the whole of society which is devoted to the ends of the faith."<sup>269</sup> And again, Bernard Lewis writes: "It is sometimes said that the caliph was head of State and Church, pope and emperor in one. This description in Western and Christian terms is misleading. Certainly there was no distinction between *imperium* and *sacerdotium*, as in the Christian empire, and no separate ecclesiastical institution, no Church, with its own head and hierarchy. The caliphate was always defined as a religious office, and the caliph's supreme purpose was to safeguard the heritage of the Prophet and to enforce the Holy Law. But the caliph had no pontifical or even priestly function... His task was neither to expound nor to interpret the faith, but to uphold and protect it - to create conditions in which his subjects could follow the good Muslim life in this world and prepare themselves for the world to come. And to do this, he had to maintain the God-given Holy Law within the frontiers of the Islamic state, and to defend and, where possible, extend those frontiers, until in the fullness of time the whole world was opened to the light of Islam..."<sup>270</sup>

However, this indivisibility of powers resulted in a gradual undermining of the quasi-democratic ideal of early Islam by the reality of the caliphs' almost unlimited power. On the one hand, the caliphs wanted to create an order in which, "as ideally conceived, there were to be no priests, no church, no kings and no nobles, no privileged orders or castes or estates of any kind, save only for the self-evident superiority of those who accept the true faith to those who wilfully reject it - and of course such obvious natural and social realities as the superiority of man to woman and of master to slave."<sup>271</sup> But on the other hand, they were military leaders, and success in war required that they should be able to command no less obedience.

As François Guizot points out, the separation of spiritual and temporal power is a legacy of Christianity which the Islamic world abandoned: "This separation is the source of liberty of conscience; it is founded upon no other principle but that which is the foundation of the most perfect and extended freedom of conscience. The separation of temporal and spiritual power is based upon the idea that physical force has neither right nor influence over souls, over conviction, over truth. It flows from the distinction established between the world of thought and the world of action, between the world of internal and that of external facts. Thus this principle of liberty of conscience for which Europe has struggled so much, and suffered so much, this principle which

---

Processes in 'the Muslim World'), in *Islam i Problemy Natsionalizma* (Islam and the Problems of Nationalism), Moscow: Nauka, 1986, p. 12.

<sup>268</sup> McEvedy, *The Penguin Atlas of Medieval History*, London: Penguin, 1961, p. 36.

<sup>269</sup> Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, London: Fontana, 1971, p. 538.

<sup>270</sup> Lewis, *op. cit.*, pp. 138-139.

<sup>271</sup> Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

prevailed so late, and often, in its progress, against the inclination of the clergy, was enunciated, under the name of the separation of temporal and spiritual power, in the very cradle of European civilisation; and it was the Christian Church which, from the necessity imposed by its situation of defending itself against barbarism, introduced and maintained it... It is in the combination of the spiritual and temporal powers, in the confusion of moral and material authority, that the tyranny which seems inherent in this [Muslim] civilisation originated."<sup>272</sup>

Islam believes that all people are bound to obey Allah, and that those who do not obey - with the partial exceptions of the Jews and Christians - have no right either to life or freedom or property. The whole world is divided into the "House of Islam" (which means "obedience"), on the one hand, and the "House of War", on the other. Therefore the natural state of relations between the two "Houses" is one of struggle, or "jihad", interrupted only by temporary periods of peace permitted for purely tactical reasons.<sup>273</sup> Thus the Koran says: "Kill the unbelievers wherever you find them" (Koran 2:191). "Make war on the infidels living in your neighbourhood" (Koran 9:123). "Fight and kill the unbelievers wherever you find them, take them captive, harass them, lie in wait and ambush them using every stratagem of war." (Koran 9:5; cf. 8:60). "O believers, make war on the infidels who dwell around you. Let them find firmness in you" (Sura: 9; Ayat: 123). "Fight those who believe not... even if they be People of the Book [Jews and Christians] until they willingly agree to pay the tribute in recognition of their submissive state" (Sura: 9; Ayat: 29). "You will be called to fight a mighty nation; fight them until they embrace Islam" (Sura: 48; Ayat: 16).

The 15<sup>th</sup>-century Islamic scholar Ibn Khaldun summed up the difference between the Christian and Muslim views of war: "In the Muslim community, jihad is a religious duty because of the universalism of the Muslim mission and the obligation to convert everybody to Islam either by persuasion or by force. The other religious groups did not have a universal mission, and the jihad was not a religious duty for them, save only for purposes of defense. But Islam is under obligation to gain power over other nations."<sup>274</sup>

Thus, as L.A. Tikhomirov wrote: "In submitting without question to God, the Muslim becomes a spreader of the power of God on earth. Everyone is obliged to submit to Allah, whether they want to or not. If they do not submit, then they have no right to live. Therefore the pagans are subject either to conversion to Islam, or to extermination. Violent conversion to Islam, is nothing prejudicial, from the Muslim point of view, for people are obliged to obey God without question, not because they desire it, but because Allah demands this of them."<sup>275</sup>

---

<sup>272</sup> Guizot, *The History of Civilization in Europe*, London: Penguin, 1997, pp. 42, 55.

<sup>273</sup> Henry Kissinger, *World Order*, London: Penguin, 2015, pp. 101-102.

<sup>274</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, <https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/.../ibn-khaldun-on-holy-...>

<sup>275</sup> Tikhomirov, *op. cit.*, p. 296.

Again, as Kenneth Craig writes, holy war, or jihad, “was believed to be the recovery by Islam of what by right belonged to it as the true and final religion but which had been alienated from it by the unbelief or perversity embodied in the minorities whose survival – but no more – it allowed....”<sup>276</sup> And if it allowed their existence, this was not because they had the “right” to survive, but because, for the time being, it was not advantageous to the Muslims – or within their power – to kill them...

\*

In 1180 a Synod in Constantinople anathematized “the god of Mohammed”, affirming that Allah, the god of Islam, is not the same as the Holy Trinity, the God of the Christians, the one True God. And this remains the main reason why Orthodox Christians have continued to fight holy wars with Muslim nations to the present day. For the purpose of the truly holy war is never to protect territory or political freedom as such, but to protect the Orthodox people from the threat of being forced to renounce their true faith and accept the false one of Mohammed, thereby losing their eternal salvation.

In the ninth century, St. Cyril Equal-to-the-Apostles was sent to preach the gospel among the Saracens. Entering into a dispute with some Muslim scholars, he was asked: «Your God is Christ. He commanded you to pray for enemies, to do good to those who hate and persecute you and to offer the other cheek to those who hit you, but what do you actually do? If anyone offends you, you sharpen your sword and go into battle and kill. Why do you not obey your Christ?» Having heard this, St. Cyril asked his fellow-polemists: «If there are two commandments written in one law, who will be its best respecter – the one who obeys only one commandment or the one who obeys both?» When the Hagerenes said that the best respecter of law is the one who obeys both commandments, the holy preacher continued: «Christ is our God Who ordered us to pray for our offenders and to do good to them. He also said that no one of us can show greater love in life than he who gives his life for his friends (John 15:3). That is why we generously endure offences caused us as private people. But in company we defend one another and give our lives in battle for our neighbours, so that you, having taken our fellows prisoners, could not imprison their souls together with their bodies by forcing them into renouncing their faith and into godless deeds. Our Christ-loving soldiers protect our Holy Church with arms in their hands. They safeguard the sovereign in whose sacred person they respect the image of the rule of the Heavenly King. They safeguard their land because with its fall the home authority will inevitably fall too and the evangelical faith will be shaken. These are precious pledges for which soldiers should fight to the last. And if they give their lives in battlefield, the Church will include them in the community of the holy martyrs and call them intercessors before God.”<sup>277</sup>

---

<sup>277</sup> Craig, *The Arab Christian*, London: Mowbrays, 1992, pp. 57-58.

## 15. THE DISSONANCE OF POWERS: (1) MONOTHELITISM

Justinian's doctrine of the Symphony of Powers, the unity of kingship and priesthood in one State, echoed the Chalcedonian teaching on the unity of the Divine and human natures in the one Christ. It is therefore not surprising to find that under later emperors who renounced Chalcedonian Orthodoxy and embraced heresy (Monothelism, which renounced the human will of Christ, and Iconoclasm, which rejected His full incarnation), the Symphony of Powers was also renounced – or rather, reinterpreted in such a way as to promote the prevailing heresy. The emperor, from being a *focus* of unity in the religious sphere, became an *imposer* of unity – and a false unity at that.

In the seventh century the Monothelite heretics wanted St. Maximus the Confessor to acknowledge the power of a Monothelite emperor over the Church, as if he were both king and priest like Melchizedek. But Maximus refused. When his interrogators asked: "What? Is not every Christian emperor a priest?" the saint replied: "No, for he has no access to the altar, and after the consecration of the bread does not elevate it with the words: 'The holy things to the holy'. He does not baptize, he does not go on to the initiation with chrism, he does not ordain or place bishops, priests and deacons, he does not consecrate churches with oil, he does not wear the marks of the priestly dignity – the omophorion and the Gospel, as he wears those of the kingdom, the crown and the purple." The interrogators objected: "And why does Scripture itself say that Melchizedek is 'king and priest' [Genesis 14.18; Hebrews 7.1]?" The saint replied: "There is only One Who is by nature King, the God of the universe, Who became for our salvation a hierarch by nature, of which Melchizedek is the unique type. If you say that there is another king and priest after the order of Melchizedek, then dare to say what comes next: 'without father, without mother, without genealogy, of whose days there is no beginning and of whose life there is no end' [Hebrews 7.3], and see the disastrous consequences that are entailed: such a person would be another God become man, working our salvation as a priest not in the order of Aaron, but in the order of Melchizedek. But what is the point of multiplying words? During the holy anaphora at the holy table, it is after the hierarchs and deacons and the whole order of the clergy that commemoration is made of the emperors at the same time as the laity, with the deacon saying: 'and the deacons who have reposed in the faith, Constantine, Constans, etc.'" Equally, mention is made of the living emperors after all the clergy'.<sup>278</sup> And again he said: "To investigate and define dogmas of the Faith is the task not of the emperors, but of the ministers of the altar, because it is reserved to them both to anoint the emperor and to lay hands upon him, and to stand before the altar, to perform the Mystery of the Eucharist, and to perform all the other divine and most great Mysteries."<sup>279</sup>

St. Maximus fled to Rome, where, as we have seen, Pope St. Martin convened a Council in the Lateran in 649 that anathematized Monothelism.

---

<sup>278</sup> Dagron, op. cit., p. 181.

<sup>279</sup> *The Life of our Holy Father Maximus the Confessor*, op. cit., p. 12.

In the second session of the Council a special libellus was composed by the eastern monks living in Rome (of whom there were many, including the future St. Theodore, Archbishop of Canterbury<sup>280</sup>). Later, Saints Martin and Maximus were arrested by Byzantine officials, and transported in chains to Constantinople.

During St. Maximus' interrogation, when Bishop Theodosius of Caesarea claimed that the Lateran Council had been invalid since it was not convened by the Emperor, St. Maximus replied: "If only those councils are confirmed which were summoned by royal decree, then there cannot be an Orthodox Faith. Recall the councils that were summoned by royal decree against the *homoousion*, proclaiming the blasphemous teaching that the Son of God is not of one essence with God the Father... The Orthodox Church recognizes as true and holy only those councils at which true and infallible dogmas were established."<sup>281</sup>

Both St. Maximus and St. Martin suffered for the faith from the tyrant emperor Constans II, dying after torture in distant exile. And it was St. Maximus who summed up the causes of tyranny as follows: "The greatest authors and instigators of evil are ignorance, self-love and tyranny. Each depends on the other two and is supported by them: from ignorance of God comes self-love, and from self-love comes tyranny over one's own kind..."<sup>282</sup>

Although Rome under Pope St. Martin clashed strongly with the Eastern Empire on religious matters, the West Romans remained loyal to the Empire in the political sphere. And from the time of Pope Vitalian Rome and Constantinople drew steadily closer as invasions by Arabs from the south and Lombards from the north demonstrated to the Romans how much they needed Byzantine protection. Religious differences were underplayed; Constans II received communion from the Pope on a visit to Rome; and Eastern influence in the Roman Patriarchate steadily increased. An example of this was Pope Vitalian's sending, in 668, of a Greek, St. Theodore, to be archbishop of Canterbury, and another Greek, St. Hadrian, to kick-start English ecclesiastical education, together with a Roman chanter, John, to introduce Roman Byzantine chant into England. Indeed, from the time of Pope St. Agatho (+680), who was a Sicilian Greek, until Pope Zacharias (+752), all the Popes were either Greeks or Syrians; the Roman Church, now filled with eastern refugees from the Muslim invasions, became a thriving outpost of Byzantine faith and culture.<sup>283</sup>

Although the main opponents of Monothelitism – St. Sophronius of Jerusalem and St. Maximus the Confessor – were Greek, all the four Eastern and Greek-speaking patriarchates – Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and

---

<sup>280</sup> Andrew Ekonomou, *Byzantine Rome and the Greek Popes, Eastern Influences on Rome and the Papacy from Gregory the Great to Zacharias, AD 590-752*, E-book, pp. 176-177.

<sup>281</sup> *The Life of our Holy Father Maximus the Confessor*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>282</sup> St. Maximus, *Various Texts on Theology, the Divine Economy, and Virtue and Vice: First Century*.

<sup>283</sup> Thus the iconography of Rome in this period is unquestionably Byzantine. See Daniel Esparza, "The 'Sistine Chapel of the Middle Ages' is back in business", *Aleteia*, May 5, 2017.

Jerusalem – fell into the heresy, leaving only the Western patriarchate of Rome to uphold the Orthodox faith. Thus in 649 a Local Council in Rome attended by St. Maximus anathematized the heresy and the four Monothelite patriarchs. And so, with the East sunk in heresy and overrun first by the Persians and then, more permanently, by the Muslims, the West became briefly the savior both of Orthodoxy and Romanity.

The pattern of Greek theological leadership fortified by Western hierarchical constancy continued until the final extirpation of the heresy. Thus at a Local Council in Hatfield in England in 679 led by St. Theodore “the Greek”, Archbishop of Canterbury, and at another Local Council in Rome under Pope St. Agatho in 680 at which the decision of the English Council was read out by St. Wilfred of York, Monothelitism was formally anathematized. This was confirmed for the Eastern Churches at the Sixth Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 681, at which St. Agatho’s epistle played an important part.

Unfortunately, however, traces of the still dormant heresy of papism are evident in St. Agatho’s epistle, notably the assertion that the Orthodox teaching rests on the rock of the Roman Church, which “remains foreign to all error of every kind” and “by the grace of God has never departed from the way of truth”. Agatho passes over in silence the uncomfortable fact that in 638 Pope Honorius died in the Monothelite heresy. The Fathers of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, together with Agatho’s legates, anathematized Honorius as “a pillar of heresy”; and this anathematization, as Dvorkin points out, “was repeated at the Seventh Ecumenical Council and proclaimed by all the Popes at their enthronement right until the 11<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>284</sup>

Nevertheless, this period represents the high-water-mark of Western Orthodoxy. In the seventh and early eighth centuries the West entered probably its most truly Christian period, its golden age. It was united ecclesiastically under a patriarchate that was more consistently Orthodox than any of the eastern patriarchates, with a vigorous monasticism on the Benedictine model, and with national kingdoms in England, France, Italy and (up to a point) Spain consciously basing their administrations on the Byzantine model of Church-State relations. Spain fell to the Moors in 711, but in 732 the Muslims were defeated for the first time by the Frankish leader Charles Martel at the Battle of Poitiers. This victory saved Christianity in the West, and significantly relieved the pressure on the Emperors in the East. At the same

---

<sup>284</sup> Dvorkin, *op. cit.*, p. 515. Excerpt from the Profession of Faith required upon the Consecration of a new Bishop of Old Rome, used from the late 7th century until sometime in the 11th century: "Also the authors of the new heretical dogmas: Sergius, Pyrrhus, Paul, and Peter of Constantinople, together with Honorius, who paid incentive to their depraved assertions." (*Patrologia Latina*, Volume 105, fol. 52, Liber Diurnus). Additionally, Pope St. Leo II (+683), in a letter to the Emperor states: "We anathematize also even Honorius, who did not purify this Apostolic Church with the Doctrine of the Apostolic Tradition, but by wicked betrayal sought to subvert the Immaculate [Faith]." (Letter to Emperor Constantine IV, (*Patrologia Latina* Volume 96, fol. 408)

time, the Byzantine Emperor Leo III's repulsion of the Arabs outside Constantinople some fifteen years earlier could be said to have saved the Balkans and Central Europe from the Muslims.

These events demonstrated the interdependence – for the time being – of the two halves of Christendom... However, the linguistic and cultural, as well as the doctrinal, differences between East and West were beginning to widen. St. Gregory the Great (+604) was the first Pope who did not speak Greek, although he had served in Constantinople, and remained loyal to the Byzantine Empire. In the sixth century Latin was still regularly spoken in Byzantium<sup>285</sup>, but from the time of the Emperor Heraclius the East stopped using Latin even in its official documents, although it always retained the title of “Empire of the Romans”. The last emperor who came to Rome did so in 663 and the last pope to go to Constantinople went there in 710.<sup>286</sup> Moreover, the patience of the West Romans was tested when the Council *in Trullo* (692) rejected certain Roman customs, such as fasting on Saturdays.

This did not mean, however, that the Romans began to submit to Constantinople in the religious sphere. After a short period of theological equivocation from the death of St. Martin to the Sixth Ecumenical Council in 681, the Roman Popes resumed their traditional role of critics of Eastern waywardness in the faith. This was particularly evident during the period of the iconoclast heresy.

---

<sup>285</sup> Judith Herrin, *Women in Purple*, London: Phoenix Press, 2002, p. 62.

<sup>286</sup> Roberts, *op. cit.*, pp. 329-330.

## 16. THE DISSONANCE OF POWERS: (2) ICONOCLASM

For over a hundred years, from the 730s to 843, the iconoclast heresy ruled in Byzantium, with only one Orthodox interlude from 787 to 815. At the beginning of the first period, Emperor Leo III espoused the heresy and began to persecute the iconophiles, which sent streams of Orthodox refugees to the West, where Popes Gregory II and III anathematized it. In 733, Leo took the whole Roman diocese of East Illyricum, including the bishoprics of Sicily, South Italy, Crete, mainland Greece and the Balkans into the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The period of Western Christendom's political and cultural orientation towards the Eastern Empire was coming to an end...

Leo's quasi-Muslim understanding of the nature of icons went hand in hand with a resurrection of the pagan model of the *imperator-pontifex maximus*. In fact, insofar as the Muslim Caliph considered himself to be both a king and successor of the prophet, Leo could be said to have borrowed his theory of kingship ("I am both king and priest"), as well as his iconoclasm, from the Muslims. It was therefore eminently fitting that his main critic in both spheres should have been St. John of Damascus, a functionary at the Caliph's court.

"What right have emperors to style themselves lawgivers in the Church?" asked St. John. "What does the holy apostle say? 'And God has appointed in the Church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers and shepherds, for building up the body of Christ.' (I Corinthians 12.28). He does not mention emperors... Political prosperity is the business of emperors; the condition of the Church is the concern of shepherds and teachers."<sup>287</sup>

Again, the Seventh Council (convened in Nicaea in 787) decreed: "God gave the greatest gift to men: the Priesthood and the Imperial power; the first preserves and watches over the heavenly, while the second rules earthly things by means of just laws".<sup>288</sup> The epistle also produced a concise and inspired definition of the Church-State relationship: "The priest is the sanctification and strengthening of the Imperial power, while the Imperial power is the strength and firmness of the priesthood".<sup>289</sup>

---

<sup>287</sup> St. John of Damascus, *Second Apology against those who attack the Divine Images*, 12. It may be pointed out, however, that I Corinthians 12.28 includes among the spiritual gifts that of "governments" (κυβερνησεις), which could plausibly be interpreted as referring to political government. But of course, this gift was that of governing the State, not the Church...

<sup>288</sup> Seventh Ecumenical Council, in Fomin and Fomina, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 91. As Gervais Dumeige points out, the Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicaea was freer than the Fifth Council, "which felt the strong pressure of the Emperor Justinian, and more even than Constantinople III [the Sixth Council] where the presence of Constantine IV risked imposing on the conciliar debates... At Nicaea the men of the Church dealt with the affairs of the Church, under the direction of a man of the Church who knew the desires and wishes of the sovereigns. It was on a path prepared in advance that the bishops were able to advance freely" (*Nicée II*, Paris: Éditions de l'Orante, 1978, p. 195).

<sup>289</sup> Seventh Ecumenical Council, in Fomin and Fomina, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 91.

Some years later, in a document probably written early in the ninth century in Constantinople, but ascribed to the earlier Orthodox Pope Gregory II, Leo III's claim to be both king and priest is fittingly refuted, while it is admitted that *true* kings are in *some* ways like priests: "You write: 'I am Emperor and priest'. Yes, the Emperors who were before you proved this in word and deed: they build churches and cared for them; being zealous for the Orthodox faith, they together with the hierarchs investigated and defended the truth. Emperors such as: Constantine the Great, Theodosius the Great, Constantine [IV], the father of Justinian [II], who was at the Sixth Council. These Emperors reigned piously: they together with the hierarchs with one mind and soul convened councils, investigated the truth of the dogmas, built and adorned the holy churches. These were priests and Emperors! They proved it in word and deed. But you, since the time that you received power, have not begun to observe the decrees of the Fathers..."<sup>290</sup>

The Pope also wrote: "You know, Emperor, that the dogmas of the Holy Church do not belong to the Emperor, but to the Hierarchs, who can safely dogmatize. That is why the Churches have been entrusted to the Hierarchs, and they do not enter into the affairs of the people's administration. Understand and take note of this... The coming together of the Christ-loving Emperors and pious Hierarchs constitutes a single power, when affairs are governed with peace and love". And again: "God has given power over all men to the Piety of the Emperors in order that those who strive for virtue may find strengthening in them, - so that the path to the heavens should be wider, - so that the earthly kingdom should serve the Heavenly Kingdom."<sup>291</sup>

One person in two distinct natures: one power in two distinct functions: the Chalcedonian basis of the symphonic doctrine of Church-State relations is clear. And just as the symphonic doctrine of Church-State relations reflects Chalcedonian Orthodoxy, so the absolutist theory of Church-State relations reflects both Monothelitism and Iconoclasm. Just as Monothelitism denies that there is more than one will in Christ, so the absolutist theory denies that there is more than one will in the government of the Christian commonwealth, declaring that the will of the emperor can take the place of the will of the hierarchs. And just as Iconoclasm destroys the proper relationship between the icon and its archetype, saying that icons are in fact idols, so absolutism destroys the proper relationship and distance between the earthly type and his Heavenly Archetype, so that the emperor becomes, in St. Maximus' words, "another God incarnate" - that is, an idol.

For this, no less than for his iconoclasm, Leo III is called "forerunner of the Antichrist" in the service books, and was anathematized by the Church as "the tormentor and *not* Emperor Leo the Isaurian".<sup>292</sup> The later iconoclast emperor,

---

<sup>290</sup> Pope Gregory II, in Fomin and Fomina, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 87.

<sup>291</sup> Pope Gregory II, in Fomin and Fomina, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 82.

<sup>292</sup> *Menaion*, May 12, Service to St. Germanus of Constantinople, Vespers, "Lord, I have cried"; Fomin and Fomina, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 88. In two hagiographical texts, Theosterict's *Life of Nicetas of Medicion* and St. Methodius' *Life of Euthymius of Sardis*, Leo is given the apocalyptic title of

Constantine Copronymus, was also anathematized and denied the title of emperor: “the tyrant, *and not Emperor*”. Even more emphatic was the anathematization of Emperor Leo V the Armenian: “the evil first beast, the tormentor of the servants of Christ, *and not Emperor Leo the Armenian*”.<sup>293</sup>

And so, just as the Seventh Council brought to an end the period of Christological debates, so it brought to an end the debates over the role of the Emperor in the Church. The Emperor was an icon of Christ the King, but only so long as he remained Orthodox; he was in the Church, but not above it. For, as the Council declared: “The priest is the sanctification and strengthening of the Imperial power, while the Imperial power is the strength and firmness of the priesthood”.

However, while the role of the Emperor in the Church was now defined in iconographic terms as an icon of Christ the King, and as such necessarily Orthodox, in the second phase, or renewal of the iconoclast heresy that took place from 815 we see an interesting new argument put forward by the iconoclasts: that an emperor that is truly an icon of Christ must necessarily be victorious in battle, having the blessing of Christ on all his works. But the unfortunate fact was that the iconoclast emperors Leo III and Constantine V were on the whole victorious in battle, while the iconophile emperors Constantine VI and Irene, Michael I Rangave and Nicephorus, were defeated. So this spoke in favour, according to the iconoclasts, of the iconoclast emperors having the true faith...<sup>294</sup>

Of course, this was not a theological argument. The success of an emperor or king in battle may or may not be a function of the Orthodoxy of his faith. Sometimes God allows an Orthodox king to be defeated for quite different reasons. Saul fell at Gilboa because of his impiety, and David triumphed because of his piety. But Josiah, though righteous, was defeated and killed in battle, as were St. Oswald of Northumbria and St. Lazar of Serbia.

Again, in the life of the sixth-century St. Elesbaan, king of Ethiopia, we read that he “lived when Arabia was ruled by Dunaan, the oppressor of Christians. The pious Elesbaan was unable to look on indifferently as believers in Christ were being massacred. He declared war on Dunaan, but his military campaign was unsuccessful.

“Wishing to learn the reason for his defeat, Elesbaan, with prompting from above, turned to a certain hermit. He revealed to the emperor that he had proceeded unrighteously in deciding to take revenge against Dunaan, since the Lord had said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay!’ (Hebrews 10:30).

---

“beast” (D.E. Afinogenov, “*Povest’ o proschenii imperatora Feofila*” i *Torzhestvo Pravoslavia* (The “Tale” of the Forgiveness of the Emperor Theophilus and the Triumph of Orthodoxy), Moscow: Ilarik, 2004, pp. 26, 28).

<sup>293</sup> Fomin and Fomina, *op. cit.*, pp. 89, 94.

<sup>294</sup> Nun Cassia (Senina) (editor), *Zhitia Vizantijskikh Sviatykh Epokhi Ikonoborchestva* (Lives of the Byzantine Saints of the Iconoclast Period), vol. I, St. Petersburg: Kvadrivium, 2015, p. 10.

“The hermit counselled St Elesbaan make a vow to devote his final days of life to God, to escape the wrath of God for his self-willed revenge, and then to defeat Dunaan. St Elesbaan made a vow to the Lord, and marching off with his army against the enemy, he defeated, captured and executed him. After the victory the saint resigned as emperor, secluded himself within a monastery and for fifteen years he dwelt in strict fasting and asceticism.”<sup>295</sup>

If we are to speak of Orthodox kings as icons of Christ the King, we must nevertheless remember that they were sinners who, with their peoples, were very often chastized by God... Moreover, God’s merciful chastisement of His sons explains why the history of the Orthodox peoples is so often a history of wars and suffering. Not that the other peoples did not suffer also. But God especially chastises those whom He loves, His sons by grace and adoption. For “if you endure chastening, God is dealing with you as with sons. For what son is there who his father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons...” (Hebrews 12.7-8).

---

<sup>295</sup> *Life of St. Elesbaan*, Holy Cross Monastery.

## 17. NEW ROME, OLD ROME AND THE FRANKS

For centuries, and in spite of the intermittent expression of papist ideas<sup>296</sup>, the Roman Papacy had seen itself as part of the Byzantine Empire and a vital link with the four patriarchates of the East. This position was reinforced in a cultural sense during the period of the “Byzantine papacy” of the seventh and early eight centuries, when several of the Popes were Greek or Syrian in origin, and many eastern monks fled to Rome to escape persecution by Monothelite or Iconoclast emperors. Even when the Emperor Leo deprived the papacy of its lands in Southern Italy and the Balkans, the Popes still looked to New Rome as the capital of the Christian *oikoumene*. They still commemorated the eastern emperors at the Liturgy, and still used the emperors’ coinage. East and West still constituted one Christian world...

However, the relationship began to undergo strain when the Lombards penetrated further south into Italy, and Leo, occupied with his Muslim enemies in the East, could offer the papacy no military support. The Popes in desperation looked for other defenders, and found them in – *the Franks*...

The first act that “brought the Franks into Italy” was the blessing by Pope Zachariah of a dynastic *coup d’état* in Francia. The last Merovingian rulers were weak and ineffective: real power was concentrated in the hands of their “mayors” or prime ministers. Pope Zachariah – the last of the Greek popes<sup>297</sup> – had already been heavily engaged in the reorganization of the Frankish Church through his legate in Francia, St. Boniface, the English Apostle of Germany. In 751 the Frankish mayor, Peppin III, Charles Martel’s grandson, sent envoys to him to ask “whether it was just for one to reign and for another to rule”. Zachariah took the hint and blessed the deposition of Childeric III and the anointing of Peppin by St. Boniface in his place.

This was a truly revolutionary act, especially for a churchman: removing a legitimate dynasty and putting upstarts in their place... Be that as it may, Zachariah’s, successor, Stephen II, a Roman aristocrat, greatly increased the links with “the most Christian king of the Franks”. Having been deserted by the iconoclast eastern emperor at a moment when Rome was in great peril from the Lombards, he crossed the Alps and in the summer of 754 gave Peppin the title of “patrician”, re-consecrated him and his queen and blessed him and his successors to rule in perpetuity.

---

<sup>296</sup> Perhaps the earliest was in 608, when the tyrant emperor Phocas gave Pope Boniface IV the title “Vicar of Christ”, while reserving for himself the title, “Christ’s deputy in the East”.

<sup>297</sup> Andrew Louth writes: “From 680 to 751, or more precisely from the accession of Agatho in 678 until Zacharias’ death in 751 – the popes, with two exceptions, Benedict II and Gregory II, were Greek in background and speakers of Greek, which has led some scholars to speak of a ‘Byzantine captivity’ of the papacy. This is quite misleading: most of the ‘Greek’ popes were southern Italian or Sicilian, where Greek was still the vernacular, and virtually all of them seem to have made their career among the Roman clergy, so, whatever their background, their experience and sympathies would have been thoroughly Roman” (*Greek East and Latin West*, Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2007, p. 79).

Perhaps Peppin's first consecration was deemed to have been illegitimate in that the last Merovingian king, Childeric, was still alive. Or perhaps this second anointing had a deeper significance. Whether Stephen already had this in mind or not, it came to signify *the re-establishment of the Western Roman Empire*, with its political capital north of the Alps, but its spiritual capital, as always, in Rome. For in exchange, the Franks became the official protectors of Rome instead of the Eastern emperors, whose subjects the Popes now ceased to be.<sup>298</sup> Moreover, from this time the popes stopped dating their documents from the emperor's regnal year, and began to issue their own coins.<sup>299</sup>

Peppin more than fulfilled his side of the bargain: he defeated the Lombards, restored the Pope to Rome and gave him the former Byzantine exarchate of Ravenna, thereby laying the foundation for the Papal States and the role of the Popes as secular as well as spiritual rulers. As Joseph Overbeck writes: In exchange for receiving anointing from Pope Stephen Pepin had had "to sign a document by which he engaged himself to conquer the Exarchate, which the Longobards had wrested from the hands of the Byzantine Emperor, and to hand it over to the Pope. Pepin accomplished the conquest. When the Emperor sent his Legates to *reclaim his lawful property*, Pepin referred to the Pope as *owner*. In private life we should call such transactions *cheat and robbery*, but as part and parcel of the '*Patrimonium of S. Petri*' they are hallowed. Or shall we defend *main force* as a 'legal title,' and cover the robberies of the Longobards with a moral cloak? Then we might as well all at once sanction highway robbery... It is a curious, not to say providential, fact that Piedmont, the first country touched by Pepin on his invading tour in Italy, when Pope Stephen asked him to take the sword in St. Peter's behalf, was the very country that was to destroy the Papal States."<sup>300</sup>

At about this time the forgery known as *The Donation of Constantine* was concocted by someone in the papal chancellery. This alleged that Constantine the Great had given his throne to Pope Sylvester and his successors because "it is not right that an earthly emperor should have power in a place where the government of priests and the head of the Christian religion has been established by the heavenly Emperor". For this reason he moved his capital to the New Rome, Constantinople. "And we ordain and decree that he [the Roman Pope] shall have rule as well over the four principal sees, Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople, and Jerusalem, as also over the Churches of God in all the world. And the pontiff who for the time being shall preside over the most holy Roman Church shall be the highest and chief of all priests in the whole world, and according to his decision shall all matters be settled."<sup>301</sup>

---

<sup>298</sup> Norman Davies, *Europe*, London: Pimlico, 1996, pp. 288-290.

<sup>299</sup> Judith Herrin, *Women in Purple*, London: Phoenix Press, 2002, p. 47.

<sup>300</sup> Overbeck, "Rome's Rapid Downward Course",  
<http://nftu.net/romes-rapid-downward-dr-j-joseph-overbeck/>

<sup>301</sup> Henry Bettenson and Christopher Maunder, *Documents of the Christian Church*, London: SPCK, 1999, p. 52.

Of course, there is an inherent contradiction in this theory. If it was St. Constantine who gave the authority to St. Sylvester, then the ultimate authority in the Christian commonwealth rested, not with the Pope, but with the Emperor. But this consequence was ignored in the face of the urgent necessity of finding some justification for the papacy's expansionist plans.<sup>302</sup>

The forgery was probably directed against the heretical emperor in Constantinople, being meant to provide a justification for the papacy's stealing of the exarchate of Ravenna from the emperor in exchange for Leo III's earlier deprivations. But in the long term its significance was deeper: it represented a quite new theory of the relationship between the secular and the ecclesiastical powers. For contrary to the doctrine of the "symphony" of the two powers which prevailed in the East and the Byzantine West, the theory encapsulated in the *Donation* essentially asserted that the head of the Roman Church had a higher authority, not only than any other bishop, but also than the head of the Empire; so that the Emperor could only exert his authority as a kind of vassal of the Pope...

In 768, King Pepin's son, Charles, later known as Charlemagne, ascended the throne. He destroyed the power of the Lombards and vigorously expanded the boundaries of his kingdom from the Elbe to the borders of Byzantine Italy and Hungary. In Western Europe, only the British Isles, Brittany, Scandinavia and some parts of Spain remained beyond his grasp. He promoted education and art, held twice-yearly Synods of his bishops and nobles, suppressed heresy (while introducing the heresy of the *Filioque*) and tried to weld the varied peoples and customs of his realm into a multi-national whole.

Charlemagne's empire was seen by the Franks as a resurrection of the Western Roman Empire. Thus the marble steps leading up to his throne came from temples in Rome.<sup>303</sup> And according to his English adviser, Deacon Alcuin, Charlemagne, like King David, combined the functions of royal leadership and priestly teaching in order to guide his people to salvation.<sup>304</sup> As early as 775 Cathwulf wrote to Charlemagne, comparing him to the Father, the bishop to the Son: "Always remember, my king, with fear and love for God your King, that you are in His place to look after and rule over all His members and to give account on judgement day even for yourself. And a bishop is in second place: he is only in Christ's place. Ponder, therefore, within yourself how diligently to establish God's law over the people of God."<sup>305</sup> Again, in 794 Paulinus of Aquileia called him "king and priest".

---

<sup>302</sup> Centuries later, in 1242, a pamphlet attributed to Pope Innocent IV corrected this flaw in the theory of papism by declaring that the Donation was not a gift, but a *restitution* (Charles Davis, "The Middle Ages", in Richard Jenkyns (ed.), *The Legacy of Rome*, Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 86.)

<sup>303</sup> Jack Watkins, "Charlemagne: Part 1 of 2", *Catholic Life*, December, 2008, p. 43.

<sup>304</sup> Joseph Canning, *A History of Medieval Political Thought, 300-1450*, London: Routledge, 1996, p. 50.

<sup>305</sup> Canning, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

Charlemagne dominated the Church in his empire. As D.E. Luscombe writes, "Among the principal tasks of a Carolingian monarch were the convening of church councils, the nomination of bishops, the maintenance of clerical discipline and public morality, and the promulgation of sound religious doctrine. Carolingian monarchy was theocratic; it intervened extensively in church affairs..."<sup>306</sup> And so, at the very moment that the Seventh Ecumenical Council was decreeing the proper spheres of Church and State in the East, Caesaropapism was threatening to undermine that decree and re-establish itself in the West...

\*

By the 790s Charlemagne was already not just a king, but *de facto* emperor. But the resurrection of the Western Empire needed a special sanction that only the Church could give. The opportunity to gain this came with the election of a new Pope, Leo III.

Leo was no supporter of caesaropapism, the "king-priest" idea. Thus when, in 796, Eadbert Praen, an English priest, assumed the crown of the sub-kingdom of Kent for himself, he was immediately rejected by the Archbishop of Canterbury and later anathematized by Leo. Such a priest-king, he wrote, was like Julian the Apostate...<sup>307</sup>

Nevertheless, he needed the support of Charlemagne; and to that end he was prepared to make compromises... For "even though his election had been unanimous," writes Tom Holland, "Leo had enemies: for the papal office, which until recently had brought its holder only bills and overdrafts, was now capable of exciting the envious cupidity of the Roman aristocracy. On 25 April, as the heir of St. Peter rode in splendid procession to Mass, he was set upon by a gang of heavies. Bundled off into a monastery, Leo succeeded in escaping before his enemies, as had been their intention, could blind him and cut out his tongue. Lacking any other recourse, he resolved upon the desperate expedient of fleeing to the King of the Franks. The journey was a long and perilous one – for Charlemagne, that summer, was in Saxony, on the very outer reaches of Christendom. Wild rumours preceded the Pope, grisly reports that he had indeed been mutilated. When he finally arrived in the presence of Charlemagne, and it was discovered... that he still had his eyes and tongue, Leo solemnly asserted that they had been restored to him by St. Peter, sure evidence of the apostle's outrage at the affront to his vicar. And then, embracing 'the King, the father of Europe', Leo summoned Charlemagne to his duty: to stir himself in defence of the Pope, 'chief pastor of the world', and to march on Rome.

---

<sup>306</sup> Luscombe, "Introduction: the Formation of Political Thought in the West", *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought, c. 350 - c. 1450*, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 166.

<sup>307</sup> A.W. Haddan & W. Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1869, 1964, vol. III, p. 524.

“And to Rome the king duly came. Not in any hurry, however, and certainly not so as to suggest that he was doing his suppliant’s bidding. Indeed, for the fugitive Pope, humiliation had followed upon humiliation. His enemies, arriving in Charlemagne’s presence only days after Leo, had publicly accused him of a series of extravagant sexual abuses. Commissioners, sent by Charlemagne to escort the Pope back to Rome and investigate the charges against him, drew up a report so damning that Alcuin preferred to burn it rather than be sullied by keeping it in his possession. When Charlemagne himself, in the early winter of 800, more than a year after Leo’s arrival in Saxony, finally approached the gates of Rome, the Pope humbly rode out to greet him twelve miles from the city. Even the ancient emperors had only required their servants to ride out six.

“But Leo, a born fighter, was still resolved to salvage something from the wreckage. Blackened though his name had certainly been, he remained the Pope, St. Peter’s heir, the holder of an office that had been instituted of Christ Himself. It was not lightly to be given to any mortal, not even Charlemagne, to sit in judgement on Rome’s bishop. In token of this, when the proceedings against Leo formally opened on 1 December, they did so, not within the ancient limits of the city, but in the Vatican, on the far side of the Tiber, in implicit acknowledgement of the rights of the Pope, and the Pope alone, to rule in Rome. Papal officials, displaying their accustomed talent for uncovering ancient documents just when they were most needed, presented to Charlemagne papers which appeared conclusively to prove that their master could in fact only be judged by God. Charlemagne, accepting this submission, duly pronounced the Pope acquitted. Leo, placing his hand on a copy of the New Testament, then swore a flamboyant oath that he had been innocent all along.

“And now, having triumphed over his enemies in Rome, he prepared to snatch an even more dramatic victory from the jaws of all his travails. Two days after the Pope’s acquittal, Charlemagne attended Christmas Mass in the shrine of St. Peter in the Vatican. He did so humbly, without any insignia of royalty, praying on his knees. As he rose, however, Leo stepped forward into the golden light cast by the altar candles, and placed a crown on his bare head. Simultaneously, the whole cathedral echoed to the ecstatic cries of the congregation, who hailed the Frankish king as ‘Augustus’ – the honorific of the ancient Caesars. Leo, never knowingly less than dramatic, then prostrated himself before Charlemagne’s feet, head down, arms outstretched. By venerable tradition, such obeisance had properly been performed only for one man: the emperor in Constantinople.

“But now, following the events of that momentous Christmas Day, the West once again had an emperor of its own.

“And it was the Pope, and no one else, who had granted him his crown...”<sup>308</sup>

---

<sup>308</sup> Holland, *Millenium*, London: Abacus Books, 2009, pp. 30-32.

Now Charlemagne's biographer Einhard claims that he would never have entered the church if he had known what the Pope was intending to do. This is difficult to believe. Everything suggests that the events leading up to the coronation were carefully stage-managed by the two men, each of whom possessed something that only the other could give.<sup>309</sup>

However, there is evidence that in later years Charlemagne drew back from the confrontation with Constantinople that his new title of "Emperor of the Romans" threatened. He dropped the phrase "of the Romans" while retaining the title "Emperor". Moreover, he dropped his idea of attacking the Byzantine province of Sicily. Instead he proposed marriage to the Byzantine Empress Irene (or perhaps it was her idea<sup>310</sup>). In this way he hoped "to unite the Eastern and Western provinces", as the Theophanes put it<sup>311</sup> - not under his sole rule, for he must have realized that that was impossible, but perhaps on the model of the dual monarchy of the fifth-century Roman empire. In any case, all these plans collapsed with Irene's overthrow in 802...

The Byzantines at first treated Charlemagne as yet another impudent usurper; for, as a chronicler of Salerno put it, "The men about the court of Charles the Great called him Emperor because he wore a precious crown upon his head. But in truth, no one should be called Emperor save the man who presides over the Roman - that is, the Constantinopolitan kingdom."<sup>312</sup> As Russell Chamberlin writes: "The Byzantines derided the coronation of Charlemagne. To them he was simply another barbarian general with ideas above his station. Indeed, he took care never to style himself *Imperator Romanorum*. His jurists, dredging through the detritus of empire, came up with a title which met with his approval: *Romanum gubernans imperium* 'Governing the Roman Empire'. The resounding title of this first of the post-classical Western Emperors was 'Charles, Most Serene Augustus, crowned by God, great and merciful Emperor, governing the Roman Empire and by the mercy of God, King of the Lombards and the Franks'."<sup>313</sup> Alcuin even supported the idea that Charlemagne was greater than both the Pope in Rome and the Emperor in Constantinople: "There have hitherto been three persons of greatest

---

<sup>309</sup> Peter Heather, *The Restoration of Rome*, London: Pan Books, 2013, chapter 5.

<sup>310</sup> Herrin, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-118.

<sup>311</sup> Theophanes, in A.A. Vasiliev, *A History of the Byzantine Empire*, Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Press, 1958, p. 268.

<sup>312</sup> Quoted in Richard Chamberlin, *Charlemagne, Emperor of the Western World*, London: Grafton books, 1986, p. 52.

<sup>313</sup> Chamberlin, "The Ideal of Unity", *History Today*, vol. 53 (11), November, 2003, p. 57. And yet in 812 the legates of Emperor Michael I saluted Charles in Aachen with the title "emperor". So from 812, as A. Vasiliev says, "there were two Roman emperors, in spite of the fact that in theory there was still only one Roman empire" (*op. cit.*, p. 268). There is an interesting parallel to this in the theory of the One Christian Empire in contemporary China. Thus when the Chinese empire actually split between the Khitans and the Sung in 1004, "to preserve the myth of indivisibility the relationship between the two emperors was henceforth expressed in the language of a fictional blood relationship" ("China in the year 1000", *History for All*, vol. 2, issue 6, December / January, 2000, p. 37).

eminence in the world, namely the Pope, who rules the see of St. Peter, the chief of apostles, as his successor...; the second is the Emperor who holds sway over the second Rome...; the third is the throne on which our Lord Jesus Christ has placed you to rule over our Christian people, with greater power, clearer insight and more exalted royalty than the afore-mentioned dignitaries. On you alone the whole safety of the churches of Christ depends."<sup>314</sup>

Whatever Charlemagne's real intentions in 800, by the mid-ninth century it was clear that for the West the only Orthodox Roman Emperor was the Emperor of the Franks. Thus whereas Alcuin in the previous century still followed the convention of calling Constantinople the second Rome, for a later Latin eulogist the second Rome was Charlemagne's capital, Aachen: "Most worthy Charles, my voice is too small for your works, king, love and jewel of the Franks, head of the world, the summit of Europe, caring father and hero, Augustus! You yourself can command cities: see how the Second Rome, new in its flowering and might extent, rise and grows; with the domes which crown its walls, it touches the stars!"<sup>315</sup>

And yet the ultimate winner from Charlemagne's coronation was probably not the emperor, but the Pope. Judith Herrin writes that his "acclamation as *imperator et augustus* only partly answered Alcuin's proposals for a grander title and did not please the Frankish theologians. They did not consider that the Bishop of Rome had any right to bestow an imperial title and thus assume a crucial role in the ceremony. The Franks did not conceive of Roman ecclesiastical authority as something overarching which covered the whole of Charles's territories. Within northern Europe, papal authority was hedged by the claims of many archbishops to an equal power...

"Of the three powers involved in the coronation event of 800, the Roman pontiff emerges as the clear winner in the triangular contest over imperial authority. By seizing the initiative and crowning Charles in his own way, Pope Leo claimed the superior authority to anoint an imperial ruler of the West, which established an important precedent... Later Charles would insist on crowning his own son Louis as emperor, without papal intervention. He thus designated his successor and, in due course, Louis inherited his father's authority. But the notion that a western rule could not be a real emperor without a papal coronation and acclamation in ancient Rome grew out of the ceremonial devised by Leo III in 800."<sup>316</sup>

Fr. Andrew Louth confirms that the real winner was the Pope: "The *Constitutio Romana* sought to establish a bond between the Frankish Empire and the Republic of St. Peter, but it was a very different relationship from that which had formerly held between the pope and the Byzantine emperor. The Frankish

---

<sup>314</sup> Alcuin, in Stephen Allott, *Alcuin of York*, York: Sessions Book Trust, 1974, p. 111.

<sup>315</sup> Alcuin, in Wil van den Bercken, *Holy Russia and Christian Europe*, London: SCM Press, 1999, p. 148.

<sup>316</sup> Herrin, *op. cit.*, pp. 124, 128.

emperor undertook to protect the legitimacy of the electoral process, but claimed no right, as the Byzantine emperor had done, to confirm the election itself. What we see here, in inchoate form, is a way of protecting the legitimacy and independence of the pope..."<sup>317</sup>

\*

So the foundations were laid for the growth of papal power in the political as well as the ecclesiastical spheres... As for Charlemagne's empire, if it was meant to be a restoration of the Western Roman Empire, it must be judged to have failed; for it disintegrated after his death and the death of his son Louis the Pious into three separate kingdoms (roughly coterminous with modern France, Germany and Northern Italy), and continued to disintegrate in the tenth century. One reason for this was that he failed to create the political bureaucracy and tax collection systems that were so important in preserving the Roman Empire.<sup>318</sup> Another reason was the fact that the dukes and counts upon whom his administration critically depended expected to be paid in land for the services they rendered, so that the kingdom was stable just so long as it was expanding – that is, until the 810s.<sup>319</sup>

For the idea of selfless service to the king as the Lord's anointed had to compete with the idea of the loyalty of a band of warriors to a leader that was conditional on his providing greater success in war and therefore more plunder than anyone else. The state was not yet fully a *res publica*, a *public* thing, in the Frankish consciousness; it was rather the private demesne of the king and those of his nobles who had earned a part of the spoils through their service to him. As Heather writes, "the fruits of expansion power... were a crucial element in the rise of the Carolingians. It really is one of the most significant statistics of them all that Carolingian armies were in the field for eighty-five out of the ninety years from the accession of Charles Martel to 803/4. The vast majority of these campaigns were aggressive and expansionary, and the renewable wealth they liberated – in all its forms – made it possible for four generations of the dynasty to build their regimes without eroding the fixed assets of the

---

<sup>317</sup> Louth, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>318</sup> Heather writes: "Fundamentally, the early Middle Ages saw the emergence of a new smaller type of state structure. With no state-run professional army, no large-scale systematic taxation of agriculture, and no developed central bureaucratic structure, the early medieval state swallowed up a much smaller percentage of GDP than had its Roman predecessor. As far as we can tell, this had nothing to do with right-wing ideologies and everything to do with a basic renegotiation of centre-local relations around the brute fact that landowning elites now owed their ruler actual military service, which put their own very physical bodies on the line. Equally important, all the changes conspired together... to make it much more difficult for early medieval rulers to hold together large geographical areas over the longer term.

"There was also the further, critical difference in the type of economic assets that the ruler of a smaller early medieval state structure had at his disposal. Although late Roman emperors were landowners in their own right, like their Carolingian successors, they drew the majority of their much larger overall income from tax revenues. And tax revenues were entirely renewable..." (*op. cit.*, p.279)

<sup>319</sup> However, see the *life* of St. William of Toulouse (+812), for an example of a completely non-acquisitive warrior lord (*Living Orthodoxy*, vol. V, N 2, March-April, 1983, pp. 3-5).

royal fisc... In the small-state world of early medieval Europe, expansionary warfare replaced large-scale taxation as the source of renewable wealth that was necessary to maintaining a powerful central authority in anything but the shortest of terms."<sup>320</sup>

However, Charlemagne's real weakness was spiritual rather than institutional. He took his own strength and the weakness of the Eastern Empire (which, since it was ruled at the time by a woman, Irene, was technically vacant according to Frankish law), as sufficient reason to usurp the role of the *Basileus*. Still more seriously, he usurped the place of the Church in the ecclesiastical sphere. As long as the Eastern Emperors had been iconoclast, while Charlemagne himself remained Orthodox, he could have had some justification for claiming the leadership of the Christian world. But since 787 the Eastern Empire had returned to Orthodoxy, whereas in 794 Charlemagne convened a false council at Frankfurt which, without consulting the Pope, condemned the Acts of the Seventh Ecumenical Council on icon-veneration and introduced the *Filioque* – the statement that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son* – into the Creed.

This rejection of the Acts of the Seventh Council has been ascribed to a mistranslation.<sup>321</sup> But we may suspect that the mis-translation was not entirely fortuitous (was there really nobody at the court who read Greek?), and that Charlemagne was actually looking for an excuse to reject the Eastern Empire as idol-worshipping and heterodox and put himself forward as the one true and Orthodox Christian Emperor. Be that as it may, his adoption of the *Filioque* made *him* a heretic rather because: (a) it contradicted the words of Christ about the procession of the Spirit from the Father *alone* (John 15.26), (b) it involved a change in the Creed, which was forbidden by the Third Ecumenical Council, and (c) it was objectively false, as destroying the monarchy of the Father and introducing a second principle into the life of the Holy Trinity.<sup>322</sup>

---

<sup>320</sup> Heather, *op. cit.*, pp. 287, 288. Tacitus had written centuries before of the pagan Germans in his *Germania*: "You cannot keep up a great retinue except by war and violence, for it is to the free-handed chief that they look for the war horse, for the murderous and masterful sphere: banquetings and a certain rude but lavish outfit take the place of salary. The material for this open-handedness comes from war and foray."

<sup>321</sup> Louth writes: "The Frankish court received a Latin version of the decrees of Nicaea II in which a central point was misrepresented: instead of an assertion that icons are not venerated with the worship owed to God, the Latin version seems to have asserted exactly the opposite, that icons are indeed venerated with the worship due to God alone. There is certainly scope for misunderstanding here, especially when dealing with a translated text, for the distinction that the iconodules had painstakingly drawn between a form of veneration expressing honour [*proskynesis*] and a form of veneration expressing worship [*latreia*] has no natural lexical equivalent [in Latin]" (*op. cit.*, pp. 86-87).

When, in 792, Charlemagne sent the *Acts* of the Seventh Council in this inaccurate translation to the kings and bishops of Britain, it was supposed that the Fathers of the Council had asserted, in the words of Symeon of Durham, "that icons are to be adored, which is altogether condemned by the Church of God"; and the reader Alcuin brought back to the continent the negative opinion of the British Church (Haddan & Stubbs, *op. cit.*, pp. 468-469).

<sup>322</sup> See St. Photius the Great, *The Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit*, Boston: Studion Publishers, 1983; "The Filioque: Truth or Trivia?", *Orthodox Christian Witness*, March 21 / April 3, 1983.

Nor was Charlemagne's iconoclasm without consequences. In the early ninth century, Bishop Claudius of Turin preached iconoclasm. And although the heresy did not prevail (it was opposed by the Irishman St. Dungalus of Pavia<sup>323</sup>), a sharp decline in iconography is evident in the West from this time.<sup>324</sup>

The *Filioque* immediately produced conflict between Frankish and Greek monks in Jerusalem. And within the Frankish camp itself there was opposition: Alcuin rejected the innovation in a letter to the monks of Lyons, and Pope Leo III had the Creed *without* the *Filioque* inscribed in Greek and Latin on silver shields and placed outside St. Peter's. But Charlemagne did not back down: in a council in Aachen in 809 he decreed that the innovation was a dogma necessary for salvation.

The iconoclast Emperor Leo the Isaurian had undermined the "symphonic" principle of Church-State relations when he had declared that he was "both king and priest". But now Charlemagne was showing himself to be no less of a caesaropapist than Leo by his imposition of heretical innovations on the Church. Indeed, the former champion of Orthodoxy and Romanity against the heretical and despotic iconoclast emperors was now well on the way to becoming the chief enemy of Orthodoxy and Romanity through his heresy and despotism, considering, as Fr. John Romanides puts it, "that the East Romans were neither Orthodox nor Roman!"<sup>325</sup>

Another important innovation of the Carolingian period was the replacement of leavened bread by unleavened in the Eucharist. As Fr. Joseph Jungman writes, "In the West, various ordinances appeared from the ninth century on, all demanding the exclusive use of unleavened bread for the Eucharist.. Still, the new custom did not come into exclusive vogue until the middle of the eleventh century. Particularly in Rome it was not universally accepted till after the general infiltration of various usages from the North."<sup>326</sup>

---

<sup>323</sup> [http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/02m/0760-0860,\\_Dungalus\\_Reclusus,\\_Responsa\\_Contra\\_Perversas\\_Claudii\\_Tauronensis\\_Episcopi\\_Sententias,\\_MLT.pdf](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/02m/0760-0860,_Dungalus_Reclusus,_Responsa_Contra_Perversas_Claudii_Tauronensis_Episcopi_Sententias,_MLT.pdf).

<sup>324</sup> However, recognizably Byzantine-style iconography still remained in the West. See for example the frescoes of the tenth-century Spanish church of St. Peter del Bural: [https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=https%3A%2F%2Fupload.wikimedia.org%2Fwiki%2Fcommons%2Fthumb%2F7%2F75%2FAbsis\\_de\\_Sant\\_Pere\\_del\\_Bural%252C\\_11th\\_c.\\_fresco.jpg](https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=https%3A%2F%2Fupload.wikimedia.org%2Fwiki%2Fcommons%2Fthumb%2F7%2F75%2FAbsis_de_Sant_Pere_del_Bural%252C_11th_c._fresco.jpg).

<sup>325</sup> J. Romanides, *Franks, Romans, Feudalism and Doctrine*, Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1981, p. 31.

<sup>326</sup> Jungman, *The Mass of the Roman Rite*, volume II, pages 33-34. Jungman goes on to say that, "the opinion put forward by J. Mabillon, *Dissertatio de pane eucharistia*, in his answer to the Jesuit J. Sirmond, *Disquisitio de azymo*, namely, that in the West it was always the practice to use only unleavened bread, is no longer tenable" [*op. cit.*, page 33].

"Now, the fact that the West changed its practice and began using unleavened bread in the 8th and 9th century -- instead of the traditional leavened bread -- is confirmed by the research of Fr. William O'Shea, who noted that along with various other innovative practices from Northern Europe, the use of unleavened bread began to infiltrate into the Roman liturgy at the

This issue did not figure among the theological differences that arose between Pope Nicholas I and St. Photius in the 850s. However, it *did* become important two centuries later, when the schism between Rome and Constantinople became permanent. At that time the Latin innovation was seen as damaging the symbolism of the human nature of Christ insofar as leaven signifies the grace of the Holy Spirit that makes human nature rise.<sup>327</sup>

Charlemagne's empire began to crumble quite soon after his death in 814. His son Louis the Pious suffered rebellions from his sons Lothar, Pippin and Louis, and was even deposed briefly by the latter. On his death in 840 the empire was divided between his three surviving sons, Lothar, Louis the German and Charles. When Lothar claimed the whole empire, the other two brothers met with their armies at Strasbourg in 842 and swore allegiance to each other and a united front against Lothar.

"The oaths and pledges... were given in the vernacular languages of each of the armies, rather than the kings' own languages or in Latin. Charles speaks to Louis' army in Old High German, '*teudisca lingua*', and they pledge in the same. Louis and Charles' army speak in Proto-French, '*romana lingua*'. By speaking to their brother's army in their own language, each oath-taker ensured they were understood and neither could escape being held to their word.

"The Oaths are important, not just for the treaty they forged but for the languages they used: in the Carolingian Empire Latin was the standard language of writing. The Oaths of Strasbourg are the very earliest written evidence of a Romance language to survive and are, therefore, the earliest words to be written in the language that would become French. The Old High German portions are one of the earliest known texts written in the language. Together they give a glimpse of how multilingual the Carolingian Empire was. Louis and Charles were both multilingual and literate.

"Thanks in part to the alliance made that day in Strasbourg the war was brought to an end in August 843 with the Treaty of Verdun. With this treaty the Empire was subdivided: Lothar took the central region around Aachen, with lands stretching down to Italy; Louis the German took East Francia, which was roughly the territory east of the Rhine; and Charles the Bald took West Francia, the western two thirds of what is now France. This subdivision created geographical regions with their own languages, political organisations and identities, which laid the foundations for the shape of western Europe."<sup>328</sup>

---

end of the first millennium, because as he put it, "Another change introduced into the Roman Rite in France and Germany at the time [i.e., 8th - 9th century] was the use of unleavened bread and of thin white wafers or hosts instead of the loaves of leavened bread used hitherto" [O'Shea, *The Worship of the Church*, page 128]. Cited by Fr. Ambrose Maonaigh on Facebook, July 6, 2016.

<sup>327</sup> See V. Moss, "The Bread of the Eucharist",

[https://www.academia.edu/13506091/THE\\_BREAD\\_OF\\_THE\\_EUCHARIST](https://www.academia.edu/13506091/THE_BREAD_OF_THE_EUCHARIST).

<sup>328</sup> "Oaths of Strasbourg Sworn", *History Today*, February, 2017, p. 8.

When, in 1978, President Giscard d'Estaing of France and Chancellor Helmut Schmidt decided to relaunch the European Project by agreeing to work towards the creation of a common currency for the West European region, they met beside the tomb of Charlemagne in his old capital of Aachen. This was appropriate; for, as K.N. Leontiev writes: "It was precisely after the fall of the artificial empire of Charles that the signs which constitute, in their integrity, a picture of a special European culture, a new universal civilization, become clearer and clearer. The future bounds of the most recent western States and particular cultures of Italy, France and Germany also begin to become clearer. The Crusades come closer, as does the flourishing age of knighthood and of German feudalism, which laid the foundations of the exceptional self-respect of the person (a self-respect which, passing first by means of envy and imitation into the bourgeoisie, produced the democratic revolution and engendered all these modern phrases about the boundless rights of the person, and then, penetrating to the lower levels of western society, made of every simple day-time worker and cobbler an existence corrupted by a nervous feeling of his own worth). Soon after this we hear the first sounds of Romantic poetry. Then Gothic architecture develops, and soon Dante's Catholic epic poem will be created, etc. Papal power grows from this time. And so the reign of Charles the Great (9<sup>th</sup> century) is approximately the watershed after which the West begins more and more to bring its own civilization and its own statehood into prominence. From this century Byzantine civilisation loses from its sphere of influence all the large and well-populated countries of the West. On the other hand, it acquires for its genius the Southern Slavs...., and then... Russia."<sup>329</sup>

---

<sup>329</sup> Leontiev, "Vizantinizm i Slavianstvo" ("Byzantinism and Slavism"), in *Vostok, Rossia i Slavianstvo* (The East, Russia and Slavism), Moscow, 1996, pp. 94-95.

III. THE ZENITH OF NEW ROME (NINTH TO  
ELEVENTH CENTURIES)

## 18. ST. PHOTIUS THE GREAT AND CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS

The last iconoclast emperor, Theophilus, died in February, 842. His widow, St. Theodora, wanted to restore the icons, but she used her imperial authority to impose a bargain on the Church: if her reposed husband could be restored to the diptychs as an Orthodox emperor, she would give *carte blanche* to the patriarch to restore the true faith as he saw fit. The confessors of Orthodoxy were understandably reluctant to enter into such a bargain, since there was no reliable evidence that Theophilus had repented before his death.

However, God inspired the new patriarch, St. Methodius, to resolve the dilemma in the following way. As Nun Cassia tells the story, "On March 4, 843 Methodius was consecrated to the see of Constantinople and immediately proclaimed that the whole Church should pray for the Emperor Theophilus, which continued for the whole of the first week of the Great Fast and ended with the miraculous blotting out of the name of Theophilus from the list of heretics that the patriarch had sealed before the beginning of the prayer and placed on the altar of Hagia Sophia. The reposed emperor was recognized as forgiven by the Church and as Orthodox, and on Sunday, March 11, 843 the icons were brought in a triumphal procession into the main church of the Empire, and icon-veneration has remained forever as an unshakeable dogma of the Orthodox Church..."<sup>330</sup>

In this way the dissonance of powers that had prevailed, with some intermissions, for such a long time was transformed into a symphony that remained stable, if not completely unshaken, until the last, Palaeologan dynasty...

With the fall of iconoclasm in Byzantium in 843, there also fell the absolutist theory of Church-State relations preached by the iconoclast emperors. Although the new dynasty of Macedonian emperors was one of the strongest in Byzantine history, the patriarchs of the period were in no mood to concede more power than was necessary to it, however Orthodox it might be. One reason for this was the particularly prominent - and damaging - role that the emperors had taken in the recent persecutions, in which several of the leading hierarchs themselves had suffered (St. Methodius had been in prison, while St. Photius' parents had been martyred). The early Roman emperors had persecuted the Church at times - but they had been pagans in a pagan society, and were therefore simply expressing the prejudices of the society in which they lived. Later emperors in the post-Constantinian era, such as Constantius and Valens, had also persecuted the Church - which was worse, since they were supposed to be Christians, but again, they had not been the initiators of the persecution, but had responded to the pleas of heretical churchmen. However, the iconoclast emperors enjoyed the dubious distinction of having

---

<sup>330</sup> Senina (editor), *Zhitia Vizantijskikh Sviatykh Epokhi Ikonoborchestva* (Lives of the Byzantine Saints of the Iconoclast Period), vol. I, St. Petersburg: Kvadrivium, 2015, pp. 129-130.

been at the head of their heretical movement; they were heresiarchs themselves, not simply the political agents of heresiarchs. "The ancient heresies came from a quarrel over the dogmas and developed progressively, whereas this one [iconoclasm] comes from the imperial power itself."<sup>331</sup> The patriarchs therefore laboured to raise the profile of the patriarchate in society, as a defence against any return to antichristianity on the part of the emperors.<sup>332</sup>

This new intransigence of the patriarchs in relation to the emperors had been foreshadowed even before the last period of iconoclast persecution, when, on 24 December, 804, as Gilbert Dagron writes, "Leo V brought Patriarch Nicephorus and several bishops and monks together to involve them in coming to an agreement with those who were 'scandalised' by the icons and in making an 'economy'. The confrontation gave way to a series of grating 'little phrases' ... which sketched a new theory of imperial power. The clergy refused to engage in any discussion with this perfectly legitimate emperor who had not yet taken any measures against the icons and who wanted a council of bishops to tackle the problem. Emilian of Cyzicus said to him: 'If there is an ecclesiastical problem, as you say, Emperor, let it be resolved in the Church, as is the custom... and not in the Palace,' to which Leo remarked that he also was a child of the Church and that he could serve as an arbiter between the two camps. Michael of Synada then said to him that 'his arbitration' was in fact a 'tyranny'; others reproached him for taking sides. Without batting an eyelid, Euthymius of Sardis invoked eight centuries of Christian icons and angered the emperor by reusing a quotation from St. Paul that had already been used by John of Damascus: 'Even if an angel from heaven should preach to us a gospel different from the one that you have received, let him be anathema!' (Galatians 1.8). The 'ardent teacher of the Church and abbot of Studion' Theodore was the last to speak: 'Emperor, do not destroy the stability of the Church. The apostle spoke of those whom God has established in the Church, first as apostles, secondly as prophets, and thirdly as pastors and teachers (I Corinthians 12.28)..., but he did not speak of emperors. You, O Emperor, have been entrusted with the stability of the State and the army. Occupy yourself with that and leave the Church, as the apostle says, to pastors and teachers. If you did not accept this and departed from our faith..., if an angel came from heaven to preach to us another gospel, we would not listen to him; so even less to you!' Then Leo, furious, broke off the dialogue to set the persecution in motion."<sup>333</sup>

What is remarkable in this scene is the refusal of the hierarchs to allow the emperor any kind of arbitrating role - even though he had not yet declared himself to be an iconoclast. Of course, the bishops probably knew the secret

---

<sup>331</sup> Theosterictus, *Life of St. Nicetas of Medicion*; in Dagron, *Empereur et Prêtre* (Emperor and Priest), Paris : Gallimard, 1996, p. 197.

<sup>332</sup> It is perhaps significant that several of the patriarchs of the period - notably Tarasius, Nicephorus and Photius - had worked as laymen in the imperial administration before becoming patriarchs. The same was true of St. Ambrose of Milan. Evidently close experience of imperial administration from within is a good qualification for a patriarch who has to stand up against imperial power!

<sup>333</sup> Dagron, *op. cit.*, pp. 198-199.

motives and beliefs of the emperor, so they knew that any council convened by him would have been a “robber council”, like that of 754. Moreover, the Seventh Ecumenical Council had already defined the position of the Church, so a further council was superfluous. However, the bishops’ fears were probably particularly focussed on the word “arbitration” and the false theory of Church-State relations that that implied. The Church had allowed, even urged, emperors to convene councils in the past; but had never asked them to arbitrate in them. Rather it was they, the bishops sitting in council, who were the arbiters, and the emperor who was obliged, as an obedient son of the Church, to submit to their judgement. The bishops were determined to have no truck with this last relic of the absolutist theory of Church-State relations.

It was St. Theodore the Studite who particularly pressed this point. As he wrote to the Emperor Leo V: “If you want to be her (the Church’s) son, then nobody is hindering you; only follow in everything your spiritual father (the Patriarch)”.<sup>334</sup> And it was the triumph of Studite rigorism – on this issue, at any rate – that determined the attitude of the patriarchs to the emperors after the final Triumph of Orthodoxy over iconoclasm in 843. For the patriarch of the time, St. Methodius, while he had severe reservations about some of the writing of St. Theodore, followed him in trying to exalt the authority of the patriarchate in relation to the empire. His successors, Saints Ignatius and Photius, went still further in the same direction...

In order to justify this programme, they needed a biblical model. And just as the Emperor Leo had used the figure of Melchizedek, both king and priest, to justify his exaltation of the role of the emperor, so Patriarch Photius used the figure of Moses, both king (as it were) and priest, to exalt the role of the patriarch.<sup>335</sup> Only whereas Melchizedek had been seen by Leo as primarily a king who was also a priest, Moses was seen by St. Photius as primarily a priest who also had the effective power of a king: “Among the citizens, [Moses] chose the most refined and those who would be the most capable to lead the whole people, and he appointed them as priests... He entrusted them with guarding the laws and traditions; that was why the Jews never had a king and why the leadership of the people was always entrusted to the one among the priests who was reputed to be the most intelligent and the most virtuous. It is he whom they call the Great Priest, and they believe that he is for them the messenger of the Divine commandments.”<sup>336</sup>

However, St. Photius soon came into conflict with one who exalted his priesthood in such a way as to encroach on the prerogatives of kings and

---

<sup>334</sup> St. Theodore, quoted in Fomin S. and Fomina T, *Rossia pered Vtorym Prishesviem* (Russia before the Second Coming), Moscow, 1994, vol. I, p. 94.

<sup>335</sup> G.A. Ostrogorsky writes: “My reposed friend N.M. Belaev indicated that in the art of medieval Byzantium the ideas of the Kingdom and the priesthood were incarnate in the images of Moses and Aaron, while in the early Byzantine period both ideas were united in the image of Melchizedek, and that the turning point here must be seen to be precisely the VIIth century” (quoted in Fomin and Fomina, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 105).

<sup>336</sup> Dagron, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

introduce heresy into the Church – Nicholas I, Pope of Rome. The dogmatic aspect of the quarrel related to Nicholas' introduction into the Creed of the *Filioque*, which Photius succeeded in having anathematized together with its author. But the conflict also had a political aspect insofar as Nicholas, reasserting the Gelasian model of Church-State relations, but also going further than that in an aggressively papist direction, claimed jurisdiction over the newly created Church of Bulgaria. It was becoming clear that if "caesaropapism" had been the greatest danger in the iconoclast period, it was its opposite, "papocaesarism", that was the greatest danger in the post-iconoclast period...

Until now, Rome had been the most consistently faithful to Orthodoxy of all the patriarchates. But her consciousness of this fine record had bred an incipient feeling of infallibility, which led her to encroach on the prerogatives both of the other patriarchates in the Church and of the emperor in the State. St. Photius stood up in defence of the Eastern Church and State. In 879-880 he convened a Great Council in Constantinople, which was attended by four hundred bishops, including the legates of Pope John VIII. It anathematized the *Filioque* and the false council of 869-70 that had anathematized St. Photius, firmly restricting the Pope's jurisdiction to the West.<sup>337</sup>

David Ford writes: "There is considerable discussion today within the worldwide Orthodox Church about the status of the so-called 'Photian Council,' held in Constantinople in 879-880. This is an exceedingly important council in the history of the Orthodox Church, and therefore deserves to be much more widely known among the Orthodox faithful. And this Council is of special relevance for our Orthodox Church vis-a-vis the Roman Catholic Church, in that 1), it officially prohibited any addition to the Nicene Creed, thus rejecting the *Filioque* clause, which was in use by many churches in Western Europe at that time (though not in Rome until 1014); and 2), it implicitly rejected the principle of Papal Supremacy, or jurisdictional authority, over the Eastern Churches, in that this Council rendered null and void the pro-papal Ignatian Council held in Constantinople ten years earlier. But in one of the

---

<sup>337</sup> "We [Pope John VIII] wish that it is declared before the Synod, that the Synod which took place against the aforementioned Patriarch Photios at the time of Hadrian, the Most holy Pope in Rome, and [the Synod] in Constantinople [869/70] should be ostracized from this present moment and be regarded as annulled and groundless, and should not be co-enumerated with any other holy Synods." The minutes at this point add: "The Holy Synod responded: We have denounced this by our actions and we eject it from the archives and anathematize the so-called [Eighth] Synod, being united to Photios our Most Holy Patriarch. We also anathematize those who fail to eject what was written or said against him by the aforementioned by yourselves, the so-called [Eighth] Synod."

Pope John VIII's Letter to Photios: "As for the Synod (i.e., the 869 Synod that condemned St. Photius) that was summoned against your Reverence we have annulled here and have completely banished, and have ejected [it from our archives], because of the other causes and because our blessed predecessor Pope Hadrian did not subscribe to it..." See Fr. George Dragas, "The 8<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Council: Constantinople IV (879/88) and the Condemnation of the Filioque Addition and Doctrine", [http://geocities.com/heartland/5654/orthodox/dragas\\_eighth.html](http://geocities.com/heartland/5654/orthodox/dragas_eighth.html).

greatest ironies of Christian history, the Photian Council *was recognized as legitimate by the papacy for nearly 200 years until the period of the Gregorian Reform*, when the canon lawyers of Pope Gregory VII (r. 1073-1085) rejected the Photian Council and resurrected the Ignatian Council to take its place."<sup>338</sup>

As regards the emperor, St. Photius gave him due honour in a letter to the bishops in exile: "While before us the divine Paul exhorts us to pray for sovereigns, so does Peter too, the chief of the apostles, saying, 'Be submissive to every human institution for the Lord's sake whether it be to the emperor as supreme,' and again, 'Honor the emperor,' But still, even before them, our common Master and Teacher and Creator Himself from His incalculably great treasure, by paying tribute to Caesar, taught us by deed and custom to observe the privileges which had been assigned to emperors. For this reason, indeed, in our mystical and awesome services we offer up prayers on behalf of our sovereigns. It is, accordingly, both right and pleasing to God, as well as most appropriate for us, to maintain these privileges and to join also our Christ-loving emperors in preserving them."<sup>339</sup> Moreover, in his advice to the newly baptized Bulgarian Tsar St. Boris-Michael St. Photius gave the tsar authority even in matters of the faith: "The king must correct his people in the faith and direct it in the knowledge of the true God".<sup>340</sup> For the emperor was, according to Alexander Dvorkin, "the supreme judge and lawgiver, the defender of the Church and preserver of the right faith. He took decisions on the declaration of war and the conclusion of peace; his juridical decision was final and not subject to appeal; his laws were considered to be God-inspired, while his power was limited only by the laws of morality and religion. On the other hand, however, once he had issued a law, the emperor himself fell under its force and he was bound to observe it."<sup>341</sup>

However, in the law code entitled the *Epanagoge*, in whose composition St. Photius probably played a leading part, the authority of the Patriarch is exalted over the Emperor. Its bias is already evident in the foreword, where, as Fr. Alexis Nikolin writes, "it says that 'the law is from God', Who is the true Basileus... [And] in the *Digests* we do not find the following thesis of Roman law: 'That which is pleasing to the emperor has the force of law'. Thus the emperor is not seen as 'the living law' [νομος εμψυχος]."<sup>342</sup> He can be called that only in the secular sphere: "The Emperor must act as the law when there is none written, except that his actions must not violate canon law. The Patriarch alone must interpret the canons of the ancient (Patriarchs) and the

---

<sup>338</sup> Ford, "St. Photius the Great, The Photian Council, and Relations with the Roman Church", Preacher's Institute, November 12, 2017.

<sup>339</sup> D.S. White, Patriarch Photios of Constantinople, Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1981, p. 155.

<sup>340</sup> St. Photius, in Fomin and Fomina, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 95.

<sup>341</sup> Dvorkin, *Ocherki po Istorii Vselenskoj Pravoslavnoj Tserkvi* (Sketches on the History of the Universal Orthodox Church), Nizhni-Novogorod, 2006, pp. 586-587.

<sup>342</sup> Nikolin, *Tserkov' i Gosudarstvo* (Church and State), Moscow, 1997, pp. 41, 42. It will be recalled that Justinian used the same phrase...

decrees of the Holy Fathers and the resolutions of the Holy Synods" (*Titulus III, 5*).

In fact, as Dagron writes, "The emperor is defined as a 'legitimate authority' (εννομος επιστασια), contrary to the Hellenistic and Roman tradition which declares him to be 'above the laws', being himself 'the living law' and only submitting to the laws of his own free will... In the first article [of *Titulus III*] the patriarch is defined as the living and animate image of Christ by deeds and words typifying the truth (εικων ζωσα Χριστου και εμψυχος δι'εργων και λογων χαρακτηριζουσα την αληθειαν)... Everything that the patriarch gains, he steals from the emperor. In place of the emperor traditionally called - as in the letter of Theodore the Studite - 'imitator of Christ' there is substituted a patriarch called the image of Christ, and in place of the emperor as the living law - a patriarch as the living truth... The idea of the emperor-priest, which was condemned in the person of Leo III, is succeeded by the prudent but clear evocation of a patriarch-emperor, or at least of a supreme priest to whom revert all the attributes of sovereignty. If he is the living image of Christ, the patriarch participates like him in the two powers. He is a New Moses and a New Melchizedek."<sup>343</sup>

The document then proceeds to contrast the rights and duties of the Emperor and the Patriarch. "The task of the Emperor is to protect and preserve the existing popular forces by good administration, and to re-establish the damaged forces by careful supervision and just ways and actions" (*Titulus II, 2*). "The task of the Patriarch is, first, to keep those people whom he has received from God in piety and purity of life, and then he must as far as possible convert all heretics to Orthodoxy and the unity of the Church (heretics, in the laws and canons of the Church, are those who are not in communion with the Catholic Church). Also, he must lead the unbelievers to adopt the faith, striking them with the lustre and glory and wonder of his service" (*Titulus III, 2*)... "The aim of the Patriarch is the salvation of the souls entrusted to him; the Patriarch must live in Christ and be crucified for the world" (*Titulus III, 3*). "The Emperor must be most distinguished in Orthodoxy and piety and glorified in divine zeal, knowledgeable in the dogmas of the Holy Trinity and in the definitions of salvation through the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ" (*Titulus II, 5*). "It particularly belongs to the Patriarch to teach and to relate equally and without limitations of both high and low, and be gentle in administering justice, skilled in exposing the unbelievers, and not to be ashamed to speak before the face of the Emperor about justice and the defence of the dogmas" (*Titulus III, 4*). "The Emperor is bound to defend and strengthen, first of all, all that which is written in the Divine Scriptures, and then also all the dogmas established by the Holy Councils, and also selected Roman laws" (*Titulus II, 4*).

Although a more exalted place is accorded to the patriarch in the *Epanagoge*, it is striking that the emperor is still given an important role in defending the faith. However, the word "emperor" is carefully defined to exclude what St.

---

<sup>343</sup> Dagron, *op. cit.*, pp. 237-238.

Basil or St. Ambrose would have called a “tyrant”: “The aim of the Emperor is to do good, which is why he is called a benefactor. And when he ceases to do good, then, it seems, he corrupts the meaning of the concept of Emperor by comparison with the ancient teachings” (*Titulus II, 3*).

In the last analysis, Photius’ conception of the kingship seems “to the right of centre” of the patristic consensus, if Justinian’s *Novella 6* is seen as the centre. This is probably to be explained by the need felt by the Patriarch to counter the absolutism of Leo III’s *Eclogue* and to check the still sometimes intemperate acts of the contemporary emperors (Photius himself was exiled more than once). Moreover, St. Photius probably felt able to express such a bold attitude in relation to the emperor because of the exceptional power he wielded in post-iconoclast Byzantium.

\*

This power was seen as extending even over the other patriarchates of the East. Thus Dmitri Shabanov writes: “As the editor of the *Nomocanon in 14 Tituli*... St. Photius often writes that on the territories of the East the Patriarch of Constantinople has all the canonical rights that the Roman Pope has on the territories of the West. For example, in *Titulus I, 5* and in *Titulus VIII, 5* of the *Nomocanon in 14 Tituli* St. Photius writes directly that Constantinople has the prerogatives of the old Rome and is ‘the head of all the Churches’ of the *oikoumene*, that is, of the Roman Empire...

“According to the thought of St. Photius, the transfer of the prerogatives of the Roman bishop to the bishop of Constantinople gives the latter the right to speak out in the capacity of highest court of appeal for the whole of the East.

“St. Photius’ conception of the equal status of the sees of the Old and New Rome was accepted at the Great Council of Constantinople of 879-880 (many canonical monuments and some of the Holy Fathers called this Council the Eighth Ecumenical Council). The Council of 879-880 was convened to rescind the decisions of the preceding Council of 869 at which particular emphasis was placed on the rights of the eastern Patriarchs. In spite of the rescinded decisions of the Council of 869, the Great Council of Constantinople of 879-880 in general made no mention of any rights of the eastern Patriarchs, but decreed in its first canon that the Roman and Constantinopolitan sees had equal judicial rights, thereby removing the right of appeal to Rome to the decisions of the Constantinople court, which in this way was recognized as the highest court of appeal for the whole of the East.”<sup>344</sup>

---

<sup>344</sup> Shabanov, “Kanonicheskaya Spravka o Prave Vselenskogo Patriarchego Prestola Konstantinopolia - Novogo Rima prinimat’ apelliatsii na sudebnie dela iz drugikh Pomestnykh Tservej” (A Canonical Note on the Right of the Ecumenical Patriarchal Throne of Constantinople - New Rome to accept appeals in judicial cases from other Local Churches), <http://portal-credo.ru/site/print.php?act=news&id=64720>, July 24, 2008.

The process of reducing the pentarchy of patriarchates to a diarchy (Rome and Constantinople) had begun in the time of Justinian in the sixth century. It gathered pace when the three Eastern patriarchates fell under Muslim rule in the seventh century and were virtually reduced to the status of metropolitan districts of the Constantinopolitan patriarchate.<sup>345</sup> In the time of St. Photius, moreover, the diarchy was sometimes seen rather as a Constantinopolitan monarchy, insofar as the decline and corruption of Rome in the early tenth century during the “pornocracy of Marozia” greatly reduced her prestige and influence. Moreover, in missionary work beyond the bounds of the empire (the Armenians and Syrians in the East, the Moravians in the West, the Khazars, Bulgars and Russians in the North), where the emperors had previously taken the initiative, the patriarch was now the prime mover.<sup>346</sup> Thus the patriarchate was becoming ever more truly “ecumenical”...

At the same time, St. Photius did not deny the traditional doctrine of Church-State symphony. Thus the *Epanagoge* concludes: “The State consists of parts and members like an individual person. The most important and necessary parts are the Emperor and the Patriarch. Therefore unanimity in everything and agreement (συμφωνία) between the Empire and the Priesthood (constitutes) the spiritual and bodily peace and prosperity of the citizens” (*Titulus III, 8*). And so the iconoclast thesis and the post-iconoclast antithesis in political theology came to rest, in the *Epanagoge*, in a synthesis emphasizing the traditional symphony of powers, even if the superiority was clearly given to the patriarch (the soul) over the emperor (the body).

It must also be remembered that the “consensus of the Fathers” with regard to the emperor-patriarch relationship did not occupy an exact middle point, as it were, on the spectrum between “caesaropapism” and “papocaesarism”, but rather a broad band in the middle. In times when the emperor was apostate, heretical or simply power-hungry and passionate, the Fathers tended slightly right of centre, emphasizing the independence of the Church, the lay, unpriestly character of the emperor, and the superiority of spiritual to temporal ends as the soul is superior to the body (SS. Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, John Chrysostom, Ambrose of Milan, Maximus the Confessor, Photius the Great). But in times when the emperor was a faithful son of the Church, the Fathers were glad to accord him a quasi-priestly role – provided that he did not undertake strictly sacramental functions (the Fathers of the First, Fourth and Fifth Ecumenical Councils, St. Isidore of Pelusium). It was only the extremes that were excluded: the royal absolutism of the iconoclast emperors and the priestly absolutism of the heretical popes, both of which tended to deny any independent sphere of action to the Church, in the former case, and to the State, in the latter.

## 19. MIGHT AND RIGHT IN NEW ROME

---

<sup>345</sup> Dagron, *op. cit.*, pp. 240, 241; Shabanov, *op. cit.*

<sup>346</sup> Dagron, *op. cit.*, p. 239.

As we have seen, it was a fundamental principle both of Justinian's and of Photius' legislation that Church canons should always take precedence over imperial laws. As this principle became more generally accepted, more areas of what had been considered secular life came under the influence of the process of "enchurchment". This process was expressed in several new requirements: that the emperors themselves should be anointed in a special Church rite<sup>347</sup>; that marriages should take place in church, and in accordance with the church canons; and that lands and monies donated by individuals to the Church should never be secularized, but should ever remain under the control of the Church. Thus one of the *novellas* of Emperor Alexis Comnenus said that it was wrong to forbid a slave a Church marriage in a Christian State, for in the Church a slave is equal to a lord. Again, in the thirteenth century there were cases of trials of murderers, not according to the civil codex, but in accordance with the Church canons: the criminal besought forgiveness on his knees and was given a fifteen-year penance of standing among the penitents at the Divine Liturgy.

However, as was to be expected, there was resistance to this process, if not as an ideal, at any rate in practice; and this was particularly so in the case of marriage law – more specifically, of marriage law as applied to emperors...

The first major conflict came towards the end of the eighth century, when St. Tarasius, Patriarch of Constantinople, refused to give his blessing to the marriage of the son of the Empress Irene, Constantine VI, who had cast off his lawful wife and entered into an adulterous relationship with his mistress. The Emperors then turned to the priest Joseph, who performed the marriage, upon which St. Tarasius at first did nothing, "through adaptation to circumstances", but then excommunicated Joseph. Fearful, however, that too great a strictness in this affair would lead the Emperors to incline towards iconoclasm, the patriarch accepted Joseph into communion before the end of his penance. He was also accepted by the next Patriarch, St. Nicephorus, who was under pressure from the next Emperor, Nicephorus. In protest against these applications of "economy", St. Theodore the Studite broke communion with both patriarchs, and returned into communion with St. Nicephorus only when he had again excommunicated Joseph. Theodore allowed no compromise in relation to the Holy Canons. He who was not guided by them was not fully Orthodox. St. Paul anathematised anyone who transgressed the law of Christ, even if he were an angel from heaven. *A fortiori* the emperors were not exempt from the Canons. There was no special "Gospel of the kings": only God is not subject to the law.<sup>348</sup>

St. Photius faithfully followed St. Theodore's teaching: when Basil I came to power after murdering his predecessor, he accepted him as emperor, but refused to give him communion. But he was deposed for this, and was deposed

---

<sup>347</sup> This did not come about until the thirteenth century. However, as we have seen, already in the fifth century the patriarch had begun to take part in the ceremony of crowning.

<sup>348</sup> Zyzykin, *Patriarkh Nikon*, Warsaw: Synodal Press, 1931, part I, pp. 89-93.

again by Basil's son, Leo the Wise, who shifted the balance of Church-State relations back towards caesaropapism, saying: "from now on the emperor's care extends to everything, and his foresight (*προνοια*, a word which can equally well mean the 'providence' of God) controls and governs everything."<sup>349</sup> He claimed, according to Dorothy Wood, "to be head of Church and State in the sense that, if the Church as led by the Patriarch was irreconcilably opposed to the Emperor, the Emperor could resolve the conflict".<sup>350</sup> And so when St. Photius' successor (and nephew), Patriarch Nicholas the Mystic, opposed his fourth marriage to Zoe, the Emperor simply removed him from office, forced a priest to perform the marriage and then himself placed the crown on his "wife's" head.

However, the patriarch did not give in. Commenting that the Emperor was to Zoe "both bridegroom and bishop"<sup>351</sup>, he defrocked the priest that had "married" him and stopped the Emperor from entering Hagia Sophia. Then, when the papal legates recognised the marriage, St. Nicholas resigned from his see, declaring that he had received the patriarchate not from the king but from God, and that he was leaving because the Emperor was making the government of the Church impossible.

The Emperor retaliated by exiling Nicholas and putting Euthymius on the patriarchal throne, who permitted the fourth marriage, saying: "It is right, your Majesty, to obey your orders and receive your decisions as emanating from the will and providence of God!"<sup>352</sup> However, after the death of Leo in 912, Euthymius was imprisoned and St. Nicholas was restored to his see. Finally, in the *Tome of Union* (920), fourth marriages were condemned as "unquestionably illicit and void", and third marriages permitted only by special dispensation.

St. Nicholas wrote to the Pope: "What was I to do in such circumstances? Shut up and go to sleep? Or think and act as befits a friend who cares at one and the same time both for the honour of the emperor and for the ecclesiastical decrees? And so we began the struggle with God's help; we tried to convince the rulers not to be attracted by that which is proper only for those who do not know how to control themselves, but to endure what had happened with magnanimity, with good hope on Christ our God; while we touched, not only his knee, but also his leg, begging and beseeching him as king in the most reverential way not to permit his authority to do everything, but to remember that there sits One Whose authority is mightier than his - He Who shed His Most Pure Blood for the Church." And to the Emperor he wrote: "My child and emperor, it befitted you as a worshipper of God and one who has been glorified by God more than others with wisdom and other virtue, to be satisfied with three marriages: perhaps even a third marriage was unworthy of your royal majesty... but the sacred canons do not completely reject a third marriage, but

---

<sup>349</sup> Dagron, *op. cit.*, p. 36

<sup>350</sup> Wood, *Leo VI's Concept of Divine Monarchy*, London: Monarchist Press Association, 1964, p. 15.

<sup>351</sup> P.G. 91.197.

<sup>352</sup> *Life of Euthymius*, quoted in Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

are condescending, although they dislike it. However, what justification can there be for a fourth marriage? The king, they say, is the unwritten law, but not in order to act in a lawless manner and do anything that comes into his head, but in order that by his unwritten deeds he may be that which is the written law; for if the king is the enemy and foe of the laws, who will fear them?"<sup>353</sup> The saint went on to say that "an emperor who gave orders to slander, to murder through treachery, to celebrate unlawful marriages, and to seize other people's property, was not an emperor, but a brigand, a slanderer, and adulterer and a thief".<sup>354</sup>

The attempts of emperors to impose their will on the Church continued. Thus "Emperor Romanus, who reigned over Byzantium at the beginning of the tenth century had a son, Theophylact, who was sixteen years old when Patriarch Stephen died. The emperor wanted his son to be elevated as patriarch for he had promised him this spiritual calling from his youth. [However,] since his son was a minor, the emperor was ashamed to do this. The patriarchal throne was assumed by Tryphun a simple but chaste and pious old man. Tryphun remained on the throne for three years. When the son of the emperor reached his twentieth year, the emperor thought to remove Tryphun at any price and to install his son as patriarch. The saint of God, Tryphun, did not want to relinquish his throne voluntarily, for no other reason, because he considered it to be a great scandal that such a young man be elevated to such a responsible and burdensome position as that of being patriarch. Through the intrigue of a nefarious bishop, the signature of the innocent Tryphun was extracted on a blank sheet of paper. Later on, in the imperial court, above that signature, the alleged resignation of the patriarch was written which the emperor decreed. As a result of this, there arose a great confusion in the Church, for the laity and the clergy stood by Tryphun, the godly man. The emperor then forcibly removed the aged patriarch and sent him to a monastery and, his son, Theophylact, was elevated as patriarch. St. Tryphun lived as an ascetic in this monastery for two years and five months and presented himself before the Lord in the year 933 A.D."<sup>355</sup>

\*

Another area in which imperial might came up against ecclesiastical right was that of imperial legitimacy and succession. We have seen that in the early Byzantine period very strict criteria of legitimacy were applied by such bold hierarchs as St. Ambrose of Milan. However, these strict criteria were by no means consistently adhered to in later centuries<sup>356</sup>; and even late into the

---

<sup>353</sup> Zyzykin, *op. cit.*, part I, p. 90.

<sup>354</sup> St. Nicholas, "Epistle 32", *P.G.* 111: 209-213; Fr. George Poullas, "Indestructible Towers", *Orthodox Tradition*, vol. 26, 2009, N 2, p. 15.

<sup>355</sup> *Life of St. Tryphun, Patriarch of Constantinople.*

<sup>356</sup> For example, in 602 Phocas brutally murdered the Emperor Maurice, and was recognized as the new emperor (Pope Gregory I even heaped praises on him!). Phocas proceeded to "establish bloody terror in the empire (602-610). One contemporary cites the story of a certain man who cried out to God: 'Why did You send Your people such a blood-thirsty wolf?' And the Lord

Christian period, Roman emperors were so often overthrown by force that J.B. Bury, following Mommsen, called the government of Byzantium “an autocracy tempered by the legal right of revolution”.<sup>357</sup>

Dagron has pointed out that one could become emperor in Byzantium in various ways: by dynastic succession from father to son, by being “purple-born (πορφυρογεννητος)”<sup>358</sup>, by marrying a former empress, by being made co-emperor by a living emperor, as well as by usurpation, that is, the overthrow of a living emperor by force.<sup>359</sup> Although a usurper would naturally be considered the very opposite of a legitimate ruler, he could nevertheless be seen as expressing God’s transfer of power from an unworthy man to one more worthy, as when He “repented” of His choice of Saul and chose David instead.<sup>360</sup> Or the legitimate emperor could simply hand over power to the usurper in order to avoid bloodshed, as when Emperor Michael Rangabe sent his crown, purple robe and shoes to Leo V, saying: “I abdicate in your favour. Enter Constantinople without fear and reign gloriously.”<sup>361</sup>

A comparison can be made between the Byzantine idea of legitimacy and the Chinese “mandate of heaven”. In the Chinese system, as J.M. Roberts writes: “Confucian principles taught that, although rebellion was wrong if a true king reigned, a government which provoked rebellion and could not control it ought to be replaced, for it was *ipso facto* illegitimate.”<sup>362</sup> Similarly, in the Byzantine system, as Lemerle writes, “usurpation... has... almost a political function. It is not so much an illegal act as the first act in a process of legitimation... There is a parallelism, rather than an opposition, between the basileus and the usurper. Hence the existence of two different notions of legitimacy, the one ‘dynastic’ and the other which we might call (in the Roman sense) ‘republican’, which are not really in conflict but reinforce each other: the

---

replied to him: ‘I tried to find someone worse than Phocas, so as to punish the people for its self-will, but was unable. But don’t you question the judgements of God’” (Dvorkin, *op. cit.*, p. 439).

<sup>357</sup> Bury, *The Constitution of the Later Roman Empire*, Cambridge University Press, 1910, p. 9. Dvorkin echoes this judgement (*op. cit.*, p. 587).

<sup>358</sup> That is, born in the *porphyra*, a special room lined with porphyry which Constantine V had constructed in the imperial palace as birth-place for his son. Being born in this room then came to confer on the new-born, writes Dagron, “a sacred character: the divine unction from the womb of his mother... {St.} Theophano, in order to explain to Leo VI that he was born in the purple without experience of unhappiness or poverty, said to him: ‘You have been anointed from the womb’” (*op. cit.*, p. 61). Several emperors, including Constantine VII, Zoe and Theodora, claimed the throne primarily on the basis of their being “born in the purple”.

<sup>359</sup> Dagron, *op. cit.*, chapter 1.

<sup>360</sup> “In the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the Khazars dispatched an envoy to [St.] Constantine/Cyril, who had landed in their country to evangelise it; and this ‘astute and malicious’ man asked him: ‘Why do you persist in the bad habit of always taking as emperors different people coming from different families? We do it according to the family?’ To which the missionary replied by quoting the example of David, who succeeded to Saul when he was not of his family by the choice of God.” (Dagron, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-34).

<sup>361</sup> *The Life of our Holy Monastic Father Nicholas the Confessor, Abbot of the Studium*, in St. Demetrius of Rostov, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, February 4.

<sup>362</sup> Roberts, *History of the World*, Oxford: Helicon, 1992, p. 360.

second, when the usurper fails, reinforces thereby the first, and when he succeeds, recreates it, whether the usurper attaches himself to the dynasty or founds a dynasty himself.”<sup>363</sup>

And yet: what if a usurper came to power by the murder of his predecessor? Even here the Church usually crowned him. Thus in 865 St. Irene Chrysovalantou revealed that the Emperor Michael III was going to be murdered. However, she said, “do not by any means oppose the new Emperor [Basil I], who shall come to the throne, though murder be at the root of it. The holy God has preferred and chosen him, so the enemy himself will not benefit.”<sup>364</sup> St. Photius also accepted the new emperor – but refused him communion in church.

Paradoxically, writes Judith Herrin, “despite his obscure origins, Basil I’s family maintained control over Byzantium for nearly two centuries, from 867 to 1056. In the tenth century, Constantine VII commissioned a biography of Basil (his grandfather), which invented a noble Armenian origin for the family and traced the portents which led to Basil ‘saving’ the empire from a drunken and dissolute ruler, Michael III, rather than gaining power in treacherous circumstances. By blackening the character of Basil’s patron and colleague, Constantine made sure that his grandfather was given a highly original and invented role, as more legitimate and worthy of the imperial title than Michael. By such means the Macedonian dynasty, as it became known, contributed to a deeper sense of order, *taxis*, and strengthened the imperial office through a proper and controlled line of succession from father to son.”<sup>365</sup>

Sometimes the usurper was crowned, provided certain conditions were fulfilled. Thus when Nicephorus Phocas was murdered on December 11, 969 by his successor, John Tzimiskes<sup>366</sup>, Patriarch Polyeuctus “declared that he would not allow the Emperor to enter the church as long as he had not expelled the Augusta from the palace and had not named the murderer of the Emperor, whoever he might be. Moreover, he demanded the return to the Synod of a document published by Nicephorus in violation of justice. The point was that Nicephorus, either intending to remove certain violations of the sacred rites that had been allowed, in his opinion, by certain hierarchs, or wishing to submit to himself even that in the religious sphere which it was not fitting for him to rule over, had forced the hierarchs to compose a decree according to which nothing in Church affairs was to be undertaken without his will. Polyeuctus suggested that the Emperor carry out all (this); in the contrary case he would

---

<sup>363</sup> Lemerle, in Rosemary Morris, “Succession and usurpation: politics and rhetoric in the late tenth century”, in Paul Magdalino, *New Constantines: the Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantine History, 4th-13th Centuries*, Aldershot, 1994, pp. 200-201.

<sup>364</sup> *The Lives of the Spiritual Mothers*, Buena Vista, CO; Holy Apostles’ Convent, 1991, p. 325.

<sup>365</sup> Herrin, *Byzantium*, London: Allen Lane, 2007, pp. 146-147. According to Andrew Louth, by the time of the Macedonian dynasty in the tenth century, the idea of legitimate succession from father to son had taken hold (*Greek East and Latin West*, p. 213).

<sup>366</sup> Nicephorus had been warned about this three months before the event by his spiritual father, St. Michael Maleinus, and so spent his last days in prayer and fasting.

not allow him to enter the holy church. (John) accepted the conditions; he removed the Augusta from the palace and exiled her to an island called Protos, returned Nicephorus' decree to the Synod and pointed to Leo Valans, saying that he and nobody else had killed the Emperor with his own hand. Only then did Polyeuctus allow him into the holy church and crown him, after which he returned to the Royal palace and was hailed by the army and people".<sup>367</sup>

This extraordinary episode tells us much about the real relationship between Church and State in Byzantium. On the one hand, there is no question that although Tzimiskes won the throne through brute force and murder, there was no real attempt to remove him or refusal to recognize him. This indicates that the pagan principle of Old Rome: "might is right", still prevailed in tenth-century Byzantium. Or rather: if might prevails, then this is by the Providence of God, and should therefore be accepted. Such a concept, as we have seen, is similar to the Chinese idea of "the mandate of heaven".

On the other hand, Tzimiskes' *de facto* victory was not felt to be enough in a Christian society: he needed the Church's forgiveness and sacramental blessing. And this the Church felt powerful enough to withhold until several conditions had been met: (1) the removal of Empress Theophano, the widow both of Nicephorus and the previous emperor Romanus and the mother of Romanus' purple-born sons Basil and Constantine, whom Tzimiskes had wanted to marry in order to strengthen his position; (2) the annulment of a caesaropapist decree of the previous emperor; and (3) the new emperor had made at least a formal attempt to find the murderer (everyone must have known that the emperor himself was the murderer, but if he did not accuse himself there was no higher judicial power that could convict him). By obtaining the fulfillment of these three conditions the Church, it could be said, made the best out of a bad job, extracting some good from an essentially evil deed.

While the Byzantines accepted Tzimiskes as *basileus*, they condemned the deed by which he attained the throne. The manoeuvre, writes Morris, was "nicely put by Leo the Deacon, who clearly understood these matters. Tzimiskes, he wrote, 'took up the reins of the Empire' at the fourth hour of the day of 11 December 963. In other words he assumed the governance of the empire. But it was not until after his coronation that his position as *autokrator* was finally legitimised by receiving the blessing of the church."<sup>368</sup>

But if this resolved the question of Tzimiskes' legitimacy, it did not wipe out his sin. The best the Byzantines could come up with here was the theory – propounded by the thirteenth-century canonist Balsamon – that the emperor's anointing washed out all his previous sins!<sup>369</sup> As Morris writes: "In the *Apocalypse of Anastasia*, dateable to the beginning of the twelfth century at the

---

<sup>367</sup> Leo the Deacon, quoted in Fomin and Fomina, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 99.

<sup>368</sup> Morris, in Magdalino, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

<sup>369</sup> Fomin and Fomina, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

latest, we have an angel indicating to the narrator an empty throne in Hell and explaining that it belonged to John Tzimiskes 'who was not worthy of it, because he murdered Nikephoros Phokas'. Then the wounded Nikephoros is seen reproaching John, saying, "John, Tzimiskes, Lord John, why did you inflict an unjust death on me..." And John replied nothing but "Woe! What have I done?" The invention of the tradition that Tzimiskes' anointing had washed away the sin of the murder is, of course, another clear indication that he was believed to have been directly implicated."<sup>370</sup>

"The aim," according to Dagron, "is to convert brute force (το θηριωδες, θηριον αλογον, as Agapetus and Basil write) into a legitimate power, and the historical sources often allude to this conversion. If Theophanes characterizes Leo V, in 814, as 'very legitimate emperor of the Romans', this is to signify that this general, who had been called to the Empire by war and popular favour, was able to carry out the mutation which from now on made him a legitimate sovereign by not being too precipitate in the stages of transition, by letting the patriarch act, by ceasing to be an army commander, by conforming himself, not to constitutional rules which did not exist, nor even to more or less uncertain procedures, but to a process that allowed him to leave one role, that of a popularly elected general, for another, that of an emperor elected by God. If, on the contrary, Michael Attaliates and his contemporaries were doubtful that Isaac I Comnenus had succeeded, in 1057, in his passage from 'tyranny' to 'legitimate power', in spite of his probity and his courage, this was because he had not been able to divest himself of his martial fury, which had given him power but not sacredness... So it is not power that is legitimate, it is he who appropriates it who can become legitimate by choosing to respect the law..."<sup>371</sup>

---

<sup>370</sup> Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 211. "Together with the Holy Synod... [Patriarch Polyeuctus] recognized that, just as chrismation at Holy Baptism forgives sins committed up to that time, whatever they may be, so, it goes without saying, anointing to the kingdom forgives the sin of murder committed earlier by Tsimiskes... On the basis of the 19<sup>th</sup> canon of the Nicaean Council, the 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of Neocaesarea and the 27<sup>th</sup> of St. Basil the Great, the ordination of hierarchs and the anointing of emperors removes all sins committed before ordination and anointing, whatever they may be. But the ordination of priests and other sacred people forgives small sins, such as impulses to sin, lying and other suchlike, which are do not subject them to deposition. But they do not forgive adultery" (M.V. Zyzkin, *Tsarskaia Vlast'* (Royal Power), Sophia, 1934, <http://www.russia-talk.lrg/cd-history/zyzykin.htm>, p. 29).

<sup>371</sup> Dagron, *op. cit.*, pp. 38, 39.

## 20. NEW ROME AND THE BULGARIANS

The question of the legitimacy of usurpers of the Roman throne was linked to the question of the legitimacy of other kings that claimed to take the place of the Roman emperor. The first Christian kingdom that posed a direct challenge to New Rome was the Frankish kingdom of Charlemagne, who was crowned as emperor in Rome by the Pope on Christmas Day, 800. However, from the Byzantine point of view, Charlemagne might be an “emperor” (*basileus*), but in no way could he be called the “emperor of the Romans”, whose seat could only be the New Rome of Constantinople.

A challenge similar to that of Charlemagne – but much more threatening to the real power of the Roman emperors – was provided by the Bulgarian tsars...

The Slavs had first moved into the Balkans in large numbers during the reign of Justinian in the sixth century. In Greece, and particularly the Peloponnese, they had quickly become Christian and Hellenized. Further north, however, they remained hostile to Byzantium. In 626 they helped the Avars in their unsuccessful siege of Constantinople. In 681 the Byzantines were forced to cede a large area of land south of the Danube to the Bulgars, a Slavic people with a Turkic aristocratic leadership, and in 811 they ceded still more territory after a Byzantine army was crushed by Khan Krum with the death of Emperor Nicephorus I – the first time a Roman or Byzantine ruler had been killed in battle in nearly five centuries.

In the 860s Khan Boris of Bulgaria was converted to the Orthodox faith by the famous Greek bishop St. Methodius...

Methodius and his brother St. Cyril were Greeks from Thessalonica who knew Slavonic because of the large numbers of Slavs living in their homeland. St. Cyril had already conducted an important diplomatic and missionary mission to the Khazars north of the Black Sea. Then he and his brother were invited to the court of Prince Rostislav of Moravia, who was interested in his land becoming Christian. In preparation for the trip, and with the blessing of St. Photius, St. Cyril created a Glagolitic alphabet for the Slavs and translated a selection from the Gospels for use in a Slavic liturgy. Decades later, Glagolitic was replaced by Cyrillic, a simpler alphabet in which the Old Slavonic Bible and liturgy common to all the Slavic Orthodox nations was written. In 863 the brothers set out for Moravia, but encountered difficulties from the German bishops who were pressing in from the West and strongly opposed a Slavic-language mission to the Slavs. Pope Nicholas I summoned the brothers to Rome, where St. Cyril died in 869. The following popes, Adrian II and John VIII, supported Methodius' Slavonic mission. Nevertheless, he was cast into prison on his return to Moravia, and with his disciples had to flee to Bulgaria, while the German bishops of Passau and Salzburg persuaded Pope Stephen V to ban Slavonic as a liturgical language (reversing the decision of his predecessor, John VIII).

In 865 Tsar Boris was baptized, probably by St. Photius, and took the name Michael after his godfather, the Emperor Michael. In this way the foundation was laid, not only of the Christianization of Bulgaria, but also of the unification of its two constituent peoples, the Bulgar ruling class and the Slavic peasants, who had been at loggerheads up to that time.

However, Tsar Boris-Michael wanted the Bulgarian Church to be autonomous, a request that the Mother Church of Constantinople denied. So, taking advantage of the rift that was opening up between the Eastern and Western Churches and empires, he turned to Pope Nicholas I with a series of questions on the faith and a request that Bulgaria be given a patriarch. The Pope did not grant the latter request, but in other respects (for example, in relation to permissible food and clothing) he showed greater flexibility than the Byzantines<sup>372</sup>, and Boris was sufficiently encouraged by his reply to expel the Greek clergy and allow Roman missionaries – with the new Frankish heresy of the Filioque - into his land.

Since the Bulgarian Church was clearly within the jurisdiction of Constantinople, the Pope's mission to Bulgaria was already a canonical transgression and an early manifestation of his claim to universal dominion in the Church. It would never have happened if the West had recognised the authority of the East Roman Emperor, as the Popes had done in earlier centuries. The same could be said of the later expulsion of Saints Cyril and Methodius from Moravia by jealous German bishops – these were all fruits, in the ecclesiastical sphere, of that division that had first begun in the political sphere, when the Pope crowned Charlemagne Emperor of the Romans.

After some turmoil, the Bulgarian Church was firmly re-established within the Eastern Church and Empire with its see in Ohrid. A pagan reaction was crushed, the Scriptures and services were translated into Slavonic by the disciples of St. Methodius, Saints Clement and Nahum, and a vast programme for the training of native clergy was initiated. The conversion of the Slavs to Orthodoxy began in earnest...

\*

However, the virus of national self-assertion had been sown in Bulgaria almost simultaneously with the Christian faith, and during the reign of St. Boris' youngest son, Symeon, Bulgaria was almost continuously at war with the Empire. Autonomy for a native Bulgarian Church was now no longer the issue: the Bulgarian khans now wanted to take the place of the Byzantine emperors. He was opposed by St. Nicholas the Mystic, who refused him the title of "Emperor of the Romans" and vigorously defended the authority of the East Roman Emperor. "The power of the Emperor," he said, "which extends over the whole earth, is the only power established by the Lord of the world upon the earth." Again, he wrote to Tsar Symeon in 913: "God has submitted

---

<sup>372</sup> Dvorkin, op. cit., p. 574.

the other sceptres of the world to the heritage of the Lord and Master, that is, the Universal Emperor in Constantinople, and does not allow his will to be despised. He who tries by force to acquire for himself the Imperial dignity is no longer a Christian".<sup>373</sup>

The patriarch called the king "a tyrant and rebel who deserved the severest penalty. The existence of an independent Bulgaria violated the principle of a single Orthodox empire as an icon of the Kingdom of God, and therefore the Bulgarians, as soon as they achieved a schism in the empire, deserved punishment. And although these wars continued to be seen as fratricidal..., they had to 'unite the divided under one yoke'."<sup>374</sup>

Symeon assumed the title of "tsar of the Bulgarians and the Romans" and unsuccessfully tried to capture Tsargrad (Constantinople). He continued to act like a new Constantine, transferring the capital of the new Christian kingdom from Pliska, with its pagan and Turkic associations, to the more Slavic and Christian Preslav on the model of St. Constantine's moving his capital from Rome to Constantinople. And during the reign of his more peaceful son Peter (927-969) the Byzantines conceded both the title of "basileus" to the Bulgarian tsar.<sup>375</sup> And in 932 the title "patriarch" was granted to the first-hierarchy of the Bulgarian Church, Damian. So there were now *three* officially recognized Christian emperors of the one Christian empire, with capitals at Constantinople, Aachen and Preslav!

However, after the death of Peter, in about 971, the Bulgarian kingdom was conquered by the Byzantines, as a consequence of which the local Bulgarian dioceses were again subjected to the Constantinopolitan Patriarchate. But then there was a resurgence of Bulgarian power in Macedonia under Tsar Samuel, who established his capital and patriarchate in Ohrid. But this did not last long either. In 1014 the Bulgarian armies were decisively defeated by Emperor Basil "the Bulgar-slayer", leading to the end of the Bulgarian empire and its re-absorption into the Roman Empire. The Ohrid diocese's autocephaly was still recognized, but it was demoted from a patriarchate to an archbishopric. And so Bulgarian nationalism was dealt a decisive blow in both Church and State...

Now it has been claimed that the task assigned to Bulgaria and King Boris by God "could be realized only by an independent, autonomous church, since, if the nation were to be dependent on another people in church matters, it could easily lose its political independence along with its religious independence and disappear from the face of the earth."<sup>376</sup>

Perhaps; and yet the idea that each nation-state has to have its own independent church was a new one in the history of Christianity. As we have

---

<sup>373</sup> St. Nicholas the Mystic, in Fomin and Fomina, *op. cit.* vol. I, p. 107.

<sup>374</sup> Svetlana Lurye, "Translatio Imperii", *Epokha*, N 10, pp. 19-20.

<sup>375</sup> Peter's legitimacy was also recognized by the greatest of the Bulgarian saints, John of Rila.

<sup>376</sup> Archimandrite Doctor Seraphim, "The Life of King Boris-Michael, Converter of the Bulgarian People to Christianity", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 35, N 3, May-June, 1985, p. 14.

seen, as a result of the conquest of certain parts of the Roman Empire by barbarian leaders, independent national Churches had sprung up in various regions, from Georgia in the East to England in the West. But the idea of a single Christian commonwealth of nations looking up to its father in God, the Christian Roman Emperor, was never completely lost; and there was still the feeling that *de jure* all Christian nations owed him some kind of allegiance. We see this as far afield as Scotland in the far north-west, where St. Columba anointed a king directly in the Roman autocratic tradition, and the Arabian kingdom of Himyar in the far south-east, where the anointing was carried out by an Italian bishop owing allegiance to the Byzantine emperor in Constantinople. It was the Bulgarian emperors who made the first serious breach in this internationalist ideal; for they called their kingdom, not by the internationalist name of Rome, but “the kingdom of the Bulgarians and the Greeks” – in other words, a national kingdom composed of two ethnic nations, with the Bulgarians as the dominant ethnic element. Coups by individuals were commonplace in Byzantine history: the attempt to place one *nation* above all others was new...

On the other hand, it could be argued that the Bulgarians’ ecclesiastical nationalism, as expressed in their insistence on having an autocephalous Church independent of Constantinople, was a natural reaction to the Greeks’ no less dangerous and prideful insistence that their empire “extends over the whole earth, and is the only power established by the Lord of the world upon the earth”. The idea of the Roman universal empire was an essentially pagan one that refused to die out when the empire became Christian. It was unsustainable, not only for the obvious reason that the Byzantine Empire never ruled the whole world and towards its end ruled only a tiny area much smaller than, for example, that of the Russian Great Prince, but also because the legitimacy of Orthodox Christian kingdoms, such as those of England or Spain or Georgia, neither derived from, nor depended on, Byzantium in any real way.

The idea of the New Rome as the *primus inter pares* was acceptable to all the Orthodox Christian States: the idea that the legitimacy of their States, and the independence of their Churches, depended completely on their submission to, or recognition by, New Rome, was not.

With the single exception of Serbian autocephaly (and that only at the beginning), the Byzantines always resisted the bestowal of ecclesiastical autocephaly, ignoring the obvious benefits that an independent Church would bring in promoting the Faith in a newly Christianized kingdom. They tended to offer autocephaly only when they had no alternative, as a bargaining chip in negotiations with a powerful rival or needed ally – and withdrew the favour immediately they themselves felt stronger and no longer in need of allies.

In this way Byzantine imperial nationalism elicited anti-imperial nationalisms among the Balkan Orthodox. It was quenched temporarily after the Fall of the City in 1453, but came to life again in the early nineteenth century in the form of “the great idea” of Free Greek quasi-imperial nationalism. Greek

and Balkan nationalisms have continued to cause innumerable inter-Orthodox quarrels down the centuries, to the tragic detriment of the universalist idea of Holy Orthodoxy....

## 21. NEW ROME, OLD ROME AND THE GERMANS

As we have seen, St. Photius had first broken relations with Old Rome because of heresy, but then restored relations when the heresy was conquered. However, from the 880s the papacy entered a period of degradation unparalleled in its pre-schism history. Heather ascribes this to two interrelated causes. First, the papacy was now, not only a Church, but also a State, the Republic of St. Peter, with vast assets bequeathed to it by Charlemagne and his successors. With this came all the temptations of political power, and a consequent increase of violence as different factions, Italian and German, and different families, especially the Tusculani and the Crescentii families, struggled for control of the see, and through it, its material assets. Secondly, from the 880s the Carolingian empire entered a further period of disintegration, which meant that the papacy lost both a whip to keep its political factions within the bounds of decency, and the broader West European stage upon which the Carolingians had allowed it to play so important a role.<sup>377</sup>

“The Popes had long since forgotten St. Paul’s injunction (2 Timothy 2:4) ‘not to entangle themselves in the affairs of this life.’ Their greediness of power was, naturally enough, not confined to ecclesiastical concerns; they strove also to become powerful political agents. Formosus was succeeded by Stephen VI (for Boniface the Sixth’s pontificate of fifteen days can scarcely be counted), who [in 897], being a fanatic partisan of the opposite political faction, had Formosus untombed, dressed in pontifical robes, arraigned, condemned, deposed, mutilated, and finally flung into the Tiber! This behaviour seems not exactly to be in accordance with the character of a ‘Vicar of Christ.’ However, the Papists have to settle this question. We prefer examining the Council convened by Stephen for the before-mentioned purpose. In this Council, Stephen declared all ordinations made by Formosus to be *invalid*, and acted accordingly. This was not a private, but an *official act*, attended by *official consequences*, and, what is more serious, it was an official act based on a *dogmatic error*; in fact, it was an anticipation of the *heresy of John Huss*. And the [Roman] Church continued for two years in this heresy! Yet the Romans are bound to believe that Stephen was an ‘infallible’ Pope. Pope John IX annulled, in 898, the decrees of Stephen, declared the ordinations made by Formosus to be valid, and reinstated the expelled clergy. The only difficulty is to come here to a decision which of the two ‘Infallibles’ is the genuine article, and even then the base article must be believed by the Romans to be *infallible*. Who is able to get out of this maze of contradictions?

“From 904-963, the *πορνοκρατία*, or ‘reign of prostitutes,’ disgraced the Papal throne. From Sergius III to John XII eleven monsters of lewdness and profligacy ruled the Church of God, persons utterly indifferent to religion and poisoning Christendom by their bad example. Sergius III had no scruple in sanctioning the sacrilegious marriage of the Byzantine Emperor Leo VI, but the Patriarch Nicholas Mysticus had vindicated the purity of the Church by

---

<sup>377</sup> Heather, op. cit., pp. 361-373.

excommunicating the Emperor, who, with the help of Pope Sergius, deposed the undaunted and faithful Patriarch. If the Roman Church was the true Church, and the Pope the factotum of this Church, where was the Holy Ghost governing the Church during these sixty years?

“Now let us cast a glance on the Patriarchs of Constantinople during the period of the Roman *πορνοκρατία*. All of them, six in number, were men of an exemplary sanctity, with the solitary exception of Theophlyact, who was a creature of Pope John XII, and was installed by the Papal Legates. He was the worst Patriarch that ever sat on the Constantinopolitan throne. Do these contrasts not convey any lesson to us? With which of the two parties was God?”<sup>378</sup>

The real ruler of Rome in his period was the Tusculani clan member Marozia, an evil woman who made, unmade, lived with and begat a series of popes.<sup>379</sup> However, in 932 Marozia’s son Alberic imprisoned his mother, took over the government of Rome, reformed its monasteries and gave it a short period of peace and relative respectability. Alberic, writes Llewellyn, “who styled himself as ruler by the grace of the Lord and had such close contacts with the Byzantine world, may have seen himself as custodian of the imperial and Roman concept of Christian rulership that had been inherent in Pepin’s patriciate and Charlemagne’s imperial title – a title that could only validly be realized by denying all initiative to the clergy.”<sup>380</sup>

But in 955 he died and his son Octavian became Pope John XII at the age of sixteen. “Even for a pope of that period,” writes De Rosa, “he was so bad that the citizens were out for his blood. He had invented sins, they said, not known since the beginning of the world, including sleeping with his mother. He ran a harem in the Lateran Palace. He gambled with pilgrims’ offerings. He kept a stud of two thousand horses which he fed on almonds and figs steeped in wine. He rewarded the companions of his nights of love with golden chalices from St. Peter’s. He did nothing for the most profitable tourist trade of the day, namely, pilgrimages. Women in particular were warned not to enter St. John Lateran if they prized their honour; the pope was always on the prowl. In front of the high altar of the mother church of Christendom, he even toasted the Devil...”<sup>381</sup>

Retribution was coming, however. Berengar of Lombardy advanced on Rome, and the pope in desperation appealed to Berengar’s feudal lord, Otto of Germany. This was Otto’s opportunity to seize that imperial crown, which would give him complete dominance over his rivals. He marched into Italy, drove out Berengar and was crowned Emperor by John on February 2, 962.

---

<sup>378</sup> Overbeck, *op. cit.* See Alberto Reche Ontillera, “Vengeance at the Vatican: The Cadaver Synod”, *National Geographic History*, January/February, 2016, pp. 14-17.

<sup>379</sup> It has been suggested by J.N.D. Kelly that Marozia’s deeds were the origin of the legend of the female Pope Joan (*The Oxford Dictionary of Popes*, quoted in Louth, *op. cit.*, p. 207).

<sup>380</sup> Llewellyn, *The Dark Ages in Rome*, p. 310.

<sup>381</sup> Peter de Rosa, *Vicars of Christ*, London: Bantam Press, 1988, p. 51.

However, when Otto demanded that the inhabitants of the Papal states should swear an oath of allegiance to him, Otto, and not to the pope, thereby treating the Papal states as one of his dependencies, the Pope took fright, transferred his support to Berengar and called on both the Hungarians and the Byzantines to help drive Otto out of Italy. But Otto saw this as treachery on the part of the pope; he summoned a synod in Rome, deposed John, and placed Leo VIII in his place. Then he inserted a clause into his agreement with Leo whereby in future no pope was to be consecrated without taking an oath of loyalty to the Emperor.

As Bishop Liutprand of Cremona relates, the Council elected Leo VIII in his place, who, however, was forced to flee and take refuge with Otto by John XII's supporters. John was eventually murdered by a jealous husband who caught him *in flagrante* with his wife. The Romans then made a deacon to be Pope Benedict V. But the emperor and the other bishops, who recognized Leo VIII, accused Benedict of various things, which Benedict admitted. He was allowed to return to his rank of deacon and exiled to a monastery outside Rome, while all his other ordinations (to priest and bishop) were declared invalid.

During the Council of Verzy in 991, Archbishop Arnulf of Orleans (+1003AD) drew conclusions from the behaviour of John XII and his successors that were by no means compatible with the later doctrine of the infallibility of the Pope: "Looking at the actual state of the papacy, what do we behold?... Are there, indeed, any bold enough to maintain that the priests of the Lord over all the world are to take their law from monsters of guilt like these - men branded with ignominy, illiterate men, and ignorant alike of things human and divine? If, holy fathers, we be bound to weigh in the balance the lives, the morals, and attainments of the meanest candidate for the sacerdotal office, how much more ought we to look to the fitness of him who aspires to be the lord and master of all priests! Yet how would it fare with us, if it should happen that the man the most deficient in all these virtues, one so subject as not to be worthy of the lowest place among the priesthood, should be chosen to fill the highest place of all? What would you say of such an one, when you behold him sitting upon the Throne glittering in purple and gold? Must he not be the Antichrist, 'sitting in the Temple of God, and showing himself as God'? Verily such an one lacketh both wisdom and charity; he standeth in the temple as an image, as an idol, from which as from dead marble you would seek counsel.

"But the Church of God is not subject to a wicked pope; nor even absolutely, and on all occasions, to a good one. Let us rather in our difficulties resort to our brethren of Belgium and Germany than to that city, where all things are venal, where judgment and justice are bartered for gold. Let us imitate the great Church of Africa, which, in reply to the pretensions of the Roman Pontiff, deemed it inconceivable that the Lord should have invested any one person with his own plenary prerogative of judicature, and yet have denied it to the great congregation of his priests assembled in Council in different parts of the world. If it be true, as we are informed by common report, that there is in Rome scarcely a man acquainted with letters, - without which, as it is written, one

may scarcely be a doorkeeper in the House of God, - with what face may he who had himself learnt nothing set himself up for a teacher of others? In the simple priest ignorance is bad enough; but in the high priest of Rome, - in him to whom it is given to pass in review the faith, the lives, the morals, the discipline, of the whole body of the priesthood, yea, of the universal Church, ignorance is in nowise to be tolerated.... Why should he not be subject in judgment to those who, though lowest in place, are his superiors in virtue and in wisdom? Yea, not even he, the prince of the Apostles, declined the rebuke of Paul, though his inferior in place, and, saith the great Pope [St]. Gregory I [the Dialogist], 'if a bishop be in fault, I know not any one such who is not subject to the holy see; but if faultless, let every one understand that he is the equal of the Roman Pontiff himself, and as well qualified as he to give judgment in any matter.'<sup>382</sup>

Although Otto was crowned in Rome, he did not call himself "Emperor of the Romans", but preferred simply "emperor". This was probably because he did not wish to enter into a competition with the Byzantine emperor. It may also have been because he had little admiration for Old Rome, just as Old Rome had little time for him.<sup>383</sup> Thus he instructed his sword-bearer to stand behind him as he kneeled at the tomb of the Apostle. "For I know," he said, "only too well what my ancestors have experienced from these faithless Romans."<sup>384</sup>

In spite of that, Otto and his dynasty were more closely linked to Old Rome than Charlemagne had been. Janet Nelson writes: "Bishop Liutprand of Cremona saw Otto in the line of Constantine and Justinian, appointed by God to establish peace in this world. Returning from an embassy to Constantinople in 968, Liutprand denounced the ritual technology of the 'Greeks' [i.e. the machines used to dazzle foreign visitors at the imperial court] as empty form: the substance of true Roman emperorship now lay in the West. Otto, legislating in Italy 'as a holy emperor' (*ut imperator sanctus*) gave colour to Liutprand's claim. In the *Ottonianum*, he confirmed the privileges of the Roman Church under his imperial protectorship."<sup>385</sup>

Otto gained the Byzantines' recognition of his imperial title, and in 972 married his son, Otto II, to Princess Theophanou, the niece of Emperor John Tzimiskes, in Rome. Theophanou then introduced another Byzantine, John Philagathos, as godfather of her son, Otto III. He became head of the royal finances and then - Pope John XVI, which led to a sharp increase in Byzantine influence in the western empire.<sup>386</sup> Also eclipsed - temporarily - was the new

---

<sup>382</sup> Archbishop Arnulf, in Schaff's *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 4, pp. 290-292.

<sup>383</sup> See Charles Davis, "The Middle Ages", *op. cit.*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>384</sup> Richard Chamberlin, "The Ideal of Unity", *History Today*, vol. 53 (11), November, 2003, p. 62.

<sup>385</sup> Nelson, "Kingship and Empire", *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought*, c. 350 - c. 1450, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 245.

<sup>386</sup> Tom Holland, *Millenium*, London: Abacus Books, 2009, pp. 75-76. Byzantine influence had already been increasing under Alberic, whose "insistence on the forms of Byzantine administration and court hierarchy... checked the growth of any real feudal devolution of

papist theory of Church-State relations. Thus in an ivory bas-relief Christ is shown crowning Otto II and Theophanou – a Byzantine tenth-century motif expressing the traditionally Byzantine concept of Church-State symphony.<sup>387</sup>

In 991 Theophanou died and Otto III became Emperor under the regency of his grandmother. Otto, as Tom Holland writes, “was nothing if not a Roman emperor. He lived on the Palatine Hill, just as Augustus had done a thousand years before him; he revived the titles of ‘consul’ and ‘senator’. He had himself betrothed to a princess from the Second Rome, Constantinople. His death in 2002, before his marriage could serve to join the eastern and western empires, left hanging one of history’s great ‘what-ifs’. Otto III’s ambition of reviving the Roman empire had been the great theme of his reign. Tantalising, then, to ponder what might have happened if he had succeeded in joining it to the eastern Roman empire – the empire that, unlike his own, could trace a direct line of descent from ancient Rome.”<sup>388</sup>

Otto, writes Jean-Paul Allard, “dreamed of reuniting the two empires into one one day, so as to restore universal peace – a new imperial peace comparable to that of Augustus, a Roman Empire which would embrace once more the *orbis terrarum* before the end of the world that was announced for the year 1000.”<sup>389</sup> And to signify that the *Renovatio Imperii Romani* had truly begun, he moved his court from Aachen to Rome, introduced Byzantine ceremonial into his court on the Aventine hill, gave a stimulus to the rediscovery of Roman law, and began negotiations with the Byzantine Emperor for the hand of a daughter or niece of the *basileus*. This union would enable him to unite the two empires in a peaceful, traditional manner...

The plan for union with Byzantium was foiled through the death of Otto’s fiancée before her arrival in Rome. However, Otto sought and followed the advice of holy hermits such as Nilus of Calabria and Romuald of Ravenna, as a result of which Byzantine influence continued to spread outwards from the court. And when Gerbert of Aurillac became the first Frankish Pope in 999 and took the name Sylvester II, he revived memories, in those brought up on the forged *Donation of Constantine*, of the symphonic relationship between St. Constantine and Pope Sylvester I.<sup>390</sup>

---

government such as the rest of Europe [outside Rome] was experiencing” (Peter Llewellyn, *Rome in the Dark Ages*, London: Constable, 1996, p. 307).

<sup>387</sup> “The image,” as Jean-Paul Allard writes, “was more eloquent than any theological treatise. It illustrated a principle that the papacy and the Roman Church have never accepted, but which was taken for granted in Byzantium and is still held in Orthodoxy today: Christ and Christ alone crowns the sovereigns; power comes only from God, without the intercession of an institutional representative of the Church, be he patriarch or pope. The anointing and crowning of the sovereign do not create the legitimacy of his power; but have as their sole aim the manifestation of [this legitimacy] in the eyes of the people.” (“Byzance et le Saint Empire: Theopano, Otton III, Benzon d’Albe”, in Germain Ivanov-Trinadtsaty, *Regards sur l’Orthodoxie* (Points of View on Orthodoxy), Lausanne: L’Age d’Homme, 1997, p. 39.

<sup>388</sup> Holland, “Rome Undead”, *New Statesman*, May 16-22, 2014, p. 24.

<sup>389</sup> Allard, *op. cit.*, p. 40

<sup>390</sup> R. Lacy & D. Danzinger, *The Year 1000*, London: Little, Brown and Company, 1999, p. 190.

However, Sylvester loved the true symphony, not the fake variety: in 1001 he persuaded Otto to issue an act demonstrating that the *Donation of Constantine* was a forgery.<sup>391</sup> Still more significantly, this very un-papist Pope did not believe that he was above the judgement of his fellow-bishops. Thus he wrote in 997: "The judgement of God is higher than that of Rome... When Pope Marcellinus offered incense to Jupiter [in 303], did all the other bishops have to do likewise? If the bishop of Rome himself sins against his brother or refuses to heed the repeated warnings of the Church, he, the bishop of Rome himself, must according to the commandments of God be treated as a pagan and a publican; for the greater the dignity, the greater the fall. If he declares us unworthy of his communion because none of us will join him against the Gospel, he will not be able to separate us from the communion of Christ."<sup>392</sup>

This must count as a formal abjuration of the papist heresy. Unfortunately, Sylvester was not imitated by his successors. But the courage of his right confession deserves appreciation. Indeed, by the year 1000 there was little formal papism in the west: it was the Byzantine ideal of "symphonic" Church-State relations that had triumphed almost everywhere. Even in those parts of the West where normal government had broken down, such as France, the ideal was still alive. Paradoxically, the very breakdown of order appears to have stimulated a kind of nostalgia for the old forms, when emperors and patriarchs ordered the Christian world between them...

Otto and Sylvester imitated the Byzantine concept of a family of kings under one Christian Emperor. Thus they handed out crowns to King Stephen of Hungary and the Polish Duke Boleslav. And in a Gospel book made for Otto four states - Roma, Gallia, Germania and Sclavinia (Poland) - are represented as women doing homage to him. "Otto even opened up friendly relations with Vladimir, prince of the powerful Russian state of Kiev, who had accepted his Christianity from Byzantium. One can only speculate how different the future history of Eastern Europe might have been had Otto's policy of pacification been followed by subsequent German rulers..."<sup>393</sup>

---

<sup>391</sup> Charles Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 84. In this exposure he was correct, even if he was wrong in his dating of the forgery to the middle of the tenth century (Allard, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-46).

<sup>392</sup> Pope Sylvester, *Letter 192*, in Fr. Andrew Phillips, "The Three Temptations of Christ and the Mystical Sense of English History", *Orthodox England*, vol. I, N 2, December, 1997, p. 6. Sylvester wrote this when he was Archbishop of Ravenna, a see that had always shown independence in relation to Rome (and remained so until the death of Henry IV's anti-Pope Clement III (Guibert) in Ravenna in 1100). Thus at the hour of his death, Sylvester's predecessor, St. Maurus of Ravenna (+671), "called all his priests, and weeping before them, and seeking their forgiveness, he said to them: 'I am entering the path of death, I call to witness and warn you, do not place yourselves under the Roman yoke. Choose a pastor for yourselves, and let him be consecrated by his bishops. Seek the pallium from the emperor. For on whatever day you are subjugated to Rome, you will not be whole.' And with these words he died; and he was buried in the narthex of Blessed Apollinaris, in a wonderful tomb." (From *The Book of the Pontiffs of the Church of Ravenna by Andreas Agnellus* [+846])

<sup>393</sup> J.B. Morrall, "Otto III: an Imperial Ideal", *History Today*, 14 January, 2011.

The Ottonian period in the history of the papacy has been viewed in sharply contrasting ways. Voltaire said that Pope John XII's summoning of the Germans to Rome was the source of all the subsequent woes.<sup>394</sup> However, an unprejudiced view must accept that the intervention of the Ottonian monarchy in Roman affairs was not wholly unbeneficial. *Someone* had to put a stop to the scandalous degeneration of the first see of Christendom - and if the Ottonians did not succeed in completely cleansing the Augean stables, it was hardly their fault alone. For the corruption in the Eternal City ran deep: in 991, at a Council in Rheims attended by English as well as French bishops, Arnulph, bishop of Orleans, more or less accused Pope John XV of being the Antichrist...<sup>395</sup>

At the same time, the rivalries between the Tusculani and Crescentii made the city virtually ungovernable in this period. The Ottonians at least seem to have had good intentions, and the partnership of the German-Greek Otto III and the Frankish Sylvester II - a collaboration "unique in medieval history", according to J.B. Morrall<sup>396</sup> - looked on the point of restoring a true unity between the Old and the New Romes. Indeed, for a short period it even looked as if Byzantinism might triumph in the West...

"But the Romans," writes Chamberlin, "rose against [Otto], drove him and his pope out of the city, and reverted to murderous anarchy. He died outside the city in January 1002, not quite twenty-two years of age."<sup>397</sup>

Sylvester survived his brilliant protégé by barely sixteen months [he died on May 12, 2003]. His epitaph summed up the sorrow that afflicted all thoughtful men at the ending of a splendid vision: 'The world, on the brink of triumph, in peace now departed, grew contorted in grief and the reeling Church forgot her rest.' The failure of Otto III and Sylvester marked the effective end of the medieval dream of a single state in which an emperor ruled over the bodies of all Christian men, and a pope over their souls."<sup>398</sup>

"Otto transposed political and religious universalism. In his legislation he evoked Justinian. Denouncing the *Donation of Constantine* as the product of papal arrogance, Otto 'slave of the Apostles' stole the clothes of papal humility. Otto died young and his successor Henry II preferred to stay north of the Alps. But Otto's imperial vision never entirely faded. His successors perpetuated it in their symbols of state. Henry II's mantle, still to be seen at Bamberg, is embroidered with the stars of heaven in imitation of Byzantine imperial claims to cosmic authority. More importantly, Otto had forged the bond between the *regnum* and the empire so strongly that it would not be broken even by rulers

---

<sup>394</sup> Voltaire, *Essay on History and Customs*, chapter 36. See Cyriaque Lampryllos, *La Mystification Fatale* (The Fatal Mystification), Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1987, pp. 59-60.

<sup>395</sup> John Eadie, "The Man of Sin", in *Greek Text Commentaries: On Thessalonians*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1877, 1979, p. 341.

<sup>396</sup> Morrall, *op. cit.*

<sup>397</sup> He died of smallpox. See Richard Cavendish, "The Death of Emperor Otto III", *History Today*, 13 December, 2001. (V.M.)

<sup>398</sup> Chamberlin, "The Ideal of Unity", *op. cit.*, p. 62.

like Henry II with little interest in a Roman power-base. Conrad I, once elected king, was already an emperor-elect and the East Frankish realm only one of the *regna* he would rule. His son Henry III immediately on Conrad's death took the title, no longer of 'king of the Franks' but 'king of the Romans'. When, later, there was a German kingdom, its ruler was never officially entitled 'king of the Germans'. German kingship had become inseparable from Roman emperorship..."<sup>399</sup>

The Holy Roman Empire of the Ottonians and their German and Spanish successor dynasties survived, amazingly, until 1806. Voltaire famously said it was "neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire". But under Otto III it had been, briefly, all three, a not unworthy consort to its greater eastern neighbour...

---

<sup>399</sup> Nelson, *op. cit.*, pp. 245-246.

## 22. NEW ROME AND THE RUSSIANS

In 860 a new nation which St. Photius called “Ros” (Ρωσ) – “an obscure nation, a nation of no account, a nation ranked among slaves.. a nation dwelling somewhere far from our country, barbarous, nomadic, armed with arrogance, unwatched, unchallenged, leaderless” - appeared in the waters surrounding Constantinople and ravaged the suburbs. They came from Russia, but were probably Scandinavian Vikings by race (the Finns call the Swedes “Rossi”, and the Estonians call them “Rootsi”, to this day). The invaders were defeated, and in the treaty which followed the ceasefire the Russians agreed to accept Christianity. A large number of Kievan merchants were catechized and baptized in the suburb of St. Mamas.

Two years after the defeat of 860, the Slavs of the northern city of Novgorod made an unprecedented change in the form of their political organisation, inviting the Scandinavian Vikings under Rurik to rule over them: “Our land is great and abundant, but there is no order in it - come and rule over us.” As N.M. Karamzin writes: “The citizens perhaps remembered how useful and peaceful the rule of the Normans had been: their need for good order and quiet made them forget their national pride, and the Slavs, ‘convinced,’ as tradition relates, ‘by the advice of the Novgorod elder Gostomysl,’ demanded rulers from the Varyangians.”<sup>400</sup> Thus by inviting the Vikings to rule over them, the Russian Slavs not only ceased to be “leaderless”, but also triumphed at one stroke over egoism and self-will in both the individual and the national spheres. As New Hieromartyr Andronicus of Perm wrote: “At a time when, in the other peoples of Europe, the power of the princes and kings was subduing the peoples to themselves, appearing as external conquerors of the disobedient, but weak, - we, on the other hand, ourselves created our own power and ourselves placed the princes, the prototypes of our tsars, over ourselves. That is how it was when Rurik and his brothers were recognised by Ilmen lake. We placed them to rule over ourselves at a time when we had only just begun to be conscious of ourselves as a people, and when our statehood was just beginning to come into being”.<sup>401</sup>

In 866, writes Archbishop Averky, “two of Rurik’s companions, Askold and Dir, taking control of Kiev, undertook a raid on Constantinople. Along with a multitude of warriors on 200 boats, they approached Constantinople itself, striking fear in the hearts of its residents. Emperor Michael III and Patriarch Photios, along with a multitude of worshipers, cried out in prayer to God to save their capital from the wild barbarians. Upon the conclusion of all-night vigil in Blachernae Church, they took out the veil of the Theotokos which was kept there and went in a procession of the cross to the shores of the Bosphorus, immersing the garment into the water. The sea began to roil with large waves, which destroyed and sank many Russian boats. Many died, while the rest fled, profoundly impressed by the Divine wrath that smote them. This

---

<sup>400</sup> Karamzin, *Predania Vekov* (The Traditions of the Ages), Moscow: Pravda, 1989, p. 65.

<sup>401</sup> St. Andronicus, *O Tserkvi, Rossii* (On the Church and Russia), Fryazino, 1997, p. 132.

caused the massive conversion of Russians to Christ. 'The people of Rus,' wrote Patriarch Photios, 'set aside the dishonorable superstitions of heathenism and took up the pure and chaste Christian faith, and, receiving a bishop and teacher, conduct themselves as obedient children and friends.' Further, he writes that they accepted a bishop and the Christian rites (*Epistle of Photios*, Stritt Memor. pop. 2, 957). Indeed, a Greek bishop soon arrived in Kiev and began to preach Christ, as Emperor Constantine wrote: 'When the bishop arrived in the capital of the Rus, the king of the Rus gathered his council (*veche*).'

"There were a great many people here: the Prince himself presided with the boyars and elders, who were from ancient times more than anyone bound to paganism. They began to discuss their faith and Christianity, and, inviting the archpastor, asked what he wishes to teach them. The bishop [called Michael] opened the Gospel and began to tell them about the Savior and His miracles, and about miracles performed by God in the Old Testament. The people of Rus, listening to the preacher, said 'If we do not see something akin to that which happened to the youths in the ovens, we do not wish to believe.' The servant of God was not perturbed, he boldly responded: 'We are nothing before God, but tell me, what do you want?' They asked that the Gospel be thrown into the fire, and vowed to convert to the Christian God if it remained undamaged. Then the bishop declared: 'Lord, glorify Your name before these people!' and place the Book in the fire. Soon, the fire burned the wood, but the Gospel itself remained whole, even the ribbons binding it. Seeing this, the coarse men, confounded by this miracle, began to accept baptism (Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *On the Administration of the Empire*, c. 29).

"This was in the year 867. Apparently, this was when the princes were baptized, too. In any case, a church was later built in honor of St Nicholas upon the tomb of one of them, Askold, which gives reason to believe he was baptized with that name.<sup>402</sup>

"Subsequently, under Prince Oleg, included among the dioceses of the Patriarchate of Constantinople was a Russian Diocese.

"During Igor's reign, as evidenced by text from the pact between the Rus and the Greeks, the Rus were officially divided into those 'who accepted baptism' and 'the un-baptized,' and in fact the baptized recognized this pact with an oath given in the Cathedral of St Elias in Kiev. The fact that a cathedral already existed in Kiev suggests that other churches already existed there, too. Consequently, there was a significant number of Christians there already.

"The first herald of the general baptism of the people of Rus was Grand Duchess Olga. The chronicler praises her with enthusiasm and warmth,

---

<sup>402</sup> According to tradition, Princes Askold and Dir were later martyred. See Protopriest Lev Lebedev, "Pervoe Kreschenie Rusi i Muchenicheskij Podvig Pervogo Russkogo Gosudaria-Khristianina Oskol'da-Nikolaia Kievskogo" ("The First Baptism of Rus' and the Martyric Feat of the First Russian Christian Ruler, Askold-Nicholas of Kiev"), [http://catacomb.org.ua/rubr12/R13\\_22.htm](http://catacomb.org.ua/rubr12/R13_22.htm). (V.M.)

venerating her wisdom. In his depiction, she was for the Russian land “the morning star preceding the Sun, the early dawn preceding the day; she shone like the full moon in the night, shining among the heathens like a pearl.” Bestowed with a bright, incisive mind and seeing the sinless life of Christians, she submitted to the Gospel truths and, according to tradition, herself traveled to Constantinople in 957, where she was baptized by Patriarch Polyeuctos, while Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenetos himself was her godfather. The Patriarch blessed Olga with a cross which she then brought back with her to Kiev, and foretold that her descendents would achieve glory. Olga gave him in return a gift of a gold platter with the depiction of the Savior in precious stones. Indubitably, many members of her entourage were also baptized. Returning to Kiev, she earnestly began spreading the Christian faith, which the *Stepennaya Kniga* [Book of Degrees of Royal Genealogy] attests to: ‘Many, wondering at her [Olga’s] words, having yet heard them before, received the word of God with love from her mouth, and were baptized.’ For this, and for her lofty Christian sensibility, the Church glorified Grand Duchess Olga and commemorates her on July 11 (o.s.).

“And so, gradually, firm foundations were laid down for the conversion of the entire Russian people to Christ, which finally occurred in the year 988 under the grandson of St Olga, Prince Vladimir, Equal-to-the-Apostles. So the Sun as described by the chronicler, was preceded by the early dawn, Olga, and was St Vladimir himself.

“Constantine the Great was for the Roman Empire what Prince Vladimir was to be for Rus, for the latter performed the great work of converting the entire Russian people to Christ. His life is exceptionally instructive for us. He clearly attests to the regenerative power of Christian teaching; how – when it is taken to heart and brought to life – it can utterly transform the human soul. The pre-baptism Vladimir and post-baptism Vladimir were two completely different people. At first brooding, cruel, suspicious, coarse, a lustful barbarian, after his baptism he becomes a tender, welcoming prince, full of love and mercy, a true father of his subjects. Vladimir the Beautiful Sun is the name given to him which characterizes the second part of his life.

“The first years of his reign, Vladimir was occupied with bloody wars and lived like the most sinful pagan. Defeating his brothers in battle, whom he had fought to gain power, he became the sole ruler of the Kievan Duchy. But his conscience gave him no respite, and he attempted to find peace by erecting new idols on the banks of the Dniepr and Volkhov Rivers, adorning them with gold and silver, and making abundant sacrifices before them. He even made human sacrifices, which apparently became the turning point in Vladimir’s soul and forced him to consider changing his faith.

“After his defeat of the Yatvags, it was decided that the gods must be thanked through human sacrifice. The lot fell to a handsome young man, a Christian named Ioann. His father, Feodor, did not wish to give up his son to be sacrificed to idols. The angered mob broke into their home with weapons,

demanding that the father surrender his son. The father, standing on an elevated balcony of his house with his son, calmly responded: 'If your gods are truly gods, let them send one of their own to take my son, why do you ask for him?' The aggravated pagans then destroyed the pillars under the balcony, and father and son died. The holiday of these first Russian martyrs, Ioann and Feodor, is celebrated on July 12.

"This event inflicted great spiritual pain on Vladimir and instilled doubt in the truth of pagan beliefs. His soul languished, seeking succor and peace, and he remembered great Olga, 'the wisest of all,' and her God, the God of the Greek Christians. According to the chronicler, representatives of neighboring faiths visited Vladimir proposing that he adopt their religion. The first to come were the Volga Bulgars, who confessed Mohammedanism, and began to praise their faith. Vladimir did not like their practice of circumcision and ban on drinking wine. Latin missionaries from the Roman pope came and spoke about the grandeur of the unseen God, and the nothingness of the idols, but the glorious prince, having had enough of the power-hungry politics of the pope, did not give them much time to speak, but sent them away with the words: 'Go back where you came from: our fathers did not take their faith from the pope.' Then the Khazar Jews came, who said that they believe in the one true God. Vladimir, hearing their words, suddenly asked 'Where is your homeland?' 'In Jerusalem,' they replied, 'but God, for the sins of our fathers, deprived us of a fatherland and scattered us throughout the world.' 'How can you teach others,' retorted Vladimir, 'having been rejected by God yourselves; if God loved you and your law, you would not be scattered throughout the foreign lands; do you wish the same for us?' So the clever words of Vladimir revealed his innate wisdom and clear, incisive intellect, qualities which justified his selection by Divine Providence as being the executor of the great work of converting the entire Russian people to Christ.

"Finally, after everyone else, Vladimir was visited by a scholarly Greek monk, a philosopher, as they called him. In a long speech, he showed the error of all other faiths and explained to him the Biblical history of Divine Providence's plan for mankind, beginning from the creation of the world and ending with the Dread Judgment, showing the prince an icon of the Day of Judgment. Vladimir, beholding the icon, sighed deeply and said: 'It is good for those on the right, and there is sorrow for those on the left.' 'If you desire to be with the righteous, be baptized,' said the preacher. 'I will wait for now,' replied the wise prince.

"Since Vladimir was considering the conversion to a new faith not only by himself but by his people, it was naturally important that the selection of a new religion would involve the best representatives of the people. So, dismissing the Greek emissary and rewarding him with abundant gifts, in 987, he gathered his council of boyars and shared with them the proposals of his recent visitors. 'Every one of them praises his own faith,' said the boyars, 'you have many wise men: send them to study whose faith is best.' Then Vladimir, heeding his advisor's words, sent 'ten men, good and wise,' so that they examined the novel

faiths in their own lands. They went to the lands of the Volga Bulgars, then to the Germans who confessed the Latin faith, and finally arrived in Constantinople, where they came to the magnificent Hagia Sophia Cathedral, where the patriarch himself was officiating at divine services. The grandeur of the temple, the service of the many clergymen, headed by the patriarch, the orderly, profoundly prayerful singing, virtually lifting worshipers up from the earth, the splendor and simplicity of the divine service brought the envoys into a holy ecstasy and shook them to their very core.

‘Returning home, they gave negative reviews of the Muslim and German services and recounted their experience of the Greek divine services with fervent elation. ‘When we came to the Greeks,’ said the envoys, ‘we were led to the place where they serve their God, and we did not know whether we were in heaven or still on earth: we cannot forget that beauty, for every man, having tasted the sweet, then disdains the bitter and we no longer wish to remain in our old pagan faith.’ Then the boyars and elders reminded the prince: ‘If the Greek law were not good, then your grandmother Olga, wisest of all, would not have adopted it.’ ‘Then we will accept christening, but where?’ asked Vladimir. ‘Wherever you wish,’ replied the boyars, presenting the prince the decision to manifest that which the people themselves, in the persons of their finest representatives, had decided – to adopt the holy faith of Christ from the Greeks.

“The warlike prince, though he decided to convert to Christianity, could not without Divine intervention, humble his soul to the degree sufficient to appeal to the Greeks with the meek request to be baptized and to be taught, together with his people, about the new faith. At the same time, his innate wisdom and refined political instinct told him asking this of the Greeks would not be without danger. Examples from history of the time indeed showed that peoples who adopted the Christian faith from another nation often found themselves not only in spiritual dependence upon them, but losing political and even sovereign independence. Vladimir, of course, did not want this for his people. And so, fearing that following spiritual submission would be the political submission of the Russian people to the Greeks, he decided to win the new faith with the power of arms. This explains everything that followed after Vladimir and his boyars decided to accept holy baptism, and what at first blush appears strange to many, and even antithetical to the Christian spirit.

“Vladimir decided to show the Greeks that, while accepting their faith, he did not intend to subject his state to them and wished to speak with them as an equal. So he set out for war, besieging the Greek city of Chersoneses (Korsun in Slavic), in the Tauride, then gave the vow to be baptized if he took the city. Having taken it, in order to further humble the Greeks, he demanded the co-Emperors Basil and Constantine their sister Anna’s hand in marriage. They responded that they would agree to give them their sister, but only on the condition that he be baptized, since their sister could not marry a pagan. ‘I have long studied and come to love the Greek law,’ replied Vladimir.

“Before Princess Anna’s arrival with the priests who were to perform the baptism then marriage, Vladimir underwent a miraculous experience which possesses profound spiritual meaning. By God’s will, he was stricken with a serious ocular sickness and was completely blinded. Blindness is an ailment in which a person is particularly sensitive to his vulnerability, his weakness, and is naturally humbled. For this reason, the Lord, wishing to make this proud prince a true servant to Him, sent him this temporary tribulation, so that before he receive the great Christian Mystery of baptism, he would be taught the great Christian virtue of humility, just as he had done to that proud persecutor of Christianity, Saul, designating him as His vessel for the conversion of pagans. Vladimir, just as Saul did in this condition, recognized his spiritual poverty, his weakness and nothingness, and with a feeling of profound humility prepared to receive the holy Sacrament. And a great miracle occurred over him which symbolized the opening of his spiritual eyes and rebirth. The moment the bishop of Korsun, during baptism, placed his hand on Vladimir (renamed Basil) as he emerged from the baptismal font, he instantly began to see and cried out joyously: ‘Now for the first time I see the true God!’ Many of his fellow warriors, stunned by this miracle, were also baptized, after which the wedding to Princess Anna took place.

“But Vladimir sought a better faith not only for himself but for his entire nation. Having himself experienced at the moment of his baptism all the power and grandeur of the Christian faith, he doubtless burned with greater fervor to hasten to illuminate with the light of faith in Christ and the greatness of the Christian faith his own people. And then, returning to Kiev, he first baptized his twelve sons, then decisively began destroying idols and spreading the Christian message to his people. The priests who came with Vladimir walked the streets of Kiev and taught the people about the truths of the new faith, which was already familiar to many Kievans.

“Vladimir then designated a specific day when all the residents of Kiev were to gather at the river to be baptized. Kievans joyfully rushed to fulfill the wish of their beloved prince, reasoning: ‘If this new faith were not better, the prince and boyars would not have adopted it.’ Countless crowds of people, old and young, mothers and children, appeared on the banks of the river. Soon the prince himself appeared along with the host of clergymen. Upon a predetermined signal, the mass of people entered the water: some up to their necks, some up to their chest, adults holding children in their arms, while the priests, standing on shore, read prayers, performing the great Mystery over them.

“During these holy moments, as the pious chronicler [Nestor] wrote, the heavens and the earth truly rejoiced to this enormous number of saved souls. Those being baptized rejoiced, those baptizing rejoiced, but more than anyone, the central figure in this celebration rejoiced, Holy Prince Vladimir. Raising his eyes to the sky, he spoke to God with love: ‘Oh God, Who hath created heaven and earth, look down, I beseech Thee, on this Thy new people, and grant them, o Lord, to know Thee as the true God, even as the other Christians nations have

known Thee. Confirm in them the true and inalterable faith, and aid me, o Lord, against the hostile adversary, so that, hoping in Thee and in Thy might, I may overcome his malice."<sup>403</sup>

Vladimir now devoted his whole life to the evangelization of his people. A.V. Kartashev writes: "To use the whole strength of state power, and all the resources of the state treasury, so that baptized people should feel, as the book of the *Acts of the Apostles* says, that they had 'one heart and one soul', and that they had 'everything in common'... He wanted to preserve and broaden the common feast and common joy of brother-loving Christian life."<sup>404</sup>

Of course, the consolidation of the victory of the true faith, and the transformation of Russia into Holy Russia, required many more centuries of spiritual and political struggle as the autocracy established itself over its internal and external rivals. But "the real state life of Rus'," writes St. John Maximovich, "begins with Vladimir the Saint. The princes who were before him were not so much ruler-lords as conquerors, for whom the establishment of good order in their country was less important than subduing the rich country to themselves and forcing it to pay some tribute. Even Svyatoslav preferred to live in Bulgaria, which he had conquered, and not in his own capital. It was Christianity, which was brought into Russian first by Olga, who had great influence on her eldest grandsons Yaropolk and Oleg, and then finally by St. Vladimir the Beautiful Sun, who baptised Rus', that laid the firm foundations of Statehood.

"Christianity bound together by a common culture the princely race, which was, they say, of Norman extraction, and the numerous Slavic and other races which constituted the population of ancient Rus'. It taught the princes to look on themselves as defenders of the weak and oppressed and servants of the righteousness of God. It taught the people to see in them not simply leaders and war-commanders, but as people to whom power had been given by God Himself."<sup>405</sup>

Archbishop Nathaniel of Vienna writes: "The ideal of Holy Rus', like the formula itself, was not born immediately. Two stages are important in its genesis: the baptism of Rus' and her regeneration after the Tatar conquest. Like any other historical people, the Russian nation is a child of her Church. Greece and Rome, on accepting Christianity, brought to the Church their rich pagan inheritance. The German peoples were already formed tribal units at the moment of their reception of Christianity, and they preserved quite a lot of their pagan past, especially in the sphere of national and juridical ideas, in their

---

<sup>403</sup> Archbishop Averky (Taushev), "The Baptism of Rus' and the Legacy to the Russian People of Holy Prince Vladimir", in *A Time for Everything. The Spiritual Inheritance of the Russian Diaspora*, Moscow Sretensky Monastery, 2006.

<sup>404</sup> Kartashev, *Ocherki po istorii Russkoj Tserkvi* (Sketches on the History of the Russian Church), Paris: YMCA Press, 1959, volume 1, p. 125.

<sup>405</sup> St. John Maximovich, *Proiskhozdenie zakona o prestolonasledii v Rossii* (The Origins of the Law of Succession in Russia), Podolsk, 1994, p. 3.

Christianity. But we – the Russian Slavs – had absolutely nothing before our acceptance of Christianity: neither state ideas, nor national consciousness, nor an original culture. The Eastern Slav pagans did not even have their own gods – the whole ancient Russian pantheon consisted of foreign divinities: Perun was a Lithuanian divinity, Khors – a Scythian-Sarmatian one, Moksha and Veles were Finnish gods. None of them even had a Slavic name. The Russian people gave their untouched soul to Christianity. And the Church gave everything to the Slavs, so that already one generation after the reception of Christianity, under Prince Yaroslav, we were no poorer in a cultural sense, but rather richer than the majority of our neighbours...”<sup>406</sup>

\*

In about 1050, in his famous *Sermon on the Law and Grace*, Metropolitan Hilarion of Kiev applied the epithet of “the new Constantine” to St. Vladimir. But he was not a “new Constantine” in the conventional sense attached to all founders of new Christian dynasties in the early Middle Ages. His kingdom evolved from being a *part* of the New Rome into being its *reincarnation* or *successor* or *heir*. Indeed, Russia was not only an *offshoot* or *child* of Christian Rome, like Bulgaria or Georgia. Through her racial and dynastic links with Western Europe (especially the Anglo-Scandinavian north-west), Russia became the heir of what was left of the *Old*, Orthodox Rome of the West, regenerating the ideal of the Symphony of Powers just as it was being destroyed in the West by the heretical Papacy. And by her filial faithfulness to Byzantium, as well as through the marriage of St. Vladimir to the purple-born princess Anna in the tenth century, and the marriage of Great-Prince Ivan III to Sophia Palaeologus in the fifteenth century, she became the heir of the *Second* or *New* Rome of Constantinople. In fact, Vladimir’s realm was *the Third Rome* in embryonic form, and he minted coins depicting himself in imperial attire.<sup>407</sup>

But Russia the Third Rome was not to become a reality for nearly another five hundred years; for while the idea of the *translatio imperii* from Old Rome to New Rome in the fourth century had been accepted by the Byzantines, they did not accept the idea of a second *translatio* – and especially not beyond the confines of the Graeco-Roman world to a “barbarian” nation like the Russians. As St. Photius the Great declared: “Just as the dominion of Israel lasted until the coming of Christ, so we believe that the Empire will not be taken from us Greeks until the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ...”<sup>408</sup> It took the profound shock of the fall of Constantinople in 1453, and the fact that the Second Coming of Christ did not take place then, to make them think again and recognize that the Russian Tsar had become, as Patriarch Jeremiah II of Constantinople said in 1589, the sovereign of *all* Orthodox Christians.

---

<sup>406</sup> Archbishop Nathanael (Lvov), “O Petre Velikom” (“On Peter the Great”), *Epokha* (Epoch), N 10, 2000, pp. 37-38.

<sup>407</sup> Vladimir Volkoff, *Vladimir the Russian Viking*, Bath: Honeyglen, 1984, p. 256.

<sup>408</sup> St. Photius, quoted in Fomin and Fomina, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 123.

After the Baptism of Rus', the Russian princes continued to look up to the Byzantine Emperor as to their father in spite of the fact that their own kingdom was completely independent of, and even more powerful than, the Empire. Nor did this change with the enthronement of the first metropolitan of Russian blood, Hilarion, in the eleventh century. Thus G. Podskalsky writes: "Although Hilarion compared Vladimir with Constantine the Great and recognised his sovereignty over Kievan Rus', he ascribed the title of 'Emperor' neither to him nor to his successor. The collector (or editor) of the *Izbornik* of 1076 everywhere exchanged the term βασιλευς ('emperor') for 'prince' or 'kahan', so as thereby to adapt the Byzantine texts to Russian conditions, while the term βασιλευς, 'tsar', was kept only when it referred to God. The idea of the 'transfer of the empire' (*translatio imperii*), which captivated the Bulgarian tsar Simeon or Charles the Great in relation to the Frankish empire, was foreign to pre-Mongol Rus'. The Byzantine supremacy in the hierarchy of States was also strengthened by the emperors' practice of adopting the role of sponsor at the baptism of newly converted kings or princes."<sup>409</sup> Thus the Emperor became the sponsor at the baptisms of Tsar Boris-Michael of Bulgaria and Princess Olga of Kiev. Such sponsorship, according to Richard Fletcher, "indicated secular lordship as well. The experience of baptism could thus become a token of submission. Exported to the west we can see the idea at work in the baptismal sponsorship of Widukind by Charlemagne in 785, or of Harald Klak by Louis the Pious in 826, or of the Viking leader Guthrum by Alfred of Wessex in 878."<sup>410</sup>

The inferiority of the other Orthodox rulers to the Byzantine Emperor was indicated by differences in titles (the Russian princes were called αρχοντες), and by the anointing of the emperors at their enthronement. Fr. Timothy Alferov writes: "The Russian Great Princes and the Serbian, Georgian and Bulgarian rulers were defenders of the Church only in their territories. They were also raised to the principedom with the blessing of the Church, but by a different rite (*o ezhe blagosloviti knyazya*), which included the crowning of the prince, but contained no anointing."<sup>411</sup> If the Frankish and Bulgarian rulers had been accorded the title of *basileus*, this was only under compulsion and was withdrawn as soon as politically expedient. And even much later, in 1561, when the pre-eminence of Russia in the Orthodox world could not be denied, the Ecumenical Patriarch Joasaph II accorded the Ivan the Terrible the title *Basileus* only because he was thought to descend from a Byzantine princess – Anna, the wife of St. Vladimir. So tenacious was the idea among the Greeks that there could be no Third Rome after the Second...<sup>412</sup>

---

<sup>409</sup> Podskalsky, *Khristianstvo i Bogoslovskaja literatura v Kievskoj Rusi (988-1237)* (Christianity and Theological Literature in Kievan Rus' (988-1037), St. Petersburg, 1996, p. 68.

<sup>410</sup> Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe*, London: HarperCollins, 1997, p. 278.

<sup>411</sup> Alferov and Alferov, *O Tserkvi, pravoslavnom Tsarstve i poslednem vremeni* (On the Church, the Orthodox Kingdom and the Last Time), Moscow: "Russkaia Idea", p. 18.

<sup>412</sup> However, not everyone shared this viewpoint. According to Podskalsky, a Greek Metropolitan of Kiev in the early twelfth century, Nicephorus I, "without hesitation called both the emperor and the prince equally likenesses of the Divine archetype. This meant that he rejected the Byzantine idea of the single and undivided imperial power, which was inherent only in the Basileus of the Romans and which in this capacity reflected the Divine order of the world. The

---

conception of the emperor as 'the image of God' (*imago Dei*, *εικων θεου*) became well-known in Kiev thanks to the *Mirror of Princes* composed in 527 by Deacon Agapetus for Justinian. Extracts from it, in which the discussion was about the duty of subjects to submit to the visible deputy (prince) of the invisible ruler of the world (God), were included in the *Izbornik* of 1076 (Podskalsky, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-68). "Yet it was a quite exceptional case," writes G. Fedotov, "when the author of the panegyric of Prince Andrew of Vladimir dared to apply to him the famous definition of Chrysostom-Agapit, so popular in later Moscow: 'Caesar by his earthly nature is similar to any man, but by the power of his dignity he is similar to God alone'" (*The Russian Religious Mind*, Harvard University Press, 1966, vol. I, p. 398).

## 23. THE TRIUMPH OF BYZANTINISM

By the year 1000 the Byzantine ideal of “symphonic” Church-State relations had triumphed well beyond the boundaries of the Eastern empire. Thus it was the rule also in the most powerful states outside Byzantium: East Francia (modern Germany), England and Kievan Rus’. Even in those parts of the West where normal government had broken down in many places, such as West Francia (modern France), the ideal was still alive. Thus in the mid-tenth century Abbot Adso of Montier-en-Der wrote to Queen Gerbera, the Saxon wife of the Frankish King Louis IV: “Even though we see the Roman Empire for the most part in ruins, nonetheless, as long as the Kings of the Franks who now possess the Roman Empire by right shall last, the dignity of the Roman Empire will not completely perish because it will endure in its kings. Some of our learned men say that one of the Kings of the Franks will possess anew the Roman Empire. He will be in the last time and will be the greatest and the last of all kings. After he has successfully governed his empire, he will finally come to Jerusalem and will lay aside his sceptre and crown on the Mount of Olives. This will be the end and the consummation of the Roman and Christian Empire...”<sup>413</sup>

As the year 1000 approached, when many Western Christians were expecting the reign of the Antichrist, the End of the World and the Second Coming of Christ, the question of the survival of legitimate monarchical authority became ever more pressing. For with the removal of that authority, according to the prophecy of St. Paul (II Thessalonians 2.7), would come the Antichrist – and the monarchy, at any rate in the Frankish lands to the west of the Rhine, was in a very parlous state as the “true” Carolingian line died out and virtual anarchy ruled. Signs of millennial fever were certainly increasing. Thus in 991, at a Council in Rheims attended by English as well as French bishops, Arnulph, bishop of Orleans, said that if Pope John XV had no love and was puffed up with knowledge, he was the Antichrist...<sup>414</sup> And in 992 Abbot Adso, now in his eighties, set sail for Jerusalem, no doubt in order to witness the apocalyptic events that were about to take place there.<sup>415</sup>

And yet paradoxically, if we exclude the chaos in West Francia, by the year 1000 the monarchical principle had never looked in better health. A survey of the world in the year 1000<sup>416</sup> gives rise to the thought: just as the year 2000 has witnessed the apex of democratism in political thought, so the year 1000 witnessed the apex of its opposite, monarchism. The monarchical regimes that dominated the ancient world were of two main kinds: autocracy, based on the *symphony* between Church and State and exemplified first of all in Byzantium, and despotism, based on the *fusion* between Church and State.

---

<sup>413</sup> Adso, *Letter on the Origin and Time of the Antichrist*.

<sup>414</sup> See John Eadie, “The Man of Sin”, in *Greek Text Commentaries: On Thessalonians*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1877, 1979, p. 341.

<sup>415</sup> He died on the way. See Tom Holland, *Millenium*, London, 1999 p. 129.

<sup>416</sup> John Man, *Atlas of the Year 1000*, London: Penguin Books, 1999.

On Christmas Day, 1000 or 1001, King Stephen of Hungary became the last member of the family of Orthodox kings of Europe... Autocracy now ruled from the England of Ethelred the Unready to the Georgia of Bagrat III, with the exception only of the Baltic lands, Finland, Iceland and the Islamic half of the Iberian peninsula. Writing about the "outer" regions of Europe, Chris Wickham writes: "Kings and princes were in every region more ambitious around 1000 than they had been around 750: they often ruled wider areas, or at least were aiming at wider hegemonies, and sometimes had more elaborate structures to underpin that rule as well; they were often more relevant to local societies, too, thus ruling more deeply as well as more widely... Overall,.. the trend to wider and deeper political power seems to have been based on two sorts of developments. The first was the development of aristocratic power, and therefore of the possibility of hierarchies of political dependence extending from kings and princes down into the localities. The second was the development of techniques of rule and of control, usually (except in Spain and Ireland) borrowed from neighbouring powers, more specialized royal officials, a more complex and more top-down judicial system, the ability to demand military service from the population, the ability to exploit manpower to build fortifications of different types, and, in newly Christianized areas, the development of tighter official hierarchies of the church...

"Broadly, the more of these developments a ruler had access to, the more stable his power was, and the more ambitious he (in Rus', once, she) could be. Political aggregation was perhaps greatest in Rus', and also, in a smaller compass, Bulgaria, Denmark and Asturias-Leon; it was beginning, however, to crystallize in Croatia, Bohemia, Poland and maybe Norway by the end of our period as well, in a less stable and more contested way, and also (the obscurest of all) in Scotland. In Wales and Ireland, however, and also Sweden, royal ambition did not yet have an adequate infrastructural development behind it, and the expansion of kingdoms promoted instability more than solid bases for government (this was partly true of Bohemia and Poland as well); and in some places, on the Baltic coast or in Iceland (as also sometimes in Norway) such expansion was successfully resisted for some time..."<sup>417</sup>

In all the Orthodox lands we find strong kings allied to independent Churches. These included not only the well-established empires of New Rome in the East and the Holy Roman Empire in the West, but also such newly-established kingdoms as Norway (Olaf Trygvasson, Olaf the Saint), Sweden (Olaf Skotkunning), Poland (Boleslav the Great), Hungary (Stephen the Great) and Russia (Vladimir the Great). Despotism in the strict sense is nowhere to be found. Iceland's Althing preserved a form of pre-liberal democratism<sup>418</sup>, while France was already breaking down into feudalism.

---

<sup>417</sup> Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome: A History of Europe from 400 to 1000*, London: Penguin, 2009, pp. 505-506.

<sup>418</sup> Things, or parliaments, were a characteristic of many Viking lands. Cf. the Tynwald, or Thingwald of the Isle of Man, which has lasted from the eleventh century to the present day, and the Veche of Novgorod.

The whole of this vast area was not only monarchical in governance, but also Orthodox Christian in faith. And so the year 1000 represented the peak of the influence both of Orthodox autocracy and of Orthodox Christianity in world history so far. As Wil van den Bercken writes: "In the eleventh century, when with the exception of the Finns and the Baltic peoples all the European peoples had adopted Christianity as their national religion, Christian Europe had formally become a historical reality"<sup>419</sup> Moreover, in all those nations the Christianity was Orthodox. It would not be until 1054 that Western Christianity fell into the heresy of Roman Catholicism...

Despotism, meanwhile, ruled throughout Asia and Northern Africa, including the Islamic lands from Morocco to northern India, and the Hindu-Buddhist-Confucian lands from southern India to China and Japan.

The unity of politics and religion is clearly evident in Japan. Thus J.M. Roberts writes: "The keys to the continuity and toughness of Japanese society have been the family and the traditional religion. The clan was an enlarged family, and the nation the most enlarged family of all. In patriarchal style, the emperor presided over the national family as did a clan leader over his clan or, even, the small farmer over his family. The focus of family and clan life was participation in the traditional rites, the religion known as Shinto, whose essence was the worship at the proper times of certain local or personal deities."<sup>420</sup>

In 645, according to the Taika Reform Edict, the emperor, who was from the ruling Yamato elite and claimed to be descended through the first emperor Jinmu from the sun goddess, acquired absolute power and claimed ownership of all land in the kingdom. As W.M. Spellman writes, "he also reaffirmed his status as Shinto high priest, thereby combining supreme religious authority with new-found political primacy on the classic pagan god-king model. In reality, however, the Taika Reform Edict did little to alter the status of powerful and semi-autonomous aristocrats in the countryside, of whom the most important were the Fujiwara..."<sup>421</sup>

Even the Jews had a quasi-monarchy in the form of their Exilarch in Baghdad-Babylon. But in 1040 this power came to an end. The only independent Jewish State since the fall of Jerusalem, Khazaria, fell in 966-967 to Sviatoslav of Kiev. However, it survived in a weakened form until the Mongols finally swept it away, eliciting a mass migration of Khazars to Eastern Europe that created the Yiddish-speaking communities that were to have such a destructive impact on Tsarist Russia.<sup>422</sup>

---

<sup>419</sup> Van den Bercken, *Holy Russia and Christian Europe*, p. 115.

<sup>420</sup> Roberts, *History of the World*, Oxford: Helicon, 1992, p. 371.

<sup>421</sup> W.M. Spellman, *Monarchies, 1000-2000*, Trowbridge: Reaktion, 2001, pp. 57, 58.

<sup>422</sup> See Schlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People*, London: Verso, 2009, pp. 210-229.

This fairly sharp contrast between Orthodox and Autocratic Europe, on the one hand, and pagan and despotic Asia and North Africa, on the other, confirms the thesis that there is a more than coincidental correlation between Orthodoxy and Autocracy, on the one hand, and paganism and despotism, on the other. Orthodoxy flourishes under authoritarian political rule, but does not allow that rule to subsume the authority of the Church, which sanctifies and supports the king while remaining independent of him. Pagan rulers, on the other hand, almost always ascribe quasi-divine honours to themselves. Thus the Japanese emperors traced their ancestry back to the sun goddess, the Khmer rulers of Cambodia in this period were “the embodiment of Shiva, spirit of the ancestors and the earth and the fount of fertility”<sup>423</sup>, and the Fatimid Islamic ruler Al-Hakim – who destroyed the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem – believed that he was god incarnate.<sup>424</sup> The sharp contrast between Orthodox and Autocratic Europe, on the one hand, and pagan and despotic Asia and North Africa, on the other, began to break down only with the appearance of the heretical papacy...

\*

Characteristic of all these European and Asian monarchies – Christian, Islamic and pagan – was an intense religiosity. The modern idea that religion should be separated from the State would have been incomprehensible to almost any man in the year 1000. The religiosity of these monarchies was not incompatible with striking artistic, technical and economic achievements. Thus the great cities of Constantinople, Cordoba, Baghdad and Bukhara were at their peak at this time, as was the Sung empire in China.

The most important corollary of the religious monarchism of Europe and Asia in the year 1000 was the belief it incarnated that, as John Man writes of Sung China, “state and society, administration and education, could be united, and take civilization forward to a new level”.<sup>425</sup> The major tendency of modern democratic civilization has been the opposite: the belief that state and society must be disjoined. Of course, one cannot deny that the conjoining of state and society can be to an evil end; and some of the states of this period, such as Al-Mansur’s in Spain or Al-Hakim’s in Egypt, were aggressively antichristian. (In 1009 Al-Hakim destroyed the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, creating the nominal cause of the First Crusade.) But it is no less unreasonable to suppose that state and society *cannot* in any circumstances be conjoined for the good. Certainly, the Christian monarchies of the period compare favourably, from a Christian point of view, with the disjointed, secularized democracies of today.

---

<sup>423</sup> Man, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

<sup>424</sup> Man, *op. cit.*, p. 75. Which is what the Druse of Lebanon still believe him to be. In fact, Al-Hakim was one of the closest of all forerunners of the Antichrist. Not only did he proclaim himself to be god: he destroyed the Temple of God, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, in 1009.

<sup>425</sup> Man, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

The unity enjoyed by these monarchical societies gave each citizen a purpose in life higher than his own narrowly personal interests. This purpose, in such a religious age, could only be religious. That is why changes of regime which did not involve changes of religion – as when the Muslim Turks took control of Bukhara from the Muslim Samanids in 999 – caused less upheaval than might have been expected. Correspondingly, the most savage wars of the time – as between the Muslims and Hindus in northern India, or between the Muslims and Christians in the Iberian peninsula – were invariably religious. The scourge of modern states, ethnic rivalry, was less of a problem in an age that took multi-ethnic empires like the Roman and Muslim for granted.<sup>426</sup> (Indeed, St. Stephen, King of Hungary (+1038), is reported to have said: “A country of one language and one set of customs is feeble and fragile”.) Much more problematic was the idea of *religious* pluralism, because it threatened society’s unity of purpose. Hence the anti-Jewish pogroms in the Rhineland in 1002 and in Limoges in 1010 – it was not the different *nationality* of the Jews that exacerbated the Christians so much as the clear contradictions in faith and life between the Jews and the Christians.

Since religion was so important to these people, when they did change religion, they tended to convert *en masse*. The most important and striking example of this is the conversion of the vast territory of Russia from paganism to Orthodoxy under St. Vladimir. Some western historians, puzzled by the speed of the process in Russia and noting one or two violent incidents, have come to the conclusion that it was all the result of coercion. But they fail to take into account, not only the grace of God, but also the cohesiveness of tribal societies, and therefore the unanimity or near-unanimity of their decision-making, and the genuine respect and awe in which the views of the tribal leader or king were held, which naturally led to their decisions being accepted as God-inspired. Thus the Kievans reasoned, as the Chronicler records: “If it had not been good, then our prince and boyars would not have accepted it”.

---

<sup>426</sup> “National identities,” writes Wickham, “were not widely prominent in 1000, even if one rejects the association between nationalism and modernity made in much contemporary scholarship. We must recognize that some such identities did exist. One can make a good case for England in this respect (the dismal years of the Danish conquest in the early eleventh century produced a number of texts invoking a version of it). Italians, too, had a sense of common identity, although it hardly reached south of Rome (of course, that is pretty much still true today), and did not lead to a desire for political unity. Geographical separation, such as that provided by the English Channel and the Alps, helped both of these, as it also did the Irish, who were capable of recognizing a version of an Irish community, however fragmented Ireland really was. In the parallel case of Byzantium, what gave its inhabitants identity was simply the coherence of the political system, which was much greater than any other in Europe at that time; Byzantine ‘national identity’ has not been much considered by historians, for that empire was the ancestor of no modern national state [not the Greek? (V.M.)], but it is arguable that it was the most developed in Europe at the end of our period. By contrast, France, Germany and Spain (either Christian or Muslim) did not have any such imagery. The Danes may have had it, but in Scandinavia as a whole there is good evidence for it only in Iceland. The Slav lands were still too inchoate to have any version of identity not specifically tied to the fate of ruling dynasties” (*op. cit.*, pp. 4-5).

Even democratic Iceland converted from paganism to Christianity at this time with scarcely any opposition once the opinion of one wise man, the Lawgiver Thorgeir, became known. For, as Tom Holland writes, "All the Icelanders assembled on the *Thingvellir*, Christian as well as pagan, duly agreed to accept his judgement on what the faith of Iceland should be; and Thorgeir accepted the fateful charge. 'He lay down and spread his cloak over himself, and lay all that day and the next night, nor did he speak a word.' Then abruptly, on the following morning, he sat up and ordered the Icelanders to accompany him to the great Law Rock – and from there he delivered them his verdict. Men were still be permitted to eat horseflesh; to expose unwanted children; to offer sacrifices, provided that it was done in private. In every other respect, however, they were to submit themselves to the laws of the new religion. Whether in cold water or warm, all were to be baptized. The inhabitants of Iceland were to become a Christian people."<sup>427</sup>

And so these societies combined two characteristics which, from the modern point of view, cannot be combined: the "collectivist" belief that men can and should freely choose its supreme end *together*, and the "individualist" belief that the supreme end can be revealed to one particular man. For if wisdom comes from God, "it is much more natural to suppose," as Vladimir Trostnikov says, "that divine enlightenment will descend upon the chosen soul of an Anointed One of God, as opposed to a million souls at once".<sup>428</sup> Scripture does *not* say *vox populi - vox Dei*, but: "The heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever He will" (Proverbs 21.1).

---

<sup>427</sup> Holland, op. cit., p. 212. Cf. Man, op. cit., p. 40; Gwyn Jones, *The Vikings*, London: The Folio Society, 1997, pp. 266-270.

<sup>428</sup> Trostnikov, "The Role and Place of the Baptism of Rus in the European Spiritual Process of the Second Millenium of Christian History", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 39, N 3, May-June, 1989, p. 34.

## 24. THE RIGHTS OF THE ORTHODOX AUTOCRAT

Whatever rights the emperor has in the Church are given to him by the Church, for the sake of the Church, and in view of the fact that he is himself specially anointed to the kingdom by the Church. This is a vitally important point which is often overlooked by those who look on Church and State as necessarily warring principles. Just as the soul and the body are not by nature warring principles, even if the fall has often set them against each other, so it is with the Church and State. And yet we must agree with Sir Steven Runciman that “the chief practical problem that faces any organized Church lies in its relation to the State” ...<sup>429</sup>

The rights of the Emperor in the Church were limited by the fact that he could not perform sacraments, nor did he ordain or defrock bishops and priests. “To be sure, the Emperor wore vestments similar to those of the bishop and even had a special place in the worship of the Church, such as censing the sanctuary at the Liturgy for the Nativity of Christ, offering the sermon during Vespers at the commencement of the Great Lent, and receiving Holy Communion directly from the altar as did the clergy. Nevertheless, the Emperor was not a priest and many Greek Fathers disapproved of even these privileges. Emperor Marcian (451-457) may have been hailed as a priest-king at the Council of Chalcedon (451), but this did not bestow sacerdotal status on him or any Byzantine *imperator*.”<sup>430</sup>

One of the rights given to the Emperor by the Church was that of convening Councils and enforcing their decisions. This right did not empower the emperor or his officials to interfere in the proceedings on a par with the bishops, but it did enable him to make quiet suggestions which were often vitally important. Thus at the First Council it was the Emperor Constantine who quietly suggested the word “consubstantial” to describe the relationship between the Son of God and God the Father.<sup>431</sup> Again, although the Emperor Marcian said that he had decided to be present at the Fourth Ecumenical Council “not as a manifestation of strength, but so as to give firmness to the acts of the Council, taking Constantine of blessed memory as my model,”<sup>432</sup> his firm but tactful intervention was decisive in the triumph of Orthodoxy.

The Emperor also had the right to invest the Patriarch. “According to the official formula,” writes Runciman, “the Patriarch was elected by the decree of the Holy Synod and the promotion of the Emperor. His investiture took place in the Imperial Palace in the presence of the high dignitaries of Church and State. Until 1204 the scene was the Palace of Magnaura, where the Emperor in person announced the election with the formula: ‘The Divine grace, and Our

---

<sup>429</sup> Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity*, Cambridge University Press, 1968, p. 55.

<sup>430</sup> *The Lives of the Pillars of Orthodoxy*, Buena Vista, Co.: Holy Apostles’ Convent, p. 125.

<sup>431</sup> Archbishop Averky (Taushev) of Syracuse, *Sem’ Vselenskikh Soborov* (The Seven Ecumenical Councils), Moscow, 1996, p. 11.

<sup>432</sup> Averky, *op.cit.*, p. 71.

Majesty which derives from it, raised the most pious [*name*] to be Patriarch of Constantinople.' After 1261 the investiture was held in the *triclinium* of the Palace of Blachernae; and about the same time the formula was changed. The Emperor now said: 'The Holy Trinity, through the power that It has given Us, raises you to be Bishop of Constantinople, New Rome, and Oecumenical Patriarch.' By the beginning of the fifteenth century the formula and the setting had changed once more. The investiture now took place in a church in the presence of the Emperor; but it was a high lay official who pronounced the words: 'Our great and holy Sovereign and the Sacred Synod call Your Holiness to the supreme throne of Patriarch of Constantinople.' The theologian Symeon of Thessalonica, writing in about 1425, regretted the change of words as there was no mention of God, though he liked the recognition given to the Holy Synod. When the election had thus been proclaimed the Emperor gave to the Patriarch the cross, the purple soutane and the pectoral reliquary which symbolized his office. After this investiture the new Patriarch rode in procession through the streets of Constantinople to the church of Saint Sophia, where he was consecrated by the Metropolitan of Heraclea, in memory of the days when Byzantium had been a suffragan see under Heraclea."<sup>433</sup>

The Emperor chose the Patriarch from three candidates put forward to him by the Holy Synod. As Simeon of Thessalonica witnessed, this right was not seized by the emperor by force, "but was entrusted to him from ancient times by the Holy Fathers, that is, by the Church itself". Moreover, "if none of the three candidates was suitable, the *basileus* could suggest his own candidate, and the Hierarchical Synod again freely decided about his suitability, having the possibility of not agreeing. The king's right did not in principle violate the Hierarchs' freedom of choice and was based on the fact that the Patriarch occupied not only a position in the Church, but was also a participant in political life... Simeon of Thessalonica said: 'He, as the anointed king, has been from ancient times offered the choice of one of the three by the Holy Fathers, for they [the three] have already been chosen by the Council, and all three have been recognized as worthy of the Patriarchy. The king assists the Council in its actions as the anointed of the Lord, having become the defender and servant of the Church, since during the anointing he gave a promise of such assistance. De jure there can be no question of arbitrariness on the part of the king in the choosing of the Patriarch, or of encroachment on the rights and freedom of choice [of the Hierarchs].'"<sup>434</sup>

Another imperial right was that of handing the Patriarch his staff. This should not be interpreted as if the emperor bestowed the grace of the Patriarchy. Nor was it the same as the ceremony of "lay investiture" in the West. The emperor did this, according to Simeon of Thessalonica, "because he wishes to honour the Church, implying also at the same time that he personally

---

<sup>433</sup> Runciman, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>434</sup> Zyzykin, *Patriarkh Nikon*, Warsaw: Synodal Press, 1931, part I, pp. 116, 117.

accepts the individual now consecrated as his own pastor whom God has chosen for him.”<sup>435</sup>

“Simeon of Thessalonica explains that in this act the king only witnesses to the fact of his agreement with the installation of the new Patriarch, and after the bestowal of the staff he witnesses to his spiritual submission... by the bowing of his head, his asking for a blessing from the Patriarch and his kissing of his hand. By the grace and action of the Hierarchy, the Patriarch does not differ from the Metropolitans and Bishops. But in the dignity of his see, and in his care for all who are under his authority, he is the father and head of all, consecrating Metropolitans and Bishops, and judging them in conjunction with the Council, while he himself is judged by a Great Council, says Simeon of Thessalonica. The king was present at both the consecration and the enthronement of the Patriarch in the altar...; but the consecration and enthronement were acts of a purely ecclesiastical character, and the king’s participation in them was no longer as active as in the first stages of the process, when he convened the Hierarchical Council, chose one of the three elected by the Council and witnessed to his recognition of him in the act of *προβλησις* [which gave the Patriarch his rights in Byzantine civil law]. In the act of consecration [assuming that the candidate to the Patriarchy was not already a bishop] Hierarchical grace was invoked upon the man to be consecrated by the Metropolitan of Heraclea, while in the act of enthronement he was strengthened by abundant grace to greater service for the benefit, now, of the whole Church, and not of one Diocese [only].”<sup>436</sup>

These rights of the emperor in the Church were paralleled by certain rights of the Church in the State, especially the Patriarch’s right of intercession (Russian: *pechalovanie*). “The Patriarch was called to intercede for the persecuted and those oppressed by the authorities, for the condemned and those in exile, with the aim of easing their lot, and for the poor and those in need with the aim of giving them material or moral support. This right of intercessory complaint, which belonged by dint of the 75<sup>th</sup> canon of the Council of Carthage to all Diocesan Bishops, was particularly linked with the Patriarch of Constantinople by dint of his high position in the Byzantine State with the king.”<sup>437</sup>

Also, State officials “were obliged to help the Bishop in supporting Church discipline and punishing transgressors. Sometimes the emperors obliged provincial officials to tell them about Church disturbances which depended on the carelessness of the Bishop, but the emperors gave the Bishops the right to keep an eye on officials, while the Bishops, in carrying out this obligation imposed on them by the civil law, did not thereby become State officials... In the Byzantine laws themselves the Church was distinguished from the State as a special social organism, having a special task distinct from that of the State;

---

<sup>435</sup> Zyzykin, *op. cit.*, part I, pp. 322-323.

<sup>436</sup> Zyzykin, *op. cit.*, part I, pp. 120-121.

<sup>437</sup> Zyzykin, *op. cit.*, part I, p. 121.

these laws recognized the Church as the teacher of the faith and the establisher of Church canons, while the State could only raise them to the status of State laws; Church administration and Church courts were recognized as being bound up with the priestly rank."<sup>438</sup>

"In reviewing Byzantine ideas on royal power, we must recognize the fact that, in spite of the influence of pagan traditions, in spite of Saracen Muslim influences leading to a confusion of powers, in spite of the bad practices of arianizing and iconoclast emperors, it remained a dogma of Byzantine law to recognize the Church of Christ as a special society, parallel to the State, standing separate and above the latter by its aims and means, by dint of which the supreme head of the State was by no means the head of the other, ecclesiastical union, and, if he entered into it in the position of a special sacred rank, it was far from being the higher, but was only equal to the deacon's, being subject thereby to the canons which established the Church as a Divine institution having its own legislation, administration and court..."<sup>439</sup>

The State is rooted in the family, so that the head of the State, the Emperor or King, is like the Father of all his citizens. However, if the Emperor is the father of his people, the Patriarch is the father of the Emperor, and was so called in Byzantium and in all her daughter-autocracies: Serbia, Bulgaria, Georgia and Russia. Thus Emperor Theodosius the Great, embraced St. Meletius, president of the Second Ecumenical Council, as his father. In Serbia, this spiritual relationship was even paralleled by physical paternity: St. Symeon, the first Nemanja king, was the physical father of the first archbishop, St. Savva, but at the same time his spiritual son. Again, in Russia the first Romanov Tsar, Mikhail Fyodorovich, was the spiritual *and* natural son of Patriarch Philaret. This emphasized that Christian politics, as represented by the Emperor or Tsar, should ideally be conformed to - even "begotten by" - the other-worldly spirit and aims of Christian spirituality, as represented by the Patriarch.

---

<sup>438</sup> Zyzykin, *op. cit.*, part I, p. 137.

<sup>439</sup> Zyzykin, *op. cit.*, part I, p. 139.

## 25. THE SCHISM OF 1054 AND THE NORMANS

The final break between the Eastern and Western Churches, which was to have such profound and long-lasting consequences for the whole of European civilization, was closely linked with the emergence of a new European nation – the Normans.

“In 876,” writes Fr. Andrew Louth, “a band of Vikings began to settle at the mouth of the Seine under the leadership of Rollo the Ganger, better known as Rollo, who had been exiled by the Norwegian king. In 911, after some decades of plundering the inhabitants there, Rollo led his band of warriors on an abortive attack on Chartres. This led to a settlement with the French king, Charles the Simple, who, in return for the Vikings’ homage and promise to defend the region against other Vikings, granted him the lands of the mouth of the Seine and the title of Count of Rouen. Already the Normans, as they were to be called, had established themselves in the region, marrying local girls. They were gradually becoming assimilated to the society of the local inhabitants, adopting their language and religion; a year after the raid on Chartres, Rollo embraced Christianity. Rollo and his descendants were given further grants of land and the region eventually became the duchy of Normandy, ruled by Rollo’s lineal descendants, powerful and not always loyal vassals of the French king. The Normans prospered, and became hungry for land. This hunger was fed at a political level by the conquest of England in 1066 under William the Conqueror, Duke of Normandy. But before – and after – this the younger sons of the Norman nobility, and their illegitimate offspring, sought land, possessions and adventure elsewhere. In the twelfth century, the Crusades would satisfy this need, but in the early part of the eleventh century, it was to southern Italy that they made their way. Sicily and much of southern Italy had long been under Muslim rule; part of the Byzantine emperor Basil II’s reconquest had restored southern Italy (Apulia – present-day Puglia, Basilicata, Campania and Calabria) to the Byzantine Empire. In the 1030s the Byzantines had made an attempt to reconquer Sicily, but only recovered the eastern coast. Traditionally, this part of the world – Sicily and ‘Magna Graecia’, ‘Great Greece’ – was Greek-speaking; it was Greek-speaking Byzantine Christianity that had survived Muslim rule and Byzantine Christianity that was restored. However, it had originally come under the jurisdiction of the pope, who had considerable landholdings there, but in the eighth century, as a result of the pope’s resistance to the imperial will over iconoclasm, the jurisdiction of this area had been transferred to the patriarchate of Constantinople (along with the area of the Balkans known as Illyricum). As we have seen, the pope’s loss of jurisdiction over these areas (and of revenue, too) had long been a bone of contention between Pope and Emperor. The coming of the Normans disturbed an already fragile situation. They established themselves throughout southern Italy, building castles from which they plundered and then sought to rule the region; later in the century they succeeded where the Byzantines had failed in driving the Arabs out of Sicily.

“The initial response of both Pope and Emperor to the Norman presence in Italy was one of alarm. Michael Kerularios, patriarch of Constantinople from 1043 to 1058, sent a friendly letter to Pope Leo IX proposing an alliance against the ‘Franks’. Nothing came of that initiative...”<sup>440</sup>

But Leo now declared a holy war against the Normans, promising “an impunity for their crimes” to all who answered his call (those who died in the battle were declared to be martyrs), and set off with himself at the head of the papal army. But at Civitate he was roundly defeated and taken hostage. The Normans, remarkably, asked forgiveness of the captive Pope for having seized territory from him. But, less remarkably, they did not want to give back this territory and wanted the Pope to bless their rapacity.

\*

Meanwhile, “as they settled in southern Italy, the Normans encountered Greek Christians following Greek customs, different from the Latin ways. Tolerance was not a virtue much respected by the Normans (nor by many others in the Middle Ages); the Greek ways were suppressed and Latin customs introduced. The cult of Greek saint, for instance, were suppressed (just as the Normans in England suppressed the cult of many of the Anglo-Saxon saints), and devotion to more mainstream Latin saints encouraged, though a few local saints were saved by the efficacy of their miracles. One custom, however, sharply marked off Greek from Latin, and that was the kind of bread used in the Eucharistic liturgy – leavened or unleavened – and there were other liturgical differences. There began, in southern Italy of the eleventh century, a different kind of encounter between Greek East and Latin West, which was to become more common over the next century or so. This was an encounter that affected ordinary people, for it concerned what they did when they worshipped. Hitherto, Latin and Greek practices had been geographically separate. Scholars – and merchants, used to local differences – had known about various differences between Eastern and Western Christians, but that was in the realm of theory. Now the differences were on the doorstep, ordinary people became aware of different customs and had to live with them, or not.

“Although the pope had no love for the Normans, he could hardly object to their imposition of Latin practices. Christians in the Byzantine Empire, especially in the geographically closer, formerly independent Bulgaria, felt very differently. The suppression of Greek services, and the replacement of ordinary leavened bread in the Eucharist by the unleavened bread favoured by the Latins, was an affront. The archbishop of Ohrid, the senior Bulgarian bishop, Leo, wrote to John, archbishop of Apulia, arguing that unleavened bread (*azyma* in Greek) was not properly bread and that, therefore, the use of unleavened bread was a Jewish practice, inappropriate for the sacrament of the New Covenant. Leo’s letter, at his request, was translated into Latin, Leo doubtless expecting the Italian episcopate to endorse his arguments. Earlier on

---

<sup>440</sup> Louth, *Greek East and Latin West*, pp. 305-306.

Leo himself had been one of the clergy of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, and was, indeed, the first Greek-speaking incumbent of the see of Ohrid. It has often been suspected that Leo's letter was written at the behest of Patriarch Michael Kerularios – a charge explicitly made by Cardinal Humbert – but there is no direct evidence that such was the case. News of the suppression of Greek services in Apulia had, however, reached Constantinople, and the patriarch had retaliated by closing some, at least, of the Latin churches there, which served the needs of Western merchants from Venice and elsewhere."<sup>441</sup>

However, as Smith writes, "it is doubtful that the patriarch had actually committed himself to suppressing the Latin rite even on a local basis. For Humbert admits that he is only repeating a rumor that he has learned from some unidentified source. And he does not appear to have repeated the charge as the controversy progressed. For the church closings are not mentioned in the second papal letter to [Patriarch Michael] Cerularius or the note to [Emperor] Constantine Monomachus, complaining about the patriarch's behavior. Nor was this made an issue in the debates with Nicetas [Stethatos] during his mission to Constantinople. Although Humbert does mention that before leaving the imperial city he brought the practice of certain churches – most likely those founded for Latins – into conformity with the standards of Rome, he does not claim that he found these churches actually closed. Therefore, it seems that the cardinal himself did not have certain evidence that Cerularius had actively persecuted Constantinople's Latins before his arrival. But, in developing his reasons for excommunicating his opponent, he included the earlier report, though without claiming to have personally verified it..."<sup>442</sup>

In September, 1053 the Pope wrote to the Patriarch, sending his letter to Constantinople with Cardinal Humbert, who, having once been archbishop of Sicily, was well acquainted with Greek liturgical practices<sup>443</sup>: "In prejudging the case of the highest See, the see on which no judgement may be passed by any man, you have received the anathema from all the Fathers of all the venerable Councils... You, beloved brother of ours, whom we still call in Christ and primate of Constantinople, with extraordinary presumption and unheard-of boldness have dared openly to condemn the apostolic and Latin Church – and for what? For the fact that she celebrates the commemoration of the sufferings of Christ on unleavened bread. That is your imprudent abuse, that is your unkind boasting, when you, supposing that your lips are in heaven, in actual fact with your tongue are crawling on the earth and striving by your human reasonings and thoughts to corrupt and shake the ancient faith. If you do not pull yourself together, you will be on the tail of the dragon [cf. Revelation 12], by which this dragon overthrew and cast to the earth a third of the stars of heaven. Almost 1200 years have passed since the Saviour suffered,

---

<sup>441</sup> Louth, *Greek East and Latin West*, pp. 306-307.

<sup>442</sup> Mahlon Smith III, *And Taking Bread: The Development of the Azyyme Controversy*, Paris: Beauchesne, 1978, pp. 130-131.

<sup>443</sup> Some scholars, such as Anton Michel, believe on stylistic grounds that these letters of Leo IX were in fact written by Cardinal Humbert. However, we shall continue to ascribe them to the man in whose name they were written. See Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

and do you really think that only now must the Roman Church learn from you how to celebrate the Eucharist, as if it means nothing that here in Rome there lived, worked for a considerable period, taught and, finally, by his death glorified God he to whom the Lord said: 'Blessed are thou, O Simon, son of Jonah' ..."<sup>444</sup>

"Then," continues A.P. Lebedev, "the Pope explained in detail why the Roman Church could not tolerate any instructions from other Churches, but remained the leader of all the rest. 'Think how senseless it would be to admit that the heavenly Father should conceal the rite of the visible sacrifice [of the Eucharist] from the prince of the apostles, Peter, to whom He had completely revealed the most hidden Divinity of His Son. The Lord promised to Peter, not through an angel, nor through a prophet, but with His own lips: 'You are Peter, and on this rock I will build My Church' (Matthew 16.16). But in the opinion of the Pope an important place in the question of the headship of the Roman high priest was occupied by the miracle-working power of Peter's shadow. This argument of the Pope in his favour was so original that we cite it in full. 'In Peter,' said the Pope, 'what is particularly remarkable is that the shadow of his body gave health to the infirm. Such power was given to none of the saints; even the Holy of holies Himself did not give the gift of healing from His own most holy body; but to His Peter alone He gave this privilege that the shadow from his body should heal the sick. Here is a great sign of the Church of the present and the future, that is, Peter has become the manager of both Churches and indicates their condition beforehand in himself: it is precisely the present Church which by the power of its visible sacraments and those that are still to come as it were by her shadow heals souls on earth, and presents to us an as yet invisible but firm image of truth and piety on earth.' Or here is one more cunning papal interpretation of one saying with which the Lord addressed Peter, and interpretation whose aim was to prove the overwhelming significance of the Roman high priests among the other bishops of the whole Church. The Pope takes the saying of the Lord: 'I have prayed for thee, O Peter, that thy faith should not fail, and when thou art converted strengthen thy brethren' (Luke 22.32).

"'By this the Lord showed,' says the Pope, 'that the faith of the other brethren will be subject to dangers, but the faith of Peter will remain unshaken. Nobody can deny that just as the whole door is ruled by the hinge, so by Peter and his successors is defined the order and structure of the whole Church. And as the hinge opens and closes the door, while remaining itself unmoved, so Peter and his successors have the right freely to pronounce sentence on every Church, and nobody must disturb or shake their condition; for the highest see is not judged by anybody (*summa sedes a nemine judicatur*).'"<sup>445</sup>

---

<sup>444</sup> Henry Bettenson and Christopher Maunder, *Documents of the Christian Church*, London: SPCK, 1999, p. 106.

<sup>445</sup> Lebedev, "Vek odinnadtsatij – Okonchatelnoe razdelenie Tserkvej (1053-1054gg.)" ("The 11<sup>th</sup> Century – the Final Division of the Churches"), <http://portal-credo.ru/site/index.php?act=lib&id=378>, pp. 23.

Leo not only tried, as Gilbert Dagron writes, “to impose obedience [on the Eastern Church] by multiplying the expected scriptural quotations... He also added that the rebels of the East should content themselves with these witnesses ‘to the simultaneously earthly and heavenly power, or rather, to the royal priesthood of the Roman and apostolic see (*de terreno et coelesti imperio, imo de regali sacerdotio romanae et apostolicae sedis*).”<sup>446</sup>

Lebedev writes that “the very new papal ideas about his secular lordship... are developed by the Pope in his letter to Cerularius and... rely on a false document – the so-called *Donatio Constantini*. Setting out his superior position among the other hierarchs of the Church, the Pope, in order to humiliate the Church of Constantinople – the aim of the letter – he develops the thought that the Popes are immeasurably superior to the representatives of all the other Churches since they are at one and the same time both first priests and emperors. In the East, it would seem, nothing of the sort had ever been heard; and for that reason it is understandable how such a novelty would affect the Church of Constantinople!

“Since the time of Constantine the Great the Popes had become at the same time emperors, insinuated Leo to Cerularius. The Pope wrote: ‘So that there should remain no doubt about the earthly [secular] power of the Roman high priest, and so that nobody should think that the Roman Church is ascribing to herself an honour that does not belong to her, we shall cite the proofs of from that privileged deed which the Emperor Constantine with his own hands laid upon the holy tomb of the heavenly key-bearer [Peter], and that the truth should be manifest and vanity disappear.’ In this privileged deed Constantine, according to the words of the Pope, declared the following: ‘We have considered it necessary, we together with all our rulers, the Senate, the nobles and the people of Rome, that, just as St. Peter was the vicar of the Son of God on earth, so the high priests, the heirs of the prince of the apostles, should retain the power to rule – and to an even more complete extent than is given to the earthly imperial dignity. That is, we are decreeing that reverent honour should be accorded both to our earthly imperial might, and in exactly the same way to the most holy Roman Church, and, so as more fully to exalt the see above our own earthly throne, we ascribe to her a royal power, dignity and honour. Moreover, we decree that the see of Peter should have the headship over the four sees of Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem and Constantinople and also over all the Church in the inhabited world; the high priest of this Roman see must be considered for all time to be higher and more glorious than all the priest of the whole world, and in relations to questions of Divine service and faith his judgement should rule over all.’ Then Pope Leo describes what precisely Constantine bestowed upon his contemporary, Pope Sylvester, so as to exalt the papal altar. In the opinion of the Pope, it turns out that Constantine bestowed upon the Pope first of all the palace in Rome. The privileged deed, according to the letter of Pope Leo, said the following about this: ‘We cede to the holy apostles themselves, the most blessed Peter and Paul, and through

---

<sup>446</sup> Dagron, *Empereur et Prêtre* (Emperor and Priest), Paris : Éditions Gallimard, 1996, p. 247.

them to our father Pope Sylvester and all his successors who will be on the see of St. Peter to the end of the ages the Lateran palace, which is superior to all the palaces in the world.’ Then the Emperor Constantine adorns, as the Pope puts it, the person of the Roman high priest with royal regalia. The deed, according to the words of Pope Leo, said this about that: ‘We transfer to the Pope of Rome the diadem, that is the crown, from our own head, the garland that adorns the imperial neck, the purple chlamys, the scarlet tunic and all the other royal vestments. We entrust to him the imperial sceptre and all the other marks of distinction and the shoulder-belt – in a word, all the appurtenances of royal majesty.’ The letter even informs us that the Emperor with his own hands want to place his crown on the Pope’s head, but ‘the Pope did not want to use a crown of gold, and for that reason the Emperor placed on him with his own hands his Phrygian wreath (*phrygium*), shining white and signifying the Resurrection of Christ.’ In the words of Pope Leo, the Emperor Constantine, having adorned the Pope with royal regalia, in correspondence with this wanted to put the clergy who constituted his suite on a level with the royal courtiers. The deed, in the words of the letter, made the following legal ruling: ‘We raise the most honourable clergy of every rank in the service of the Roman Church to the same height of power and brilliance as our Senate, and decree that they should be adorned as our patricians and consuls are adorned. In a word, just as there are various kinds of servants attached to the imperial dignity – bed-makers, doormen and guards, so must it be with the holy Roman Church. And more than that: for the sake of the greater brilliance of the papal dignity let the clergy travel on horses adorned with the whitest of materials, and let them wear exactly the same shoes as are worn by the senators. And in this way let the heavenly [papal] power be adorned like the earthly [imperial], to the glory of God.’ In his concern for the person of the Pope and those close to him, according to the words of the Pope’s letter, Constantine bestowed on Sylvester and his heirs a broad, *de facto* royal power over a whole half of the Roman kingdom: the Roman high priest became the Roman emperor. In the words of the Pope, the deed said the following on this score: ‘So that the high priestly power should not decline, but should flourish more than the imperial power itself, we have decreed that besides the Lateran palace, the city of Rome, the provinces of Italy and all the western lands, and all the places and cities in them, should be transferred to our father Sylvester, so that he should have complete use of and dominion over them.

“We believe and firmly confess the following: the Roman Church is such that if any nation (Church) on earth should in its pride be in disagreement with her in anything, then such a Church ceases to be called and to be considered a Church – it is nothing. It will already be a conventicle of heretics, a collection of schismatics, a synagogue of Satan.”<sup>447</sup>

Things were made worse when Humbert called the Greeks pimps and disciples of Mohammed! Humbert made it clear where the first loyalties of all Christians should lie when he told the Byzantines: “All men have such

---

<sup>447</sup> Lebedev, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-5, 7.

reverence for the holder of the apostolic office of Rome that they prefer the holy commandments and the traditions from the mouth of the head of the Church than from the Holy Scriptures and patristic writings. [Thus the Pope] makes almost the whole world run after God with delight and enthusiasm."<sup>448</sup>

As a consequence of these events, the Greeks unsurprisingly refused to enter into negotiations with the papal legates about an alliance against the Normans...

The climax came on July 16, 1054, when the papal legates marched into the cathedral of Hagia Sophia and placed what has been called "a fantastically ignorant"<sup>449</sup> bull of excommunication on the altar, anathematizing Patriarch Kerularios, Leo of Ohrid and their associates. "Then they strode out of the church, ceremoniously shaking its dust off their feet. A deacon ran out after them and begged them to take back the bull. They refused, and he dropped it in the street..."<sup>450</sup>

Thus did the West renounce its spiritual mother, the Orthodox Church of the East, and reject its Heavenly Father, initiating a schism that has lasted to the present-day and caused innumerable woes and suffering not only to themselves but to the whole world

Four days later, the Patriarch convened a Council that excommunicated the legates.<sup>451</sup> "O you who are Orthodox," he said, "flee the fellowship of those

---

<sup>448</sup> Humbert, in Heather, *op. cit.*, p. 384.

<sup>449</sup> Alexander Dvorkin, *Ocherki po Istorii Vselenskoj Pravoslavnoj Tserkvi* (Sketches on the History of the Universal Orthodox Church), Nizhni-Novgorod, 2006, p. 618. Humbert wrote: "May Michael the neophyte...and all those who follow him... fall under the anathema, Maranatha..." Comby (*op. cit.*, p. 133) supposes that "he did not know that Maranatha means 'Come, Lord', and is not a condemnation". But was he simply quoting I Corinthians 16.22?

<sup>450</sup> Runciman, *The Eastern Schism* 1955, p. 48.

<sup>451</sup> The Byzantine decision read: "When Michael, our most holy ruler and Ecumenical Patriarch was presiding, certain impious and disrespectful men--what else could a pious man call them? -- came out of the darkness, because they were begotten of the West. They came to this pious and divinely protected city from which the springs of Orthodoxy flow as if from on high, disseminating the teachings of piety to the ends of the world. They came like a thunderbolt, or an earthquake, or a hail-storm, or to put it more directly, like wild wolves trying to defile the Orthodox belief by different doctrines..."

"We do not wish to tamper with the Sacred and Holy Creed...by wrongful arguments, improper reasoning and extreme boldness. Unlike them, we do not wish to say that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son -- What a devilish deceit! -- but we say that the Holy Spirit Proceeds from the Father. We also declare that they do not follow the Scripture which says, 'Do not shave your beards.' (Leviticus 19:27).

"They do not want to understand that God created woman, and He decreed that it was improper for men to be alone. We continue to observe inviolate the ancient Canons of the Apostolic perfection and order, and affirm that the marriage of ordained men should not be dissolved. Neither should they be deprived of having sexual relations with their wives, which from time to time is appropriate. So if anyone is found to be worthy of the office of deacon or sub-deacon, he should not be kept from this office. He should be restored to his lawful wife in order that we not dishonor what God has Himself ordained and blessed, especially since the Gospel declares, "Those whom God has joined together, let not man put asunder." (Matthew

who have accepted the heretical Latins and who regard them as the first Christians in the Catholic and Holy Church of God!" For "the Pope is a heretic."<sup>452</sup>

"The bull," writes Louth, " tried to drive a wedge between the emperor and the people of Constantinople on the one hand and the patriarch and his associates on the other. The emperor and the people were praised, while Keroularios was accused of daily disseminating heresy, and a list of such heresies followed: the absurdity of the Greek claim to be the one true Church, alone dispensing baptism and offering the Eucharistic sacrifice, and the use of the title 'oecumenical patriarch' by the patriarch of Constantinople, treating Latins as heretics ('azymites') and practicing rebaptism; allowing clerical marriage ('Nicolaism'), deleting the *Filioque* from the creed, not allowing the baptism of infants before the eighth day (and consequently consigning those who died beforehand to perdition); forbidding Communion to menstruating women; and expelling from the Eucharist clean-shaven Latins...

"Michael Kerularios was careful in his response to the bull. He did not excommunicate the pope. He knew that Pope Leo IX was dead, but was not enough of a canonist to make anything of this by claiming that the legates had exceeded their powers. He concentrated on Humbert's meetings with [the Latinizing Byzantine commander] Argyros at Benevento on the way to Constantinople, claiming that their plotting together had poisoned the whole legation. Like Humbert, he listed the errors of the Latins: the *Filioque*, insistence on priestly celibacy, use of unleavened bread in the Eucharist, failure to offer proper reverence to relics and icons; failure to avoid eating blood in accordance with the decree of the Apostolic synod of Act 15; encouragement of clean-shaven clergy; allowing clergy to take part in war; inclusion of *Tu solus sanctus* ('You alone are holy') in the Great Doxology; use of episcopal rings; laxity in the Lenten fast; and a coolness in referring to the blessed Virgin as simply *Sancta Maria*, rather than the synodically authorized *Theotokos* or *Deipara* - 'Mother of God'. On this basis, Michael appealed for support to the other Eastern patriarchs - of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem - especially to Peter III of Antioch. In his response to Michael Kerularios, however, Peter deplored his inflammatory tone, and argued that all his allegations were either matters

---

19:6) If someone then dares to act against the Apostolic Canons by removing anyone of the clergy who is a presbyter, deacon, or sub-deacon, depriving him of his lawful bond with his wife, let him be excommunicated....

"But they come against us and against the Orthodox Church of God... arriving before the most pious emperor. They intrigued against the faithful and even 'counterfeited' their arrival with the pretext that they came from Rome, and pretended that they were sent by the Pope.... They even produced fraudulent letters which allegedly had been given them by him. This fraud was detected, among other things, also from the seals which were clearly tampered with... The original of the impious document deposited on the Altar of the Great Church by these irreligious and accursed men was not burned, but was placed in the depository to bring the perpetual dishonour to those who have committed such blasphemies against us, and as permanent evidence of this condemnation." (From *Readings in Christianity*, by Robert Van Vorsts, pp. 129-130)

<sup>452</sup> *The Lives of the Pillars of Orthodoxy*, Buena Vista, CO: Holy Apostles Convent, 1990, p. 155.

of no importance or misunderstandings. Different customs were no ground for refusal of Communion; Rome had a place of honour within the Pentarchy of the patriarchs, which Peter upheld. Nor was Peter indifference to the Roman claim that the Petrine foundation of Antioch placed Antioch above Constantinople! For the most part, the Latin errors were not a matter of contumacy, but were to be put down to thie rustic ignorance: they were barbarians and the poverty of language meant that they could not be expected to match the level of conceptual accuracy found among other educated Greeks (a form of condescension that was often to characterize the more conciliatory Greek opponents of the Latins)."<sup>453</sup>

\*

Although 1054 has conventionally been taken as the date of the severing of the branch, the moment when the Western Church finally fell away from the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, many in more recent times have doubted that this was the real cut-off point. Thus a Byzantine council of 1089 acted as if the schism of 1054 had not taken place.<sup>454</sup> Again, Dvorkin writes that "the popular consciousness of that time in no way accepted the schism as final: nobody pronounced a ban on mutual communion, and concelebrations of priests and hierarchs of the two halves of Christianity continued even after 1054. The name of the pope of Rome was commemorated in the diptychs of other Eastern Churches (at any rate, sometimes). In our [Russian] lists of saints there were western saints who died after 1054."<sup>455</sup>

Nevertheless, the balance of evidence remains in favour of the traditional dating.<sup>456</sup> Formally speaking there had been no communion between Rome and Constantinople since 1014, when Rome reintroduced the *Filioque* into the Creed. In 1054, this break was consolidate, and there was a sharp and noticeable change in the papacy's policies and attitudes to dissidents in Church and State. The bloody destruction of Orthodox England in 1066-70 completely transformed the character of English Christianity and statehood; it was followed by the less violent subjection of Churches throughout Western Europe. The "Gregorian Reform" confirmed several of the heretical innovations that Michael Cerularius had condemned: compulsory celibacy for the clergy, the universal jurisdiction and infallibility of the papacy; the subjection of all kings to papal rule. In the 1080s came the papal blessing of the Norman invasion of Greece and in 1095 the first of the crusades – which did so much damage to Eastern Orthodox Christendom. In 1098 the Pope presided

---

<sup>453</sup> Louth, *op. cit.*, pp. 309, 310-311. Cf. Archpriest Vladimir Dolgikh, "A History of the Papal Pride that led to the Great Schism", *Orthodox Christianity*, January 28, 2020.

<sup>454</sup> Papadakis, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-77.

<sup>455</sup> Dvorkin, *op. cit.*, p. 619.

<sup>456</sup> Cf. O. Barmin, "Sovremennaia istoriografia o datirovke tserkovnoj skhizmy mezhdou Zapadom i Vostokom khristianskoj ekumeny" ("Contemporary Historiography on the Dating of the Church Schism between the West and the East of the Christian Oikumene"), in D.E. Afinogenov, A.V. Muraviev, *Traditsii i Nasledie Khristianskogo Vostoka* (The Traditions and Heritage of the Christian East), Moscow: "Indrik", 1996, pp. 117-126.

over the pseudo-council of Bari, at which the Greeks of southern Italy were persuaded to accept the *Filioque*...

Moreover, there seemed to be no attempt to heal the breach. "No further missions were sent [from Rome to Constantinople]. Already, in the space of a few years, the mood in Rome had decisively shifted. What was at stake, many reformers had begun to accept, was nothing less than a fundamental point of principle. Cardinal Humbert had sounded out a trumpet blast on a truly decisive field of battle. The message that it sent to the rest of Christendom could hardly have been more ringing: no one, not even the Patriarch of the New Rome, could be permitted to defy the authority of the Pope..."<sup>457</sup>

Ironically in view of Romanides' theory that it was the Germans who destroyed the papacy, the last powerful opponent of the new, "Reformed" papacy was the German Emperor Henry IV, who was anathematized and deprived of his crown by Pope Gregory VII...

The momentous event of the Great Schism was heralded in the heavens by a huge explosion. "Arab and Chinese astronomers recorded the appearance of the bright Crab Supernova in [July] 1054. At X-ray and gamma-ray energies above 30 KeV, the Crab is generally the strongest persistent source in the sky today."<sup>458</sup> From now on, the whole of the West would be steadily sucked into the great black hole formed through the apostasy of the Roman papacy - the explosion of the first star in the firmament of the Church on earth.

---

<sup>457</sup> Tom Holland, *Millenium*, London: Abacus Books, 2009, p. 280.

<sup>458</sup> Dr. Jerjis Alajaji, personal communication, March 22, 2010.

*IV. THE DECLINE AND FALL OF NEW ROME  
(TWELFTH TO FIFTEENTH CENTURIES)*

## 26. THE SLIDE TOWARDS ABSOLUTISM

We have seen that political power, even Christian political power, was evaluated ambiguously by the Holy Fathers. On the one hand, it was a force for law and order, a protection of the defenceless, a focus of unity in the Church, a support of missionary work beyond the boundaries of the Church. On the other hand, it could be the object of naked ambition, the instrument of the oppression of Christians and even of open revolt against God.

We have already met the two basic forms of the abuse of state power in Christianity: caesaropapism, the besetting sin of the East, and papocaesarism, the besetting sin of the West.<sup>459</sup> In modern times the philosopher Nicholas Berdiaev was an opponent of all Christian state power, seeing in it just so many variations on the caesaropapist or papocaesarist theme. As he writes: "Papocaesarism and caesaropapism were two forms of 'the Christian state', two false attempts on the part of the authorities of this world to claim themselves to be Christian, whereas it has never been said or foretold that the religion of Christ would lord it over the world, would persecute and rape (and not itself be persecuted and raped). 'The Christian state', which gives the impression that the world has accepted Christianity and that Christian power lords it over the world, in all its forms was a historical deal between Christianity and paganism, or rather, it was a state of non-Christians. The state is of pagan origin and is necessary only for the pagan world; the state cannot be a form of Christian society, and for that reason Catholic papism and Byzantine caesaropapism are remains of paganism, signs of the fact that humanity has not yet accepted Christ into itself. For humanity that has accepted Christ, for God-manhood, human power is not necessary, since it is absolutely obedient to the power of God, since for it Christ is the High Priest and King. A genuine theocracy is the revelation of Godmanhood on earth, the revelation of the Holy Spirit in conciliar humanity. In Christian history, in 'historical Christianity' the time of this revelation has not yet arrived, and humanity has been deceived, living in its collective history in a pagan manner. As an exception, ascetic religious consciousness has turned away from the earth, from the flesh, from history, from the cosmos, and for that reason on earth, in the history of this world the pagan state, the pagan family, and the pagan way of life have pretended to be Christian, while papism and the whole of medieval religious politics has been called theocratic."<sup>460</sup>

The Church has never accepted this view. As we have seen, she has accepted Christian statehood since Constantine as a gift from God. And however frequently Christian statehood has fallen away from the ideal, this does not mean that the gift itself should be rejected.

---

<sup>459</sup> For a history of the terms "papocaesarism" and "caesaropapism", see Gilbert Dagron, "Vostochnij tsezaropapizm (istoria i kritika odnoj kontseptsii)" ("Eastern Caesaropapism (a history and critique of one conception)", <http://portal-credo.ru/site/?act=lib&id=177>).

<sup>460</sup> Berdiaev, *Filosofia Svobody* (The Philosophy of Freedom).

Nevertheless, it is true that the more ascetic writers have tended to give more ambiguous assessments of Christian statehood. For example, St. Symeon the New Theologian (+1022), while never saying a word against the institution of the Orthodox autocracy as such, was fierce in his criticism of its abuse at the hands of Emperor Basil II. As Archbishop Basil (Krivoshein) writes: "Following the thought of the Apostle Paul (I Corinthians 1.27-28) that 'God has abandoned the wise and powerful and rich of the world, and has chosen in His inexpressible goodness the weak and foolish and poor of the world', Symeon the New Theologian draws the following contrast between the Divine and the earthly kingdom: 'People are disgusted by them (i.e. the weak, the foolish, the poor), the earthly king cannot bear the sight of them, their ruling men turn away from them, the rich despise them and, when they meet them, pass by them as if they did not exist, and nobody considers it desirable to mix with them, while God, Who is served by an innumerable number of angels, Who upholds all things by the word of His power, Whose majesty is unbearable for all, did not refuse to become father and friend and brother of these outcasts, but wanted to become incarnate, so as to become like us in everything except sin and make us participants in His glory and kingdom.' In this excerpt from the second *Catechetical Sermon*, what is interesting is not only the vivid description both of the 'rich' with their disgust and disdain towards the 'weak and poor', and of the 'king' who cannot even 'bear the sight of them', but also the contrast between the 'earthly king' and the heavenly King, God, Who, in contrast to the earthly did not refuse to become poor and a man like us, our brother. As we can see from this, St. Symeon the New Theologian was foreign to the thought that the 'earthly king' was an image of God on earth, and that the earthly kingdom is a reflection of the Heavenly Kingdom. On the contrary, the earthly kingdom with all its customs seems to him to be the opposite of the Kingdom of God".<sup>461</sup>

Unfortunately, from the twelfth century, the behaviour of the Byzantine emperors tended to confirm St. Symeon's negative assessment of the earthly kingdom...

However, before that we are presented with the much rarer image of a papocaesarist patriarch in the person of Michael Cerularius. This is somewhat ironical because it was in the patriarchate of Michael Cerularius that the papocaesarist patriarchs of the West fell away from the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, being condemned precisely by him and his Synod. But if we are to believe Psellos, the patriarch "tried to rule over the Empress" Theodora, overthrew her successor, Michael VI (1056-1057), forcibly tonsuring him, and set up Isaac Comnenus (1057-1059) in his place.

---

<sup>461</sup> Krivoshein, "Prepodobnij Simeon Novij Bogoslov i ego otnoshenie k sotsial'no-politicheskoj dejstvitsel'nosti svoego vremeni" ("St. Symeon the New Theologian and his relationship to the social-political reality of his time", in *Bogoslovskie Trudy* (Theological Works), Nizhni Novgorod, 1996, pp. 242-243.

Then, “losing all shame,” according to Psellos, “he joined royalty and priesthood in himself; in his hand he held the cross, while from his mouth imperial laws came.” But gradually Isaac asserted his power, arrested Cerularius and tried him for high treason in 1059. So the East’s one brush with papocaesarism came to a swift end...

It is a striking coincidence that in the same year, 1059, in which Pope Nicholas II obtained an imperial-style coronation from his cardinals, Patriarch Michael Cerularius should attempt the same. But Nicholas succeeded, whereas Michael failed, defeated by the power of the Orthodox Emperor. That was the difference between East and West.

As Bishop Dionysius (Alferov) of Novgorod writes: “Fortunately, these [papocaesarist] tendencies did not develop in the East into real papism. The eastern ‘candidates for the papacy’ (for example, the Egyptian or Constantinopolitan patriarchs) always had a power counter-weight in the person of the emperors. In this sense the emperors played the role of the *restrainers* not only of the external forces of evil nestling in the underground, but also the forces of intra-ecclesiastical apostasy in the person of archpastors wanting to be ‘ecclesiastical monarchs’.”<sup>462</sup>

The difference between East and West consisted in the fact that while deviations from the “symphonic” norm of Church-State relations were common in both, this norm was never forgotten in the East, whereas it was officially and triumphantly rejected in the West.

The norm was described by I.I. Sokolov as follows: “In the question of the mutual relations of Church and State Byzantium not only limited the principle of the all-powerful and all-devouring State (*quod principi placuit, legis habet vigorem*), but also pushed into the foreground the idea of the Church and proclaimed the superiority of Church canon over civil law, ecclesiastical power over secular power, ecclesiastical teaching over the principles of social-political life. According to the Byzantine view, the State could carry out its function only to the extent that it was penetrated with the teaching of the Church.”<sup>463</sup> And again he wrote, referring to the *Epanagoge*: “The very nature of royal power is corrupted when the king weakens in carrying out good works. In relation to the Church the king is the keeper of piety and right belief, the exact fulfiller and protector of the church dogmas and canons; he must be distinguished more than anyone else by zeal for God. But generally speaking the whole power of the king finds its limit in the religious and moral law established by the Supreme Lawgiver and Judge, Christ.”<sup>464</sup>

---

<sup>462</sup> Alferov, “Teokratia ili Ierokratia” (Theocracy or Hierocracy), [www.evanorthodox.ru; Vernost'](http://www.evanorthodox.ru/Vernost/), 130, 2009, <http://metanthonymemorial.org/VernostNo130.html>.

<sup>463</sup> Sokolov, *Lektsii po istorii Greko-Vostochnoj Tserkvi* (Lectures on the History of the Greek-Eastern Church), St. Petersburg, 1914, p. 14.

<sup>464</sup> Sokolov, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

These principles were in general respected by the early Comnenan emperors. Thus Emperor John Comnenus wrote to Pope Honorius (1124-1130): "In the course of my reign I have recognized two things as being completely distinct from each other. The one is the spiritual power, which was bestowed by the Great and Supreme High Priest and Prince of the world, Christ, upon His apostles and disciples as an unalterable good through which, according to Divine right, they received the power to bind and to loose all people. The other thing is the secular power, a power directed towards temporal things, according to the Divine word: Give to Caesar that which belongs to him; a power shut up in the sphere belonging to it. These are the two dominant powers in the world; although they are distinct and separate, they act for their mutual benefit in a harmonious union, helping and complementing each other. They can be compared with the two sisters Martha and Mary, of whom the Gospel speaks. From the consensual manifestation of these two powers there flows the common good, while from their hostile relations there flows great harm."<sup>465</sup>

But the norm was more and more often defied as the later Comneni Emperors took it upon themselves not only to convene Church Councils, but even to take the leading part in them and punish dissidents.<sup>466</sup> Thus John Comnenus' successor, Manuel I, had the following powers, according to Archbishop Demetrius Chomatianos: "He presided over synodal decisions and gave them executive force; he formulated the rules of the ecclesiastical hierarchy; he legislated on the 'life and the statute' of the clergy, including the clergy of the *bema*, and on the ecclesiastical jurisdictions, the elections to vacant sees and the transfer of bishops; he could promote a bishopric to the rank of a metropolia 'to honour a man or a city'. The frontier thus traced annexed to the imperial domain several contested and contestable zones, but in the name of a right - that which gave the emperor his statute and his title of common *epistemonarch* of the Churches."<sup>467</sup>

The meaning of the term "*epistemonarch*" here is obscure<sup>468</sup>; it may also have been obscure to most Byzantines. But that was all the better from Satan's point of view; for, as Aristotle said, "the occurrence of an important transition in customs often passes unnoticed".<sup>469</sup> However, the Byzantines could hardly fail to notice the use to which the emperors now put it - to justify their ever-increasing interference in ecclesiastical affairs.

---

<sup>465</sup> Emperor John Comnenus, in A.P. Lebedev, *Istoricheskie Ocherki Sostoiania Vizantijsko-Vostochnoj Tserkvi* (Historical Sketches of the Condition of the Byzantine Eastern Church), St. Petersburg, 2003, p. 101.

<sup>466</sup> This tendency is already evident in Alexis I, who also ordered one of the very rare executions for heresy in Orthodox history, that of the Paulician Monk Basil, which took place after Alexis' death, in 1119 (Lebedev, *op. cit.*, p. 105).

<sup>467</sup> Dagron, *Empereur et Prêtre* (Emperor and Priest), Paris : Éditions Gallimard, 1996, pp. 259-260.

<sup>468</sup> It seems to have referred to the monastic duty of gathering together the brothers in church for services. See I.I. Sokolov, "Tserkovnaia politika imperatora Isaaka II Angela" (The Church Politics of Emperor Isaac II Angelus), in *Svt. Grigorij Palama*, St. Petersburg, 2004, pp. 166-167.

<sup>469</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, 1303 a 22.

Thus the first of the Angeli dynasty, Isaac, in a novella issued in 1187, justified his hearing complaints of bishops together with the patriarch on the grounds that he had received “the rank of *epistemonarch* of the Church from him who anointed him and made him emperor.”<sup>470</sup>

Using this invented power, the Emperors tended to choose patriarchs who would be obedient to them. As George Acropolites wrote: “The Emperors in general want the patriarchs to be humble people, not greatly endowed in mind, who would easily give in to their desires as to law-giving decrees. And this happens all the more frequently with uneducated people; being ignorant in word, they are not capable of bold speaking and bow before the Emperor’s orders.”<sup>471</sup> Similarly, Nicephorus Gregoras wrote that the emperors chose simple people for the post of patriarch “so that they may unhesitatingly obey their commands, like slaves, and so that they should not offer any resistance.”<sup>472</sup>

And yet they did not always get their way. The extent, but also the limits, of the Emperor’s power were strikingly illustrated by a debate that took place towards the end of the reign of Manuel I. The Emperor convened a Council in order to strike out the following words found in the rite for the reception of Muslims to Orthodoxy: “Anathema to the God of Mohammed, about whom Mohammed says that... He does not beget and is not begotten, and nobody is like Him.” However, the hierarchy did not want to strike out this phrase. Then the Emperor “issued a second decree, in which he again insisted on his opinion and then appointed another Council in Scutari, where the Emperor had withdrawn because of illness to make use of the pure country air. Thither the Emperor summoned the Patriarch and Bishops, but Manuel because of his illness could not enter into personal conversation with the Fathers: the matter was conducted through the Emperor’s beloved secretary. The latter in the person of the Emperor presented two papers to the Council. These were, first, a document in which Manuel set out his point of view on the question being debated, and secondly, his letter to the Patriarch. The Emperor demanded that the Bishops should sign the indicated document. And in the letter he in every way reproached the Patriarch and Bishops for their stubbornness and defiance, even threatening to convene a Council in which he wanted to entrust the presidency to none other than the Pope of Rome (it can be understood that the Pope in this letter served for Manuel only as a kind of scarecrow). In the same letter to the Patriarch the Emperor wrote: ‘I would be ungrateful to God if I did not apply all my efforts so that He, the true God, should not be subjected to anathema.’ But the Patriarch and Bishops even now did not want to share the Emperor’s opinion. On this occasion the noted Eustathius, Metropolitan of Thessalonica, spoke out with special zeal against the Emperor’s demands. He was a man of wide learning, distinguished by the gift of eloquence. He heatedly

---

<sup>470</sup> Dagron, *op. cit.*, p. 261. See Sokolov, *op. cit.*

<sup>471</sup> Acropolites, *Chronicle*, ch. 53; in Lebedev, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

<sup>472</sup> Gregoras, *History of Byzantium*, VIII, 2; in Lebedev, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

declared: 'I would consider myself completely mad and would be unworthy of these hierarchical vestments if I recognized as true some Mohammedan God, who was his guide and instructor in all his disgusting deeds.' The unusual boldness with which Eustathius began to oppose the Emperor horrified everyone. The hearers almost froze at these words of Eustathius. The Emperor's secretary immediately set off to inform Manuel about his. The Emperor was indescribably amazed and considered himself deeply offended by Eustathius' words. He said: 'Either I shall justify myself and prove that I do not believe in a God that is the teacher of all impiety, and then I shall subject him who vomits blasphemy against the Anointed of God to merited punishment, or I shall be convicted of glorifying another God, and not the true one, and then I will be grateful that I have been led away from a false opinion.' Patriarch Theodosius set off for the quarters of the Emperor, and for a long time tried to persuade him to forgive the act of Eustathius, and finally, to reduce the Emperor's anger, promised that he, the Patriarch, and the Bishops would agree to accept the removal of the formula about the God of Mohammed from the *trebniks*. And apparently, the Council did in fact cease to oppose the will of the Emperor. Manuel was delighted, forgave Eustathius and sent the Bishops off to Constantinople in peace. But the Emperor somewhat deceived himself in his hopes. The next day, early in the morning, an envoy of the Emperor came to the Patriarch demanding impatiently that the Bishops should assemble and sign a decree of the Emperor. The Bishops quickly assembled at the Patriarch's, but refused to sign the decree. Although, the day before, the Bishops, probably out of fear for Eustathius, had agreed completely to accept the opinion of Manuel, now, when the danger had passed, they again began to oppose the Emperor. They began to criticize the decree, found inaccuracies in it, began to demand changes and removals. Learning about this, the Emperor became very angry against the Bishops and showered them with indecent swear-words, calling them 'pure fools'. History does not record what happened after this. At any rate the end of the quarrel was quite unexpected: the historian Gregoras records the ending in only a few words. The Bishops, he says, somehow agreed to reject the formula which had enticed the Emperor, and replaced it with a new one, in which, instead of the anathema on the God of Mohammed there was proclaimed an anathema on Mohammed himself and on his teaching and on his followers."<sup>473</sup>

Now the Church herself began to find ways of justifying the emperor's new power. Canonists were found - Patriarch Theodore Balsamon of Antioch (12<sup>th</sup> century) and Archbishop Demetrius (Chomatianos) of Ochrid (early 13<sup>th</sup> century) - who ascribed to the emperor all of the privileges of the episcopate except the conducting of church services and sacraments, but including the traditionally exclusively episcopal domain of teaching the faith. According to Balsamon, "the Orthodox Emperors can enter the holy altar when they want to, and make the sign of the cross with the *trikiri*, like hierarchs. They present catechetical teachings to the people, which is allowed only for local bishops." "Since the reigning Emperor is the Lord's Anointed by reason of his anointing

---

<sup>473</sup> Lebedev, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-124.

to the kingdom, but our Christ and God is, besides, a bishop, similarly the Emperor is adorned with hierarchical gifts."<sup>474</sup>

According to Balsamon, as Dagron summarizes his thought: "If the emperor acts in many circumstances as a bishop, this is because his power is dual. His dual competence, spiritual and temporal, can only be understood by the quasi-sacerdotal character of royalty, founded on anointing...

"The Church is subject to the authority of the emperor and that of the patriarchs. That is established. But what is the authority of the emperor based on? On his role as *epistemonarch* – that is, on the disciplinary function which he is recognized to have. Balsamon does not reject this explanation and uses it on occasion, for example, with regard to the right of appeal to the emperor in ecclesiastical matters, to show that the decisions of the patriarchal tribunal are without appeal in view of the loftiness of the see, but that the emperor in his capacity as *epistemonarch* of the Church will have to judge the patriarch if he is personally accused of sacrilegious theft (ιεροσυλη) or heterodoxy...

"Insofar as the Emperor, through his anointing to the kingdom, is the Anointed of the Lord, while the Christ [= the Anointed One] and our God is, besides other things, also a Bishop, there is a basis for the Emperor being adorned with hierarchical gifts'. The reasoning is simple, albeit under a complicated form: the Anointed One *par excellence*, Christ, is qualified as bishop by us, so the emperors, who also receive anointing, must be equally considered to be bishops."<sup>475</sup>

Chomatianos is hardly less clear than Balsamon in his caesaropapist views: "The Emperor, who is and is called the general supreme ruler of the Church, stands above the decrees of the Councils; he gives to these decrees their proper force. He is the standard in relations to the ecclesiastical hierarchy, the lawgiver for the life and conduct of the priests, to his jurisdiction belong the quarrels of bishops and clergy and the right of filling vacant sees. He can make bishops metropolitans, and Episcopal sees – metropolitan sees. In a word, with the single exception of carrying out Divine services, the Emperor is endowed with all the remaining Episcopal privileges, on the basis of which his ecclesiastical resolutions receive their canonical authority. Just as the ancient Roman Emperors signed themselves: *Pontifex Maximus*, such should the present Emperors be considered to be, as the Lord's Anointed, for the sake of the imperial anointing. Just as the Saviour, being the Anointed One, is also honoured as First Priest, so the Emperor, as the Anointed one, is adorned with the charismata of the firstpriesthood."<sup>476</sup>

---

<sup>474</sup> Balsamon, *Interpretation of the 69th Canon of the Council in Trullo*, in Lebedev, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>475</sup> Dagron, *op. cit.*, p. 267; Fomin and Fomina, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

<sup>476</sup> Chomatianos, in Ralley and Potlis, *Mega Syntagma ton theion kai ieron kanonon* (Great Collection of the Divine and Sacred Canons), Athens, 1855, vol. V, p. 429.

Again, he writes that the transfer of bishops “is often accomplished at the command of the emperor, if the common good requires it. For the emperor, who is and is called the supreme watchman over church order, stands higher than the conciliar resolutions and communicates to them strength and validity. He is the leader of the Church hierarchy and the law-giver in relation to the life and behaviour of priests; he has the right to decide quarrels between metropolitans, bishops and clergy and fills vacant Episcopal sees. He can raise Episcopal sees and bishops to the dignity of metropolias and metropolitans... His decrees have the force of canons.”<sup>477</sup>

Ostrogorsky characterizes the ideas of Balsamon and Chomatianos as “merely echoes of old and antiquated ideas”.<sup>478</sup> But these old ideas, dressed up in new, pseudo-canonical forms, were still dangerous... Thus Dagron writes: “Insensibly we have passed from one logic to another. The rights of intervention recognized by the Church for the emperor are no longer considered as exceptional privileges, but as a manifestation of the quasi-episcopal nature of imperial power. Taken together, they give the temporal power a particular status, and force one to the conclusion that if the emperor is not strictly speaking a cleric ‘after the order of Aaron’, he is not in any case a simple layman. By contrast with a purely juridical conception, Balsamon sketches, not without prudence, a charismatic conception of imperial power. He suggests that [the emperor’s right of] ‘promoting’ the patriarch is not only the [right of] choosing from a list of three names which is in principle submitted by the assembly of metropolitans, or of imposing his choice on the same assembly in the case of disagreement, as is envisaged in a chapter of the *Book of Ceremonies*: it is above all [the right of] ‘creating’ him – before the religious consecration in which the metropolitans proceed to Hagia Sophia on the following Sunday -, either by invoking the Holy Spirit, as Balsamon says, or by using the somewhat more neutral formula preserved by the ceremonial of the 10<sup>th</sup> century: ‘Grace Divine and the Royalty that we have received from it promote the very pious person before us to the rank of patriarch of Constantinople.’ The ‘designation’ of the patriarch would be a political prerogative, just as the carving out of dioceses and the promotion of Episcopal sees, to which the emperor has the sovereign right to proceed for a better harmony between the spiritual and the temporal powers; but his ‘promotion by invocation of the Spirit’ is a religious, if not a liturgical act, which only a charisma can justify...”<sup>479</sup>

Balsamon even went so far as to reverse the traditional Patriarch-soul, Emperor-body metaphor in favour of the emperor: “Emperors and Patriarchs must be respected as teachers of the Church for the sake of their dignity, which they received through anointing with chrism. Hence derives the power of the right-believing Emperors to instruct the Christian peoples and, like priests,

---

<sup>477</sup> *Tvorenia sv. Otsov i uchitelej tserkvi* (The Works of the Holy Fathers and Teachers of the Church), St. Petersburg, 1907, pp. 360-361.

<sup>478</sup> Ostrogorsky, “Otnoshenie Tserkvi i gosudarstva v Vizantii” (“The Relationship of the Church and the State in Byzantium”), quoted in Fomin and Fomina, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 104.

<sup>479</sup> Dagron, *op. cit.*, p. 271.

offer incense to God. Their glory consists in the fact that, like the sun, they enlighten the world from one end to the other with the flash of their Orthodoxy. The strength and activity of the Emperor touches the soul and body of man while the strength and power of the Patriarch touches only the soul." Again, he wrote: "The emperor is subject neither to the laws nor to the Church canons".<sup>480</sup> And yet St. Nicholas the Mystic had written: "If the emperor is the enemy and foe of the laws, who will fear them?" And so the Balsamonite teaching on the role of the Emperor could only lead to the undermining of the Empire and its eventual fall...

---

<sup>480</sup> Balsamon, quoted in Fomin and Fomina, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 120.

## 27. THE FIRST FALL OF THE CITY

The late twelfth century was bloody even by Byzantine standards... During the Macedonian dynasty, the idea of lawful succession from father to son had taken root, so the anarchy at the end of the twelfth century was a sharp regression from earlier practice – a regression made worse by the fact that there now existed a “canonical” argument for the absolutism of the emperors. Moreover, ambition on the one side was matched by servility on the other: the attitude of many in Byzantium to the emperors was nothing short of idolatrous. Thus in 1216 Nicetas Choniates wrote: “For most of the Roman Emperors it was quite intolerable merely to give orders, to walk around in gold clothes, to use the public purse as their own, to distribute it however and to whomever they wanted, and to treat free people as if they were slaves. They considered it an extreme insult to themselves if they were not recognised to be wise men, like gods to look at, heroes in strength, wise in God like Solomon, God-inspired leaders, the most faithful rule of rules – in a word, infallible judges of both Divine and human matters. Therefore instead of rebuking, as was fitting, the irrational and bold, who were introducing teachings new and unknown to the Church, or even presenting the matter to those who by their calling should know and preach about God, they, not wishing to occupy the second place, themselves became at one and the same time both proclaimers of the dogmas and their judges and establishers, and they often punished those who did not agree with them...”<sup>481</sup>

The ghastly story began in 1182, when a popular philanderer and adventurer, Andronicus Comnenus, marched on the capital against the young Emperor Alexis Comnenus II. “As he progressed,” write Lord Norwich, “the people flocked from their houses to cheer him on his way; soon the road was lined with his supporters. Even before he crossed the straits, rebellion had broken out in Constantinople, and with it exploded all the pent-up xenophobia that the events of the previous two years [Manuel’s pro-western proclivities] had done so much to increase. What followed was the massacre of virtually every Latin in the city: women and children, the old and infirm, even the sick from the hospitals, as the whole quarter in which they lived was burnt to the ground.”<sup>482</sup>

Vengeance was swift in coming, both from within and outside the empire. First, Andronicus, having ascended the throne, proceeded to conduct a reign of terror against his subjects that can be compared only to Ivan the Terrible’s. And then the empire began to collapse. Already in 1181 the Hungarians had seized Dalmatia, much of Croatia and Sirmium. In 1183 they joined forces with the Serbs under Stephen Nemanja and sacked Belgrade, Nish and Sardica. A great-nephew of Manuel’s, Isaac Comnenus, seized power in Cyprus and

---

<sup>481</sup> Nicetas Choniates, *The Reign of Manuel*, VI, 31; quoted in Fomin and Fomina, *op. cit.*, p. 120; Lebedev, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

<sup>482</sup> John Julius Norwich, *Byzantium: The Decline and Fall*, London: Penguin, 1996, p. 143. See also [http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massacre\\_of\\_the\\_Latins](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massacre_of_the_Latins).

declared its independence. In 1185 a huge Sicilian army sacked Thessalonica with fearful brutality and were finally repelled only by the next emperor, Isaac II Angelus. Later, the Bulgarians and Wallachians under Peter and Asen rebelled.

Andronicus was overthrown by Isaac II Angelus, and the ever-fickle people took a gory revenge on their former idol, torturing him before finally killing him. For, as Nicetas Choniates relates, "they did not think that this was a man who had not long ago been the Emperor adorned with a royal diadem, and that they had all glorified him as a saviour, and greeted him with best wishes and bows, and they had given a terrible oath to be faithful and devoted to him".<sup>483</sup> Thus in the person of Andronicus was fulfilled the prophecy of Emperor Constantine VII in 1057: "If the Emperor forgets the fear of God, he will inevitably fall into sin and be changed into a despot, he will not be able to keep to the customs established by the Fathers, and by the intrigues of the devil he will do that which is unworthy and contrary to the commandments of God, he will become hateful to the people, the senate and the Church, he will become unworthy to be called a Christian, he will be deprived of his post, will be subject to anathema, and, finally, will be killed as the 'common enemy' of all Romans, both 'those who command' and 'those who obey'..."<sup>484</sup>

Isaac in his own way was no better than Andronicus. He deposed several patriarchs; for, as he claimed, "the Emperors are allowed to do everything, because on earth there is no difference in power between God and the Emperor: the Emperors are allowed to do everything, and they can use God's things on a par with their own, since they received the royal dignity itself from God, and there is no difference between God and them."<sup>485</sup> Isaac ascribed to himself the power to correct what was done in the Church contrary to the Church canons.<sup>486</sup> Moreover, the encomiasts blasphemously addressed him as "God-like" and "equal to God"! <sup>487</sup>

When the Emperors exalted their dignity to the level of Divinity, and the people trampled on them in spite of the Lord's command: "Touch not Mine anointed", Divine vengeance could not fail to appear. Isaac was deposed and blinded by his brother, Alexis III Angelus, who was no better than he. Finally, in 1204 Isaac's son, Alexis IV regained the throne for himself and his father. He did this by accompanying the Doge of Venice Dandolo (who was thirsting for revenge against the Greeks for earlier mistreatment) and the soldiers of the Fourth Crusade to Constantinople and promising them money, soldiers and

---

<sup>483</sup> Nicetas Choniates, *The Reign of Isaac*, III, 7; quoted in Lebedev, *op. cit.*, p. 95. See also Norwich, *op. cit.*, chapter 9.

<sup>484</sup> Emperor Constantine VII, *On the Government of the Empire*.

<sup>485</sup> Nicetas Choniates, quoted in Fomin and Fomina, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

<sup>486</sup> Isaac, *Novella de electionibus pontificum (Law on the Election of Bishops)*, P.G. 135: 440; in Lebedev, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

<sup>487</sup> R.J. Macrides, "From the Komnenoi to the Palaiologoi: imperial models in decline and exile", in Paul Magdalino (ed.), *New Constantines: the Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, Aldershot: Variorum, 1994, p. 278.

the subjection of the Church of Constantinople to Rome. But the Angeli betrayed the Venetians, who then seized the City, subjected it to the worst sacking in its history and installed a western king on the imperial throne and a western bishop on the patriarchal throne...

As Bishop Dionysius writes: "No more than 15,000 Latin crusaders stormed the well fortified city with its population of one million and its five-times larger garrison! After this the same band of wandering knights took possession of the whole of Balkan Greece and founded their Latin empire on its ruins. Nobody thought of resisting, of saving the capital, of defending the Orthodox monarchy. The local Byzantine administration itself offered its services to the new masters. In the lower classes apathy reigned towards all that had happened, and even evil joy at the wealthy city's sacking. Using the suitable opportunity, local separatists sprang into life: not only Serbia, Bosnia and Bulgaria separated and declared their independence, but also the purely Greek provinces of Epirus, Trebizond and some of the islands..."<sup>488</sup>

\*

After the fall of Constantinople to the crusaders in 1204, asks Bishop Dionysius (Alferov), "what remained for the few Byzantine patriots and zealots of Orthodoxy to do? Correctly evaluating the situation, they understood that the process of the fall was already irreversible, that neither the empire nor the capital could be saved by them. Having elected Theodore Lascaris as emperor on the day before the fall of Constantinople, they left the capital with him and founded a centre of resistance in the hilly and wooded district of Bithynia. It is noteworthy that the centre became the city of Nicaea, the place in which the First and Seventh (the last) Ecumenical Councils had been conducted. Here, to Nicaea, there flowed the church hierarchs who had not submitted to the Roman pope and his puppet - the new patriarch of Constantinople. These zealot bishops elected their own Orthodox Nicaean patriarch. The Nicaean patriarch received St. Savva of Serbia and gave autocephaly to the Serbian Church; and it was he who appointed our Metropolitan Cyril, the fellow-struggler of the right-believing Prince Alexander Nevsky. In this way the Nicaean Greeks had communion with the Orthodox in other countries.

"The material and military forces of the Nicaean Empire were tiny by comparison with its mighty enemies: the Latin West and the Muslim East. And in spite of that the Nicaean Kingdom survived for more than half a century. The Providence of God clearly preserved it, destroying its dangerous enemies in turn: the Turks constricted the Latins, and these same Turks were themselves defeated by the Mongols.

"The Nicaean Empire relit in the Greeks the flame of zeal for Orthodoxy and its national-state vestment. It opposed faith, and life according to the faith, to

---

<sup>488</sup> Alferov, "Uroki Nikejskogo Tsarstva" ("Lessons of the Nicaean Empire"), [http://catacomb.org.ua/rubr10/R10\\_05.htm](http://catacomb.org.ua/rubr10/R10_05.htm).

the society that had been corrupted by base materialist instincts. The first three Nicaean emperors Theodore I Lascaris, John Vatatzes and Theodore II were people of burning faith, firm and energetic rulers and courageous warriors.

“Interesting is the reply of the second Nicaean Emperor John Vatatzes to Pope Innocent III. Rejecting the pope’s offer of a unia, and replying to his mockery (what kind of emperor are you, he said, if you sit in the woods and not in the capital), John replied: ‘The emperor is he who rules not walls and towers, not stones and logs, but the people of the faithful.’ And this people was those who for the sake of the preservation of Orthodoxy abandoned the capital and gathered with him ‘in the woods’.”<sup>489</sup>

So Romanity survived in Nicaea; the Lascarid Emperors preserved and nurtured the strength of the Roman power in exile. And their position was reinforced by an important sacramental development that strengthened the autocracy while at the same time restoring the Patriarch to a position of something like equality with the Emperor – the visible anointing of the emperor with holy oil, at the hands of a patriarch. This was first introduced at the coronation of Emperor Theodore I Lascaris.

It had taken several centuries for the imperial coronation to acquire this strictly ecclesiastical character. Alexander Dvorkin writes: “The ceremony of coronation introduced by Diocletian was accomplished by the first official of the Empire. The first Christian emperors continued this practice. For example, Theodosius II was crowned by the prefect of the city of Constantinople. However, at the coronation of his successor, Marcian, the patriarch was already present. [And his successor, Leo, was probably crowned by the patriarch.] On the one hand, this signified that the patriarch had become the second most important official person in the Empire after the emperor himself. But on the other hand, his participation turned the coronation into a religious ceremony. In the course of it the emperor was subjected to a kind of ordination, he received the gifts of the Holy Spirit. From that time the imperial palace became known as the holy palace. The palace ceremonies acquired a liturgical character in which the emperor played a double role: as representative of God on earth and representative of the people before God, the symbol of God Himself and of the Divine incarnation. Nevertheless, during the whole of the first half of Byzantine history the crowning only sanctioned *de facto* the already proclaimed emperor. The ancient Roman tradition of the army and senate proclaiming the emperor continued to remain the main criterion of their [his?] entering into his post. However, in the eleventh century there appeared the opinion among the canonists (such as Patriarch Arsenius the Studite) that the lawfulness of the emperors was founded, not on the proclamation, but upon the patriarchal crowning.

“A special character was given to the position of the emperor by specific petitions in the litanies and prayers read in the churches on feastdays. In the

---

<sup>489</sup> Alferov, “Uroki Nikejskogo Tsarstva” (“The Lessons of the Nicaean Empire”), *op. cit.*

prayer on Christmas Eve Christ was asked to 'raise the peoples of the whole inhabited world to give tribute to Your Majesty as the magi brought gifts to Christ'. In the songs of Pentecost it was said that the Holy Spirit descended in the form of fiery tongues on the head of the emperor. Constantine Porphyrogennitus wrote that it was precisely through the palace ceremonies that 'imperial power is directed in the needful rhythm and order, and the Empire can in this way represent the harmony and movement of the Universe that comes from the Creator'. The Byzantines believed fervently precisely in such an understanding of the role of the emperor. However, this did not prevent them from taking part in the overthrow of an emperor whom they considered unworthy or dishonourable. His holiness did not guarantee him from suffering a violent death. The Byzantines venerated the symbol, which by no means necessarily coincided with every concrete personality. That emperor whose personality in the eyes of the people and the Church did not correspond to his lofty calling was considered a tyrant and usurper, and his violent overthrow was only a matter of time and was seen as a God-pleasing act...

"The emperor was crowned by the patriarch, and in later Byzantium the opinion prevailed that it was precisely this act of crowning that led him into the imperial dignity. The patriarch received his confession of faith and could refuse to crown him if he did not agree to change his faith or correct his morals. As a last resort the patriarch could excommunicate the emperor..."<sup>490</sup>

G.A. Ostrogorsky describes the fully-fledged rite as follows: "Before the coronation, the Emperor, on entering the church of Hagia Sophia, first of all handed over to the Patriarch the text of the Symbol of Faith written in his own hand and signed, and accompanied... by promises to follow unfailingly the Apostolic traditions, the decrees of all the Ecumenical and Local Councils, and the teaching of the Fathers of the Church, and always to remain a faithful son and servant of the Church, etc.... Then before the accomplishment of the actual rite of coronation, in the Augusteon (a courtyard leading to Hagia Sophia) there took place the ceremony of raising on the shield... The shield was held in front by the Patriarch and the first functionary of the Empire, while on the sides and behind there went the nobles who were next in rank... The anointing and crowning of the Emperor were included in the course of the Divine service. At a particular moment in the Liturgy, when the Patriarch came out of the altar and onto the ambon, accompanied by the highest ranks of the Church, and 'a great silence and quiet' settled in the church, the Patriarch invited the Emperor to come onto the ambon. The Patriarch read the prayers composed for the rite of anointing - one quietly, the others aloud, - after which he anointed the Emperor with chrism in the form of the cross and proclaimed: 'Holy!' Those around him on the ambon repeated this cry three times, and then the people repeated it three times. After this the altar brought a crown out of the altar, the Patriarch placed it on the head of him who was to be crowned and proclaimed:

---

<sup>490</sup> Dvorkin, *op. cit.*, pp. 695-696, 697-698. The patriarch first received the emperor's confession of faith in 491 (Joseph Canning, *A History of Medieval Political Thought 300-1450*, London & New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 14).

‘Worthy!’ This proclamation was again repeated three times, first by the hierarchs on the ambon and then by the people.”<sup>491</sup>

The late appearance of the fully-fledged rite, including anointing, requires some explanation... According to Dagron, Theodore Lascaris’ anointing by the patriarch in Nicaea in 1208 was modelled on the westerners’ anointing of Baldwin I in Constantinople in 1204.<sup>492</sup> It both bolstered imperial power and strengthened the position of the Church in relation to imperial power.

“Far from the historical capital, in the modest surroundings of Nicaea, it would have appeared necessary to materialise the ‘mystery of royalty’. The Church, being from now on the only force capable of checking the secessionist tendencies, was able to seize the opportunity to place her mark more deeply on the imperial coronation. Using the request of clergy from Constantinople who wanted the convocation of a council to nominate a patriarch, Theodore Lascaris, who was not yet officially emperor, fixed a date that would allow the new titular incumbent to proceed to the ‘habitual’ date, that is, during Holy Week [Holy Thursday, to be more precise], for the making of holy chrism (το θειον του μυρου χρισμα). On his side, [Patriarch] Michael Autoreianos, who had just been elected on March 20, 1208, multiplied initiatives aimed at strengthening imperial authority, exhorting the army in a circular letter in which we are astonished to find echoes of the idea of the holy war, remitting

---

<sup>491</sup> Ostrogorsky, “Evolutsia vizantijskogo obriada koronovania” (“The Evolution of the Byzantine Rite of Coronation”), quoted by Fomin and Fomina, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 117.

<sup>492</sup> Dagron, *Empereur et Prêtre* (Emperor and Priest), Paris: Gallimard, 1996, p. 282. Dvorkin agrees with him (*op. cit.*, p. 698). So, in a more guarded way, does Vera Zemskova, who writes that “the rite of anointing arose in Byzantium under the influence of the West, where the sacrament already existed and had its source in the understanding of the sacredness of power that was characteristic for the Barbarians. True, it is impossible to say precisely what kind of influence this was. Even in the history of the intensive contacts between the Emperor Manuel Comnenus (1143-1180) and the western sovereigns there is no mention of this subject. The rite appeared after the conquest of Constantinople with the emperors of the Nicaean empire...” (personal communication, August 11, 2000)

There is in fact little agreement about the date at which this sacrament was introduced in Byzantium. According to Fomin and Fomina, (*op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 96), it was introduced in the ninth century, when Basil I was anointed with the chrismation oil or with olive oil (*P.G.* 102.765); according to M.V. Zyzykin (*Patriarkh Nikon* (Patriarch Nikon), Warsaw, 1931, part 1, p. 133) – in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, when Nicephorus was anointed by Patriarch Polyeuctus; according to Canning (*op. cit.*, p. 15) – in the 12<sup>th</sup> century; according to Dagron (*op. cit.*, p. 282) and G. Podskalsky (*Khristianstvo i Bogoslovskaja literatura v Kievskoj Rusi (988-1237)* (Christianity and Theological Literature in Kievan Rus’ (988-1037), St. Petersburg, 1996, p. 70) – in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Nicetas Khoniates mentions that Alexis III was “anointed” at his coronation in 1195; but according to Vera Zemskova (personal communication) it is likely that this meant “raising to the rank of emperor” rather than anointing with chrism in the literal, bodily sense. In this distinction between visible and invisible anointing lies the crux of the matter, for even bishops, who (in the East) received no visible anointing, were often described as having been anointed. And when St. Photius said of the Emperor Michael III that God “has created him and anointed him since the cradle as the emperor of His People”, he was clearly speaking about an invisible anointing. See also O.G. Ulyanov, “O vremeni vzniknovenia inauguratsionnogo miropomazania v Vizantii, na Zapade i v drevnej Rusi”, in *Rus’ i Vizantia*, Moscow, 2008, pp. 133-140.

the sins of the soldiers and of the emperor, and taking an oath of dynastic fidelity from the bishops assembled in Nicaea."<sup>493</sup>

Royal anointing exalted the authority of the emperor. The rite had similarities to the rite of ordination of clergy and was administered by the Patriarch. As the Byzantine writer Zosimas wrote: "Such was the link between the Imperial dignity and the First-Hierarchical dignity that the former not only could not even exist without the latter. Subjects were much bolder in deciding on conspiracies against one whom they did not see as having been consecrated by native religion."<sup>494</sup>

Perhaps also the Byzantines introduced anointing at this point in reaction to its downgrading by Pope Gregory VII and his successors, in order to bolster the prestige of the anointed kings in the face of the anti-monarchism of the Popes, who constituted the greatest political power in the world at that time and the greatest threat to the survival of the Byzantine Church and Empire. Against the claims of the Popes to possess all the charismas, including the charisma of political government, the Byzantines put forward the anointing of their Emperors. It was as if they said: a truly anointed and right-believing Emperor outweighs an uncanonically ordained and false-believing Patriarch...

The lateness of the introduction of imperial anointing in Byzantium is paralleled by a similar slowness, as we have seen, in the development of the rite of crowning in marriage. Both marriage and coronation are "natural" sacraments that existed in some form before the coming of Christianity; so that they needed not so much replacing as supplementing, purifying and raising to a new, consciously Christian level. This being so, the Church wisely did not hasten to create completely new rites for them, but only eliminated the more grossly pagan elements, added a blessing and then communed the newly-weds or the newly-crowned in the Body and Blood of Christ.

Since kingmaking, like marriage, was a "natural" sacrament that predated the New Testament Church, the ecclesiastical rite was not felt to be constitutive of legitimate kingship in Byzantium – at any rate, until the introduction of the last element of the rite, anointing, probably 1208. After all, the pagan emperors had been recognized by Christ and the apostles although they came to power independently of the Church. The Roman Empire was believed to have been created by God alone, independently of the Church. As the Emperor Justinian's famous *Sixth Novella* puts it: "Both proceed from one source", God, which is why the Empire did not need to be re-instituted by the Church.

Of course, the fact that the Empire, like the Church, was of Divine origin did not mean that the two institutions were of equal dignity. Whereas the Church was "the fullness of Him Who filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1.23), and as such eternal, the Empire, as all believing Byzantines knew and accepted, was

---

<sup>493</sup> Dagron, op. cit., pp. 282-283.

<sup>494</sup> Zosimas, quoted in Fomin and Fomina, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 118.

destined to be destroyed by the Antichrist. The Church was like the soul which survives the death of the body, being by nature superior to it.

Having said that, the fact that the Empire, like the body, was created by God was of great importance as against those who asserted, like Pope Gregory VII, that its origin lay in the fallen passions of man and the devil. It was against this political Manichaeism that the institution of imperial anointing in Byzantium stood as a powerful witness. Or, to use a different metaphor: the quasi-Chalcedonian “dogma” of the union without confusion of the two institutions in Byzantium, the one institution anointing and the other being anointed, served to mark it off from the political Monophysitism of the Popes, for whom the Divinity of the Church “swallowed up”, as it were, the “mere humanity” of the Empire.

Another reason for the introduction of imperial anointing may have been a perceived need to protect the monarchy against potential usurpers and bolster the legitimacy of the lawful Emperors against those innumerable coups which, as we have seen, so disfigured the image of Byzantine life in the decades before 1204. As we have seen, the earlier introduction of anointing in Spain, Francia and England had had just such a beneficial effect. And certainly, the need for some higher criterion of legitimacy had never been more sorely needed than in the period of the Nicaean empire, when Roman power appeared to be divided among a number of mini-states.

In previous centuries, the *de facto* criterion of legitimacy had been: the true emperor is he who sits on the throne in Constantinople, whatever the means he used to obtain the throne. This may have seemed close to the law of the jungle, but it at any rate had the advantage of clarity. The problem after 1204, however, was that he who sat on the throne in Constantinople was a Latin heretic who had obtained his throne, not just by killing a few personal enemies, but by mass slaughter of the ordinary people and the defiling of all that was most holy to the Byzantines, including the very sanctuary of Hagia Sophia. The patriarch had not recognized him and had died in exile. There was no question for the majority of Byzantines: this was not the true emperor.

So the true emperor had to be found in one of the Greek kingdoms that survived the fall of the City: Nicaea, Trebizond and Epirus. But which? For a time it looked as if the Epirote ruler Theodore Angelus, whose dominion extended from the Adriatic to the Aegean and who was related to the great families of the Comneni and Ducae, had a greater claim to the throne than the Nicene John Vatatzes, who was the son-in-law of the first Nicaean emperor, Theodore Lascaris. However, Theodore Angelus’s weakness was that the Patriarch lived in Nicaea, and the metropolitan of Thessalonica refused to crown him, considering that a violation of the rights of the Patriarch.

So he turned instead to Archbishop Demetrius (Chomatianos) of Ochrid, who crowned and anointed him in Thessalonica in 1225 or 1227. As Vasiliev writes, Theodore “‘put on the purple robe and began to wear the red shoes’,

distinctive marks of the Byzantine basileus. One of the letters of Demetrius shows that his coronation and anointment of Theodore of Epirus was performed 'with the general consent of the members of the senate, who were in the west (that is, on the territory of Thessalonica and Epirus), of the clergy, and of all the large army.' Another document testifies that the coronation and anointment were performed with the consent of all the bishops who lived 'in that western part'. Finally, Theodore himself signed his edicts (*chrysobulls*) with the full title of the Byzantine Emperor: 'Theodore in Christ God Basileus and Autocrat of the Romans.'<sup>495</sup>

From the letters of Metropolitan John Apocaurus of Naupactus, as V.G. Vasilievsky writes, "we learn for the first time what an active part was taken by the Greek clergy and especially by the Greek bishops. The proclamation of Theodore Angelus as the Emperor of the Romans was taken very seriously: Thessalonica, which had passed over into his hands, was contrasted with Nicaea; Constantinople was openly indicated to him as the nearest goal of his ambition and as an assured gain; in speech, thought, and writing, it was the common opinion that he was destined to enter St. Sophia and occupy there the place of the Orthodox Roman emperors where the Latin newcomers were sitting illegally. The realization of such dreams did not lie beyond the limits of possibility; it would be even easier to take Constantinople from Thessalonica than from Nicaea."<sup>496</sup>

However, Theodore Angelus' position had one weakness that proved fatal to his hopes: he was not anointed by the Patriarch of Constantinople. Previous Byzantine emperors, including Constantine himself, had received the throne through the acclamation of the army and/or the people, which was considered sufficient for legitimacy. But now, in the thirteenth century, acclamation alone was not enough: imperial anointing by the first-hierarchy of the Church was considered necessary.

But here it was the Lascarids of Nicaea had the advantage over both the Angeli of Thessalonica and the Comneni of Trebizond. For the first Lascarid, Theodore I, had been anointed earlier (in 1208) and by a hierarch whom everybody recognised as having a greater authority - Patriarch Michael IV Autoreianus. As Michael's successor, Germanus II, wrote to Archbishop Demetrius: "Tell me, most sacred man, which fathers bestowed on you the lot of crowning to the kingdom? By which of the archbishops of Bulgaria was any emperor of the Romans ever crowned? When did the archpastor of Ochrid stretch out his right hand in the capacity of patriarch and consecrate a royal head? Indicate to us a father of the Church, and it is enough. Suffer reproach, for you are wise, and love even while being beaten. Do not get angry. For truly the royal anointing introduced by you is not for us the oil of joy, but an unsuitable oil from a wild olive. Whence did you buy this precious chrism

---

<sup>495</sup> Vasiliev, *A History of the Byzantine Empire*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1955, p. 521.

<sup>496</sup> Vasilievsky, quoted in Vasiliev, *op. cit.*, pp. 521-522.

(which, as is well known, is boiled in the patriarchate), since your previous stores have been devoured by time?"<sup>497</sup>

In reply, Archbishop Demetrius pointed to the necessity of having an emperor in the West in order effectively to drive out the Latins. Theodore Angelus had carried out his task with great distinction, and was himself of royal blood. Besides, "the Greek West has followed the example of the East: after all, in despite of ancient Constantinopolitan practice, an emperor has been proclaimed and a patriarch chosen in the Bithynian diocese as need has dictated. And when has it ever been heard that one and the same hierarch should rule in Nicaea and call himself patriarch of Constantinople? And this did not take place at the decree of the whole senate and all the hierarchs, since after the capture of the capital both the senate and the hierarchs fled both to the East and the West. And I think that the greater part are in the West...

"For some unknown reason you have ascribed to yourself alone the consecration of chrism. But it is one of the sacraments performed by all the hierarchs (according to Dionysius the Areopagite). If you allow every priest to baptise, then why is anointing to the kingdom, which is secondary by comparison with baptism, condemned by you? But according to the needs of the time it is performed directly by the hierarch next in rank after the patriarch, according to the unfailing customs and teaching of piety. However, he who is called to the kingdom is usually anointed, not with chrism, but with oil sanctified by prayer... We had no need of prepared chrism, but we have the sepulchre of the Great Martyr Demetrius, from which chrism pours out in streams..."<sup>498</sup>

Nevertheless, in the end it was the anointing from the true first-hierarch of the Church that gave the victory to the Lascarids. We have seen that this sacrament was critical in strengthening the Western Orthodox kingdoms at a time when invasions threatened from without and chaos from within. Now it came to serve the same purpose in Eastern Orthodoxy. As Papadakis writes, "the continuity and prestige conferred on the Lascarid house by this solemn blessing and by the subsequent presence of a patriarch at Nicaea were decisive. For, by then, coronation by a reigning patriarch was thought to be necessary for imperial legitimacy."<sup>499</sup>

Soon the opponents of the anointed emperors in the West began to fail. The power of the Angeli was crushed by the Bulgarian Tsar John Asen. Then, in 1242, the Nicaean Emperor John III Vatatzes forced Theodore Angelus' son John to renounce the imperial title in favour of "despot"; and four years later the Emperor John conquered Thessalonica.<sup>500</sup> Thus it was the earlier and more

---

<sup>497</sup> Patriarch Germanus, in F.I. Uspensky, *Istoria Vizantijskoj Imperii* (A History of the Byzantine Empire), Moscow: "Mysl'", 1997, p. 412.

<sup>498</sup> Archbishop Demetrius, in Uspensky, *op. cit.*, p. 413.

<sup>499</sup> Papadakis, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

<sup>500</sup> John Julius Norwich, *Byzantium: The Decline and Fall*, London: Penguin books, 1996, pp. 188, 189.

authoritative anointing of the Nicaean Emperors that enabled them to win the dynastic struggle. And under their rule the Nicaean Empire prospered.

Another reason for its prosperity was that the Lascarid emperors of Nicaea were much more modest in their pretensions than their predecessors. As R.J. Macrides writes: "Their style of rule was partly a response to limited resources, partly to exclusion from Constantinople, the natural setting, and also a reaction to the 'sins' which had caused God to withdraw his support from the Byzantines. John III Vatatzes and his son Theodore II ruled as if New Constantines had never existed. To rephrase Choniates' words of criticism for the twelfth-century emperors: John III and Theodore II did not wear gold, did not treat common property as their own nor free men as slaves, nor did they hear themselves celebrated as being wiser than Solomon, heroic in strength, God-like in looks. Contrary to the behaviour of most emperors, John did not even have his son proclaimed emperor in his lifetime, not because he did not love his son, nor because he wanted to leave the throne to anyone else, but because the opinion and choice of his subjects was not evident. John was an emperor who reproved his son for wearing the symbols of imperial power, for wearing gold while hunting, because he said the imperial insignia represent the blood of the emperor's subjects and should be worn only for the purpose of impressing foreign ambassadors with the people's wealth. John's care to separate public wealth from his own became legendary. He set aside land to produce enough for the imperial table and had a crown made for the empress from the sale of eggs produced by his hens. He called it the 'egg crown' (oaton). John was an emperor who submitted to the criticism of the church. When his mistress was forbidden entrance to the church by the... monk Blemmydes, tutor to his son, she went to him in a fury and charged him to come to her defence. But he only replied remorsefully that he could not punish a just man. It was precisely the qualities which made him an exceptional emperor which also contributed to his recognition as a saint by the local population in Magnesia..."<sup>501</sup>

In relation to the patriarchate, too, the Lascarid emperors were less "caesaropapist" than their predecessors. We see this in the election of Patriarch Arsenius under Theodore II: "After the triumphant burial of Emperor John [Vatatzes] in Sosandri, Theodore II was raised onto the shield by the nobility and clergy, in accordance with ancient custom. Setting off for Nicaea, he occupied himself with the election of a patriarch in the place of the reposed Manuel; then the new patriarch had to crown the new emperor. Up to 40 hierarchs assembled, and asked for the learned Blemmydes as patriarch. He, however, was displeasing to the court because of his independence. Emperor John Vatatzes had already once rejected his candidacy, declaring openly that Blemmydes would not listen to the emperor, who might have different views

---

<sup>501</sup> Macrides, *op. cit.*, pp. 280-281. The emperor's body was found to be incorrupt and fragrant seven years after his death. See *The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church*, vol. 11 (November), Athens, 1979, pp. 154-156; translated in *Orthodox Life*, vol. 32, N 6, November-December, 1982, p. 44).

from those of the Church. The new Emperor Theodore did not decide on speaking openly against Blemmydes, and even tried to persuade him, promising various honours. But Blemmydes refused outright, knowing the explosiveness and insistence of the young emperor. The efforts at persuasion ended in a tiff, and Blemmydes left Nicaea for his monastery.<sup>502</sup> That is how Blemmydes himself recounted the matter, but according to an anonymous author there was a strong party against Blemmydes among the hierarchs. Then the emperor suggested electing the patriarch by lot. On proclaiming the name of a candidate, they opened the Gospel at random and read the first words of the page. To one there fell the words: 'They will not succeed', to another: 'They drowned', to the abbot of Sosandri there even came: 'ass and chicken'. Finally Arsenius Avtorianus succeeded: at his name there fell the words 'he and his disciples', and he was elected. Monk Arsenius, from a family of officials... was a new man, with a strong character, sincerely devoted to the royal house... At Christmas, 1254, Patriarch Arsenius triumphantly crowned Theodore II as emperor of the Romans...."<sup>503</sup>

---

<sup>502</sup> Theodore offered his old tutor "more power and glory than any Patriarch had ever possessed before. But he [Nicephorus] was suspicious because the young Emperor had already published a treatise maintaining that matters of faith and doctrine could only be decided by a General Council summoned by the Emperor and attended also by members of the laity. So he said that he would accept the Patriarchate only if he could put first the glory of God. 'Never mind about the glory of God', the Emperor replied crossly. Blemmydes, so he says, was so deeply shocked that he refused the post..." (Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity*, Cambridge University Press, 1968, p. 66). (V.M.)

<sup>503</sup> Uspensky, *op. cit.*, pp. 463-464.

## 28. NEW ROME AND THE GEORGIANS

Georgia, the lot of the Most Holy Mother of God, had played only a minor role in Orthodox history since her baptism by St. Nina in the fourth century. However, in 1008 a political and ecclesiastical unification took place between the kingdom of Abkhazia (much larger then than now, with its capital at Kutaisi) and Kartli (with its capital in Uplistsikhe) under the authority of King Bagrat III, who was now called “the king of kings of All Georgia”.

Since the western kingdom contained two metropolias under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Byzantine Emperor Basil II sent an army into Georgia in 1014, but it was soundly beaten. In 1021-1022, however, the Byzantine army, strengthened by the presence of Varangians (probably Russians from Kievan Rus’) overcame the Georgians. But the Byzantines wisely did not crush the Georgian state system, which gradually strengthened under Byzantine tutelage.

Moreover, in the course of the next two centuries Byzantine influence in general became stronger, and Byzantine liturgical practice became the norm throughout the autocephalous Church of Georgia...<sup>504</sup>

It is from the moment of the union of 1008, writes Aristides Papadakis, “that we may speak of Georgia...”

“The new unity... brought Church and State closer together. The ecclesiastical hierarchy were doubtless advocates of national unity and in this sense were of the greatest benefit to Georgia’s Bagratid rulers. The catholicus on the other hand retained control of ecclesiastical affairs and administration, and was even formally recognised as the spiritual king of the nation. However, the Georgian primate along with all major bishops and abbots were temporal princes of the realm as well, and actually sat on the council of state or Darbazi together with the feudal princes of Georgia...”

“Arguably, the two most important members of the new Caucasian monarchy were David II (1089-1125) and Queen Tamar (1184-1212). Both of these Bagratid sovereigns were in the end canonized as saints by the Georgian Orthodox Church. By extending Georgia’s power far beyond its historic frontiers, these rulers were in the final analysis responsible for creating a genuine Georgian hegemony not only over Georgians but over Muslims and Armenians as well. David II was surnamed by contemporaries the Restorer or Rebuilder (*aghmashenebeli*) for good reason... His reign constitutes a genuine ‘epic period’ in the history of medieval Georgia. David’s victories against the Muslims were especially important since they paved the way for the Transcaucasian multinational empire of his successors. In 1122 he was able to gain control of Tiflis (it had been for centuries an Islamic town) and to

---

<sup>504</sup> V.M. Lurye, “Tysiacha let Gruzinskogo Imperializma” (One Thousand Years of Georgian Imperialism), *Russkij Zhurnal* (Russian Journal), August, 2008; Alexander Dvorkin, *Ocherki po Istorii Vselenskoj Pravoslavnoj Istorii* (Sketches on the History of the Universal Orthodox Church), Nizhni-Novgorod, 2006, pp. 824-825.

reestablish it as Georgia's capital. But his great triumph was without doubt his decisively humiliating defeat of the Seljuks a year earlier at the battle of Didgori (12 August).<sup>505</sup> Georgians to this day celebrate the victory annually as a holiday in August.

"In addition to a strengthened monarchy and a magnified Georgia, David II also bequeathed to his descendants a reformed Church. The attention he was willing to devote to the welfare of the Church as a whole, was doubtlessly genuine. He was also evidently concerned with Christian unity and repeatedly labored to convince the separated Armenian community to return to the unity of the Orthodox Church by accepting Chalcedonian Christology and by renouncing schism. His vigorous efforts to establish ecclesiastical discipline, eliminate abuses, and reorganize the Church, culminated in 1103 at the synod of Ruisi-Urbinisi. This meeting – one of the most famous in Georgian history – was presided over by the king who had also convened it...

"It was during [Queen Tamar's] rule that the great golden age of Georgian history and culture reached its summit. There is no denying the multinational nature of her kingdom by the dawn of the thirteenth century. By then Georgia was one of the most powerful states in the Near East. As a result of Queen Tamar's numerous campaigns, which took her armies to the shores of the Black Sea, Paphlagonia and further east into Iranian territory, the Georgian state extended far beyond its original borders. By 1212 the entire Caucasus, the southern coast of the Black Sea, most of Armenia and Iranian Azerbaijan, had in fact been annexed to the Georgian state....

"[The queen was in general friendly towards] Saladin, who was actually responsible in the end for the return to the Georgians in the Holy City of properties that had once belonged to them. In contrast, Tamar's relations with the Latins in the crusader states... were rarely courteous or fraternal. The Orthodox Georgians never actually directly involved themselves with the crusades. This may have been at the root of the friendship Muslims felt for them."<sup>506</sup>

However, Tamar defeated the Turks when they tried to conquer Georgia. "During two terrible battles she herself saw the finger of God directing her to the fight, and, with her soldiers, witnessed the miraculous conversion of one of the Mohammedan generals who was made prisoner."<sup>507</sup>

---

<sup>505</sup> "On his own testimony, while meeting an attack from the Turks, both he and his enemies saw S. George protecting him; and on another occasion, he was saved from instant death by a special act of faith, when a thunderbolt falling upon him was prevented from hurting him by the golden image of the Archangel Michael which he wore on his breast" (P. Ioseliani, *A Short History of the Georgian Church*, Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1983, p. 115). (V.M.)

<sup>506</sup> Papadakis, *The Orthodox East and the Rise of the Papacy*, Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1994, pp. 139, 140, 141, 143-144.

<sup>507</sup> Ioseliani, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

The Georgians in this, their golden age, saw themselves as sons of the Byzantines. This was undoubtedly good for them. The contrast between Georgia and Bulgaria is instructive here: the Georgian kings saw themselves as sons of the Byzantines, and prospered, whereas the Bulgarian tsars saw themselves as rivals, and were brought low...

Let us examine this relationship to Byzantium a little more closely.

Antony Eastmond writes: "The two hundred years before Tamar's reign saw a very marked change in the depiction of power in Georgia in an attempt to establish an effective form of royal presentation. The Georgian monarchy came increasingly to model itself on imperial rule in Byzantium. The Bagrat'ioni kings began to see themselves as inheritors of Byzantine royal traditions, and displayed themselves as the descendants of Constantine the Great, rather than their own Georgian ancestors, such as Vakhtang Gorgasalan (the great Georgian king who ruled c. 446-510). Between the ninth and twelfth centuries it is possible to trace the way the Bagrat'ionis began to adopt more and more of the trappings of Byzantine political ideas. In the ninth century, Ashot' I the Great (786-826), the first Bagrat'ioni ruler, showed his dependence on Byzantine ideas by accepting the title of Kouropalates; although the only surviving image of the king shows him in a very abstract, indistinguishable form of dress. By the tenth century the Georgians had adopted a more positive Byzantine identity. At the church of Oshk'i (built 963-73), the two founder brothers, Davit and Bagrat' are shown in a donor relief on the exterior wearing very ornate, 'orientalized', Byzantine costume. All earlier royal images in Georgia, as well as the contemporary image of the rival King Leo III of Abkhazia (a neighbouring Georgian Christian kingdom) in the church of K'umurdo (built 964), had shown the rulers in less distinct, or clearly local forms of dress. The choice of dress at Oshk'I showed the outward adherence of the Bagrat'ionis to the Byzantine political system...."

"This gradual process of Byzantinization continued throughout the eleventh century, becoming increasingly dominant. It was encouraged by closer links between the Georgian and Byzantine royal families. Bagrat' IV (1027-72) married Helena, the niece of Romanos III Agyros in 1032; and his daughter, Maria 'of Alania' married two successive Byzantine emperors (Michael VII Doukas and Nikephoros III Botaneiates).

"By the beginning of the twelfth century, there had been a transformation in the whole presentation of the Georgian royal family. In addition to Byzantine court dress, all aspects of the royal environment became 'Byzantinized'. In the royal churches standard Byzantine forms were adopted...

"At Gelati, built between 1106 and 1130 by Davit IV and his son Demet're (1125-54), this Byzantinization reaches its peak... The point of strongest Byzantine influence at Gelati comes in the fresco scenes in the narthex. These show the earliest surviving monumental images of the seven ecumenical councils... Davit IV himself

convened and presided at two sets of church councils in his reign, and clearly saw himself as a successor to the early Byzantine emperors and their domination of the church: Davit IV's biographer even calls him a second Constantine..."<sup>508</sup>

The most striking example of Georgia's filial relationship to Byzantium can be seen after the capture of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204, when "a Georgian army immediately took Trebizond and handed it over to a relative of the queen [Tamara], Alexis Comnenus. He became the first emperor of Trebizond. The empire of the Great Comneni, which at first existed under the vassalage of Georgia, continued to exist for almost three hundred years, outlasting Constantinople, and was destroyed by the Turks only in 1461."<sup>509</sup>

As we ponder why little Georgia should have fared so prosperously and heroically at a time when the Byzantine Empire was being defeated by her enemies, we should remember two factors.

One was the internal unity of the State under its strong and pious rulers. A second was its strictness in relation to heresy. Thus the Georgians were much firmer in relation to the heretical Armenians than the Byzantines were in relation to the heretical Latins during the same period. This refusal to make concessions on the faith for the sake of political gains reaped both spiritual and material fruits for the Georgians.

Thus the Synod of Ruisi-Urbnisis decreed that "an Orthodox Christian was not authorized to contract a marriage either with a heretic or an infidel... Armenians and other monophysite dissidents upon returning to the unity of the Orthodox faith were legally compelled to be rebaptized."<sup>510</sup>

In Tamara's reign there was an official debate between the Georgians and Armenians at which a great miracle took place: a dog fled in fear from the Orthodox Mysteries of the Georgians, but immediately devoured the sacrifice of the Armenians. As a result, the Armenian nobleman John Mkhargradzeli accepted Orthodoxy and was baptized by Patriarch John.<sup>511</sup>

The unity of the kingdom was not achieved without a struggle - even a struggle, at one point, against a form of parliamentary democracy! Thus "in the first year of Tamara's reign, an officer of the royal court, Kurltu-Arslan, whose dream was to become the Minister of Defense, insisted that a parliament be established in Iani, where, according to his plan, all internal and external problems of the country were to be discussed, and only after that was a notice to be sent to the king for approval. The Isani Parliament was planned to appropriate the legislative power and leave the monarch a symbolic right to approve decisions already made and give orders

---

<sup>508</sup> Eastwood, "Royal renewal in Georgia: the case of Queen Tamar", in Paul Magdalino (ed.), *New Constantines: the Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th-13th Centuries*, Aldershot: Variorum, 1994, pp. 284, 285, 286.

<sup>509</sup> Dvorkin, *op. cit.*, p. 828.

<sup>510</sup> Papadakis, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

<sup>511</sup> *The Life of St. Tamara*.

to carry out the will of the members of this parliament. Thus, the very foundations of the royal institution blessed by God Himself were shaken and the country found itself face to face with the danger of civil war.

“Tamara ordered that Kurlu-Arslan be arrested, but his followers, bearing arms, demanded the release of their leader. In order to avoid imminent bloodshed, Tamara came to a most wise and noble solution, sending to the camp of the rebels as negotiators two of the most respectable and revered ladies: Huashak Tsokali, the mother of the Prince Rati, and Kravai Jakeli. The intermediation of the two noble mothers had such an effect on the conspirators that they ‘obeyed the orders of their mistress and knelt in repentance before her envoys and swore to serve the queen loyally.’ The country felt the strong arm of the king. Tamara appointed her loyal servants to key government posts...”<sup>512</sup>

Queen Tamara is called a second Constantine, a David and a Solomon in the chronicles.<sup>513</sup> She deserves both titles as having been great in both peace and war, and as having defended Orthodox autocracy against the threat of constitutionalism. She preserved the Orthodox and Byzantine ideal of the symphony of powers as purely, perhaps, as it has ever been seen in Christian history...

---

<sup>512</sup> “Holy Righteous Queen Tamara of Georgia”, *Orthodox Life*, March-April, 2003, p. 9.

<sup>513</sup> Eastwood, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

## 29. NEW ROME AND THE SERBS

Among the achievements of the Nicaean Empire was the granting of autocephaly to the Serbian Church in the person of her first archbishop, St. Savva. This was a unique event in that *full* autocephaly, - as opposed to, for example, the semi-autocephaly of the Bulgarian Church centred at Ohrid, - had never been granted before to any Church by the Byzantines. As Alexander Dvorkin writes, St. Savva “received practically complete independence from Constantinople and jurisdiction ‘over all the Serbian and coastal lands’ (an unambiguous reference to Zeta [Montenegro], which had left to join the Latins). Thus the status of the Serbian Church was in essence equivalent to that of a patriarchate or to the autocephalous Churches of today. The one link with Constantinople that was demanded of it was the commemoration of the Ecumenical Patriarch in the Eucharistic prayer (‘Among the first, O Lord, remember...’). The autocephalous status of the Serbian Church became in many ways a new formula...

“The establishment of the Serbian demonstrated a subtle, but very important evolution in the meaning of the concept of autocephaly. Before that, with the single exception of Georgia, all the autocephalous Churches had been in the Empire and had acquired juridical status by a one-man decision of the emperor or by a decree of an Ecumenical Council. The new autocephalies (that is, Serbia and Bulgaria) were created by means of bilateral agreements between two civil governments. This reflected the new tendency to view ecclesiastical autocephaly as the mark of a national state, which undoubtedly created a precedent for ecclesiastical relations in recent history, when increasingly passionate nationalist politics – both in the Balkans and in other places – turned the struggle for national autocephalies into the phenomenon which we know today as ecclesiastical **phyletism**...”<sup>514</sup>

And yet the Serbian autocephaly was neither motivated by phyletism, nor were its consequences in the medieval period anything other than good. For the Serbs proceeded to create one of the most perfect examples of Church-State symphony in Orthodox history. Both in the fact that the first king, St. Stefan, and the first archbishop of the Nemanja dynasty, St. Savva, were father and son, and that the son became the spiritual father of his physical father, we see a profound symbol of the true relationship between Church and State, in which the physical pre-eminence of the State is controlled and purified by the spiritual pre-eminence of the Church.

Moreover, St. Savva enshrined the ideal in his *Zakonopravilo* or *Kormchija*, “a code,” as Dmitrije Bogdanovich writes, “written in 1220 and consisting of a selection of Byzantine legal texts, to be enforced in the Serbian Church and State life. Under the title of ‘The Law of the Holy Fathers’, they were enforced throughout the Middle Ages; to a certain extent, they were valid even later, during the reign of the Ottoman empire. It is a known fact that the reason

---

<sup>514</sup> Dvorkin, *op. cit.*, pp. 688, 690.

behind the drafting of this code was the planned establishment of an independent, autocephalous Serbian Church. On his way back from Nicaea, where in 1219 he succeeded in having the autocephaly recognized, thus securing the preconditions for the organization of a new Church, Serbia's first archbishop St. Sava, aided by a group of collaborators and working on Mount Athos and in Salonika, put together a selection of Byzantine Church laws, relying on the existing nomocanon but taking a highly characteristic course. Instead of following the existing nomocanonic codes, where certain commentators opposed the original symphony of the political and ecclesiastical elements, subordinating the latter to the former, Sava selected texts which, as opposed to the ideas and relations then obtaining in Byzantium ('Caesaropapism', the supremacy of the State over the Church), constituted a return to the old, authentic relation, i.e. the original Orthodox, early Byzantine political philosophy.

“‘St. Sava’, as S. Troitsky puts it, ‘rejected all the sources containing “traces of the Hellenic evil” in the form of the theory of Caesaropapism’, since that theory went against the dogmatic and canonical doctrine of the episcopate as the seat of Church authority, as well as the political situation in Serbia, where imperial authority had not yet been established at the time. He also rejected the theory of “Eastern Papism”, which, according to Troitsky, imposes the supremacy of the Church of Constantinople over all the other local Churches of the Orthodox *oecumene* – and which was, moreover, at variance with the dogmatic doctrine of the Council as the supreme organ of Church authority, with the canonical doctrine proclaiming the equality of the heads of the autocephalous Churches, and with the position of the Serbian Church itself, which met the fundamental canonical condition of autocephaly (that of independently electing its own bishops), so that any interference of the Patriarch of Constantinople in its affairs would have been anticanonical. Sava therefore left out of the *Nomocanon* any work from the Byzantine canonical sources in which either the centripetal ideology of Caesaropapism or the Eastern Papism theory was recognized; he resolutely ‘stood on the ground of the diarchic theory of symphony’, even to the extent of amending it somewhat...”<sup>515</sup>

“Serbian history,” writes Bishop Nikolai, “never knew of any struggle between Church and state. There were no such struggles, but bloody wars have filled the history of Western nations. How does one explain the difference between the two cases? The one is explained by *theodulia* [the service of God]; the other by theocracy.

“Let us take two tame oxen as an example, how they are both harnessed to the same yoke, pull the same cart, and serve the same master. This is *theodulia*.

---

<sup>515</sup> Bogdanovich, “The Political Philosophy of Medieval Serbia”, in 1389-1989, *Boj na Kosovu* (The Battle of Kosovo), Belgrade, 1989, p. 16. St. Sava's *Zakonopravilo* has only recently been published in full by Professor Miodrag M. Petrovich – not in Serbia, where the official hierarchy discouraged its publication, but in Greece.

Then let us take two oxen who are so enraged with each other that one moment the ox on the left pulls himself out from the yoke and gores the other one, goading him on to pull the cart alone, while the next moment the ox on the right does the same to his companion on the left. This is theocracy: the war of the Church against the state and the war of the state against the Church; the war of the pope against kings and the war of kings against the pope. Neither ox wished to be yoked and serve the Master; each of them wanted to play the role of the Master and drive his companion under the yoke. Thus the Master's cart has remained stationary and his field uncultivated and has eventually become completely overgrown with weeds. This is what happened in the West."<sup>516</sup>

"In those days the problem of relations between the Church and the State did not disquiet people as it does in our days, at least not in the Orthodox countries. It had been regulated as it were by itself, through long tradition. Whenever Caesaropapism or Papocaesarism tried to prevail by force, it had been overcome in a short time. For there existed no tradition in the Church of the East of an augustus [emperor] being at the same time Pontifex Maximus, or vice-versa. There were unfortunate clashes between civil and ecclesiastical authorities on personal grounds, but those clashes were temporary and passing. Or, if such clashes and disagreements arose on matters of religious doctrines and principles, threatening the unity of the Christian people, the Councils had to judge and decide. Whoever was found guilty could not escape condemnation by the Councils, be he Emperor or Patriarch or anybody else.

"Savva's conception of the mutual relations between Church and State was founded upon a deeper conception of the aim of man's life on earth. He clearly realized that all rightful terrestrial aims should be considered only as means towards a celestial end. He was tireless in pointing out the true aim of man's existence in this short life span on earth. That aim is the Kingdom of Heaven according to Christ's revelation. Consequently, both the Church and the State authorities are duty-bound to help people towards that supreme end. If they want to compete with one another, let them compete in serving people in the fear of God and not by quarrelling about honors and rights or by grabbing prerogatives from one another. The King and the Archbishop are called to be servants of God by serving the people towards the final and eternal aim..."<sup>517</sup>

---

<sup>516</sup> Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich, *A Treasury of Serbian Orthodox Spirituality*, Grays lake, Ill.: Free Serbian Diocese, 1988, pp. 23-24.

<sup>517</sup> Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich, "The Life of St. Sava", in *Sabrana Dela* (Collected Works), volume 12, Khimelstir, 1984, pp. 573-574.

### 30. NEW ROME AND THE UNIA

As the Roman Catholic heresy gained in strength, a reminder of what true, Orthodox Catholicism is was provided by the foundation of the multinational monastic community of Mount Athos. There had been hermits and small communities there for centuries; but the first large coenobitic community was founded by St. Athanasius in 963. Following his lead, many new monasteries were founded, not only Greek, but also Georgian (in 979), Bulgarian (980), Russian (in 1169), Serbian (1197) and even Latin. The ruins of the Amalfitan Latin monastery, founded in the eleventh century, can still be seen today.<sup>518</sup>

The papacy tried to subdue the Orthodox East to itself not only by force, but also by negotiation, through the offer of ecclesiastical union – but in any case under the Pope. For their part, ever since communion with the Roman Church had been broken in the eleventh century, the Byzantine Emperors had sought to restore it, not so much for spiritual reasons (although there were Emperors with spiritual motives) as for political reasons, so that they could call on the West to provide military support against the Turks. Thus Alexius I Comnenus and Manuel I Comnenus both put pressure on the patriarchs of their time to restore union.

However, these early negotiations came to an abrupt end after the fearful sack of Constantinople in 1204. Even the Pope, Innocent III, recognized that relations could never be the same again: “How is the Church of the Greeks, when afflicted with such trials and persecutions, to be brought back into the unity of the Church and devotion to the Apostolic See? It has seen in the Latins nothing but an example of perdition and the works of darkness, so that it now abhors them as worse than dogs. For they who are supposed to serve Christ rather than their own interests, who should have used their swords only against the pagans, are dripping with the blood of Christians. They have spared neither religion, nor age, nor sex, and have committed adultery and fornication in public, exposing matrons and even nuns to the filthy brutality of their troops. For them it was not enough to exhaust the riches of the Empire and to despoil both great men and small; they had to lay their hands on the treasures of the Church, and what was worse its possessions, seizing silver retables from the altars, breaking them into pieces to divide among themselves, violating the sanctuaries and carrying off crosses and relics.”<sup>519</sup>

Several Greek bishops, writes Spiros Vryonis, “fled the Latin lands. Others remained in their sees, sometimes ignoring Latin ecclesiastical demands and often maintaining contact with the Greek clergy in non-Latin territory. The Catholics decided that the Greek clergy were to keep the churches in those regions inhabited exclusively by Greeks, but in mixed areas the bishops were to be Latins. The hierarchy of the Church in the conquered areas thus passed

---

<sup>518</sup> See Dom Leo Bonsali, “The Benedictine Monastery of St. Mary on Mount Athos”, *Eastern Churches Review*, 2:3 (1969), pp. 262-7.

<sup>519</sup> Innocent III, in R.H.C. Davis, *A History of Medieval Europe*, Harlow: Longmans, 1988, p. 333.

into the hands of the Catholics, whereas the village priests remained Greek. With some exceptions the Latin bishoprics were filled with adventurers little inspired by the religious life, who treated their Greek parishioners as schismatics. Very often the Greek clergy who conformed to the demands of the papacy and hence were supported by Innocent were removed by fanatic Latin bishops who wished to take over all the bishoprics."<sup>520</sup>

The Pope was right that the Greeks would now hate the Latins. But he was wrong in thinking that they would not seek the union of the Churches. For the sake of preserving the empire the Greek leaders began to bargain with the faith. Thus the Nicaean Emperor Theodore I unsuccessfully attempted to convene a Council of Patriarchs and to decide, with them, on the opening of negotiations with the Pope.

Then, as Fr. Ambroise Frontier relates, "John Vatatzes, the new emperor, took as his second wife, Constance, the daughter of Frederick II, the Emperor of the West. Upon becoming Orthodox she took the name Anna. A great friendship linked Frederick II and John Vatatzes. Even though Frederick II was a Roman Catholic he was in conflict with the Pope and he showed much regard for the Orthodox Church: '... how can this so-called pontiff every day excommunicate before the whole world the name of your majesty and all the Roman subjects (at this time the Greeks were called Romans) and without shame call the most orthodox Romans, heretics, thanks to whom the Christian Faith was spread to the far ends of the world.' ..."

"...Whole territories were breaking away from the Latin state of Constantinople and were repudiating their forced submission to the Pope. Innocent IV thought that it would be good, before the fall of the weakening Latin state of Constantinople, to come to an agreement with the Greeks and thus place the union on a more solid foundation. He thus imposed two more conditions: 1) The Latin Patriarch installed by the Crusaders in Constantinople in place of the legitimate Orthodox Patriarch would be kept in the capital, 2) The doctrine of the *Filioque*, that is of the Holy Spirit's procession from the Father and the Son, a heretical doctrine, cause of the schism between the two Churches and a stumbling block to all attempts at union, would be introduced into the Orthodox Creed. Theodore II Lascaris, the successor of John Vatatzes, a child of his first marriage, however, had other plans. He refused the papal proposals and sent Innocent's legates away. He even wrote a treatise in which he defended the Orthodox dogmas and refuted the doctrine of the *Filioque*."<sup>521</sup>

Finally, in 1261 the Greeks defeated the Latins and Emperor Michael Palaeologus entered Constantinople...

---

<sup>520</sup> Vryonis, *Byzantium and Europe*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1967, p. 161.

<sup>521</sup> Frontier, "The Council of Lyons and the False Union of 1274", *The True Vine*, vol. 2, N 4, Winter, 1975, pp. 5-6.

“The splendour surrounding the ‘New Constantine’,” writes F.I. Uspensky, “was a reflection of the great national triumph. Not only the courtiers and service people rejoiced, but also the patriots, the venerators of the ancient glory; and they could hardly imagine what the restoration would cost the real interests of the people. They had reasons for their joy. From its many years of struggle with the foreign aggressors, the Greek nation emerged not overcome, but united. Under the leadership of the Orthodox Church the population from Thessalonica to Magnesia and Attalia was conscious of itself as one body; the consciousness of nationality grew in strength – the Hellenic idea – not a literary idea, but a popular one; and the Church herself, having borne the struggle upon her shoulders, became still more dear, native and Greek. Some of the educated people could still talk about the unia from the point of view of an abstract dogma; the politicians... could reluctantly wish for peace with the curia, but the simple people was lost for ‘the Latin faith’ forever.”<sup>522</sup>

The Nicaean Empire had been a period of spiritual recovery, and of return to the symphonic tradition of the Orthodox Autocracy. However, after the reconquest of the City in 1261, Byzantium began a long decline. Already, immediately after the reconquest, there were ominous signs. The City itself was still devastated as a result of the Latin conquest, and greatly reduced in population and wealth; its trade was now controlled by the Genoans and Venetians. Independent Greek statelets in Epirus and Trebizond still existed, and the Serbs and Bulgarians were also independent now. At the same time, Michael imitated the luxuriousness of the caesaropapist Angeli rather than the modesty of the more Orthodox Lascari. As Uspensky writes, “Palaeologus openly set out on the old path of the Comneni and Angeli. Not only was the capital returned, but the old order, the demands and expenses of the antiquated world order that had lived out its time, was also re-established...”<sup>523</sup>

Worse still, overtures to the Pope continued. As regent, Michael had flattered the hierarchs, saying that he would accept power only from their hands, and promised that he would consider the Church to be his mother – in contrast to Emperor Theodore, who had supposedly despised the Church and kept it in subjection to imperial power.<sup>524</sup> However, on ascending the throne, he changed course in a caesaropapist direction... His aim was to compel the Church and Byzantine society to adopt a more pro-Western attitude leading ultimately to a unia with Rome. For he feared an alliance between Pope Urban, the former Latin Emperor of Constantinople Baldwin and King Manfred of Sicily, whose designs on Constantinople were well-proven. To that end he proposed divorcing his wife Theodora and marrying Manfred’s half-sister Anna, the widow of John Vatatzes – but abandoned the project under pressure from his wife, Anna herself and Patriarch Arsenius.<sup>525</sup>

---

<sup>522</sup> Uspensky, *Istoria Vizantiiskoj Imperii* (A History of the Byzantine Empire), Moscow: “Mysl’”, 1997, p. 496.

<sup>523</sup> Uspensky, *op. cit.*, p. 494.

<sup>524</sup> Uspensky, *op. cit.*, p. 486.

<sup>525</sup> Norwich, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

In fact, Michael was, as Sir Steven Runciman writes, “a usurper who had made himself in turn Grand Duke and regent for the child Emperor John IV, then co-Emperor and finally senior Emperor. The Patriarch Arsenius had grudgingly condoned each step, only when Michael swore to respect the boy-Emperor’s rights. He was so suspicious of Michael’s intentions that in 1260 he abdicated; but, when his successor died a few months later, Michael persuaded him to return, again promising not to harm John IV. But his triumphant recapture of the capital convinced Michael that he was divinely protected. He pushed the boy further and further into the background, and in 1262 he deposed and blinded him. Arsenius, who had been looking on with growing horror, thereupon excommunicated Michael.”<sup>526</sup>

The news about the blinding spread, and in Bithynia a rebellion broke out under a blind pretender with the name John Lascaris. The rebellion was suppressed with difficulty. Meanwhile, Michael tried through the clerics to get his excommunication removed. “But Arsenius replied: ‘I let a dove into my bosom, but it turned out to be a snake and fatally bit me.’ Once, on listening to a rejection, Palaeologus said: ‘What then, are you commanding me to renounce the empire?’ – and wanted to give him his sword. Arsenius stretched out his hand, and Palaeologus began to accuse the old man of making an attempt on the emperor’s life. In vain did the emperor embrace the knees of the patriarch: Arsenius pushed him away and went off to his cell. Then the emperor began to complain: ‘The patriarch is ordering me to abandon State affairs, not to collect taxes, and not to execute justice. That is how this spiritual doctor heals me! It is time to seek mercy from the pope’. The emperor began to seek an occasion to overthrow Arsenius, but the patriarch’s life was irreproachable. The emperor gathered several hierarchs in Thessalonica and summoned Arsenius to a trial, but he did not come. The obsequious hierarchs tried to demonstrate that the disjunction of the ‘soul of the State’ from the Church was a disease that threatened order... Palaeologus decided to get rid of Arsenius whatever the cost. Having gathered the hierarchs, he laid out to them all the steps he had taken to be reconciled with the patriarch. ‘It seems that because of my deed he wants me to abandon the throne. But to whom am I to give the kingdom? What will be the consequences for the empire? What if another person turns out to be incapable of such a great service? Who can guarantee that I will live peacefully, and what will become of my family? What people ever saw the like, and has it ever happened amongst us that a hierarch should do such things without being punished? Doesn’t he understand that for one who has tasted of the blessedness of royal power it is impossible to part with it except together with his life? Repentance is decreed by the Church, and does it not exist for emperors? If I don’t find it from you, I will turn to other Churches and receive healing from them. You decide.’”<sup>527</sup>

Finally Arsenius was deposed for failing to appear at his trial, and was replaced by the more malleable Germanus. In justification of his deposition of

---

<sup>526</sup> Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity*, Cambridge University Press, 1968, p. 67.

<sup>527</sup> Uspensky, *op. cit.*, pp. 510, 511.

Arsenius, the emperor, in a *prostagma* of 1270, “invoked yet again his title of *epistemonarch* of the Church to force Patriarch Joseph I to give Deacon Theodore Skoutariotes, on whom he had conferred the imperial title of *dikaiophylax*, a rank corresponding in the hierarchy to the *archontes* of the Church. In order to settle this trivial affair, the emperor, completely impregnated with the spirit of the Comneni and the teachings of Balsamon, did not hesitate to affirm that the [Church’s] choices of patriarch had to be aligned with those of the emperor and that the ecclesiastical offices were nothing other than transfers of the imperial offices, as was demonstrated in the *Donation of Constantine*.”<sup>528</sup>

Meanwhile, the Emperor was continuing to manoeuvre for an ecclesiastical union with Rome. His real purpose was the reunification of the Greek lands under his authority, for which he needed the help of the Pope against his western enemies, especially Charles of Anjou, the new king of Sicily – which help could be bought only at the price of a *unia*. Charles was ready to invade in 1270, but a terrible storm destroyed his fleet. Michael had been saved again...

Both the people and the Church were against the *unia*. They were not prepared to place the nation or the emperor above the faith. Even “the emperor’s spiritual father Joseph went over to the opposition... He began to advise the emperor that Germanus was not able to absolve him from the curse placed on him by Arsenius, and the emperor sent Joseph to Germanus to persuade him to leave voluntarily. When Germanus was convinced that this advice came from the emperor, he departed for the Mangana monastery...

“Joseph achieved his aim and occupied the patriarchal throne for seven years (1267-74)... The removal of the curses from the emperor – his first task – was carried out with exceptional triumphalism. In the presence of the Synod and the court the emperor crawled on his knees, confessing his sin, the blinding of Lascaris. The patriarch and hierarchs one by one read out an act of absolution of the emperor from the excommunication laid upon him...”<sup>529</sup>

“But the Emperor’s humiliation,” continues Runciman, “did not satisfy Arsenius’s adherents. The ascetic element in the Church, based mainly the monasteries, always suspicious of the court and the upper hierarchy, believing them to be sinfully luxurious and over-interested in secular learning, saw in Arsenius a saintly martyr who had dared to oppose the Emperor on a basic moral issue; and their party was joined by many even in the hierarchy who maintained the old Studite tradition that opposed Imperial control of the Church. The Arsenites, as they began to be called, would not accept Joseph’s compromise. They continued to regard the Emperor as excommunicate, his hierarchy as illegitimate and his officials as the servants of a usurper. They were never very numerous; but their monkish connections gave them influence over the people. The hierarchy tried to rid the monasteries of such dissidents, but only drove them underground. Dismissed monks, poorly clad, and often called

---

<sup>528</sup> Dagron, *op. cit.*, p. 262

<sup>529</sup> Uspensky, *op. cit.*, p. 513.

the *saccophoroi*, the wearers of sackcloth, would go about the people preaching resistance..."<sup>530</sup>

Restored to communion, and with the anti-uniatic Arsenites excommunicated, the Emperor now had greater freedom in planning the unia. However, the reaction of the Church against the unia was growing stronger. Patriarch Joseph was now determined to limit the Emperor's use of the 'epistemonarchy' "to the most modest temporal dimensions. Job Iasites, in the name of Patriarch Joseph, restated the issue a little after 1273: 'It is true that he who wears the crown has received in person the responsibility and the title of *epistemonarch* of the holy Churches. However, that does not consist in electing, or deposing, or excommunicating, or carrying out any other action or function of the bishop, but, in accordance with the meaning of the term '*epistemonarch*', it consists [for the emperor] in wisely keeping the leaders of the Churches in order and rank, and in giving the force of law to the canonical decrees which they issue. If these decrees are truly canonical, it is not in his power, as *epistemonarch*, to oppose them..."<sup>531</sup>

The unia was signed at Lyons in 1274 by a delegation led by the ex-Patriarch Germanus. The emperor conceded all the dogmatic points (the *Filioque*, azymes, papal supremacy) without argument and promised to help the pope in his next crusade. In exchange Pope Gregory X promised to stop his enemies, especially Charles of Anjou, from invading the Greek lands.

Michael continued to persecute the anti-uniatics, imprisoning and mutilating their leaders. However, the Church as a whole offered strong resistance.

"Two parties were formed," writes Fr. Ambroise Frontier: "the Politicals or Opportunists, who strangely resemble the Ecumenists of today, and the Zealots, who were especially strong in Thessaloniki."<sup>532</sup> The center of Orthodoxy, however, was Mount Athos. The persecutions of Michael VIII and of Beccus, his Patriarch, equalled those of the first centuries of Christianity. The intruder Patriarch went himself to the Holy Mountain to impose the decree of Lyons but he failed miserably. Only a few poor weak-minded monks followed him. In the *Menaion* of September 22, we read the following rubric: 'Memory of the Holy Martyrs of the Monastery of Zographou, who chastized the Emperor Michael Palaeologus, the latinizer and his Patriarch Beccus, and died, through burning in the tower of their monastery.' Yes, 26 monks died, burned in the

---

<sup>530</sup> Runciman, *op. cit.*, p. 69. The Arsenites remained in schism from the official Church for several more decades. They insisted, writes Aristides Papadakis, that "all elections to the see of Constantinople after the patriarch's deposition (1265) were uncanonical and invalid. No less irregular in their opinion was the status of those elevated to the episcopal dignity by Arsenius' 'illegitimate' successors." (*The Orthodox East and the Rise of the Papacy*, Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1994, p. 219.) (V.M.)

<sup>531</sup> Dagrón, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

<sup>532</sup> "The Zealots preached asceticism and contemplation and disliked the Imperial court and the intellectuals, lay and clerical, who frequented it. Their opponents, known as the Politicals, believed in co-operation with the State and the use, if need be, of Economy" (Runciman, *op. cit.*, p. 70). (V.M.)

tower of their monastery, others were drowned in the sea in front of Vatopedi and Iviron. At Karyes, the capital of Mount Athos, both laity and monks were beheaded. These Martyrs assured the victory of Orthodoxy by their sacrifice and with their blood washed away the shame of the treason of Lyons.

“To please the new Pope, Nicholas III, the servile Emperor ordered Isaac of Ephesus to accompany the papal legates through the prisons of Constantinople to show him the imprisoned Orthodox. Some had been tortured, others had their hands and feet cut off, others their eyes punctured and others their tongues ripped out. It is a fact: Christ is not discussed, He is confessed...<sup>533</sup>

“An anti-uniatic council was in Thessaly, which anathematized the pope, the emperor and his uniatic patriarch, John Beccus. The Fathers of Holy Mount Athos joined in the condemnation, writing to the emperor: “It is written in the explanation of the Divine Liturgy that the liturgizer commemorates the name of his hierarch, showing his exceeding obedience to him, and that he is in communion with him both in faith and as a steward of the Divine Mysteries... [But] he who receives a heretic is subject to the curses laid on him, and he who gives communion to an excommunicate is himself excommunicate.”<sup>534</sup>

In 1280 (Pope Gregory had died by this time) Charles again invaded from the West. In the next year he was defeated by the Emperor Michael, but was planning to invade again in 1282 – this time by sea. And his chances looked good, especially since a new Pope, Martin IV, was now on his side and had excommunicated the Emperor. But then the Sicilians, supported by an Aragonese army, rose up against Charles in the so-called “Sicilian Vespers”.

The threat of invasion from the West was now finally removed – which only left the formidable threat of the Seljuk Turks in the East to deal with...

In spite of this improvement in his military fortunes, and his excommunication by the Pope, Michael remained faithful to the unia until the end, not least because he needed the help of the West against the Orthodox Serbs and Bulgarians who resisted him. Thus he was in union with those Catholic soldiers that killed the zealot monks of Zographou on Mount Athos. "The pope dispatched an army to help the emperor. The Latin army entered the Holy Mountain and committed such barbarism as the Turks had never committed in five hundred years. Having hanged the Protaton, and having killed many monks in Vatopedi, Iveron and other monasteries, the Latins attacked Zographou. The blessed Abbot Thomas warned the brethren that

---

<sup>533</sup> Outside Athos, the resistance to the unia was led by the holy King Milutin of Serbia, whose body remains incorrupt and wonderworking to this day (Velimirovič, *op. cit.*, pp. 130-131). In Constantinople, the unia was denounced by the great ascetic, St. Meletius of Mount Gelesion. The emperor ordered his tongue to be cut out, but by a miracle the saint continued to speak clearly and distinctly (*Living Orthodoxy*, vol. XII, N 4, July-August, 1990, p. 15). (V.M.)

<sup>534</sup> Monk Kallistos Vlastos, *Dokimion istorikon peri tou skhismatos tis dutikis ekklesias apo tis Orthodoxou Anatolikis* (Historical Treatise on the schism of the western church from the Orthodox East), Mount Athos, 1991, p. 109.

whoever wished to be spared from the Latins should flee from the monastery, and that whoever desired a martyr's death should remain. And so, twenty-six men remained: the abbot, twenty-one monks, and four laymen who served as laborers for the monastery. They all closed themselves in the monastery's tower. When the Latins arrived, they set fire to the tower and these twenty-six heroes of Christ found a martyr's death in the fire. While the tower was burning, they chanted the Psalms and the Akathist to the Most-holy Mother of God. They gave their holy souls to God on October 10, 1283. In December of the same year, the dishonorable Emperor Michael died in poverty, when the Serbian King Milutin rose up against him in defense of Orthodoxy.<sup>535</sup>

“His wife, Empress Theodora and his son and successor Andronicus II Palaeologus refused to give him burial and Church honors.<sup>536</sup> Andronicus II officially denounced the union and restored Orthodoxy. He sent edicts to all parts of the Empire proclaiming an amnesty for all those who had been exiled or imprisoned because of their zeal for the Church.

“Ten years after the council of Lyons, in 1285, an Orthodox Council was held in the Church of Blachernae in Constantinople. Gregory of Cyprus was the Orthodox Patriarch and Andronicus II the Emperor. The false union of Lyons was rejected and the heresy of the *Filioque* was condemned. Later on, Gennadius Scholarius, Patriarch of Constantinople, after the fall of the Empire in the XVth century, declared this Council to be Ecumenical. To those who considered it local because of the absence of the heretics and schismatics, Gennadius answered that: ‘... the absence of heretics does not diminish in any way the character of Ecumenicity.’”<sup>537</sup>

And so the conqueror of Constantinople, the “new Constantine”, died, hated by his own people. Rarely has such a glorious beginning to a reign ended in such ignominy...

The humiliation of Michael coincided with the exaltation of the memory of his first ecclesiastical opponent, Patriarch Arsenius. By 1310 most of the Arsenites had been reconciled with the official Church. Encomia were written to Arsenius, and he was even venerated as a saint. But as Ruth Macrides writes, “it is not only in encomia that Arsenios was a symbol for the Church which had emerged stronger from the crisis of the thirteenth century. Almost every aspect

---

<sup>535</sup> Bishop Nikolai Velimirovič, *Prologue from Ohrid*, October 10,

<sup>536</sup> Andronicus dared not bury his body openly, but put him into the ground at night without a funeral or prayers. The empress issued the following declaration: “My Majesty hates and regards as loathsome this action (the union) that has recently come about in the Church and has caused such discord... As the holy Church of God has determined not to sanction any official commemoration of my departed spouse, our lord and king, on account of his aforementioned actions and intrigues, my Majesty also, bowing in all things to the fear of God and submitting to the holy Church, approves and accepts her decree, and will never presume to commemorate the soul of my lord and spouse in any way.” (Bishop Nikolai Velimirovič, *The Prologue from Ochrid*, Birmingham: Lazarica Press, 1986, part 4, p. 59) (V.M.)

<sup>537</sup> Frontier, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12. The Synod’s « Exposition of the Tomos of Faith against Beccus » is found here : <https://sangiulio.org/holy-canons/blachernae/>.

of Arsenios' recognition as a saint demonstrated the triumph of the Church over the Palaiologi: his reinstatement in Hagia Sophia, the office celebrating him as a champion of the truth, his perfectly preserved body a source of healing. Even in the late fourteenth century,... anyone could see with his own eyes that Arsenios had been blessed and his opponent damned. Philotheus, the metropolitan of Selumbria... commented that the body of the emperor Michael lay in Selymbria in the monastery of Christ Saviour, 'all bloated' because of his heterodoxy and because of the excommunication which 'the most holy patriarch Arsenios pronounced against him'. Michael never received proper burial rits, his corpse was left near the place of his death, 'a plaything and laughing-stock even to his own children;. Agallianos, writing in the fifteenth century, invites anyone who has doubts about the sanctity of Arsenios and the damnation of Michael to 'judge for himself [...] and tell me with conscience which is the excommunicate and which the saint. But this is obvious even to a blind person.'

"If Agallianos and others before him attributed Michael's eternal damnation to the power of Arsenios' excommunication, they also acknowledge the part played by Michael's declaration of Union with the Church of Rome. The latter came to be the dominant issue of his reign and the reason for which his name is missing from the commemorative list of emperors in the Synodikon for the Sunday of Orthodoxy. Those who suffered persecution for opposing union were restored and honoured after his death in the reign of Andronicus II..."<sup>538</sup>

---

<sup>538</sup> Macrides, "Saints and Sainthood in the Early Palaiologan Period" in "The Byzantine Saint", *Sobornost'*, 1981, pp. 78-79.

## 31. THE SERBIAN REBELLION

“The 14th century,” writes Dvorkin, “buried the epoch of multinational super-empires. The future lay with centralized national states. However, it is interesting to note how long the peoples did not want to part with the myth of the Empire, to become the centre of which became the dream of practically every European state both in the East and in the West, from Bulgaria to Castilia. In the course of the 13th-14th centuries the canonists of many countries independently of each other developed the principle of the *translatio imperii* (translation of the empire). This process touched Russia a little later – in the 15th century, in the form of the theory of the Third Rome...”<sup>539</sup>

Of all the newly powerful nation-states of the 14th century formed out of the ruins of the ever-decreasing Byzantine Empire, the most powerful was Serbia. As Aristides Papadakis writes: “Greatly expanded under powerful leaders like King Stephen Urosh Milutin (1282-1321) and particularly Stephen Dushan (1331-55), the Serbian kingdom annexed traditionally Byzantine territories in Macedonia and northern Greece. In fact, Stephen Dushan dominated the entire Balkan peninsula. It was inevitable that, like Symeon of Bulgaria in the tenth century, he would dream of taking Constantinople itself and assume the ‘Roman’ imperial title. In the expectation of achieving this goal, he called himself – provisionally – ‘emperor and autocrat of Serbia and Romania’ (1345) and raised the archbishop of Pech to the rank of ‘patriarch of the Serbs and the Greeks’. The important city of Skopje, captured by Milutin, had, more than the other, smaller cities of the Serbian realm, the appearance of an imperial capital. There, on April 16, 1346, Dushan was crowned emperor by his newly-established patriarch Ioannikije.”<sup>540</sup>

Shortly after this, Dushan published his “Archangelic Charter”, whose introduction set out his political theology in impressive style. The foundation of all power is the Lord God, Who dwells in eternal light. The earthly ruler is a lord only for a time; he does not dwell in eternal light; and his splendour is only a reflection of the splendour of the Lord God. The incarnation of God the Word, His humiliation and descent, is imitated by the earthly ruler in his constant self-correction and the thought of death: “I am reminded of the terrible hour of death, for all the prophets, and apostles, and martyrs, and saints, and emperors died in the end; none of them remained, all were buried, and the earth received them all like a mother”. At the same time, the ruler, if he protects Orthodoxy and is guided by love for God, earns the titles “holy lord”, “patriot”, “enlightener of Serbia” and “peace libator”. In accordance with this dual character of the ruler’s power, his subjects are obliged, on the one hand, to obey him, in accordance with St. Paul’s word, and on the other to criticise him if he departs from the true path. For while power as such is from God, those in power may act in accordance with God’s will or against it.<sup>541</sup>

---

<sup>539</sup> Dvorkin, *op. cit.*, p. 716.

<sup>540</sup> Papadakis, *op. cit.*, pp. 258-259.

<sup>541</sup> Bogdanović, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

Dushan's code, writes Rebecca West, "brought up to date the laws made by the earlier kings of the Nemanyan dynasty and was a nicely balanced fusion of Northern jurisprudence and the Byzantine system laid down by Justinian. It coped in an agreeable and ingenious spirit with the needs of a social structure not at all to be despised even in comparison with the West.

"There, at this time, the land was divided among great feudal lords who ruled over innumerable serfs; but here in Serbia there were very few serfs, so few that they formed the smallest class in the community, and there was a large class of small free landowners. There was a National Diet which met to discuss such important matters as the succession to the throne or the outbreak of civil war, and this consisted of the sovereigns, their administrators, the great and small nobility, and the higher clergy; it was some smaller form of this, designed to act in emergencies that met to discuss whether John Cantacuzenus should receive Serbian aid. All local government was in the hands of the whole free community, and so was all justice, save for the special cases that were reserved for royal jurisdiction, such as high treason, murder, and highway robbery. This means that the people as a whole could deal with matters that they all understood, while the matters that were outside common knowledge were settled for them by their sovereign and selected members of their own kind; for there were no closed classes, and both the clergy and the nobility were constantly recruited from the peasantry."<sup>542</sup>

In this period, the way in which the Serbian kings were portraying themselves was almost indistinguishable from the symbolism of the Byzantine Emperors. Thus Desanka Milošević describes a portrait of Tsar Milutin in Grachanitsa in which "the king had all the prerogatives of power of the Byzantine Emperor, except for the title. The crown, the garments, the loros and the sceptre were all identical to the Byzantine Emperor's. Before Milutin, something like this would have been absolutely unthinkable, for only the Byzantine Emperor was Christ's regent on earth..."<sup>543</sup>

Dushan went further: directly challenging the authority of the Byzantine Emperor, he refused to call his kingdom, following Byzantine custom, "of the Romans", but rather "of the Serbs and the Greeks". The ethnicity of this title was in direct contradiction to the universalism of Christian Romanity. And yet he had come to the throne by rebelling against and then strangling his own father, St. Stephen Dechansky; so his claim even to the Serbian throne, not to speak of the Byzantine, was weak.

In spite of this, so feeble and divided was the Empire at this time that many Greeks supported his claims, and the *protos* of Mount Athos was present at his coronation in Skopje. But St. Gregory Palamas, remained loyal to Byzantium – even though Dushan had ransomed him from captivity to the Turks. St.

---

<sup>542</sup> West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, Edinburgh: Canongate, 2006, pp. 892-893.

<sup>543</sup> Milošević, in Tim Judah, *The Serbs*, London: Yale University Press, 1997, p. 22.

Gregory confirmed the traditional Byzantine theory that just as there is only one true God, so there can be only one Orthodox empire. As he wrote: "Will you transform into two emperors that one emperor whom God has established for us on the earth? Will you demonstrate that his empire is composed of two empires?"<sup>544</sup>

"The Serbian patriarchate was immediately recognized and supported by the patriarch of Trnovo and the archbishop of Ochrid (the latter was now controlled by Serbian power), as well as the monasteries of Mount Athos. It included within its realm a number of Greek dioceses, located on territories conquered by Dušan. In the circumstances, it is understandable that the establishment of such a patriarchate was challenged in Constantinople: on December 1349, ecumenical patriarch Callistus anathematized the Serbian Church."<sup>545</sup>

To anathematize a whole Local Church neither for heresy nor for schism, but for appropriating to itself territories that did not belong to it may have been a defensible step, but it was also a drastic one. It showed how anxious the patriarch was, in the absence of a strong emperor, to retain the centralising power of the patriarchate as the "glue" holding the Byzantine commonwealth together.

However, there is no question: the leading power in the Balkans at this time was not Byzantium, but Serbia. Dushan's land was prosperous, and attracted Venetians and Ragusans as traders, and Saxons as miners. As West writes: "Against the military difficulties that constantly beset Stephen Dushan there could be counted the security of this possession: a country rich in contented people, in silver and gold, in grain and cattle, in oil and wine, and in the two traditions, one Byzantine and mellow, one Slav and nascent, which inclined its heart towards civilization... Stephen Dushan ordered that all foreign envoys travelling through the land should be given all the meat and drink they desired at the imperial expense. As he pressed southward into Byzantine territory he restored to it elements necessary to civilized life which it had almost forgotten. He was not in need of money, so he did not need to rob his new subjects after the fashion of participants in the Civil War; he taxed them less, repaired gaps in their strongholds, and lent them Serbian soldiers as police. He also practised the principle of toleration, which was very dear to the Byzantine population; it must be remembered that the Orthodox crowd of Constantinople rushed without hesitation to defend the Saracen merchants' mosque when it was attacked by the fanatic Latin knights. There could be no complete application of this principle, and Stephen Dushan certainly appointed Serbian governors to rule over his new territories, as well as Serbian ecclesiastics when the local priests were irreconcilable; but he left the indigenous social and political

---

<sup>544</sup> St. Gregory Palamas, *Triads*, III, 2, 27, in *Défense des saints hésychastes (Defence of the Holy Hesychasts)*, edited by John Meyendorff, Louvain: Sacilegium Sacrum Lovaninense, 1973, pp. 692, 693 (in French and Greek).

<sup>545</sup> Papadakis, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

systems as he found them, and there was no economic discrimination against the conquered.

“It was as if there were falling down the map from the Serbian Empire an ooze of honey, runnels of wine. They must drip across Byzantium, they must spread all over the country to the sea, to the Bosphorus. To all men’s minds it became possible that some day Stephen Dushan might come to Constantinople and that he might be Emperor not only of the Byzantines but of Byzantium, seated at its centre in the palace that had known Constantine the Great and Justinian... His own age, and those who lived within recollection of its glory, believed him capable of that journey, and more...”<sup>546</sup>

But it was not to be. Why? Because Dushan’s quarrel with Byzantium divided the Orthodox world at just the moment it needed to unite against their common enemy, the Turks. Indeed, it was the rivalry between the two Orthodox states that let the Turks into the Balkans, leading to the destruction of both... For, as Andrew Wheatcroft writes, “in 1350 the Byzantine Emperor, John Cantacuzenus, recruited [Sultan] Orhan’s Ottoman warriors in his campaign against the King of Serbia, Stephen Dushan. Three years later Orhan’s son, Suleiman, crossed the Hellespont to take possession of the fortresses promised as the price of their support. Within a few years, from their base at Gallipoli, the Ottomans had advanced to cut the road from Constantinople to the fortress town of Adrianople, the capital of Thrace.”<sup>547</sup>

Still more importantly, the prosperity of the Serbian Empire under Dushan could not outweigh the injustice of his seizure of the throne, and, above all, the curse of the Church on the ecclesiastical and political disunity that he introduced into the Orthodox world. And so Dushan, for all his glory, was one of the few kings of the glorious Nemanja dynasty who is not inscribed among the saints. Like King Solomon’s in the Old Testament, his reign marks the culmination of his people’s glory in the political sphere, on the one hand, and on the other, the beginning of its decline in the spiritual sphere.

According to Bishop Nikolai Velimirović, “The Serbs had their national state from St. Sava until Czar Dušan. Dušan strayed from the ideals of St. Sava, he created an empire, and by this he prepared the downfall of his country, that is, of the national state. As in other instances, here too, the empire destroyed our homeland, our national state. For being subjugated or subjugating another nation result in the same catastrophe...”<sup>548</sup>

In 1354 Patriarch Ioannikije died, and in 1355 - Tsar Dushan. “It was as if,” writes Fr. Daniel Rogich, “the passing of two great religious and secular leaders created a huge vacuum over the empire which was filled by a black cloud of

---

<sup>546</sup> West, *op. cit.*, pp. 893-894.

<sup>547</sup> Wheatcroft, *Infidels*, London: Penguin Books, 2004, p. 203.

<sup>548</sup> Bishop Nikolai Velimirović, “Saint Sava’s Nationalism”, 1935, in *The New Chrysostom*. Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, St. Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 2011, p. 126.

lack of faith and political disaster. The upcoming events and internal and external strife would bring Serbia to the brink of political and religious disaster.

“The new leadership fell into the hands of Dushan’s son, King Urosh IV and Empress Helen. Urosh was only seventeen years old at the time... Being truly humble in spirit and less worldly than his departed father, Urosh was unable to control such a vast territory. In fact many began to call him Urosh ‘the Weak’. As a result, the next twenty years saw the breakup of the entire region of the southern territory of the Serbian empire, as well as a vying for power in the northern half.”<sup>549</sup>

In 1371 the Serbs were disastrously defeated by Sultan Murad I on the Maritsa, and in the same year Tsar Urosh died. However, at this point the Serbian Prince Lazar of Krushevac gradually began to reunite the Serbs with the slogan, *Samo Sloga Srbina Spasava*, that is, “Only Unity Saves the Serbs”.

Still more important, he finally managed to heal the ecclesiastical break with Constantinople. “In the spring of 1375, Holy Lazar called a National Church Assembly, inviting all civil leaders and bishops to his palace in Krushevac. The widowed Empress Helen, Dushan’s wife, was given a special place of honor, and Patriarch Sava IV served as the ecclesiastical head of the meeting. It was decided at the gathering to bless the virtuous monk Isaiah of Hilandar, with monks Theophanes, Silvester, Niphon, and Nicodemus as companions, to travel to Constantinople to visit His Holiness, Patriarch Philotheos (1364-1376). Due to the letters of the Patriarch and Holy Tsar Lazar, Patriarch Philotheos granted, as Archbishop Danilo II wrote in his Lives of the Kings and Archbishops of Serbia, ‘that the Serbs would no longer simply have an archbishop, but an autocephalous Patriarch over whom no one would exercise authority.’ The Patriarch also forgave Tsar Dushan, Patriarch Ioannikios, Patriarch Sava IV, King Urosh IV, and all the Serbian Orthodox Christians. He also sent two hieromonks, Matthew and Moses, to Prizren to celebrate Divine Liturgy with His Holiness Patriarch Sava IV, and to pronounce over the grave of Tsar Dushan in Pristina the revocation of the anathema. This took place on Thomas Sunday, April 29, 1375. Shortly thereafter Patriarch Sava IV fell asleep in the Lord, and Tsar Lazar summoned the Synod of Bishops, which elevated the venerable elder Ephraim as the new Patriarch of Serbia”.<sup>550</sup>

In spite of this inspiring miracle of political and ecclesiastical peacemaking, the Turks continued to make inroads, defeating the Serbs at the battle of the River Maritsa in 1371. Then, at the famous battle of Kosovo Polje (Blackbird Field) in 1389, the Sultan was killed, but also 77,000 Serbs, including Tsar Lazar. According to tradition, on the eve of the battle King Lazar had a vision in which he was offered a choice between an earthly victory and an earthly kingdom, or an earthly defeat that would win him the Heavenly Kingdom. He chose the latter and lost the battle – but his incorrupt relics continue to work miracles to this day.<sup>551</sup>

---

<sup>549</sup> Rogich, *Great Martyr Tsar Lazar of Serbia*, Platina: St. Herman Brotherhood, 2001, pp. 8-9.

<sup>550</sup> Rogich, *Great Martyr Tsar Lazar of Serbia*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>551</sup> Tim Judah, *The Serbs*, Yale University Press, 1997, p. 39.

For as Patriarch Danilo wrote in his late-fourteenth century *Narrative about Prince Lazar*: “We have lived for a long time in the world, in the end we seek to accept the martyr’s struggle and live for ever in heaven. We call ourselves Christian soldiers, martyrs for godliness to be recorded in the book of life... Suffering begets glory and labours lead to peace.”<sup>552</sup>

According to Bishop Nikolai Velimirović, just as St. Sava taught the Serbs how to live, so St. Lazar taught them how to die. It was this conscious seeking of martyrdom, rather than self-preservation, that distinguished Kosovo from all other battles between Orthodox armies and the enemies of Orthodoxy. “As the dead are dressed in new and expensive clothes, so was the Serbian army dressed in its best robes. The shiny and glowing procession hurried from all the borders of the empire into the focus of honour and fame, to the field of Kosovo. Shaded by cross-shaped banners and the icons of the family saints (slava), singing and cheering, singing and playing musical instruments, with song and joy, the army rushed towards its place of execution. Not a single Christian martyr is known to have prayed to God to save him from his approaching death, while thousands and thousands are known to have prayed not to be spared from a martyr’s death. Neither did Lazar’s army hold prayers for salvation from death. On the contrary – it confessed its sins and took Communion – for death. One whole armed people as one Christian martyr, obedient to the thoughtful will of the Almighty, accepted the bitterness of death and that not as bitterness but as a vital force. And hasn’t Kosovo right up to the present day, indeed, served as a vital force to dozens of generations? In the history of the Christian peoples there is not a case of one whole army, one whole armed people being imbued by the wish to die, to meet death for the sake of its religion. Not to meet a suicidal but a heroic death. Kosovo is unique in the twenty-century-old history of the Christian world.”<sup>553</sup>

However, as he stood, supported in the arms of a Turkish soldier, the dying king began to have doubts. “He prayed to God to reply to the question that was tormenting him: ‘I am a sinner, and I am dying, but why are my people and my warriors condemned to this torment, to these sufferings?’ And at this moment the king remembered that he had once made a choice between the earthly kingdom and the Heavenly Kingdom. And at that time he had chosen the Heavenly Kingdom. Perhaps his choice had been incorrect, and he had stirred up his people, forcing it to suffer. This thought tormented the dying king. Perhaps it was this decision of his that had become the main reason for the defeat of Serbia and the destruction of his people, the destruction of his closest friends...

“At that moment, when the pain in the soul of the king was so deep that he could no longer feel his physical sufferings, he was suddenly overshadowed by a bright light, and before him there stood an angel and someone else in

---

<sup>552</sup> Danilo, in Wheatcroft, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

<sup>553</sup> Velimirović, “Kosovo”, in 1389-1989, *Boj na Kosovu*, pp. 52-53.

shining raiment. (This was the Prophet Amos – King Lazarus' holy 'slava', that is, his heavenly protector – Nun I.).

“The angel addressed him with the following words: ‘Do not grieve, King Lazarus. I am sent from God. I have been sent to you to answer all the questions which are tearing your soul apart. Do not suffer thinking that you made an incorrect choice. Your choice was correct’....

“He said: ‘Why has your country fallen? Because it has grown old.’

“Seeing the perplexity of the king, the angel explained that old age is not a physical condition, but a spiritual one (more precisely, not old age, but spiritual paralysis). The poison of sin had poisoned the Serbian nobility and made it old, and this poison was beginning also to penetrate the people and poison its soul. Only a powerful storm could sweep away this evil, the corrupting spirit of the poison, and save the people from the destruction that threatened it. And so in order to save the country spiritually (from sin), it would have to be overthrown. ‘Do not grieve, king,’ continued the Angel, ‘your choice was correct and in agreement with the will of God. It is clear that Christ Himself and His angels, while confirming the sufferings of life, have given them a special higher meaning and thereby forced man to find in them a higher righteousness: to find in these sufferings the path to a better life.’ King Lazarus had to understand this inner and higher meaning of sufferings. These sufferings had to be perceived by him as a voluntary exploit taken on by him and his people, an exploit of love for the highest principles of life.

“The world cannot accept this love, for it loves only itself with a love of the flesh and sensuality.

“‘No, king, no,’ said the angel, ‘you made no mistake in your choice, and therefore you will receive a double crown, both a heavenly and an earthly. You have made the right choice, but you are sinning in doubting it.’

“‘But how can my choice of the Heavenly Kingdom,’ asked the king, ‘bring good to my people?’

“Your choice of the Heavenly Kingdom will undoubtedly give unwaning benefit to your people. It will purify their mind, heart and will. It will transfigure their souls into radiant mirrors in which eternal life will be reflected. The Heavenly Kingdom will enter into them and will make them worthy of It. Their minds will be purified from impurity, and their hearts will become worthy of grace. ‘In Thy light shall we see light’...

“‘Since neither the example of the saints of your people, nor the sermons of the priests have produced any benefit or positive result, Providence allowed this terrible death, this killing of your noble generals, and your death. Then will come a time of deep repentance, silence and sufferings. And so, step by step, the hearts of people will have to be drawn away from this world and return to

Heaven. Their hearts must be freed from the smoke of hell and be filled with the true Light...

“One more question tormented King Lazarus: ‘Will not slavery destroy that feeling of inner freedom which is innate in my people? And will not all their talents and abilities dry up under the heavy yoke of slavery?’

The angel replied: ‘Your words, O king, witness to the fact that you are still in the chains of the flesh. But in the Heavens human affairs are evaluated only in accordance with the motives that rule man. All the rest: cities, palaces, mechanisms – are emptiness without any value. Huge cities are all just the dust of the roads, smoke that vanishes. A small, pitiful bee can laugh on looking at your huge towers and empires. And how is one to explain to a bird sitting in a cage this inner, deep meaning of the freedom of a free bird? Those who have chosen the earthly kingdom cannot understand those who have chosen the Heavenly Kingdom. Their evil will is united with the demonic will and so they cannot look on the Heavenly Kingdom. The entrance into it is closed to them. And they have no freedom, they are the slaves of their flesh and the demons.

“Understand, O king, that this sad day may be the day of the turning of your people, not to evil, but to good. Until now their earthly will has dragged them down into the abyss of eternal death. Beginning from now, your people must carry out the will of another, and this can teach them to carry out the will of God, separating them from self-opinion and self-will.

“They will have to submit to the will of a cruel tyrant, and so will be able to understand and hate their own tyranny, the tyranny of their flesh over their soul. Through the years and centuries, labours and sorrows will teach them to hate these evil powers, their own will and the will of their slave-owners.

“And so the people will strive upwards, to heaven, as a tree in a thick wood, and will seek the bright light of their Creator, for, not possessing anything earthly, they will easily acquire the Heavenly Light; for they will hate both their own will and the will of their slave-owners. And then the Divine will will become for them sweeter than milk and honey.

“... And so, O king, say to God: ‘Thy will be done.’ It is possible to understand the meaning of the cross and sufferings only if one voluntarily accepts to take up the cross sent by God. Taking up the cross is a witness to one’s love for God through one’s voluntary sufferings. The cross is the witness of holy love.’

“The angel also explained the meaning of freedom. What does freedom mean? It is a symbol. The word ‘freedom’ has many meanings. When the external form of freedom changes to the tyranny of one man over another, and is not punished by the laws of the country, then the Lord takes away the freedom of this nation and casts it into the ‘school’ of slavery, so that the people may esteem and understand true freedom. But this true, golden freedom is

closely linked with the honourable cross. Only through the cross is golden freedom revealed to people. Golden freedom is true, unfailing freedom. And only that mortal man who acquires such freedom becomes truly free, and not the slave of the flesh and passions. Then it truly becomes free from illusions, fleshly passions and glory, free from people and demons, free from himself, from his passions. Free at all times and in all places, wherever he may be, whether in freedom or in slavery. This gem is preserved precisely in the depths of the human soul. True freedom is that freedom which cannot be taken away from man by prison or any foreign power. Without this freedom man is a pitiful slave, be he a king or the meanest servant. This freedom is not from obedience to God, but this freedom is in God - the true, eternal, joyful and golden freedom.

“... And the angel added: ‘It is better to acquire the Kingdom of Heaven by sufferings that the kingdom of the earth by evil. And there is no evil on earth, or in hell, that could conquer the eternal wisdom of the Heavens.’

“After these words of the angel, Lazarus was no longer spiritually the old man, but was renewed in spirit. His soul was enlightened by the spirit of the Heavens. And although the battle still raged around him, in his soul Lazarus felt a new, eternal life and eternal joy. He sighed deeply and said: ‘Amen’.”<sup>554</sup>

As James E. Held writes, after Kosovo “Serbia did not totally lose its independence until 1459, and Orthodox refugees fleeing as well, Latin Crusaders and Venetian raiders, found refuge under the rule of Stefan, Prince Lazar’s son. Although an Ottoman vassal, his sister Olivera joined the Sultan’s harem, his reign was a time of cultural growth and economic prosperity. For a time, Serbia held a privileged position in the Ottoman Empire, even as the Turks systematically dismembered the disjointed Balkan kingdoms until twice reaching the gates of Vienna.”<sup>555</sup>

Meanwhile, under Tsar Ivan Alexander (1331-71) the Bulgarians recovered somewhat; but the “Autocrat of all Bulgarians and Greeks” had the same ambition as had Tsar Dushan of replacing Roman universalism with the ethnic principle. St. Theodosius, of Trnovo (+1363) prophesied that the Turks would conquer the Bulgarian land because of its sins. And so it turned out: in 1393, Trnovo was conquered, the Bulgarian state was dissolved and the patriarch, St. Euthymius, was deposed.

---

<sup>554</sup> Velimirović, in Nun Ioanna, “Taina kosovskoj bitvy - dukhovnoe zaveshchanie tsaria Lazaria” (“The Mystery of the Battle of Kosovo - the Spiritual Will of Tsar Lazarus”), *Pravoslavnaia Zhizn’* (Orthodox Life), N 7 (583), July, 1998, pp. 15, 16, 19, 21, 22-23.

<sup>555</sup> Held, “Legend of the Fall, 1389: the Battle of Kosovo”, *Medieval History*, January, 2004, p. 37.

## 32. ST. GREGORY PALAMAS AND THE HESYCHAST CONTROVERSY

In the middle of the fourteenth century the Black Death struck Constantinople, killing, according to one source, most of the inhabitants and further undermining the strength of the State. Meanwhile, the divisions between and within the state continued, and there was a state of near-permanent civil war between the members of the ruling Palaeologan dynasty. The humiliation of Orthodoxy was such that towards the end of the century, all the Orthodox rulers, Greek, Slav and Romanian, were vassals of the Turkish sultan and even had to fight in his armies against other Orthodox Christians...<sup>556</sup>

The underlying spiritual cause of these disasters was not far to find: in spite of the chastening experiences of the previous century, Byzantine rulers still continued to dangle the bait of union with Rome before western princes in exchange for military help that very rarely came. Only once, at the battle of Nicopolis in 1396, did a large-scale crusade led by the King of Hungary set off to rescue the Greeks from the Turks. It ended in disaster...

The lesson was obvious, but seemed never to be learned: no material gain, but only continued disasters, not to speak of spiritual shipwreck, come from attempting to sell the birthright of the Orthodox Faith for political gain...

\*

Paradoxically, however, this deeply dispiriting period from the point of view of state life also witnessed something of a spiritual renaissance in the cultural and religious spheres. This was the result, we may suppose, of *the hesychastic movement*, which was spread by wandering monks such as St. Gregory of Sinai throughout the Orthodox commonwealth, and which brought forth rich fruits of sanctity for centuries to come. Moreover, in defending hesychasm against its humanist and latinizing detractors, the Orthodox Church was able to define the difference between Orthodoxy and Catholicism more broadly and deeply than ever before.

In this struggle, whose epicentre was the decade between 1341 and 1351, two outstanding personalities shine out in the surrounding darkness as defenders of the truth: St. Gregory Palamas, leader of the hesychast monks on Mount Athos and later Archbishop of Thessalonica, who formulated the theological defence of hesychasm, and his friend John Catacuzenus, who in turn became the Great Domestic, the Emperor John VI and then plain Monk Joasaph, and who, while never rejecting the idea of the union as such, always cleverly insisted that it could only be done through an Ecumenical Council – an idea

---

<sup>556</sup> Thus the Emperors Manuel II and John VII were forced by the Sultan to take part in the siege of the last Byzantine city in Asia Minor, Philadelphia (Norwich, op. cit., pp. 345-47).

that the Popes rejected because they knew it would end in failure for the uniata cause.

The debate began in the 1330s with a rather original attempt to engineer the unia. The Calabrian Greek monk Barlaam argued that the truths of the Faith – he was thinking especially of the *Filioque* controversy - cannot be proved, they were attempts to know the unknowable; so we might as well take both positions, the Greek and the Latin, as private opinions! Such relativism was refuted by St. Gregory, and found no support in the West either: Pope Benedict was no more inclined than the Byzantine Church to accept it.

But Barlaam's pride had been hurt, and he now set about attacking the Athonite hesychast monks with regard to their practice of the Jesus prayer. In particular, he attacked the claim that by combining the prayer with certain physical exercises that involved directing the eye of the mind on the physical heart, the monks could reach a state of deification and behold the Uncreated Light that emanated from Christ's Body during the Transfiguration. Barlaam mockingly called the hesychasts *omphalopsychoi*, that is, those who locate the soul in the navel, and identified them with the fourth-century sect of the Messalians, which taught that through asceticism and prayer and without the aid of the sacraments one could see God with one's physical eyes.

The Athonite hesychasts refuted Barlaam's charges in a *Tomos* entitled "The Declaration of the Holy Mountain in Defence of Those who Devoutly Practise a Life of Stillness". Composed by St. Gregory and signed by the leading hesychasts, including Bishop James of Hierissos and the Holy Mountain, it argued that: 1. The deifying grace of God, in and through which we are united with God and saved, is God Himself, uncreated and eternal; 2. This deification is not a capacity inherent in human nature, as the Messalians taught, but a gift of God by grace; 3. The mind (*nous*) which sees God in the Divine Light is located in the heart, for the body takes part in deification as well as the soul; 4. The Light that shone around the disciples on Mount Tabor was not an apparition or a symbol, but the Uncreated Divine Light, God Himself, Which they were able to see through the opening of their spiritual eyes, a transmutation of their spiritual senses; 5. Both the Essence of God and His Energies are Uncreated, but constitute one God, insofar as the Energies are not a second God, but the One God going out of Himself, as it were, in order to unite Himself with created nature; 6. This vision of God and participation in His Uncreated Energies is the mystery of the age to come manifest already in this age. "For if in the age to come the body is to share with the soul in ineffable blessings, then it is evident that in this world as well it will also share according to its capacity in the grace mystically and ineffably bestowed by God upon the purified intellect [*nous*], and it will experience the divine in conformity with its nature. For once the soul's passible aspect is transformed and sanctified – but not reduced to a deathlike condition – through it the dispositions and activities

of the body are also sanctified, since body and soul share a conjoint existence.”<sup>557</sup>

This teaching was vindicated at a Council in Constantinople presided over by Emperor Andronicus III in 1341. There were further Councils in 1347 and 1351, when Barlaam and his helpers Acindynus and Nicephorus Gregoras were excommunicated. Barlaam renounced Orthodoxy and became a Catholic bishop.<sup>558</sup>

Something of the spirituality of the hesychast monks may be gleaned from the spiritual testament of St. Teodosi of Trnovo, a disciple of St. Gregory of Sinai, that he gave to his disciples on his deathbed: “First of all, hold fast to the holy faith of the Church of the Apostles and Councils, and to its inviolable precepts. Shun the Bogomil and Messalian heresies as something totally unfitting, and after them the heresies of Barlaam, Akyndinos, Gregory and Athanasius. Believe those things which we have received from the beginning, and do not remove or add anything, for this leads to blasphemy. This is what caused Akyndinos to blaspheme, when he described Christ’s glory, which once shone forth in a truly glorious and miraculous manner, as something created. Hold fast to both these things. In addition he who is a true Christian, by deed and repute as well as in name, also roots out of himself love of self-will. Do not burden your life with possessions, and practice self-denial in order to lull your passions. Subdue anger and all forms of bodily disturbances, and so drive out spiritual darkness. These things, in short, dry up all the moisture and sweetness of the flesh. He whose spiritual eye is clear can see into himself, as did the pious David; and he overcomes the realms of the evil one, that is the cunning inward thoughts of our hearts. Keep constantly before you, as an activity of the mind, the vision of God; for this is a powerful weapon that will not yield or break before any opposing force. Above all, hold fast to love, the supreme virtue, with all your strength, for this is the fulfillment of all blessings. Make all strangers welcome; do not make false accusations; and avoid anger, rage, remembrance of wrongs and hatred, for these things darken the soul and estrange it from God.”<sup>559</sup>

Apart from their great dogmatic significance, these Palamite Councils presented a precious image of Orthodox bishops convened by a right-believing emperor to define essential truths of the faith and thereby preserve the heritage of Orthodoxy for future generations and other nations...

---

<sup>557</sup> *The Philokalia*, vol. IV, translated and edited by G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware, London: Faber and Faber, 1995, p. 423.

<sup>558</sup> According to Fr. Alexander Prapertov, he “stood at the sources of the Renaissance. One of his pupils was Petrarch himself. And another of his pupils was Leontius Pilatus, the first professor of the Greek language in Western Europe, who translated a multitude of the works of the ancient philosophers and writers (in particular, Homer’s *Iliad*) and was a vivid figure in the Early Renaissance. Giovanni Boccaccio learned Greek from him.” (Facebook communication, March 13, 2017)

<sup>559</sup> St. Teodosi, in Muriel Heppell, “The Spiritual Testament of St. Teodosi of Turnovo”, *Sobornost’*, vol. 4, no. 2, p. 202.

### 33. ST. SERGIUS OF RADONEZH AND THE RISE OF MUSCOVY

Byzantium survived for over sixty years after the defeat of the Serbs at Kosovo Polye in 1379 and the fall of Bulgaria in 1393. In this there is a moral: that the persistent attempts of the Slavic states to achieve equal status, ecclesiastically as well as politically, with Byzantium were not pleasing to God insofar as the spiritual leadership of the Orthodox world was still entrusted by God to Byzantium. But it was a different story with a third Slavic state to the north – Russia.

The principality of Moscow was founded in 1276 by a younger son of St. Alexander Nevsky, Daniel; and in 1299 a new phase in Russian history began when Metropolitan Maximus of Kiev, whose title now included the phrase “of all Russia”, moved the seat of the Russian metropolitanate from the devastated ruins of Kiev in the South to Vladimir-Suzdal in the North. In this way the Church followed where the State, in the person of St. Andrew of Bogolyubovo, had led in the previous century. This indicated that the political leadership of Russia had to come from the north, from the area that was now called “Great Russia”, as opposed to “Little Russia” in the south, centred on Kiev, or “White Russia” in the west, which was increasingly coming under the dominion of the pagan rulers of Lithuania.

On the death of Maximus, Great Prince Yury of Galicia petitioned Patriarch Athanasius I to consecrate a “metropolitan of Galicia”. This move was potentially very dangerous for the unity of the Russian lands. For once the Russian territories under Lithuanian rule had their own metropolitan, they might be tempted to break with Great Russia ecclesiastically as well as politically. And this in turn would certainly expose Little Russia to the danger of absorption into Roman Catholicism, which threatened from Poland and the Baltic German lands...<sup>560</sup> It appears that the patriarchate recognised its mistake, because when Maximus died and Great Prince Yury put forward a Galician abbot, Peter, for the metropolitanate of Galicia, the patriarchate appointed him “metropolitan of Kiev and All Russia”.

Beginning with St. Peter, the metropolitans firmly maintained their rights to rule over the whole of the Russian flock, having for this the support of the Tatars in the same way that the ecumenical patriarch would later have the support of the Turks. St. Peter moved the seat of Church government again,

---

<sup>560</sup> That this was a real threat already in the fourteenth century, and even in some parts of Great Russia, is illustrated by an incident that took place in Novgorod, which was traditionally, because of its foreign merchant colony, less anti-Catholic than other parts of Great Russia. “On one occasion at the end of the fourteenth century, the city, in bargaining with the patriarch of Constantinople for privileges for its archbishop, threatened to go to Rome as a final argument. This threat was not serious and did not fail to elicit a severe rebuke from the patriarch, but, up to the time of the loss of their independence, the Novgorodians saw no objection against a political alliance with the Catholic kings of Lithuanian Poland” (G. Fedotov, *The Russian Religious Mind*, Harvard University Press, 1966, vol. I, p. 336).

from Vladimir to Moscow – that is, to the town whose princes, more than any others, followed the “Alexandrian” pro-Tatar and anti-Catholic policy, and which was neither too far east to be under the shadow of the Tatars nor too far west to be under the shadow of the Lithuanians.<sup>561</sup>

St. Peter advised Prince Ivan I Danilovich to build a stone church dedicated to the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God, which became the first church of Russia. “If, my son, you obey me, and build the church of the Most Pure Mother of God, and give me rest in your city, God will bless you and make you higher than all the other princes, and will extend this city more than all other cities. And your race will possess this place to the ages”.<sup>562</sup>

In 1326 St. Peter moved his see to Moscow, and died in December of the same year. He was canonized astonishingly quickly, only a year later... At the time of St. Peter’s death, the prince of Tver had the “yarlik” of tax-collector and the title of Great Prince. Almost immediately, however, in 1327, the citizens of Tver rose up against the khan and killed a high-level deputation from the Mongol capital of Sarai sent to oversee the collection of tribute. After some hesitation, the prince of Tver sided with the rebels – which gave Great Prince Ivan of Moscow his chance. He set off for Sarai and returned at the head of a Mongol-Russian force which devastated Tver; Prince Alexander of Tver was excommunicated by the new metropolitan, Theognost. In reward for this service, in 1328 the khan bestowed the title of Grand Prince on Prince Ivan of Moscow together with the responsibility of farming all the taxes due to the khan from the whole of Russia. Hence his nickname of “Kalita”, “money bag”. In exchange for providing the Horde with regular income, the great prince was protected from Mongol raids and had the opportunity of making considerable gains for himself from the other tribute-paying princes. As St. Peter had prophesied, Moscow was on the way to becoming the economic and political centre of Russia...

In 1345 Great-Prince Olgerd ascended the throne of Lithuania. He was a pagan; but, as Papadakis writes, he “would extend his domains over Russian territories from the Baltic to the Black seas, including the prestigious city of Kiev. His avowed goal was to free Russia from the Mongol rule and assume the legacy of the ancient Kievan princes. To reach that goal he was ready to embrace Orthodox Christianity, which was already the religion of his two successive wives (who were Russian princesses), of all his numerous children, and of the vast majority of his subjects. However, it was not Olgerd but the Church that was actually holding “the trump card: the real center of the country had to be the metropolitan’s residence, since that prelate controlled the only administrative structure covering Moscow, Novgorod, Kiev, Vilna (the

---

<sup>561</sup> A.E. Presniakov, “Na puti k yedinoderzhaviu” (“On the Path to One-Man Rule”), *Rodina* (Homeland), N 11, 2003, pp. 15-16.

<sup>562</sup> St. John Maximovich, *Proiskhozhdenie zakona o prestolonasledii v Rossii* (The Origin of the Law of Succession in Russia), Podolsk, 1994, p. 9.

Lithuanian capital) and distant Galicia. He was, in addition, a representative of Byzantium and a religious official respected by the Tatar khans."<sup>563</sup>

It was at about this time, in 1347, that Olgerd's supposed conversion to Orthodoxy was shown to be not genuine: three young Orthodox, Anthony, John and Eustathius, were martyred by him in Vilna for refusing to accept paganism. It then suddenly became clear to all those with eyes to see that the interests of Orthodoxy lay with Moscow rather than Lithuania. And at the same time the issue of the metropolitanate again became of political importance.

In 1353, Metropolitan Theognostus of Kiev, a Greek, had "personally arranged his succession in the person of a Russian, Alexis, whom he had consecrated as bishop of Vladimir... In 1352 the Lithuanian grand-prince strongly demanded from the patriarchate that the seat of the metropolitanate be returned to Kiev, and even sent his candidate, Theodoret, to Constantinople for consecration. Facing a rebuke, he took the unusual step of having Theodoret ordained by the Bulgarian patriarch of Trnovo. Understandably, Theodoret was labelled a schismatic in Constantinople and in Moscow..."<sup>564</sup>

The Ecumenical Patriarch, St. Philotheus, wanted to preserve the unity of the Russian metropolitanate and resist the divisive plans of Olgerd. So in 1354 he consecrated Bishop Alexis as metropolitan of Kiev and All Russia. Alexis was a holy man who in 1357 had healed the influential widow of khan Uzbek, Taidul, and consequently had great authority with the Golden Horde.

However, Olgerd put forward his own candidate, a Russian from Tver named Roman, as metropolitan of Lithuania, with the aim of having Roman take over the whole of Russia, And indeed, Roman, having been consecrated by Patriarch Callistos of Constantinople (who had replaced the deposed Philotheus), began styling himself Metropolitan of Kiev and all Russia and moved his residence to Kiev. So it was only after the death of Roman in 1362 that Alexis was able to reunite the Russian metropolitanate under his sole rule.

However, continues Boris Floria, "Olgerd wasn't about to give up so easily. Over the next decade and a half until his death in 1377, the energetic Lithuanian great prince challenged Moscow for control of Russia. That struggle was a major watershed in Eastern European history. It reached its peak in his unsuccessful siege of Moscow in 1368, which was repelled by Moscow's Great Prince Dimitri II, not yet the victor of the Don. Olgerd's campaign continued even after that defeat. It turned Alexis and the metropolitanate into political footballs..." Thus in 1369 Great Prince Dimitri, having consolidated his position within Great Russia, sent an army against Lithuanian-controlled Smolensk and Briansk. "At the same time Metropolitan Alexis

---

<sup>563</sup> Papadakis, *op. cit.*, p. 337.

<sup>564</sup> Papadakis, *op. cit.*, p. 338.

excommunicated from the Church those princes who had entered into union with the Lithuanian pagans against the Christian prince of Moscow.”<sup>565</sup>

By this time, Philotheos had resumed control of the patriarchate on the death of Callistos in 1363 – and resumed also his support of St. Alexis. Olgerd hit back by complaining to Philotheos that Alexis never visited his flock in Lithuania, and asked him to grant a second metropolitan for all the lands that he and his allies controlled. He was supported by a threat coming from King Casimir of Poland, as Papadakis writes, “forcibly to convert the Galicians to Roman Catholicism. Faced with an emergency situation, Philotheus reestablished a separate [but *temporary*] metropolitanate in Galicia (1371), and called on Alexis to exercise more even-handedness towards Olgerd and his Orthodox subjects. [In particular, he was to visit them more often.] In 1375, he also consecrated a man of his immediate entourage, the learned Bulgarian and Athonite monk Cyprian, as metropolitan in Lithuania. He made sure, however, that this consecration would not lead to a lasting division of the metropolitanate: Cyprian received the right to succeed Alexis. Upon his arrival in Kiev in 1376, he restored order and the prestige of the metropolitanate in territories controlled by Lithuania.”<sup>566</sup>

At the same time, Great Prince Dimitri brought Tver from the Lithuanian sphere of influence into vassalage to himself, and Prince Sviatoslav of Smolensk broke with Olgerd and entered into union with Dimitri. With the change in political orientation in these lands, Metropolitan Alexis was able to appoint new bishops for Smolensk and Briansk. As Lithuania began to be threatened by the Catholic Teutonic knights from the Baltic, Prince Dimitri took the title “Great Prince of all Russia” when signing a treaty with Novgorod; and it looked as if the reunification of the Russian lands under Moscow was about to begin....

At about this time the Metropolitan of Lithuania Cyprian urged a union between Orthodox Muscovy and Lithuania against the Tatars. However, this policy was not favoured by the Muscovite Great-Prince. And so when Cyprian hastened to Moscow on the death of St. Alexis in 1378 he was imprisoned and then expelled from Moscow, which led to a prolonged struggle to fill the vacant metropolitan’s throne...

Encouraged by another coup in Constantinople, Dimtri sent his candidate for the metropolitanate, Mityai, to the City. But Cyprian had got there before him – and another coup changed the situation again in Cyprian’s favour. Besides, as Mityai came within sight of the City he dropped dead...

But in 1380 the pendulum swung again. The new patriarch, Neilos, could not resist the pressure of Dimitri, and decided on a compromise. A certain

---

<sup>565</sup> Floria, “Tochka raspada” (“The Point of Dissolution”), *Rodina* (Homeland), N 11, 2003, p. 29.

<sup>566</sup> Papadakis, *op. cit.*, p. 339

Pimen was consecrated metropolitan of Kiev and Great Russia, while Cyprian was given Lithuania and Little Russia.

\*

Under Dimitri, writes Hosking, “Moscow consolidated its authority over the principalities of Rostov, Suzdal, and Nizhni Novgorod and extended its territory far toward the northeast, into Starodub (east of Suzdal), Kostroma, Galich, Uglich, and Beloozero, whether by some kind of financial transaction or by invasion has never been clear. These acquisitions greatly increased Moscow’s access to the wealth of the forests and lakes of the north while curtailing the territory which had been the key to Novgorod’s affluence.

“This expansion coincided with a period when the Golden Horde, having been a stable overlord for more than a century, began to fall apart. Until the late fourteenth century, it remained indisputably the leading power in Eurasia. It dominated the great trading route down the Volga, from the Baltic to the Middle East, Persia, and India; it protected the caravan trade across the steppes from Central Asia and China to the Black Sea and the ports of the Mediterranean. The incomes it derived from these lucrative sources, together with the tributes from its subordinate lands, ensured that it was not only a powerful but also a wealthy state. On the other hand, this wealth generated an increasingly sophisticated urban civilization which was difficult to reconcile with continuing nomadic rule. The far-flung, highly diverse territories of the Horde, each developing in its own way, were becoming more difficult to administer adequately from horseback.

“Eventually the accumulating pressures brought about an explosion. The assassination of Khan Berdi-bek in 1359 inaugurated a series of coups, in which short-lived rulers succeeded one another on the throne of Sarai, while one of the more enterprising generals, Mamai, set up his own independent horde on the steppes east of the Volga and proceeded to claim the lands of Rus as part of his *ulus*. Faced with two demanding, unstable, and mutually jealous claimants for acknowledgement and tribute, the princes of Rus fell prey to confusion and apprehension. Yet they also had the opportunity to exploit the divisions among their masters, if only they could unite to take advantage of them.”

Further east, meanwhile, the Mongol warlord Timur (Tamerlane) was establishing a great Central Asian empire with its capital at Samarkand. “One of his generals, Tokhtamysh, broke away to move westward with his own army, seize power at Sarai, and reunite most of the fragments of the Golden Horde. Only Mamai eluded his grasp.”<sup>567</sup>

\*

---

<sup>567</sup> Hosking, *Russia and the Russians*, London: Penguin, 2012, pp. 78-79.

It was at this time that one of the greatest saints of this or any other age, Sergius of Radonezh, a hermit of the northern forests who founded the great Lavra at Sergiev Posad (Zagorsk), the most famous of all Russian monasteries that became the spiritual centre of the Moscow Patriarchate, assumed the spiritual leadership of the Russian Church.

In 1380, Mamai, invaded Muscovy. He was claiming unpaid tribute, and was supported by Lithuania under Olgerd's son Jagiello.

St. Sergius did not immediately bless the Great Prince to fight Mamai, but only when all other measures had failed<sup>568</sup>: "You, my lord prince, must care and strongly stand for your subjects, and lay down your life for them, and shed your blood in the image of Christ Himself, Who shed His blood for us. But first, O lord, go to them with righteousness and obedience, as you are bound to submit to the khan of the Horde in accordance with your position. You know, Basil the Great tried to assuage the impious Julian with gifts, and the Lord looked on Basil's humility and overthrew the impious Julian. And the Scripture teaches us that such enemies want glory and honour from us, we give it to them; and if they want silver and gold, we give it to them; but for the name of Christ, the Orthodox faith, we must lay down our lives and shed our blood. And you, lord, give them honour, and gold, and silver, and God will not allow them to overcome us: seeing your humility, He will exalt you and thrust down their unending pride."

"I have already done that," replied the Great Prince: "but my enemy is exalted still more."

"If so," said the God-pleaser, "then final destruction awaits him, while you, Great Prince, can expect help, mercy and glory from the Lord. Let us hope on the Lord and the Most Pure Mother of God, that They will not abandon you". And he added: "You will conquer your enemies."<sup>569</sup>

Fortified by the blessing of the saint, Great-Prince Demetrius defeated the enemy at the great battle of Kulikovo Polje, at which over 100,000 Russian warriors gave their lives for the Orthodox faith and their Russian homeland. Some have seen in this, the first victory of the Russians over the Tatars, as a sign that the Russians had changed the policy of submission to the Tartars that they had inherited from St. Alexander Nevsky, and that St. Sergius actively blessed a policy of rebellion against those whom previous princes and

---

<sup>568</sup> The following account, though accepted before the revolution, has been rejected more recently by scholars who argue that St. Sergius could not have blessed the Great-Prince, who had been excommunicated by St. Cyprian, Metropolitan of Moscow. See Oleg Morozov, "Novie Russkie Sviatie", *Portal-Credo.Ru*, February 5, 2016. However, in lieu of a definitive consensus among the historians, I have chosen to keep the following account in this work, especially in view of its important didactic content.

<sup>569</sup> Archimandrite Nikon, *Zhitie i Pobedy Prepodobnago i Bogonosnago Otsa Nashego Sergia, Igumena Radonezhskago* (The Life and Victories of our Holy and God-bearing Father Sergius, Abbot of Radonezh), Sergiev Posad, 1898, p. 149

metropolitans had seen as their lawful sovereigns. However, as we have seen, the saint advised submission in the first place, and war only if the Tatar could not be bought off. Moreover, it needs to be borne in mind that Mamai was himself a rebel against the Horde, so that in resisting him the Russians were in no way rebelling against their lawful sovereign.

In any case, two years later the lawful khan Tokhtamysh came and sacked Moscow; so there was not, and could not be, any radical change in policy yet – tribute continued to be paid. The real significance of Kulikovo Polje lies in the fact that a union of princes had defeated an external foe under the leadership of the Orthodox Church, thereby holding out the promise that the spiritual unity of the Russian lands, which had never been lost, could be complemented by the political unity which had been lost two hundred years before.

To seal this spiritual unity, Metropolitan Cyprian returned in triumph to Moscow in the spring of 1381. “A chronicler relates that he was greeted with great rejoicing among the people. He resumed his active promotion of ecclesiastical unity, conspicuously ministering to the Orthodox in Lithuanian-controlled ‘Little Russia’ (which included Kiev).

“But he also made it clear that this unity now cohered around Moscow, exalting it as the divinely favored center of Orthodoxy in Russia. His *Life of Peter*, written at this time, pointedly celebrates his illustrious predecessor, the metropolitan who had first taken up residence in Moscow. Dimitri and his dynasty benefited immensely from such influential propaganda. The *Life of Peter* glorifies them as the legitimate heirs of Kievan rule, specially anointed to hold sway over the lands of the Orthodox Russians...”<sup>570</sup>

As it turned out, in spite of the pan-Russian vision of such leaders as Metropolitan Cyprian and St. Sergius, political union with Lithuania was not achieved: although, in 1383, the Lithuanian Great Prince Jagiello signed a treaty with Moscow and agreed to convert to Orthodoxy, he quickly changed his mind and instead, in 1386, converted to Catholicism, which led to the union of Lithuania with Catholic Poland and the increasing identification of Russian Orthodoxy and Russian Orthodox statehood with Muscovite Great Russia alone. Nevertheless, although only Great Russia remained faithful to the ecumenical vision of Orthodoxy, that vision, drawing strength from the Palamite renewal of monasticism taking place in Constantinople and the Balkan lands, helped produce that flowering of monasticism, iconography and missionary activity that makes the Age of St. Sergius such a glorious one in the annals of Russian history. The northern forests were covered with new monasteries founded by the disciples of St. Sergius (over 100 of whom were canonized). And icon-painters such as Andrei Rublev glorified the newly-built churches with their wonderful works.

---

<sup>570</sup> Wells, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

Moreover, it was at this time that, under the influence of St. Sergius, Great-Prince Dimitri ordered his children to observe a new order of inheritance, whereby his eldest son was to inherit the Great Princedom, not allowing any quarrels or claims from the other children. Once again, St. Sergius was entrusted with guarding this most important decree, which served to strengthen the institution of one-man, autocratic rule in Russia.<sup>571</sup> For, as St. John Maximovich writes, "under Dimitri Ivanovich the significance of the Great Prince grew mightily. The most powerful appanages of the Great Prince – Tver and Ryazan – were forced to conclude agreements with him in which they recognised themselves to be his younger brothers... Basil Dimitrievich continued the work of his father. He joined some appanages to Moscow, and with the remaining appanage princes he concluded agreements to the effect that they had to submit to him and not seek the Great Princedom."<sup>572</sup>

Although Dimitri again quarreled with St. Cyprian and replaced him with Pimen, on the deaths of both Dimitri and Pimen in 1388, Cyprian re-entered Moscow again in 1390 as the unchallenged metropolitan of Kiev and all Russia...

The Russians' defeat of the Mongols at Kulikovo Polje in 1380 and the Serbs' defeat by the Ottomans at Kosovo Polje in 1389, represent the opposite poles of Orthodox fortunes in the Middle Ages. The latter marked the beginning of the end of Orthodox autocracy in its original Mediterranean homeland, while the former marked the beginning of the rise of the last of the Orthodox autocracies.

After the death of St. Sergius on September 25, 1392, for six years the monastery was guided by St. Sava of Storozhevsk (December 3). In the year 1400 Saint Sava founded his own monastery near Zvenigorod, and the brethren entreated St. Nikon, St. Sergius' closest disciple, to take over its direction. He consented, but allotted himself a certain time each day for silence, so as to stand alone before God.

In 1395, the fearsome Tamerlane was at the gates of Moscow, but was forced to retreat after the Vladimir icon of the Mother of God was brought from Vladimir to Moscow.

When reports began to spread about an invasion of the Russian land by Khan Edigei in 1408, St. Nikon zealously prayed to God to spare the monastery. In a dream the Moscow hierarchs Peter (December 21) and Alexis (February 12) together with St. Sergius appeared to him and said that he should not grieve over the destruction of the monastery, since it would not become desolate, but would flourish all the more.

---

<sup>571</sup> Archimandrite Nikon, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

<sup>572</sup> St. John Maximovich, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

The monks left the monastery, taking with them relics, books, and consecrated vessels. When they returned, they saw that their beloved place had been reduced to ashes. But St. Nikon did not despair, and the brethren began to restore the monastery. First of all a wooden church was built in honor of the Most Holy Trinity. It was consecrated on September 25, 1411, the anniversary of the repose of St. Sergius.

The monastery was restored, and St. Nikon began construction of a stone church over the grave of his spiritual Father, St. Sergius. The work crew digging the foundations uncovered the incorrupt relics of St. Sergius on July 5, 1422. Amidst universal rejoicing they placed the relics in a new reliquary and at the new site a wooden church was built (now the church in honor of the Descent of the Holy Spirit is at this place). St. Nikon later built a new stone church in the Name of the Most Holy Trinity. In honor and memory of his spiritual Father, he transferred the holy relics into this newly built church.

St. Nikon brought in the finest iconographers, SS. Andrew Rublev (July 4) and Daniel Cherny (June 13) for the adornment of the temple. St. Andrew painted the famous icon of the Most Holy Trinity (the Hospitality of Abraham). St. Nikon was occupied with the construction of the Trinity church until the end of his life on November 27, 1426. .

From about 1430 both of Moscow's main enemies, Lithuania and the Golden Horde, began to disintegrate. From the Golden Horde there separated the khanate of Kazan on the mid-Volga, the Crimean khanate, and the khanate of Astrakhan.

Moscow did not capitalize on this because she suffered her own divisions and civil war. But by the middle of the century, Vasily II had defeated his enemies among his relatives, and increased his power over Novgorod. And so, "built upon territorial, economic, military and ideological foundations that displaced both the traditional heritage of Kievan Rus and Tatar authority, the new state of Muscovy was poised to exploit the disintegration of the Golden Hord and the reduction of Lithuanian expansion and to become a mighty Eastern European power."<sup>573</sup>

However, it was not until nearly a century later, in 1480, that the Muscovites finally felt strong enough to refuse any further tribute to the khans...

\*

The rise of Muscovy was accompanied by a great spiritual efflorescence. "Altogether fifty monasteries," writes Sergius Bolshakoff, "were founded from St. Sergius' monastery, which was dedicated to the Most Holy Trinity. These fifty monasteries founded forty others in their turn. One hundred canonized

---

<sup>573</sup> Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

monks came from St. Sergius' foundations. From 1300, in the course of 150 years 180 new monasteries were founded...

"Although fifteenth-century Russia was rich in monasteries, they were mostly small. Communities of two to six monks were numerous, while those with 100 to 300 monks were rare...

"The Russian monasteries in the North were centers of colonization. Many peasants from poor or overpopulated districts moved into vast new estates of the distant monasteries where they expected a better living. Gradually villagers began to ring monasteries and then towns. The townships of Ustyug, Varnavin, Kalyazhin, Kirilov, Zagorsk, Pecheri and others came into existence in this way. Many people settled on the monastic estates for security's sake. They were sure that they would not be abandoned to die of sickness and hunger in hard times. Russian monasteries were renowned for charitable aid. Kirilov monastery used to feed 600 people daily during famines while Paphnutiev fed up to 1,000. Moreover, the monasteries used to have hospital, homes for the aged and guest houses. They were, in short, the welfare centers of the age. They were, of course, cultural centers as well. They possessed libraries, where manuscripts were copied and circulated. People went to monasteries to be educated. Schools were rare and were maintained mostly by monasteries. Those who wanted to learn reading and writing, arts and crafts went to the monasteries as well. The Russian monasteries were not only schools, universities and welfare centers, but also strongholds, offering refuge in times of trouble. They were also often missionary centers from which Christianity was spread among the heathen.

"However great the merits of the Russian monasteries in the field of culture and welfare, the monks never forgot that their main purpose was to cultivate the religious life. As soon as people began to invade monasteries and settle around them, the best of the monks, who cared only for union with God in prayer and contemplation, moved out to distant and inaccessible spots, to the impenetrable northern forests, to islands in remote lakes or in the Arctic Ocean, to marshes, mountains and tundras. The saintliest Russian monks were always afraid that close contact with secular society would make them worldly and prevent them living in union with God."<sup>574</sup>

---

<sup>574</sup> Bolshakov, *The Russian Mystics*, Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1980, pp. 15, 16-17.

## 34. THE CRISIS OF NEW ROMAN STATEHOOD

But amidst this spiritual triumph the state continued to decline, and now divisions appeared not only within the members of the ruling dynasty but between different layers of society. Thus when St. Gregory Palamas was appointed archbishop of Thessalonica he was not at first allowed to enter his see, because in Adrianople and Thessalonica, where sharp divisions in wealth were exacerbated by the feudal system that had been introduced by the Latin crusaders, a social revolution of the poor (called "zealots") against the rich was in progress.<sup>575</sup> These revolutionaries "advocated a democratic city-state", according to Runciman<sup>576</sup>; according to Diehl, they betrayed "a vague tendency towards a communistic movement"<sup>577</sup>. In any case, they forced the abdication of Emperor John VI, the champion of the hesychasts, in 1354.

St. Gregory defended the principle of autocracy against the revolutionaries: "The worst... are those who do not demonstrate a due loyalty to the kings established by God... and do not humble themselves under... the hand of God and do not submit to the Church of Christ." However, he also chastised the rich whose greed and selfishness had laid the seeds for the revolution, exhorting them: "Do not use force against those subject to you; show them... a fatherly attitude, remembering that you and they are of one race and co-servants. And do not go against submission to the Church and her teachings... You who are in subjection, consider it your duty in relation to the authorities to carry out only that which does not serve as an obstacle to your promised hope of the Heavenly Kingdom."<sup>578</sup>

Amidst all this turmoil there was no agreement about who was the true emperor. First there was a bitter civil war between Andronicus II and his grandson Andronicus III. Then in 1341, after the death of Andronicus III, war broke out between John V Palaeologus and the army's choice, John VI

---

<sup>575</sup> "It is perhaps the fault for which Byzantium was punished," writes Rebecca West. "The two classes, the 'powerful' and the 'poor', fought hard from the ninth century. The small landowners and the free peasants were so constantly harried by invasion and civil war that they bartered their liberty in return for the protection of the great nobles, who took advantage of the position to absorb the small landowners' estates and to make serfs of the free peasants. At first the monarchy fought these great nobles, and even appeared to have vanquished them. Feudalism, the exploitation of a country by its large landowners, could not exist in a declared theocracy, which implied the conception of divinely impartial justice for all individuals and every class. But when the Latins invaded the Byzantine Empire they brought with them the feudal system which was established in their own countries, and it could not be driven out with them, because the Byzantine nobles, like all the rich, would rather choke than not have their mouths full, and applauded the idea of any extension of their wealth and their power, however dangerous." (*Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, Edinburgh: Canongate, 2006, pp. 872-873)

<sup>576</sup> Runciman, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

<sup>577</sup> Diehl, in A.A. Vasiliev, *A History of the Byzantine Empire*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1955, p. 684.

<sup>578</sup> St. Gregory Palamas, *Homilies*; quoted in D.I. Makarov, *Antropologia i Kosmologia Sv. Grigoria Palamy* (The Anthropology and Cosmology of St. Gregory Palamas), St. Petersburg, 2003, pp. 403, 400. See also Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos, *Saint Gregory Palamas as a Hagiorite*, Levadia: Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, 1997, pp. 247-257.

Cantacuzenus (a firm believer in the dynastic principle and lifetime supporter of the Palaeologi!). Then came the forced abdication of John VI, who became a monk. Then civil war again broke out between John V and his son Andronicus IV. Early in the fifteenth century, Manuel II exiled his nephew; and in the very last years of the Empire John VIII had to contend with a rebellion from his brother Demetrius...

Of course, coups and counter-coups were no rarity in Byzantine history - in 74 out of 109 cases, the throne was seized by a coup.<sup>579</sup> The period of the Nicaean Empire had seen a marked increase in stability and in the quality of imperial rule. But in the fourteenth century, when the external situation of the State was increasingly desperate, the old bad habits reasserted themselves.

At the same time, the Byzantines had not lost the consciousness that "rebellion is as the sin of divination" (I Samuel 15.23). For, as Nikolsky writes, "an anathema against those daring to undertake rebellion was pronounced in the 11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries... Thus, according to the Byzantine historian Kinnamas, Andronicus Manuel fell under anathema in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. 'This traitor, enemy of the fatherland, made frequent assaults on the Roman lands from Persia, enslaved many people and handed over much military booty to the Persians, for which he was subjected to anathema by the Church.'... But the anathematization against the rebels and traitors was in all probability not introduced by the Greeks into the *Order of Orthodoxy*".<sup>580</sup>

We have seen that the Byzantines never had an agreed system of imperial legitimacy and succession. However, L.A. Tikhomirov points to another, still deeper weakness of the Byzantine system: the fact that imperial power was based on two mutually incompatible principles, the Christian and the Old Roman (Republican). According to the Christian principle, supreme power in the State rested in the Emperor, not in the People. But, while supreme, his power was not absolute in that it was limited by the Orthodox Faith and Church; for the Emperor, while supreme on earth, was still the servant of the Emperor of Emperors in heaven. According to the Old Roman principle, however, which still retained an important place alongside the Christian principle in the legislation of Justinian, supreme power rested, not in the Emperor, but in the Senate and the People. The Old Roman principle was paramount in the view of Anthony Kaldellis, who writes: "Byzantium must first be understood as a republic in the Roman tradition...The Roman people remained the true sovereign of the political sphere, and they both authorized and de-authorized the holding of power by their rulers...The *politeia* was the Byzantine Greek translation and continuation of the ancient *res publica*."<sup>581</sup>

---

<sup>579</sup> Ivan Solonevich, *Narodnaia Monarkhia*, Minsk, 1998, p. 77.

<sup>580</sup> Nikolsky, in Fomin & Fomina, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 122.

<sup>581</sup> Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic: People and Power in New Rome*, Harvard University Press, 2015, p.ix.

However, since the Senate and the People had, according to the legal fiction, conceded all their empire and power to the Emperor, he concentrated all executive power in his own person, and his will had the full force of law: "What is pleasing to the Prince has the force of law."<sup>582</sup> "This idea" writes Tikhomirov, "was purely absolutist, making the power of the Emperor unlimited, but not supreme, not independent of the people's will. The formula also contradicted the Christian idea of 'the King, the servant of God', whose law could in no way be simply what was 'pleasing' to him. But the conjunction of popular delegation and Divine election gave Byzantine imperial power the opportunity to be very broadly arbitrary. In the case of a transgression of the people's rights, it was possible to refer to the unlimited delegation of the people. However, it is impossible not to see that this same conjunction, which gave the Emperor's power the opportunity to be arbitrary, at the same time did not give it solidity. This power could be taken away from an unworthy bearer of it also on a dual basis: for transgression of the will of God, or on the basis of the will of the people, which did not want to continue the 'concession' it had given before any longer.

"The idea of the delegation of the people's will and power to one person in itself presupposes centralisation, and then bureaucratisation. Truly, as the point of concentration of all the people's powers, the Emperor is an executive power. In accordance with the concept of delegation, he himself administers everything. He must do all the work of the current administration. For that reason everything is centralised around him, and in him. But since it is in fact impossible in fact for one person, even the greatest genius, to carry out all the acts of State, they are entrusted to servants, officials. In this way bureaucratisation develops.

"The king, 'the servant of God', is obliged only to see that the affairs of the country are directed in the spirit of God's will. The people's self-administration does not contradict his idea on condition that over this administration the control of 'the servant of God' is preserved, directing everything on the true path of righteousness, in case there are any deviations from it. But for the Emperor to whom 'the people concedes all power and might', any manifestation of popular self-administration, whatever it may be, is already a usurpation on the part of the people, a kind of taking back by the people of what it had 'conceded' to the Emperor."<sup>583</sup>

\*

In 1369 Emperor John V, knowing that he could never bring his whole people into the unia, went to Italy. As Lord Norwich writes, "he formally signed a document declaring his submission to the Holy Roman Church and its father the Pope, sealing it with his imperial golden seal; and the following

---

<sup>582</sup> *Quod Principi placuit legis habet vigorem, et in eum solum omne suum imperium et potestatem concessit.*

<sup>583</sup> Tikhomirov, *op. cit.*, p.163.

Sunday, in the presence of the entire Curia, he did obeisance to the Supreme Pontiff on the steps of St. Peter's, kneeling before him and kissing him on the feet, hands and finally on the lips."<sup>584</sup>

But there was no rebellion, and no public humiliation of the body of the apostate after his death, as in the time of Michael VIII. In almost any previous period of Byzantine history, such an apostasy would have elicited disturbances among the Orthodox people. But not now... The reason was that, as Runciman writes, "he was careful not to involve the Church in his conversion. His tact was rewarded. Towards the end of his reign, probably in 1380 or soon afterwards, in circumstances that are unknown to us, he was able to make a concordat with the Patriarchate which clarified and restored much of the Imperial control over the Church. It contained nine points. The Emperor was to nominate metropolitans from three candidates whose names were submitted to him. He alone could transfer and promote bishops. He had to sanction appointments to high Church offices. He alone could redistribute sees. Neither he nor his senior officials nor members of the Senate, which was his advisory council, could be excommunicated except with his permission, 'because the Emperor is defender of the Church and the canons'. Bishops were to come to Constantinople and to leave it whenever he ordered. Every bishop must take an oath of allegiance to him on appointment. Every bishop must put his signature to acts passed by a Synod or Council. Every bishop must implement such acts and refuse support to any cleric or candidate for ecclesiastical office who opposed Imperial policy."

St. Simeon, Metropolitan of Thessalonica, commented with some bitterness on the situation: "Now... the Bishop is not counted worthy of any kind of honour for the sake of Christ, but rather his lot is dishonour; he is counted immeasurably inferior to the emperor, who receives a blessing from the Hierarch. At the present time the Bishop falls down at the feet of the emperor and kisses his right hand. With the sanctified lips with which he recently touched the Sacred Sacrifice, he servilely kisses a secular hand, whose function is to hold the sword. And, O shame!, the Bishop stands while the emperor sits. For the Bishop, as the delegate of the Church, all this reflects in an indecent and shameful manner on Christ Himself. These absurd customs were introduced, however, not by the emperors themselves, but by flatterers, who in an undiscerning manner suggested to them that they should use the Divine for evil, that they should ascribe to themselves power and install and remove the Bishop. Alas, what madness! If the deposition of a Bishop is necessary, this should be done through the Holy Spirit, by Whom the Bishop has been consecrated, and not through the secular power. Hence come all our woes and misfortunes; hence we have become an object of mockery for all peoples. If we give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's, then the blessing of

---

<sup>584</sup> Norwich, *op. cit.*, p. 333.

God will rest on everything: the Church will receive peace, and the State will become more prosperous.”<sup>585</sup>

“As an Emperor,” continues Runciman, “John V was incompetent and almost impotent. The Turks were overrunning all his territory and exacting tribute from him. He himself in a reign of fifty years was three times driven into exile, by his father-in-law, by his son and by his grandson. Yet, as the concordat shows, he still retained prestige enough to reaffirm his theoretical control over a Church, many of whose dioceses lay far outside of his political control. It was soon after his death that the Patriarch Antony IV wrote the letter in which he talked of the great position of the Emperor. It was addressed to the Grand Prince of Muscovy, Vassily I, who had somewhat scornfully pointed out the actual weakness of the Emperor, hinting that some more powerful Orthodox ruler ought to lead the Oecumene. ‘The Emperor,’ Antony wrote, ‘is still the Holy Emperor, the heir of the Emperors of old and the consecrated head of the Oecumene. He, and he alone, is the King whom Saint Peter bade the faithful to honour.’

“The Patriarch’s loyalty was greater than his realism. But the Emperor still had some power. About twenty years later, in 1414 or 1415, Manuel II, who was generally liked by his ecclesiastics, when in Thessalonica appointed a Macedonian bishop to the see of Moldavia and sent him to Constantinople for consecration by the Patriarch, Euthymius II. Euthymius refused to perform the service, on the out-of-date ground that a bishop could not be transferred. The case undoubtedly had deeper implications, of which we can only guess. It must be remembered the Emperor was actually nominating a bishop for a Christian country over which he had no control; and the Patriarch must have feared that his own good relations with the sovereign Prince of Moldavia might be endangered. He insisted that the transference be approved by the Holy Synod. But the Emperor referred him to the concordat. He had to yield...”<sup>586</sup>

The concordat was a truly shameful document. And yet there were still many in Byzantium who rejected the subordination of the Church to the State and preferred the dominion of the infidel Turks to that of the heretical Latins. For in religious matters the Turks were more tolerant than the Latins. Moreover, submission to the Turks would at least have the advantage of making the administration of the Church easier – in the present situation, the bishops under Turkish rule were separated from their head in Constantinople and were distrusted because that head lived in a different state...

V.M. Lourié writes: “It was precisely in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when immemorial Greek territories passed over to the Turks, and some others – to the Latins, that there was formed in Byzantine society those two positions whose struggle would clearly appear in the following, 15<sup>th</sup> century. It was precisely in the 14<sup>th</sup>

---

<sup>585</sup> St. Symeon, in M.V. Zyzkyin, *Patriarkh Nikon*, Warsaw: Synodal Press, 1931, part I, pp. 122-123.

<sup>586</sup> Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity*, Cambridge University Press, 1968, pp. 71-72.

century that the holy Fathers established a preference for the Turks over the Latins, while with the humanists it was the reverse. Neither in the 15<sup>th</sup>, nor in the 14<sup>th</sup> century was there any talk of *union* with the Turks – their invasion was thought to be only an evil. But already in the 14<sup>th</sup> century it became clear that the Empire would not be preserved, that they would have to choose the lesser of two evils. In the capacity of such a lesser evil, although a very great one, the holy Fathers were forced to make an irrevocable decision in favour of the Turks, under whose yoke it was possible to preserve the Church organisation and avoid the politics of forced conversions to Latinism. The danger of conversions to Islam was significantly smaller: first, because the inner administration of the Ottoman empire was based on ‘millet’, in accordance with which the civil administration of the Orthodox population was realized through the structure of the Orthodox Church and the patriarch, and this created for the Turks an interest in preserving the Church, and secondly, because the cases of conversion to Islam, however destructive they were for those who had been converted, did not threaten the purity of the confession of the Christians who remained faithful, while Latin power always strove to exert influence on the inner life and teaching of the faith of the Orthodox Church. The Church history of the 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries showed that, in spite of all the oppressions caused to the Christians in the Ottoman empire, it protected the Christian peoples living within its frontiers from the influence of European religious ideas and *Weltanschauungen*, whereby it unwittingly helped the preservation of the purity of Orthodoxy...”<sup>587</sup>

Of course, the victory of the Turks would be a terrible disaster.<sup>588</sup> But the victory of the Latins would be an even greater disaster, since it would signify the end of Greek Orthodoxy. Nor, said the Zealots, would buying the support of the Latins help matters. For, as the Studite Monk and head of the Imperial Academy, Joseph Vryennios, said early in the fifteenth century: “Let no one be deceived by delusive hopes that the Italian allied troops will sooner or later come to us. But if they do pretend to rise to defend us, they will take arms in order to destroy our city, race and name...”<sup>589</sup>

Runciman argues: “Had the Orthodox states of Eastern Europe ever been able to bring themselves together in a real alliance, they might have been able to

---

<sup>587</sup> Lourié, commentary on J. Meyendorff, *Zhizn' i Trudy Sviatitelia Grigoria Palamy* (The Life and Works of the Holy Hierarch Gregory Palamas), St. Petersburg, 1997, pp. 396-397.

<sup>588</sup> St. Gregory Palamas was for a time a captive of the Turks and said of them: “This impious people [the Turks] boasts of its victory over the Romans, attributing it to their love of God. For they do not know that this world below dwells in sin, and that evil men possess the greater part of it... That is why, down to the time of Constantine, ... the idolaters have almost always held power over the world.” (John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, London: Faith Press, 1964, p. 104) But Palamas saw the “intermingling” of the Christians and the Turks as an opportunity for the Turks to find the true faith and be converted. As he wrote to his flock: “It seems to me that, because God has ordained things in such a way that Christians and Turks are intermingled, and that I am a prisoner of the Turks, that God’s Providence and the works of our Lord Jesus Christ...are being made manifest to them (the Turks) as well..., such as to be without excuse before His future and most dread Tribunal.”

<sup>589</sup> Cited in Vasiliev, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 672.

hold out against the West and the Turks alike. But civil war and the latent dislike of the Balkan Slavs for the Greeks prevented any such alliance. If the Turks were to be driven back it could only be with western help..."<sup>590</sup>

But this faced the Emperors with a further complication. Thirty-six metropolitans now lived under Turkish rule; they could face persecution from the Turks if they were suspected of disloyalty to the Sultan at the instigation of the Emperor. The Emperor did his best to prevent such suspicions; but they could be reawakened if he united with Rome; for this could look like a coalition against the Ottomans. Moreover, those metropolitans, together with the Patriarchs of the East and independent nations such as the Russians, might object strongly to the unia on purely theological grounds, thereby threatening a schism in the Orthodox Church throughout the world and further loss of support for the Emperor. The unia might look like a quick-fix political solution to the Empire's problems, but it created several new ones of its own...

\*

The agonizing dilemmas faced by the Byzantines at this time can be seen in the life of St. Symeon, archbishop of Thessalonica in the early fifteenth century. As David Balfour writes, "Thessalonica, the second capital of the Empire, had surrendered to Turkish sovereignty from 1387 to 1403 and there was a large party, supported by a majority of the populace, which felt that the resultant regime had been tolerable and that to resist the Sultan again was suicidal because hopeless. Another party had already begun, it seems, to make private overtures to the Venetians to take over the city (a plan which was actually carried out next year). Symeon agreed with neither party<sup>591</sup> and had done his best to persuade the young governor, the Despot Andronikos, to maintain a purely Byzantine policy independent of both. With the Despot's approval, he slipped away unobserved, leaving behind an Apologia explaining to the Thessalonians that he was proceeding to the capital to solicit such imperial aid from Manuel II as might enable them 'to stay with their Orthodox masters'. His quest was probably hopeless, and anyway he could hardly have chosen a more inappropriate moment, for within five days, first Constantinople and then Thessalonica were blockaded by Murad with a view to their siege. Symeon got no further than Mount Athos; he was persuaded to return to his see; he hints at dangers and afflictions suffered on the Holy Mountain; he must have returned

---

<sup>590</sup> Runciman, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

<sup>591</sup> St. Symeon of Thessaloniki taught concerning the pope, "not only do we have no communion, but we also call him a heretic." "Therefore the innovators are blaspheming and are far away from the Spirit, by blaspheming against the Holy Spirit, hence everything of theirs is graceless, inasmuch as they have violated and have demoted the Grace of the Spirit... which is why the Holy Spirit is not among them, and there is nothing spiritual in them, as everything of theirs is new and altered and contrary to Divine tradition." - *Dialogue 23*, PG 155, 120-121. Epistle regarding blessedness 5, in D. Balfour, *Simeon Archbishop of Thessaloniki (1416/17-1429)*, "Theological Works," Thessaloniki 1981, page 226. (V.M.)

by sea. From then on, as he often complains, he was virtually a prisoner on his own throne...

“There followed over a year of mounting anguish, during which Symeon felt even more ill, until in mid-September 1423 Thessalonica was handed over to Venice by Andronikos, reluctantly but with his father Manuel’s approval. The new sources show that to the very last the saintly Archbishop resisted the hand-over; but he accepted the *fait accompli* and it is recorded that he enjoined obedience to the Venetian authorities as now established by God. He could hardly have done otherwise, seeing that the Palaeologi, father and son, had approved the take-over. But he never ceased to regret what had occurred, or to say so openly. It was a bitter pill for the rigorous anti-Latin to swallow: circumstances that obligated him to become the loyal supporter of a heretical regime which held him prisoner, yet described him and rewarded him as *fidelissimus noster*...

“The circumstances that led up to the hand-over had been tragic... As the siege initiated in June 1423 progressed and privations and dangers began to multiply, the pro-Turkish party, the party of surrender, became vociferous and took to violence. It had nearly succeeded in betraying the city to a ferocious Turkish leader called Musa who besieged it in 1411. It saw no hope now in resistance to Murad. The majority of the people, as we learn from both Anagnostes and Symeon, wanted to capitulate to the Turks, and the Archbishop was singled out as a principal target of popular indignation, because his utter opposition was well known. Much rioting went on. One has to grasp the fact – which modern Greek patriotism tends to ignore – that apostasy to Islam was becoming a mass phenomenon; some of the tumultuous rabble must have been intending it, for the rioters, Symeon reports, threatened to drag him down and his churches with him. It was this danger that induced a group of notables to force the Despot Andronikos to call in the Venetians, since it had become evident that Byzantium could do nothing effective. But when that sole solution of the city’s predicament was proposed, Symeon rejected it too. He thus became unpopular with nearly everyone, and when during negotiations with Venice he stood up for his Church’s rights under the future Latin regime he met, he says, with ‘contemptuous treatment and disdainful insults’... So the saintly Archbishop was not only very ill, he was not even enjoying the personal respect and public honour due to him. He did succeed with difficulty in inserting into the agreement with Venice a clause guaranteeing his Church’s independence from the Latin Church. But his stand for Orthodoxy and Empire, against both Islam and the Franks, was a venerable martyrdom; he suffered agonies of frustration and humiliation, and nearly died of his distress.

“However, under the Venetian regime from 1423 onwards he does seem gradually to have recovered some degree of respect. The party of surrender now had to keep quiet; some of its leaders had soon been arrested and exiled. The Venetians, sensing how unreliable the population was, appreciated Symeon’s outstanding resolution to resist the Turks. He became the most

important citizen in their eyes. The people were soon disillusioned with their new masters and learned to appreciate better Symeon's stand against the hand-over. But the beleaguement continued. Murad dropped the siege at Constantinople after a few months and later signed a peace with the Emperor which, onerous though it was, relieved Thrace of the ravages of war for the next twenty-nine years. But Murad refused to recognize the Venetians' right to take over Thessalonica, and continued the blockade of the city, punctuating his blockade with marauding skirmishes and at least one mass onslaught, the progress and final defeat of which Symeon most graphically and fully describes. In the end, Murad in person descended on Thessalonica with overwhelming force and seized it on 29 March 1430, and all its surviving inhabitants were held for slavery or ransom. Symeon himself escaped that fate by dying suddenly a little more than six months before the fatal date..."<sup>592</sup>

Simeon was "so well beloved in his diocese that when he died... not only did the Italians mourn him along with the Greeks, but the Jews, a race that seldom had cause to love Byzantine hierarchs, joined sincerely in the mourning. The ease with which the Turks captured Thessalonica the following year was attributed by many to the feeling of despair in the city which followed the great Metropolitan's death."<sup>593</sup>

\*

The Fall of Bulgaria in 1393 exposed Constantinople to the Turks, and the West summoned a large army under King Sigismund of Hungary to rescue the first city of Christendom. The two armies met at Nicopolis in 1396: the Turks triumphed...

The battle witnessed the humiliating sight of an Orthodox prince, the Serbian Despot Stephen Lazarevich, fighting on the Turkish side as a vassal of the Ottoman sultan. It may be that, like St. Alexander Nevsky 150 years before, Stephen consciously chose to support the Turks rather than the Catholics, seeing in the latter a greater danger to the Serbian Faith and Nation. In partial support of this hypothesis, Barbara Tuchman writes that, "as a vassal of the Sultan," Stephen "might have chosen passive neutrality like the Bulgarians on whose soil the struggle was being fought, but he hated the Hungarians more than the Turks, and chose active fidelity to his Moslem overlord. His intervention was decisive. Sigismund's forces were overwhelmed."<sup>594</sup>

Even the Emperor became a vassal of the Sultan. Thus he used his authority "to enforce his own free citizens of Philadelphia to submit themselves to the

---

<sup>592</sup> Balfour, "St. Symeon of Thessalonica: a polemical hesychast", *Sobornost'*, 1982, vol. 4, no. 4, pp. 1-15.

<sup>593</sup> Runciman, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

<sup>594</sup> Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous Fourteenth Century*, New York: Knopf, 1978, p. 560.

Sultan. Politically he was becoming impotent; and his dwindling prestige could only be maintained by the loyal support of the Church...<sup>595</sup>

The way to Constantinople was now open for the Turks. But once again God saved the Orthodox when all human support had failed: at the battle of Ancyra in 1402 the Turkish Sultan Bayezit (with Stephen Lazarevich again fighting on his side) was defeated by the Mongol Tamerlane, one of the greatest and most ruthless conquerors in history. "Later the same year," writes Simon Sebag Montefiore, "he annihilated the Christian city of Smyrna, floating the severed heads of his victims out to sea on candlelit dishes. By 1404, even the Byzantine emperor John I was paying him tribute in return for a guarantee of safety."<sup>596</sup>

However, the position of the Empire continued to decline. The City itself was ravaged and largely depopulated; its inhabitants dragged out a miserable existence, ill-fed, ill-clothed and demoralized. In a desperate last throw of the dice, the Byzantines decided to unite with the Roman Church in exchange for the promise of military help against the Turks... Outside the City, the Despot Andronicus Palaeologus, as we have seen, had given Thessalonica into the hands of the Venetians, who then, in 1430, lost it to the Turks. The only considerable possession left in the hands of the Byzantines was the Despotate of Morea, now known as the Peloponnese. There, in the capital of Mystra, whose evocative ruins can still be seen, a last flourishing of Byzantine civilization took place...

And yet it was a strange, syncretistic flourishing when Mystra's most famous citizen, the philosopher George Gemistus Plethon, was a student of Aristotle, Zoroaster and the Jewish Cabala, and who was discovered, after his death, to have been a believer in the pagan Greek gods! In the eleventh century the Church had officially condemned the Platonist teachings of John Italus. But Plethon was protected by the fact that he no longer lived in the City itself...<sup>597</sup>

B.N. Tatakis writes that Plethon dared "to resuscitate in the 15<sup>th</sup> century this dead past and to establish on it a new and, in his opinion, universal religion. 'I heard him say,' George Trapezountios writes for Plethon, 'when we were in Florence, that after a few years all human beings in the whole of the earth will accept with a common consent and with the same spirit one and only religion... and, when I asked him whether this religion was going to be the religion of Jesus Christ or that of Mohammed, neither the one nor the other, he said to me, were the case, but a third one which would not be very different from paganism.' It does not matter whether this witness is exact or not (Trapezountios is not a trustworthy witness), since the most important work of Plethon, the *Laws*, fully expresses the absolute confidence of Plethon on philosophy which 'reveals to the spirit, when it is freed from dogma, the naked

---

<sup>595</sup> Runciman, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

<sup>596</sup> Montefiore, *Titans of History*, London: Quercus, 2012, p. 157.

<sup>597</sup> Runciman, *op. cit.*, pp. 121-125.

truth, and obliges the human being to accept it by common consent and with the same spirit.”<sup>598</sup>

Colin Wells writes: “In so flagrantly abandoning Orthodox Byzantium for ancient Greece, Pletho represents an extreme version of the classicizing tendency that had helped drive the humanists [students of the “Outer Wisdom”, pagan classical literature and art] further and further from the Byzantine mainstream. Most Byzantines had already paid their money and taken their choice, and their choice was not Pletho’s. Their most urgent priority was to save their immortal souls, not to preserve what was an essentially Greek state... The mainstream of Byzantine civilization had already turned towards a better life in the next world while resigning itself to Turkish captivity in this one. For his self-reliant stand against the Turks, Pletho has been called the first Greek nationalist – so ardent was he, in fact, that he argued against church union not for religious reasons but for patriotic ones, preferring to find strength from within.”<sup>599</sup>

---

<sup>598</sup> Tatakis, *Christian Philosophy in the Patristic and Byzantine Tradition*, Rollinsford, NH: Orthodox Research Institute, 2007, pp. 275-276.

<sup>599</sup> Wells, *Sailing from Byzantium*, New York: Bantam Deli, 2006, pp. 91-92.

## 35. THE COUNCIL OF FLORENCE

Negotiations with Rome dragged on, "held up partly", as Runciman writes, "by the Pope's difficulties with the leaders of the Conciliar movement and partly by the uneasy situation in the East. At one moment it seemed that a Council might take place at Constantinople; but the Turkish siege of the city in 1422 made it clear that it was no place for an international congress. Manuel II retired from active politics in 1423 and died two years later. His son, John VIII, was convinced that the salvation of the Empire depended upon union and tried to press for a Council; but he was unwilling at first to allow it to take place in Italy; while the Papacy still had problems to settle in the West. Delays continued. It was not until the beginning of 1438 that plans were completed and the Emperor arrived with his delegation at a Council recently opened in Ferrara and transferred to Florence in January 1439."<sup>600</sup>

The Greek delegation consisted of 700 ecclesiastical and lay notables, including twenty metropolitans. The leader of the bishops was Patriarch Joseph II of Constantinople. He had previously told the Emperor: "The Church must go in front of the power of the Emperor, or next to it, but in no way behind it."<sup>601</sup> And yet he meekly followed the same Emperor to Florence and submitted to his instructions in accordance with the caesaropapism that had now entrenched itself in Constantinople. Moreover, he was prepared to make critical concessions on the issue of the *Filioque*, agreeing with the Latins that the prepositions "proceeding through" and "proceeding from" meant the same.

But he did not become a Roman Catholic... One day, as Hefele writes, "The Patriarch was found dead in his room. On the table lay (supposedly) his testament, *Extrema Sententia*, consisting in all of some lines in which he declared that he accepted everything that the Church of Rome confesses. And then: "In like manner I acknowledge the Holy Father of Fathers, the Supreme Pontiff and Vicar of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Pope of Old Rome. Likewise, I acknowledge purgatory. In affirmation of this, I affix my signature."

"There is no doubt whatever that Patriarch Joseph did not write this document. The German scholar Frommann, who made a detailed investigation of the "Testament" of Patriarch Joseph, says: "This document is so Latinized and corresponds so little to the opinion expressed by the Patriarch several days before, that its spuriousness is evident."<sup>602</sup>

The need for western military help was not the only factor that propelled the Byzantines to Florence. Another was the idea, dear to the humanists whose influence was increasing in Byzantium, that Greek culture was so precious that it had to be preserved at all costs. But "Greek culture" for the humanists meant

---

<sup>600</sup> Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity*, Cambridge University Press, 1968, pp. 103-104.

<sup>601</sup> A.P. Lebedev, *Istoricheskie Ocherki Sostoiania Vizantijsko-Vostochnoj Tserkvi* (Historical Sketches of the Condition of the Byzantine Eastern Church), St. Petersburg, 2003, p. 102.

<sup>602</sup> Hefele, *Histoire des Conciles*, vol. VII, pt. II, pp. 1015sq.

the pagan culture of Classical Greece, not the Orthodox civilization of the Holy Fathers; and by the fifteenth century, by contrast with the eleventh or even the thirteenth century, the Latins had become almost as enthusiastic fans of pagan Greek culture as the Greeks themselves. So it was much more likely that the Latins would preserve that culture than the Turks. Thus better for many (but not all) the humanists the pope's tiara than the sultan's turban... As a sign of the increasing influence of the humanists, "suddenly in the middle of the fourteenth century Byzantine intellectuals began to speak of themselves as Hellenes", which until then no Orthodox Christian would have done.<sup>603</sup>

However, it was not only humanists or Greek nationalists that looked with hope towards the council in Florence. Paradoxically, even some of those who remained true Romans – that is, who valued the *universalist* heritage of Christian Rome more than any specifically Hellenistic elements, and for whom the true glory of the empire was its Orthodoxy – were attracted by the prospect. In the minds of some, this was because the idea of *imperial* unity between East and West was inextricably linked with that of *ecclesiastical* unity.

Thus Fr. John Meyendorff writes that an essential element of the Byzantine world-view "was an immovable vision of the empire's traditional borders. At no time – not even in the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries – did the Byzantines abandon the idea that the empire included both East and West, that ideally its territories comprised Spain as well as Syria, and that the 'Old Rome' somehow remained its historical source and symbolic center in spite of the transfer of the capital to Constantinople. There were theological polemics against the 'Latins'; there was popular hatred against the 'Franks', especially after the Crusades; there was resentment against the commercial colonization of Byzantine lands by the Venetians and the Genoese, but the ideal vision of the universal empire remained, expressed particularly in the exclusive 'Roman' legitimacy of the Byzantine emperor. As late as 1393, patriarch Anthony of Constantinople, in his often-quoted letter to the grand-prince Basil I of Moscow urging him not to oppose the liturgical commemoration of the emperor in Russian churches, expresses the utterly unrealistic but firm conviction that the emperor is 'emperor and *autokrator* of the Romans, that is, of *all Christians*'; that 'in every place and by every patriarch, metropolitan and bishop the name of the emperor is commemorated wherever there are Christians...' and that 'even the Latins, who have no communion whatsoever with our Church, give to him the same subordination, as they did in past times, when they were united with us.' Characteristically, the patriarch maintains the existence of an imperial unity *in spite of the schism dividing the churches.*"<sup>604</sup>

Another anachronistic idea was that of the *pentarchy* – that is, that the Church was composed of five patriarchal sees, like the five senses, of which Old Rome was one. Several Orthodox Byzantines even in the fourteenth century, such as

---

<sup>603</sup> Runciman, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

<sup>604</sup> Meyendorff, "Was there an Encounter between East and West at Florence?" in *Rome, Constantinople, Moscow*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996, p. 89.

Emperor John VI Cantacuzene and Patriarch Philotheus Kokkinos, had been in favour of an ecumenical council, which by definition had to involve all five patriarchates, including Rome.

Of course, they knew that the Latins were power-loving heretics. But this was not new. Even during the “Acacian schism” of the early sixth century Pope Hormisdas had presented overweening demands relating to the supremacy of the papacy, which Patriarch John the Cappadocian had accepted, adding only the significant phrase: “I proclaim that the see of the Apostle Peter and the see of this imperial city are one”. Could not the two sees be reunited again, this time under the leadership of the new Justinian, Emperor John VIII? And in this context Justinian’s idea of the pentarchy also became relevant again, for, as Meyendorff points out, it was “an important factor in the Byzantine understanding of an ‘ecumenical’ council, which required the presence of the five patriarchs, or their representatives, even as the Eastern sees of Alexandria and Antioch had, in fact, ceased to be influential. In any case, in the Middle Ages, these two interconnected elements – the theoretical legitimacy of the Byzantine emperor over the West and a lingering respect for the pentarchy, of which the Roman bishop was the leading member – made it into a requirement that a properly *ecumenical* council include the bishop of Rome (in spite of the schism), and the four Eastern patriarchs (although three of them were now heading churches which were barely in existence at all).”<sup>605</sup>

Thus many factors – obedience to the emperor, fear for the fate of Hellenism, hopes of a reunion of Christendom – combined to undermine the resistance of most Greeks to the unia. “Yet the discussion of differences in doctrine and in practice was somewhat pointless when one side was determined to secure the total submission of the other. If the average Byzantine had no confidence in the value of a Union council, it was because he saw that its intention was to force his religious life under the control of a foreign potentate whose claims he thought to be uncanonical and whose doctrines faulty, and whose followers in the past had shown themselves to be hostile and intolerant. The most for which he could hope from such a council was to be graciously permitted to retain certain of his ritual usages...”<sup>606</sup>

During the council, the Latins wore down the Greeks with their scholastic reasoning. “The Papal theologian John Protonotarios, the Spaniard, otherwise known as Juan de Torquemada, uncle to the terrible Inquisitor Tomás de Torquemada, during one of the synodal assemblies, abused the logic of Aristotle to such an extent, that one Orthodox Bishop from Iberia was overheard by Silvester Syropoulos, an eyewitness of this historic Synod, muttering: ‘Aristotle, Aristotle, why all this Aristotle when they should be quoting St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Basil, Gregory the Theologian, Chrysostom, but not Aristotle.’ Syropoulos says that he writes this to show how the Latins were condemned for their scholastic mentality, which was foreign to the authentic

---

<sup>605</sup> Meyendorff, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

<sup>606</sup> Runciman, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

ecclesiastical spirit, not only by the Orthodox who attended the Synod, but also by those "who spoke other languages" who were present at the discussions."<sup>607</sup>

Throughout, the heretical Pope stubbornly insisted that the Orthodox were outside the Church: ""The most Holy Roman Church firmly believes, professes and preaches that none of those existing outside the Catholic Church, not only pagans, but also Jews and heretics and schismatics, can have a share in life eternal; but that they will go into the eternal fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels, unless before death they are joined with Her; and that so important is the unity of this ecclesiastical body that only those remaining within this unity can profit by the sacraments of the Church unto salvation, and they alone can receive an eternal recompense for their fasts, their almsgivings, their other works of Christian piety and the duties of a Christian soldier. No one, let his almsgiving be as great as it may, no one, even if he pour out his blood for the Name of Christ, can be saved, unless he remain within the bosom and the unity of the Catholic Church."

"In the end, weary of it all, longing to get home and, it was said, deliberately kept short of food and comforts<sup>608</sup>, the whole Greek delegation, under orders from the Emperor and in obedience to the concordat of their Church with Rome under John V, signed the decree of union [on July 6, 1439], with the exception of Mark Evgenicus [Metropolitan of Ephesus], and, it seems, of Plethon...; and, after retiring for a while to his see of Ephesus, in Turkish territory, he submitted to pressure and abdicated."<sup>609</sup> The Greeks had surrendered to almost all the pope's demands, including the *Filioque* and papal supremacy.

---

<sup>607</sup> John Sanidopoulos, "The Danger of 'Mutant' Theology", <http://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2015/03/the-danger-of-mutant-theology.html?m=1>.

<sup>608</sup> "The Russians Semion of Suzdal and Isidor, and the Greek Sylvester Syropoulos, testify that after refusing to sign the Act of Union, Greeks, Russians and Georgians were badly bullied by the papal servants" (Donaly Rayfield, *Edge of Empire: A History of Georgia*, London: Reaktion, 2012, p. 156). (V.M.)

<sup>609</sup> Runciman, *op. cit.*, p. 109. Bishop Isaiah of Stavropol, the Bishop of Tver and Bishop Grigol of Georgia secretly left the city to avoid signing. George Scholarius, the future patriarch, together with John Evgenicos, St. Mark's brother and the Despot Demetrius of the Morea also left earlier without signing. And the signature of Methodius of Lacedaemon is nowhere to be found... (*The Lives of the Pillars of Orthodoxy*, Buena Vista, CO: Holy Apostles Convent, 1990, p. 466)

## 36. ST. MARK OF EPHESUS AND THE ANTI-UNIATES

The Pope quickly took advantage of his victory over the Greeks at Florence to conclude separate unias with the Armenians, the Copts, the Ethiopians, the Monophysite Syrians, the Chaldean Nestorians and the Cypriot Maronites, making inroads into the East that the papacy has retained to the present day. This greatly increased the prestige of Rome, which in turn contributed significantly to "the ultimate defeat of the anti-council of Basle and of the anti-Pope Felix IV, who eventually abdicated. All subsequent 'unions' were clearly formulated as an unconditional surrender to the Church of Rome. The shrewd Latins, choosing the Greeks first as their negotiation partners, broke them down. Rome used this fact as an argument in their severe negotiations with the other churches, from whom they extracted complete submission."<sup>610</sup>

Michael Ducas records that on February 1, 1440, "the people of Constantinople kissed the hierarchs immediately as they disembarked from the triremes and they asked the hierarchs how things went. 'What happened at the Synod? Were we successful?' The hierarchs answered, 'We sold our faith, we exchanged Godliness for godlessness, betraying the pure sacrifice, we became upholders of unleavened bread.' They said all this and more obscene and sordid words. When they were asked why they had signed, they said 'Because we feared the Latins.' And when they were asked if the Latins had tortured them or whipped them or put them in prison they responded, 'No'. The people then asked them: 'So what happened? Let the right hand that signed,' they said, 'be cut off and the tongue that professed [heresy] be pulled out from its root.' ...

"The people spat in their faces, and history recorded them as betrayers and the people praised St. Mark of Ephesus as the pillar of Orthodoxy..."<sup>611</sup>

\*

St. Mark's confession had a good effect. In April 1443 the three Patriarchs Joachim of Jerusalem, Philotheos of Alexandria, and Dorotheos of Antioch met in Jerusalem and condemned the Council of Florence as "vile". "By the decision of this Council," writes Sergei Shumilo, "the 'Council of Florence' held in Italy by the Constantinople and Latin hierarchs was declared 'odious, foul' (*μιαρά*), and the hierarchs and other clergy who received the ordination from the [Uniate] Patriarch of Constantinople who had ceased from Orthodoxy were declared 'idle and unholy... from henceforth their piety is investigated in a general and ecumenical way [and found lacking].' Also, Metropolitan Arsenius [of Caesarea of Cappadocia and Exarch of all the East Arsenius from the Church of Constantinople], as a 'preacher of piety and Orthodoxy,' was authorized by the Jerusalem Pan-Orthodox Council to notify the entire ecclesiastical completeness of Orthodoxy of this decision, ordering him to

---

<sup>610</sup> *The Lives of the Pillars of Orthodoxy*, Buena Vista, CO: Holy Apostles Convent, 1990, pp. 476-477.

<sup>611</sup> Ducas, in volume 6, p. 299 of the *History* of Paparrigopoulos.

'henceforth preach piety everywhere, not fearing the Emperor, nor the Patriarch, or anyone else who doesn't glorify that right.'"<sup>612</sup>

On the day of his death in 1444, St. Mark said: "Concerning the Patriarch I shall say this, lest it should perhaps occur to him to show me a certain respect at the burial of this my humble body, or to send to my grave any of his hierarchs or clergy or in general any of those in communion with him in order to take part in prayer or to join the priests invited to it from amongst us, thinking that at some time, or perhaps secretly, I had allowed communion with him. And lest my silence give occasion to those who do not know my views well and fully to suspect some kind of conciliation, I hereby state and testify before the many worthy men here present that I do not desire, in any manner and absolutely, and do not accept communion with him or with those who are with him, not in this life nor after my death, just as (I accept) neither the Union nor Latin dogmas, which he and his adherents have accepted, and for the enforcement of which he has occupied this presiding place, with the aim of overturning the true dogmas of the Church. I am absolutely convinced that the farther I stand from him and those like him, the nearer I am to God and all the saints; and to the degree that I separate myself from them am I in union with the Truth and with the Holy Fathers, the Theologians of the Church; and I am likewise convinced that those who count themselves with them stand far away from the Truth and from the blessed Teachers of the Church. And for this reason I say: just as in the course of my whole life I was separated from them, so at the time of my departure, yea and after my death, I turn away from intercourse and communion with them and vow and command that none shall approach either my burial or my grave, and likewise anyone else from our side, with the aim of attempting to join and concelebrate in our Divine services; for this would be to mix what cannot be mixed. But it befits them to be absolutely separated from until such time as God shall grant correction and peace to His Church."<sup>613</sup>

St. Mark, as Runciman writes, "was treated as a martyr by almost the whole body of the Greek Church. The Emperor soon found that it was easier to sign the union than to implement it. He remained personally loyal to it, but, influenced by his aged mother, he refrained from trying to force it on his people. He found it hard to persuade anyone to take the empty Patriarchal chair. Metrophanes II, whom he appointed in May 1440, died soon afterwards. His successor, Gregory Mammias, who was a sincere advocate of union, found it prudent to retire to Italy in 1451. Bessarion [of Trebizond], liked and admired though he was personally, had already moved to Italy, shocked at the hostility that his actions had aroused at Constantinople and believing that he could best serve the Greek cause by remaining among the Italians. Isidore of Kiev's adherence to the union was angrily repudiated by the Russian Prince, Church and people, who deprived him of his see."<sup>614</sup> He too went to Italy. The Eastern

---

<sup>612</sup> Shumilo, "Shine Forth, O Kiev, the New Jerusalem – the Mother of Churches Watches over You", *Orthodox Christianity*, February 27, 2020.

<sup>613</sup> St. Mark, *P.G.* 160, cols. 536c and 537a.

<sup>614</sup> On March 19, 1441 Isidore celebrated the Divine Liturgy in the cathedral of the Ascension in Moscow and promulgated the unia before Princ Basil II and his court. Four days later Basil

Patriarchs announced that they were not bound by anything that their representatives had signed and rejected the union. George Scholarius, though he had accepted the union and was devoted to the works of Thomas Aquinas, was soon convinced by Mark Eugenicus that he had been wrong. He retired into a monastery; and on Mark's death in 1444 he emerged as leader of the anti-unionist party. The lesser clergy and the monks followed him almost to a man.

“Meanwhile, the Pope, trying to fulfill his side of the bargain he had made with the Greeks at Florence, called on western leaders to mount a crusade against the Turks. The resultant ‘Crusade of Varna’ set out from Hungary with twenty-five thousand men. It was crushed by the Turks at Varna in November, 1444...

“The Emperor John VIII died weary and disillusioned in 1448. His brother and heir Constantine XI considered himself bound by the union; but he did not try to press it on his people till the very end of the final Turkish siege. In the autumn of 1452 Isidore of Kiev, now a Roman cardinal, arrived at Constantinople with the union decree, which was solemnly read out in the Cathedral of Saint Sophia on 12 December. Isidore, who was anxious that everything should go smoothly, reported that it was well received. But his Italian assistant, Leonard of Chios, Archbishop of Mitylene, wrote angrily that few people were present and many officials boycotted the ceremony. Certainly, though during the last few months of the Empire's existence Saint Sophia was served by Latin and by a handful of unionist clergy, its altars were almost deserted. The vast majority of the clergy and the congregations of the city would have nothing to do with them...

“At this supreme moment of the Empire's agony, the [unionist] Church of Constantinople could provide little help for the people. Its provincial administration had been disorganized by the Turkish advance. In Constantinople itself the official policy of union had produced chaos. There was no Patriarch. The last occupant of the post, Gregory Mammias, had fled to Italy. As bishoprics fell vacant the Emperor could find no one to fill them who would support his work for union. The clergy and the congregations of the city held aloof from the ceremonies in the Great Church of Saint Sophia, going instead for guidance to the monastery of the Scholarius, where the monk Gennadius, the former George Scholarius, fulminated against the union. Was it right for the Byzantines to seek to save their bodies at the cost of losing their souls? And indeed, would they save their bodies? To Gennadius and his friends it was all too clear that the help provided by the West would be pathetically inadequate. Holy Writ maintained that sooner or later Antichrist would come as a precursor of Armageddon and the end of the world. To many Greeks it seemed that the time had come. Was this the moment to desert the purity of the Faith?”<sup>615</sup>

---

arrested him, but (probably deliberately) allowed him to escape. Basil then appointed Metropolitan Jonah in his place.(V.M.)

<sup>615</sup> Runciman, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-110, 159-160.

Gennadius went into seclusion, but left a notice on the door of his cell: "O unhappy Romans, why have you forsaken the truth? Why do you not trust in God, instead of in the Italians? In losing your faith you will lose your city."<sup>616</sup>

---

<sup>616</sup> Gennadius Scholarius, in Sir Edmund Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. J. B. Bury, VII, 176.

## 37. RUSSIA AND THE COUNCIL OF FLORENCE

We have seen that the rising star in the Orthodox firmament, Russia, firmly rejected the council of Florence. Let us in a little more detail at how this took place...

In 1434, on the death of Metropolitan Photius, Bishop Jonah of Ryazan was elected metropolitan of Kiev by Russian bishops and sent to Constantinople for consecration. However, in 1436 Patriarch Joseph consecrated a Greek called Isidore instead; Jonah was promised the metropolitanate after Isidore.

“Soon after Isidore had arrived in Moscow,” writes Protopriest Peter Smirnov, “he declared that the Eighth Ecumenical Council was being prepared in Italy for the union of the Churches, and that it was necessary for him to be there. Then he began to prepare for the journey. Great Prince Basil Vasilievich tried in every way to dissuade Isidore from taking part in the council. Finally he said to him: ‘If you unfailingly desire to go to the eighth council, bring us thence our ancient Orthodoxy, which we received from our ancestor Vladimir, and do not bring us anything new and foreign, which we will not accept.’ Isidore swore to stand for Orthodoxy, but at the council of Florence he was especially zealous in promoting an outcome that was favourable for the pope. At the end of the council and after the reception of the unia, Isidore... returned to Moscow<sup>617</sup>, and in his first service began to commemorate the pope instead of the Patriarch of Constantinople. The great prince publicly called him a Latin seducer and heretic and ordered that he be placed under guard until a conciliar resolution of the matter. The Russian bishops gathered in Moscow [in 1441] and condemned Isidore. Together with his disciple Gregory he fled to Tver, then Lithuania, and finally to Rome, where he remained for good with the pope.

“After Isidore’s flight from Russia, St. Jonah remained for seven more years a simple bishop... Finally, in 1448... Basil Vasilievich summoned all the bishops of the Russian land to a council. The Fathers of the Council, on the basis of the Church canons, previous examples and the decision of the Constantinopolitan Patriarch that St. Jonah should be metropolitan after Isidore, appointed him to the see of the first-hierarch. At a triumphant service in the Dormition cathedral the omophorion which had been placed on earlier metropolitans was placed on him, and the great metropolitan’s staff, the symbol of first-hierarchical power, was put into his hands.”<sup>618</sup>

As Andrei Shishkov writes, “This decision was the first sovereign act of the Russian Church. It created a situation of emergency (exception) in which the existing canonical order was changed as the Russian Metropolitanate removed

---

<sup>617</sup> He entered the city in a solemn procession and “carrying before him a Latin cross”. (V.M.)

<sup>618</sup> Smirnov, *Istoria Khristianskoj Pravoslavnoj Tserkvi* (A History of the Orthodox Christian Church), Moscow: Krutitskoe podvorye, 2000, pp. 159-160.

itself from the control of the Patriarchate of Constantinople.”<sup>619</sup>

The Russian Church was now technically in schism from Constantinople, which had fallen into the Latin heresy...

“However,” writes Nicholas Boyeikov, “even after he had learned about the treachery of the Orthodox emperor and the events which had shaken Byzantium, Basil did not consider that he had the right to break the canonical dependence which the Russian Church had inherited since the time of the Baptism of Rus’, and after Jonah’s election he wrote the following: ‘After the death of Metropolitan Photius, having taken counsel with our mother, the Great Princess, and with our brothers, the Russian princes, both the Great Princes and the local ones, together with the lord of the Lithuanian land, the hierarchs and all the clergy, the boyars and all the Russian land, we elected Bishop Jonah of Ryazan and sent him to you in Constantinople for consecration together with our envoy. But before his arrival there the emperor and patriarch consecrated Isidore as metropolitan of Kiev and all Rus’, while to Jonah they said: “Go to your see - the Ryazan episcopate. If Isidore dies or something else happens to him, then be ready to be blessed for the metropolitan see of all Rus’.” Since a disagreement in the Church of God has taken place in our blessed kingdoms, travellers to Constantinople have suffered all kinds of difficulties on the road, there is great disorder in our countries, the godless Hagarenes have invaded, there have been civil wars, and we ourselves have suffered terrible things, not from foreigners, but from our own brothers. In view of this great need, we have assembled our Russian hierarchs, and, in accordance with the canons, we have consecrated the above-mentioned Jonah to the Russian metropolitanate of Kiev and all Rus’. We have acted in this way because of great need, and not out of pride or boldness. We shall remain to the end of the age devoted to the Orthodoxy we have received; our Church will always seek the blessing of the Church of Tsargrad and obey her in everything according to the ancient piety. And our father Jonah also begs for blessing and union in that which does not concern the present new disagreements, and we beseech your holy kingdom to be kindly disposed to our father Metropolitan Jonah. We wanted to write about all these church matters to the most holy Orthodox patriarch, too; and to ask his blessing and prayers. But we do not know whether there is a patriarch in your royal city or not. But if God grants that you will have a patriarch according to the ancient piety, then we shall inform him of all our circumstances and ask for his blessing.’

“On reading the *gramota* of the Great Prince Basil, one is amazed at his tact and the restraint of his style. Knowing that the emperor himself had betrayed the faith, that Patriarch Gregory had fled to Rome, as also Isidore, who had been sent to Moscow, Basil II, instead of giving a well-merited rebuke to his teachers and instructors, himself apologised for the fact that circumstances had compelled the Russian bishops to consecrate a metropolitan for themselves,

---

<sup>619</sup> Shishkov, “Church Autocephaly as Sovereignty: a Schittian Approach”, *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, 60:3, 2016, p. 377.

and comes near to begging him to receive Jonah with honour. It is remarkable that the Great Prince at every point emphasizes that this consecration took place 'in accordance with the canons', while doubting whether there was a lawful patriarch in Byzantium itself or not. The whole of this *gramota* is full of true Christian humility and brotherly compassion for the emperor who had fallen on hard times."<sup>620</sup>

The Russian Church was now *de facto* autocephalous. And soon, after the fall of the City in 1453, the Russian State, too, would be independent, not only in the sense of being *de facto* self-governing (she had been that for centuries), but also in the sense of owing no filial, *de jure* allegiance to any other State. Indeed, the Russian Great Prince Basil was already being called "brother" rather than "son" by Emperor John VIII... Russia, whose Church constituted only one of the two hundred or so metropolias of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, was becoming the leader of the Orthodox world...

Today, when Russia is again threatened by union with the ungodly Latins, it is worth recalling an incident from the life of St. Sergius of Radonezh: "After the ungodly Council of Florence a multitude of pious hierarchs and priests did not wish to submit to the errors of the Latins and were put to death by the Romans by means of various tortures. Now there was a certain priest from the land of Great Russia who went to the council with Isidore, the Metropolitan of Kiev, who later fell from Orthodoxy. The presbyter's name was Symeon, and he endured many afflictions and torments for piety's sake at the hands of the apostate Metropolitan Isidore. When he was released from his bonds, he took counsel with Thomas, the envoy from Tver, and fled from the Latin city of Florence to his own land. Because of the hardships of the journey, he was troubled and cast into great sorrow. Once, when he laid down to sleep, he fell into a dream and beheld a venerable elder standing above him. The elder took him by the right hand and said: 'Did you receive the blessing of Mark, the Bishop of Ephesus, who follows in the footsteps of the apostles?'

"Symeon replied, 'Sir, I have indeed seen the wondrous and resolute Mark and received his blessing.'

"The elder said, 'God's blessing is upon that man, for the vain assembly of the Latins has utterly failed to prevail over him either by offers of wealth or flattery or threats of torture. As you have heard the blessed Mark's teaching and instruction, proclaim to all the Orthodox wherever you go that, possessing the traditions of the holy apostles and the ordinances of the holy fathers of the Seven Councils and knowing the truth, they should be not deceived by the Latins. Moreover, do not be troubled by the journey's difficulties, for I will remain with you and shall keep you from harm.'

---

<sup>620</sup> Boyeikov, *Tserkov', Rus' i Rim (The Church, Rus' and Rome)*, Jordanville, N.Y.: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1983. See Fr. John Meyendorff, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia*, Cambridge University Press, 1981.

“After the venerable elder had said this and much else, the presbyter asked him, ‘Sir, tell me who are you, for it seems to me that it was God that sent you to lead us who are in despair out of this strange land.’

“‘I am Sergius, to whom you once prayed and to whose monastery you vowed to come,’ replied the elder.

“After seeing this vision the presbyter took heart and arose, and arose, and he told his companion Thomas that which he had seen and heard. Rejoicing, they continued alone their way, and soon, by God’s providence and through the prayers of their intercessor, the godly Sergius, they reached the land of Russia unharmed. They told the people of the vision and the help they had received from the saint, proclaiming that which the presbyter had heard, and they related all that had occurred at the Council of Florence...”<sup>621</sup>

---

<sup>621</sup> St. Dmitri of Rostov, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, vol. 1: September, House Springs, Mo.: Chrysostom Press, 2000, pp. 415-416.

## 38. THE FALL OF CONSTANTINOPLE

In December, 1452 a liturgy in which the Pope was commemorated was celebrated in Hagia Sophia. The emperor communed... In the months that followed, the uniate churches were only sparsely attended as the anti-unionists boycotted them. However, on the very eve of the Fall, May 28, 1453, large numbers crowded into Hagia Sophia for a final Great Vespers. They sought comfort in numbers where they had lost comfort in the true faith...

“The Patriarchal Chair,” writes John Julius Norwich, “was still vacant [the uniate Patriarch Gregory had fled the unwelcoming city]; but Orthodox bishops and priests, monks and nuns – many of whom had sworn never to cross the threshold of the building until it had been formally cleansed of the last traces of Roman pollution – were present in their hundreds. Present too was Isidore, formerly Metropolitan of Kiev, long execrated as a renegade and traitor to his former faith, but now heard with a new respect as he dispensed the Holy Sacrament and intoned once again the old liturgies.

“The service was still in progress when the Emperor arrived with his commanders. He first asked forgiveness of his sins from every bishop present, Catholic and Orthodox alike; then he took communion with the rest...”<sup>622</sup>

This moment marked the real spiritual death of Byzantium. And now, with both emperor and patriarch fallen into heresy, and the holiest shrine in Orthodoxy defiled by the communion of heresy, the protection of the Mother of God deserted the Empire, which had ceased to be an instrument of God’s purpose, and allowed it to be conquered by Sultan Mehmet II...

Sir Steven Runciman describes the final assault as follows: ‘The afternoon of Monday, 28 May, had been clear and bright. As the sun began to sink towards the western horizon it shone straight into the faces of the defenders on the walls, almost blinding them. It was then that the Turkish camp had sprung into activity. Men came forward in thousands to complete the filling of the foss, while others brought up cannons and war-machines. The sky clouded over soon after sunset, and there was a heavy shower of rain; but the work went on uninterrupted, and the Christians could do nothing to hinder it. At about half-past one in the morning the Sultan judged that everything was ready and gave the order for the assault.

“The sudden noise was horrifying. All along the line of the walls the Turks rushed in to the attack, screaming their battle-cries, while drums and trumpets and fifes urged them on. The Christian troops had been waiting silently; but when the watchmen on the towers gave the alarm the churches near the walls began to ring their bells, and church after church throughout the city took up the warning sound till every belfry was clanging. Three miles away, in the Church of the Holy Wisdom the worshippers knew that the battle had begun.

---

<sup>622</sup> Norwich, *Byzantium: The Decline and Fall*, London: Penguin, 1996, p. 452.

Every man of fighting age returned to his post; and women, nuns amongst them, hurried to the walls to help bring up stones and beams to strengthen the defenses and pails of water to refresh the defenders. Old folk and children came out of their houses and crowded into the churches, trusting that the saints and angels would protect them. Some went to their parish church, others to the tall Church of Saint Theodosia, by the Golden Horn. It was her feast-day on the Tuesday; and the building was decked with roses gathered from the gardens and the hedgerows. Surely she would not abandon her worshippers. Others went back to the great cathedral, remembering an old prophesy that said that though the infidel might penetrate through the city right into the holy building, there the Angel of the Lord would appear and drive them back with his bright sword to perdition. All through the dark hours before dawn the congregations waited and prayed.

“There was no time for prayer at the walls. The Sultan had made his plans with care. Despite his arrogant words to his army experience had taught him to respect the enemy. On this occasion he would wear them down before risking his best troops in the battle. It was his irregulars, the Bashi-bazouks, whom he first sent forward. There were many thousands of them, adventurers from every country and race, many of them Turks but many more from Christian countries, Slavs, Hungarians, Germans, Italians and even Greeks, all of them ready enough to fight against their fellow-Christians in view of the pay that the Sultan gave them and the booty that he promised. Most of them provided their own arms, which were an odd assortment of scimitars and slings, bows and a few arquebuses; but a large number of scaling-ladders had been distributed amongst them. They were unreliable troops, excellent at their first onrush but easily discouraged if they were not at once successful. Knowing this weakness Mehmet placed behind them a line of military police, armed with thongs and maces, whose orders were to urge them on and to strike and chastise any who showed signs of wavering. Behind the military police were the Sultan’s own Janissaries. If any frightened irregular made his way through the police they were to cut him down with their scimitars.

“The Bashi-bazouks’ attack was launched all along the line, but it was only pressed hard in the Lycus valley. Elsewhere the walls were still too strong; and they were attacked chiefly with the purpose of distracting the defenders from going to reinforce their comrades in the vital section. There the fighting was fierce. The Bashi-bazouks were up against soldiers far better armed and far better trained than themselves; and they were further handicapped by their numbers. They were continually in each other’s way. Stones hurled against them could kill or disable many at a time. Though a few attempted to retreat, most of them kept on, fixing their ladders to the walls and the stockade and clambering up, only to be cut down before they reached the top. Giustiniani and his Greeks and Italians were supplied with all the muskets and culverins that could be found in the city. The Emperor came himself to encourage them. After nearly two hours of fighting Mehmet ordered the Bashi-bazouks to retire. They had been checked and repulsed, but they had served their purpose in wearying the enemy.

“Some of the Christians hoped that this might be just an isolated night-attack, intended to test their strength; and all of them hoped for a moment of rest. It was not granted to them. They scarcely had time to reform their lines and replace beams and barrels of earth on the stockade before a second attack was launched. Regiments of Anatolian Turks from Ishak’s army, easily recognized by their special uniforms and breastplates, came pouring down the hill from outside the Civil Gate of Saint Romanus into the valley and wheeled round to face the stockade. Once more the bells of the churches near the walls rang out to give the alarm. But the sound was drowned by the booming of Urban’s great cannon and its fellows as they began afresh to pound the walls. Within a few minutes the Anatolians had rushed in to the assault. Unlike the irregulars they were well armed and well disciplined, and all of them devout Moslems eager for the glory of being the first to enter the Christian city. With the wild music of their trumpeters and pipers to encourage them they hurled themselves at the stockade, climbing over each other’s shoulders in their efforts to fix their ladders on to the barrier and hack their way over the top. In the faint light of flares, with clouds continually veiling the moon it was hard to see what was happening. The Anatolians, like the irregulars before them, were at a disadvantage on that narrow front because of their numbers. Their discipline and their tenacity only made their losses the heavier as the defenders flung stones down on them and pushed back their ladders or fought with them hand to hand. About an hour before dawn, when this second attack was beginning to falter, a ball from Urban’s cannon landed fully upon the stockade, bringing it down for many yards of its length. There was a cloud of dust as the rubble and earth were flung into the air; and the black smoke of the gunpowder blinded the defense. A band of three hundred Anatolians rushed forward through the gap that had been made, shouting that the city was theirs. But, with the Emperor at their head, the Christians closed around them, slaughtering the greater part and forcing the others back to the foss. The check discomfited the Anatolians. The attack was called off, and they retired to their lines. With cries of triumph the defense once more set about repairing the stockade.

“The Turks had been no more successful on other sectors. Along the southern stretch of the land-walls Ishak was able to keep up enough pressure to prevent the defense from moving men to the Lycus valley, but, with his own best troops gone to fight there, he could not make a serious attack. Along the Marmora Hamza Bey had difficulty in bringing his ships close in shore. The few landing parties that he was able to send were easily repulsed by the monks to whom the defense had been entrusted or by Prince Orhan and his followers. There were feints along the whole line of the Golden Horn but no real attempt at an assault. Around the Blachernae quarter the fighting was fiercer. On the low ground by the harbour the troops that Zaganos had brought across the bridge kept up the constant attack, as did Karadja Pasha’s men higher up the slope. But Minotto and his Venetians were able to hold their section of the walls against Zaganos, and the Bocchiardi brothers against Karadja.

“The Sultan was said to be indignant at the failure of his Anatolians. But it is probable that he intended them, like the irregulars before them, to wear out

the enemy rather than themselves to enter the city. He had promised a great prize to the first soldier who should successfully break through the stockade; and he wished the privilege to go to some member of his own favourite regiment, his Janissaries. The time had now come for them to enter the battle. He was anxious; for if they failed him it would scarcely be possible to continue the siege. He gave his orders quickly. Before the Christians had time to refresh themselves and do more than a few rough repairs to the stockade, a rain of missiles, arrows, javelins, stones and bullets fell upon them; and behind the rain, the Janissaries advanced at the double, not rushing in wildly as the Bashibazouks and the Anatolians had done, but keeping their ranks in perfect order, unbroken by the missiles of the enemy. The martial music that urged them on was so loud that the sound could be heard between the roar of the guns from right across the Bosphorus. Mehmet himself led them as far as the foss and stood there shouting encouragement as they passed him. Wave after wave of these fresh, magnificent and stoutly armoured men rushed up to the stockade, to tear at the barrels of earth that surmounted it, to hack at the beams that supported it, and to place their ladders against it where it could not be brought down, each wave making way without panic for its successor. The Christians were exhausted. They had fought with only a few minutes' respite for more than four hours; but they fought with desperation, knowing that if they gave way it would be the end. Behind them in the city the church bells were clanging again, and a great murmur of prayer rose to heaven.

“The fighting along the stockade was hand-to-hand now. For an hour or so the Janissaries could make no headway. The Christians began to think that the onslaught was weakening a little. But fate was against them. At the corner of the Blachernae wall, just before it joined the double Theodosian wall, there was, half-hidden by a tower, a small sally-port known as the Kerkoporta. It had been closed up many years earlier; but the old men remembered it. Just before the siege began it had been reopened, to allow sorties into the enemy's flank. During the fighting the Bocchiardis and their men had made effective use of it against Karadja Pasha's troops. But now someone returning from a sortie forgot to bar the little gate after him. Some Turks noticed the opening and rushed through it into the courtyard behind it and began to climb up a stairway leading to the top of the wall. The Christians who were just outside the gate saw what was happening and crowded back to retake control of it and to prevent other Turks from following. In the confusion some fifty Turks were left inside the wall, where they could have been surrounded and eliminated if at that moment a worse disaster had not occurred.

“It was just before sunrise that a shot fired at close range from a culverin struck Giustiniani and pierced his breastplate. Bleeding copiously and obviously in great pain, he begged his men to take him off the battle-field. One of them went to the Emperor who was fighting near by to ask for the key of a little gate that led through the inner wall. Constantine hurried to his side to plead with him not to desert his post. But Giustiniani's nerve was broken; he insisted on flight. The gate was opened, and his bodyguard carried him into the city, through the streets down to the harbour where they placed him on a

Genoese ship. His troops noticed his going. Some of them may have thought that he had retreated to defend the inner wall; but most of them concluded that the battle was lost. Someone shouted out in terror that the Turks had crossed the wall. Before the little gate could be shut again the Genoese streamed headlong through it. The Emperor and his Greeks were left on the field alone.

“From across the foss the Sultan noticed the panic. Crying: ‘The city is ours’, he ordered the Janissaries to charge again and beckoned on a company led by a giant called Hasan. Hasan hacked his way over the top of the broken stockade and was deemed to have won the promised prize. Some thirty Janissaries followed him. The Greeks fought back. Hasan himself was forced to his knees by a blow from a stone and slain; and seventeen of his comrades perished with him. But the remainder held their positions on the stockade; and many more Janissaries crowded to join them. The Greeks resisted tenaciously. But the weight of numbers forced them back to the inner wall. In front of it was another ditch which had been deepened in places to provide earth for reinforcing the stockade. Many of the Greeks were forced back into these holes and could not easily clamber out, with the great inner wall rising behind them. The Turks who were now on top of the stockade fired down on them and massacred them. Soon many of the Janissaries reached the inner wall and climbed up it unopposed. Suddenly someone looked up and saw Turkish flags flying from the tower above the Kerkopoporta. The cry went up: ‘The city is taken.’

“While he was pleading with Giustiniani the Emperor had been told of the Turks’ entry through the Kerkopoporta. He rode there at once, but he came too late. Panic had spread to some of the Genoese there. In the confusion it was impossible to close the gate. The Turks came pouring through; and the Bocchiardis’ men were too few now to push them back. Constantine turned his horse and galloped back to the Lycus valley and the breaches in the stockade. With him was the gallant Spaniard who claimed to be his cousin, Don Francisco of Toledo, and his own cousin Theophilus Paleologus and a faithful comrade-at-arms, John Dalmata. Together they tried to rally the Greeks, in vain; the slaughter had been too great. They dismounted and for a few minutes the four of them held the approach to the gate through which Giustiniani had been carried. But the defense was broken now. The gate was jammed with Christian soldiers trying to make their escape, as more and more Janissaries fell on them. Theophilus shouted that he would rather die than live and disappeared into the oncoming hordes. Constantine himself knew now that the Empire was lost, and he had no wish to survive it. He flung off his imperial insignia and, with Don Francisco and John Dalmata still at his side, he followed Theophilus. He was never seen again.”

And so, writes Andrew Wheatcroft, on the morning of May 29, 1453, “after fifty-three days of desperate resistance, the Ottoman janissaries broke through the walls into the city. By custom they were entitled to three days of looting in any city they had taken by storm. At first they killed everyone they found alive. From the Church of St. Mary of the Mongols high above the Golden Horn, a torrent of blood rained down the hill towards the harbour. The soldiers broke

into the churches, ripping out the precious objects, raping or killing anyone who caught their fancy. In the afternoon the sultan made his formal entry, and went directly to the Church of the Holy Wisdom, Hagia Sophia. There he ordered an end to the pillage and destruction and directed that the great church should become the chief mosque of the city. Ducas, in his *Historia Turco-Byzantina*, records the day:

“He [Mehmed] summoned one of his vile priests who ascended the pulpit to call out his foul prayer. The son of iniquity, the forerunner of Antichrist, ascending the holy altar, offered the prayer. Alas, the calamity! Alack, the horrendous deed! Woe is me! What has befallen us? Oh! Oh! What have we witnessed? An infidel Turk, standing on the holy altar in whose foundation the relics of Apostles and Martyrs have been deposited! Shudder, O sun! Where is the Lamb of God, and where is the Son and Logos of the Father Who is sacrificed thereon, and eaten, and never consumed?

“Truly we have been reckoned as frauds! Our worship has been reckoned as nothing by the nations. Because of our sins the temple [Hagia Sophia] which was rebuilt in the name of the Wisdom of the Logos of God, and is called the Temple of the Holy Trinity, and Great Church and New Sion, today has become an altar of barbarians, and has been named and has become the House of Muhammad. Just is Thy judgement, O Lord.”<sup>623</sup>

\*

The Fall of Constantinople brought the Age of Faith to an end. It was the greatest disaster in Christian history since the Fall of Old Rome in 476; and its like would not be seen until the fall of the Third Rome in 1917. Everybody lost. The Orthodox of the Balkans came under infidel rulers; the Orthodox of Russia began to weaken spiritually as the Byzantine traditions in which they had been nurtured became more remote to them; the Western Catholics lost their best chance of being restored to *Orthodox* Catholicism; and the Western Conciliarists, who were meeting in Basle at the very moment of the council of Florence, and to whom John VIII had sent three ambassadors, lost their chance of being united to the Conciliar Church *par excellence*.

Many Greeks fled to the West, taking their learning and culture with them and giving an important impulse to the Renaissance. But it was pagan poets such as Plato and Homer and the pagan court philosopher of Mystra, George Gemisthus Plethon, not saints such as John Chrysostom or Gregory Palamas, whom the Westerners were eager to read. The true heroes of Byzantium did find admirers and imitators - but in the north, in the mountains of Romania, and, especially, in the forests of Russia, not in the Mediterranean homeland of Roman Christian civilization. Here *Romanitas*, the ideal of Christian Statehood, remained intact.

---

<sup>623</sup> Wheatcroft, *Infidels*, London: Penguin Books, 2004, p. 207.

Many causes have been proposed for the Fall of Constantinople in 1453. Secular historians have naturally looked for material causes: the loss of Anatolia to the Ottoman Turks, with the consequent loss of manpower and economic resources; the handover of trade into the hands of the Genoese; the debasing of the currency; the feudal system introduced by the Latins; social inequalities between the rich and the poor; and the Black Death... Orthodox historians have gone deeper, proposing the divisions in the Byzantine commonwealth of States between Slavs and Greeks, and Greeks and Greeks, or, most plausibly, the betrayal of the Faith at Florence in 1439...

And yet there is something not quite convincing in these explanations. While undoubtedly valid up to a point, they fail, individually and collectively, to explain why the Fall took place precisely at this time. After all, the Byzantines had suffered similar disasters on previous occasions. Anatolia had been lost to the Persians in the seventh and to the Arabs in the eighth centuries, and again to the Seljuks in the eleventh century – but they had recovered. Before 1204 trade had been in the hands of the Venetians – but they had recovered. Social rest had been rife at the end of the Comnenan period, and again in mid-fourteenth century Thessalonica – but they had recovered. The Black Death afflicted them, as it afflicted many European states – but they had recovered. As for trouble with the Slavs, especially the Bulgarians, this was not new. And as for falls into heresy, these had been frequent and sometimes prolonged, as in the time of the iconoclasts – but both the Church and the Empire had recovered. There was no reason to believe that this fall into heresy was any deeper than previous falls – the unia of Florence 1439 was rejected almost immediately by the people, and was officially rejected by the hierarchy after the Fall in 1454 and again in 1484.<sup>624</sup>

A clue to our conundrum is provided by an 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> century Greek prophecy found in St. Sabbas' monastery in Jerusalem, which says: "The sceptre of the Orthodox kingdom will fall from the weakening hands of the Byzantine emperors, *since they will not have proved able to achieve the symphony of Church and State*. Therefore the Lord in His Providence will send a third God-chosen people to take the place of the chosen, but spiritually decrepit people of the Greeks."<sup>625</sup>

---

<sup>624</sup> Some sources claim that there was a truly Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople, Athanasius II, from 1450 to 1453. However, a Wikipedia article on the Patriarchs of Constantinople states: "Athanasius II (1??? – 29 May 1453) is reckoned as the last Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople before the Fall of Constantinople. Athanasius purportedly served as patriarch from 1450 to 1453, but the only document indicating his existence is "Acts of the council in Hagia Sophia" – widely considered a forgery due to the presence of anachronisms in the text. Contemporary scholars dispute his existence, then, suggesting that the unionist patriarch Gregory III of Constantinople, residing in Rome from 1451 on, remained the city's nominal patriarch through the Ottoman capture of the city."

<sup>625</sup> Archbishop Seraphim, "Sud'by Rossii" ("The Destinies of Russia"), *Pravoslavnij Vestnik* (Orthodox Messenger), N 87, January-February, 1996, pp. 6-7; translated in Fr. Andrew Phillips, *Orthodox Christianity and the Old English Church*, English Orthodox Trust, 1996. See also <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wG9wwq60XM8>.

If we take this prophecy as God-inspired, as I believe we can, then we have the beginnings of an answer: Constantinople fell because something fundamental in the relationship between Church and State went wrong in the Palaeologan period – something that was irreparable in the context of late Byzantium, and which was so serious, according to God’s righteous judgement, as to require the final Fall of the Empire itself...

The “third God-chosen people” of the prophecy was the Russians. It was they who were able to re-express the Christian ideal of the symphony of powers for the modern age, the age of Rationalism and Revolution, when the foundations, not only of the Church, but also of the State, would be shaken to their foundations...

But had not the Church-State relationship almost always been in crisis in Byzantine history? How many emperors had not come to power through murdering their predecessors, prompting the remark of J.B. Bury that the government of Byzantium was “an autocracy tempered by the legal right of revolution”.<sup>626</sup> How many had not broken the laws of marriage in a flagrant manner! How many had not tried to impose heresy on the Empire, thereby stretching the Church-State relationship to breaking point! What was so sinister about the apparently peaceful relations between Church and State in the Palaeologan period that called for so terrible and final a judgement?

According to the theory of Church-State “symphony”, the Emperor was in complete command of the political sphere, and could be deposed only in the case of his apostasy from the true faith. However, until the first Fall of the City in 1204, the Byzantines, following the bad old traditions of pagan Rome, were constantly “shaking the yoke of the emperors from their necks” – and not for reasons of the faith. They were killed or mutilated simply because, in the opinion of some army commander, they were bad rulers. And the Church and the people usually acquiesced in the deed...

The Russian diplomat K.N. Leontiev tried to defend the Byzantines against the charge of serial regicide: “They drove out the Caesars, changed them, killed them. But nobody touched the holiness of Caesarism itself. They changed *the people*, but nobody changed *its basic organization*.”<sup>627</sup> But was he correct? Was Caesarism truly seen as holy? Is not the truth rather that the Byzantine attitude to the imperial power veered, for much of its history, from one unchristian extreme to the other, from the extreme of *idolatry* (the emperor as demi-god) to the extreme of *sacrilege* and *murder* (the emperor as a mere mortal, who could be removed by force if “the mandate of heaven” deserted him)? In neither case was the Lord’s command: “Touch not Mine anointed ones” (Psalm 104.15) seen as applying to emperors, and emperors continued to be slaughtered right until the first Fall of the City in 1204.

---

<sup>626</sup> Bury, *The Constitution of the Later Roman Empire*, Cambridge University Press, 1910, p. 9.

<sup>627</sup> Leontiev, “Vyzantinizm i Slavianstvo” (“Byzantinism and Slavism”), in *Vostok, Rossia i Slavianstvo* (The East, Russia and Slavism), Moscow, 1996, p. 97.

But then, under the impact of that terrible tragedy, attitudes began to change. Emperor Theodore I Lascaris received the physical sacrament of anointing to the kingdom for the first time in Byzantine history. And the effects were felt immediately: the Lascarid dynasty was the most pious and effective in Byzantine history, even if – and perhaps partly *because* – their rule was exercised in the more modest conditions of Nicaean exile. Moreover, no Lascarid emperor was killed by his own people...

However, with the advent of the last Byzantine dynasty, that of the Palaeologi, this apparent improvement in morals was compromised by what amounted to a deviation from the faith, *a heresy concerning the kingdom*. For the emperor was now not only the Anointed one – both physically and spiritually, but also considered to be *untouchable and irremovable*, even in the event of his falling away from the Orthodox faith. The Easterners now had their equivalent of the Western Pope...

This development began in 1369, only a few years after the great spiritual triumph of the Palamite Councils, when the Emperor John V Palaeologus travelled to Italy and converted to Roman Catholicism. No rebellion against him followed because of his apostasy, as there had been in the time of Michael VIII. For the emperor was now untouchable...

The concordat concluded by John V with the Orthodox Church was a shameful document, which subordinated the Church to the State in a truly caesaropapist manner. The Emperor now had a control over the Church that the iconoclast emperors could only have dreamed of. Moreover, nobody had twisted the Church's arm: the hierarchs had surrendered their power voluntarily and without compulsion...

From now on, even if the emperor betrayed the Faith he could not be removed or even excommunicated, according to the concordat. Or, if some still thought he should be removed, nobody called on the people to do it. Thus John V submitted to Rome – and kept his throne. John VIII signed the unia in 1439 – and kept his throne. Constantine XI remained faithful to the unia – and kept his throne – until an unbelieving Turk killed him and captured it...

The unia with Rome was not caused by real sympathy for the papacy: only a small minority were real Latinophiles. It was caused by the fact that the bishops (except Mark of Ephesus) chose to follow their emperor rather than Christ. But the last emperor, Constantine XI, was not even crowned after his return to Constantinople in 1449, but in Mystra, because of the opposition of the zealots of Orthodoxy.<sup>628</sup> And yet in spite of the fact that their emperor was

---

<sup>628</sup> Pope Nicholas V wrote to him: "From this man [the imperial legate, Andronicus Vryennios] and from your own letters, we have learned that you desire union and accept the synodal decree" (P.G. 160, 1201B). See "The Long-Awaited King", *Orthodox Christian Witness*, May 7/20, 1979. And Bishop Leonard of Chios wrote: "Through the diligence and honesty of the said Cardinal, Isidore of Kiev, and with the assent (if it was not insincere) of the emperor and the

neither anointed nor Orthodox, the people still followed him... And so the emperors, although they were no longer seen as gods, as in pagan times, nor have pretensions to be priests, as in the times of the iconoclasts, were nevertheless for all practical purposes god-kings and king-priests. They were *untouchable*, being placed by their subjects above the laws both of God and of man. And this untouchable idol was placed as the lynch-pin upon which the whole Byzantine system of government, both political and ecclesiastical, rested. For as Patriarch Anthony IV said, falsely, to Great Prince Basil of Moscow, "it is impossible for Christians to have a Church, but not have an Emperor".

The patriarchs knew better than anybody else that this was not true. For whereas, in the last years of Byzantium, the emperor's ever-decreasing rule extended only over the City, the Morea, and little else, the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarch was truly universal in the Orthodox world, extending throughout the Orthodox commonwealth of nations.<sup>629</sup>

So why did the powerful patriarchs fawn on, and bow down to, the almost powerless emperors? The paradox is explained by the fact that the Ecumenical Patriarchate was no longer truly ecumenical but increasingly Greek, Hellene rather than Roman, in its orientation – and Greek hopes centred narrowly and exclusively on the Empire, and specifically on Constantinople. In 1204 the patriarchs had been prepared to fight on even after the fall of the City – and had supported the Nicaean emperors in building a viable and prosperous realm outside it. In the past they might have thought of a *translatio imperii* to some foreign land that was still devoted to the ideals of the Christian Empire – Romania, perhaps, or Moscow. But not now...

The fatal weakness of the Byzantines was their placing the Empire above the Church, the earthly kingdom above the Heavenly Kingdom. They reversed the choice that the holy Prince Lazar of Serbia had made on the field of Kosovo. Like Judah in the time of Jeremiah, they tried to play off one despotic power against another – the Pope against the Sultan – and lost to both. Unable to present a truly Catholic – in the sense of universal, non-nationalistic – vision of Christian society to the world, the Byzantines fell into a false union with the

---

senate, the holy union was sanctioned and solemnly decreed on December 12<sup>th</sup>, the feast of Saint Spiridon, the bishop" (quoted in Judith Herrin, "The Fall of Constantinople", *History Today*, vol. 53, N 6, June, 2003, p. 15). St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite believed that Constantine was not a uniate and therefore inscribed him in some calendars. His name is also found on some Russian calendars. But there appears to be no doubt that he was a uniate, having received communion from Cardinal Isidore a few hours before his death, and therefore cannot be counted as an Orthodox saint. Lebedev writes: "Whatever might be said in his defence, nevertheless the last Orthodox Byzantine Emperor was a traitor to Orthodoxy. His betrayal is the more shameful the less it was sincere. Here are the words by which the Emperor and those who thought like him tried to pacify the crowd which did not want the unia; they said: 'Be patient a little, wait until God has delivered the capital for the great dragon [the Turks], who wants to devour it. Then you will see whether our reconciliation with the azymites [the Latins] was sincere.'" (*op. cit.*, p. 392).

<sup>629</sup> For a map of the patriarchate's dominions, see

[https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=zFF\\_0-ggg3xI.kANSIEUOgS-o](https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=zFF_0-ggg3xI.kANSIEUOgS-o)

West with its heretical, but more explicitly universal vision. And so, in becoming Latins, they ceased to be Romans, whose whole glory, even when their dominion was no longer universal, lay in their *universal vision*. For, as Solomon said, "where there is no vision, the people perish..." (Proverbs 29.18)

Great Prince Basil had been right when he said to the Patriarch "We have a Church, but we do not have an emperor". For how can the emperor of Christian Rome be a heretic? But the Byzantines could not and would not believe this, even when it was obvious that their heretical emperor was leading them to political and spiritual disaster. Unlike their great ancestors, who had often defied heretical emperors for the sake of the Faith, they tried to preserve their earthly kingdom at the price of the Kingdom of Heaven, forgetting that the whole glory of the Christian Empire lay in its readiness to live and die for its Heavenly King; "for here we have no lasting city, but seek the City which is to come" (Hebrews 13.14). The universal, eschatological and supernatural vision of Christian Rome had been narrowed to a terribly debilitating concentration on one small speck of dust in space and time. And so, in order that this extreme narrowness of vision should not contract to complete blindness, the Lord in His great mercy removed even that speck from their sight...

## APPENDIX. THE GREAT IDEA

Greek nationalism under the Turkish yoke was nourished and sustained from two quite different sources. One was the Orthodox faith. Greek language and culture were encouraged by the Orthodox Church because the Gospel and most of the patristic writings were written in Greek, and a good knowledge of Orthodoxy required a good knowledge of Greek and Byzantine history. Orthodox Christian Hellenism, or Romanity (Ρωμαιοσύνη), excluded the pagan Hellenism that glorified pagan Greek culture, placing it on a par with the Holy Fathers. Orthodox Greek nationalism wanted to liberate Greece for the sake of the faith; as such, it was to be found especially among the monks of Mount Athos. Throughout the period of the Ottoman yoke this true and Orthodox nationalism gave birth to saints and martyrs; the names of 162 martyrs for the faith at the hands of the Turks between 1453 and 1838 are known.<sup>630</sup>

Another, impure source of Greek nationalism was the western teaching on freedom promulgated by the French revolution, and brought back to Greece by the sons of the wealthy Phanariot families of Constantinople. As Mark Mazower writes, “it was the French Revolution which first suggested that emancipation might come through the action of the masses themselves [as opposed to a foreign king]. The toppling of the French monarchy, the rise of Bonaparte and above all, his invasion of Ottoman Egypt in 1798, radicalized the political thought of Balkan Christian intellectuals.”<sup>631</sup>

The best of the Greeks rejected and exposed the propaganda of the French revolution even while so many of their fellow-countrymen succumbed to it. Thus St. Athanasius of Paros wrote: “The real reason the French were led into impiety is something else. However, because they have shown and continue to show such a fierce obsession with the establishment of secular freedom and equality, the impression is that for this reason alone, by a common decision and choice, they have almost completely eliminated Christ and Christianity and its holy books.

“Freedom, then, is found in two forms. One is the freedom of the soul and the other of the body. Examining the definition of freedom in both of these forms, we find that it is defined as complete autonomy, that is, that no one recognizes any kind of dependence above themselves, nor do they receive orders from another, but that they are the sole master and ruler of themselves and no one else in the world. So if this is defined as an essential feature of freedom, that is, that man is not subject to any principle, I completely reject this general axiom of the most foolish atheists. In other words, I do not accept that people are born free (independent) in the world. On the contrary, I support and will prove that there is no such freedom in the world: people are born and live in the world as ‘slaves’ (dependent) in many ways.

---

<sup>630</sup> Norman Russell, “Neomartyrs of the Greek Calendar”, *Sobornost*, vol. 5, no. 1, p. 39.

<sup>631</sup> Mazower, *The Balkans*, London: Phoenix, 2000, p. 81.

“People are ‘slaves’ of God, just like the rest of creation. That people are "slaves" is so true, that when they are ignorant of their Creator and do not carry out His commandments, they are punished even for eternity. In fact, this punishment does not apply to any other tangible creature, because only people are distinguished from all the rest, since they have reason and have been adorned with the gift of autonomy, so they voluntarily become wicked and worthless servants and disobedient to the orders of their Master.

“Therefore, those who proclaim with words and decide in accordance with the law that people are born free are ignorant and foolish. Those who think this way are among the herd of Epicurus' followers. They are atheists and believe that the soul is mortal. They are apostates of the Divine revelations, rebels against the greatness of God Himself, deserving of hatred and despising by all creation, as enemies of God, the Creator and Lord of all. So here we have a way of ‘slavery’ (dependence) that is necessary and inevitable, as long as it is impossible for the creature to deny its Creator, the formed its Fashioner, the caused its Cause. After all, who is so ignorant that they do not know that the constituent parts of man are two, that is, the body and the soul? And that the rational soul is the one that governs the body, that is, the irrational part, and causes it to move wherever and however it wants? So is there anyone who doesn't know and doesn't accept this truth, which is known even to the Gentiles? A slight observation is enough for everyone to locate it in their consciousness.

“The word ‘freedom,’ according to the Greek interpretation, is etymologized by ελεύθειν ἐνθα ἐρά. That is, to go somewhere you like, wherever you want. And if one is deprived of this opportunity, if one is prevented from behaving in this way, he is called a slave.

“When we encounter another kind of ‘slavery’, dependence on the body, which is completely natural and necessary, how can various vain people say and write that people are born free? After all, isn't each of us born under parental authority? Don't parents naturally have the absolute power over us to treat us the way they want us to live when we don't live right or obey their promptings? Don't they punish us? Do they not renounce us and deprive us of our paternal inheritance?

“But isn't every head of household a kind of monarch at home? Doesn't he have different people at his workplace and he tells one ‘come’ and they come, and to the other ‘do this’ and they do it? And what happens to every apprentice and students of every specialty? Aren't they subject to the authority of their teachers, as if they were masters? Who can deny that they obey with respect and definitely carry out the orders and are severely punished when they do not obey the rules of apprenticeship accurately?

“When we see people subjected in so many ways and maybe even more, where is their natural freedom? Even if we consider that they can be freed from parental and doctrinal dependencies, how can we ignore the dominance of the innate soul and that of the First and Supreme Cause, that is, the Creator and God of all?

“To the extent that it is impossible for the Creator and Maker not to be the Lord and Master of men, and to the extent that it is impossible for the soul, as a rational and intangible nature, not to be the hegemonic part of human composition, it is to the same degree that it is impossible for people to be free, independent.

“From a political point of view, the most appropriate government for governing states is the monarchical, imitating, after all, God, the King of all. This is because monarchical power is the best and most correct form of government, when the Monarch is not a tyrant, but submits to existing laws and is surrounded by wise and honest counselors, since pansophy and infallibility are qualities of God alone.

“I, in this work, am concerned with what contributes to my purpose, which is, as I said at the beginning, the benefit of my simpler brothers. As for which government is best suited for governing a state, let moral philosophers and political scientists investigate.

“After we have proved that people are neither born nor are free, it is time to look at this much-praised and legendary freedom, which has shaken and continues to shake everything. Examining it in the light of truth, we come to the conclusion that it is false in every way and not even worthy of the name ‘freedom’. Judge if I’m wrong.

“He who is a slave only physically, and if he is chained and if he is beaten and if he suffers in many ways, not only is he not inflicted with any accusation from any prudent man, but on the contrary he wins compassion and mercy, since he is a fellow human being who has been out of luck. On the contrary, those who have unwittingly succumbed to the passions of the flesh are not only criticized and hated as mean and immoral, but also punished by the laws of the state as villainous and destroyers of public order and good behavior, and if by chance they escape here the life of punishment they deserve, after death it is impossible to avoid the indisputable decision of Divine Judgment.

“At this point I find it very difficult to find words to describe slavery rather than freedom, on the yoke of which the pseudo-liberals voluntarily submitted themselves. What can I say, what can I list to describe in all its extent their miserable condition? For two hours with the clock they shouted ‘liberty! liberty!’ when they beheaded their king at the guillotine. Freedom! Where is it

located, where does it appear, where is this legendary and hidden in the sky liberty - freedom? In bodies only.

“Only the bodies of the French are free, that is, unruly, ungovernable, not subject to any human power. In other words, the molded, shaped and beautifully decorated clay, which is subject to decay and decomposition, the meal of worms, the source of stench! What is perceived today by the senses, dances and chatters and tomorrow withers, dissolves, does not count for anything! That alone is the great thing that caused all this rage, for which there has been and is so much excitement, rivers of blood have been shed, tens of thousands of people have been killed, not enemies, but compatriots and mutual friends!

“And, although sin is a common defect of human nature and there is no man who has not sinned, but they as a whole want to shake off all political and spiritual power, in order to be free and unhindered to commit every evil and impermissible thing: they become arrogant, shameless, audacious, malicious, murderous, predatory, cunning, arrogant, proud, fornicators, adulterers, bloodthirsty, to such an extent that I cannot describe how sly, filthy and unclean these Illuminati pigs are. And of course, it is true that the Franks have always been like that, but now their libertarianism has come to an end, sealed them, cut them off from other people, and guided them like irrational animals, whose lives they imitated with their works.

“And, if that wise opinion is true (and must be true) that says ‘it is more burdensome to be enslaved to one's passions than to external tyrants,’ they are absolutely slaves to the passions, and this slavery is much more burdensome, worse and poorer than enslavement to tyrannical people. Because the body is by nature subject to the commands of the dominant soul, and for this reason it is not paradoxical to submit to some external power and perform bodily services and works. However, it is completely unheard of and paradoxical for the dominant soul to fall from its high order, the utterly free one, and to submit with its own will to the irrational and filthy passions of the body.

“And who are those who have fallen into this wicked, filthy and vicious slavery? The Illuminati! That is, the enlightened. From where were they enlightened? From philosophy, as they themselves boast. And of course, no other country and no other nation has been fortunate enough to be as rich in academic schools and in every kind of science as the Kingdom of France. And yet, ‘Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools’ (Romans 1:22), according to the Holy Apostle.

“But with their declarations of freedom, they also link the declaration of Equality. And high on their flags they write ‘Freedom-Equality’. And the reckless and relentless mob, what else more attractive, appealing and motivating for uprisings against superiors would they expect to hear beyond

these declarations? With the proclamation of Freedom, he imagines himself free from all external human power, which he indiscriminately calls tyranny, even if it is not. With Equality statements, the water carrier and the one who cleans the feces, imagines himself as the most noble and prominent.

“Stupid and vain people! If, as Gregory the Theologian says, the monkey imagines he is a lion, what good will such an imagination do him? Equal! Tell me, where is this equality? He lives in fancy palaces and towering towers, and you, unfortunate one, have a poor hut, enough to house your sick and tired body. He is resting in a golden and ivory bed and on soft mattresses, and by force you have a wooden mat, to lay down your tormented body. There is not much space left on his table due to the abundance of food and wine, and you just have some bread and some poor quality cheese to fool your hunger!

“But why expand on the matter? How can two people be called equal when one is very rich and the other is starving and forced to steal because of his poverty? These declarations are an invention of cunning and insidious people, who, wanting to satisfy their passions and fulfill their evil desires, instilled in the minds of the common people this unbridled wind of equality, to help them achieve their purpose. Can there ever be equality in societies dominated by greed, dominated by passions, where no other expression is heard more often than ‘mine’ and ‘yours’?

“Equality, yes, did exist once! But where? In the newly formed Church of those good Christians, the simple and pious! There, as Saint Luke describes it (Acts 4:32), no one had anything of their own, but it was all common - money, clothes and food. But why was everything common? Because, he says, the hearts and souls of the faithful were one! Everyone had an opinion and a will about God and they were all connected with brotherly love, so close that, although they were a lot of people and of different ages, men and women, old and young, they were all so unified that they looked like one body that was moved by one soul.

“The same equality and solidarity has existed for many centuries in the coenobiums of the Venerable ones of old, Pachomios, Savvas, Euthymios, Theodosios and many others, because in them brotherly love and solidarity were preserved. That, indeed, was true Equality!

“But the equality the new democrats are showing is false, it is naked, as is their freedom. They have been invented by cunning people to carry out their plans with the power of the people. And of course, this double declaration of freedom and equality, as a whole, gained great prestige among the anonymous crowd, not only within the borders of France, but also in the campaigns against Italy, where, although they were campaigning for a war against the armies of its cities, they were welcomed everywhere with open arms, not as enemies, but as friends and brothers and saviors. At some point, however, they realized the

fraud, perhaps because they saw that in many other places where the preachers of equality were trampled, 'grass did not sprout again,' as it is commonly said.

"And more than anywhere else, this fraud of the preachers of equality was to be understood by Venice, which unexpectedly became poor, unhappy, and afflicted. Venice, the once glorious city, famous all over the world for the noble origin of its inhabitants, for the cultivation of the arts, for its great and special wisdom and prudence. Venice, the city that for many centuries ruled many cities, now, unchallenged, with only the declarations of freedom and equality, the one that boasted that it would never be enslaved, became, alas, enslaved and, as it seems, fulfilled in it was Isaiah's prophecy, and it was abandoned as a tent in the vineyard, and as a fruit tree in the vineyard.

"Oh the paradoxical pitfalls of God's supreme providence! Perhaps it was this cup of Divine Judgment that the Most Peaceful had to drink, because of the tyranny imposed on us, treating us with great hostility.

"But for the consequences of external hardships as well as internal annihilation, the total destruction and the merits of many tearful calamities, caused and continue to be incessantly caused by the excitement of pseudo-freedom, a separate historical pain would be needed. At the moment, we have not promised such a thing, nor can we fulfill it satisfactorily. Suffice it to say, among other things, that the Libertines are in vain proclaiming freedom, at a time when they themselves are such tyrants: and if perhaps they were once martyred by one or a few, now, on the contrary, they are all tyrants and kill, exile or impose another penalty on those who are not convinced of their will. That is why many of their so-called priests and bishops and abbots fell victim to the terrible guillotine, not for a crime or an injustice, but because they wanted to preserve the freedom of their conscience and not sign against 'the anointed of the Lord,' that is, against their king. And of course, if all of them did not die in the communion of papal doctrines, they would certainly all be martyrs.

"So freedom is false, it is false and destructive, as well as equality: even the most intelligent people should not be seduced by such false declarations..."<sup>632</sup>

\*

Unfortunately, however, the Orthodox thinking of St. Athanasius was rejected by many of his compatriots. "According to my judgement," wrote Theodore Kolokotronis in his *Memoirs*, "the French Revolution and the doings of Napoleon opened the eyes of the world. The nations knew nothing before, and the people thought that kings were gods upon the earth and that they were

---

<sup>632</sup> St Athanasius of Paros, "Human Beings Are Neither Born Free Nor Equal", *A Christian Apology*, <https://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/.../human-beings-are...>

bound to say that whatever they did was well done. Through this present change it is more difficult to rule the people."<sup>633</sup>

Another aspect of westernism that entered Greece at this time was Freemasonry. In 1815 Archbishop of Cyprus anathematized it as follows: "Wherefore, clad in the sacred vestments of epitrachelion and omophorion, we say, If any man preach unto you any other gospel than that which we have preached unto you, even though an angel from heaven, let him be accursed." (Galatians 1,8,9) As many as are befitting, that pursue after such a diabolic and lawless employment of Freemasonry, and all they that follow unto their infatuation and unto their error, let them be excommunicated and accursed by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. After death, they shall be unpardoned, indissoluble, and bloated. Groaning and trembling, as Cain, shall they be upon the earth. (Genesis 4:14). The earth shall cleave and swallow them up, as Dathan and Abiram (Numbers 16, 31-32). The wrath of God shall be upon their heads, and their portion together with Judas the betrayer. An angel of the Lord will prosecute them with a flaming sword and, unto their life's termination, they will not know of progress. Let their works and toil be unblessed and let them become a cloud of dust, as of a summer threshing-floor. And all they indeed that shall abide still unto their wickedness will have such a recompense. But as many as shall go out from the midst of them and shall be separated, and having spat out their abominable heresy, and shall go afar off from their accursed infatuation, such kind shall receive the wages of the zealot Phineas; rather let them be blessed and forgiven by the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Only unconfused and undivided Trinity, the One God in nature, and by us His servants."<sup>634</sup>

By the end of the eighteenth century most educated Greeks were deeply tainted by westernism. And there were other, political and economic factors exciting the dreams of the Phanariots: the conquest of the Ionian islands by Napoleon and then by the British; the rebellion of the Mohammedan warlord Ali Pasha against the Sultan in 1820; the inexorable gradual southward expansion of the Russian Empire, which drew Greek minds to the prophecies about the liberation of Constantinople by "the yellow-haired race", the Russians; and the restrictions on the accumulation of capital in the Ottoman empire, which contrasted unfavourably with the more business-friendly regimes they had encountered in the West. However, the most important influences were undoubtedly ideological – the influence of western ideas made available by the explosion in the provision of educational opportunities for young Greeks that the Phanariots created in the last quarter of the eighteenth century and the first quarter of the nineteenth. Such an emphasis on education had been made by New Hieromartyr Cosmas of Aitolia (+1779), who built over two hundred schools. But he emphasized, not education in western culture, but the opposite: education in Orthodoxy in order to escape the snares of western

---

<sup>633</sup> Kolokotronis, in Mazower, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

<sup>634</sup> <https://www.orthodox.net/.../declaration-of-cyprianus-against...>

culture.<sup>635</sup> The merchants, however, sent young Greeks to the heterodox universities of Western Europe, especially Germany.

“Here,” writes Richard Clogg, “they came into contact not only with the heady ideas of the Enlightenment, of the French Revolution and of romantic nationalism but they were made aware of the extraordinary hold which the language and civilization of ancient Greece had over the minds of their educated European contemporaries.”<sup>636</sup>

“During the centuries of the *Tourkokratia* knowledge of the ancient Greek world had all but died out, but, under the stimulus of western classical scholarship, the budding intelligentsia developed an awareness that they were the heirs to an heritage that was universally revered throughout the civilized world. By the eve of the war in independence this *progonoplexia* (ancestor obsession) and *arkhaiolatreia* (worship of antiquity), to use the expressive Greek terms, had reached almost obsessive proportions. It was precisely during the first decade of the nineteenth century that nationalists, much to the consternation of the Church authorities, began to baptize their children with the names of (and to call their ships after) the worthies of ancient Greece rather than the Christian saints....”<sup>637</sup>

Such veneration of Greek antiquity could, unfortunately, be combined with contempt for the real strength and glory of Greece – the Orthodox Church.

A case in point was Adamantios Korais. Sir Steven Runciman writes: “He was born at Smyrna in 1748 and went as a young man to Paris, which he made his headquarters for the rest of his life. There he made contact with the French *Encyclopédistes* and their successors. From them he learnt a dislike for

---

<sup>635</sup> “It is better,” he said, “my brother, for you to have a Greek school in your village rather than fountains and rivers, for when your child becomes educated, then he becomes a human being. The school opens churches; the school opens monasteries.” And to the people of Parga he said: “Take care to establish without fail a Greek school in which your children will learn all that you are ignorant of [because] our faith wasn’t established by ignorant saints, but by wise and educated saints who interpreted the Holy Scriptures accurately and who enlightened us sufficiently by inspired teachings” (Nomikos Michael Vaporis, *Witnesses for Christ: Orthodox Christian Neomartyrs of the Ottoman Period 1437-1860*, Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2000, p. 202).

<sup>636</sup> The Europeans were originally interested in the ancient monuments. Hence the removal of the Elgin marbles and the Venus of Milo to London and Paris respectively. However, attitudes were changed, as Zamoyski points out, “by Lord Byron’s visit to Greece in 1809, whose fruits were the second canto of *Childe Harold*, published in 1809, *The Giaour* and *The Bride of Abydos* (1813), and *The Siege of Corinth* (1816). More interested in people than in stones, Byron concentrated on depicting the craggy nobility of the natives. He was also much affected by the notion of a once great people under alien oppression. The negative picture of the Turks and their culture – rococo Ottomania had given way to priggish neoclassical contempt – made the oppression all the crueller to the European imagination, in which the Turk combined lustfulness with barbarity. The educated European of 1800 was as disgusted by the idea of the ‘terrible’ Turk defiling Greece as his twelfth-century forebear had been at the idea of Saracens profaning the Holy Land. And just as the Holy Land called out to Christendom for vengeance and crusade, so the oppressed Greek land called out for liberation” (*Holy Madness*, p. 233).

<sup>637</sup> Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece*, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 27-28.

clericalism and for tradition. From reading Gibbon he came to believe that Christianity had ushered in a dark age for European civilization. His friend Karl Schlegel taught him to identify nationality with language. 'Language is the nation.' He wrote; 'for where one says *la langue de France* one means the French nation.' The Greeks of his time were therefore of the same race as the ancient Greeks. But to make the identification closer he sought to reform the language so that it would be nearer to the Classical form... For the Byzantine past of Greece and for the Orthodox Church he had no use at all. His writings were eagerly read by the young intellectuals at the Phanar and by men of education all over Greece."<sup>638</sup>

And so, mixed with the righteous Greek nationalism "for faith and fatherland", was an unrighteous, fallen nationalism influenced by the ideas of the French revolution and ready at times to put the narrow interests of the Greek nation - or rather, of the nation's Phanariot elite - above those of the other oppressed Orthodox under the Turkish yoke.

Such was the nationalist bombast of, for example, Benjamin of Lesbos, who wrote: "Nature has set limits to the aspirations of other men, but not to those of the Greeks. The Greeks were not in the past and are not now subject to the laws of nature."<sup>639</sup>

This mixed character of the Greek revolution, symbolized by the use of three different flags<sup>640</sup>, determined its mixed outcome, and the fact that, in the course of the nineteenth century, Orthodox Eastern Europe was liberated, not through a single, united Orthodox movement of liberation, but by separate nationalist movements - Greek, Bulgarian, Serb, Romanian - which ended up, in 1912-1913, fighting each other rather than the common enemy...

"One of the first to develop plans for a coordinated revolt," writes Clogg, "was Rigas Velestinlis, a Hellenized Vlach from Thessaly. After acquiring his early political experience in the service of the Phanariot *hospodars* of the Danubian principalities, he had been powerfully influenced by the French Revolution during a sojourn in Vienna in the 1790s. The political tracts, and in particular his *Declaration of the Rights of Man*, which he had printed in Vienna and with which he aspired to revolutionize the Balkans, are redolent of the French example. Potentially the most significant was the *New Political Constitution of the Inhabitants of Rumeli, Asia Minor, the Islands of the Aegean and*

---

<sup>638</sup> Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity*, Cambridge University Press, 1968, pp. 392-393.

<sup>639</sup> Benjamin, *Stoikheia tis Metaphysikis (The Elements of Metaphysics)*, 1820 (in Greek); quoted in Clogg, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>640</sup> Alexander Pushkin, who was in nearby Kishinev at the time, wrote that the Greeks "published proclamations which quickly spread everywhere - in them it is said that the Phoenix of Greece will arise from its own ashes, that the hour of Turkey's downfall has come, and that a great power [Russia?] approves of the great-souled feat! The Greeks have begun to throng together in crowds under three banners; of these one is tricoloured [the revolutionary flag], on another streams a cross wreathed with laurels, with the text 'By this sign conquer' [the religious flag, derived from God's promise to St. Constantine], on a third is depicted the Phoenix arising from its ashes [the patriotic flag]" (in Mazower, *op. cit.*, p. 91).

*the Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia*. This envisaged the establishment of a revived Byzantine Empire but with the substitution of republican institutions on the French model for the autocracy of Byzantium. Although it was intended to embrace all the inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire, Greeks, whether by birth or by culture, were to predominate. Rigas' carefully articulated schemes were without result for he was betrayed (by a fellow Greek) in Trieste as he was about to leave the Hapsburg territory to preach the gospel of revolution in the Balkans. With a handful of fellow conspirators he was put to death by the Ottomans in Belgrade in May 1798."<sup>641</sup>

\*

The spiritual leader of the Greek people, and the *ethnarch* of all the Orthodox under Turkish rule, was the Ecumenical Patriarch. He had good cause to resent the Sultan's dominion. "The rights of the patriarch," writes Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, "were gradually reduced to nothing; all that was left to him was the 'right' of being responsible for the Christians. In the course of seventy-three years in the eighteenth century, the patriarch was replaced forty-eight times! Some were deposed and reinstated as many as five times; many were put to torture. The rebellions of the Janissaries were accompanied by terrible bloodshed. Churches were defiled, relics cut to pieces, and the Holy Gifts profaned. Christian pogroms became more and more frequent. In the nineteenth century Turkey was simply rotting away, but the 'sick man of Europe' was supported at all points by other nations in opposition to Russia."<sup>642</sup>

However, the Patriarch was bound by his oath of allegiance to the Sultan not to encourage protest against the Turks, a contract that went back to the original agreement between Mehmet II and Patriarch Gennadius Scholarius. (New Martyr Demetrios of Samarina (+1808) also urged the Greeks to obey the Ottoman laws.) He was therefore unable to bless or help any potential revolution, which inevitably led to misunderstandings and disillusionment. For, as Runciman writes, "the Greek in the provinces could not understand the subtle politics of the Patriarchate. He could not appreciate the delicacy that the Patriarch and his advisers had to show in their dealings with the Sublime Porte. He looked to his village priest or to the local abbot or the bishop to protect him against the Turkish governmental authorities, and he gave his support to anyone who would champion him against the government. In the great days of the Ottoman Empire, when the administration had been efficient and on the whole just, Greek nationalism could be kept underground. But by the eighteenth century the administrative machinery was beginning to run down. Provincial Turkish governors began to revolt against the Sultan and could usually count on the support of the local Greeks. A growing number of outlaws took to the mountains. In Slav districts they were known by the Turkish name

---

<sup>641</sup> Clogg, *op. cit.*, pp. 29, 31.

<sup>642</sup> Schmemmann, *The Historical Road of Eastern Orthodoxy*, Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1977, p. 274.

of *haidouks*; in Greece they were called the Klephts. They lived by banditry, directed mainly against the Turkish landowners; but they were quite ready to rob Christian merchants or travellers of any nationality. They could count on the support of the local Christian villagers, to whom they were latter-day Robin Hoods; they could almost always find refuge from the Turkish police in some local monastery..."<sup>643</sup>

However, neither the klephts nor the villagers who supported them nor the Phanariots who nursed ideas of revolution could count on support from the Patriarchate.

Runciman writes: "A test came early in the nineteenth century when Sultan Selim made a serious effort to suppress brigandage. The Klephts in Greece, thanks to the spirit of revolt and to the hymns of Rhigas, had become popular heroes. It was a patriotic duty for a Greek to give them shelter against the police; and the village priest and the monks of the country monasteries were eager to help them. But they were a menace to orderly rule; and when the Sultan demanded of the Patriarch that he should issue a stern decree threatening with excommunication any priest or monk who would not aid the authorities in their suppression, the Patriarch could not well refuse. The decree was published in the Peloponnese; and though most of the higher clergy sullenly obeyed it, the villages and the poorer monasteries were outraged; and even at the Phanar there was open disapproval. It became clear that when the moment for revolt arrived the Patriarch would not be at its head.

"In spite of the Patriarch the plots continued. At the end of the eighteenth century there were even several secret societies in existence, with names such as the *Athena*, which hoped to liberate Greece with French help and which counted Korais among its members, or the *Phoenix*, which pinned its hopes on Russia. In 1814 three Greek merchants at Odessa in Russia, Nicholas Skouphas, Emmanuel Xanthos and Athanasius Tsakalof, the first a member of the *Phoenix* and the latter two freemasons, founded a society which they called the *Hetaireia ton Philikon*, the Society of Friends. Thanks chiefly to the energy of Skouphas, who unfortunately died in 1817, it soon superseded all the previous societies and became the rallying point of the rebellion. Skouphas was determined to include in the society patriots of every description; and soon it had amongst its members Phanariots such as Prince Constantine Ypsilanti and his hot-headed sons, Alexander and Nicholas, all now living in exile in Russia, and members of the Mavrocordato and Caradja families, or high ecclesiastics such as Ignatius, Metropolitan of Arta and later of Wallachia, and Germanus, Metropolitan of Patras<sup>644</sup>, intellectuals such as Anthimus Ghazis, and brigand leaders such as the armatolos George Olympios and Kolokotronis.<sup>645</sup> It was

---

<sup>643</sup> Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity*, Cambridge University Press, 1968, p. 391.

<sup>644</sup> He came from the same village of Dhimitsana in the Peloponnese as Patriarch Gregory V. The attitudes of these two hierarchs came to symbolise a fundamental division in Greek society that was to continue for decades... (V.M.)

<sup>645</sup> Adam Zamoyski writes that the *Hetaira's* "ultimate aim was the liberation of Greece and the restoration of a Greek Empire. More immediately it was concerned with the 'purification' of

organized partly on Masonic lines and partly on what the founders believed to have been the early Christian organization. It had four grades.<sup>646</sup> The lowest was that of Blood-brothers, which was confined to illiterates. Next were the Recommended, who swore an oath to obey their superiors but were not permitted to know more than the general patriotic aims of the society and were kept in ignorance of the names of their superiors and were supposed not even to know of the existence of the Blood-brothers. Above them were the Priests, who could initiate Blood-brothers and Recommended and who, after solemn oaths, were allowed to know the detailed aims of the society. Above them again were the Pastors, who supervised the Pastors, who supervised the Priests and saw that they only initiated suitable candidates; a suitable Recommended could become a Pastor without passing through the grade of Priest. From the Pastors were chosen the supreme authorities of the society, the *Arche*. The names of the *Arche* were unknown except to each other, and their meetings were held in absolute secrecy. This was thought necessary not only security against external powers but also for the prestige of the society. Had the names of its directors been known, there might have been opposition to several of them, particularly among such a faction-loving people as the Greeks; whereas the mystery surrounding the *Arche* enabled hints to be dropped that it included such weighty figures as the Tsar himself. All grades had to swear unconditional obedience to the *Arche*, which itself operated through twelve Apostles, whose business it was to win recruits and to organize branches in different provinces and countries. They were appointed just before the death of Skouphas; and their names are known. It was first decided to fix the headquarters of the society on Mount Pelion, but later, after the initiation of the Maniot chieftain, Peter Mavromichalis, it was moved to the Mani, in the south-east of the Peloponnese, a district into which the Turks had never ventured to penetrate.

“There were however two distinguished Greeks who refused to join the Society. One was the ex-Patriarch Gregory V. He had been deposed for the second time in 1808, and was living on Mount Athos, where the Apostle John Pharmakis visited him. Gregory pointed out that it was impossible for him to swear an oath of unconditional obedience to the unknown leaders of a secret society<sup>647</sup> and that anyhow he was bound by oath to respect the authority of the Sultan. The reigning Patriarch, Cyril VI, was not approached.

---

the Greek nation.... By 1821 the *Hetairia* had a total of 911 members.” (*Holy Madness*, p. 234) (V.M.)

<sup>646</sup> Although the *Philiki Hetairia* recalled Masonry in its four grades, in its oaths of secrecy and obedience to unknown leaders, and in the fact that two of its three founders were in fact Freemasons, it was nevertheless Orthodox in its ideology, according to Archimandrite Ambrose, (*Tektonismos kai Philiki Hetairia* (Masonry and the Society of Friends), Athens, 1972 (in Greek)). But if two of the three founders of the *Hetairia* were Masons, then Masonic influence cannot be ruled out. (V.M.)

<sup>647</sup> Gregory Frazee, *The Orthodox Church and Independent Greece 1821-1852*, Cambridge University Press, 1969, p. 24. Moreover, these “highest authorities” (*anotati arkhi*) were called “Great Priests of the Eleusinian Mysteries” (Clogg, *op. cit.*, p. 35). It is understandable that the first priest in Orthodoxy could not be involved in such things! (V.M.)

“Still more disappointing for the revolutionaries was the refusal of the Tsar’s foreign minister, John Capodistrias, to countenance the *Hetairia*.<sup>648</sup>

“John Antony, Count Capodistrias, had been born in Corfu in 1770, and as a young man had worked for the Ionian government there, before going to Russia at the time of the second French occupation of the Ionian islands in 1807. He was given a post in the Russian diplomatic service and was attached to the Russian Embassy at Vienna in 1811, and next year was one of the Russian delegates at the treaty negotiations at Bucharest. His remarkable abilities impressed Tsar Alexander, who in 1815 nominated him Secretary of State and Assistant Foreign Minister. In his youth Capodistrias had made contacts with many of the Greek revolutionary thinkers, and he was well known to be a Greek patriot. In the past many Greeks had looked to France to deliver them from the Turks; but after Napoleon’s collapse the whole Greek world turned to Russia, and Capodistrias’s accession to power gave them confidence. The Russian sovereign was the great patron of Orthodoxy. The Greeks forgot how little they had gained from Catherine the Great, the imperialistic German free-thinker, who had incited them to revolt in 1770 and then had abandoned them.<sup>649</sup> But at the Treaty of Kucuk Kainarci in 1774 Russia had acquired the right to intervene in Turkish internal affairs in the interests of the Orthodox. Catherine’s son, ... Paul, was clearly unwilling to help the Greek cause; but when Alexander I succeeded his murdered father in 1801 hopes rose. Alexander was known to have liberal views and mystical Orthodox sympathies. Belief in his aid had encouraged the Princes of Moldavia and Wallachia to plot against the Sultan in 1806; and, when they were deposed by the Sultan, the Tsar cited his rights under the Treaty of Kucuk Kainarci and declared war on Turkey. The only outcome of the war had been the annexation by Russia of the Moldavian province of Bessarabia. But the Greeks were not discouraged. Now, with a Greek as the Tsar’s Secretary of State, the time had surely come for the War of Liberation. The plotters refused to realize that Capodistrias was the Tsar’s servant and a practical man of the world; and they did not know that the Tsar himself was becoming more reactionary and less willing to countenance rebellion against established authority.

---

<sup>648</sup> The *Hetairia* sent an envoy to Capodistrias in St. Petersburg. He was appalled, and advised them that if the conspirators “do not want to perish themselves and destroy together with themselves their innocent and unfortunate Race, they should abandon their revolutionary plots and live as before under the Governments they find themselves, until Providence decides otherwise.” Again, when the revolution broke out, he said: “So, a premature revolution for Greece that is going to destroy all my efforts for a happy future” (Frazee, *op. cit.*, p. 17). However, he did not betray the plan of the plotters, and when the revolution began he resigned his post as minister and went to Geneva, where he worked quietly to help the insurgents. (V.M.)

<sup>649</sup> “The ill-fated Orlov expedition to the Peloponnesos, launched by Catherine the Great, and the combined Russian-Greek attempt to free the Peloponnesos from the tyranny of the Ottoman Mohammedans, ended in disaster. In addition to destroying the Greek military forces and many of the Russians, the Albanian Mohammedan mercenaries, who were called in by the Ottoman Mohammedans, wreaked havoc on the local population...” (Vaporis, *op. cit.*, p. 337) (V.M.)

“The planners of Greek independence could not count on the open support of the Patriarchate. They should have realized that they also could not count on the support of Russia. And the nationalist ecclesiastical policy of the Church during the last century deprived them of the friendship of the other peoples of the Balkans. The leaders of the *Hetairia* were aware of this. They made earnest attempts to enrol Serbian, Bulgarian and Roumanian members. When Karageorge revolted against the Turks in Serbia Greek *armatoles* and *klephts* came to join him. Even the Phanariot princes had offered support; but they were rebuffed. ‘The Greek Princes of the Phanar,’ Karageorge wrote, ‘can never make common cause with people who do not wish to be treated like animals.’ Karageorge’s revolt was put down by the Turks in 1813. Two years later the Serbs revolted again, under Miloš Obrenovic, a far subtler diplomat, who secured Austrian support and eventually induced the Sultan to accept him as a reliable vassal-prince. Miloš had no contact with the Greeks. The *Hetairia* therefore pinned its faith on Karageorge, who was persuaded to become a member in 1817. As Karageorge was greatly admired by the Bulgarians it was hoped that numbers of them would now join the movement. Karageorge was then sent back to Serbia. But the Serbs, who were satisfied with Miloš’s achievements, offered him no support; and Miloš regarded him as a rival to be eliminated. He was assassinated in June 1817. With his death any hope of interesting the Serbs in the coming Greek rebellion faded out; and there was no one capable of rallying the Bulgars to the cause. Karageorge alone could have given the *Hetairia* the air of not being exclusively Greek.

“The *Hetairia* had higher hopes of the Roumanians. There a peasant leader, Tudor Vladimirescu, who had led a band to help the Serbs, was defying the Turkish police in the Carpathian mountains and had gathered together a considerable company. He was in close touch with two leading hetaerists, George Olympius and Phokianos Savvas, and he himself joined the society, promising to co-ordinate his movements with the Greeks’. But he was an unreliable ally; for he was bitterly opposed to the Phanariot princes, who, he considered, had brought ruin to his country...”<sup>650</sup>

“By the end of 1820,” continues Runciman, “everything seemed to be ready. Ali Pasha of Janina was in open revolt against the Sultan; and had promised help to the Greeks; and though Osman Pasvanoglu was dead, his pashalik of Vidin was in disorder, tying up Turkish troops south of the Danube. The *Arche* of the *Hetairia* had a few months previously elected a Captain-General,

---

<sup>650</sup> Runciman, *op. cit.*, pp. 398-402. That the Romanians should have placed their hopes of freedom from the Turks on the tsar rather than on a phanariot was hardly surprising. Moldavia had been closely linked to Russia for many centuries, and in November, 1806, when the Russo-Turkish war began, Metropolitan Benjamin (Kostake) in his pastoral epistle wrote: “The true happiness of these lands lies in their union with Russia”. And when Bessarabia, that is, the part of Moldavia east of the Prut, was united to Russia in 1812 (an annexation recognized by the Congress of Vienna in 1815), there was great rejoicing among the people, and in five years the population of Bessarabia almost doubled through an influx from the lands west of the Prut. (Vladimir Bukarsky, “Moskovskij Patriarkhat pod udarom: na ocheredi - Moldavia”, *Pravoslavnaiia Rus'*, N 23 (1836), December 1/14, 2007, p. 4).

choosing a young Phanariot Alexander Ypsilanti, son of the ex-Prince Constantine of Moldavia. It is interesting to note that the plotters considered that only a Phanariot had sufficient experience and prestige for the post. Alexander Ypsilanti was born in 1792 and spent his youth in Russia. He had won a reputation for gallantry and military skill when serving in the Russian army and had lost an arm at the battle of Kulm, fighting against the French. He was known to be an intimate friend of the Tsar and the Tsaritsa and of Capodistrias. He made it his first task to improve the efficiency of the Society and summoned the one and only plenary meeting of the *Arche*, which was held at Ismail in southern Russia in October 1820. The original plan had been to start the revolt in the Peloponnese, where there would be a secure base in the Mani and where the sympathy of the inhabitants was assured. Alexander now changed his mind. It would be better to start the main campaign in Moldavia. By the Treaty of Bucharest the Turks had undertaken not to send troops into the Principalities without Russian consent. Vladimirescu would distract what Turkish militia was there already; and a successful army sweeping through Wallachia and across the Danube was the only thing that might induce the Bulgarians and the Serbians to join in. Meanwhile a subsidiary rising in the Peloponnese, which Alexander's brother Demetrius was sent to organize, would further embarrass the Turks.

"The invasion of Moldavia was timed to begin on 24 November (O.S.) 1820. Alexander had already gathered together a small army of Greeks and Christian Albanians on the Russian side of the frontier. Almost at the last moment Capodistrias counselled delay. The Austrian secret police had discovered the plans and had sent to warn the Sultan; and the Tsar was nervous of international reactions. But, in January 1821, Vladimirescu, encouraged by George Olympus, against the advice of Phokianos Savvas, began to attack Turkish police posts and was scornful of Ypsilanti's hesitation. About the same time the Prince of Wallachia, Alexander Soutzo, died, poisoned it was rumoured by the *Hetairia*, of which he was known to disapprove. Demetrius Ypsilanti reported from the Peloponnese that everyone there was impatient of further delays. Alexander Ypsilanti decided that the time had come to act. He sought an audience of the Tsar before leaving St. Petersburg, but it was refused.<sup>651</sup> The Tsaritsa, however, sent him her blessing; and he was assured that the

---

<sup>651</sup> Michael Binyon writes that a letter from Alexander I, signed by Capodistrias, "denounced Ypsilanti's actions as 'shameful and criminal', upbraided him for misusing the tsar's name, struck him from the Russian army list, and called him to lay down his arms immediately" (*Pushkin*, London: HarperCollins, 2002, p. 133). Ironically, the officer sent by the Russian government to report on the insurrection was Pestel, the future leader of the Decembrist rebellion (*op. cit.*, p. 134). (V.M.)

Troubetskoy writes: "Under normal circumstances there would have been no doubt about the tsar's reaction: as champion of the Orthodox world, he could hardly have rejected such a plea. The circumstances at the time, however, were anything but normal. Central Europe was captive to the views of Austrian chancellor Metternich, to whom any hint of insidious liberalism - revolutionary movements in particular - was anathema. The Holy Alliance, of which Russia was an enthusiastic signatory and driving force, was to assure this. Despite his personal sympathy for the Greeks and antipathy to the Turks, there was no way the tsar could let down the established new order. It was a conundrum that he painfully resolved by

Tsar would personally protect his wife. On 22 February (O.S.) Alexander and his little band crossed over the Pruth into Moldavia.

“In his desire to prevent a leakage of news Alexander had not warned his fellow-plotters. When news of his advance reached the Peloponnese, his brother Demetrius hesitated, fearing that it might be a false rumour. But the people would not wait. They found a leader in Germanus, Metropolitan of Patras, who, in defiance of the Patriarchate and of Orthodox tradition, raised the standard of revolt at the monastery of Agia Lavra, near Kalavryta, on 25 March.<sup>652</sup> The Mani had already risen. The islands of Spetsai and Psara and a little later Hydra rose in early April. By the end of April all central and southern Greece was up in arms.

“But it was now too late for Alexander Ypsilanti. He had marched unopposed on Bucharest. But there was no news of any rising among the Bulgarians or the Serbs; and when he reached Bucharest he found that Tudor Vladimirescu and his troops were there before him; and they refused to let him into the city. ‘I am not prepared to shed Roumanian blood for Greeks,’ said Vladimirescu.<sup>653</sup> There were skirmishes between the two forces. Then came news that the Tsar had repudiated the whole rebellion at the Congress of Laibach, and with his permission a huge Turkish army was approaching the Danube, ready to invade the Principalities. Ypsilanti retired north-east, towards the Russian frontier. Vladimirescu, after lingering for a few days in Bucharest trying to make terms with the Turkish commander, moved back on 15 May into the Carpathians. But he had lost control over his own followers. They allowed George Olympus to take him prisoner and to put him to death, on the evening of 26 May, for his treason to the cause. Phokianos Savvas and a garrison of Albanians held Bucharest for a week, then also retired into the mountains. The Turks entered Bucharest before the end of May, then moved in pursuit of Ypsilanti. On 7 June (O.S.) they routed his army at a battle at Dragasani. His best troops perished. He himself fled over the Austrian border into Bukovina, where by Metternich’s orders he was arrested. He spent the remainder of his life in an Austrian prison. The remnant of his army was rallied by George Cantacuzenus, who led them back towards the Russian frontier. But the frontier was closed to them. The Turks caught up with them at Sculeni on the Pruth and massacred them there, on 17 June, in sight of Russian territory. Savvas surrendered to the Turks in August and was put to death by them. George Olympus held out till September in the monastery of Secu. When all

---

disavowing and censuring Ypsilantis.” (*Imperial Legend*, Staplehurst: Spellmount, 2003, pp. 112-113) (V.M.)

<sup>652</sup> Germanus wrote to the ambassadors of the foreign powers: “We, the Greek race of Christians, seeing that the Ottoman people despises us and is intending destruction against us, sometimes in one way and at other times in another, have decided firmly: either we shall all die or we shall be liberated.” (*Boanerges*, 24, March-April, 2006, p. 32 (in Greek)). Germanus was supported by eight other bishops, five of whom died in prison. (V.M.)

<sup>653</sup> Here we see the bitter fruits reaped by the Greek Phanariots’ rule in Romania. (V.M.)

hope was lost he fired his powder stores and blew up the monastery with himself and all his garrison within it.”<sup>654</sup>

However, while the Phanariot rebellion in the north failed, the rebellion of the bishops and the people in the south, in the Peloponnese, succeeded. But the cost was high. A characteristic of the war was the extreme cruelty on both sides. It began with the Greeks. By April, 1821, 15,000 out of the 40,000 Turkish inhabitants of the Peloponnese had been killed. Within a few months, shouting “Kill all the Turks in the Morea”, the Greeks had killed 20,000 men, women and children. At Tripolitsa, the Scottish Philhellene Thomas Gordon watched as the Greeks, “mad with vindictive rage, spared neither age nor sex – the streets and houses were inundated with blood, and obstructed with heaps of dead bodies. Some Mohammedans fought bravely and sold their lives dearly, but the majority were slaughtered without resistance...” The British observer George Finlay wrote: “Women and children were frequently tortured before they were murdered. After the Greeks had been in possession of the city for forty-eight hours, they deliberately collected together about two thousand persons of every age and sex, but principally women and children, and led them to a ravine in the nearest mountain [Mount Maenalion] where they murdered every soul.”

“On 27 January 1822,” writes Sir Richard Evans, “meeting at Epidaurus in the Peloponnese, a self-styled Greek National Assembly issued a ringing declaration of independence from ‘the cruel yoke of Ottoman power’. The Greeks, it proclaimed, were fighting ‘a holy war, a war the object of which is to reconquer the rights of individual liberty, of property and honour – rights which the civilized peoples of Europe, our neighbours, enjoy today.’ Yet despite the ideological proclamations of the Assembly, which provided the formal leadership of the rebel movement, the uprising remained uncoordinated, internally divided and chaotic, a huge gulf separating the educated professional elements from the rough-and-ready and often barely politically aware fighters on the ground...”<sup>655</sup>

The Turks responded in kind. Massacres began in Constantinople, where Patriarch Gregory V was in an impossible position. The Sultan was convinced that he supported the insurrection. So Gregory, writes Frazee, “called a meeting of the Greek leaders and people to discuss their common peril that same day after he had met with the sultan. Mahmud had demanded that the patriarch and Synod excommunicate those responsible for the uprising and those who had killed innocent Turks. At the patriarchate, therefore, the patriarch of Jerusalem, Polykarpos, four synodal archbishops, Karolos Kallimachi, Hospodar of Wallachia, the Dragoman of the Porte, Konstantinos Mourousi, and the Grand Logothete, Stephanos Mavroyeni, gathered to decided on their next step. A number of other Greeks were also in attendance ‘of every class and condition’. Gregorios and Mourousi presided. The assembled Greeks were all

---

<sup>654</sup> Runciman, *op. cit.*, pp. 403-405.

<sup>655</sup> Evans, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-55.

exhorted 'to carefully guard against any move or action contrary to their allegiance and fidelity to their Sovereign'. A letter was drafted which incorporated the sultan's suggestion and was sent off to be printed at the patriarchal press. The patriarch then urged that the Greeks prepare to leave the city quickly, promising that he would stay: 'As for me, I believe that my end is approaching, but I must stay at my post to die, and if I remain, then the Turks will not be given a plausible pretext to massacre the Christians of the capital.'

"The letter of excommunication against the revolutionaries appeared on Palm Sunday, 4 April, in all the Greek churches of the capital signed by the patriarch, Polykarpos of Jerusalem, and twenty-one other prelates. In part, the document stated: 'Gratitude to our benefactors is the first of virtues and ingratitude is severely condemned by the Holy Scriptures and declared unpardonable by Jesus Christ; Judas the ungrateful traitor offers a terrible example of it; but it is most strongly evidenced by those who rise against their common protector and lawful sovereign, and against Christ, who has said that there is no rule or power but comes from God. It was against this principle that Michael Soutzos and Alexandros Ypsilantis, son of a fugitive, sinned with an audacity beyond example, and have sent emissaries to seduce others, and to conduct them to the abyss of perdition; many have been so tempted to join an unlawful *hetairia* and thought themselves bound by their oath to continue [as] members, but an oath to commit a sin was itself a sin, and not binding - like that of Herod, who, that he might not break a wicked obligation committed a great wickedness by the death of John the Baptist.' The text ended by solemnly condemning and excommunicating Soutzos and Ypsilantis, having been signed on the altar itself. The patriarchal letter was the final blow to strike Ypsilantis' fading expedition in the Principalities."<sup>656</sup>

Some have argued that the patriarch secretly repudiated this anathema; which is why the Turks, suspecting him of treachery, hanged him at Pascha. Gregory's biographer, Kandiloros writes: "As the representative of Christ it cannot be believed that the patriarch signed such a letter. But as the head of a threatened people, he had to take measures, as well as he could, to save his powerless and hard-pressed population from being massacred."<sup>657</sup> "In any case," writes Fr. Anthony Gavalas, "the anathema was ignored, as were all the other letters unfavourable to the plans of the revolutionaries, as having been issued under duress. There is an opinion that the patriarch knew that the anathema would be so considered and issued it, hoping to placate the Turks on the one hand, and on the other, to gain time for the revolution to gain strength."<sup>658</sup>

In the opinion of the present writer, while the patriarch was undoubtedly a patriot who longed for the freedom of his country, his righteousness of

---

<sup>656</sup> Frazee, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>657</sup> Kandiloros, in Frazee, *op. cit.* p. 29.

<sup>658</sup> Gavalas, "St. Gregory V, Patriarch of Constantinople", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 28, N 2, March-April, 1978, p. 22.

character precludes the possibility that he could have been plotting against a government to which he had sworn allegiance and for which he prayed in the Divine Liturgy, or that he could have been hypocritical in such an important church act. After all, as we have seen, he had always refused to join the *Philiki Hetairia*. In this connection it is significant that the patriarch's body was picked up by a Russian ship and taken to Odessa, mutely pointing to the place where the organization that had indirectly caused his death had been founded.

The patriarch was not the only one to die. "Two metropolitans and twelve bishops followed him to the gallows. Then it was the turn of the laymen. First the Grand Dragoman, Mouroussi, and his brother, then all the leading Phanariots. By the summer of 1821 the great houses in the Phanar were empty. A new Patriarch had been appointed... There was a new Dragoman, unrelated to any of the Phanariot clans; and he was executed on the merest suspicion of treason a few months later; and the post was abolished. The powers of the Patriarchate were severely curtailed. The contract between the Conquering Sultan and Gennadius had been broken by the Patriarchate. The Turks were no longer prepared to trust the Orthodox..."<sup>659</sup>

The Tsar, writes John Julius Norwich, "did not mince his words" when condemning the Turks. "In an ultimatum drafted by Capodistrias, he declared that: 'the Ottoman government has placed itself in a state of open hostility against the Christian world. It has legitimised the defence of the Greeks, who will henceforth be fighting solely to save themselves from inevitable destruction. In view of the nature of that struggle, Russia will find herself strictly obliged to offer them help, because they are persecuted; protection, because they need it; and assistance, jointly with the whole of Christendom, because she cannot surrender her brothers in religion to the mercy of blind fanaticism.' This was presented to the Turkish government on 18 July. On the 25th, having received no reply, the Russian ambassador, Count Stroganoff, broke off diplomatic relations with the Porte and closed the embassy..."<sup>660</sup>

Nevertheless, there was to be no military help from Tsar Alexander, who disapproved of revolution on principle.<sup>661</sup> Thus Capodistrias wrote: "The emperor has highly disapproved of these [means] which Prince Ipsilanti appears to wish to employ to deliver Greece. At a time when Europe is menaced everywhere by revolutionary explosions, how can one not recognize in that which has broken out in the two principalities [Wallachia and Moldavia] the identical effect of the same subversive principles, the same intrigues which attract the calamities of war... the most dreadful plague of demagogic despotism."<sup>662</sup>

---

<sup>659</sup> Runciman, *op. cit.*, p. 406.

<sup>660</sup> Norwich, *The Middle Sea*, London: Vintage, 2007, p. 469.

<sup>661</sup> America's President John Quincy Adams also refused to support the Greeks.

<sup>662</sup> Capodistrias, in Mazower, *op. cit.*, pp. 91-92.

The main leader of the Greeks now was General Theodore Kolokotronis, whose greatest success was the defeat of the Ottoman army under Mahmud Dramali Pasha at the Battle of Dervenakia in 1822. In 1825, he was appointed commander-in-chief of the Greek forces in the Peloponnese. However, Runciman had good reason to call him a "brigand"; for he was cruel not only to the Turks, but also to those Greeks that did not obey him. Thus in his *Memoirs* he wrote: "'The people of Karytaina's plains have not taken arms.' Such was the writing which I received. I lost no time, but straightway issued the following proclamation: 'Fire and sword to every place that does not listen to the voice of the nation.'"<sup>663</sup>

\*

The Greeks after the revolution were desperately poor and even more desperately divided. The new patriarch, Eugenius, again anathematized the insurgents. In response, twenty-eight bishops and almost a thousand priests in free Greece anathematized the patriarch, calling him a Judas and a wolf in sheep's clothing.<sup>664</sup> The Free Greeks now commemorated "all Orthodox bishops" at the Liturgy instead of the patriarch. Not surprisingly, in 1824 the patriarchate refused a request from the Greek Church for Holy Chrism.<sup>665</sup>

In 1822 the Free Greeks entered into negotiations with the Pope for help against the Turks. Very soon the Faith was being betrayed for the sake of the political struggle, as at the council of Florence. President Mavrokordatos wrote to the Papal Secretary of State: "The cries of a Christian nation threatened by complete extermination have the right to receive the compassion of the head of Christendom."<sup>666</sup> Greek delegates to the meeting of the Great Powers in Verona wrote to Pope Pius VII that the Greek revolution was not like the revolutions of other nations raised against altar and throne. Instead, it was being fought in the name of religion and "... asks to be placed under the protection of a Christian dynasty with wise and permanent laws". In another letter the delegates addressed the pope as "the common father of the faithful and head of the Christian religion", and said that the Greeks were worthy of the pope's "protection and apostolic blessing". Metropolitan Germanus was even empowered to speak concerning the possibility of a reunion of the Churches. However, it was the Pope who drew back at this point, pressurized by the other western States that considered the sultan to be a legitimate monarch.<sup>667</sup> How soon had a struggle fought "for faith and fatherland" betrayed the faith while only partially winning the fatherland! For real political independence had not been achieved. If the Turks had been driven out, then the British and the French and later the Germans came to take their place.

---

<sup>663</sup> Kolokotronis, *Memoirs: War of Greek Independence 1821-1833*, p. 133.

<sup>664</sup> Gregory Frazee, *The Orthodox Church and Independent Greece 1821-1852*, Cambridge University Press, 1969, p. 44.

<sup>665</sup> Frazee, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

<sup>666</sup> Frazee, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

<sup>667</sup> Frazee, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-57.

The Greeks had to pay a heavy price for their rebellion.<sup>668</sup> After the martyrdom of Patriarch Gregory, the Turks ran amok in Constantinople; and there were further pogroms in Thessaloniki, Smyrna, Adrianople, Crete and especially in Chios, where, in May, 1922, in response to the arrival of a small party of Greek revolutionaries from Samos, 30,000 Muslims invaded from Asia Minor, killed 25,000 Greeks and took 45,000 into slavery. Many others fled. The population of the island fell from 120,000 before 1822 to 30,000 a year later.<sup>669</sup>

Aroused by these events, many young westerners, among whom was the famous poet Lord Byron, decided to join the Greek freedom-fighters. They sympathized with the sufferings of the Greeks, which were popularized by works of art such as Byron's poems and Eugene Delacroix's painting *The Massacre at Chios* (1824); but they were fighting, not so much for Orthodox Greece as for their romantic vision of ancient, pagan Greece, which they saw as having been the first to espouse the ideal of freedom.<sup>670</sup> Similarly, although many Greeks undoubtedly fought for the sake of Orthodoxy against Islam, several of their leaders espoused an essentially western ideology of freedom.<sup>671</sup>

A more peaceful, and ultimately more beneficial, contribution to the new Greek state was offered by Lord Frederick North, Earl of Guildford, a younger son of the British Prime Minister that had surrendered British sovereignty over the North American colonies to Washington's rebels.

North visited the island of Corfu in 1792, and after being converted to Orthodoxy by a layman (he already knew the main points of Orthodox theology) he was received into the Church by baptism with the name Demetrios. Keeping his conversion secret from his compatriots, North returned to the island in 1820, spending the greater part of each year there until his death in 1827. "To the British and Greek public of the time, the fifth earl of Guilford was simply one among a number of British philhellenes. They knew him as the author of a Pindaric ode in Greek honouring the empress Catherine of Russia, as president of the 'Society of the Lovers of the Muses... founded at Athens in 1814, as an indefatigable collector of books and manuscripts. They knew him above all as an ever-generous patron of Greek letters, as benefactor to a host of Greek students in western universities, and as chancellor of the Ionian academy founded at Corfu in 1824, almost entirely through his efforts. This academy or university, as it could with some justice claim to be, served as a notable centre

---

<sup>668</sup> Not for the first time. Thus in 1601 Metropolitan Dionysius rebelled twice against the Turks, which led, not only to his own death, but to the deaths of many innocent Christians, including Hieromartyr Metropolitan Seraphim of Phanarion, who had taken no part in the rebellion.

<sup>669</sup> Evans, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

<sup>670</sup> However, there is a strong tradition in Greece that Byron was baptized into the Orthodox Church before he died.

<sup>671</sup> Ypsilantis' ideology had little to do with Orthodoxy. "Let us recollect, brave and generous Greeks, the liberty of the classic land of Greece; the battles of Marathon and Thermopylae, let us combat upon the tombs of our ancestors who, to leave us free, fought and died," Ypsilantis wrote in his declaration of 24 February 1821. 'The blood of our tyrants is dear to the shades of the Theban Epaminondas, and of the Athenian Thrasybulus who conquered and destroyed the thirty tyrants' - and so on." (Zamoyski, *Holy Madness*, p. 235).

of education to the whole Greek nation during the years of the rising against the Turks and in the period immediately following, when the Greeks possessed as yet no other institute of higher learning..."<sup>672</sup>

London financiers were also involved in the Greek war effort. Their reasons, of course, had nothing to do with sympathy for the suffering or with an enthusiasm for Classical Greece. Nevertheless, their contribution was vital. As Yuval Noah Harari writes, "They proposed to the rebel leaders the issue of tradable Greek Rebellion Bonds on the London stock exchange. The Greeks would promise to repay the bonds, plus interest, if and when they won their independence. Private investors bought bonds to make a profit, or out of sympathy for the Greek cause, or both. The value of Greek Rebellion Bonds rose and fell on the London stock exchange in tempo with military successes and failures on the battlefields of Hellas. The Turks gradually gained the upper hand. With a rebel defeat imminent, the bondholders faced the prospect of losing their trousers. The bondholders' interest was the national interest, so the British organized an international fleet that, in 1827, sank the main Ottoman flotilla at the Battle of Navarino. After centuries of subjugation, Greece was finally free. But freedom came with a huge debt that the new country had no way of repaying. The Greek economy was mortgaged to British creditors for decades to come..."<sup>673</sup>

\*

Before Navarino, however, the Greek cause had very nearly been lost. "The Ottomans," writes Evans, "dispatched a strong force of Egyptian troops supplied by the sultan's nominal vassal Muhammad Ali (1769-1849), who had agreed to put down the rebellion in return for the addition of Syria to his fiefdom. His troops soon began advancing up the Peloponnese, leaving a bloody trail behind them. Public pressure in western Europe mounted, but serious differences opened up between the Russians, who sought to exploit the weakness of the Ottomans for their own purposes, and the British, who distrusted Russian ambitions. Alexander I had initially shrunk from unilateral action since he knew this would undermine the Holy Alliance, which after all had largely been his own creation. But the continued deterioration of the situation made this policy difficult for his successor Nicholas I to continue without serious damage to Russian influence and prestige. Soon the tsar felt forced to act. A chance for him to intervene was supplied by serious internal disturbances within the Ottoman capital of Constantinople, resulting from military reforms introduced by Mahmud II, who was understandably concerned by the multiple threat now emerging towards his rule over south-eastern Europe.

---

<sup>672</sup> Kallistos Ware, "The Fifth Earl of Guilford (1766-1827) and his Secret Conversion to the Orthodox Church", in Derek Baker, *The Orthodox Churches and the West (Studies in Church History, vol. 13)*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1976, p. 254). North "adopted a Socratic purple robe and around his head wore a velvet band embroidered with olive leaves and the owl of Athens, and made the teachers wear similar garbs" (Zamoyski, *Holy Madness*, *op. cit.*, p. 234).

<sup>673</sup> Harari, *Sapiens. A Brief History of Humankind*, London: Vintage, 2011, pp. 365-366.

“The disturbances started with the Janissaries, created in the fourteenth century as an elite military corps of slaves recruited from young Christian boys but which had evolved into a largely hereditary body by the early modern period, becoming corrupt and undisciplined. In 1826 the sultan, recognizing that they had become largely useless for military purposes, ordered that the Janissaries be disbanded. In the past they had on more than one occasion deposed sultans who attempted reform, and in 1826 too, most of the 135,000 members of the corps refused to obey the command. But as well as the Janissaries, Mahmud II had been recruiting a modern army on European lines, consisting of free Turks, so that when the Janissaries began fighting their way to the sultan’s palace, they were quickly forced back into their barracks. The sultan’s new troops bombarded the barracks, killing at least 4,000 of the mutineers; the rest fled or were imprisoned. At least 1,000 of them were taken to Thessaloniki and beheaded in what became known as the ‘blood fort’. These disturbances provided the opportunity for the Russians in 1826 to impose on the sultan the Convention of Akkerman, which forced the Turks to evacuate the Romanian Principalities. In July 1827 the British, French and Russians managed to patch up their disagreements in the Treaty of London to work together for an armistice between the Greeks and the Ottomans without committing themselves to either side, and dispatched their fleets to the area. The commander of the joint fleet, the British Vice-Admiral Sir Edward Codrington (1770-1851), was less than impressed by the town of Nafplio (‘the filthiest town, with the worst streets and most wretched houses, I ever saw’), the capital of the provisional Greek government in the Peloponnese, and still less by the gunfire that echoed round the streets as the different Greek factions tried to pick each other off with small-arms fire. But when the sultan refused to accept the Treaty of London, Codrington, encouraged by the British consul in Istanbul, the philhellene Stratford Canning (1786-1880), ordered his ships in October 1827 to open fire on the Turkish fleet lying at anchor in the sheltered bay of Navarino in the south-western corner of the Peloponnese. There was nowhere for the Turkish ships to escape apart from a narrow channel leading to the waiting British fleet. In three and a half hours of relentless bombardment, the Turkish fleet was sunk and Ottoman naval power destroyed.

“Both Canning and Codrington had exceeded their brief. The Duke of Wellington, commander-in-chief of the British Army at the time, was furious and publicly disowned the action. It was not in the British national interest to weaken the Ottoman Empire, because this would simply open the door to an extension of Russian power in the area. His perception was correct, but he was unwise to give it public expression. The Ottoman Sultan saw Wellington’s statement as an encouragement to repudiate the Akkerman Convention and continue with his efforts to suppress the Greeks; the tsar responded by declaring war on the Ottoman Empire. Initially the campaign did not go well... but by August 1829 a Russian army was threatening Constantinople and the Ottoman Empire seemed on the verge of collapse. Paradoxically, this provided the stimulus needed to patch up the Concert of Europe that had become so badly unstuck over the Greek rebellion. It was in nobody’s interests at this stage

to replace the Ottoman Empire in Europe with a disorderly collection of weak and unstable states run by bandits and revolutionaries. A conference held in London between November 1829 and February 1830 decided to establish by European agreement a small independent Greek state under a constitutional monarchy, assigned the Romanian Principalities to Russia's sphere of influence, [guaranteed the passage of Russian ships through the Straits] and committed the participants, including Russia, to abandoning any further claims on Ottoman territory in the Balkans. The Greek revolt had posed the most serious threat to the Concert of Europe so far. In the end, the Concert had held together..."<sup>674</sup>

The question now was: who was to lead the newly independent state of Greece? The best candidate was the former Foreign Minister of Russia Capodistrias, who was elected as 'Governor' of Greece by a National Assembly in 1827. In an encyclical to the clergy he wrote: "Speak to the hearts of the people the law of God, rightly dividing the word of truth. Announce peace. Evangelize unanimity. Teach philanthropy, love for each other, that all may be one in Christ."<sup>675</sup>

"Returning to the capital at Nafplio in 1828, Capodistrias introduced a new currency and implemented educational reforms, as he had done on Corfu more than two decades earlier, setting up schools, establishing a university and using his medical knowledge to establish a quarantine system against infectious diseases such as the plague. Among other things, he also introduced the potato into Greece in an effort to improve people's diet. At first, this met with deep skepticism among the peasantry, who refused to take up his offer of free distribution of seed potatoes to anyone who would plant them. Trying a new tactic, Kapodistrias had the potatoes piled up on the waterfront at Nafplio and surrounded by armed guards. This convinced local people and visitors from the countryside that these new vegetables were precious objects, and thus worth stealing. Before long, as the guards turned a blind eye, virtually all the potatoes had been taken - and their future in Greece was assured. But Kapodistrias did not take such a subtle approach in his dealings with the warring factions whose internecine rivalries were proving such an obstacle to the creation of a stable Greek state.<sup>676</sup> His attempts to centralize military administration and recruitment, taxation and customs revenues, met with determined opposition from the fiercely independent leading families of the Mani peninsula, where an uprising was quelled with the aid of Russian troops. Further trouble was caused by the piratical merchant ship-owners of the islands of Hydra, Spetses and Psara, who captured the ineffectual Greek national fleet, but were themselves defeated by the French navy and scuttled their own ships rather than be incorporated into a new Greek navy under central government control.

---

<sup>674</sup> Evans, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-59.

<sup>675</sup> *Boanerges* (Esphigmenou monastery, Mount Athos) 24, March-April, 2006, p. 32.

<sup>676</sup> "He dismissed the primates as 'Christian Turks', the military chieftains as 'robbers', the intelligentsia as 'fools' and the Phanariots as 'children of Satan'" (Clogg, *op. cit.*, p. 46). (V.M.)

“The most dangerous opposition to Kapodistrias came from the Mavromichalis family, one of the turbulent and powerful clans based on the Mani peninsula. In an attempt to bring the clan to heel, Kapodistrias imprisoned its leading figure, Petrobey Mavromichalis (1785-1848), formerly governor of the peninsula under the Ottomans. Outraged at this insult to their honour, Petrobey’s two brothers decided to follow local tradition and assassinate Kapodistrias. They were waiting for him as he went to church on 9 October 1831. As Kapodistrias made to enter the building, one of the brothers shot him in the head, while the other stabbed him through the lungs...”<sup>677</sup>

Misha Glenny summarizes the rule of Kapodistrias thus: "Although [he] attempted to integrate the various factions into his system of authoritarian government, he underestimated the strength of particularism. All sides distinguished themselves by their appalling behavior. The Hydriots, who had excelled themselves during the war, mounted an insurrection in August 1831 so bitter that they preferred to scuttle their entire fleet, the only real source of independent Greek power, rather than see it come under central government control. By imprisoning Petrobey, the Maniot leader of the Mavromichalis family, Capodistrias sealed his own fate."

\*

The Free State of Greece has continued to this day, although its political and economic freedom is now heavily mortgaged to the European Union and the world’s bankers.

Fortunately, “the Great Idea” in its nationalist form has lost its power over the minds of most Greeks, especially after the last, catastrophic attempt made in 1922 to restore Greek control over Asia Minor and create a restored empire “washed by five seas”. Now should be the time to return to the truly great idea, that of *Orthodoxy*, for which the Great Church of Constantinople laboured so fruitfully in the time of its glory. Unfortunately, however, the Free Church of Greece has abandoned True Orthodoxy, adopting the new calendar and participating in the pan-heretical World Council of Churches, which is controlled by Freemasonry; and until it returns to Orthodoxy there can be no hope for the realization of the truly great idea of Orthodoxy and the restoration of Romanity.

---

<sup>677</sup> Evans, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-61