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SOBORNOST': DREAM OR REALITY?

ANDREW LOUTH¹

Abstract. This essay explores the concept of *sobornost'* as a cornerstone of Orthodox ecclesiology, tracing its origins, theological implications, and philosophical underpinnings. Coined in the context of 19th-century Slavophile thought, *sobornost'*—often translated as “catholicity”—balances unity and freedom, offering a mystical vision of the Church as the Body of Christ. The paper examines the term’s adoption into Western theology, its early articulations by thinkers like Khomiakov, and its prominence in ecumenical dialogue, particularly through the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius. However, the ideal of *sobornost'*, emphasizing love and mutual prayer, is juxtaposed against the modern struggles of the Orthodox Church, highlighting tensions between spiritual ideals and political realities. The discussion concludes by questioning the contemporary relevance of *sobornost'* amid ecclesiastical and geopolitical challenges.

Keywords: Sobornost', Orthodox ecclesiology, Slavophile thought, Church unity, Mystical theology

From the mid-nineteenth century and thereafter, the word *sobornost'* (соборность) has come to characterize Orthodox ecclesiology, first in a Russian context, and then more widely. This is especially true of the English-speaking world (or perhaps more accurately the British Isles), where the word *sobornost* has been adopted as the title of the journal of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius, founded to promote deeper understanding between Russian Christians expelled from Russia by the Bolshevik Revolution and Western Christians. The origins of the term *sobornost'*, more or less adopted in English as ‘sobornost’, lie in the word used in the Slavonic translation of the Nicene Creed (that is, the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, associated with the Second Ecumenical Council held in Constantinople in 381) to render one of the notes

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of the Church, viz., καθολικός, ‘catholic’. It follows that, in English, a natural equivalent to *sobornost*’ would be ‘catholicity’. Why Slavonic did not follow the practice of most Western languages by simply transliterating the Greek, we shall never know, for the origins of the use of соборную in the Creed are lost in the mists of early Slavonic Christianity. It could be that соборную was simply derived from собор, ‘council’ or ‘synod’, and intended, again, to oppose an ‘Orthodox’—synodical or conciliar—understanding of the note of the Church to the Western understanding of ‘catholic’, increasingly associated in the second Christian millennium with the Church as a Papal Monarchy, indicating its universal aspirations.

It is possible, however, the use of соборную was an attempt to render into Slavonic what the word καθολικός *meant* in Greek, rather than simply transliterating it. In other words, the word соборную was an attempt to reach back into the etymology of the Greek word: derived from καθ’ ὅλου, more usually contracted to καθόλου, it means universal, literally ‘taking as a whole’, in contrast to καθ’ ἕκαστον or κατὰ μέρος, ‘taken individually’ or ‘partially’. So соборный is derived etymologically from the verb собирать/собрать, to collect or to gather together.

‘Sobornost’ entered Western philosophical vocabulary through the thought of the Slavophiles, especially Ivan Kireevsky and Aleksei Khomiakov. Robert Bird, in his introduction to *On Spiritual Unity: a Slavophile Reader*, states that ‘[t]he Slavophiles’ thought is all about sobornost and integral knowledge; these concepts stand, both at the beginning and the end of their writings, at the source and delta of their intellectual journey’.² Of these two words or concepts, Bird had remarked a few lines earlier that ‘[t]hese terms retain a certain fragility characteristic of attempts to express the inexpressible’.³ Neither term, as Bird suggests, is capable of exact definition, which is both maddening for tidy minds and yet allows a broad range of connotation, that can be an advantage in itself: discussion is not foreclosed by a clear lexical definition. The thought of both Kireevsky and Khomiakov concerned the nature of human society, which included the nature of the Church, but it seems the case that their thought had theological ramifications, rather than theological roots: they were concerned with general philosophical issues, in this case the nature of human society and the relationship between individual and community, resisting what they saw as a damaging individualism that characterized the transition from

2 Robert BIRD, *On Spiritual Unity: a Slavophile Reader—Aleksei Khomiakov, Ivan Kireevsky*, trans. and ed. Boris Jakim and Robert Bird, Hudson NY: Lindisfarne Books, 1998, 8.

3 R. BIRD, *On Spiritual Unity*

a largely agricultural society, based on traditional communities with organic structures in which the different groups of people lived in mutual dependence on one another, to an increasingly industrialized society with workers providing the necessary labour for factories, funded by capital which reaped the profits of such enterprise for a relatively small group of owners and investors. The Slavophiles shared this analysis of the transition with thinkers in other countries, whom one might call, following Andrzej Walicki,⁴ 'conservative romantics', which would include people such as Coleridge in England and Tocqueville in France. As with these thinkers, the Slavophiles looked back—with rosy spectacles and a good deal of nostalgia—to a past with its villages, churches, and local magnates, an existence that revolved round the cycles of nature, reflected in the liturgical cycles of the Orthodox Church Year.

Khomiakov introduced the Slavophile concept of *sobornost'* into his understanding of the Church, even though its roots lay in a broader understanding of the nature of human society. Difficult to define, it lends itself to negative characterization: what it is not. *Sobornost'* is therefore used to characterize the Church, that is, the Orthodox Church, against Catholicism on the one hand and Protestantism on the other: against Catholicism which achieves unity at the expense of freedom, and against Protestantism which sacrifices unity to freedom. *Sobornost'*, it is maintained, holds together unity and freedom in the organic unity of a community in which its members find their meaning and their freedom. It is an attractive ideal, but does not give much of a clue as to how it is to be achieved or maintained.

The short treatise, written by Khomiakov for his English friend William Palmer, *The Church is One*, is his principal explanation and justification of what he meant by *sobornost'*—Walicki calls it his 'only consistent attempt to systematize his views'.⁵

The unity of the Church is established by Khomiakov in a primarily metaphysical way: *The Church is One* begins:

The Church is one. Her unity follows of necessity from the unity of God; for the Church is not a multitude of persons in their separate individuality, but a unity of the grace of God, living in a multitude of rational creatures, submitting themselves willingly to grace.⁶

4 See his two works, Andrzej WALICKI, *The Slavophile Controversy and A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, 1980).

5 Walicki, *Slavophile Controversy*, 188.

6 Aleksei Stepanovici KHOMIAKOV, *The Church is One*, trans. William Palmer, modified, ed. with an introductory essay by Nicolas Zernov, London: The Fellowship of St Alban

Khomiakov further affirms:

The Church visible, or upon earth, lives in complete communion and unity with the whole body of the Church, of which Christ is the Head. She has abiding within her Christ and the grace of the Holy Spirit in all their living fulness, but not in the fulness of their manifestation, for she acts and knows not fully, but only so far as it pleases God.⁷

Khomiakov's presentation of the Church is mostly in abstract or universal terms:

The Church is called One, Holy, Catholic (that is, *соборную*), and Apostolic; because she is one, and holy; because she belongs to the whole world, and not to any particular locality; because by her all mankind and all the earth, and not any particular nation or country, are sanctified; because her very essence consists in the agreement and unity of the spirit and life of all the members who acknowledge her, throughout the world; lastly, because in the writings and doctrine of the Apostles is contained all the fulness of her faith, her hope, and her love.⁸

Khomiakov then turns to the Holy Spirit:

The Spirit of God, who lives in the Church, ruling her and making her wise, manifests Himself within her in divers manners; in Scripture, in Tradition, and in Works.⁹

which leads into an exposition of the relation of Scripture and Tradition; an account of the Nicene Creed, which is quoted in full and provokes a discussion of the Latin addition of the *Filioque* clause. The whole stress of his account of the Church and its activities lies in the heavenly... and the inward; the antecedents of *sobornost'* in the local village seem left far behind. This externality extends to the sacraments; participation in them seems curiously formal. 'External unity is the unity manifested in the communion of the Sacraments; while internal unity is unity of spirit'. The source of *sobornost'* is, clearly, the Holy Spirit, the means by which the Holy Spirit achieves this *sobornost'* remain external realities, otherwise left shrouded in unclarity, save that He works inwardly (and spiritually).

Towards the end Khomiakov seems to change into a different gear:

We know that when any one of us falls, he falls alone; but no one is saved alone. He who is saved is saved in the Church, as a member of her, and in unity

and St Sergius, 1986, 18.

7 A. S. ΚΗΟΜΙΑΚΟΒ, *The Church is One*, 19.

8 A. S. ΚΗΟΜΙΑΚΟΒ, *The Church is One*, 21.

9 A. S. ΚΗΟΜΙΑΚΟΒ, *The Church is One*, 22.

with all her other members. If anyone believes, he is in the communion of faith; if anyone loves, he is in the communion of love; if he prays, he is in the communion of prayer. Wherefore no one can rest his hope on his own prayers, and everyone who prays asks the whole Church for intercession, not as if he had any doubts of the intercession of Christ, the one Advocate, but in the assurance that the whole Church ever prays for all her members. All the angels pray for us, the apostles, martyrs, and patriarchs, and above all, the Mother of our Lord, and this holy unity is the true life of the Church.¹⁰

This sense of prayer as constituting the sinews of the unity of the Church, which hold the Church lightly (or tightly?) in a bond of unity, yields a more vivid sense of unity as constituted by mutual prayer—prayer in Christ through the Holy Spirit. This leads to a much warmer way of speaking of the Eucharist, the Divine Liturgy. Hitherto, the sacraments seemed, as we have seen, somewhat external, and contrasted with the inward, but now Khomiakov says,

we pray in the spirit of love, knowing that no one will be saved otherwise than by the prayer of the Church... The Saints whom God has glorified are much higher than we, but higher than all is the Holy Church, which comprises within herself all the Saints, and prays for all, as may be seen in the divinely inspired Liturgy.¹¹

As he continues he says that '[m]utual prayer is the blood of the Church, and the glorification of God her breath... True prayer is true love...'¹² And further on claims that

The Church accepts every rite which expresses spiritual aspiration towards God... but she recognizes as higher than all rites the holy Liturgy, in which is expressed all the fulness of the doctrine and spirit of the Church; and this not only by conventional signs or symbols of some kind, but by the word of life and truth inspired from above. He alone knows the Church who knows the Liturgy. But above all is the unity of holiness and love.¹³

We see that what Khomiakov means by *sobornost'*, as applied to the Church, is deeper than conciliarity, that is, a unity established by councils, as opposed to a unity secured by communion with the Bishop of Rome, the Pope. It is more than a transition into the realm of ecclesiology of ideas about traditional Russian society,

10 A. S. Khomiakov, *The Church is One*, 38–9.

11 A. S. Khomiakov, *The Church is One*, 40.

12 A. S. Khomiakov, *The Church is One*, 41,

13 A. S. Khomiakov, *The Church is One*, 42–3.

as exemplified in the *mir*, often idealized in such peasant sayings as ‘Doing anything in common is good, even dying’.¹⁴ Nor is it exactly a philosophical or metaphysical notion, even though N. O. Lossky (Vladimir Lossky’s father) professed to find in Khomiakov and his ideas about *sobornost’* ‘the germ of the metaphysical system that has subsequently been worked out in detail in Russian philosophy’.¹⁵

This sense of something imponderable, even ‘mystical’, about *sobornost’* recurs in early attempts by Russians to explain in an ecumenical context the meaning of the term in the context of the foundation of the originally Anglican-Russian Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius.

Already in the *Journal of the Fellowship the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius*, as it was known before it adopted the title *Sobornost’*,¹⁶ there was reflection on the concept. There were articles in issue 7 (December 1929) by N. Arseniev, ‘The Organic Nature of the Church’, and in issue 12 (June 1931) by Sergii Bulgakov on ‘I believe in One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church’. N. Arseniev, something of an apostle for the ideal of Holy Russia, ended his days in exile as a professor at St Vladimir’s Orthodox Seminary in New York. His article could be regarded as a sketch for a working out in more detail of the ‘germ of the metaphysical system’, desiderated by N. O. Lossky in the citation above. Arseniev begins by asserting that ‘The Church as a great organism, not merely an external institution, but the great body – the mystical Body of Christ, the great stream of the life of grace which shall embrace everyone and everything’, and he continues, quoting Khomiakov: ‘It is recognized mystical-wise: “The believer”, says the great Russian theologian Khomiakov, “knows the truth; he who does not believe does not know it; he knows it only with an outward and imperfect knowledge”’.¹⁷ ‘There is no external authority... such a conception is inappropriate here. “Authority” is too small, too external for this mystical reality’: and Arseniev continues to speak of the ‘innermost foundation of our life’, ‘our higher life’, ‘the life of grace within us, which has seized us, flows through us, by which we are led, so long as we have not

14 A proverb quoted by Donald NICHOLL, *Triumphs of the Spirit in Russia*, London: DLT, 1997, 195.

15 Nikolay Onufriyevich LOSSKY, *History of Russian Philosophy* (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1951), 33.

16 *Journal of the Fellowship the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius* [= JFSASS] 1 (1928) – 26 (1934), after which it changed its name to *Соборность/Sobornost’*, and eventually to *Sobornost*.

17 JFASS 7 (Dec. 1929), 34.

severed ourselves from the whole'. This Arseniev supports by another quotation of 'eloquent words of mystical power' from Khomiakov—a series of passages that sound as if they come from 'The Church is One', though I cannot identify them precisely. Arseniev is working with a series of polarities: organism/institution, inward/outward, small/powerful, life/structures, mystical/(presumably: rational), love/conformity—the former characterizing the true Church, the latter a deformed simulacrum. All this is summed up in:

It is a mystical doctrine of the Church of soul-stirring grandeur; wherein the principles of freedom and of the great fellowship are most intimately united in the free fellowship of love (*sobornost*); when each surrenders himself to the whole, nay, more, each prays for the others.¹⁸

Arseniev goes on to claim that it is 'entirely wrong' to think that the Church requires 'enforced unity' or 'enforced obedience': the Church abhors both and instead calls for 'freedom of love'. Nevertheless, the Church is 'no invisible quantity, no formless and lifeless abstraction'; it has to be comprehended 'in her *mystical nature* in her *mystical depth*'. A page or so later he states 'expressly once more': 'it is not something subjective, transient, but something *endlessly objective*, this life of the Spirit in us'.¹⁹ It worth noting, however, that Arseniev links the notion of *sobornost'* with the Eucharist: "The objective divinity of the Spirit, the Grace of God, and the moral freedom of man are here united in one organic reciprocity. The heart of the Church's life is the Eucharist. "Only he understands the Church who understands the Eucharist".

This certainly illustrates the way in which, as a concept, *sobornost'* retains 'a certain fragility characteristic of attempts to express the inexpressible', as Bird put it above. However, seen like that, the power of the concept can be felt, even if it proves difficult to capture its meaning more precisely.

The other article in the *Journal* can be dealt with more briefly, as Bulgakov's concept of *sobornost'* is fundamentally congruent with Arseniev's. Bulgakov's address covers all the notes of the Church—one, holy, catholic, and apostolic—but the individual treatment of each is prefaced by a general reflection of the nature of the Church as visible and invisible: the visible manifesting the invisible, and the invisible made known through the visible—or in Bulgakov's own words: 'the nature of the Church is symbolic—the inward and the outward being grafted into

18 *JFASS* 7 (Dec. 1929), 35.

19 *JFASS* 7 (Dec. 1929), 36.

a single reality'.²⁰ Bulgakov's treatment of the note of catholicity or *sobornost'* is marked by a good deal of digression.

In the first issue of *Sobornost'* /*Соборность*, there was, unsurprisingly, an article on *sobornost'*, by V. Ilyin (*sic*; Ilyin was Professor of Church Music at the Russian Musical Academy in Paris).²¹ This brief article (only three pages) is coherent with what we have found already: *sobornost'* stands for a 'whole complex of meanings', conveying 'the fundamental characteristics of the structure of the Church of Christ', while simultaneously expressing 'the actual spiritual atmosphere in which members of the Church exist— viz., the spiritual oxygen... which they inhale and through which they are united'.²² It is a reflection of the united life in common of the persons of the Trinity, so that the Trinity itself can be called 'a Heavenly Church, a Heavenly Sobor'.²³ It proceeds from the heavenly prayer of Jesus Christ to the Father (cf. John 17) and is fulfilled in the song of a communion in love between 'the Creator and his Mystical Bride Creation as represented by the members of the Church' (Ilyin 1935, 7).²⁴

Even in these early attempts to explain to the English West what is meant by *sobornost'*, we find a positive delight in celebrating its 'mystical' character, without any comment on how this ideal was to be achieved, save for a 'mystical' evocation of prayer as constituting the sinews of the Church and lightly binding its members, members of the Body of Christ, into unity. Perhaps that was all right then, in the period 'between the wars', when on virtually all fronts Orthodoxy was weak. The position of the Ecumenical Patriarch was weak after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, in which he had a clearly defined (though constricted) role, and its replacement by Turkey, a secular state then, which recognized the Ecumenical Patriarch as no more than the Orthodox bishop in Istanbul. In Russia the Orthodox Church, even with its newly restored Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus', faced liquidation by an avowedly atheist state. Now both patriarchates are flexing their muscles, the Patriarch of Moscow finding power in giving religious depth to the ideology of a Greater Russia, while the Ecumenical Patriarch seeks a political dimension to ancient canons designed to find some role for the bishop of the newly founded imperial city—the Queen City. One of the results of these

20 *JFASS* 12 (June 1931), 17

21 *Sobornost'* /*Соборность* 1: 1 (March, 1935), 5–7.

22 *Sobornost'* /*Соборность* 1: 1 (March, 1935), 5.

23 *Sobornost'* /*Соборность* 1: 1 (March, 1935), 6.

24 *Sobornost'* /*Соборность* 1: 1 (March, 1935), 7.

bids for political power has been to lay bare a rift within Orthodoxy, sealed by excommunication of the Ecumenical Patriarch and those that support him by the Patriarch of Moscow in 2018. The rift has ceased to be a matter of words exchanged in anger between patriarchs and has opened up an ugly chasm within Orthodoxy manifest in a war waged by two sides each claiming to be Orthodox, and invoking God's blessing as they kill one another. It looks as if the *sobornost'* that seemed such an attractive dimension of Orthodoxy, its unity depending on mutual love rising from the freedom of its members, is dissolving like wax before fire in a struggle for political, palpable, power. In this context, what relevance has the ideal of the Church represented by the notion of *sobornost'*? It seems too vague a notion, too weak in the context of a struggle for power. Perhaps we should call the mind the words of Christ to his Apostle, Paul: 'My grace is enough for you, for strength is made perfect in weakness' (2 Cor. 12: 9).

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GLOBAL ORTHODOXY: DESPERATE NEED FOR SELF-CRITIQUE

CYRIL HOVORUN¹

Abstract. New concerns about Orthodoxy grow within and without it. Many no longer have a romantic outlook on Orthodoxy of the sort that flourished in the second half of the 20th century but see it as intrinsically susceptible to weaponisation. To correct this outlook, the Orthodox need to start a thorough self-evaluation through ecclesiology and political theology. The paper explores the ecclesiological and theopolitical preconditions that have led to the support of dictatorships in the past, as well as the modern wars waged between the Orthodox peoples. It also suggests ways out of the ongoing crises of the Orthodox identity and theology based on the Church's emancipation from imperial and authoritarian phantoms, as well as on observing the demarcation lines between the church and the state. Shifting from the "ecclesiology from above" to the "ecclesiology from below" could help the Orthodox church overcome the crises.

Keywords: Symphonia; Ideology; Fascism; Dictatorship; War

Crises in the Orthodox Identity and Theology

History demonstrates that crises help the churches develop. We are in the middle of a major crisis. A previous crisis of such magnitude occurred about a hundred years ago, with the collapse of the empires where Orthodoxy was present predominantly, namely the Ottoman, Russian, and Austro-Hungarian. This caused not only an exodus of Orthodox masses from the fallen empires to the West but also a transformation of their identities and theological ideas. The latter included the famous neo-Patristic synthesis, which was more about identities and ideological standpoints than Patristics; synodality and eucharist, which we now believe to be deeply embedded within Orthodoxy as its ostensibly unalienable identity; and

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personalism, which became perceived as a distinct feature of Eastern Christianity that differentiates it, so many of us believe, from the Western Christianity.

More recent events put all these ideas and identities to test. The Holy and Great Council, which was envisioned as early as the 1920s as a celebration of synodality, when eventually happened, disillusioned many and urged them to ask the question: does synodality really exist in Orthodoxy beyond declarations? The local Orthodox churches that decided not to come to Crete in 2016, unwillingly undermined the tenet held for a century that the quintessence of Orthodoxy is conciliar. They demonstrated that conciliarity cannot translate from theological textbooks to the Church's *praxis*, at least now. The pandemic of COVID-19, which sparked in early 2020 and lasted about two years, forced many to rethink the Eucharistic essence of the Church.² Indeed, the Eucharistic ecclesiology states that the Eucharist makes the Church.³ However, what happens to the Church when the Eucharist cannot be celebrated and shared? Does she cease to exist? If she does not, what holds her together? The Russian war against Ukraine provoked the question of whether there is such a thing as the togetherness of Global Orthodoxy. One Orthodox nation wages a genocidal elimination of another Orthodox nation, and the local Orthodox churches pretend this does not happen. The protagonists and supporters of the war, especially in the Russian Orthodox Church, did not read the fascist theologians of the interwar period. Their favourite books are Fr Georges Florovsky's, Vladimir Lossky's and other personalists'. They started their intellectual journey by fervently affirming the prevalence of human hypostasis over essence. They are ending it by searching in cold blood for theological justifications for the brutal destruction of both human hypostases and essence in Bucha and Mariupol.

The Russian war against Ukraine is like the coronavirus: we may ignore it, but it does not ignore us. It can leave some ecclesial bodies suffocating and eventually breathless, as this has happened to the Russian Orthodox Church. Some other ecclesial bodies can survive it but would experience the so-called "long COVID"—discomfort and the loss of some capacities for years, if not decades. Like with the virus, ignoring the war does not help us to deal with it. On the contrary, the more we ignore it, the more damaging it is to us. To minimise the damage, we need to start by asking two basic questions: what is the Church, and how do we relate to her?

2 See Cyril HOVORUN, „Covid Theology,' or the 'Significant Storm' of the Coronavirus Pandemic", *State, Religion and Church* 8. 2 (2021), 20–33.

3 See Paul MCPARTLAN, *The Eucharist Makes the Church*, London: T&T Clark, 1996.

A hundred years ago, the answer that Orthodox theology gave to similar questions was that the Church is different from both an empire and, by extension, from any kind of coercive state power. She is something ontologically else. Among the most enlightened Orthodox Church members, there grew an understanding that the ecclesiastical body is closer to the social body of responsible citizens than to the state bureaucracy. Consequently, twentieth-century post-imperial ecclesiology radically shifted from top-down to bottom-up. That is, from so-called “ecclesiology from above” to “ecclesiology from below.”⁴

Ecclesiology of freedom against the ecclesiology of fear

Freedom is the main element that differentiates the latter from the former. In radical contrast to the ancient world, where religion was not an individual choice but imposed by authorities from above, Christ gave everyone the responsibility to choose how to relate to God: “To sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father” (Mt 20:23, English Standard Version (ESV)). From then on, one’s relationship with God has value as long as it remains his or her free choice. Which means that belonging to the Church requires both the potentiality and actuality of choice. People need to be allowed to choose and to actually have will to make it. I would venture to say that belonging to the Church is not a momentary status but must be chosen and continuously asserted. Only through perpetual choice and assertion does the congregation remain genuine and effective for salvation. Then a church with a small “c” becomes the Church with a capital “C”. Otherwise, the Church gets reduced to a sect. I believe that the key criterion that differentiates the Church from a sect is respect for the freedom and choices of each of its members. Such respect implies a great deal of risk, but it is a precondition sine qua non for the Church to remain both orthodox and catholic.

The riskiest aspect of the Church is synodality. Those who try to contain the risk of freedom in the Church, paralyse its conciliar functions. They confess synodality with their lips only, without using or practising it. The local churches that did not show up in Crete in 2016, were either consciously or unconsciously afraid to take the risk of the synodality. Although they declared that they wanted to protect the

4 See Gerard MANNION, *Comparative Ecclesiology: Critical Investigations*, London: T&T Clark, 2008.

Church from misguidance, in effect they were motivated by misguided perceptions about the Church, i.e., by fear and not by faith in the Church.

Ecclesiology that fears, avoids, or marginalises freedom causes local churches to succumb to fear, distrust, and even paranoia. In its extreme version, such ecclesiology provides an indirect justification for various abuses, including the most painful of them: war. Churches that fight against their members' freedom inspire their people's leaders to wage wars against other people. Fear-based ecclesiology looks for arguments to justify authoritarianism and totalitarianism of all kinds.

This ecclesiology imposes within the churches an ethos that is not much different from the ethos that cements empires. It prefers coercion to consent. However, the church's use of coercion—always for the best of the Church's interests—often ends up with the churches supporting wars. That is how we have come to the tragic situation in which the majority of Orthodox Christians today (I include here those in Russia who identify themselves with the Orthodox Church and those Orthodox outside Russia who sympathise with what the leadership of that country is trying to achieve) either actively or passively support the complete annihilation of an Orthodox people—that of Ukraine.

I cannot explain this paradox except by a distorted ecclesiology. The main element of such ecclesiology is that it looks not to Christ as the head and sole reference point for the phenomenon of the Church but to his substitutes. These may include secular authorities, so-called traditional values, the glorious pasts of the churches and empires, etc. All these are nothing else but idols that substitute for God.

The idol of Byzantium

Byzantium is among the idols worshipped in our days most. Populist politicians across Orthodox countries cynically exploit romantic enthusiasm for Byzantium shared by their populations. It is no coincidence that this enthusiasm refers to a state that never existed — as we know, Byzantium is a Western fantasy about the state with its capital in Constantinople that called itself Roman.⁵ Our fantasies about Byzantium lead us to fantastic ideas about the Church. Being moved by these ideas, we want our church to be state-owned, politically powerful, and exercising

5 See Anthony KALDELLIS, *Romanland: Ethnicity and Empire in Byzantium*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019.

a monopoly on all tenets within the society. In reality, however, at least in modern reality, such a church cannot last for long. All attempts at political Byzantinism in the twentieth century prove this. I deliberately use the word “Byzantinism” with -ism at the end as a sign of the ideological character of this conception.

The person who laid the theoretical foundations of modern Byzantinism was Nicolae Iorga. He is best known for his work *Byzantium after Byzantium*.⁶ It was first published in 1935, three years before the Romanian King Carol II established royal dictatorship (in 1938). Under Carol, Iorga served as prime minister and as president of the Senate, the Parliament, and a nationalist party. As almost every dictatorship in the Orthodox countries during the twentieth century, that of Romania, with Iorga’s contribution, pretended to function as a Byzantium after Byzantium. That is, trying to incorporate some elements of Byzantium under the new historical conditions, and almost always failing.

In most cases, Byzantinism ended up in unchecked and unrestrained personal power of a dictator who had imagined himself a reincarnation of the Byzantine basileuses. Sometimes, the dictatorial appetites of the modern “basileuses” surpass what the old ones allowed for themselves. Like the latter, the former seek to legitimise themselves through the Church. In contrast to the past, however, which embraced contemporaneity, the modern adepts of Byzantinism reject modernity. Their Byzantinism is a caricature of Byzantium. The protagonists of phantasmagoric Byzantinism usually fail to comprehend that the real Byzantium was not a dictatorship of typology that flourished in the twentieth century. It was a complex political entity featuring quite strong democratic structures that only recently scholars have begun acknowledging.⁷

Russian President Vladimir Putin is one of those ignoramuses who enacts Byzantium without understanding it. He has been misinformed about Byzantium by some high-ranked prelates, who think they know Byzantium, even though they do not, such as Metropolitan Tikhon Shevkunov. He has inspired Putin to imagine himself a new Constantine or Justinian, or at least a second Vladimir the Great, the Grand Prince of Kyiv. That is why, for example, Putin endorsed building an enormous “archaeological park” in the occupied Crimea on the

6 Nicolae IORGA, *Byzance après Byzance: continuation de l’histoire de la vie byzantine*, Bucarest: L’Institut d’études Byzantines, 1935.

7 See Anthony KALDELLIS, *The Byzantine Republic: People and Power in New Rome*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015.

spot where Prince Vladimir allegedly received his baptism from Byzantium. I put “archaeological park” in quotation marks because, first, its constructors destroyed some archaeological monuments and artefacts, and second, it is not about archaeology but about propaganda. Shevkunov made sure that archaeology was subsumed to the needs of the state propaganda.

Putin’s fantasies about himself constitute a big problem. But an even bigger problem is that many Orthodox today still fantasise about their Church as an extension of an empire that no longer exists. They admire the TV images of Putin being pompously received on Mount Athos, where he was welcomed to stand in the stasidia that serve as a symbol of imperial might.⁸ The Orthodox, infected with the virus of Byzantinism, are willing to forgive Putin for any crime, even the genocide of another Orthodox people, as long as he promises them a second coming of the ghost of an empire and an imperial church.

Self-denial of Orthodox political theologies

Such a false eschatology stems not only from the false ecclesiology but also from a false political theology. There is an intrinsic connection between ecclesiology and political theology, particularly in the Orthodox world. Since the Church determines how we live and act as Christians, ecclesiology determines how we understand our Christian selves. We live, act, and perceive in a space which is both social and political. It is impossible to extract ourselves from it. When we turn our backs or avert our sight from it, we do not make it disappear. We simply stop influencing this space while it continues to influence us. We, thus, make ourselves unprepared to face it and vulnerable to its many impacts, both positive and negative. We are more prepared to face it when we look in its face. Then we better understand not only the world but also ourselves as members of the Church and the Church per se.

It is no coincidence that ecclesiology as a theological discipline emerged in modern times with the advance of secularisation. As a result of the latter, the Church, from engulfing the entire world, suddenly found herself smaller than the world and surrounded by it. This world no longer recognised itself as an intrinsic part of the Church. Several times it rejected the Church altogether, such as in the

8 “Putin on Athos: the Protaton throne”, in *Athos – Agion Oros Weblog*, June 1, 2016, <https://athosweblog.com/2016/06/01/1823-putin-and-the-protaton-throne/> [accessed on September 7, 2024].

cases of the French Revolution or Soviet Communism. Sometimes the Church responded by rejecting the world altogether. It was as if she stood in front of a mirror and made the same gestures that the secularised world made toward her, with the only difference that her right hand in the mirror was left. That is how the churches that fight secularism and wrong (according to them) political doctrines, end up self-secularised and siding with wrong political regimes.

When the Church acknowledges the world (without necessarily accepting it), even if the latter seems to be hostile, this helps her to see and understand herself significantly better. Thus, ecclesiology as a theological discipline was born when the Church turned to the secular world instead of averting from it. Of course, this does not mean that ecclesiologies did not exist before the “secular age.” As long as she existed, the Church reflected on herself theologically. Yet she did not produce a systematic theology about herself that would be similar to a systematic theology about the Triune God or the Incarnation. Perhaps this can be explained by the lack of a mirror in front of her which was not her.

Something similar happened with Orthodox political theology. It has always existed unsystematised, without being recognised as a theology. Even today, many Orthodox theologians refuse to acknowledge that it exists. Yet some of them are involved in political theology *nolens volens*, and indeed are political theologians *par excellence*. A towering figure among such crypto-political-theologians was Christos Yannaras, who believed that political theology is a Western discipline that does not deserve to be included in the nomenclature of the Orthodox theological disciplines.⁹ Ecclesiology as an Orthodox theology was recognised late. The recognition of Orthodox political theology has been delayed even more.

One reason for such a stagnation is that in the East, it is often seen as a Western theology. Indeed, one of the first references to this kind of theology is made by Augustine when he quoted the Roman intellectual Marcus Terentius Varro (116-27 BC). Augustine preserved in his *City of God* the following passage from the lost treatise of Varro: “*tria genera theologiae dicit esse: <...> unum mythicon appellari, alterum physicon, tertium civile.*”¹⁰ That is, he distinguished three kinds

9 Χρήστου Γιανναρά, *Κεφάλαια Πολιτικής Θεολογίας*, Αθήνα: Γρηγόρη, 1983, 14.

10 In Burkhardt CARDAUNS, *M. Terentius Varro. Antiquitates rerum divinarum* [Abhandlungen der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse 1], Mainz: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, 1976, liber 1, fr. 7, p. 18. In Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, trans. by William M. Green [Loeb Classical Library 412], Cambridge, MA: Harvard

of theology: mythic, physical, and civil. The last one had to do with citizens. Varro used two terms for the citizens engaged in political theology: *populi* and *in urbibus cives*.¹¹ The last phrase literally means citizens.

Although Augustine was highly critical of Varro's political theology, he adopted from him the most important idea—the idea of political theology per se—to the point that he is considered the father of Western political theology. His *The City of God* is the founding *opus* of this theology.

Here we should make a footnote that a later follower of Augustine, a Bernardine monk Peter of Poznan in Poland (c. 1575 - 1658) paraphrased Varro's definition of theology as “rationis quae de diis explicatur”¹² to “ratio quae de Deo haberi potest.”¹³ The same Peter of Poznan wrote another work, bearing the title *Splendores hierarchiae politicae et ecclesiasticae*.¹⁴ In this work he explored ecclesiology and political theology as intrinsically connected — something I also insist upon.

I also insist that, although the West indeed has a tradition of political theology that goes back to Varro and, through Augustine, to our own day, this theology is not original but a copy. The same Augustine, while describing Varro's theology, referred to its Greek originals, which he found in Heraclitus, Pythagoras, Epicurus, and others.¹⁵ Augustine himself had predecessors among the Greek Christian theologians. Eusebius of Caesarea can be considered the father of Eastern political theology par excellence. He elaborated on it in his cycle of writings on Emperor Constantine. *Life of Constantine* has a prominent place in this circle.¹⁶

University Press, 1963, liber VI 5, pp. 306-309. ([“He said] there are three kinds of theology, that is, of a logic seeking to explicate the gods. Of these one is called ‘mythic’, the second, ‘natural’, and the third, ‘civic’ [...] the one they call ‘mythic’ is that most especially used by poets; the ‘natural’, by the philosophers; and the ‘civic’, by the people.”)

11 In Augustine, *The City of God*, liber VI 5, pp. 312-313.

12 Augustine, *The City of God*, liber VI 5, p. 306.

13 Petrus Posnaniensis, *Commentaria in primum librum Sententiarum fratris Joannis Duns Scoti*, Mainz: Schönwetter, 1612, 71.

14 Petrus Posnaniensis, *Splendores hierarchiae politicae et ecclesiasticae*, Kraków: Łukasz Kupisz, 1652.

15 Augustine, *The City of God*, liber VI 5, pp. 310-311.

16 Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, translated by Averil Cameron and Stuart George Hall, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999.

Even before Eusebius we find original samples of political theology in the East. The letter from a second century's unknown author to a certain Diognetus is one of these.¹⁷ Even in the time of Constantine, Eusebius was not the only political theologian in the East. Athanasius can be seen as a robust alternative to Eusebius. The archbishop of Alexandria stood not only for a different theology of the Triune God, but also for a different political theology. Which can be seen in the *Life of Anthony*.¹⁸ Athanasius disagreed with Eusebius, who had Constantine as the model of Christian ethos. He instead promoted Antony the monk as such a model. In this way, Athanasius disagreed also with the Eusebian paradigm of church-state relations. Since then and up to the present day, the dilemma that Eusebius and Athanasius had set forth has continued. It is the dilemma between an absolute and a more careful support of the state by the Church.

The Athanasian theopolitical line can be discerned in some other great Patristic figures of the past. For example, the surviving documents from the trial of Maximus the Confessor¹⁹ present him as a notable political theologian. He, like Athanasius before him, drew a clear red line between the Church and the state, which the latter must not transcend. So did the patriarch of Constantinople Photius, although he was more cautious than Maximus. The *Introduction to the Law*, written during the reign of Basil I (r. 867-886), probably on the initiative and with the contribution of Photius himself, clearly expounds some principles of his political theology. Without much exposure, Photius tried to maintain the same line between the church and the state that Athanasius and Maximus had held.

Most other patriarchs of Constantinople cared less about maintaining this line. One of the last patriarchs of the empire, Anthony IV, wrote to the Grand Prince of Moscow Basil I (r. 1389-1425) that it was impossible for Christians to have the Church without an emperor.²⁰ Soon, however, the Orthodox Christians would have lost their emperor, without losing the Church.

17 Edited by Henri Irénée MARROU, *A Diognète* [Sources chrétiennes 33 bis], Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 196, 52-84. Translated by Bart D. EHRMAN [Loeb Classical Library 25], Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003.

18 See Raymond VAN DAM, *The Roman Revolution of Constantine*, Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 318.

19 See Pauline ALLEN and Bronswen NEIL, *Maximus the Confessor and His Companions: Documents From Exile*, Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2002.

20 See Robert L. WOLFF, "The Three Romes: The Migration of an Ideology and the Making of an Autocrat", *Daedalus*, 88.2 (1959), 291-311 (299).

Itching for dictatorship

The counterposition of the two lines originating from Eusebius and Athanasius continues in our time. The collapse of the old empires in the 20th century caused many crises in the life of the local Orthodox churches, in their relations with the state, and in their political theologies. After the First World War, most states with a significant Orthodox population demonstrated inclinations towards democratisation, although most remained monarchies. Serbia (later Yugoslavia), Bulgaria, Albania, and Romania retained their kings, while Greece was torn between monarchy and republic. Russia, too, after the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II and the February Revolution of 1917, adopted republican rule, which immediately affected the church, providing it with more freedom. As a result, the Russian Orthodox Church managed to convene its council in Moscow. This council became a milestone in the process of the Orthodox *aggiornamento*.

Russia's democratisation was reversed with the Bolshevik revolution in October 1917. The same setback would soon affect other Orthodox countries, with the Orthodox churches in them playing leading roles in the anti-democratic reversals. Thus, the Synod of the Church of Greece supported King Constantine I (r. 1913-17; 1920-22) against Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos, to the point of anathematising the latter. Those political theologians who in the 1920s sympathised with democratic changes in their contemporary societies, during the 1930s, U-turned towards supporting autocracy. One of them was Nikolaj Velimirović.²¹

In some cases, the Orthodox-majority countries ended up with military dictatorship; in others, with royal dictatorship; and in some, with both. In Serbia, King Alexander I Karađorđević (r. 1921-34) declared a royal dictatorship on 6 January 1929. He annulled the democratic Vivodan constitution, dissolved the parliament and political parties, and made General Petar Živković, the head of his guard, Prime Minister. He thus set an attractive example for other Orthodox countries that followed suit over the next decade.

Romania followed this example closely enough. It resembled Serbia in many respects. Both countries were created in the 19th century by the unification of

21 See Vladimir CVETKOVIĆ, “‘Nationalism’, ‘Fascism’ and ‘Anti-Semitism’ of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović”, in *Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović: Old Controversies in Historical and Theological Context*, edited by Vladimir CVETKOVIĆ and Dragan BAKIĆ, Alhambra, CA: Sebastian Press, 2022: 211-254.

pieces extracted from two empires: Ottoman and Habsburg. After World War I, both countries grew in size. Serbia was transformed to a significantly more sizable Yugoslavia, while Romania, to *România Mare*, “Great Romania.” Both countries, as a result of adding territories, became more difficult to govern. Consequently, soon after the liberal reforms of the 1920s, they slipped to dictatorships.

The evolution of the Romanian dictatorship was a bit more complicated than in the case of Yugoslavia. It was established quite late, in 1938, i.e., almost ten years after the Serbian dictatorship, and followed a similar line. Its protagonist was the king, Carol II (r. 1930-40). He annulled the democratic Constitution of 1923 and dissolved the Parliament and political parties, which he replaced with his own “Front of National Renaissance” (*Frontul Renașterii Naționale*, FRN). This party exercised a political monopoly in the country until it was replaced by another monopoly, that of the “Iron Guard” (*Garda de Fier*). This party, which began as a movement similar to the fascist movement in Italy, in contrast to the latter, had a strong clerical character. We can say that it was effectively a political wing of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

Similarly to the Serbian King Alexander who appointed a general as his prime minister, Carol in Romania, when he declared a dictatorship, also appointed a general as prime minister. His name was Ion Antonescu. But this general was not as obedient to the king as Petar Živković was in Yugoslavia. He soon managed to get rid of his mentor. Carol was forced to resign on 6 September 1940, and on the same day Antonescu was declared the Leader (*Conducător*) of the state. He, thus, joined the family of other “conductors” of European nations. Each of them was called by the same word in their own languages: *Duce* in Italian, *Igetis* (Ἰγέτης) in Greek (the title adopted by the Greek dictator Ioannis Metaxas), *Führer* in German, and *Vozhd’* (Вождь) in Russian.

Antonescu first relied on the Iron Guard for which he secured a political monopoly. From 14 September 1940 to 14 February 1941, Romania was officially the National Legionary State (Statul Național Legionar). That means that it effectively adopted some theocratic elements. The German “Conductor” of the time, despite his hesitations about the role that religion could play in politics, paradoxically supported both the Iron Guard and the Legionary State. One of the reasons for this support was the fanatical anti-Semitism of the guards, who even sought to reorganize themselves with the Nazi *Schutzstaffel* (SS) as their model.²²

22 Rebecca HAYNES, “Germany and the Establishment of the Romanian National Legionary State, September 1940”, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 77.4 (1999) 700-725 (723).

Theocracies are usually unstable and do not last long. So the National Legionary State soon began to descend into chaos, and Antonescu decided to dissolve it. But doing so was no easy task, given the German support of the Iron Guard. Only personal approval from Hitler allowed the Romanian leader to get rid of the Guard.²³

But this meant that he had to take more personal responsibility for the so-called resolution of the Jewish question, for which Antonescu usually used the euphemism “cleansing.”²⁴ It actually meant almost 300,000 lost lives. According to research,²⁵ between 12 and 20 thousand Jews were shot by the Romanian and German armies in Bessarabia and Bukovina in July and August 1941. Romanian forces killed about 15 to 20 thousand Jews in Odessa during October 1941. Of the 14 thousand Jews in Bukovina, Bessarabia, and Transnistria, at least 90 thousand died between 1941 and 1943, the majority of them from typhus and starvation. In the same period, between 130 and 170 thousand Ukrainian Jews disappeared. This policy was favoured and sometimes supported by the kind of Orthodox political theology that developed in interwar Romania. Among the protagonists of this political theology was Nichifor Crainic, who was a notorious anti-Semite.²⁶

In the so-called First Balkan War (1912-1913), in which the Orthodox nations fought together against the Ottoman Empire, Bulgaria gained a lot of territory. This territory was lost in the Second Balkan War and the First World War, which is also considered to have started as the Third Balkan War. Unlike Serbia and Romania, where territorial acquisitions eventually led to dictatorship, Bulgaria was driven to

23 See Dennis DELETANT, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally: Ion Antonescu and His Regime, Romania 1940-44*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, 62-64.

24 DELETANT, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 128.

25 See DELETANT, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 127. According to the report from a commission established by Romanian President Ion Iliescu in 2003, “Of all Nazi Germany’s allies, Romania bears the responsibility for the greatest contribution to the extermination of the Jews, apart from Germany itself. The murders carried out at Iași, Odessa, Bogdanovka, Domanevka and Pecioara are among the most heinous crimes committed against the Jews during the Holocaust. Romania carried out genocide against the Jews. The survival of some Jews in certain parts of the country does not change this reality.” In Gabriel ANDREESCU, “Raportul Comisiei Internationale pentru Studiarea Holocaustului in Romania”, *Ziua* (18 November 2004).

26 See Iuliu-Marius MORARIU, “Aspects of the Anti-Semitic Views of Nichifor Crainic Reflected in ‘Gândirea’ Journal”, *Research and Science Today* 17.1 (2019) 110–18.

the same destination by territorial loss and the obligation to pay war reparations as Germany's ally in the Great War. They felt something similar to the Germans of the Weimar Republic: people became frustrated with democracy.

On 19 May 1934, two colonels, Damian Velchev and Kimon Georgiev, successfully staged a coup. They had the support of a group called the “Zveno” (which means “chain”). This group resembled the Romanian Iron Guard in several respects and was not far from the other fascist movements of the time. Once it seized power it established a regime similar to the National Legionary State of Romania a few years later. It deactivated, but did not annul, the Tarnovo Constitution (1879), and dissolved the political parties. Unlike the Romanian Guard, it promoted secularist policies, although it still supported the Church. Like the Guard, it did not last long. Its downfall, however, came not from within, as in the case of General Antonescu in Romania, but from without, from King Boris III (r. 1918-43). In April 1935, he replaced the “Zveno” regime with his own royal dictatorship. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church widely accepted both dictatorships.²⁷ The then Metropolitan of Sofia, Stefan Shokov, even took an active part in the coup of 1934.²⁸

In similar ways, each dictatorship was widely accepted and supported by the Church in Greece. They include the coup of General Georgios Kondylis in 1935 and, after 4 August 1936, the so-called “Third Greek Civilization” of General Ioannis Metaxas. The Church of Greece also actively collaborated with the “dictatorship of the Colonels” Georgios Papadopoulos and Dimitrios Ioannidis (1967-74). The Archbishop of Athens Ieronymos Kotsonis was of particular help to this dictatorship, which had promoted him to this position. A political theology backed dictatorship, such as represented, for example, by Fr Ioannis Romanidis.

Proposals how to update Orthodox ecclesiology and political theology

In sum, we can see how in the shadow of the grand fascist systems of Germany and Italy, smaller fascisms and semi-fascisms mushroomed across the Orthodox countries. They all were celebrated by most theologians and hierarchs. After World War II, the Western churches mostly recognised their crimes and tried to correct

27 See James L. HOPKINS, *The Bulgarian Orthodox Church: A Socio-Historical Analysis of the Evolving Relationship between Church, Nation and State in Bulgaria*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

28 See. Дилян Николчев, *Екзарх Стефан под «грижите» на Държавна сигурност*, София: Военно издателство, 2015, 58-75.

the errors of their political theology. The Protestants did so more quickly and openly, while the Catholics did so belatedly and indirectly. The Second Vatican Council promoted the *aggiornamento* agenda as an indirect acknowledgement for the Catholic Church's collaboration with the dictatorships. More directly, this council elaborated on a political theology that made such cooperation difficult in the future.

In the Christian East, only a few theological voices have condemned the toxic collaborations of the past: with the right-wing and left-wing dictatorships of the twentieth century. Church authorities prefer not to refer to their collaboration as if it never happened. This is, in my opinion, one of the main reasons why toxic collaborations with dictatorships still occur in the twenty-first century: unrepentant sins tend to be made again.

Hence my proposals for the future Orthodox political theology:

1. This should continue the line of Athanasius and Maximus, and not Eusebius. That is, we must critically assess the Byzantine *symphonia* between the Church and the State, as well as the attempts to re-enact it in modern times.

2. Cooperation with the fascist and semi-fascist regimes of the interwar period, as such re-enactment, as well as with the communist regimes of the post-war period, must be evaluated openly and critically. Such recognition and re-evaluation need to be done in a conciliar manner.

3. This will help us to recognise and critically assess the recent wars in Yugoslavia, Georgia, and Ukraine. It is a great injustice to Orthodoxy that all the wars of the last thirty years in the territories of Europe have been fought among or involving Orthodox peoples, and we pretend that they did not or do not happen. We, as the Orthodox Church, will not move forward, or rather we will regress if we continue to ignore these wars, especially the one in Ukraine.

4. Many Orthodox justify this war on the pretext of the assumed East-West dichotomy. Now it is time to overcome this dichotomy, which is a pseudomorphosis of the Orthodox theology and *praxis*.

5. Finally, it is vital to keep a safe distance from the culture wars of our time. This does not mean that we should avoid a critical evaluation of all the ideologies that contribute to these wars from both the left and right margins of the political spectrum. It means that we must not allow our theology to be politicised.

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THE POSSIBILITIES OF DIALOGUE ON THE FILIOQUE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CURRENT SITUATION OF ORTHODOXY

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Abstract. This article examines the theological and historical implications of the Filioque doctrine within the context of contemporary Orthodox-Catholic dialogue, emphasizing its relevance amid the current challenges facing Orthodoxy, including ecclesiastical and political divisions. It traces the evolution of the Filioque controversy, highlighting key theological contributions from Orthodox scholars such as Vladimir Lossky and Dumitru Stăniloae and their perspectives on Orthodoxy's identity. The paper discusses the Filioque's impact on ecumenical efforts, noting the divergence in approaches between Orthodox and Western traditions. Furthermore, it explores the influence of nationalism and geopolitical conflicts, particularly the Russian-Ukrainian war, on inter-Orthodox relations and their effect on broader ecumenical dialogues. The article concludes by proposing that while institutional dialogue may be hindered by these crises, academic and theological exchanges remain vital for fostering understanding and advancing unity.

Keywords: Orthodoxy, Filioque, Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue, Theological Controversy, Nationalism in Orthodoxy, Ecumenical Relations

Introduction

Today, the situation of Orthodoxy in Europe and worldwide is undoubtedly determined by Russia's war against Ukraine. This has had a direct and drastic impact on ecumenical dialogue and, in particular, on the development of the Filioque issue. Since the joint declaration of the North American Orthodox and Catholic Bishops' Councils in 2003,² there has been no noteworthy progress on

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- 2 *The Filioque: A Church Dividing Issue?: An Agreed Statement*; North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation, 2003, <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/>

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this issue, and there is little prospect of it at present, given the relationship between the Orthodox Churches. For the Catholic Church, it would be important if a united Orthodox position on the question of the Filioque could be formulated in the course of the dialogue, and a common Orthodox reflection on the documents of the Holy See and the ecumenical documents could be developed, because this would give a better chance of moving forward towards unity. In this paper, I will review the main contemporary Orthodox trends on the Filioque issue and the difficulties that the current divisions in Orthodoxy cause, and on this basis try to outline the possibilities for further progress together.

The latest in Orthodox-Catholic dialogue

In both Catholic and Protestant theology, we can speak of a roughly unified position on the question of the Filioque, without these excluding differences of emphasis by one theologian or another. The most of Catholic theologians follow the position of the Church, which has remained essentially unchanged since the Council of Florence-Ferrara in the 15th century. In 1995, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity issued a clarifying statement that did not change the Church's position in substance, but merely increased openness on the question of the interpretation of theological concepts, shifting the emphasis to the analysis of biblical and patristic texts.³ The clarifying statement was based on the 1982 Munich Declaration of the International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches,⁴ which does not directly address the question of the Filioque but the meaning of the patristic conceptual system, and thus sought to make a gesture by the Catholic Church towards Orthodoxy. At the same time, it was hoped that the statement of the Pontifical Council would provoke a significant response from the Orthodox Church and theologians, which would lead to a revival of dialogue. However, this has failed

ecumenical-and-interreligious/ecumenical/orthodox/ filioque-church-dividing-issue-english.cfm (23. 10. 2024)

- 3 The Greek and the Latin Traditions Regarding the Procession of the Holy Spirit, *Information Service of the Secretariat of The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity*, 89, II-III (1995). 88–92.
- 4 *Le mystère de L'église et de L'eucharistie à la lumière du mystère de la Sainte Trinité* 3, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/ch_orthodox_docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_19820706_munich_fr.html. (2024. 10. 23.)

to materialize in Europe, although John Paul II made a similar gesture in the liturgical sphere when he ordered that the Creed be recited without the Filioque at Masses celebrated in the presence of Orthodox guests.⁵

An important consequence of the 1995 Clarification Statement⁶ is the dialogue between the Orthodox and Catholic bishops in North America, which was concluded in 2003 with the joint statement *The Filioque: a Church-Dividing Issue?* The dialogue examined the question of the Filioque from theological, historical, and hermeneutical perspectives, analyzing differences and common ground. The document concluded that, while there are linguistic and theological differences between the Eastern and Western traditions, there is also a substantial commonality. The statement emphasizes the uniqueness of the Holy Spirit and the role of the Father as the primary source, while acknowledging the mediating role of the Son in Western theology. The debate is fundamentally linked to historical, cultural, and ecclesiological contexts, especially the question of papal primacy. The document made recommendations, such as the abandonment of the Filioque on symbolic occasions and the withdrawal of the former anathemas. The North American context has helped to foster an impartial dialogue, although the implementation of the proposals is still to be seen. In a spirit of moderate optimism, the declaration contributes to the theological rapprochement between the two traditions.⁷

The starting point for Protestant theology on this issue is that the question of the Filioque is an integral part of the Lutheran tradition, so the goal of ecumenical dialogue should focus on a common understanding of the biblical texts without questioning the origin of the Holy Spirit from the Son.⁸ Adherence to ecclesiastical tradition has not been an obstacle to Protestant-Orthodox dialogue, which has in many cases been more intense than Catholic-Orthodox dialogue, although in

5 Avery, DULLES, Filioque: What is at Stake?, *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, 1–2 (1995), 33.

6 A detailed analysis of the document see: ANDRÁS Szabolcs, *A Filioque mint a teológia és a politika konfrontációja. Megoldási kísérletek az ökumené szolgálataiban*, Cluj: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2020, 252–266.

7 *The Filioque: A Church Dividing Issue?: An Agreed Statement*; North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation.

8 Some Protestant Theologians think the controversial part of the Filioque-debate is irrelevant for the Protestant theology, it is only an Orthodox-Catholic issue. Peter, GEMEINHARDT, The Dynamics of Mutual Condemnations in the Filioque Controversy, *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*, 91. 2 (2015), 201–222.

most cases the question of origin has not been at the heart of the dialogue. It is also worth noting here that Karl Barth undertook an in-depth analysis, including not only scriptural but also ecclesiological aspects in his understanding of processions,⁹ from which neither the Orthodox nor the Catholic side can depart.

Main trends in contemporary Orthodox theology on the Filioque question

There is a rich literature on the theology of the Filioque in Orthodoxy, with different approaches, which it is not possible to present in full here, so I will only present some of the important positions that have influenced the actualization of the issue and the development of ecumenical dialogue.

I think that Vladimir Lossky has had the most important influence among contemporary Orthodox theologians, and he has put the Filioque issue back at the center, even if this has not necessarily led to positive results. For Lossky updated the Filioque debate not in a theological

sense but in terms of the preservation of Orthodox identity, when he concluded from the situation of Orthodox in diaspora that it is the attitude to the Filioque that distinguishes an Orthodox from the heterodox (Catholics and Protestants).¹⁰ Lossky's contention is therefore that an integral part of the Orthodox faith is the rejection of the Filioque and the confession of procession from the Father alone, because on the one hand this is dictated by the patristic and Byzantine tradition, and on the other hand the icon of the Father's monarchy is the most representative of the social image of Orthodox peoples. The Orthodox theologian proclaimed a radical return to the Church Fathers and to Gregory Palamas, which has had a major impact on contemporary theology.

In the view of Lossky and his followers, the significance of Gergely Palamas is reassessed and takes on new meaning. The Byzantine monk's debate with Barlaam of Calabria in this new perspective did not so much revolve around monasticism and Jesus-prayer, but Palamas was the embodiment of Orthodoxy, while Barlaam was the filioquist West.¹¹ It is important to add here the critical remark that this

9 Karl BARTH, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1, (trad.: Bromiley, G. W.), Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975, 481–490.

10 Vladimir LOSSKY, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1957, 44–47.

11 A. Edward, SIECIENSKI, *The Filioque: History of a Doctrinal Controversy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, 211–212.

dialectical categorization is wrong because Barlaam, although a Catholic, never accepted the Filioque.¹² Lossky's position is not without precedent. A few decades earlier, Nikolai Velimirović and Justin Popović had already formulated similar conclusions for Serbian theology: Orthodoxy must return to its Cappadocian and Byzantine roots, so that it can preserve its identity in the face of heterogeneous elements. What belongs in the group of heterogeneous elements usually varies from author to author: for Velimirović, communism was the source of danger,¹³ while Popović identified the Church with society, thus rejecting any state interference.¹⁴ For them, St. Sava and St. Palamas are historical and hagiographic figures whose following is one with defending the Church and the Orthodox faith. Although the Filioque did not play a key role for Serbian theologians, they had a great influence on the Orthodox generations that followed them, who also looked up to Lossky. One such was the Romanian theologian Dumitru Stăniloae.

Stăniloae's great merit is that he created a comprehensive synthesis, among other things, on the question of the Filioque, which he rejected following Lossky, but his thought is also clearly influenced by St Augustine, in addition to the Palamasian ideas.¹⁵ In his view, the basis of the Orthodox doctrine of the origin of the Holy Spirit is to be found in the Cappadocian Fathers and Byzantine theologians, while all other approaches are incomplete or erroneous, and he criticized the work not only of Western theologians but also of various Orthodox theologians.

Stăniloae starts from the Cappadocian thesis that the origin of the Holy Spirit is part of the immanent, intratrinitarian life of God, of which we know only what is revealed in Scripture, namely that the Holy Spirit comes from the Father (John 15, 26). This in itself does not imply a rejection of being also from the Son, and Stăniloae (though sympathetic to Patriarch Photios'

formulation "only from the Father") never rejected some kind role for the Son, and even used the phrase "through the Son", following St Gregory of Nyssa,

12 BAÁN István, Útkeresés Kelet és Nyugat között. Kalábriai Barlaám (1290-1348), *Vigilia*, 68/6 (2003), 429–435.

13 Nicolae, VELIMIROVICI, *Capete*, (trad.: Ionuț Gurgu), București: Predania, 2015.

14 Iustin POPOVICI, *Credința Ortodoxă și viața în Hristos*, (trad.: Paul Balan), Galați: Bunavestire, 2003, 77.

15 ANDRÁS Szabolcs, Ágostoni visszhangok Dumitru Stăniloae szentháromságtani szeretetmodelljében? in: Kiss Gábor (ed.), *Fiatal Kutatók és Doktoranduszok VIII. Nemzetközi Teológuskonferenciájának tanulmánykötete*, Pécs: Pécsi Püspöki Hittudományi Főiskola, 2017, 199–208.

primarily as an economic character. For man, the presence of the Holy Spirit through the Son means that, although the natural difference of existence between God and man limits man's possibilities of knowing God, he cannot grasp the divine essence, but he can experience the presence of the Holy Spirit in prayer. This is the point where Cappadocian and Palamas theology are linked: in the Jesus prayer in particular, man can experience that God cares for him, loves him, through the Holy Spirit. St. Gregory of Nyssa used the concept of dynamism to describe how the divine intratrinitarian life is the continuous flow of love from the Father to the Son and vice versa, and this dynamism is realized in the Holy Spirit, in the third person, who moves out of the intratrinitarian framework to the level of the economy, so that man can realize that it is in the Holy Spirit sent by the Son that his path leads him towards God.¹⁶ Here Palamas uses the term energy, which is nothing other than the tangible divine presence that sustains the world. For Palamas, the problem was that when the Holy Spirit is poured out into the world, the traditional teaching that the boundary of knowledge and existence between God and man is impenetrable is dissolved. In his view, the doctrine of the Filioque further reinforces the idea that man can see into the intratrinitarian being because it is a positive theological statement that exceeds the immediate scriptural framework and disrupts the monarchy of the Father.¹⁷ Hence, the doctrine of uncreated energy emerged in Byzantine theology, which on the one hand eliminates the need to deduce the mode of origin of the Holy Spirit from the economical sending, and makes the Holy Spirit part of the created, empirical world, and on the other hand explains the authenticity of the Jesus-prayer: although God is unknowable, he can be experienced through energies.

In Byzantine theology and its contemporary followers, there is no uniform understanding of how energies are related to the Trinity. While for some theologians, they proceed from the Father or the divine essence (*ousia*) as a kind of fourth hypostasis, for others they are expressions of the presence of the Holy Spirit, the activity of divine love in the world. It is towards the latter position that Stăniloae tends, with his emphasis on love, and it is at this point that we can undoubtedly recognize the influence of Augustine.

16 Gregorius NYSSENSIS, *Oratio Catechetica Magna*, Jacques Paul MIGNE, *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Graeca* 45, Paris, 1863, 15.

17 Gregory PALAMAS, *The Triads*, E.III.i.16., Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1983, 72.

God is love itself, this is the expression of his essence, and it is expressed at the intratrinitarian level in the Father giving the Spirit to the Son, who gives him in return. Without the Holy Spirit there is no Trinity. At this point, Stăniloae makes a conscious effort to break away from Augustine, claiming that the reciprocal giving of the Holy Spirit does not imply a common origin and sending, because the Son loves the Father so much that he cannot want to assume his monarchical role in order to process the Spirit from him. The love relationship is fulfilled precisely in the fact that the Holy Spirit comes from the Father - through the Son. This is primarily an economic term referring to the sending of the Holy Spirit.¹⁸

For Stăniloae, theology is not an abstract science, but a very practical one. Every dogmatic statement also speaks about man, and so it is with processions. It is not only about God's inner dynamic of love, but also about the way God wants the world he has created to be. When orthodoxy insists on the monarchy of the Father, it also speaks of Trinity as the icon of human society, which must follow the triune model. Accordingly, at the macro level, the Church stands at the head of society as the image of the Father, with the state and the family below her. At the micro level, the family also bears the icon of the Trinity, with the father as the head of the family, the wife and children subordinate to him. With the Filioque doctrine, Western theology questions the monarchy of the Father and with its traditional Christian society, says Stăniloae. The Filioque suggests that the Son wants to act as an individual, making this doctrine synonymous with a decadent Western society. Therefore, Stăniloae agrees with Lossky that the doctrine of the Filioque is not only about the Trinity, but also about identity, only by rejecting it can one be a true believer and a faithful member of the nation. He differs from Lossky in that he recognizes the full form of orthodoxy in only one nation, and thus nationalism is given an important role in his theology.¹⁹ This is also worth noting because it leads to an understanding of why Orthodoxy is divided today: the emergence and development of national churches has been accompanied by the emergence of national theologies which not only reject „heterogeneous“ elements but are often at odds with each other.

Like Stăniloae, several Greek theologians, such as John Romanides and Christos Yannaras, interpret the Filioque question in a national ideological framework.

18 Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Sfânta Treime sau la început a fost Iubirea*, București: Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, 2012, 77.

19 Dumitru STĂNILOAE, Sfântul Duh și sobornicitatea Bisericii, in: *Ortodoxia*, nr. 1. (1967), 44.

The latter takes a radical stance and, like the monks of Mount Athos, considers as heretics all those who accept or tolerate the Filioque doctrine, which he sees as the source of all theological problems, and therefore rejects ecumenical dialogue.²⁰ Romanides is not an isolated member of contemporary Orthodox theology but voices the opinions of many. Yannaras differs from him only in that he interprets the significance of the doctrine of the Filioque in a cultural rather than a theological framework. In his view, this doctrine is the calling card of Western individualistic culture, which has been a destructive influence on Hellenistic culture for centuries. Hellenism is to be understood as a combination of the Greek and Byzantine tradition which provided the framework for the development of Christianity, and it is therefore the task of the Greek nation today to ensure the survival of orthodox Christian civilization.²¹

Several representatives of Greek theology criticize the position of Romanides and Yannaras for the importance they attach to dialogue on controversial theological issues and reject the inclusion of nationalist ideology in the trinitarian doctrine. John Zizioulas stresses that the appropriation of the idea of the chosen nation is contrary to the universality of Christianity, that Jesus Christ is the universal savior of all and that the celebration of the Eucharist is a celebration of the one Church. Although he rejects the Filioque doctrine, he considers dialogue important, calling in particular for an analysis of the scriptural foundations. This included a critique of the tendency marked by Lossky, that patristics cannot be equated with revelation, but that a critical perspective can be applied to the work of both the Church Fathers and contemporary theologians.²² Aristotle Papanikolaou has shown that the anti-Western views of Romanides and Yannaras contributed to the popularization of authoritarian political regimes in Greece and beyond.²³

The same phenomenon can be observed in Russian theology. Both Pavel Florensky and George Florovsky approach the subject primarily from a cultural

20 Ioannis ROMANIDES, *Dogmatica patristică ortodoxă. O expunere concisă*, trad.: Dragoș Dâscă, Sibiu: Ecclesiast, 2010, 44–45.

21 Christos YANNARAS, *Orthodoxy and the West*, trad.: Peter Chamberlas – Norman Russel, Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2006, 24.

22 Ioannis ZIZIOULAS, *Prelegeri de dogmatică creștină*, trad.: Florin Caragiu, București: Sofia, 2014, 164.

23 Aristotle PAPANIKOLAOU, Divine Energies or Divine Personhood: Vladimir Lossky and John Zizioulas on Conceiving the Transcendent and Immanent God, *Modern Theology*, 19/3. (2003), 360.

perspective. According to Florovsky, the Orthodox Church, and the Russian Church in particular, has a civilizing mission, to educate the peoples who have come under the rule of the empire and to show the way to other civilized peoples. The Russian Church has been given a special mission because it has preserved and continued the Greco-Byzantine tradition, opposing the Westernizing tendencies which would have meant, among other things, the adoption of the Filioque.²⁴ In Florensky's case, we can recognize a mixture of neo-gnostic views with neopalatism, the divine feminine principle, the Sophia, mediating between God and man, and therefore no need for a Western doctrine such as the Filioque.²⁵ It is an interesting fact that similar neo-gnostic elements can be found in Russian theologians who were tolerant of the Filioque doctrine. Vladimir Soloviov, Alexei Homiakov or Sergei Bulgakov sympathized with or explicitly professed the Sophia doctrine and tended to accept the place of the Filioque in Catholic-Protestant doctrine as a particular theological element, as a theologumenon, for ecumenical reasons. At the same time, they also articulated (long before Lossky) that the self-definition of orthodoxy could not be a negation: it is not the orthodox who reject papal primacy or the Filioque, but the orthodox who profess doxology. A similar view is shared by John Meyendorff, who places the interpretation of the Filioque in the history of the development of theology, highlighting the political, cultural and ecclesial elements that have contributed to the emergence of the present face of Christianity over the last two thousand years, including the polarization of orthodoxy, which is not a recent phenomenon.²⁶ With this in mind, one can theologially criticize the Filioque, but to accuse Western Christianity of heresy has always meant radicalization.

The insights of important Orthodox theologians could be listed at length, but I believe that what has been outlined so far has shown that there are basically two major trends in Orthodox theology regarding the Filioque doctrine. One is a radical rejection of it, often seeing it as heresy, and one is also closed to ecumenical dialogue. The other tendency also criticizes it, but accepts that it has a strong

24 George FLOROVSKY, *The Ethos of the Orthodox Church*, *The Ecumenical Review*, 12/2 (1960), 191.

25 Pavel FLORENSKY, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth. An Essay in Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters*, trad.: Boris Jakim, Princeton – Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004, 237–239.

26 See: John MEYENDORFF, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, New York: Fordham University Press, 1983.

tradition in Catholic theology and seeks to answer the legitimate need of what we can say about the relationship between the Son and the Holy Spirit in the context of origins. The Filioque seemed to be a possible answer for Western theology, the lessons of which are worth discussing, ecclesiological, cultural, and other aspects.

The current ecclesiastical and political divisions in Orthodoxy

It is not news to anyone that the Russian attack on Ukraine in February 2022 has deeply divided Orthodox churches and countries with significant Orthodox populations. However, the roots of this division go back further, to the beginning of the emancipation of the Ukrainian Church after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. The failure of the Pan-Orthodox Synod in Crete, planned for 2016, showed that the opposition between the Orthodox churches has deepened to the point where there is little dialogue between them,²⁷ making ecumenical dialogue between Orthodoxy and the Western churches practically impossible.

From an ecumenical point of view, the schism between the Patriarchates of Moscow and Constantinople is particularly important and serious, because they are the two most important centers of Orthodoxy. As soon as the Ecumenical Patriarch began to support the establishment of an autocephalous Ukrainian Church, Moscow not only tried to prevent it, but also to retaliate.²⁸ One of the first victims of this was the Patriarchate of Alexandria, which sided with Constantinople, because the Russian Church had set up its own missionary organization in Africa, dividing the already small African Orthodox community.²⁹ The process can also be observed in Europe, for example in Hungary, where until 2010 most of the Orthodox institutions and churches belonged to the Patriarchate of Constantinople (or Romanian and Serbian), but now, with the cooperation of the government,

27 Ionuț BILIUȚĂ, The Romanian Orthodox Church Between the Alliance for the Union of Romanians and the Putinist Temptation: Ultrnationalist Propaganda among Orthodox Clergymen and the Russian War Against Ukraine, *Studia Theologica Latina*, LXVIII, 1 (2023), 127.

28 Pavlo SMYTSNYUK, The War in Ukraine as a Challenge for Religious Communities: Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Prospects for Peacemaking, *Studia Theologica Latina*, LXVIII, 1 (2023), 45.

29 The Patriarchate of Alexandria defrocked the second „Exarch in Africa” of the Patriarchate of Moscow, *Orthodox Times*, <https://orthodoxtimes.com/the-patriarchate-of-alexandria-defrocked-the-second-exarch-in-africa-of-the-patriarchate-of-moscow/> (2024. 10. 10.)

the presence of the Moscow Patriarchate is growing. A prominent moment in this process was the transfer of the seat of Metropolitan Hilarion, who had been responsible for the ideological background to the war in Ukraine, to Budapest.³⁰

The Russian – Ukrainian conflict dates back to at least 2014, when it became clear that Ukraine wanted to break with its imperial past. At the same time, President Poroshenko, as part of the independence process, began to push for Kyiv to have an ecclesiastical leadership independent of Moscow, with autocephalous status, and his efforts were supported by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. In practice, however, the Ukrainian church was split into three parts, but ultimately the creation of a national church was achieved.

In the war so far, it is clear that the conflict is not only on the front line, but also at the ecclesiastical level. Patriarch Kiril of Moscow has proclaimed forgiveness for soldiers who have served in the army and died on the battlefield. Russian church publications regularly talk of a holy war, which has not escaped the apocalyptic terms, suggesting that the very survival of Christianity is at stake, with Russia actually fighting for universal Christianity.³¹ The foundations of this idea can already be found in the document *Church and Society*, published in 2000, and considered by many to be the first Orthodox social teaching. The document states that in Russia the Church and the military are historically intertwined, the country can legitimately launch a war in its national interest, which the Church will support, as it has done in the past. For the Russians, both church and military service are, and will remain, a sacred mission.³²

It is not surprising that in a situation of war, we also find on the Ukrainian side that the Russian Church is the schismatic one, and that the Ukrainian Church and State represent true Christianity. Symbolic expressions such as St. Javelin were also coined. However, this tendency towards self-mystification is also evident in other national churches, as in Romania, where it is increasingly being said that the country is the Garden of Our Lady, or the public figures of the extreme right in the

30 Recently Hilarion was removed due the sexual scandal in Budapest, see: Russian Orthodox Church demotes scandal-prone former bishop, *Novaya Gazeta Europe*, <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2024/12/28/russian-orthodox-church-demotes-scandal-prone-former-bishop-en-news> (28. 12. 2024)

31 Katharina KUNTER, Still Sticking tot he Brother. History, German Protestantism and the Ukrainian War, *Studia Theologica Latina*, LXVIII, 1 (2023), 74.

32 *Biserica și societatea sau Fundamentele concepției sociale a Bisericii Ortodoxe Ruse*, Sinodul episcopal jubiliar al Bisericii Ortodoxe Ruse, Moscova, 2000. 33–37.

1920s and 1930s who mixed Orthodox and chauvinist ideas are being promoted.³³ It is not surprising that the radicalization of public life in Central and Eastern Europe is being driven by the powerful role of Russia, which is trying to create divisions between the allied states in a war situation.

In addition to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, there are a number of other problems that complicate the dialogue between the Orthodox Churches. To mention only a few, the situation in Georgia, where there has been a serious internal political crisis since the Russian invasion in 2008. The believers' community in the Republic of Moldova is also divided over the dispute between the Patriarchate of Moscow and the Patriarchate of Bucharest.³⁴ In the Balkans, there are also many problems, such as the attempts of the Church of North Macedonia to become autonomous (not only from the Serbian Church but also from the Bulgarian Church), and Montenegro is in a similar situation, where Belgrade is trying to prevent the establishment of an autocephalous ecclesiastical center in Podgorica.³⁵ In addition, of course, the Orthodox Churches are also facing a massive demographic decline due to emigration and secularization. One could go on at length about how the Orthodox churches outside Europe have changed their relations with the mother churches, trying to distance themselves from these conflicts, which is strengthening their efforts to become more autonomous. To sum up, it may not be an exaggeration to say that Orthodoxy today is in a serious crisis, which limits the possibilities for ecumenical dialogue.

Conclusions

The Filioque issue is itself a theologically, historically, culturally charged conflictual element of the Christian belief system that has long divided Christianity, although seeks to answer the simple question of the relationship between the Son

33 I. BILIUȚĂ, *The Romanian Orthodox Church Between the Alliance for the Union of Romanians and the Putinist Temptation*, 128.

34 Eka CHITANAVA, *The Georgian Orthodox Church: National identity and political influence*, Adam HUG (ed.): *Traditional religion and political power: Examining the role of the church in Georgia, Armenia, Ukraine and Moldova*, London: The Foreign Policy Centre, 2015. 40–52.

35 Vladimir JOVANOVIĆ, *Lavrov: The Montenegrin Orthodox Church is part of the Serbian Orthodox Church*, *Actuelno*, <https://www.aktuelno.me/clanak/lavrov-the-montenegrin-orthodox-church-is-part-of-the-serbian-orthodox-church> (2024. 10. 20.)

and the Holy Spirit in the context of processions. Formally, its role was to affirm the deity of the Son in opposition to late Arianism. During the Middle Ages, the Franco-Byzantine rivalry made this theological thesis a victim of political interests and then an important element of division. Saint Maximus the Confessor already drew attention to the fact that East and West should engage in dialogue due to the linguistic, translation, and interpretation problems observed in the doctrine. I think that the Council of Lyon in 1274 did not help the dialogue, while the Council of Ferrara-Florence in the 15th century was a better attempt to seek unity, but the historical-political conditions were not there. In the 20th century, more serious steps towards dialogue were taken by the parties, such as the Klingenthal Declaration or the 1995 Clarification Declaration. Unfortunately, since the North American Joint Declaration of 2003, there has been no significant progress.

The key question now is: is there a possibility to continue the dialogue? The current state of Orthodoxy is not really conducive to a comprehensive, institutional church-level dialogue in which Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant positions are universally represented. I think that the Orthodox Churches are completely preoccupied with the Russian-Ukrainian war and its regional implications, and therefore there is no possibility for the Orthodox Churches to present a united position in the current situation. The end of the war must be followed by a long healing process that will settle the fraternal relations between the autocephalous churches.

However, the current situation does not have to mean a complete suspension of dialogue, which can and should be continued at the level of theological academic schools, workshops, conferences. The search for agreement, for a common understanding of the Filioque question can contribute to the healing process mentioned above. Here, then, the Catholic Church has a responsibility and a mission, as do theologians, who must enter into communion with their Orthodox brothers and sisters in difficulty.

The dialogue on the Filioque issue must always adapt to the opportunities available but must not be interrupted. Whether at individual, committee, or ecumenical organizational level, it should be pursued and should seek not only to explore its historical dimension, but to understand why it is important in the context of Orthodox identity. Dialogue should also include an examination of the relationship between faith and politics (nationalism) and its impact on theology, so that it can be clarified so that theological dialogue can move forward independently of political interests. There is still a long way to go in the ecumenical dialogue on the Filioque.

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THE UKRAINIAN ECCLESIASTICAL CRISIS AND ITS GLOBAL REVERBERATIONS: THE RUSSIAN EXARCHATE IN AFRICA AS A CASE STUDY

NIKOS KOUREMENOS¹

Abstract. This article explores the Ukrainian ecclesiastical crisis, focusing on the granting of autocephaly to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in 2019 and its global repercussions. The study highlights the schism with the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), which views this move as a challenge to its canonical authority and geopolitical influence. A key case examined is the ROC's establishment of the Exarchate in Africa, traditionally under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Alexandria, showcasing how theological disputes intersect with geopolitical ambitions. The article delves into issues such as nationalism, the Russky Mir ideology, and canonical principles to analyze the broader implications for Orthodox unity, synodality, and global mission. It argues that while the crisis threatens ecclesiastical cohesion, it also offers an opportunity for renewal, reflection, and a redefinition of Orthodox structures to better navigate contemporary challenges.

Keywords: Ukrainian Ecclesiastical Crisis, Autocephaly, Russian Orthodox Church, Russky Mir Ideology, Orthodox Unity and Synodality

Introduction

The granting of autocephaly to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in 2019 signaled a critical juncture in contemporary Orthodox history. This decision, intended to resolve divisions within Ukrainian Orthodoxy, triggered a *quasi*-schism with the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and set in motion far-reaching pan-orthodox impacts. While rooted in Ukraine's aspirations for national and ecclesiastical independence, the crisis has deeply affected the unity of the Orthodox Church worldwide, exposing underlying tensions over authority, jurisdiction, and geopolitical influence.

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Historically, Ukraine's church has been at the center of competing claims by Constantinople and Moscow, dating back to the contested 1686 transfer of the Kyivan Metropolia to the Moscow Patriarchate. The 2019 autocephaly decision by Constantinople sought to restore Ukraine's ecclesiastical sovereignty, aligning with its broader political pivot away from Russian influence. This move, however, prompted the ROC to sever communion with Constantinople and mount a global campaign to delegitimize the OCU. The fallout extended far beyond Eastern Europe, challenging the equilibrium of authority within Orthodoxy and raising critical questions about the role of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in granting autocephaly.

One striking manifestation of this crisis has been the ROC's establishment of an exarchate in Africa, a territory historically under the canonical jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Alexandria. This unprecedented move, in response to Alexandria's recognition of the OCU, underscores the intersection of theological disputes and geopolitical ambitions. By focusing on the Ukrainian crisis and its implications for African Orthodoxy, this paper examines the broader ramifications of the ecclesiastical tribulation, highlighting the challenges posed to Orthodox unity, canonical principles, and global mission.

1. The Ukrainian Crisis and Its Impact on Global Orthodoxy

0.1. Brief History of the Ukrainian Orthodoxy

The historical dimension of Orthodox autocephaly in Ukraine is deeply tied to the shared yet contested heritage of Kyivan Christianity, which serves as a cornerstone for both Russian and Ukrainian religious and national identities. In an insightful essay, Alfons Brüning explores the historical narratives and memory conflicts that have shaped the debate over ecclesiastical independence².

Kyivan Rus', baptized in 988 under Prince Vladimir, laid the foundation for Eastern Slavic Christianity, characterized by Byzantine influences and later distinct cultural developments. The adoption of Church Slavonic and engagement with both Byzantine and Latin traditions created a unique Christian identity in the region. However, the Mongol invasion in 1240 disrupted Kyiv's prominence, shifting

2 In what follows in this subsection I am based mainly on Alfons BRÜNING, *Orthodox Autocephaly in Ukraine: The Historical Dimension*, Andrii KRAWCHUK and Thomas BREMER (ed.), *Churches in the Ukrainian Crisis*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 79–101.

ecclesiastical authority northward to city of Vladimir and eventually Moscow, while western regions like Galicia developed alternative ecclesiastical connections, including with Rome. The establishment of the Moscow Patriarchate in 1589 marked a significant shift, as Moscow claimed to be the successor to the Byzantine and Kyivan legacy. This claim intensified with the 1686 incorporation of the Kyivan Metropolitanate into the Moscow Patriarchate—a move contested by Ukrainians as uncanonical and a source of modern ecclesiastical disputes³.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Romantic nationalism revitalized the notion of a distinctive Ukrainian Christianity. Scholars and church leaders emphasized democratic and local governance traditions in Ukrainian Orthodoxy, contrasting with perceived Muscovite autocracy. These ideas culminated in the 1921 establishment of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC), which sought to institutionalize these principles despite lacking recognition from other Orthodox Churches⁴. The Soviet era suppressed autocephalous movements, but Ukrainian ecclesiastical independence resurfaced after 1991 with the country's political independence. Competing narratives about the rightful heir to Kyivan Christianity persist among the Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP), the Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP), and the UAOC. Each faction claimed historical legitimacy and continuity, reflecting deeper national and geopolitical tensions.

1.2. The Autocephaly Decision and the Global Orthodox reactions

In response to Ukraine's appeals for ecclesiastical independence⁵, the Ecumenical Patriarchate took decisive action. In October 2018, it annulled the 1686 agreement

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- 3 On the differing interpretations which have influenced the debates over the 1686 transfer of jurisdiction, see Denys SHESTOPALET, *The Discursive Construction of the Past: The 1686 Resubordination of the Kyiv Metropolitanate, Ukrainian Autocephaly and the Conflict of Moscow and Constantinople*, *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 42 (2022): Article 5.
 - 4 For the emergence of the UAOC and its roots in liberation, Ukrainisation and modernization during the revolutionary period of 1917-1930, see Nicholas E. DENYSENKO, *The Orthodox Church in Ukraine: A Century of Separation* DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2018, 13–59.
 - 5 In April 2018, the Ukrainian Parliament and President Petro Poroshenko formally appealed to the EP to grant a *tomos* of autocephaly. See Viktor YELENSKY, *Orthodox churches*,

granting jurisdiction over Kyiv to Moscow and lifted canonical sanctions on the leaders of the UOC-KP and UAOC⁶. This paved the way for the unification council of December 2018, where representatives of the UOC-KP, UAOC, and some bishops from the UOC-MP formed the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU)⁷. In January 2019, the Patriarch of Constantinople issued a *tomos*, or decree, officially granting autocephaly to the OCU⁸. This historic decision established the OCU as an independent Orthodox body under Metropolitan Epiphanius.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate justified this move as a necessary step to resolve divisions within Ukrainian Orthodoxy and restore canonical order. However, the ROC viewed it as a unilateral and illegitimate act that encroached upon its canonical territory. Already in October 2018, the ROC severed communion with Constantinople, asserting that the OCU lacked legitimacy and accusing the Ecumenical Patriarchate of violating Orthodox ecclesiology⁹. This marked the beginning of pan-orthodox tribulations, as other Orthodox churches were drawn into conflict, forced to take sides or remain neutral in a deeply polarized environment.

The fallout from the Ukrainian crisis reverberated across the Orthodox world, disrupting unity and reshaping the landscape of global Orthodoxy. The Orthodox Church of Greece and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria were among the

nation-building and forced migration in Ukraine, Lucian N. LEUSTEAN (ed.), *Forced Migration and Human Security in the Eastern Orthodox World*, London: Routledge 2020, pp. 39–40. This appeal, backed by civil and ecclesiastical authorities, emphasized Ukraine's historical ties to Constantinople and the need to heal decades of church schism.

- 6 Ecumenical Patriarchate, Announcement of the Holy and Sacred Synod of 11 October 2018, <https://www.ecupatria.org/2018/10/12/announcement-of-the-holy-and-sacred-synod-of-11-october-2018/>. (12. 10. 2024)
- 7 Cornelia MUREȘAN, Ukrainian Orthodox Church Autocephaly and its Ecumenical Consequences, *Review Ecumenical Studies* 12 (2018) 461–462.
- 8 Ecumenical Patriarchate, *Patriarchal and Synodal Tomos for the Bestowal of the Ecclesiastical Status of Autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in Ukraine*, January 5, 2019, accessed December 12, 2024, <https://ec-patr.org/patriarchal-and-synodal-tomos-for-the-bestowal-of-the-ecclesiastical-status-of-autocephaly-to-the-orthodox-church-in-ukraine/>. (12. 10. 2024)
- 9 Russian Orthodox Church, *Statement of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church Concerning the Encroachment of the Patriarchate of Constantinople on the Canonical Territory of the Russian Church*, October 15, 2018.

first to recognize the OCU, aligning with Constantinople's stance¹⁰. Their decisions underscored the enduring primacy of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in granting autocephaly, but also deepened divisions within the Orthodox communion. Other churches, particularly those aligned with Moscow, such as the Serbian and Antiochian Patriarchates, refused to recognize the OCU. These jurisdictions argued that the autocephaly process lacked pan-Orthodox consensus, challenging Constantinople's authority while emphasizing the need for broader ecclesial consultation¹¹.

This crisis exposed underlying tensions over the interpretation of primacy within Orthodoxy. Constantinople's claim to be the "first among equals" among autocephalous churches clashed with Moscow's assertion of its own status as the largest and most influential Orthodox church. This struggle for primacy was not merely theological but also geopolitical, reflecting broader power dynamics between Russia and the West¹². The ROC framed its opposition to the OCU as a defense of Orthodox tradition against what it perceived as Western interference in the form of Constantinople's decision¹³.

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- 10 In an extraordinary meeting, the Holy Synod of the Hierarchy of the Church of Greece recognized on 12th October 2019 the new established autocephalous Orthodox Church in Ukraine, see on this regard *The Church of Greece on the Autocephaly of the Church of Ukraine*, accessed December 11, 2024, <https://www.ecupatria.org/2019/10/15/the-church-of-greece-on-the-autocephaly-of-the-church-of-ukraine/>. On 8th November 2019, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria officially recognised the Orthodox Church in Ukraine, see on the regard *Patriarchate of Alexandria Officially Recognizes Ukraine Autocephaly*, <https://www.ecupatria.org/2019/11/28/patriarchate-of-alexandria-officially-recognizes-ukraine-autocephaly/>. (12. 10. 2024)
- 11 For the reaction of the Serbian Orthodox Church, see *Position of the Serbian Orthodox Church on the Church Crisis in Ukraine*. http://arhiva.spc.rs/eng/position_serbian_orthodox_church_church_crisis_ukraine.html. (12. 10. 2024) In a letter dated on 31st Decemer 2019, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, Yuhanna X urged the Ecumenical Patriarch to prioritize unity and pan-Orthodox dialogue over unilateral decisions, see on this regard <https://www.antiochpatriarchate.org/en/page/your-all-holiness-archbishop-of-constantinople-new-rome-and-ecumenical-patriarch/2101/>, (12. 10. 2024)
- 12 On the intersection of geopolitical conflicts and ecclesial struggle for autocephaly in Ukraine, see Silviu Nate – Daniel Buda, Eastern European Geopolitics and Ecclesial Autocephaly for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church: A Hard Way for Ukraine, *Teologia* 80 (2019), 11–38.
- 13 On the accusations by ROC representatives and high-ranking Russian officials that Constantinople acted to destabilize the cultural-political role of the ROC in Ukraine, see Alexander PONOMARIOV, Ukrainian Church Autocephaly: The Redrawing of the Religious

Even from the time of Crimea's annexation (2014), the ROC portrayed the events as a civilizational struggle, a defense of Russian Orthodoxy against the Western attempts to fragment its unity through secularism and liberalism¹⁴.

The establishment of the OCU and the ensuing pan-orthodox ecclesiastical crisis disrupted traditional understandings of canonical territory and the processes for granting autocephaly, raising critical questions about jurisdictional boundaries and authority within Orthodoxy¹⁵. Furthermore, the crisis underscored the intersection of religion and geopolitics, with the Ukrainian ecclesiastical dispute mirroring broader political struggles between Russia and the West. As the crisis unfolded, its effects extended beyond Eastern Europe, setting a precedent for future disputes and reflecting the urgent need for dialogue and reconciliation to preserve Orthodox unity.

2. Theological and Canonical Challenges of the Crisis

The Ukrainian ecclesiastical crisis has not only fractured Orthodox Church at a global level but also highlighted the interplay of theological principles and canonical norms in addressing jurisdictional disputes. At the core of the crisis lies the interplay between ecclesial autonomy and unity, as well as the enduring question of how the Orthodox Church navigates its commitment to synodality amidst geopolitical and ecclesial pressures. These tensions have profound implications for the integrity of Orthodox canonical order and theology.

2. 1. *Ethnophyletism and Ecclesial Unity*

The crisis has rekindled debates about the challenge of nationalism in Orthodox Churches or even *ethnophyletism*, a concept condemned as heretical in 1872 by

Borders and Political Identities in the Conflict between Ukraine and Russia, *Russian Analytical Digest* 231 (January 2019) 2–6.

14 On this civilizational narrative, central to the ROC's rhetoric, see Mikhail SUSLOV, The Russian Orthodox Church and the Crisis in Ukraine, *Churches in the Ukrainian Crisis*, ed. Andrii KRAWCHUK and Thomas BREMER, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 133–152, especially on pp. 143-147.

15 Especially on the concept of canonical territory, see Johannes OELDEMANN, Canonical Territory: A New Paradigm of Orthodox Ecclesiology with Ancient Roots, E. G. Farrugia – Z. Paša (eds), *Autocephaly: Coming of age in communion: Historical, Canonical, Liturgical and Theological Studies*, vol. II, [OCA, 315], Roma: Pio 2023, 1159–1190.

a Pan-Orthodox Council held in Constantinople¹⁶. Ethnophyletism, defined as the conflation of national identity with ecclesiastical jurisdiction, has been a persistent challenge for Orthodoxy, especially in the context of modern nation-states or even in that of Orthodox diaspora¹⁷. It should not be undermined that, historically, Orthodox church's liturgical, theological, and canonical identity was shaped primarily within the Byzantine framework, which provided a model of unity beyond ethnic or national identities. The legacy of Byzantium, with its multi-ethnic and transnational nature, therefore, could and should serve as a reminder that the Church's mission is eschatological and universal, not confined to national interests or cultural particularities¹⁸.

In the case of Ukraine, it seems that the demand for autocephaly was driven by both ecclesial aspirations for self-governance and nationalistic motivations, reflecting broader trends of religious nationalism in Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, there are still prophetic voices within Orthodox theology that critique the tendency of Orthodox churches to become vehicles for nationalistic ideologies, describing this alignment as a distortion of the Church's mission. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, for example, a prominent Orthodox theologian, emphasizes that the Church's identity transcends national and ethnic boundaries, calling for a renewed focus on the universality of the Gospel and the pan-Orthodox ethos¹⁹. These critiques are particularly relevant in light of the Ukrainian crisis, as they underscore the dangers of reducing ecclesiastical unity to nationalistic ambitions.

16 These events are directly linked to the ecclesiastical dimension of the Bulgarian national awakening, which eventually led to the so-called Bulgarian schism that plagued the unity of the Orthodox Church for more than seven decades. On this regard, see Vassilis PNEVMATIKAKIS, "Les causes du Concile de Constantinople (1872) sur le phylétisme : le contentieux ecclésial gréco-bulgare au XIXe siècle", *Contacts* 249 (2015), 17–39.

17 On this regard, see Gregorios PPATHOMAS, Ethno-phyletism and the [so-called] Ecclesial "Diaspora", *St Vladimir's theological Quarterly*, 57 (2013) 431–450.

18 Dimitrios KERAMIDAS – Nikos KOUREMENOS, Byzantine, National and Ecumenical Orthodoxy, *Nationalism and Ecumenical Orthodoxy*, Thessaloniki: Cemes Publications 2021, 9–20.

19 See, among others, Pantelis KALAITZIDIS, Orthodox Theology Challenged by Balkan and East European Ethnotheologies, *Politics, Society and Culture in Orthodox Theology in a Global Age*, 2023, 108–159.

2.2. *Rusky Mir Ideology and its ecclesiastical implications*

The *Rusky Mir* (“*Russian World*”) ideology represents a vision that merges Russian Orthodoxy with geopolitical aspirations, positing Moscow as the spiritual and cultural leader of a transnational Orthodox civilization. Rooted in the concept of Moscow as the “Third Rome,” this ideology ties the spiritual unity of Orthodox Slavic peoples—especially Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus—to Russian cultural and ecclesiastical dominance²⁰.

The Ukrainian ecclesiastical crisis exemplifies the conflict surrounding *Rusky Mir*. The Moscow Patriarchate’s opposition to the autocephaly of the OCU is deeply connected to its vision of Ukraine as a central component of the *Rusky Mir* framework. In a sermon delivered on March 6, 2022, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow framed the conflict in Ukraine as a metaphysical battle against Western liberal values, particularly criticizing the acceptance of LGBTQ+ rights, which he associated with “gay parades.”²¹ He suggested that the war was a defense of the *Ruskiy Mir* against such influences, thereby reinforcing the ideological narrative that positions Ukraine within a shared civilizational space under Russian spiritual and cultural leadership.

By granting autocephaly, Constantinople challenged this ideological narrative, fracturing the unity that Moscow seeks to maintain through its ecclesial and cultural influence. In his December 2022 speech in Abu Dhabi, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew addressed the ideological underpinnings of the Russian Orthodox Church’s actions, particularly the promotion of the *Ruskiy Mir* concept. He criticized the Russian Church for aligning with state policies and actively promoting this ideology, which envisions a transnational Russian sphere encompassing Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and other territories. Patriarch Bartholomew highlighted that this alignment has led to the instrumentalization of religion for political and military objectives, thereby undermining Orthodox

20 Cyril HOVORUN, Interpreting the Russian World, Andrii KRAWCHUK-Thomas BREMER (eds), *Churches in the Ukrainian Crisis*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 163–171. Cf. also Viorel COMAN, Critical analysis of the Moscow Patriarchate vision on the Russian–Ukrainian military conflict: *Ruskiy mir* and just war, *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 76 (2023) 332–344, especially pp. 337–340.

21 Patriarch of Moscow Blesses War Against Gay Prides, *Bitter Winter*, March 6, 2022. <https://bitterwinter.org/patriarch-of-moscow-blesses-war-against-gay-prides/>. (12. 10. 2024)

unity²². This stance reflects Constantinople’s view that granting autocephaly to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine was a necessary step to counteract the divisive effects of the *Russkiy Mir* ideology and to restore canonical order and unity within the Orthodox Church, free from political exploitation.

Criticism of the *Russkiy Mir* ideology has been sharp within theological circles, particularly for its alignment of religious and national identities, which risks distorting the universal mission of the Church. The *Declaration on the “Russian World” (Russkii Mir) Teaching*, issued by a group of Orthodox theologians in March 2022, explicitly condemns the ideology as a dangerous form of “ethnophyletism,” the heresy of equating the Church with a single nation or ethnic group²³. The declaration emphasizes that *Russkiy Mir* replaces the Kingdom of God with an earthly vision that sanctifies state power and national identity, subverting the Church’s mission and its synodical ethos. The declaration critiques *Russkiy Mir* as a “false teaching” that deifies the state through a theocratic framework and divinizes Russian culture at the expense of the Church’s universal message. It states: “the teaching of the ‘Russian World’ is profoundly un-Orthodox, un-Christian, and against humanity.²⁴” By conflating Orthodox Christianity with the geopolitical ambitions of the Russian state, this ideology distorts the Church’s role as a spiritual institution and compromises its witness to the Gospel. The theologians urge Orthodox Christians to reject all ethno-phyletist ideologies, warning that such teachings undermine the unity and catholicity of the Church. Additionally, according to Ioannis Kaminis *Russkiy Mir* reflects an attempt to extend Russian Orthodoxy’s reach globally, often at the expense of canonical norms and ecclesial

22 Bartholomew: Russian Church Has Sided with Putin, Promotes Actively the Ideology of Russkiy Mir, *Orthodox Times*, December 2022. <https://orthodoxtimes.com/bartholomew-russian-church-has-sided-with-putin-promotes-actively-the-ideology-of-russkii-mir/>. (12. 10. 2024)

23 The *Declaration* was first simultaneously published by the Fordham Center for Orthodox Christian Studies on *Public Orthodoxy* (<https://publicorthodoxy.org/2022/03/13/a-declaration-on-the-russian-world-russkii-mir-teaching>) and the Volos Academy for Theological Studies on *Polymeros kai Polytropos* (<https://www.polymerwsvolos.org/2022/03/13/a-declaration-on-the-russian-world-russkii-mir-teaching/>). (12. 10. 2024) It has since been republished in various platforms; for example, see its reprint in B. GALLAHER – Pantelis KALAITZIDIS, A Declaration on the Russian World (Russkii Mir) Teaching: Coordinators of the Drafting Committee, *Mission Studies* 39, 2 (2022), 269–276.

24 GALLAHER–KALAITZIDIS, *Declaration*, 272.

unity²⁵. The African Exarchate, for instance, illustrates how this ideology drives Moscow's expansionist ecclesiastical policies, raising concerns about its alignment with Orthodox theology and mission

3. The Establishment of the Russian Exarchate in Africa

The establishment of the ROC's Exarchate in Africa in December 2021 represents a significant moment for the global dimension of the Ukrainian ecclesiastical crisis. The move, prompted by Moscow's dissatisfaction with the Alexandrian Patriarchate's recognition of the autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) can be considered a significant departure from the Orthodox canonical conception of territoriality and has had far-reaching ecclesiastical and geopolitical implications. The creation of the Exarchate, with its two dioceses (North Africa and South Africa), reflects both the ecclesial aspirations and geopolitical strategies of the ROC.

3.1. Background and Motivations

The decision to establish the Patriarchal Exarchate of Africa by the ROC was preceded by escalating tensions between the Patriarchates of Moscow and Alexandria. The primary trigger was Patriarch Theodore II of Alexandria's recognition of the OCU. On November 8, 2019, during a Divine Liturgy in Cairo, Patriarch Theodore II commemorated Metropolitan Epiphaniy of Kyiv in the diptychs, acknowledging *de facto* the *tomos* of 2018. The accompanying announcement of the Alexandrian Patriarchate emphasized the principle of synodality as central to Orthodox governance, highlighting that this was a collective decision of the Alexandrian Patriarchate, reflecting the consensus of its hierarchs while praying for peace and stability within the Orthodox communion²⁶.

Moscow interpreted this recognition as a deviation of the Orthodox canonical norms. On December 26, 2019, the synod of the ROC stopped the eucharistic communion with Patriarch Theodore, citing his recognition of what Moscow

25 Ioannis KAMINIS, *The Russian World: A Version of Aggressive Ethnophyletism*, *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*, 44 (2024) 5, 1–17.

26 The Patriarchate of Alexandria Recognizes the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, *Orthodox Times*, November 8, 2019. <https://orthodoxtimes.com/the-patriarchate-of-alexandria-recognizes-the-orthodox-church-of-ukraine/>. (12. 10. 2024)

described as a “schismatic group”²⁷. The ROC claimed to have received numerous petitions from clergy within the Alexandrian Patriarchate who opposed Patriarch Theodore’s actions as un-canonical and sought to transfer to Moscow’s jurisdiction²⁸. However, according to Evangelos Thiani, a local cleric from Kenya, these petitions were rooted less in doctrinal disputes and more in long-standing frustrations over administrative neglect, racial discrimination, and financial inequalities within the Alexandrian Church²⁹.

In September 2021, the ROC’s Holy Synod formally considered these petitions, culminating in the establishment of the Exarchate in December 2021, incorporating the North African and South African dioceses.³⁰ This unprecedented move, led by Metropolitan Leonid (Gorbachov) as the newly appointed Exarch, was framed as a pastoral response to clergy in Africa who rejected Patriarch Theodore’s recognition of the OCU and sought canonical protection under the Moscow Patriarchate. The new Exarchate included over 100 parishes across several African countries³¹. The Alexandrian Patriarchate reacted strongly, condemning this initiative as a deeply unethical and divisive action. In an official statement, Alexandria described the move as “an immoral blow” and accused the ROC not only of violating canonical norms by invading the jurisdiction of an ancient patriarchate but also of aggressive attempt related to Russian geopolitical ambitions in Africa³².

27 Russian Church Stops Eucharistic Communion with Patriarch Theodoros of Alexandria, *Pravmir*, December 26, 2019. <https://www.pravmir.com/russian-church-stops-eucharistic-communion-with-patriarch-theodoros-of-alexandria/>. (12. 10. 2024)

28 On the position of the ROC regarding the petitions from the African clergy, see N. VORONINA – Daria TURIANITSA, The African Exarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC): Reasons for the Establishment and Prospects of Further Expansion, *Scientific Conference with International Participation FRESKA* (2022), 104–105.

29 Evangelos Thiani, The Russian Orthodox Church in Africa – For Political or Ecclesial Reasons?, *Studies in World Christianity* 30 (2024), 258–259.

30 Russian Orthodox Church Establishes Exarchate in Africa, *Orthodox Christianity*, January 5, 2022, <https://orthochristian.com/143723.html>. (12. 10. 2024)

31 History of the Patriarchal Exarchate of Africa, *Patriarchal Exarchate of Africa*, <https://exarchate-africa.ru/en/history/>. (12. 10. 2024)

32 Patriarchate of Alexandria: ‘We Face an Immoral Blow from the Orthodox Russians’, *Orthodox Times*, December 29, 2021, <https://orthodoxtimes.com/patriarchate-of-alexandria-we-face-an-immoral-blow-from-the-orthodox-russians/>. (12. 10. 2024)

3.2. Geopolitical Dimensions

The Exarchate's creation is not merely an ecclesiastical act but also a geopolitical strategy that aligns closely with Russia's broader ambitions in Africa. Patriarch Kirill's address at the 2023 Russia-Africa Summit underscored this alignment, presenting the ROC's actions as part of a historic and ongoing relationship with Africa: "Russia has never viewed the African continent as a space for profit or as an object for colonization, and has never spoken to the people of Africa in an arrogant tone, from a position of superiority and strength. In difficult historical moments, we have always tried to show solidarity and provide mutual assistance to each other". He also elaborated on the historical presence of the Russian Orthodox Church in Africa, noting the establishment of Russian churches in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including in Abyssinia, Egypt, and Tunisia, and highlighted the continued development of Russian Orthodox parishes in Africa to this day³³. By emphasizing Russia's non-colonial approach, Kirill sought to differentiate the ROC's presence from Western influences, portraying it as a genuine partner to African nations.

In a remarkably interesting interpretation, Mikhail Suslov highlights that this recalibration stems from the declining relevance of the *Russky Mir* framework, historically tied to Russia's Orthodox neighbors. Geopolitical tensions, particularly the war in Ukraine and the even partial recognition of the OCU, have eroded this framework's effectiveness. In response, the ROC has pivoted toward the Global South, presenting itself as a universal church with a mission extending beyond regional boundaries³⁴. Although the ROC presents the Russian ecclesiastical expansion in Africa as a response to pastoral needs, it is evident that this narrative is closely intertwined with ideological objectives. By adopting anti-colonial rhetoric, the ROC integrates Soviet-era legacies of solidarity with the Global South into its contemporary outreach. This approach not only seeks to expand Russia's ideological and religious influence but also reinforces its opposition to the Western hegemony. An additional element is the self-portrait of the ROC's presence in

33 Address by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill at the Russia-Africa Summit, *The Russian Orthodox Church* (Moscow Patriarchate), July 27, 2023. <http://www.patriarchia.ru/en/db/text/6045854.html>. (12. 10. 2024)

34 Mikhail SUSLOV, The Russian Orthodox Church Turns to the Global South: Recalibration of the Geopolitical Culture of the Church, *Religions* 15, 12(2024), 1517. (<https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15121517>). (12. 10. 2024)

Africa as a proponent of traditional Christian values, including familiar integrity and resistance to secularisation. This positions it as a moral partner to African societies facing the pressures of globalisation³⁵.

In a way to conclusion

The discussion of the above thematic units should reveal that the ecclesiastical crisis that arose with the declaration of the autocephaly of the OCU is not merely a temporary interruption of the Eucharistic communion between some local Orthodox churches. Instead, it represents a critical turning point for the Orthodox Church, with implications for its mission in the contemporary world and its ecumenical witness. The establishment of the Russian Exarchate in Africa, a continent traditionally under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria, represents a troubling violation of Orthodox canonical order and a dangerous precedent for the expression and effectiveness of Orthodoxy's mission in the contemporary world. The institution of parallel jurisdictions carries the risk of undermining the principle of territorial unity, fragmenting communities and weakening the Church's capacity to respond to the spiritual and pastoral needs of its flock. It would be a simplistic assumption to believe that the Ukrainian ecclesiastical conflict is solely about jurisdictional issues or questions of ecclesiastical authority. Rather, the significant danger that emerges is that this crisis is ultimately about the Church's ability to embody its unity in diversity and to bear a credible witness to the Gospel in an increasingly fragmented and polarised world.

Nevertheless, it is encouraging to recognise that this crisis presents an invaluable opportunity for the Orthodox Church to engage in a process of reflection and renewal. Indeed, it requires the Orthodox Church to confront with honesty and self-criticism a number of issues, including those of ecclesiastical authority, applied synodality, and the desired balance between its universal pan-Orthodox unity and the autonomy of local individual Orthodox churches. After all, the notion of autonomy in the Orthodox ecclesiology inherently signifies full interdependence.

35 On the promotion of the conservative police agenda by the ROC in the service of the Russian foreign policy, see the insightful article by George Сорока, *International Relations by Proxy? The Kremlin and the Russian Orthodox Church*, *Religions* 13, 3 (2022), 208, in which, however, the African case is referred only occasionally.

It is not an isolated achievement but requires a continuous and diligent effort in evangelization, reaching beyond the confines of the local community, while simultaneously integrating this autonomy into the broader communion of the universal Church³⁶. A way forward will necessitate a redefinition of the structures of communion that respects the distinctive histories of local churches while affirming the primacy of Christ as the ultimate source of unity. The realization of this vision would serve to enhance the Church's capacity to offer a compelling testimony and reinvigorate its missional ethos.

The long-term outcome of the Ukrainian ecclesiastical crisis will serve to test the resilience of the Orthodox Church in maintaining its unity, as well as its capacity to navigate the tensions and challenges posed by historical developments, ecclesiastical authority issues, and geopolitical factors. The potential for this moment to become either a stumbling block or a stepping stone will depend on the willingness of the Orthodox world to address its divisions with courage, humility and faith. By reclaiming its role as a symbol of unity and peace, the Church will be able to transform this crisis into an opportunity for renewal, both within its own ranks and in relation to its mission in the world.

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36 KERAMIDAS-KOUREMENOS, *Byzantine, National and Ecumenical Orthodoxy*, 10.

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XXX

SECURITY CHALLENGES FOR UKRAINIAN ORTHODOXY DURING THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

LIUDMYLA FYLYPOVYCH¹

Abstract. The article looks at the rapid changes taking place in the Orthodox environment of Ukraine during the Russian-Ukrainian war, exploring the main challenges for Ukrainian Orthodoxy and the issue of the religious security of Ukraine. It discusses the Law “On the Protection of the Constitutional Order in the Sphere of Religious Organisations” adopted by the Ukrainian Parliament on August 20, 2024, and the tensions within Ukrainian Orthodoxy, notably from the perspective of the relations between the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), and the position of the UOC towards the Russian Orthodox Church.

Keywords: Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), inter-Orthodox conflict, state-church relations, Russian-Ukrainian war, *Law On the Protection of the Constitutional Order in the Sphere of Religious Organisations*

Introduction

This article is not a theological exploration that proposes to delve into theological reflections on the challenges facing Orthodoxy. Firstly, because the author is not a theologian, therefore cannot provide a theological point of view properly speaking on theological problems. The author is limited by her experience as a secular researcher of religion, who certainly sees the possible challenges the Church faces, but views them from the perspective of an observer, not a participant immersed in the problem. Secondly, even being a member of the Orthodox Church, as a layperson, the author is not initiated into all the details

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of intra-clerical life, where the problems that require clarification and resolution are actually formulated. The layperson is aware of the problems not at the level of theory, the science of God, but at the everyday level, at the level of a user of the knowledge that theology provides. The general goal of the article is to look at the rapid changes taking place in the Orthodox environment of Ukraine, building on my previous reflections set out in an article published in this journal in 2023.² There, analysing the situation in Ukrainian Orthodoxy at that time, I have noted that the war only exacerbated the existing confrontations between the two churches – the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) [UOC MP] and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine [OCU]. Even then, it was clear that the intra-Orthodox conflict was rapidly polarizing society, marginalizing the UOC, which had lost its former dominant status in the state and the prevailing support of the Ukrainian people. Since the writing of that article (2022), but already after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, two years have passed, during which many new events have occurred, leading to new threats. These challenges require an analysis, which is offered in the form of an essay – a free presentation of the author’s observations of the development of the situation in Ukrainian Orthodoxy during 2023–2024.

The main challenges for Ukrainian Orthodoxy

The challenges that have arisen before Ukrainian Orthodoxy, and therefore before Orthodox theologians today, depend on (1) circumstances external to the Church and (2) the internal state of the Church itself.

(1) The external circumstances are related to the Russian-Ukrainian war, which is a defining factor of the current situation of the entire Ukrainian society. The war divided Ukraine and the whole world along the lines of defining their attitude to Putin’s military aggression against a sovereign state. There are political forces that

2 Liudmyla FYLYPOVYCH, “The Realities of Current Orthodox Life in Ukraine during the Russian-Ukrainian War”, *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai. Theologia Catholica Latina* 1 (2023) 7–25, DOI: 10.24193/theol.cath.latina.2023.LXVIII.1.01, also Анатолій Колодний, Людмила Филипович, “Свобода релігії в часі російсько-української війни”, in *Незалежність України: Права людини та національна безпека. Збірник матеріалів Третьої міжнародної науково-практичної конференції, Національний університет «Львівська політехніка»*, 28 квітня 2023 року, Львів, 2023, 35–39, <https://lpnu.ua/sites/default/files/2020/pages/483/zbirnik-13062023.pdf>.

condemned the politics of Kremlin, but there are also those who support Putin in his violent efforts to establish control over Ukraine. The war also affected the life of the Church, in particular, the state of Ukrainian Orthodoxy (and not only). The church environment, like the secular one, was faced with the need to answer a number of important questions: Is this a war? Is this a just war? Who is the victim and who is the perpetrator, on whose side should the Church be? Should the church condemn Russia's aggression against Ukraine? How to fulfil its role as a peacemaker? What should Christians do in this situation? For the Orthodox Churches, the question was detailed as follows: do you defend your autonomous (autocephalous) status, and therefore, sever all ties with the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), or do you defend your affiliation with the Moscow Patriarchate?

(2) The second aspect regards the internal state of Ukrainian Orthodoxy. The war, which openly began in 2014 and which was de facto the consequence of Ukraine's leaving the USSR/Russia in 1991, led to the appearance on the religious map of Ukraine, instead of the Ukrainian Exarchate of the Moscow Patriarchate, of three Orthodox churches: the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC MP), the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC KP), and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC).

The unification council of the three branches of Ukrainian Orthodoxy (UAOC, UOC-KP and part of the UOC-MP) in 2018 and the receipt of the Tomos of autocephaly from the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 2019 have changed the alignment of Orthodox forces not only in Ukraine, but also in the world. The hegemony of the UOC-MP in Ukraine and of the ROC in the world has been greatly shaken. In the process of recognizing the OCU, Ecumenical Orthodoxy has become even more polarized. Those churches that supported Constantinople have clearly been defined – the Patriarchate of Alexandria, the Orthodox Church of Cyprus, the Orthodox Church of Greece and de facto the Romanian Orthodox Church.

But there are also churches – the Jerusalem and Antioch Patriarchates, the Serbian and Polish Orthodox Church – which are clearly on the side of Moscow. The ROC cannot accept the fact that a large part of Orthodox Christians in Ukraine have moved away from its influence, that a new autocephalous church, the fifteenth, the Ukrainian Church, has appeared in the range of Orthodox churches. A paradoxical situation has developed in Ukraine. Those who were disregarded for 30 years and were considered schismatics, with whom no one wanted to deal in the religious world, completely ignoring any working relationships, have now acquired canonical status. And their counterpart – the UOC-MP – has lost this

canonical privilege, since its declared independence (not even autocephaly!) has not been recognised by anyone.

This new situation required a radical rethinking on the part of both the OCU and the UOC, in fact a new theology, which is designed to reflect the reaction of the church environment through the church intellectual elite to the changes taking place within the religious organisation and in society.

For one Church, this circumstance was perceived as the restoration of historical justice, as a natural legitimization (recognition) of the long-oppressed part of the Orthodox world – the supporters of the UOC-KP and the UAOC. The other Church – the UOC-MP still does not recognize the legitimacy of the Tomos, criticizes the initiative of the Ecumenical Patriarch to grant autocephaly to the OCU, which allegedly contradicts the canons of Orthodoxy – as it is not a conciliar, but a personal patriarchal solution to the issue. The UOC still does not recognize the ordinations performed by the “schismatic” Patriarch Filaret (UOC-KP) and the “self-consecrated” Metropolitan Vasyl Lypkivsky (UAOC). This is one of the serious reasons for the clergy of the UOC in the issue of joining or uniting with the OCU and performing joint prayers, holding joint divine services, and remaining in Eucharistic unity.

In the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, which has the largest number of parishes, significant changes occurred after the death of Metropolitan Volodymyr Sabodan (2014). Firstly, this concerned the clear position of the head of the church regarding its autocephaly and its withdrawal from the control of Moscow. The issue of autonomy was always recognised as untimely. Metropolitan Onufriy Berezovsky, unlike his predecessor, was not known for his support to pro-Ukrainian trends in the church. Moreover, he actually launched the processes of denationalization in this church.

Metropolitan Onufry did not agree with the assessment of the Holodomor as a genocide of the Ukrainian people, calling it God’s punishment of Ukrainians. Having headed the UOC MP, Onufry removed from the church government all pro-Ukrainian figures close to Volodymyr Sabodan, in particular Metropolitan Oleksandr Drabynko, and the church’s former press secretary, Archpriest Georgy Kovalenko. Other priests and hierarchs, concerned about their church careers, fell silent. For a long time, Onufry did not recognize Russia as an aggressor, called for some abstract peace, and therefore equated Ukrainian soldiers with separatists and Moscow invaders. The bishop presented manifestations of Ukrainian nationality, in particular linguistic, as a sin. With his position on interfaith relations in the

country, his hostile attitude towards the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), Onufry contributed to the incitement of interfaith confrontations, in particular in the Orthodox segment of the country. Only under the pressure of the circumstances of the war and the condemnatory reaction of believers is the church leadership cautiously beginning to move towards a cautious separation from the Russian Orthodox Church. By the decision of the local council on May 27, 2022, the church declared its independence from the ROC, but the matter did not go beyond the declaration. The UOC is still in a state of uncertainty regarding the political and religious position towards Kremlin. It seems to be expecting the return of its former status, when it perceived itself as a subsidiary church of the Moscow Patriarchate, from which it never received recognition of its independence/autocephaly. The facts of cooperation of the UOC members with the occupation authorities raise the question of the unitary official position of the UOC on the war, of the spiritual and mental connection of the Orthodox with Moscow. According to many experts, if the UOC evades clear answers to the acute questions of its affiliation with the ROC, this church will appear in Ukraine as one of the most organized and structured communities with clear opposition to the establishment of Ukrainian independence. This church will be suspected of striving to return Ukraine to a new union community under the supremacy of Russia. In conditions of open military confrontation, such a position is perceived as anti-Ukrainian – anti-state and anti-people.

In Ukraine, in the eleventh year of the war, the propaganda of the “Russian world” continues, affirming the ideas of the “one and indivisible Holy Russia”, a common baptismal font, the all-Russianness of Prince Volodymyr the Baptiser, “the only truth of Russian Orthodoxy”, “the divine election of the Russian people and Putin”. The Cathedral of St. Sophia of Kyiv, the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra and other holy places have been declared the property of the Russian people, who are called to liberate them from the Ukrainian fascists. The doctrine of “Moscow as the third Rome”, of Russia as the source of Orthodox civilization, of the Church Slavonic (i.e. Old Russian) language as a sacred language still live in the minds of many Orthodox Ukrainians – parishioners of the UOC.

Until recently, pro-Moscow-oriented Orthodox church structures operated in Ukraine, in particular the Union of Orthodox Journalists. On the initiative of these organisations in Ukraine during the war, although prohibited by law, mass events were held, including religious processions, sometimes with icons of Emperor Nicholas II and the imperial slogans “Orthodoxy-[Tsarist] Autocracy [Самодержавство]-Peoplehood”. They promote the Russian Empire and the

desire to return to it. They express contempt for Ukrainian state independence and Ukrainian symbols. The state does not always respond in a timely and adequate manner to such situations, uses soft power, refuses mass persecution, does not arrest pilgrims who go to the Pochaiv Lavra in religious processions. The state does not want the aggravation of state-confessional and inter-church relations as additional challenges, especially during martial law.

The ROC-oriented forces in the UOC oppose Ukraine's accession to the EU and NATO, considering such demands from the Church a manifestation of "political Orthodoxy", from which it has been distancing itself since 2014. The slogan "we are outside politics", so popular in the UOC environment, is actually quite shrewd. Church leaders declare themselves outside politics, but outside Ukrainian politics, which is aimed at protecting Ukrainian independence. At the same time, with its uncertainty about the Kremlin's policy, its failure to condemn aggression, and its support for the occupation regime, this Church is drawn into politics, but on the side of Russia. The Church is involved in politics by dividing and promoting the views of the ROC on the Ukrainian war, criticizing the patriotic position of Ukrainian churches, falsifying their history, and accusing them of colluding with the Americans against the ROC.

Ukraine has to respond to such anti-Christian and anti-state propaganda. The struggle is currently limited to "verbal battles" in the form of appeals, statements, expert opinions, and laws. Finally, numerous calls from Ukrainian society to ban the activities of anti-Ukrainian organisations on the territory of war-torn Ukraine were implemented in the Law "On the Protection of the Constitutional Order in the Sphere of Religious Organisations" (Registration No. 3894-IX) adopted by the Parliament on August 20, 2024 (265 deputies voted in favour). Given that the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is an ideological successor to the regime of the aggressor state and an accomplice in war crimes and crimes against humanity committed on behalf of the Russian Federation, its activities in Ukraine are prohibited.

According to this Law, religious organisations that are part of the ROC must leave it. The law clearly defines the procedure that the State Service of Ukraine on Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience (DESS) must ensure. The DESS must establish the facts of the community's affiliation with Russian structures. This has already been partially done as a result of a religious expert examination conducted in early 2023.³ Responding to a request from the UOC hierarchs regarding measures

3 Висновок релігієзнавчої експертизи Статуту про управління Української Православної Церкви на наявність церковно-канонічного зв'язку з Московським

they can take to avoid being considered part of the ROC, the DESS clarified in its letter of June 1, 2023:⁴

- the publication of an official document of the church authorities or a person (persons) authorised to speak on behalf of the UOC, on the withdrawal of the UOC, including all its dioceses, synodal institutions, deaneries, monasteries, church educational institutions, brotherhoods, sisterhoods, parishes and missions, from the ROC;

- submission and publication of statements by the hierarchs and clergy of the UOC, who are part of the episcopate of the ROC, on the withdrawal from the Synod of the ROC, synodal institutions and Inter-Council Commissions;

- official notification of the Local Orthodox Churches of the world on the withdrawal of the UOC from the ROC.

Ukraine does not require the UOC to betray the doctrine of the Orthodox Church, nor to change its liturgical practice, the language of worship or the transition to another liturgical calendar. The only requirement that the law insists on is withdrawal from the ROC, which is a party to the war against Ukraine.

In connection with the adoption of the Law, UOC believers have concerns: does the ban on the activities of the ROC automatically mean a ban on the activities of the UOC (MP)? The head of the DESS, Viktor Yelensky, has repeatedly explained that the Law clearly stipulates that the activities of the Russian Orthodox Church as a foreign religious organisation with a centre of administration in the aggressor state are prohibited in Ukraine. The procedure specified in the Law will apply to religious organisations belonging to the ROC. Thus, having received the order, they will have to leave the ROC. If a religious organisation refuses to comply with the order, the DESS will have the right to go to court. And the court, and only the court, as it should be in a democratic society, will decide to terminate the activities of a religious organisation.⁵

патріархатом [Conclusion of the Religious Expertise of the Statute on the Governance of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church on the Existence of Ecclesiastical and Canonical Relations with the Moscow Patriarchate]; <https://dess.gov.ua/vysnovok-relihiieznavchoi-ekspertyzy-statutu-pro-upravlinnia-ukrainskoi-pravoslavnoi-tserkvy/>.

4 Повідомлення щодо зустрічі ДЕСС та представників УПЦ МП [Announcement regarding the meeting of the DESS and representatives of the UOC-MP], 26 June 2023, <https://dess.gov.ua/povidomlennia-shchodo-zustrichi-dess-ta-predstavnykiv-upts-mp/>.

5 Віктор Єленський: російська православна церква — не просто натхненниця розв'язаної війни проти України, вона бере в ній участь, [Viktor Yelensky: the

Thus, the Law “On the Protection of the Constitutional Order in the Sphere of Religious Organisations”⁶ pursues, in the opinion of the authorities, a legitimate goal, namely preventing the subversive activities of the ROC in Ukraine.

The law does not provide for the banning of any existing church in Ukraine, but still does not allow the subordination of religious organisations in Ukraine to leading centres aimed at the destruction of Ukrainian statehood, culture and identity. It should be noted that such Ukrainian churches as the Old Believers and the True Orthodox Church have already severed ties with centres in the aggressor state.

Ukraine has always been proud of its achievements in the sphere of religious freedom. Moreover, it has never had any banned or closed churches. The Russian invasion, of which the ROC is an active accomplice, forced our country to defend itself from abuses and the use of religion as a weapon by the aggressor state.

The highly authoritative interfaith organisation of Ukraine, the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organisations (AUCCRO), which joins 90% of religious communities in Ukraine stated that no organisation, either secular or religious, with a leadership centre in the aggressor state can operate in Ukraine. On August 16, 2024, during a meeting with the President of Ukraine, members of the AUCCRO confirmed their position and supported the President’s course on the spiritual independence of the country. In addition, they emphasised that even in the conditions of the ongoing brutal war, religious freedom in Ukraine is respected and has never been violated. Such support from the majority of the religious communities is important for the state and confirms the correctness of state policy in the field of religions.⁷

Russian Orthodox Church is not just the inspirer of the war waged against Ukraine, it is participating in it], DESS (4 April 2024), <https://dess.gov.ua/viktor-yelenskyy-rosiyska-pravoslavna-tserkva-ne-prosto-natkhnennytsia-rozv-iazanoi-viyny-proty-ukrainy-vonabere-v-niy-uchast/>; Голова Держслужби з етнополітики пояснив, як визначатимуть зв'язок церкви з РФ [The Head of the State Service for Ethnopolitics explained how the church’s connection with the Russian Federation will be determined], *Ukrinform* (22.08.2024), <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3897507-golova-derzsluzbi-z-etnopolitiki-poasniv-ak-viznacatimut-zvazok-cerkvi-z-rf.html>.

6 Про захист конституційного ладу у сфері діяльності релігійних організацій: Закон України від 20.08.2024 № 3894-IX, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3894-20#Text>.

7 ВРУ ухвалила Закон „Про захист конституційного ладу у сфері діяльності релігійних організацій” [The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopts Law “On Protection of Constitutional Order in the Field of Activities of Religious Organizations”], <https://carpathia.gov.ua/>

Sociological surveys confirm that the Ukrainian society also supports the policy of the government. Thus, according to a study by the Razumkov Center, most respondents stated that there is freedom of conscience in Ukraine. Also, almost 60% of the respondents consider the relations between believers of different faiths to be normal, and only 3% consider them to be conflictual.⁸ At the same time, as noted in the latest Pew Research Center report (published on 5 March 2024), Ukraine's performance on the government religious restrictions index is not only better than that of countries of the former Soviet Union, but also compared to six European democratic countries.⁹

The law does not prohibit the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. It only prevents religious organisations in Ukraine from being subordinated to the Russian Church, which has declared a "holy war" against Ukraine.

Even before the adoption of the Law, some local authorities, without waiting for instructions from Kyiv, regional and city state administrations suspended the activities of the Orthodox parishes of the UOC, deregistered them, did not approve the church charters of these communities, terminated lease agreements, and even turned off electricity, water, and gas. For example, the Ivano-Frankivsk Regional State Administration, after the flight to Moscow of the UOC local Bishop Seraphim, closed their church until the proper paperwork was completed, including renaming in accordance with the law preventing the subordination to the ROC. Everything is going to the point that there will be no UOC parish in Zakarpattia. The Lviv Regional State Administration did the same. In some respects, Ukrainian civil society is more resolute than the state, which keeps a balance and does not want confrontations.

news/verkhovna-rada-ukrainy-ukhvalyla-zakon-pro-zakhyst-konstytutsiinoho-ladu-u-sferi-diiialnosti-relihiinykh-orhanizatsii (16 October 2024).

8 Рівень релігійності, довіра до Церкви, конфесійний розподіл та міжцерковні відносини в українському суспільстві (листопад 2023р.) [Level of Religiosity, Trust in the Church, Confessional Distribution and Interchurch Relations in Ukrainian Society (November 2023)], <https://razumkov.org.ua/napriamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/riven-reliiynosti-dovira-do-tserkvy-konfesiinyi-rozpodil-ta-mizhtserkovni-vidnosyny-v-ukrainskomu-suspilstvi-lystopad-2023r>.

9 For the Report on Government Restrictions on Religion: <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2024/03/05/restrictions-methodology/#fn-69419-9>, with Appendix A: Government Restrictions Index (Ukraine is listed under moderate restrictions), and Appendix C: Religious restrictions index scores by region (GRI 4.1, lower than that of Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Greece, Romania).

Civil society in Ukraine wants to know why the bishops of the UOC MP did not stand up at the commemoration of heroes in the Ukrainian Parliament, why they did not condemn Moscow's aggression, why they did not sing a funeral service for the fallen soldier in the church, why they cooperate with the occupation authorities, why they flee from Ukraine to Russia, etc. It is public organisations that initiate various inter-church dialogues, call for an open conversation with the UOC, from which citizens, conscious patriots, want to hear answers to their "Why?". It is known that some consultations are being held, informal meetings are taking place between priests of the two jurisdictions, ways out of the crisis of Orthodoxy in Ukraine are being sought. But this is done not on the basis of a developed theology of inter-church relations in times of crisis/war, but intuitively, based on the practice of communication, on the basis of finding a way to overcome the crisis.

Life has prompted the birth of a new initiative from below – the establishment of the "Sophia Brotherhood"¹⁰ as a dialogue platform for communication between representatives of the UOC and the OCU. The emergence of the brotherhood is actually a grassroots initiative to restore church unity in Ukraine, it is the beginning of negotiations between the two branches of Orthodoxy at an unofficial level. The main goal of the Brotherhood is to consolidate the efforts and support the initiatives of Orthodox Christians aimed at developing dialogue. The members of the Brotherhood recognize as important the principles defined in the Declaration of Understanding,¹¹ which was published after the meeting in the St. Sophia Cathedral on July 5, 2022, as well as the provisions voiced in the Address of the dialogue participants dated February 20, 2023.¹²

The Brotherhood has determined the areas of its activity. In particular, its activity is aimed at reviving the principle of conciliarity in church life, intensifying the involvement of the Orthodox clergy and believers in processes related to the development of Ukrainian Orthodoxy. The Brotherhood plans to promote Christian education through the implementation of Orthodox missionary projects,

10 Sofia Brotherhood, <https://sofiyske-bratstvo.org/en/home/>.

11 "OCU and UOC MP Sign Declaration of Understanding", *RISU* (7.7.2022), https://risu.ua/en/ocu-and-uoc-mp-sign-declaration-of-understanding_n130717.

12 Appeal of the Participants of the Interchurch Dialogue in St. Sophia of Kyiv to the Bishops, Clergy, and Faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, *Public Orthodoxy* (23 February 2023), <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2023/02/23/st-sophia-oco-uoc-appeal/>.

organizing cultural and educational events, developing educational and scientific programs, research, restoration and dissemination of the spiritual and cultural tradition, liturgical and musical, architectural and iconographic heritage of Ukrainian (Kyiv) and Ecumenical Orthodoxy, etc. The Brotherhood intends to create a unique information space regarding the defined goals of its activities, in particular, “exposing the true essence of the ideology of the ‘Russian world’, its anti-church and anti-Ukrainian orientation, and overcoming its negative impact on Ukrainian Orthodoxy.”¹³

In the Ukrainian expert and church environment, two opposing positions have developed regarding the brotherhood. Optimists, like the brothers themselves, believe that this initiative has a future, that it is able to overcome the existing hostility, distrust, resentment and confrontation between the two churches. It just takes time, the absence of interference from the state and radically minded members of society. That is, it is a completely church project. Pessimists see in this initiative an attempt to preserve the UOC as an autonomous structure without its entry and unification with the OCU. In general, society, which is now very focused on all kinds of unifying strategies, perceives this brotherhood as one of the possible ways of understanding between the two branches of Ukrainian Orthodoxy.

The real possibilities of inter-church understanding are evidenced by the mood within the UOC. An interesting project, supported by the Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOiS), was implemented in 2024 by the young religious scholar Andrey Fert. Based on his interview, the Centre prepared a report, “War and Religion: Views from Inside the ‘Russian’ Church of Ukraine”.¹⁴ A cursory review of the survey results indicates the unpreparedness of the UOC faithful to constructively resolve the problem of the schism in Ukrainian Orthodoxy. The self-awareness of the vast majority of UOC faithful is filled with a large number of stereotypes that have been imposed on them for years. These people are mostly unable to think critically, do not want to change anything in their lives and in their understanding, are terribly conservative, because they are so eager to preserve themselves. The cause of all troubles, according to the interviewees, is not the

13 “викриття справжньої сутності ідеології «Русского мира», її антицерковної й антиукраїнської спрямованості та подолання її негативного впливу на українське Православ’я”, Sofia Brotherhood. <https://sofiyske-bratstvo.org/en/home/>.

14 Andriy FERT, “War and Religion. Views from within Ukraine’s ‘Russian’ Church”, *ZOiS Report 6* (2024), https://www.zois-berlin.de/fileadmin/media/Dateien/3-Publikationen/ZOiS_Reports/2024/ZOiS_Report_6_2024.pdf.

Church and its policies, but journalists, authorities, scientists, volunteers, other churches, who deliberately distort reality. The UOC faithful believe that they are under terrible pressure from the authorities that persecute them. Therefore, they must stand firm in their faith, because they are the last stronghold of Truth in this sinful civilization. The report concludes:

- Most respondents attribute the current public disapproval of the UOC to the misrepresentation of their church in the media. However, a few acknowledge that the church also bears some blame, arguing that its leaders failed to effectively communicate their break with the Moscow Patriarchate in 2022 or condemn instances of collaborationism within the church. While many believe that the church leaders should improve their communications with society, most respondents doubt that this will help to change public sentiment or alleviate state pressure on the church.

- With few exceptions, the respondents are not in favour of changing the language of UOC religious services from Church Slavonic to Ukrainian. They explain their reluctance with reference to habit and theological considerations. At the same time, some concede that if Ukrainian society perceives Church Slavonic as Russian, it might be helpful to introduce elements of Ukrainian into the liturgy. However, only a few parishes have taken this step to date.

- Since February 2022, UOC members have been under pressure from society, the media, and the authorities to switch their affiliation to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), the church that now has the largest share of support in Ukraine. For most of my interviewees, re-affiliating with this ‘rival’ church is not an option. Yet several expressed a readiness to re-affiliate, provided the whole parish agree to do so. Only two priests were ready to change affiliation if it means protecting their parish and retaining a place of worship.

- Interviewees by and large echo internal UOC propaganda about the illegitimacy of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) and describe the state policy towards their church as religious persecution. Yet many challenge these narratives, acknowledge the religious validity of the OCU, and deny that religious persecution is taking place in Ukraine. Even those who subscribe to anti-OCU narratives still say that many OCU priests and parishioners they know personally are good Christians.

- Roughly half of the interviewees admit that there are some pro-Russia people in their church. The concept ‘pro-Russia’ varies from interviewee to interviewee. For some, it includes those who believe that Russia and Ukraine should be united,

that Ukraine is to blame for the war, or that the bonds between the UOC and the Russian Orthodox Church should be preserved. Others speak of people who are ‘indirectly pro-Russia’ – those who think that Russian culture is superior, refuse to take sides in the ongoing war, or are critical of what they see as the anti-Christian agenda of Ukraine and the West.

– Nearly all respondents are dismissive of politics as something they do not, under any circumstances, want their church to be involved in. For them, the term encompasses everything that has nothing to do with prayer, one’s relationship with God, and parish life. Their resistance to engaging in debates about the veneration of Russian saints in the UOC, autocephaly or language change is palpable in our conversations. Politics is thus a concept the interviewees use to justify their apolitical stance and discursively shield themselves from what they see as hostile and wrong.

In our opinion, it is unrealistic to overcome such uncertainty and even ambivalence of positions within the UOC in the near future. Therefore, the unification of the two branches of Ukrainian Orthodoxy is a matter of the future. Given the situation of the war, which, on the one hand, can accelerate the unifying intentions of the Orthodox, and on the other, hinder any movements towards each other, it is necessary to approach the matter moderately. Without violating religious freedoms and the right of every person to profess his/her chosen system of values, the state and society must take care of the consequences of the division of Orthodoxy in Ukraine, which is regarded by all experts as a factor of danger.

The country has already faced major security problems. The aggressor is destroying churches and houses of prayer, killing believers, Orthodox and other Christians and non-Christians, destroying the Ukrainian state itself, establishing a racist regime in the occupied territories, deporting Ukrainians to Russia, and forcibly denationalizing Ukrainian children. In addition to such obvious external threats that cannot be ignored when drawing up a security strategy, one cannot neglect internal dangers that Ukrainians often forget about, explaining the reasons for all their failures or problems to the outside world. And these internal factors, if not taken into account, can even play a decisive role in changing the security of life. The war devalued the very existence of a person, problematized the issue of one’s own identity, and led to an internal imbalance of the national organism. The vast majority of Ukrainians are in a state of uncertainty, poorly imagining life after the end of the war.

People are looking for support in faith in God, in hope for the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Demand and trust in the Church have increased. But not all religious organisations have coped with the challenges of the war era.

Orthodox priests of the UOC have appealed to the Ecumenical Patriarch with a request to help in the self-determination of the UOC. Although they recognised the perniciousness of the Russian world, they do not know "...what canonical path we should take to unite all Orthodox in Ukraine into a single Local Church. We are trying to find a compromise, perhaps a transitional option, acceptable to all, since not all clergy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church are currently ready to join the Orthodox Church of Ukraine... We turn to you for support and advice. We hope that with the help of Universal Orthodoxy we will be able to overcome conflicts in Ukrainian Orthodoxy."¹⁵

Another test for the UOC was the "Order of the World Russian People's Council", called the program document of the 21st century, dated 27 March 2024, which is addressed to the legislative and executive authorities of Russia.¹⁶ Without ever mentioning God, Christ, or the Gospel, the Order presented a strategy for the development of the country and the church. In this picture of the future, there is no place for either Ukraine, which is called the "lands of South-Western Rus", or for Ukrainians, who are presented as a sub-ethnic group of one – Russian – people. If Ukrainians do not accept the values of the "Russian world", which was created by Russia, the support and defender of this "spiritual and cultural-civilizational phenomenon", "the single spiritual space of Holy Russia", then they will be destroyed, the possibility of their existence "must be completely excluded".

The UOC responded to such xenophobic, in fact genocidal calls from the ROC and Russia with a statement from the Department of External Church Relations, in which the church distanced itself, not sharing and condemning the ideas set forth in the Order. The church declared that it was building God's, not the "Russian world",

15 Священики УПЦ МП звернулися до Патріарха Варфоломія з проханням допомогти їм розірвати стосунки з РПЦ і Кирилом. <https://bukinfo.com.ua/religiya/svyashchenykurc-mp-zvernulysya-do-patriarha-varfolomiya-z-prohannyam-dopomogty-jim-rozirvaty-stosunky-z-rpc-i-kyrylom>

16 Наказ XXV Всемирного Русского Народного Собора «Настоящее і будущее русского мира». <https://forum.pravda.com.ua/index.php?topic=1140166.msg27853966#msg27853966>.

and was not forming “geopolitical and geospiritual structures”.¹⁷ The danger that is openly present in the policy of the ROC towards Ukraine threatens, first of all, the Orthodox “brothers”, who are slowly realizing these challenges, still believe in the brotherhood of the Russian people of the same faith. It is possible to ban the activities of such organisations that work for the interests of others, but will the ban change the orientation of their doctrinal concepts, practical activities, which undermine the independent existence of Ukrainian society? How to overcome the post-Soviet pro-imperial aspiration of such Ukrainians to join some historically dead unions, societies, communities, church organisations? Calls for a return to a single spiritual ecumenism of true – Russian – Orthodoxy are not just dangerous, but also criminal.

The activity of religious organisations that cherish only foreign values, neglecting their own, is dangerous. By forming a detachment from Ukrainian social life, a certain alienation of their believers from Ukrainian realities, such confessions devalue Ukrainian citizenship, historical memory, and a sense of being rooted in this land. But in conditions of war, there are more and more people who understand the value of Ukraine’s existence as a state that provides all, even anti-Ukrainian-minded citizens, with freedom of conscience and religion. Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Krishnas, and others who did not define themselves as Ukrainian-centric before the war, have stood up in defence of Ukrainian statehood.

Religious security of Ukraine is not only the presence of those confessional communities that defend its sovereignty, it is not only the possible deprivation of the right to activity of those who show their servility to the enemies of Ukraine. It is at the same time the active engagement of believers of these confessions in defending Ukrainian, it is the removal of their post-colonial consciousness.

Today, following the Russian-Ukrainian war, Ukraine is gaining a unique experience that makes us realize that security - national and individual – is unthinkable without the free exercise of faith by every citizen, provided that

17 “Заклики до знищення України та виправдання військової агресії неспівставні з євангельським вченням” – заява ВЗЦЗ УПЦ. <https://vzcz.church.ua/2024/03/28/zakliki-do-znishhennya-ukrajini-ta-vipravdannya-vijskovoji-agresiji-nespivstavni-z-jevangeliskim-vchennyam-zayava-vzcz-upc/>. In English: “Calls for the Destruction of Ukraine and the Justification of a Military Aggression are Inconsistent with the Gospel Teaching” – Statement from the UOC Department for External Church Relations” (28.03.2024), <https://vzcz.church.ua/2024/03/28/calls-for-the-destruction-of-ukraine-and-the-justification-of-a-military-aggression-are-inconsistent-with-the-gospel-teaching-statement-from-the-uoc-department-for-external-church-relations/?lang=en>.

religious communities function freely. Religion is becoming a significant element of the entire national security system, which will successfully protect Ukrainians under certain conditions. Among them, the most important are:

1) a worldview orientation towards building our own Ukrainian world, which should be understood as a society where Ukrainian values and Ukrainian visions prevail;

2) upholding the value of religious freedom and the plurality of religious life in Ukraine;

3) affirmation of the openness of religions existing in Ukraine, when a particular religious system is not closed in its tradition, but is open to interaction with other institutions of both the secular and religious worlds;

4) practicing a new format of communication between people and their communities, which is possible only through and in the form of dialogue: dialogue between church and state, church and society, between the churches;

5) assisting the state and its representatives in implementing a policy of equality towards religious organisations;

6) relying on the professionalism of experts and the responsibility of the media in objective coverage, scientific analysis and large-scale dissemination of information about the religious life of Ukraine.

Conclusions

The specific circumstances in which the Church finds itself require complex theological analysis. New or updated old concepts must be developed that would provide answers to the challenges of the day. And these are: the theology of war, the theology of just peace, the theology of dialogue (interreligious and interdenominational communication), and the theology of post-war revival.

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DALLA FUGA MUNDI AL CONTEMPTUS MUNDI SEGNO DI UNA RICERCA CONTINUA PER L'UOMO

GABRIEL HĂLĂNDUȚ¹

Abstract. When we look at how people lived in the past, it can happen that we remain puzzled and see no trace of meaning. In this article I consider two paradoxical attitudes from the past: *fuga mundi* and *contemptus mundi* and I try to show that life is not always a linear path, nor a safe, predetermined and progressive journey. On the contrary, history shows us that one's existence is spontaneous and dynamic. From time to time, one must return to the cave of their interiority to find there, on another level, the possibility of a new beginning, separating oneself from what normally distracts one from their fulfilment. Sometimes this withdrawal can lead to contempt. A philosophical reading of these matters, apparently purely theological, brings new and rich meanings into focus.

Keywords: Fuga mundi, contemptus mundi, interiority, meaning of life.

Introduzione

«Recentemente, fra i molti fastidi che ho avuto, e di cui conoscete il motivo, mi è toccato anche un po' di quiete. Ma non ho trascorso tutto quel tempo in ozio. Per soffocare la superbia, fonte di tutti i vizi, ho cercato di descrivere in qualche modo la bassezza della condizione umana»². Queste parole sono prese dal Prologo che apre il libro *De contemptu mundi* e descrivono il contesto nel quale il cardinale Lotario di Segni ha scritto quest'opera nel Medio Evo.

Queste poche parole penso che rivelano già qualcosa sulla complessità della condizione umana su quale vorrei riflettere in seguito. Finché l'uomo vive su questa terra, egli è sempre sulla via, desideroso di superare i confini, di esplorare, di

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- 2 Lotario di SEGNI, *La miseria della condizione umana. De contemptu mundi*, tr. Carlo Carena, Silvio Berlusconi Editrice, Milano 2004, 3.

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provare, ma anche di superare sé stesso, di elevarsi moralmente e intellettualmente. Essere in cammino oppure essere *homo viator*, secondo l'espressione che si è imposta durante i secoli, deriva da un "gene" presente non solo nel nostro DNA biologico, ma anche in quello spirituale, come cercherò di mostrare in questo articolo. In realtà, guardando da un punto di vista fenomenologico, questa continua ricerca che caratterizza l'uomo è il segno di una povertà genetica e ontologica che prova di realizzarsi ad ogni passo. Questo significa che l'uomo è un progetto che conserva per tutta la vita la vocazione di (auto)realizzarsi.

Dunque, la domanda centrale della mia riflessione sarà la seguente: come avviene questo divenire? Quale strada dovrà scegliere l'uomo tra le possibilità infinite che si aprono davanti a lui? Come impara a riconoscere i pericoli e come può evitarli? Esiste una sola via giusta, mentre tutte le altre portano alla perdizione? Oppure cosa succede quando qualcuno si rende conto di aver sbagliato la strada, può cambiare la direzione? Tra le innumerevoli risposte che la storia del mondo conosce e che sono giunte a noi sotto varie forme, propongo di analizzarne due: *fuga mundi* e *contemptus mundi*. Sebbene si impongano come modelli specifici del cristianesimo, approfondendo il contesto nel quale sono comparsi e i meccanismi che li hanno costituito, si potrà cogliere che le radici sono molto più profonde e ampie di quanto potremmo pensare ad un primo sguardo.

La ricerca come modello ermeneutico³

Riprendendo quanto detto sopra, vorrei riportare nell'analisi alcuni studi antropologici, sociologici ed etnologici che individuano una costante nel compor-

3 È molto interessante, in questo senso, il modo in cui, sulla scia di Andrei Plesu, Gabriel-Iulian Robu presenta pure la fede come ricerca, come tensione, come cammino di ricerca: „Non c'è solo una ricerca spaziale, all'interno di un perimetro fisico. Se fosse solo questa comprensione, la nostra ricerca spirituale sarebbe persa. Ci sono pure altre ricerche: cercare un senso nella vita, cercare una soluzione a un problema, cercare un amico, cercare la vocazione. In tutti questi casi non sai esattamente che cosa stai cercando e che cosa troverai. Eppure non cerchi con un vagabondo, ma proprio come uno che cerca, ciò è diverso, perché cerchi con la speranza globale del buon risultato e il presentimento che l'oggetto della ricerca diventerà anche l'oggetto della scoperta” (Gabriel-Iulian ROBU, *La fede come cammino, tensione e ricerca negli scritti di Andrei Plesu: una voce dalla Romania*, in SERGIO GABURRO – ANTONIO SABETTA (edd.), *Elogio della porosità. Per una teologia con-testuale Miscellanea di studi per il prof. Giuseppe Lorizio*, Studium, Roma 2023, 342).

tamento umano. Nonostante lo proteggesse dalle intemperie e dagli attacchi di altri simili o di animali selvatici, l'uomo è stato sempre attratto dall'idea di uscire dalla sua caverna primordiale perché nel suo profondo intuisce il prezzo delle limitazioni che la sua dimora glielo impone⁴.

Rievocando in qualche modo il noto frammento platonico della *Repubblica*, lo sforzo del "prigioniero" che si libera dalla caverna ed esce alla luce, è diventato l'archetipo di ogni passaggio dalle tenebre alla luce, dall'opinione alla verità, dal pregiudizio alla conoscenza. In qualche modo, l'intera storia dell'umanità può essere letta seguendo e vedendo i passi che l'uomo ha imparato a compiere in favore della propria realizzazione. Ma per quanto persuasiva e ben argomentata possa essere questa visione dialettica della storia e dell'uomo, non posso omettere un'altra questione. Dopo la liberazione dal regno delle illusioni e dei pregiudizi attraverso la filosofia e dopo l'accesso ad una verità più profonda sul mondo e sulla vita attraverso la religione, come spiegare il fatto che nel corso dei tempi, in una forma o nell'altra, l'uomo ha continuato ad essere affascinato dal ritorno al deserto e alle celle dei monasteri? Dove va l'uomo quando fugge dal mondo? E poi, è davvero possibile staccarsi completamente dal mondo e sospendere i rapporti con i propri simili per diventare più autentico? Sarà questa la via vera?

Penso che il punto più solido per costruire una risposta sia legato al significato che il *mondo* aveva per quelli che si sono decisi di seguire questa via nella loro vita. Le ricerche che ho potuto fare su alcuni scritti dei padri della Chiesa mi hanno portato a individuare due possibili visioni sul mondo nell'ambito della Chiesa. A seconda di questi, il ritiro dal mondo assume un significato diverso o addirittura contraddittorio rispetto all'altro.

La più diffusa, probabilmente, è stata la concezione ispirata dagli scritti neotestamentari⁵ (*Gv* 4,8; *Col* 1,1-18) che parlano di una bontà intrinseca del mondo, creazione di Dio, sempre chiamata a rinnovarsi e a ritornare allo stato paradisiaco originario.

4 René GUÉNON, *Symboles de la science sacrée*, Éditions Gallimard, Paris 2013², 172–178.

5 Già dalle sue prime pagine la Bibbia ripete sotto forma di canto liturgico l'esclamazione che Dio ha davanti a quello che Lui ha creato: "Dio vide che era cosa buona", e alla fine della creazione l'autore esclama pure: "Dio vide quanto aveva fatto, ed ecco, era cosa *molto* buona" (*Gen* 1,31). Nella riflessione metafisica della Scolastica, la bontà della creazione è una proprietà fondamentale di tutti gli enti, a motivo e nella misura della loro partecipazione all'essere, che nella filosofia cristiana si chiama *Dio*. Per una sintesi dell'evoluzione di questa concezione lungo la storia della Chiesa vedi Medard KEHL, „E Dio vide che era cosa buona” in *Una teologia della creazione*, tr. V. Maraldi, Edizione Queriniana, Brescia 2009, 29–31.

Quindi, se per il concetto di *mondo* intendiamo l'insieme delle attività secolari, della vita sociale e familiare, ecc. senza alcuna connotazione negativa, *fuga mundi* potrebbe essere l'atteggiamento raccomandato come mezzo straordinario di perfezione e come testimonianza davanti al mondo della transitorietà di tutto ciò che si trova sulla terra e, inoltre, del fatto che solo i beni soprannaturali sono il fine ultimo e vero dell'uomo.

Ci sono stati però altri autori cristiani o addirittura sempre gli stessi che, in altri scritti, hanno abbracciato una visione più pessimistica del mondo, vedendo in esso l'insieme dei beni materiali e delle attività temporali che, ricercate in modo disordinato, impediscono oppure rendono difficile che l'anima si avvicini a Dio⁶. Per questi ultimi la *fuga mundi* diventa quindi l'atteggiamento fondamentale e necessario perché il cristiano si salvi la propria anima.

Personalmente penso che sia difficile tracciare una demarcazione precisa tra queste due visioni o stabilire una sequenza chiara riguardo ai tempi in cui si sono succedute. Ecco perché preferisco considerare come atteggiamento fondamentale del cristiano una sorta di "riserva" verso le cose mondane, riserva costantemente assunta a livello interiore e talvolta espressa in forme esplicite di vita religiosa, anacoretica o cenobitica⁷. Si deve ancora dire che un simile modo di vivere si estende oltre i primi secoli cristiani, trovando esempi sufficienti anche oggi, e osservando anche un risveglio di interesse per un simile atteggiamento. Inoltre, come mostra la storia delle religioni, la *fuga mundi* va anche oltre i confini del cristianesimo, essendo presente nella maggior parte delle religioni, come tentativo di raggiungere un "progetto" migliore, addirittura vicino all'*utopia*⁸.

L'esperienza della *fuga mundi*

Della *fuga mundi* si parla di più da un punto di vista delle persone che l'hanno praticata e soprattutto dal punto di vista delle trasformazioni che questo approccio

6 IGNAZIO DI ANTIOCHIA, *Rom.*, 3-4; 6,1; *Pastore di Herma*, 4,3, 2-4; TERTULIANO, *De spectaculis*, 29 dove si trova l'espressione: "saeculi totius contemptus". In questi scritti si può ritenere che si trovino i primi semi dei moderni trattati di Teodicea.

7 Termine che deriva dalla lingua greca: *ana-horetés*, *aná*, indietro e *horéo*, ritiro) e designa il monaco che sceglie di vivere solitario, lontano dal mondo. Per questo lo distinguiamo dal monaco cenobitico (*koinobiátes*) che vive in un monastero o in una comunità monastica. Se gli anacoreti affondano le loro radici in sant'Antonio Abate (250-356), il fondatore del movimento cenobitico è considerato san Pacomio (292-348).

8 Italo MANCINI, *Teologia, ideologia, utopia*, Edizione Queriniana, Brescia 1974, 468-476.

volontario ha prodotto nella loro vita. Tuttavia è facile trascurare le radici di questa scelta e in questo modo si rischia di perdere una parte importante del suo contenuto.

Un interessante punto di partenza per avvicinarci alla genealogia di questa pratica spirituale è fornito da J.P. Vernant. Egli scrive che «aussi longtemps que la cité est demeurée vivante, aucune secte, aucune pratique culturelle, aucun groupement organisé n'a exprimé en pleine rigueur et avec toutes ses conséquences cette exigence de sortie du corps, de fuite hors du monde, d'union intime et personnelle avec la divinité. La religion grecque n'a pas connu le personnage du *renonçant*. C'est la Philosophie qui, en transposant dans son propre registre les thèmes de l'ascèse, de la purification de l'âme, de son immortalité, a pris le relais»⁹.

L'osservazione di questo autore coglie il fatto che alla base di ogni ritiro dell'uomo dal mondo c'era un esercizio spirituale praticato per la prima volta dalla filosofia. Prima della religione, i filosofi, come dimostrerà Pierre Hadot nei suoi studi, erano coloro che si *curavano* della perfezione spirituale dell'uomo¹⁰. L'antico culto religioso era piuttosto rivolto al miglioramento degli dei e ad assicurare la loro protezione nei diversi momenti che attraversava la città. Si trattava, in altre parole, di riti e pratiche rivolte all'esterno. Al contrario, la filosofia ha cercato di soddisfare il bisogno di interiorizzazione e di cura spirituale di cui l'uomo aveva bisogno, anche raccomandando il ritiro temporaneo attraverso pratiche mentali e spirituali. In realtà, questo è uno degli *esercizi spirituali* fondamentali della filosofia antica. Più tardi, il monachesimo cristiano si farà carico di questo esercizio, soprattutto del suo valore pratico, e lo eleverà ad uno stile di vita, lasciando la parte teorica alla Filosofia, ridotta alla funzione di scienza teorica¹¹.

9 Jean Pierre VERNANT, *Mythe et religion en Grèce ancienne*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1990, 112–113.

10 Pierre HADOT, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, Paris 2002. Questo articolo propone un ritorno alle origini antiche della filosofia come *esercizio spirituale* e costituirà la base di un nuovo corrente nella filosofia contemporanea, meglio conosciuto sotto la titolazione inglese: *Philosophy as a Way of Life*. Inoltre, questo articolo programmatico sarà seguito da una serie di libri che Hadot scriverà su questo argomento. I libri di un altro filosofo francese, Michel Foucault, contemporaneo di Hadot, completeranno le intuizioni di Hadot sull'essenza della filosofia.

11 Michael CHASE, „Observations on Pierre Hadot's conception of Philosophy as a Way of Life”, 13. <http://www.practical-philosophy.org.uk> (25.08.2024).

Ma dove entra in questo ambito la scelta volontaria da parte dell'uomo di ritirarsi dalla comunità? Contrariamente all'opinione comune, il mondo del deserto, con le sue caverne, è piuttosto un mondo pieno di vita. Gli anacoreti, prima gli egiziani e poi tutti gli altri, avevano subito capito che la libertà che il mondo gli offre non è sufficiente per la perfezione a cui Gesù Cristo li invita nel Vangelo. Pertanto, alcuni andarono alla ricerca di luoghi dove potevano compiere questo desiderio di purificazione spirituale e di unione con Dio. E se il ritiro dal mondo era già una pratica a cui già molti ricorrevano, Antonio Abate porta la novità del *deserto*¹².

Perché il deserto? Perché questo luogo è per eccellenza una rappresentazione metaforica del ritiro e dell'abbandono e, quindi, implica una rinuncia completa e radicale allo spirito del mondo. Pertanto, chi ha questo desiderio può trovare le prove necessarie per purificarsi dalle inclinazioni peccaminose a cui il mondo abitualmente lo tenta. Ad esempio, Isacco il Siro diceva che «ritirarsi dal mondo consiste nel non occuparsi del mondo»¹³, cioè al monaco era richiesto di abbracciare un atteggiamento di distacco e di non coinvolgimento, una sorta di *epoché* spirituale. In secondo luogo, la povertà del deserto e l'impossibilità di impegnarsi nei lavori che la vita in una comunità rurale o urbana solitamente richiedeva, lasciava un ampio spazio alla preghiera, alle letture spirituali e alla contemplazione mistica. Ricordiamo come nel libro dell'Esodo Mosè incontra la presenza di Dio proprio in mezzo al deserto, ed è proprio qui che Dio sceglie di fare l'alleanza con il suo popolo (*Ex* 3; 19-20). Più tardi, anche Gesù, il nuovo Mosè, attraverserà esplicitamente le prove del deserto prima di iniziare la sua attività pubblica (*Mt* 4,1-11; *Mc* 1,12-13; *Lc* 4,1-13). Da questi esempi riesce quindi l'importanza cruciale del deserto in una visione religiosa del mondo e dell'uomo.

Tornando al nostro discorso, l'elemento centrale che dirige le pratiche e i rituali degli anacoreti è la vita con tutto ciò che ne consegue: vivere, semplicità, pentimento. Il deserto non è il luogo delle parole, delle teorie, dei libri, delle regole o della gerarchia, ma del ritorno radicale alle componenti essenziali dell'esistenza. Eppure la *fuga mundi* non presuppone un'esclusione *a priori* e totale della parte intellettuale, ma significa adottare una nuova comprensione e un nuovo modo di rapportarsi alla conoscenza.

12 Luigi BORRIELLO, Edmondo CARUANA, Maria Rosaria del GENIO, (ed), *Dizionario di mistica*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Roma 1998, 888.

13 Daniel LEMENI, *Duhul a suflat în pustie. Lumea duhovnicească a Părinților deșertului*, Editura Renașterea, Cluj-Napoca 2014, 113.

Inoltre, la vita dei padri del deserto mostra che questo stile di vita non ha nulla di magico o di romantico, anzi, potrebbe essere un abbraccio di realismo più genuino: «vai, fermati nella cella e la cella ti insegnerà tutto», dice, per esempio, un apoftegma. È stato questo realismo a produrre uomini santi e veri maestri spirituali. Dall'enfasi esagerata sulla mente e sulla ragione che il mondo pratica, l'eremita impara ad ascoltare la voce onesta del cuore, a placare la curiosità dell'anima, a controllare le sue passioni. Non è priva di importanza anche l'associazione tra il desiderio di conoscenza e il peccato dei primi uomini, che gli autori di tutti i tempi hanno colto e sviluppato nei loro libri¹⁴.

Credo quindi che chi ha scelto la via del deserto non abbia abbandonato del tutto i libri e la preoccupazione per conoscenza, ma abbia cercato di convertirla in uno strumento al servizio della scienza sacra, come via per avvicinarsi a Dio. In altre parole, chi rinuncia al mondo non si dedica allo sviluppo della propria conoscenza, ma si avvale del dono divino della ragione per crescere in qualità, per approfondire e purificare ciò che conosce per la salvezza dell'anima¹⁵. Tramite la *fuga mundi* e il rifiuto di accettare a compiacersi con la semplice sopravvivenza e una vita superficiale, gli anacoreti hanno trovato l'ordine e il significato della vita, poiché l'interiorità è spesso la via dimenticata verso la profondità e verso la verità¹⁶.

Dunque, «il deserto è il luogo di un incontro profondo, e non di una fuga superficiale; è il luogo dove, tagliato fuori dal mondo e dai rapporti con gli altri, sei costretto a confrontarti con te stesso. Il deserto è un luogo di prova e di preparazione, un luogo dove si va per iniziare un vasto lavoro volto a sbarazzarsi di tutto ciò che non è essenziale e inutile»¹⁷. Ma, cosa ancora più importante,

14 Forse che la forma artistica più alta di questa idea appare espressa nel poema *Paradiso perduto* di John Milton (1608-1674). Ecco la risposta straordinaria dell'Arcangelo Raffaele ad Adamo, tormentato da domande e dubbi: Solicit not thy thoughts with matters hid, / Leave them to God above, him serve and fear; / Of other creatures, as him pleases best, / Wherever placed, let him dispose: joy thou / In what he gives to thee, this Paradise / And thy fair Eve; heaven is for thee too high / To know what passes there; be lowly wise: / Think only what concerns thee and thy being; / Dream not of other worlds, what creatures there / Live, in what state, condition or degree, / Contented that thus far hath been revealed / Not of earth only but of highest heaven. (John MILTON, *Paradise lost*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2005, VIII, 167-178)

15 Daniel LEMENI, *Duhul a suflat in pustie*, 97.

16 Daniel LEMENI, *Duhul a suflat in pustie*, 103.

17 Daniel LEMENI, *Duhul a suflat in pustie*, 107 (mia traduzione).

«l'esperienza del deserto è la prova di verità per ogni uomo, perché le permette – una volta cadute le ultime illusioni – di scoprirsi così come egli è, e in questo modo, di trovarsi preparato al suo incontro con Dio»¹⁸.

È interessante notare ora le somiglianze tra questi testi che, da una parte, descrivono la vita dei monaci e, dall'altra parte, l'interesse per l'autenticità che la Filosofia cerca. Per essere autentico, l'uomo deve scoprirsi, ritirarsi e conoscersi profondamente, e non arrivare alla meta in maniera spontanea o per un semplice atto di volontà. Come avevano intuito i padri del deserto, l'uomo ha bisogno di esercizio, cioè di ascesi (del corpo, ma anche della mente) e deve compiere uno sforzo spirituale per riconquistare sé stesso. Proprio questa esperienza finisce per *tras-formare* la persona in questione, cioè dandole *forma* - una nuova forma spiritualizzata - dopo una serie di esercizi¹⁹.

Mi sembra che uno degli esempi più belli in questo senso è proprio la vita di Michel de Montaigne. Come lui stesso afferma nei suoi *Saggi*, all'età di 38 anni, forse ispirato dai modelli presi della tradizione, filosofi e santi, e disilluso dal proseguimento degli affari mondani che conduceva come sindaco di Bordeaux o come deputato, sceglie di ritirarsi nel castello della famiglia per prendersi cura del suo edificio interno. «Recentemente, quando mi sono ritirato in casa mia, risoluto per quanto potessi a non occuparmi d'altro che di trascorrere in pace e appartato quel po' di vita che mi resta, mi sembrava di non poter fare al mio spirito favore più grande che lasciarlo, nell'ozio più completo, conservare con sé stesso e fermarsi e riposarsi in sé medesimo. Cosa che speravo potesse ormai fare più facilmente, divenuto col tempo più posato e più maturo»²⁰. Questa *fuga mundi* moderna, con la quale l'ex politico sceglie deliberatamente l'ozio e il *conservare*

18 Daniel LEMENI, *Duhul a suflat în pustie*, 108 (mia traduzione).

19 Jean Philippe MILET, „L'expérience comme technique de soi” in *De l'Expérience*, Les Papiers du Collège International, Nr. 22, 135–150. Non era questa fin dall'inizio la vocazione originaria della filosofia. Prima Pierre Hadot e poi Michel Foucault, in tempi recenti, hanno cercato di mostrare che al centro della filosofia c'era l'*epimeleia heautou* oppure cura di sé, cioè l'interesse per lui di comprendere sé stesso e realizzarsi mettendo in pratica certi *esercizi spirituali*. Purtroppo, la filosofia viene spesso ridotta a una teoria della conoscenza, a un sistema o a un altro, in cui il principio “conosci te stesso” è ritenuto fondamentale. Vedi Michel FOUCAULT, *L'ermeneutica del soggetto. Corso al Collège de France (1981-1982)*, tr. Mauro Bertani, Edizione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, Milano 2018 e Pierre HADOT, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?*, Édition Gallimard, Paris 1995.

20 Michel DE MONTAIGNE, *Saggi*, Edizione Bompiani, Roma 2014, I.8.

con sé stesso, non è solo una condizione (necessaria) per aprirsi alla filosofia, ma è già un atto filosofico, il primo passo verso la strada dell'autenticità. Quindi, la lezione che ci lascia il conte di Montaigne è che l'edificazione di sé non può essere realizzata a livello teorico, né in mezzo al mondo, ma richiede un riorientamento verso l'interno, verso l'anima.

Questa breve incursione nella storia e la presentazione di alcuni modelli di coloro che hanno scelto di ritirarsi dal mondo, a partire dai filosofi antichi, passando per i grandi asceti del primo millennio cristiano, fino ad arrivare ai grandi moralisti della Modernità, ci ha mostrato che la *fuga mundi* si radica in una volontà capace di rinunciare alle gioie di questo mondo per raggiungere la purificazione e la perfezione interiore. Ma questo significa che il problema non è il mondo, e quindi non va disprezzato, ma compatito. Il mondo è solo lo specchio in cui l'uomo si guarda per comprendere meglio sé stesso e per imparare ad agire secondo il progetto che vuole realizzare. *Fuga mundi* è stato, quindi, un esilio volontario, una rottura dall'esterno in vista di un bene più grande, interiore dell'uomo. A differenza dei filosofi che si prendono l'obiettivo di raggiungere l'atarassia, i cristiani vedranno in questo esercizio solo un momento passeggero, perché il loro obiettivo è l'unione più intima con il Dio in cui credono.

L'esperienza del *contemptus mundi*

In questo contesto, una volta con il passare dei secoli, la consapevolezza che la Chiesa ha del proprio insegnamento e delle pratiche di pietà che raccomanda, subisce un ampio processo di maturazione e di trasformazione. Le nuove sfide sociali e politiche, ad esempio le invasioni barbariche, le dispute territoriali tra gli imperi, la tendenza alla secolarizzazione della società, ma anche la comparsa di nuovi ordini monastici che propongono l'uscita dai monasteri verso il popolo, con l'obiettivo di predicare il Vangelo a tutti²¹, ha portato ad un cambiamento molto notevole nella visione del mondo da parte dell'uomo.

21 Nel 1210 l'Ordine dei Frati Minori (Francescani) ottiene il permesso di fare prediche e catechesi itineranti. Quattro anni dopo viene fondato anche l'Ordine dei Predicatori (Domenicani) che predicheranno il Vangelo soprattutto contro la eresia dei albigesi. Vedi AA.vv., *Storia della Chiesa. Dalle origini fino ai nostri giorni*, X. *La cristianità romana (1198-1274)* di A. Fliche, Ch. Thouzellier, Y. Azais, tr. Eugenio da Veroli, Edizione S.A.I.E., Torino 1968, 21.

Così, a partire dall'XI secolo, assistiamo alla nascita di un nuovo genere letterario che propone pratiche ascetiche più severe, questa volta motivate dalla meditazione sulla finitudine della vita terrestre, sul destino mortale dell'uomo, meglio conosciuto con la locuzione latina: *contemptus mundi*. In ambito religioso troviamo già i primi approcci a questo tema con i Padri della Chiesa (cronologicamente il primo trattato è quello di sant'Ambrogio, *De fuga saeculi*), poi acquistò nuova importanza nel periodo del rinnovamento monastico (ad esempio San Bernardo di Cluny e il suo trattato *De contemptu mundi*)²², ma raggiunge il suo apice nel secolo successivo, con l'opera *De contemptu mundi sive de miseria humane conditionis* di Lotario di Segni²³.

Da questo libro prenderò alcuni frammenti per esemplificare la svolta che subisce la ricerca del sé in quest'epoca. L'opera, scritta tra il 1191 e 1198, conobbe un immenso successo per diversi secoli, finché Blaise Pascal propose questo tema in un modo completamente nuovo²⁴. Inoltre, questa corrente si è manifestata al di fuori dell'ambiente ecclesiastico, potendo essere osservata anche nelle creazioni di alcuni poeti. Si conoscono i poemi di Walther von der Vogelweide e di Konrad von Würzburg su *Frau Welt*, dove il mondo si presenta personificato da una donna dalle attrattive fallaci, seducente vista di dietro, repellente di faccia²⁵. Comunque, il disprezzo del mondo è radicato nella sensibilità comune.

Grosso modo, il discorso adottato all'inizio del secondo millennio è caratterizzato da uno stile molto più incisivo e duro, rispetto a quello precedente. Così, nel descrivere la condizione misera dell'uomo, corrotto dal peccato fin dalla nascita, il

22 Francesco LAZZARI, *Il contemptus mundi nella scuola di S. Vittore*, nella sede dell'Istituto, Napoli 1965, 11–15.

23 Con il nome di Innocenzo III, Giovanni Lotario, conte di Segni (nato il 22 febbraio 1160 a Gavignano, Lazio e morto il 16 luglio 1216 a Perugia), fu il 176-esimo papa dal 8 gennaio 1198 al 16 luglio 1216. Innocenzo fu eletto per meriti propri. Uomo intelligente e di assoluta integrità personale, aveva studiato teologia a Parigi e giurisprudenza a Bologna. Vedi Eamon DUFFY, *La grande storia dei papi. Santi, Peccatori, vicari di Cristo*, tr. S. Venturini, Edizione Arnoldo Mondadori, Milano 2000, 125

24 Un elemento che prova l'ampia diffusione dell'opera è rappresentato dai numerosi manoscritti giunti fino a noi (672) e dalle numerose edizioni del testo, senza contare l'ammirazione espressa con devozione da Petrarca e da cardinale Bellarmino, colui che lo adottò nei primi collegi dei Gesuiti come manuale di meditazione.

25 Jean LE GOFF, *La civiltà dell'Occidente medievale*, tr. Adriana Menitoni, Edizione Arnoldo Mondadori, Milano 2010, 212.

linguaggio di Lotario assume un violento realismo: «L'uomo è putredine e il figlio dell'uomo un verme. [...] L'uomo fu concepito di sangue guasto per ardore della libidine, e alla fine attornieranno il suo cadavere i vermi come a un funerale»²⁶. Notiamo che questa visione assomiglia per molti versi alla dottrina dei Catari²⁷ – paradossalmente, più tardi, come papa, Lotario combatterà questa eresia– con l'insegnamento cristiano dei Vangeli e dei Padri²⁸.

Dunque, nel corso dei secoli XI e XII assistiamo alla costruzione di un ricco immaginario sulla morte. Le cause che contribuirono alla nascita di questo tipo di letteratura vanno ricercate nell'opposizione al mondo aristocratico e borghese dell'epoca, nonché nella reazione contro una cultura edonistica che si diffondeva sempre più in Europa. Di questo tema si nutriranno anche alcuni ordini monastici, che hanno incentrando le loro prediche sul giudizio finale universale e sui terribili castighi che minacciano tutti coloro che tentarono di lodare la vita terrena. Infatti, «questa letteratura produce una sorta di potente drammatizzazione dell'esistenza, divaricata fra il peccato e la pena, la sofferenza e la redenzione, e sono entrambe ovviamente legate al motivo della morte. [...] La cultura ecclesiastica reagisce insomma al nuovo amore per la vita che si va diffondendo in quest'epoca soprattutto insistendo sul tema della morte, utilizzato da un lato per svalutare l'esistenza terrena... dall'altro per indurre alla conversione, al pentimento e al distacco dal mondo»²⁹.

26 Lotario DI SEGNI, *La miseria della condizione umana*, 3, IV.

27 I Catari sono la continuazione dei Manichei e condividono la fede nell'esistenza di due principi uguali in potere: il bene e il male. Per Catri tutta la creazione è in balia del Principe delle Tenebre, l'uomo è fortemente diviso, e il corpo è completamente identificato con il male. Vedi, Jacques LE GOFF, *La civiltà dell'Occidente medievale*, tr. Adriana Menitoni, Edizione Arnoldo Mondadori, Milano 2010, 116; Mircea ELIADE, *Ocultism, vrăjitorie și mode culturale. Eseuri de religie comparată*, tr. E. Bortă, Editura Humanitas, București 1997, 110.

28 Anche se ha organizzato e sostenuto una vera e propria crociata contro i Catari, che ha culminato con il massacro degli abitanti della città di Béziers nel 1209, Innocenzo riconobbe che l'eresia poteva essere disarmata solo se venivano incoraggiate l'autentica pietà religiosa e la riforma. Eamon DUFFY, *La grande storia dei papi*, 127; Steven RUNCIMAN, *Maniheul medieval. Studiu asupra ereziei dualiste în Evul Mediu*, tr. M. Grigore – D. A. Anfile, Editura Nemira, București 2016, 176–185.

29 Carlo DONÀ, „Introduzione” in Hélinand de Froidmont, *I versi della morte*. Edizioni Pratiche, Parma 1988, 8.

Ritornando all'opera di Lotario, *De contemptu mundi*, l'autore si ispira in gran parte dai testi della Sacra Scrittura e poi dagli scritti dei Padri della Chiesa, dagli autori scolastici, ma anche dagli autori classici profani. In realtà, l'opera somiglia piuttosto a un mosaico di citazioni intrecciate sul tema del disprezzo del mondo. Lotario dice che è proprio la miseria della propria condizione che induce l'uomo a compiere «azioni vane, per le quali trascura quelle serie, utili e necessarie. Diverrà esca del fuoco che arde sempre e brucia inestinguibile, nutrimento di vermi, che sempre rodono senza sosta e divorano senza fine; un ammasso di marciume dal fetore incessante e orrenda sporcizia»³⁰.

Educatore fin da giovane nella disciplina più rigorosa dall'abate Ismaele nella letteratura e nella salmodia, Lotario sa utilizzare, quando necessario, oltre alle citazioni bibliche, la cultura classica attraverso Orazio e Giovenale. Inoltre, attirano immediatamente l'attenzione le ricche citazioni bibliche che l'autore utilizza per proporre e dimostrare la sua concezione della precarietà della condizione umana. I testi dell'Antico Testamento sono preferiti da Lotario. Come accennato, hanno la priorità i libri sapienziali e profetici, ma anche il Libro dei Salmi. Del Nuovo Testamento l'autore cita principalmente il vangelo secondo Matteo e quello secondo Luca, oltre al libro dell'Apocalisse. Tuttavia, tra tutti i testi biblici, il riferimento per eccellenza resta il Libro di Giobbe, soprattutto nella prima e ultima parte del *De contemptu mundi*, quando Lotario descrive gli orrori della nascita, le fatiche della vita e la putrefazione della carne avvolta nel fetore del peccato. Anche se non si avvale esclusivamente delle dichiarazioni degli amici di Giobbe, rappresentazioni subdole e malvagie delle tentazioni del diavolo, l'autore utilizza questo libro quasi in opposizione alle parole luminose della Sapienza³¹.

Un tratto distintivo di quest'opera consiste nel fatto che i destinatari non sono più, come prima, i monaci di un monastero o il clero di una diocesi, ma l'intero popolo di Dio, il quale, vivendo sulla terra, immerso nelle miserie del mondo, dimentica la felicità celeste, alla quale nemmeno lui non spera più. Così, il fascino di qualcuno che appartiene alla Chiesa incontra e si integra con quello degli autori laici che perseguono lo stesso tema.

Per Lotario lo sviluppo della miseria umana deriva dal fatto che «tre sono le massime aspirazioni degli uomini: ricchezze, piaceri, onori: e dalle ricchezze

30 Lotario DI SEGNI, *La miseria della condizione umana*, I, 1.3.

31 AA.VV., *Storia della Chiesa. Dalle origini fino ai nostri giorni*, 21.

deriva il male, dai piaceri la vergogna, dagli onori la vanità» e per questo motivo «la concupiscenza della carne riguarda i piaceri, quella degli occhi le ricchezze, mentre la superbia della vita riguarda gli onori. Le ricchezze producono avidità e avarizia, i piaceri generano gola e lussuria, gli onori alimentano superbia e arroganza»³².

Nella seconda parte del libro, suggestivamente intitolato: *De culpabili humane conditionis progressu*, Lotario presenta, con intenti etici espliciti, la classificazione dei sette vizi capitali, tema pressa dalla catalogazione fatta da papa Gregorio Magno nei *Moralia*: superbia, ira, invidia, tristitia, avaritia, gula, luxuria³³.

L'autore, coerente con l'ideale del suo progetto di riforma della Chiesa, volendo rafforzare il peso politico del papato e rinnovare la Chiesa ormai libera da ogni legame feudale, secolarizza i sette vizi capitali proiettandoli dalla sobrietà dei monasteri direttamente nel mondo, dove l'uomo sperimenta diverse forme di vanità. Con ciò l'autore vuole dimostrare che l'uomo è la causa della propria miseria e dei propri castighi³⁴.

Infine, il terzo libro, *De damnabili humane conditionis egressu*, inizia con la descrizione della morte e, qui, l'autore sostiene l'opinione dei teologi del suo tempo secondo cui, nel corso della vita, ogni persona ha la possibilità di incontrare la grazia di Cristo, un'occasione che porta con sé la possibilità di ottenere la salvezza eterna. Ecco perché il tono dell'autore è simile agli affreschi che al suo tempo rappresentavano scene tratte dalle pagine dell'Apocalisse, scene piene di drammaticità e inquietudine escatologica. Egli ricorda ai suoi lettori che al momento della morte: «non soccorreranno le ricchezze, non difenderanno gli onori, non proteggeranno gli amici»³⁵. Dove queste cose finiranno, il Figlio dell'uomo manderà i suoi angeli e «là sarà strepito e stridore di denti, gemiti e strilli, pianti e ululati e tormenti, strida e clamori, timore e tremore, dolore e malore, ardore e fetore, oscurità e ansietà, crudeltà e asprezza, sventura e penuria, angustia e tristezza, oblio e delirio, torture e punture, amarezze e terrori, fame e sete, freddo e bruciore, zolfo e fuoco ardente per i secoli dei secoli»³⁶.

32 Lotario DI SEGNI, *La miseria della condizione umana*, 2, I.

33 Felice COMELLO, „Introduzione” in Evagrio Pontico, *Gli otto spiriti malvagi*, Edizione Pratiche, Parma 1990, 13-14.

34 Francesco LAZZARI, *Il contemptus mundi nella scuola di s. Vittore*, 22-23.

35 Lotario DI SEGNI, *La miseria della condizione umana*, III, 20.1.

36 Lotario DI SEGNI, 20.3.

Conclusione

Alla fine di questa incursione nella quale abbiamo potuto prendere contatto con l'atmosfera del primo millennio cristiano, possiamo dire che questo atteggiamento del disprezzo verso il mondo deriva certamente dalla continuazione della pratica della *fuga mundi* fin dai primi secoli della Chiesa, e anche se il XII secolo ci porta ad una specie di apice, dobbiamo ammettere che la dottrina che teorizza l'antagonismo tra cielo e terra è una delle radici su cui si è sviluppato il cristianesimo. Il *contemptus mundi* è dunque un tema sempre presente nella spiritualità e nel vivere il cristianesimo, solo che nel medioevo l'iniziale antagonismo teorico si configura come una separazione quasi totale sul piano pratico.

Ma anche questa opinione ha le sue sfumature, nel senso che l'opera di Lotario è una costruzione intellettuale che, come ho detto, si inserisce in una corrente letteraria che andava di moda in quei tempi. La vita, la cultura e gli eventi di una certa epoca non devono essere giudicati solo dal punto di vista delle sue componenti razionali, ma bisogna sempre tenere conto di tutto il complesso dei sentimenti, dei desideri, delle intuizioni che completano l'esistenza umana in quel momento. Pertanto, il *De contemptu mundi* è tutt'al più una prospettiva, un progetto, un ideale, di ciò che l'uomo pensava, credeva e viveva nel XII secolo, e non il ritratto completo e veridico dell'epoca in cui fu scritto.

Personalmente ritengo che quest'opera non debba essere letta come una teoria teologica o filosofica che argomenta in modo rigoroso questioni di antropologia, né come una riflessione sul rapporto tra l'uomo e il mondo. Oserei collocarla piuttosto tra le meditazioni spirituali e filosofiche che affrontano la difficile questione del valore della vita e del destino dell'uomo. È quindi possibile che sia la *fuga mundi* che il *contemptus mundi* siano due atteggiamenti distinti, ma accomunati da quella naturale inclinazione alla ricerca alla quale l'uomo è *condannato* su questa terra. La vita non è sempre un percorso lineare, né un viaggio sicuro, predeterminato e progressivo. Al contrario, la storia ci mostra che l'esistenza dell'uomo è spontanea e dinamica, e il suo movimento attraverso questo mondo potrebbe forse essere meglio riassunto dall'immagine di una spirale ellittica. Di tanto in tanto, l'uomo deve ritornare alla caverna della sua interiorità per trovare là, su un altro livello, la possibilità di un nuovo inizio, separandosi da ciò che normalmente lo distrae dalla sua realizzazione.

Così come diceva nel Prologo, Lotario scrive i suoi pensieri nel momento in cui si ritira per raccogliersi. In tale momento scopre che l'uomo è un essere inadeguato

e che, a causa del peccato, delle inclinazioni e delle passioni che lo turbano, sembra destinato piuttosto alla morte e ai castighi dell'Inferno. La sua salvezza potrà venire solo dall'umiltà e dall'assunzione di alcune sofferenze che lo purificheranno. Pertanto, questo libro può essere inteso non tanto come una condanna del mondo e dell'uomo, non solo come un esempio di letteratura fatale, ma piuttosto come un invito a meditare sulle forme del male affinché alla fine l'uomo possa accedere a una vita miglior

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SENSI DELL'ORGANIZZAZIONE TESTUALE INTERNA IN AP 21,12-14 SENSES OF THE INTERNAL TEXTUAL ORGANIZATION IN AP 21,12-14

IULIAN FARAOANU¹

Abstract. The purpose of this study is to explore the sense of unity and internal organization in Ap 21,12-14 as basis for a right interpretation. After establishing the authentic text through textual criticism, the analysis focuses to the internal organization of Ap 21,12-14, which can be the synthesis of the main aspects visible on the external side of the New Jerusalem: the wall, the 12 gates and the 12 foundations. The construction method of the biblical passage Ap 21,12-14 could reflect a rhetorical intention. The 12 gates, the 12 foundations and the surrounding wall with the following descriptions are indications of a secure, universal and open city that fascinates the faithful. At the same time, the internal organization of the text indicates aspects of the writing style, symbols and imagery used by the author.

Keywords: Revelation; wall; gates; foundations; twelve; unity; internal organization.

Introduzione

Lo studio ha l'intento di offrire alcuni spunti per l'interpretazione di Ap 21,12-14 a partire dal lavoro testuale. Il punto di partenza per una corretta esegesi deve essere il testo² così come è stato trasmesso. Seguendo questo principio il primo passo sarà quello di stabilire, per quanto possibile il testo originale mediante la critica testuale, facendo uso dei criteri esterni ed interni. Il frammento su cui si fermerà l'analisi è Ap 21,12-14, gruppo di versetti che sono parte nella descrizione della nuova Gerusalemme. In seguito, si dimostrerà l'unità del brano e saranno fatte alcune riflessioni sulla struttura.

La prima premessa riguarda le particolarità del testo del Nuovo Testamento in generale, il quale si distingue per la molteplicità delle varianti che si sono diffuse

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- 2 Il testo base è Ebelhard NESTLE – Kurt ALAND, *Novum Testamentum graece*, 27^a, Stuttgart, 1993.

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nella storia abbastanza breve del testo neotestamentario.³ Un'altra osservazione si riferisce al testo dell'Apocalisse, testimoniato in un numero minore di manoscritti rispetto agli altri libri del Nuovo Testamento. La storia della tradizione manoscritta dell'Apocalisse è piuttosto complessa,⁴ sia per il linguaggio e la grammatica usate, che per la difficoltà dell'accettazione nel Canone soprattutto nelle chiese orientali. Una classificazione dei testimoni si presenta in questo modo: 7 papiri, tra cui i più importanti risultano P⁴⁷ e P¹¹⁵; 12 onciali, di cui solo il Sinaitico e 046 sono completi e l'Alessandrino che è leggermente mutilato, e 286 minuscoli che hanno il loro valore nel ricostruire l'autenticità del testo. Le versioni, ridotte come numero, non aiutano a ricostruire il testo autentico perché non riportano le sgrammaticature. Accanto a questa scarsità di manoscritti si deve rivalutare il discorso sui tipi di testo. Il tipo più affidabile sembra essere quello di P¹¹⁵, Alessandrino e *Ephraemi rescriptus*, sostenuti dai minuscoli 2053, 2062 e 2344.⁵ Una precisazione ulteriore fa riferimento al testo maggioritario dei minuscoli diviso in due: A, la recensione rappresentata dal commentario di Andrea di Cesarea (P o 025) e K, la recensione rappresentata dal testo della Koinè, la tradizione bizantina (046).

Restrungendo la sfera solo al capitolo 21 di Apocalisse, questo non è contenuto in nessun papiro e non si ritrova in *Ephraemi rescriptus* (il quale si ferma a 19,5). Questa mancanza può costituire una difficoltà in più per l'interpretazione. Ap 21 appare solo nei codici maggiori: Alessandrino, Sinaitico, 046, 025, 051 e nella maggior parte dei minori.

Un'ultima osservazione. Prima di cominciare una breve analisi dell'apparato critico, si deve essere cauti nell'applicare i metodi perché un metodo equilibrato di critica testuale è un'impresa delicata nel caso del libro di Apocalisse.⁶

3 Stephen PISANO, *Introduzione alla critica testuale dell'Antico e del Nuovo Testamento*, Roma, 2005, 43.

4 Umberto VANNI, *L'Apocalisse*. Ermeneutica, esegesi, teologia, Bologna, 1988, 17. Kurt ALAND – Barbara ALAND, *Il testo del Nuovo Testamento*, Genova, 1987, 273.

5 Giancarlo BIGUZZI, *Apocalisse*, Milano, 2005, 45-46. Juan CHAPA, "Il papiro 115: qualcosa in più del numero della bestia", in Elena BOSETTI – Alberto COLACRAI, *Apokalypsis. Percorsi nell'Apocalisse in onore di U. Vanni*, Assisi, 2005, 311-315; 330-331. Jacques DOBEL, "Le texte de l'Apocalypse: Problèmes de méthode", in Jan LAMBRECHT, *L'Apocalypse johannique et l'Apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament*, Gembloux, 1980, 152-154. Esso conta solo 5 papiri, accentua la mancanza del codice Vaticano e ammette che solo una cinquantina di codici minuscoli di tutto il Nuovo Testamento contengono il testo di Apocalisse.

6 J. DOBEL, "Le texte de l'Apocalypse", 166.

1. Critica testuale di Ap 21,12-14

1.1. Varianti testuali del v. 12

La prima variante discussa nell'apparato critico si trova nel v. 12b. Qui il codice Alessandrino, il supplemento di 051 e pochi codici minuscoli 2030, 2050 e 2377 e alcune versioni (*vg^{fu}*, *syr*, *arm*) omettono il gruppo di parole *kai epi tois pulōsin angelous dōdeka*. Il manoscritto Sinaitico e 94 riportano *epi tous pulōnos*, ma questa variante non è molto differente presentando un altro caso nella costruzione della preposizione. Alcuni manoscritti della Vulgata hanno *angulos* al posto di *anghelous*. In alcuni manoscritti di Ecumenio²⁰⁵³²⁰⁶² si trova *dekapente*. Anche se molti manoscritti contengono la lezione del testo di Nestle Aland, l'omissione del gruppo di parole nell'Alessandrino crea difficoltà. Una delle ipotesi può essere il tentativo dei copisti di creare un parallelismo con il v. 14 dove si parla semplicemente di fundamenta e 12 apostoli. L'autore dell'Apocalisse usa spesso la categoria degli angeli e la loro menzione non può essere considerata un'aggiunta.

Al v. 12c si trova un'altra variante. In pochi manoscritti del codice Sinaitico e nella revisione siriana di Filosseno viene inserita la parola *autōn* come specificazione dei nomi. Anche in questo caso i codici più importanti non hanno l'aggiunta. La scelta della variante testuale è giustificata anche dalla sua brevità.

Una terza variante discussa è la parola *epigegrammena* che ha la lettura alternativa *gegrammena* in pochi manoscritti del Sinaitico, in pochissimi lezionari della tradizione che si rifa ad Andrea I¹⁶⁷⁸¹⁷⁷⁸ e in alcune versioni della Vulgata. La maggioranza dei manoscritti è però conforme al testo. Questa parola è un'apposizione di *onomata* ed è l'oggetto del participio presente *echousa*. Aune nota che la costruzione: verbo *echō* + oggetto + participio perfetto si incontra altre volte in Apocalisse (12,6; 14,1; 19,12.16), ma non costituisce una costruzione perifrastica.⁷ Nel contesto dei vv. 12-14 la preposizione *epi* è molto usata e può confermare la variante del testo. La lezione può essere considerata difficile visto che il verbo *epigraphō* ricorre solo 6 volte nel Nuovo Testamento.

La quarta questione riguarda la difficoltà dell'accettazione dell'espressione *ta onomata*. Nella edizione 25^a di Nestle essa viene omessa perché mancava nel codice Sinaitico e 051 e nella tradizione della maggioranza di Andrea. Anche nel *Greek New Testament* è uno dei punti più discussi. La variante presente nel testo è attestata

7 David E. AUNE, *Revelation 17-22* (WBC 52C), Nashville (TN), 1998, 1137.

solo nel codice Alessandrino e alcuni codici minori (1611, 1841, 1854, 2030, 2053, 2329, 2377), però non da quelli più antichi. Inoltre in alcuni manoscritti bizantini della tradizione di maggioranza K (1006, 2062) ricorre solo la parola *onomata* senza articolo. Esiste ancora un'altra lettura alternativa in qualche manoscritto di Andrea: la parola in causa al singolare preceduta dall'articolo. Già la nota del testo che mette l'espressione tra parentesi quadre parla della difficoltà della scelta.⁸ In questo caso si deve fare appello ai criteri della critica interna. Uno sguardo al contesto conferma l'uso dell'espressione nome o nomi scritti, soprattutto nel libro della vita. Probabilmente è da conservare la variante con l'articolo plurale che è conforme allo stile di Apocalisse e con l'unanimità delle versioni. Nonostante tutte le difficoltà il testo risulta comprensibile e la variante testuale sembra sia quella originale.⁹

E infine l'ultima variante del v. 12 nell'apparato critico, la parola *huōin*, la quale è preceduta dall'articolo *tōn* in P (025- la tradizione della maggioranza A), nel supplemento del codice 051 e in 2050. Alcuni manoscritti della tradizione maggiore A (1006, 1854) hanno l'articolo *tou*. E' meglio mantenere la variante testuale che ha un forte sostegno nei codici Sinaitico e Alessandrino come nei codici della maggioranza K. Inoltre anche in Ap 7,4 non è presente l'articolo.

Un ultimo problema non segnalato nell'apparato è il primo participio *echousa* del v. 12. che viene tradotto dalla Vulgata con *habebat*. Il participio è al nominativo ed è in relazione con quello del v. 11 che è all'accusativo. Probabilmente in continuità con il v. 11 alcuni codici poco rilevanti 172, 2018 e il commentario di Ticonio 35, 87 lo riportano all'accusativo.¹⁰ Un cambiamento ulteriore si trova nel Sinaitico dove al posto del participio presente si trova la forma *echonta*.¹¹ Il secondo participio *echousa* ha nei manoscritti 104, 172, 2018, 2050 e in Ticonio di nuovo la forma all'accusativo. Tutto questo si può spiegare con la grammatica particolare dell'autore, anche riguardo all'utilizzo dei casi.

8 Herman Charles HOSKIER, *Concerning the Text of the Apocalypse*, vol II, London, 1929, 592: esso ommette l'espressione *ta onomata*.

9 Stephen S. SMALLEY, *The Revelation to John*, Downers Grove (IL), 1998, 529. D.E. AUNE, *Revelation 17-22*, 1137. A suo avviso la lezione è conforme con lo stile di Apocalisse che spesso ripete l'articolo e riflette il consenso generale delle versioni.

10 H.C. HOSKIER, *Concerning the Text of the Apocalypse*, 590.

11 Henry Barclay SWETE, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, London, 1907² (1906¹), 285. R.H. CHARLES, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, vol II, Edinburgh, 1920, 364.

1.2. Varianti testuali del v. 13

Nel v. 13a la tradizione della maggioranza Koine bizantina ha il genitivo plurale di *anatolē*. Però l'Alessandrino, il Sinaitico, 025 e molti manoscritti minuscoli contengono la variante del testo che è da conservare.

Una seconda questione riguarda le tre parole *kai*, che mancano in alcuni codici della tradizione maggiore A, nel supplemento 051 e nei manoscritti della Vulgata.¹²

L'ultima variante del v. 13 è l'espressione *apo notou pulōnes treis* che viene omessa nel Sinaitico, Ecumenio²⁰⁵³ e in Andrea. Poi in pochi manoscritti della tradizione A *notou* viene sostituito da *dusmōn*. Tutto questo crea una certa confusione nell'ordine dei punti cardinali e nella numerazione delle porte. Così risultano 15 porte in Ecumenio^{2053com2062} per l'aggiunta di *kai apō meshmbrias pulōnes treis* e 9 porte in Ecumenio^{2053text} a causa dell'eliminazione di *kai apo dusmōn pulōnes treis*, espressione assente anche nel Sinaitico e in 2037. Il numero più attestato è comunque il dodici e la ragione di queste varianti numerici è dovuta ad una certa confusione nella trasmissione.¹³ Inoltre è meglio conservare l'integrità dei 4 punti cardinali usati probabilmente dall'autore come simbolo dell'universalità.

1.3. Varianti testuali del v. 14

In questo versetto la prima variante, riguarda la sostituzione di *echōn* con *echon*. Questa variante appare nel Sinaitico di seconda mano, nel supplemento 051 e nel testo della maggioranza. Nel Sinaitico originale il participio viene omesso. Il testo è contenuto nell'Alessandrino e in alcuni manoscritti minori (1006, 2329, 2377). Anche in questo caso l'interpretazione risulta difficile.¹⁴ Comunque c'è una tendenza in alcuni manoscritti a sostituire *echōn* con *echon*.

In conclusione si è rivelata l'esigenza di prendere in considerazione anche la varianti secondarie perché possono riflettere qualcosa dell'ambiente in cui sono nate. In più un'attenzione particolare hanno meritato le varianti con espressioni

12 H.C. HOSKIER, *Concerning the Text of the Apocalypse*, vol II, 593. J. SCHMID, *Studien zur Geschichte der griechischen Apokalypse-Textes*, vol. I, München, 1955, 240. I due autori preferiscono omettere la preposizione.

13 D.E. AUNE, *Revelation 17-22*, 1138. S.S. SMALLEY, *The Revelation*, 530.

14 H.C. HOSKIER, *Concerning the Text of the Apocalypse*, vol II, 594.

legati alla lingua e alla grammatica particolare dell'Autore.¹⁵ In genere si è cercato di mantenere il testo convinti che il cambiamento o il mutilamento non è consigliabile. Su questa linea si è favorito il codice Alessandrino considerato il testo migliore. Uno sguardo alle versioni prova in genere la fedeltà al testo greco. Nel confronto con le versioni si osserva come la Vetus latina e la Vulgata offrono una traduzione abbastanza fedele, anche se in alcuni punti si nota la tendenza a interpretare.

2. Delimitazione del brano Ap 21,12-14

L'esegesi di questi ultimi decenni ha insistito sull'importanza dell'uso dei metodi sincronici che danno credito al testo, per completare il metodo storico-critico. In questa direzione si pone l'operazione di individuare l'unità letteraria¹⁶ sulla quale si svolge l'interpretazione. Questo procedimento non ha l'intento di frammentare il testo biblico e tiene conto dell'unità del libro.

Uno degli obiettivi principali della delimitazione è quello di natura didattica così da facilitare l'esegesi. Ma si deve avere la consapevolezza della difficoltà di stabilire con esattezza i confini di un brano della Scrittura, libro sacro, ispirato da Dio, il quale ha una ricchezza inestimabile.

I versetti che costituiscono l'oggetto dell'analisi, appartengono alla parte finale dell'Apocalisse dedicata alla nuova Gerusalemme. Il brano preso in considerazione sembra un'unità letteraria abbastanza evidente, sia dal punto di vista interno, sia riguardo alla relazione con il contesto prossimo.

2.1. Unità interna: elementi testuali e letterari

Prima di tutto c'è un'inclusione messa in evidenza dalla parola *teichos*, presente nel v.12 e nel v. 14, con gli aggettivi che la qualificano all'inizio e l'attributo *poleōs* alla fine. L'inclusione si può ancora ampliare includendo anche il participio del verbo *echō* e il numerale 12, presenti nel versetto iniziale e in quello finale. Tali elementi inducono a separare il testo da ciò che precede e da ciò che segue, e nello stesso tempo costituiscono un indizio della compattezza del brano.

15 U. VANNI, *L'Apocalisse*, 17–18.

16 Alcune idee riguardanti la delimitazione si ritrovano nello studio Iulian FARAOANU, „Ap 21,12-14 nel contesto letterario dell'Apocalisse”, *Dialog Teologic* 41 (2014), 56–71.

Un secondo argomento forte per vedere unitari questi versetti è il vocabolario specifico costruito sulle ripetizioni: il numero 12 è ripetuto per 6 volte, il numero 3 per quattro volte. Accanto ai numeri sono anche delle parole frequenti: *pulōnes* per 6 volte, *teichos* 2 volte e *onomata* 2 volte. Inoltre la congiunzione *kai*, appare in posizione coordinativa per 7 volte.

Sempre nell'ambito del vocabolario, un criterio importante sembra essere il numero 12, il quale viene specificato con attributi diversi che mai si ripetono due volte. Così si parla di 12 porte, angeli, basamenti, nomi, tribù, apostoli. Questo numero, fra l'altro molto importante per l'Apocalisse, appare tre volte nel v. 12 e altre tre nel v. 14. Il v. 13 non contiene il numero. Appare invece il numero tre accompagnato da "porte" e un lessico differente: i quattro punti cardinali.

Tutto il brano è scandito dai participi del verbo *echō* che accentuano l'oggetto. Nel v. 12 sono due frasi participiali che introducono il muro e le porte della città e nel v. 14 un'altra frase participiale mette in risalto le sue fondamenta.

L'inclusione, le ripetizioni, il vocabolario specifico e la tematica, cioè la descrizione degli elementi esterni che balzano a prima vista agli occhi nella visione della città, inducono a sostenere l'unitarietà dei versetti 12-14. A sostegno dell'unità si può aggiungere l'abbinamento di 12 tribù e 12 apostoli elemento unico e specifico del frammento 21,12-14, ripreso poi indipendentemente nei versetti successivi.

2.2. Delimitazione dal contesto precedente e seguente

L'esame breve del contesto prossimo può approfondire ulteriormente il discorso dell'unità del brano e i suoi confini.

Inanzitutto la relazione con i versetti precedenti. Un legame forte si nota con i vv. 9-11 dove è menzionata la città santa Gerusalemme che scende dal cielo, centro di tutto il contesto 21,9-22,5. Fra gli elementi testuali c'è una continuità reperibile nel participio del verbo *echō* presente al v. 11 qualificato dall'attributo la "gloria di Dio". Nei versetti 9-14 sono 4 participi presenti del verbo *echō*, tre di loro riferiti alla città (v. 11 e 12) e l'ultimo è riferito al muro (v. 14). Un altro elemento comune è la coppia di aggettivi *mega kai hupsēlon* riferito al monte nel v. 10, mentre nel v.12 caratterizza il muro della città. E infine il termine "Agnello" che ricorre al v. 9 e al v. 14.

Ci sono però alcuni elementi differenti di vocabolario e stili che non permettono di unire i vv. 9-11 a 12-14. Nei vv. 9-11 c'è un vocabolario specifico che non si

ritrova nei versetti successivi: il numero 7 ricorre 3 volte nel v. 9, poi l'allusione alle coppe, ai flagelli, la gloria, lo splendore. Tutto questo viene completato da altre parole specifiche "sposa", "fidanzata" che caratterizzano Gerusalemme. La città viene presentata in relazione a Dio.

Lo stile dei vv. 9-11 è uno dialogico, mentre in 12-14 è descrittivo. Il dialogo suppone anche dei personaggi, perciò i protagonisti sono l'angelo e il veggente. Ci sono poi molti verbi di movimento: "andare", "venire", "trasportare". Tutto ciò spinge a considerare il frammento che costituisce l'oggetto dell'analisi staccato dai vv. 9-11.

In secondo luogo la relazione con i versetti seguenti, dal v. 15 fino a 21. Anche in questo caso si notano dei punti di contatto tra i due brani. Fra gli elementi comuni sono le parole "porte", "fondamenta", "mura" presenti già al v.15, il quale sembra essere uno di transizione. In seguito saranno descritte le mura nelle dimensioni e nei materiali, poi le fondamenta con le pietre preziose e infine le porte che sono 12 perle. Verrà ripreso il numerale 12 per parlare di fondamenta e porte. Il numero però può essere intravisto anche nei multipli: 12.000 stadi e 144 braccia risultati dopo la misurazione. Lo stile è descrittivo e completa il quadro della città le cui linee esterne erano dipinte nei vv.12-14.

Nonostante le somiglianze, ci sono anche delle differenze. Al v.15 appare un personaggio nuovo, l'angelo che già aveva parlato prima al veggente. La descrizione esterna della città viene interrotta da un'azione, quella di misurare. Per questo nei vv.15-17 tutto si riferisce a quest'azione, la quale suppone termini specifici: lo strumento per misurare, la forma, che è quella di quadrato, altezza- lunghezza- larghezza per definire un perimetro, e le unità di misura per le distanze.

I vv. 18-21 riprendono a parlare del muro, delle fondamenta e della porte con un'ordine diverso dal discorso di 12-14, dove al secondo posto erano le porte mentre l'inizio era costituito sempre dall'allusione al muro. Nel v. 18 si descrivono i materiali preziosi delle mura, nei vv.19-20 sono elencate le 12 pietre preziose delle fondamenta e nel v. 21a si parla di 12 perle che sono le porte della città.

Lo stacco presente al v. 15 con l'introduzione di un nuovo personaggio, l'allusione al dialogo dei vv. 9-10, l'azione di misurare e il vocabolario particolare incentrato sulle pietre preziose conducono alla separazione dei vv. 15-21 da quelli del frammento 12-14.

In sintesi, il brano preso in considerazione sembra un'unità letteraria abbastanza evidente, sia dal punto di vista interno, sia riguardo alla relazione con il contesto prossimo.

3. Articolazione e composizione di Ap 21,12-14

I commentatori in genere non si soffermano sul brano 21,12-14, ma prendono in esame la sezione 21,9-22,5. Alcuni sono d'accordo che i versetti 12-14 costituiscono una piccola unità all'interno della descrizione esterna della nuova Gerusalemme.¹⁷

Il brano incomincia in un modo inconsueto perché manca una congiunzione o una preposizione che agganci il testo al discorso precedente. Anche se non c'è un simile elemento di collegamento, il participio presente *echousa* può essere considerato il legame, perché si riferisce alla parola *polis* del v. 10. La relazione tra le due parole è abbastanza evidente per l'uguaglianza di genere e numero e, soprattutto per la logica del discorso. Molti preferiscono tradurre: "la città ha" considerando così il verbo in questione come finito e offrire coerenza al periodo.¹⁸

Alcuni elementi testuali e letterari sono stati già ricordati nel discorso sull'unità basato sul vocabolario specifico, le ripetizioni, l'inclusione creata dalla parola *teichos*. E' apparsa così una costruzione con questi elementi: il muro (v. 12 e 14), le porte e il numero 12 ripetuto tre volte nel v. 12, le fondamenta e lo stesso numerale 12 ripetuto per tre volte. Il versetto 13 anche se parla solo di porte, include il discorso sui punti cardinali. Questi indizi sommari già permettono di individuare uno schema incipiente di tipo chiasmico: A) v. 12: il muro con *12 porte* (12 viene ripetuto tre volte); B) v. 13: tre porte per ogni punto cardinale; A') v. 14: il muro con *12 fondamenta*, (12 viene ripetuto tre volte). Come si sa il punto centrale di una struttura tipo chiasmo non è sempre il centro semantico del testo. Il punto culminante è la descrizione dell'esterno della città, quindi la parte A- A' nei vv. 12 e 14. Non si deve dimenticare che il testo sacro era letto e l'attenzione dell'uditorio era più intensa all'inizio e alla fine del discorso. Dopotutto, seguendo le regole della retorica la parte più importante si enunciava all'inizio e alla fine venivano le conclusioni. In questo caso la parte B, il v. 13 sembra essere una spiegazione, il dettaglio della distribuzione delle porte. Tuttavia un interesse deve esserci, cioè quello di dimostrare l'universalità, proprio per il fatto di ricorrere ai punti cardinali che riguardano tutta la terra.

L'analisi si può approfondire ulteriormente ampliando la ricerca sul vocabolario, sul genere letterario e sul modo di costruzione del frammento.

17 D.E. AUNE, *Revelation 17-22*, 1142: I vv. 12-14 hanno come titolo "il muro della città".

18 D.E. AUNE, *Revelation 17-22*, 1136-1137. E.B. ALLO, *Saint Jean. L'Apocalypse* (EtB), Paris, 1921, 318.

Una prima osservazione riguarda il lessico. Il brano conta 41 parole, tra cui molte ricorrono più volte. Se ci si riferisce al vocabolario di questo frammento, le parole impiegate sono 23. Alcuni vocaboli non si incontrano spesso nel libro e sono specifici di 21,12-14: i punti cardinali, muro, fundamenta, apostoli. Le parole più frequenti sono il numero 12 (vv. 12 e 14) e le “porte”, vocaboli che ricorrono 6 volte (vv. 12-13). Nell’ordine di frequenza appare il numerale tre, che ricorre quattro volte (v. 13), *onomata* tre volte, *teichos* due volte e il participio *echousa* due volte.

Le preposizioni e congiunzioni impiegate sono tre: *kai*, 7 volte lega periodi dove spesso il verbo è sottinteso e una volta lega i due aggettivi “grande” e “alto”. Da notare che tale congiunzione coordinativa dà fluidità e continuità alla narrazione¹⁹, poiché il genere letterario dominante sembra essere quello della descrizione. Poi c’è la preposizione *epi*, nei vv. 12 e 14 (sulle porte e sui fondamenti, implicitamente). E infine nel v.13 la preposizione *apo*, che sembra indicare la direzione.²⁰

Per quanto riguarda i verbi, si incontra *eimi*, una volta ed è l’unico verbo finito del frammento. Poi una sola volta appare il verbo *epigraphō* al participio ed ha come oggetto i nomi. E infine il verbo *echō* il quale ricorre al participio nei vv. 12 e 14. I verbi impiegati sono specifici per la narrazione e non disegnano nessun movimento. Si intravede così un’immagine statica.

L’organizzazione dei periodi. Il brano comincia con l’introduzione del “muro” nella descrizione (12a). Senza una parola di collegamento si introduce un altro oggetto le “porte” (12b). I due oggetti della visione sono introdotte dal participio *echousa*. In seguito sono due specificazioni che completano l’immagine delle porte: 12 angeli sulle porte (12c) e nomi scritti, cioè i nomi delle 12 tribù dei figli di Israele (12d). L’ultima parte del v.12 è più lunga rispetto alle precedenti dedicando più spazio ai nomi. Si nota come il discorso ha di vista solo le “porte” e questo continua nel v. 13 dove si precisa come erano distribuite. Qui sono 4 segmenti assegnando ad ogni punto cardinale tre porte. Il v. 14 contiene solo due periodi di lunghezza quasi uguale. Nel v. 14a è introdotto di nuovo “il muro”, di cui si aveva parlato in 12a. Il muro, oltre al suo aspetto alto e grande, ha 12 fundamenta. In 12b si chiarisce che su questi basamenti sono i 12 nomi dei 12 apostoli dell’Agnello.

19 Friedrich BLASS – Albert DEBRUNNER, *Grammatica greca del Nuovo Testamento*, Brescia, 1997² (Göttingen 1976¹⁴), § 458,1: la congiunzione lega pensieri completi simili, dando continuità.

20 Emile Bernard ALLO, *L’Apocalypse*, 318.

Il procedimento usato può essere ipotizzato in questi termini. L'autore introduce la città santa, Gerusalemme che discende dal cielo nel v. 10. Prima di tutto si dà una definizione di questa città Gerusalemme: santa, scende dal cielo, da Dio. Con il v. 11 e il primo participio *echousa* comincia la descrizione, la quale si concretizza in tre aspetti, tutti e tre introdotti da questo participio. La prima nota è il possesso della gloria di Dio, la quale si presenta come una luce che avvolge la città e la fa splendere come una pietra preziosa. Le pietre dicono l'indicibile di Dio e la parola *homoios* punta sulla somiglianza, non sull'identità. Le altre due note sono presenti al v. 12: aveva un muro e aveva 12 porte. Si tratta ovviamente del muro di Gerusalemme, perché nel v.14 si dice chiaramente "il muro della città".

Una valutazione ulteriore del modo in cui procede la descrizione. All'inizio del v. 12 sono inseriti nella descrizione i due tratti esterni della città: prima il muro, l'elemento A, poi le 12 porte, l'elemento B. La narrazione prosegue con la parte B dove sono tre annotazioni: a) 12 angeli sulle porte, b) nomi scritti, di fatti i nomi delle 12 tribù e c) distribuzione delle porte secondo i 4 punti cardinali. In tutta questa sezione la parola predominante è "porte" che appare per ben sei volte. Il v. 14 riprende il discorso sull'elemento A, il muro. Anche il muro ha tre note: a) grande e alto (v. 12a), riguardo all'aspetto, b) muro della città (v. 14a) e c) ha 12 fondamenta. Così appare il terzo oggetto della visione. E l'autore descrive brevemente quest'ultimo oggetto della visione: sulle fondamenta sono i 12 nomi dei 12 apostoli dell'Agnello. I basamenti sono parte della descrizione del muro. Si deve prendere in considerazione la relazione con i vv. 18-21 dedicati alla descrizione dei materiali delle porte e delle fondamenta.

Un ultimo aspetto è la simmetria come espediente nell'organizzazione interna: 12 porte e 12 nomi delle tribù, 12 fondamenta e 12 apostoli, 3 porte per ogni punto cardinale. Tale simmetria è in rapporto con il parallelismo.

Ipotesi di struttura

A) Il muro grande e alto (12a)

B) Le **12 porte** (12b- 13)

a) 12 angeli sulle porte (12b)

b) i *nomi delle 12 tribù* scritti sulle porte (12c)

c) la distribuzione delle porte (13)

A') Il muro della città (14a)

a) le **12 fondamenta** (14a) (elemento C?)

b) i *12 nomi dei 12 apostoli* (14b)

La configurazione del brano

A) [La città] ha un muro grande e alto,

B) ha dodici porte

a) e sulle porte 12 angeli

b) e nomi scritti, i quali sono i nomi delle dodici tribù dei figli di Israele

c) a oriente tre porte, a settentrione tre porte, a mezzogiorno tre porte e ad occidente tre porte.

A') E il muro della città ha

a) dodici fondamenta

b) e su di essi dodici nomi dei dodici apostoli dell'Agnello.

Lo schema presentato ha dei punti su cui si può ancora discutere. Si può vedere una certa sproporzione tra la sezione dedicata alle porte, la quale è più lunga e quella che riguarda il muro che è più breve. La menzione del muro di cui all'inizio si danno gli attributi, viene interrotta dall'introduzione sulla scena delle porte a cui l'autore dedica uno spazio abbastanza ampio.

Se all'inizio si parte dalla visione del muro e delle porte in seguito viene introdotto al v. 14 il discorso sulle fondamenta. Queste sono in stretta relazione con il muro come tratto della descrizione di quest'ultimo. Si può parlare di inclusione di un oggetto nella descrizione di un altro. Infine la sottosezione c) non si inquadra bene nella simmetria.

Il punto centrale è la menzione delle 12 tribù e dei 12 apostoli, elementi simmetrici in qualche modo e conclusioni alla fine della descrizione delle porte e delle fondamenta.

Conclusioni

Il brano Ap 12,12-14 ha una organizzazione interna del tutto particolare. La parola di ordine è la coerenza interna e l'unità. L'analisi testuale ha rilevato diversi elementi interessanti. Al di là delle difficoltà della trasmissione del testo del libro dell'Apocalisse, un'attenzione particolare hanno meritato le varianti con espressioni legati alla lingua e alla grammatica particolare dell'autore.

Un'altra impresa è stata la dimostrazione della unitarietà del frammento Ap 21,12-14 il quale è il sommario degli aspetti principali che si notano all'esterno della città: il muro, le porte e le fondamenta. La descrizione riflette lo stile originale dell'autore, esperto dei simboli e delle immagini.

Alla fine è stata proposta uno schema di struttura del brano Ap 21,12-14 sulla base di diversi criteri. L'ipotesi di struttura è solo una visione del modo in cui è costruito il frammento. Essa non vuole forzare il testo sacro, invece si presenta come base per individuare i significati misteriosi delle 12 porte e delle 12 fondamenta abbinati ai nomi dei capi delle tribù di Israele e ai nomi dei 12 apostoli.

Il modo in cui è costruito il frammento Ap 21,12-14 può riflettere un intento retorico. Le 12 porte, i 12 fondamenti e il muro circostante con le descrizioni che si susseguono sono indizi di una città sicura, universale e aperta che attrae i credenti dentro le sue mura. La nuova Gerusalemme con le sue porte e fondamenta speciali è sogno di coloro che seguono l'Agnello nella fiducia e nella fedeltà. Inoltre, l'organizzazione del brano riflette qualche idea riguardo lo stile dell'autore e il modo originale in cui esso propone i suoi simboli e le sue immagini.

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