

Saturday and not on any other day, or, out of obstinacy and self-opinion, celebrates such services and offers *κόλλυβα* on Sunday, reinforcing those who have, from time to time, fallen into this error, or openly states that Christians should Commune every forty days, neither more nor less, such a person, no matter what his station in life, or rank, or age, should be aware that if his conduct becomes known to the Church, he will be subject to her righteous indignation and chastisement and will experience such things as he has never imagined even in his wildest dreams.⁵⁹

The example of the great *Κόλλυβάδες* Fathers, whose zeal was tempered by love—leaders among them included Saint Makarios of Corinth and Saint Nikodemos the Hagiorite, the compilers of the *Φιλοκαλία* (*Philokalía*), and Saint Athanasios of Paros—, remains an inspiring model for contemporary traditionalists seeking to cure the ills plaguing the Church in our own age of innovation and apostasy.

The Synod of Constantinople of 1872

When the Ottoman Empire conquered Constantinople in 1453, it introduced the *millet* (“nation,” “religious community”) system of government in the territories of the former Eastern Roman Empire. Under this system, non-Muslim minorities (largely Christians and Jews) were grouped together by faith as distinct political entities with limited autonomy (but second-class citizenship). An ethnarch, or *millet başı* (“head of the nation”), was appointed for each of these religious communities by the Turkish authorities, and this leader was responsible for overseeing his *millet* on behalf of the state. In the case of Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire, this task was deputed to the Patriarch of Constantinople, who became the head of *Rum milleti*, “the Roman nation,” an indiscriminate congregation of all Orthodox peoples—Wallachians, Serbs, Greeks, Bulgarians, Arabs,

⁵⁹ *Collectio Conciliorum Recentiorum Ecclesiae Universae*, ed. Jean-Baptiste Martin and Louis Petit, Vol. IV (Paris: Expensis Huberti Welter, 1909), col. 82.

Albanians, etc. The Patriarch of Constantinople came to enjoy an administrative ascendancy over the Patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, as a result of which, in the harsh words of the Roman Catholic scholar Father Adrian Fortescue (1874–1923),

most of these Greek patriarchs did not even take the trouble to reside in their titular city. Mere servants of the oecumenical bishop..., they were content to fritter away their lives in Constantinople, useless ornaments of the Phanar.⁶⁰

The corruption of the Hierarchy at its highest levels was one of “two melancholy effects”⁶¹ that, in the assessment of Metropolitan Kallistos, the *millet* system inflicted upon the Church, the other one being

a sad confusion between Orthodoxy and nationalism. With their civil and political life organized completely around the Church, it became all but impossible for the Greeks to distinguish between Church and nation. The Orthodox faith, being universal, is limited to no single people, culture, or language; but to the Greeks of the Turkish Empire “Hellenism” and Orthodoxy became inextricably intertwined, far more so than they had ever been in the Byzantine Empire.⁶²

Describing this phenomenon at work in the Jerusalem Patriarchate, Father Theodore Pulcini, in words that are equally applicable to the Œcumenical Patriarchate, states:

After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, and the concomitant demise of the empire..., the “Romans” of the Patriarchate thought of themselves more and more as “Greeks,” in contradistinction to

⁶⁰ Adrian Fortescue, “Jerusalem,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. VIII (New York, NY: Robert Appleton Co., 1910).

⁶¹ Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 89.

⁶² *Ibid.* Metropolitan Kallistos’s astute observation, here, puts the lie to allegations that the Roman Empire was guilty of cæsaropapism—sometimes pejoratively termed “Byzantinism”—for, in fact, it was a Muslim state, not a Christian one, that made the Œcumenical Patriarchate an instrument of temporal power.

the...native ecclesiastical populace. Thus the cultural-linguistic distinction of earlier centuries was transmogrified into a racial-ethnic (or national) one. The Byzantine/"Roman" emphasis in the Patriarchate became a Hellenic one.⁶³

These historical factors set the stage for the confrontation that, rightly or wrongly, has come to be known as "The Bulgarian Schism," a complex sociopolitical drama involving not only Greeks and Bulgarians, but also Turks and Russians. The Bulgarians had been converted to Orthodoxy by Saints Cyril and Methodios the Equals-to-the-Apostles, who, under the patronage of Saint Photios the Great, developed the Glagolitic alphabet (which evolved into the modern Cyrillic alphabet, named in honor of Saint Cyril) in order to evangelize Slavic peoples in their vernacular tongues. From its establishment in the ninth century, however, the autonomy of the Bulgarian Church was on-again-off-again, and, as Father Meyendorff notes,

The question of independence was long a sore point in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, for the Bulgarians were governed by Greek bishops who, especially in the towns, sought to suppress the Slavonic liturgy and generally Hellenize the Church.⁶⁴

Tensions only escalated as the intractability of the problem revealed itself:

Several of the ecumenical patriarchs tried to satisfy the legitimate claims of the Bulgarians in the course of the nineteenth century, but they always failed because of the hopeless way in which the two populations were mixed up with each other in the Balkan area. In Constantinople itself they lived side by side, but the Bulgarians, inspired by nationalist feelings, demanded the establishment of a

⁶³ Theodore Pulcini, "Tensions Between the Hierarchy and Laity of the Jerusalem Patriarchate: Historical Perspectives on the Present Situation," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, Vol. xxxvi, No. 3 (1992), p. 279.

⁶⁴ John Meyendorff, *The Orthodox Church: Its Past and Its Role in the World Today*, 4th ed., rev. Nicholas Lossky (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), p. 152.

genuine national church without any precise territorial limits and with jurisdiction over all their compatriots, in default of which they wished to have equality between Greeks and Bulgarians in the administration of the ecumenical patriarchate.⁶⁵

The volatility of this ecclesiastical disagreement was then exacerbated by having political intrigue thrown into the mix:

Other pressures mounted, forcing the issue of an autocephalous church in Bulgaria. After the defeat of Russia in the Crimean War, union was proposed with Rome through French aid. ...Russia, eager to exert a leading influence in Bulgaria, felt that it should encourage a national church rather than one connected with Rome. ...In 1870 the Turks wished to divorce Bulgaria from Russian influence and complied with the Bulgarian wishes for an independent church.⁶⁶

Thus it was that in 1870, with the connivance of the Ottoman authorities, the Bulgarian Exarchate, an independent ecclesiastical entity, with segregated Bulgarian parishes under a Bulgarian Hierarchy—Metropolitan Hilarion of Trnovo was originally offered this position, but, when he declined, Exarch Anthimos of Bulgaria was eventually appointed instead—, was established and legitimated legally by a *firman* (“decree”) of Sultan Abdülaziz Oglu Mahmud II. In response, Patriarch Anthimos VI of Constantinople convened a Synod in 1872, which was attended by Patriarch Sophronios IV of Alexandria, Patriarch Hierotheos of Antioch, and Patriarch Cyril II of Jerusalem, along with other Hierarchs, to consider the situation of the Bulgarian Exarchate. The Synod excommunicated the Bulgarians and condemned them for a heresy it termed “phyletism,” (from “φυλή” [*phylé*] or “φῦλον” [*phylou*]), “clan,” “tribe,” “race”), the false principle that ecclesiastical jurisdictions and congregations should correspond to the ethnic divisions among the Faithful in a given territory, each ethnic group having its own Hierarchy and parishes:

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 152–153.

⁶⁶ Maloney, *A History of Orthodox Theology Since 1453*, p. 235.

In compunction of soul, and invoking the Grace from on high that comes down from the Father of Lights (St. James 1:17), setting in our midst the Gospel of Christ, “in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3), and comparing phyletism both to the teaching of the Gospel and to the age-old polity of the Church of God, we have discovered that it is not only alien, but also diametrically opposed to them, and we perceive that the transgressions that have occurred in the formation of their [the Bulgarians’] phyletistic conventicle [*παρασυναγωγή* (*parasynagōgḗ*)], when enumerated one by one, are manifestly exposed by the corpus of the Sacred Canons.

Wherefore, together with our Holy and God-bearing Fathers “embracing with gladness the Divine Canons, holding fast all the decrees of the same without alteration, whether they have been set forth by the holy trumpets of the Spirit, the all-laudable Apostles, or by the Holy Seven Œcumenical Synods,⁶⁷ or by Synods locally assembled for the promulgation of such decrees, or by our Holy Fathers, for all of these, being illumined by the same Spirit, decreed such things as were expedient” (Canon 1 of the Seventh Œcumenical Synod), moved by the Holy Spirit:

We denounce, censure, and condemn phyletism, to wit, racial discrimination and nationalistic disputes, rivalries, and dissensions in the Church of Christ, as antithetical to the teaching of the Gospel and the Sacred Canons of our Blessed Fathers, “who uphold the Holy Church and, ordering the entire Christian commonwealth, guide it to Divine piety.”⁶⁸

This decree faithfully expresses the catholic transcendence of the Orthodox Church, “where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor

⁶⁷ In the original text of this Canon, it is actually “the Holy Six Œcumenical Synods” that are mentioned. The Synod of 1872 altered the number to seven in order to reflect more accurately the historical reality of the Seven Œcumenical Synods.

⁶⁸ *Τὰ Δογματικά καὶ Συμβολικά Μνημεῖα τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας*, Vol. II, pp. 1014–1015.

free: but Christ is all, and in all,"⁶⁹ where, again, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."⁷⁰ However, as Father Meyendorff candidly points out, "Actually, the Bulgarians were not the only ones guilty of phyletism. The wrongs were also shared by the other side, as the history of the schism shows."⁷¹ The *millet* system had indulged "the chauvinism of the Greeks,"⁷² so that "[i]f during the five centuries that Bulgaria was maintained in ignorance by the Turks and the Phanariots no theology was produced, the reasons are understandable."⁷³ Thus, while upholding the correct ideal, the Greeks, in many ways, failed to practice what they preached.

This is perhaps best illustrated by the case of Patriarch Cyril II of Jerusalem. Urbane and dignified, Patriarch Cyril broke with his immediate predecessors by taking up permanent residence, not in Constantinople, but in Jerusalem, where he struggled actively to minister to the needs of his predominantly Arab flock. Scandalously neglected by their own Patriarchate, the Orthodox Arabs of the Holy Land were being aggressively proselytized by Papist and Protestant missionaries, who lured them away from Orthodoxy by establishing Arabic-speaking social institutions. Patriarch Cyril sought to counteract this devastating trend by implementing a number of essential educational, philanthropic, and administrative reforms. His efforts were made financially possible by the substantial influx of revenue brought about by a tremendous increase in pilgrimages to the Holy Land during the nineteenth century, with Russian pilgrims in particular visiting the Holy Land in droves; cultivating good relations with the Russian Church and state was thus a top priority for Patriarch Cyril. While understandably popular among the Arab Faithful, Patriarch Cyril's

⁶⁹ Colossians 3:11.

⁷⁰ Galatians 3:28.

⁷¹ Meyendorff, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 153.

⁷² Maloney, *A History of Orthodox Theology Since 1453*, p. 230.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

reforms met with stiff opposition from his own Greek Hierarchy. Thus, at the Synod of 1872, Patriarch Cyril II defied expectations by refusing to subscribe to its decisions, for he realized that they would work against the interests of his own Patriarchate (1) by reinforcing the subordinate and dependent relationship of Jerusalem to Constantinople, which relationship was contrary to ancient historical precedent, (2) by stymieing the full incorporation of the Arab Faithful in the ecclesiastical life of the Jerusalem Patriarchate (the upper echelons of that Church remain, effectively, an exclusive Greek club to this day), and (3) by offending the sensibilities of the Russian Faithful, who, empathizing with their fellow Slavs, sided with the Bulgarians. For his defiance of the Œcumenical Patriarchate, Patriarch Cyril found himself deposed that same year and replaced by a more compliant successor.

Above and beyond the issue of phyletism, the deposition of Patriarch Cyril II of Jerusalem illustrates another ecclesiastical ill fostered by the *millet* system, *viz.*, the notion that within the Orthodox Church the Œcumenical Patriarch is some kind of "Pope of the East," a contemporary *idée fixe* rightly criticized as "Neo-Papism." The Patriarchs of Constantinople, who have long held the honorific status within the Orthodox Hierarchy as *primus inter pares*, "first among equals," have found it exceedingly difficult to let go of the Papalistic privileges their rôle as *millet başı* afforded them. As Metropolitan Kallistos observes:

...[I]n the nineteenth century, as Turkish power declined, the frontiers of the Patriarchate contracted. The nations which gained freedom from the Turks found it impracticable to remain subject ecclesiastically to a Patriarch resident in the Turkish capital and closely involved in the Turkish political system. The Patriarch resisted as long as he could, but in each case he bowed eventually to the inevitable. A series of national Churches were carved out of the Patriarchate: the Church of Greece (organized in 1833, recognized by the Patriarch of Constantinople in 1850); the Church of Romania (organized in 1864, recognized in 1885); the Church of Bulgaria (re-established in 1871, not recognized by Constantinople until 1945);

the Church of Serbia (restored and recognized in 1879). The diminution of the Patriarchate has continued..., chiefly as a result of war, and its membership in the Balkans is now but a tiny fraction of what it once was in the palmy days of Ottoman suzerainty.⁷⁴

Although even today the Œcumenical Patriarch nurses Papal pretensions to possessing “spiritual authority over the world’s 300 million Orthodox Christians,”⁷⁵ a recent decision by a Turkish court, which “reject[ed] any Vatican-like status for the Patriarch,”⁷⁶ forced him to face the reality that “he is the religious head of the [local] Greek community of around 3,000.”⁷⁷ While the court’s decision was obviously politically motivated—Turkey routinely seeks to contain and to contravene the international influence of the Patriarchate whenever possible—, its conclusion is nonetheless painfully true.

Although the Slavic Churches never acknowledged it as such, the Bulgarian Schism only formally ended in 1945, when the Constantinopolitan Patriarchate granted autocephalous status to the Bulgarian Exarchate. It must be noted that there is some misunderstanding today regarding phyletism, some observers incorrectly assuming that the Synod of 1872 condemned the idea of patriotism, that is, love of one’s country or people. It did not. Thus, the activities of the two most influential figures in the awakening of modern Bulgarian national consciousness—Saint Paisios of Hilandar, who sought to engender in his people “the spirit of patriotism and healthy national pride..., a love for the Bulgarian language and nation,”⁷⁸ and Saint Sophronios of Vratsa, who “taught in the Bulgarian language and insisted on the necessity of opening national schools in which the Bulgarian language

⁷⁴ Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 91.

⁷⁵ “Status of Patriarch Rejected,” *The Sentinel*, Vol. XII, No. 8 (August 2007), p. 1.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Maloney, *A History of Orthodox Theology Since 1453*, p. 230.

and culture could be taught”⁷⁹—cannot be described as phyletistic. Rather, phyletism is the intrusion of chauvinism, even jingoism, in the administration or spiritual life of the Church within a given locale, when nationalistic pride trumps catholic humility and the Faithful, inappropriately, divide into ethnic ecclesiastical cliques. The contemporary situation of Orthodoxy in Western Europe and the Americas, where there exists a multitude of separate Orthodox Churches, each organized according to ethnic origin, and where numerous separate ethnically-defined Hierarchies overlap one another in their territorial jurisdictions, is precisely what the Fathers of the Synod of Constantinople of 1872 had in mind in their deliberations and precisely what they condemned.

Finally, we must note that the term “Greek Orthodoxy” is frequently used in a broad sense, and this general usage should never be misconstrued as an instance of phyletism. “Greek Orthodoxy” is a blanket term applicable to all ethnic manifestations of our Faith. As Father Georges Florovsky reminds us, Greek is the *Ursprache* of Christianity, and the Patristic categories of “Christian Hellenism” are *absolutely indispensable* to Orthodoxy:

...Greek is the language of the New Testament. Everything in early Christianity is Greek. We are all Greeks in our thinking as Christians. This is not meant in a narrow nationalistic sense, but as part of our common spiritual and intellectual background.⁸⁰

Thus, in order to avoid the pitfalls of phyletism, it is always necessary for us, regardless of the jurisdiction to which we belong, to strike the proper balance between our common Hellenic patrimony as Orthodox and our unique ethnic identities, an ideal to which Archbishop Chrysostomos eloquently gives voice:

A recent article...recounts moves by a group in New York to create an American Orthodox Church which will “transcend the

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 232–233.

⁸⁰ “Discussion: Concerning the Paper of Father Meyendorff,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, Vol. x, No. 2 (Winter 1964–1965), p. 33.

boundaries” of “Greek” Orthodoxy: a universal “church” holding to Orthodox beliefs but free from traditional Greek traits.

I am not an advocate of philetism. And while I personally prefer Byzantine music and the Divine Liturgy in Greek, I insist that my non-Greek-speaking flock hear services—especially the instructive passages from the *Menaion* in Vespers and Orthros—in their own language. Many services have been translated into English and set to simple Slavic chant (which has some Byzantine roots). I find nothing offensive about this. After all, the Orthodox spirit has accommodated many cultures that have, even in deviating from the pristine standard of Byzantine music and liturgics, produced great and wondrous Saints. It is philetism and sheer stupidity to deny these things and to limit the Church.

Nonetheless, Orthodoxy is Greek. It is the Hellenic world which gave us the medium in which the great Icon of Orthodoxy is painted. Russian Orthodox are Greek first—by virtue of participating in the universality of Christian Hellenism—, Russian second. The same is true of the Serbs, the Romanians, the Bulgarians, and so on. Our catholicity as Orthodox is rooted in the true belief and Apostolic Faith preached, preserved, and perpetuated largely in the Greek language and in the transformed Hellenistic philosophy that gave theological expression to our Faith. If pagan Hellenism was Baptized by the Greek Fathers and made Christian, all Orthodox in some manner—whether Russian, Greek, American, or even Swedish—participate in that Baptism when they embrace and confess the Orthodox Church!

If there is no “Greek” in our Orthodoxy, then there is no historical validity to our Orthodoxy. That self-evident truth alone exposes this inane anti-Hellenism for the blasphemy that it is.⁸¹

⁸¹ Bishop Chrysostomos of Etna, “Greek Orthodoxy Without ‘Greek?’” *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. VII, No. 2 (1990), p. 14.