THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

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CHAPTER 9
The Twentieth Century, III:
Diaspora and Mission

Every foreign country is our motherland, and every motherland is foreign.

Epistle to Diognetus v.5

DIVERSITY IN UNITY

In the past Orthodoxy has appeared, from the cultural and geographical point of view, almost exclusively as an ‘eastern’ Church. Today this is no longer so. Outside the boundaries of the traditional Orthodox countries there now exists a large Orthodox ‘dispersion’, its chief centre in North America, but with branches in every part of the world. In numbers and influence Greeks and Russians predominate, but the diaspora is by no means limited to them alone: Serbs, Romanians, Arabs, Bulgarians, Albanians and others all have a place.

The origins of this Orthodox diaspora extend some way back. The first Greek church in London was opened as long ago as 1677, in the then fashionable district of Soho. It had a brief but troubled career, and was closed in 1682. Henry Compton, the Anglican Bishop of London, forbade the Greeks to have a single icon in the church and demanded that their clergy omit all prayers to the saints, disown the Council of Jerusalem (1672), and repudiate the doctrine of Transubstantiation. When the Patriarch of Constantinople protested against these conditions to the English Ambassador, Sir John Finch, the latter retorted that it was ‘illegal for any public church in England to express Romish beliefs, and that it was just as bad to have them professed in Greek as in Latin’! The next Orthodox place of worship founded in London, the Russian embassy


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chapel – opened around 1721 – enjoyed diplomatic immunity, and so it was no concern of the Anglican Bishop of London what went on inside it. During the eighteenth century this chapel was used by Greeks and by English converts as well as by Russians. In 1838 the Greeks were able to open a church of their own in London, without any irksome restrictions from the Anglican authorities.

There was an Orthodox presence in the North American continent from the middle of the eighteenth century. The Russian explorers Bering and Chirikov sighted the coast of Alaska on 15 July 1741, and five days later, on the feast of the Prophet Elijah, the first Orthodox Liturgy in America was celebrated in Sitka Bay on board the ship St Peter. A few years later, in 1768, a large group of Greeks arrived in Florida to establish the colony of New Smyrna, but the venture proved a disastrous failure. Yet, if the fact of an Orthodox diaspora is not itself new, it is only in the twentieth century that the diaspora has attained such dimensions as to make the presence of Orthodoxy a significant factor in the religious life of non-Orthodox countries. Even today, as a result of national and jurisdictional divisions, the influence of the diaspora is not nearly so great as it ought to be.

The most important single event in the story of the dispersion has been the Bolshevik Revolution, which drove into exile more than a million Russians, including the cultural and intellectual élite of the nation. Before 1914 the majority of the Orthodox immigrants, whether Greek or Slav, were poor and little educated – peasants and manual labourers looking for land or work. But the great wave of exiles after the Russian Revolution contained many people qualified to make contact with the west on a scholarly level, who could present Orthodoxy to the non-Orthodox world in a way that most earlier immigrants manifestly could not. The output of the post-1917 Russian emigration, particularly in its first years, was astonishing: in the two decades between the world wars, so it has been

calculated, its members published 10,000 books and 200 journals, not counting literary and scientific reviews. Today the second and third generations of Greeks in the west, especially in the USA, are also coming to play a prominent part in the political, academic and professional life of their adopted countries.

On the religious side, the Orthodox emigration has come to be organized on strongly national lines. In the nineteenth and the early twentieth century, the first initiative usually came not from above but from below – from the laity rather than the hierarchy. A group of immigrants would join together and invite a priest from their old country, and so a parish would be formed. Often it was only much later that any bishop became directly involved in this arrangement. For the first generation, the local parish church was their chief link with the mother country; it was the place where they could hear their native language spoken, the ark and guardian of their national customs. Thus, for fully understandable reasons, Orthodoxy in the west possessed from the start a markedly ethnic character.

Now nationhood is certainly a gift from God. Alexander Solzhenitsyn was right to say, in his 1970 Nobel Prize speech, ‘Nations are the wealth of mankind, its collective personalities; the very least of them wears its own special colours and bears within itself a special facet of divine intention.’ Unfortunately, however, in the religious life of the diaspora, national loyalties, in themselves legitimate, have been allowed to prevail at the expense of Orthodox Catholicity, and this has led to a grievous fragmentation of ecclesial structures. Instead of a single diocese in each place, under one bishop, almost everywhere in the west there has grown up a multiplicity of parallel jurisdictions, with several Orthodox bishops side by side in every major city. Whatever the historical causes of this, it is certainly contrary to the Orthodox understanding of the Church; the Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios, visiting the USA in 1990, was right to speak of the ethnic divisions in American Orthodoxy as ‘truly a

scandal’. Today many of us would like to see, in each western country, a single local Church embracing all the Orthodox in a unified organization; individual parishes could retain their ethnic character, if they so desired, but all would acknowledge the same local hierarch, and all the hierarchs in each country would sit together in a single synod. Regrettably this is as yet no more than a distant hope. Ethnic divisions are proving hard to transcend.

In addition to these ethnic divisions, there have also been internal splits within many of the national groups; and spiritually these have had a far more harmful effect on the life of Orthodoxy in the west than the ethnic divisions have done. Since 1922, apart from certain local tensions, the Greek emigration has been ecclesiastically more or less united under the Ecumenical Patriarchate. But the Orthodox peoples who fled from Communism became divided in almost every instance into warring factions, with one group maintaining its links with the Mother Church and another group setting up an independent ‘Church in Exile’. Despite the collapse of Communism in the late 1980s, most of these schisms remain still unhealed.

The story of the Russian diaspora is particularly complex and tragic. There are four main jurisdictions:

1. The Moscow Patriarchate, comprising those parishes in the emigration which have chosen to maintain direct links with the Church authorities inside Russia (?30,000–40,000 members, in all parts of the west).

2. The Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR); also known as ‘The Russian Orthodox Church in Exile’, ‘The Russian Orthodox Church Abroad’, ‘The Synodal Church’, ‘The Karlovtsy Synod’ (perhaps 150,000 members). Present head: Metropolitan Vitaly (elected 1986).

3. The Russian Orthodox Archdiocese in Western Europe, under the Ecumenical Patriarchate; also known as the ‘Paris Jurisdiction’ (perhaps 50,000 members). Present head: Archbishop George (elected 1981).

4. The Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church of America,
also known as ‘The Metropolia’. In 1970 this became ‘The Orthodox Church in America’ (OCA, total membership: 1,000,000). Present head: Metropolitan Theodosius (elected 1977).

How did these divisions arise? On 20 November 1920 the Patriarch of Moscow, St Tikhon, issued a decree authorizing bishops of the Russian Church to set up independent organizations of their own on a temporary basis, should it become impossible to maintain normal relations with the Patriarchate. After the collapse of the White Armies, the Russian bishops in exile decided to carry into effect the terms of this decree, even though it is questionable whether Tikhon intended it to apply outside the borders of Russia. A first meeting was held in Constantinople in 1920; and then in 1921, with the support of Patriarch Dimitrie of Serbia, a further council was convened at Sremski-Karlovci (Karlovtsi) in Yugoslavia. A temporary administration for the Russian Orthodox in exile was set up, under a synod of bishops that was to meet annually at Karlovtsi. The first head of the Karlovtsi Synod (ROCOR) was Antony (Khrapovitsky) (1863–1936), formerly Metropolitan of Kiev, one of the most daring and original theologians in the Russian hierarchy at this time. Among other decisions, the Karlovtsi council of 1921 passed a motion – against the wishes of many participants – calling for the restoration of the Romanov dynasty in Russia.

The vehemently anti-Communist attitude of the Karlovtsi bishops placed Patriarch Tikhon in a delicate situation. In 1922 he ordered the Synod to be dissolved, but the bishops reconstituted it in what was virtually the same form. The Karlovtsi bishops totally rejected the 1927 declaration by Metropolitan Sergius, the Patriarchal locum tenens, while on his side Sergius stated in 1928 that all the acts of the Karlovtsi Synod were null and void. After the Second World War the Synod moved its headquarters to Munich, and since 1949 its centre has been in New York. In 1990 ROCOR extended its work to the former Soviet Union, consecrating two bishops there and establishing parishes in Moscow, St Petersburg and elsewhere;

the branch of ROCOR within Russia is known as the ‘Free Russian Orthodox Church’. Naturally this step has led to further tension between ROCOR and the Moscow Patriarchate.

From the early 1960s, ROCOR has become increasingly isolated, although still maintaining links with the Serbian Church. This state of separation has been largely by ROCOR’s own choice: its leaders feel strongly that the other Orthodox Churches have compromised the true faith through their participation in the Ecumenical Movement. Whatever the reasons, the isolation of ROCOR is certainly much to be regretted. It has preserved with loving faithfulness the ascetic, monastic and liturgical traditions of Orthodox Russia, and this traditional spirituality is something of which western Orthodoxy stands greatly in need.

Initially, all the Russian bishops in exile tried to work with the Karlovtsi Synod, but from 1926 onwards divisions occurred which led to the establishment of the third and fourth among the four groups mentioned above. The Paris jurisdiction owed its origin to the Russian bishop in Paris, Metropolitan Evlogy (1864–1946), whom Patriarch Tikhon had appointed as his Exarch in western Europe. Evlogy broke with the Karlovtsi Synod in 1926–7; then in 1930 he was disowned by the Patriarchal locum tenens, Sergius, because he had taken part in a service of prayer in Westminster Abbey, London, on behalf of persecuted Christians in the Soviet Union. In 1931 Evlogy appealed to the Ecumenical Patriarch Photius II, who received him and his parishes under the jurisdiction of Constantinople. Evlogy returned to the jurisdiction of Moscow in 1945, shortly before his death, but the great majority of his flock chose to remain under Constantinople. Despite difficulties during 1965–71, the Russian Archdiocese in Paris has continued until now within the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical throne.

Finally there is the fourth group, the North American Metropolia. After the revolution, the Russians in America stood in a slightly different position from the Russian émigrés elsewhere, since here alone among the countries outside Russia there were regularly constituted Russian dioceses before 1917, with resident bishops. Metropolitan Platon of New York
(1866–1934), like Evlogy, separated from the Karlovtzy Synod after 1926; he had already severed contact in 1924 with the Moscow Patriarchate, so that from 1926 onwards the Russians in the USA formed de facto an autonomous group. During 1935–46 the Metropolia maintained links with the Karlovtsy Synod, but at the Synod of Cleveland in 1946 a majority of the delegates voted to return to the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate on condition that Moscow allowed them to retain their ‘complete autonomy as it exists at present’. At that time the Patriarchate was unable to consent to this. In 1970, however, the Church of Russia granted the Metropolia not just autonomy but autocephaly. This ‘Autocephalous Orthodox Church in America’ (OCA) has been formally recognized by the Churches of Bulgaria, Georgia, Poland and Czechoslovakia, but not as yet by Constantinople or any other Orthodox Church. The Ecumenical Patriarchate takes the view that it alone, acting in consultation with the other Orthodox Churches, has the right to establish an autocephalous Church in America. But, despite this unresolved dispute, the OCA continues in full communion with the rest of the Orthodox Churches.

WESTERN ORTHODOXY

Without attempting to be exhaustive, let us briefly survey the Orthodox scene in western Europe, North America and (more briefly) Australia. In western Europe, the chief intellectual and spiritual centre is Paris. Here the celebrated theological Institute of St Sergius (under the Paris jurisdiction of Russians), founded in 1925, has acted as an important point of encounter between Orthodox and non-Orthodox. Particularly during the inter-war period, the Institute numbered among its professors an extraordinarily brilliant group of scholars. Those formerly on the staff of St Sergius include Archpriest Sergius Bulgakov (1871–1944), the first rector; Bishop Cassian (1892–1965), his successor; Anton Kartashev (1875–1960); George P. Fedotov (1886–1951); and Paul Evdokimov (1901–70). Among its professors at present are Constantin Andronikoff, Fr Boris Bobrinskoy, and the French Orthodox writer Olivier Clément.

HISTORY

Diaspora and Mission

Three members of St Sergius, Fathers Georges Florovsky, Alexander Schmemann (1921–83) and John Meyendorff (1926–92), moved to America, where they played a decisive role in the development of American Orthodoxy. A list of books and articles published by teachers at the Institute between 1925 and 1947 runs to ninety-two pages, and includes seventy full-scale books—a remarkable achievement, rivaled by the staffs of few theological academies (however large) in any Church. St Sergius is also noted for its choir, which has done much to revive the use of the ancient ecclesiastical chants of Russia. Almost entirely Russian between the two wars, the Institute now attracts students of many other nationalities, and the teaching is given mainly in French. There are at present more than fifty full-time students, and about 400 others who are following correspondence courses.

The Moscow Patriarchate has also made a distinguished contribution to Orthodox life in western Europe. Among its theologians have been Vladimir Lossky (1903–58), Archbishop Basil (Krivocheine) of Brussels (1900–85), and Archbishop Alexis (van der Mensbrugge) (1890–1980) (originally a Roman Catholic). Nicholas Lossky, the son of Vladimir, is an expert on the seventeenth-century theologian Lancelot Andrewes, in whose thinking he has discerned striking Orthodox affinities.1 Leonid Ouspensky (1902–87) was widely influential both as an iconographer and as a writer on the theology of the icon, while the monk-iconographer Gregory Kroug (1909–69) has shown through his work how a loyalty to iconographic tradition can be combined with a wide measure of artistic creativity.2 In Great Britain the head of the Moscow Patriarchal diocese, Metropolitan Anthony (Bloom) of Sourouzh, is much respected as a teacher on prayer. His diocese has taken the lead in Britain in using the English language at services, and at its annual Effingham conference there is an unusually close collaboration between clergy and laity.

Western Orthodoxy has so far produced few composers of religious music, but there is at least one notable exception, the British convert John Tavener. Well known initially for his secular music, he now confines himself exclusively to religious themes, experimenting creatively with the traditional eight tones of Byzantine hymnography and with ancient Russian chant, which he transposes into an idiom that is timeless yet contemporary. Summing up his approach to his work, he has observed, ‘I would say that the dictum for all sacred Christian art must be as St Paul expressed it in another context: “It is not I who live, but Christ in me”.’

Orthodoxy in Great Britain is particularly blessed by the presence of a growing monastic community, with both monks and nuns, at Tolleshunt Knights, Essex (Ecumenical Patriarchate), founded by Archimandrite Sophrony, disciple of St Silouan of Athos. Here a central place is given to the Jesus Prayer. The monastery is widely visited by pilgrims, especially Greek Cypriots, who comprise the great majority of Orthodox in Britain. In France there are two well-established monasteries for women, at Provence, Normandy (ROCOR), and at Bussy-en-Othe, Yonne (Ecumenical Patriarchate). Archimandrite Placide (Deseille) (a former Roman Catholic) has founded two communities, one for women and one for men, at St Laurent-en-Royans; these depend on the Athoite house of Simonos Petras.

A highly distinctive Orthodox figure in western Europe was the Frenchman Archimandrite Lev (Gillet) (1893–1980), the ‘Monk of the Eastern Church’, to use the name under which most of his books were published. At first a Catholic priest of the Eastern rite, he was received into Orthodoxy in 1928, and in later life served in London as chaplain to the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius. He has expressed, better than most, the paradox of the Orthodox Church in the twentieth century:

O strange Orthodox Church, so poor and so weak, at the same time so traditional and yet so free, so archaic and yet so alive, so ritualistic and yet so personally mystical, Church where the pearl of great price of the Gospel is precisely preserved, sometimes beneath a layer of dust – Church that has so often proved incapable of action, yet which knows, as does no other, how to sing the joy of Easter.1

In North America (the USA and Canada) there are between two and three million Orthodox, with over forty bishops and around 2,250 parishes subdivided into at least fifteen different jurisdictions. The Russians, as we have seen, were the first Orthodox arrivals on the American continent. In 1794 an eclesiastical mission was established in Alaska – part of the Russian Empire until 1867 – by a group of monks from the Russian monastery of Valamo on Lake Ladoga. One of its members, St Herman (died 1836), the hermit of Spruce Island, came to be especially loved by the native people. Missionary work in Alaska was placed for the first time on a firm basis by St Innocent (Veniaminov), who worked in Alaska from 1824 until 1853, first as priest and then as bishop. He took a close and sympathetic interest in the native customs and beliefs, and his writings in this field remain a primary source for modern ethnography. Following the tradition of St Cyril and St Methodius, he was quick to translate the Gospels and the Liturgy into Aleutian. He sought to build up a native priesthood, opening a seminary at Sitka in 1845. A man of great physical strength, an indefatigable traveller, he undertook year-long missionary journeys of extreme hardship to the more remote islands, often travelling through heavy seas in a frail native boat, ‘with not a single plank to save you from death – just skins’, as he put it.

Meanwhile, as the nineteenth century proceeded, large numbers of Orthodox immigrants – Greek, Slav, Romanian, Arab – began to settle on the eastern seaboard of America and to move gradually westwards. In 1891 and the years following, many Eastern-rite Catholics, led by Fr Alexis Tóth (1854–1909), joined the Russian Orthodox archdiocese, chiefly because the Roman Catholic hierarchy refused to allow them to retain married priests. Under St Tikhon, the future Patriarch of Moscow, who was in North America for nine years (1898–1907),

Russian archdiocese began to assume an increasingly multinational character, and in 1904 a Syrian, Raphael (Hawaweeny), was consecrated as one of his assistant bishops, to minister to the Arab Orthodox. Tikhon encouraged the use of English in services and promoted the publication of English translations, in particular the well-known Service Book prepared by I. F. Hapgood.

Up to the end of the First World War, the Russian archdiocese was the only organized Orthodox presence in North America, and most Orthodox parishes, whatever their ethnic character, looked to the Russian archbishop and his suffragans for pastoral care. Although this arrangement was never formally accepted by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Church of Greece, canonical and organizational unity existed de facto. But after the 1917 revolution a time of grave confusion ensued. The Russians became divided into conflicting groups, although the majority remained within the Metropolia. 1 A separate Greek Orthodox archdiocese was set up in 1922, and in due course the other national groups followed suit by establishing dioceses of their own. So there arose the present multiplicity of 'jurisdictions', a situation as bewildering to the American Orthodox themselves as it is to outside observers.

The largest Orthodox group in North America today is the Greek Archdiocese, with around 475 parishes. Crippled by internal schisms in the 1920s, it was reorganized and unified by Athenagoras, Archbishop during 1931-48 and later Ecumenical Patriarch. Archbishop Iakovos, the present head (appointed 1959), has done more than any other single person to make Orthodoxy known and respected by the American public at large. Next in size after the Greek Archdiocese is the OCA, the former Russian Metropolia, now multi-national in character, with English as the main liturgical language and with many convert clergy. The third largest body is the Antiochian Archdiocese (within the Patriarchate of Antioch), under the dynamic leadership of Metropolitan Philip. In 1986 he received into Orthodoxy a group of former Protestants, the 'Evangelical Orthodox Church', headed by Peter Gillquist. In Canada, the most numerous Orthodox community is that of the Ukrainians: canonically isolated for many years, in 1991 they were received into the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

The Orthodox in America have ten theological schools, of which the most significant are St Vladimir's, at Crestwood, outside New York (OCA), and Holy Cross, at Brookline, Boston (Greek Archdiocese). Both are responsible for substantial theological journals: St Vladimir's issues St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly, while Holy Cross produces The Greek Orthodox Theological Review. Orthodox theologians at work in North America today include Archbishop Peter (I'Huillier) (OCA), Fr Thomas Hopko, Fr John Breck and John Erickson (St Vladimir's), Fr Joseph Allen (Antiochian Archdiocese), Bishop Maximos of Pittsburgh (Greek Archdiocese), and Fr Stanley Harakas (Holy Cross). Monastic life has found North America a stony and harsh terrain, and in many jurisdictions the monastic life is very weak. It is strongest in ROCOR, where the leading monastery is Holy Trinity, Jordanville. A number of smaller monasteries are growing up in the OCA, but there is as yet little monastic presence in the Greek Archdiocese. If St Theodore of Stoudios was right to say, 'Monks are the sinews and foundations of the Church', the American Orthodox scene leaves room for some disquiet!

The Orthodox emigration in Australia is of more recent date than the North American diaspora, and most Australian Orthodox parishes have been founded since the Second World War. The Greek Archdiocese is the largest body, with over 121 parishes and a recently opened theological college in Sydney. There are also many Russian parishes (belonging mainly to ROCOR) and a significant Arab presence (under the Patriarchate of Antioch).

Two basic problems confront the Orthodox diaspora. There is, first of all, the transition from a first generation of Orthodox immigrants to a second generation of Orthodox born and

1. See above, pp. 177-8.

brought up in the west. The first generation of immigrants, even if not always active in practising their faith, will in most cases retain until death the sense that they are Orthodox Christians. But what of the second generation? Will they remain faithful to their Orthodox inheritance, or will they grow indifferent and become assimilated to the secular western society around them? In North America, where a high proportion of the immigrants arrived before the First World War, most Orthodox groups have already passed through this crucial cultural transition from the first generation to the second; the losses have been immense, yet Orthodoxy has survived. But in western Europe and Australia the bulk of the immigrants arrived only after the Second World War, and the transition is by no means complete.

In effecting the transition, it is vitally important that all Orthodox groups should draw their future clergy from young Orthodox born and trained in the west, rather than importing priests 'ready-made' from the mother country. It is still more important that the local language – English, French, German and so on – should be widely used in liturgical worship. Otherwise the young people will drift away, alienated by a Church that seems more concerned with maintaining the culture and language of the 'old country' than with preaching the Christian faith. Unfortunately the Orthodox authorities in the west, anxious to preserve their national heritage, have usually been slow to introduce the local vernacular into their church services. In North America, English, although now widely employed in the OCA and the Antiochian Archdiocese, is still little used in many Greek parishes, and in Britain most of the Greek parishes at present use virtually no English at all.

The second obvious problem facing the diaspora is its fragmentation into separate jurisdictions. However understandable this may be from the historical point of view, it is doing grievous harm both to the pastoral work of the Orthodox Church among its own members in the west, and also to the witness of western Orthodoxy before the outside world. With increasing frustration, both laity and clergy are asking: When shall we be visibly one? How can we testify more effectively to the universality of Orthodoxy? A small beginning has been made through the establishment of episcopal committees in most western countries (although not yet in Great Britain). In the American continent, for example, the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA) was founded in 1960, but so far it has failed to contribute as positively to Orthodoxy unity as was originally hoped. At the local level, throughout the USA there are active Orthodox Christian Fellowships, involving both clergy and laity, which seek to build up friendship and co-operation across jurisdictional boundaries. Similar work is being done in France by the Fraternité Orthodoxe, and in Britain by the Orthodox Fellowship of St John the Baptist. The potential contribution of such grassroots organizations is very great; for Orthodoxy unity in the west, when eventually realized, will probably come not so much from above, through the decisions of pan-Orthodox conferences, as from below, through the mutual love and the holy impatience of the people of God.

There is one further aspect of western Orthodoxy which calls for special mention: the existence, albeit limited and tentative, of an Orthodoxy of the Western rite (equivalent to Eastern-rite Catholicism, but in reverse). In the first millennium of Christian history, before the schism between west and east, the west used its own Liturgies, different from the Byzantine rite, yet fully Orthodox. People often talk about 'the Orthodox Liturgy', when what in fact they mean is the Byzantine Liturgy. But we should not speak as if that alone were Orthodox, for the ancient Roman, Gallican, Celtic and Mozarabic Liturgies, dating back to the pre-schism era, also have their place in the fullness of Orthodoxy. Western-rite Orthodox parishes exist both in the USA, within the Antiochian Archdiocese (with a membership of about 10,000), and in France, where there is a very active group known as the Catholic-Orthodox Church of France. The origins of this last extend back to 1937, when a former Roman Catholic priest, Louis-Charles Winnaert (1880–1937), who had received episcopal consecration in the Liberal Catholic Church, was received at Paris with his followers into the Moscow
Patriarchate.¹ By special decision of the Patriarchal locum tenens, Metropolitan Sergius, they were allowed to continue using the Western rite. Winnaert's successor, Fr Evgraph Kovalovsky (1905–70) – consecrated in 1964 as Bishop Jean de St-Denys – devised a Liturgy based on the ancient Gallican rite, but incorporating many Byzantine elements. The Catholic-Orthodox Church of France, which is now somewhat isolated from the other Orthodox jurisdictions in France, has been accused of links with Theosophy; but the charge is vigorously denied by its present leader, Bishop Germain.

A small minority in an alien environment, the Orthodox of the diaspora have often found it a hard struggle simply to survive. But some of them, at any rate, realize that besides mere survival they have a greater challenge to meet. If they really believe Orthodoxy to be the true Catholic faith, then they should not cut themselves off from the non-Orthodox majority around them, but as a duty and privilege they should share their Orthodoxy with others. It is surely not by chance that God has allowed Orthodoxy to be scattered throughout the west in the twentieth century. This dispersal, so far from being fortuitous and tragic, constitutes on the contrary our kairos, our moment of opportunity. But if we are to respond as we should to this kairos, we Orthodox need both to understand and to listen: to understand more profoundly our own Orthodox inheritance, and to listen more humbly to what is being said by our western contemporaries, both religious and secular.

It is not only in the diaspora that Orthodoxy suffers from a lack of reciprocal contacts. For a long time all the different Patriarchates and autocephalous Churches, often through no fault of their own, have been far too isolated from one another. At times the only formal contact has been the regular exchange of letters between the heads of the Churches. Today this isolation still continues, but there is a growing desire for much closer co-operation. Orthodox participation in the World

Council of Churches has played its part here: at the great gatherings of the World Council of Churches, the Orthodox delegates have often found themselves ill-prepared to speak with a united voice. Why, they have asked, does it require the World Council to bring us Orthodox together? Why do we ourselves never meet to discuss our common problems? The urgent need for pan-Orthodox co-operation has been felt particularly by youth movements, and here valuable work has been done by Syndesmos, the international youth organization founded in 1953.

In the attempts at co-operation a leading part is naturally played by the senior hierarch of the Orthodox Church, the Ecumenical Patriarch. After the First World War the Patriarchate of Constantinople contemplated gathering a ‘Great Council’ of the whole Orthodox Church, and as a first step towards this, plans were made for a ‘Pro-Synod’ which was to prepare the agenda for the council. A preliminary Inter-Orthodox Committee met on Mount Athos in 1930, but the Pro-Synod itself never materialized, largely owing to obstruction by the Turkish government. Around 1950 the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras revived the idea, and after repeated postponements a ‘Pan-Orthodox Conference’ eventually met at Rhodes in September 1961. There were further Rhodes conferences in 1963 and 1964, and since then inter-Orthodox conferences and committees have been meeting regularly in Geneva. The chief items on the agenda of the ‘Great and Holy Council’, when and if it eventually meets, will probably be the problems of Orthodox disunity in the diaspora, the relations of Orthodoxy with other Christian Churches (ecumenism), and the application of Orthodox moral teaching in the modern world.

MISSIONS

Orthodoxy has often been criticized for failing to be a missionary Church, and there is truth in the charge. Yet if we reflect on the conversion of the Slavs by Cyril and Methodius and their disciples, it has to be acknowledged that Byzantium can claim missionary achievements in no way inferior to those of

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¹ When Winnaert was received, it was specified that he should officiate only as a priest; the validity of his episcopal consecration by the Liberal Catholics was deemed doubtful.
Celtic or Roman Christianity during the same period. The Greeks and Arabs under Turkish rule were, of course, precluded from doing any missionary work, but the Russian Church in the nineteenth century maintained a wide range of missions among the many non-Christian nationalities within the Russian Empire. By 1900 the Liturgy was being celebrated within Russia not only in Slavonic but in at least twenty different native languages. The whole of this missionary programme was suppressed under Communism, but it is now being resumed on a limited scale.

Russian missions before 1917 extended also outside Russia, not only to Alaska (of which we have already spoken), but also to China, Japan and Korea. One of the concerns of the Russian missionaries, wherever they went, was to establish a native clergy as soon as possible. The origins of the Chinese mission extend back to the late seventeenth century, although systematic work did not develop until the late nineteenth century. About 400 Chinese Orthodox suffered martyrdom in the Boxer Rebellion (1901). In 1937, when the Chinese Orthodox Church became autonomous, there were two Chinese bishops, with perhaps 20,000 faithful, but repression by the ‘Red Guards’ in 1966 drove Chinese Orthodoxy almost entirely underground. Today the Liturgy is celebrated in several places by elderly Chinese priests, but there are no surviving bishops and few remaining faithful.

The Japanese Orthodox Church was founded by St Nicolas (Kassatkin) (1836–1912), one of the greatest missionaries of modern times in any Christian community. Sent to Hakodate in 1861 as chaplain to the Russian consulate, he decided from the start to devote himself to preaching the Christian faith among the Japanese, even though at that time missionary work was strictly forbidden by the Japanese laws. He baptized his first converts in 1868, and the first Japanese clergy were ordained in 1875. When he died in 1912, there were 266 congregations, with a membership of 33,017, served by thirty-five Japanese priests and twenty-two deacons. Losses were suffered in the inter-war period, but today there are about 25,000 faithful, with one bishop and about forty priests. The present head, Metropolitan Theodosius (elected 1972), was originally a Buddhist; in common with all his clergy he is Japanese. The Church of Japan is autonomous, under the spiritual care of its mother Church, the Church of Russia.

The Korean mission, founded by Russian clergy in 1898, almost came to an end in the 1950s, but it has revived in the last ten years under the leadership of a Greek priest, Archimandrite Sotirios (Trambas). There are now five parishes, a seminary and a monastery. In the 1980s, under the auspices of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, missionary work was also started in Indonesia, the Philippines, Hong Kong and South Bengal (India).

Besides these Orthodox missions in Asia, there is also an exceedingly lively African Orthodox Church in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Indigenous from the start, African Orthodoxy did not arise through the preaching of missionaries from the traditional Orthodox lands, but was a spontaneous movement among Africans themselves. The founders of the African Orthodox movement were two native Ugandans, Rauben Sebanja Mukasa Spartas (born 1899, bishop 1972, died 1982) and his friend Obadia Kabanda Basajakitalo. Originally brought up as Anglicans, they were converted to Orthodoxy in the 1920s, not as a result of personal contact with other Orthodox, but through their own reading and study. At first the canonical position of Ugandan Orthodoxy was in some doubt, as originally Rauben and Obadia established contact with an organization emanating from the USA, the ‘African Orthodox Church’, which, though using the title ‘Orthodox’, has in fact no connection with the true and historical Orthodox communion. In 1932 they were both ordained by a certain Archbishop Alexander of this Church, but towards the end of that same year they became aware of the questionable status of the ‘African Orthodox Church’, whereupon they severed all relations with it and approached the Patriarchate of Alexandria. But only in 1946, when Rauben visited Alexandria in person, did the Patriarch formally recognize the African Orthodox community in Uganda, and definitely take it under his care.

Rauben and Obadia preached their new-found faith with great enthusiasm to their fellow Africans, and the movement
expanded rapidly. One reason was that the Orthodox mission, while condemning polygamy, was in practice less strict than the European missions in its treatment of those who had already contracted polygamous marriages. Political factors were also involved: before Kenya gained its independence in 1959, the Kenyan Orthodox were closely linked with African liberation movements such as Mau Mau. One of the obvious attractions of Orthodox Christianity in African eyes was its freedom from colonial links. Following independence, much of the support for the Orthodox mission fell away. But more recently African Orthodoxy has become better organized and has begun once more to grow. Some observers reckon the number of Orthodox in Kenya at between 70,000 and 250,000, and in Uganda at 30,000; but Greek Orthodox sources often quote a much lower figure of around 40,000 native Orthodox in the whole of East Africa. At present there is an African bishop in Kampala (Uganda), Theodore Nakyamas, a graduate of Athens University. In 1992 there were nineteen native clergy in Uganda, sixty-one in Kenya, and seven in Tanzania. The Orthodox theological school at Nairobi, founded in 1982, has about fifty students.

The spontaneous growth of African Orthodoxy has had a significant effect on the Greek Orthodox both in Greece itself and in North America, making them much more directly aware of the missionary dimension of the Church. The visits of Rauben Sparta to Greece in 1959 and of Theodore Nakyamas to the USA in 1965 proved widely influential, with many parishes and, more especially, youth groups pledging themselves to prayer and financial help. It could be argued that the African Orthodox have in this way given to Greek Orthodoxy more than they have received.

Every Christian body is today confronted by grave problems, but the Orthodox have perhaps greater difficulties to face than most. In contemporary Orthodoxy it is not always easy 'to recognize victory beneath the outward appearance of failure, to
discern the power of God fulfilling itself in weakness, the true Church within the historic reality'. But if there are obvious weaknesses, there are also many signs of life. Whatever the compromises of Church leaders under Communist rule, Orthodoxy also produced countless martyrs and confessors. In the highly unstable situation following the demise of Communism, there are reasons not only for unease but for great hope. The decline of Orthodox monasticism has been dramatically reversed on the Holy Mountain, and Athos will perhaps prove the source of a wider monastic resurrection. The spiritual treasures of Orthodoxy — for example, the Philokalia and the Jesus Prayer — so far from being forgotten, are used and appreciated more and more. Orthodox theologians are few in number, but some of them, often under the stimulus of western contacts, are rediscovering forgotten yet vital elements in their theological inheritance. A short-sighted nationalism is hindering the Church in its work, but there are sporadic attempts at cooperation. Missions are still on a very small scale, but Orthodoxy is showing a growing awareness of their importance. We Orthodox, if we are realistic and honest, can scarcely feel complacent or triumphalist about the present state of our Church. Yet, despite its many problems and manifest human shortcomings, Orthodoxy can at the same time look to the future with confidence and sober optimism.


1. V. Lossky, The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church, p. 246.