

A PERSPECTIVE ON NATIONAL IDENTITY AND ETHNICITY IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

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Abstract: Nation and Ethnos (Ethnicity), as we perceive them today, have become two sociological phenomena since the second half of the XVIII century, particularly after the French Revolution. However, in Church circles, and even more outside of them, one can hear criticisms at the Church's expense in the sense that she, in present days, „fell under the influence“ of these two phenomena, and is in „imminent danger“ to fully embrace them. Nevertheless, these criticisms bear little value in the tradition and history of the Church. Referring to the time long before the emergence of the postmodern understanding of nation and ethnicity, these concepts were seen as natural, and as such an integral part of the social order. This paper aims to show that the concepts of nations and ethnos have always been known to the Church, and that the Church has incorporated them into official names and titles for more accurate and precise administrative determinants. Ultimately, it aims to show that the danger of postmodernism is not, so much, in pursuit of artificial and impalpable goals, but in twisting the meaning of the natural and pure concepts such as nation and ethnos.

Key words: *nation, ethnos, Church, Diaspora, bishop, title, jurisdiction*

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The question of national¹ symbols in the Church has become increasingly actual in both church and non-church circles.² Some go so far as to claim that the Church ought to be transnational and trans-ethnic, or perhaps supranational and supra-ethnic since the Church of Christ is Catholic (Καθολική - Universal, all encompassing). Moreover, by highlighting national and ethnic symbols, they claim the Church limits its very mission, because *there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28)*.³ Therefore, national and ethnic features in the Church are, at the minimum, unnecessary and superfluous in the Church.

On the other hand, there are those who see ethnic and folk elements as not being contrary to the Scriptures and the canons of the Church. Not only do these elements signify the most accurate and precise jurisdictions, but the official titles of the bishops were always determined by *jurisdiction*, which did not necessarily imply a territory, but also ethnicity, not affecting the catholicity of the Church of Christ in the least way. In this paper we will attempt to show that the latter approach is a more accurate one.

Ethnicity in the Scriptures

In the Old Testament, the concept of nationhood is stressed to the point that it stipulated the belief and faith in one true God, the Creator of all and everything. To belong to the Jewish nation meant to belong to God's chosen people, led by God Himself. All others, who did not belong to the chosen people of God were pagans -

¹ "Nation" is a term derived from the Latin *natio* - the "people." At the time of the French Revolution, it assumed a more political connotation. Previously, the expressions *ἔθνος* and *populous* were known. Today the concepts of nations and ethnic groups are still insufficiently defined by sociologists, but are mostly associated with the nation-state; a nation may include more ethnic groups and tribes.

² At the outset we have to clarify that by national and ethnic identity we mean exclusively official ethnic and national symbols, titles, as well as names of local Churches, and we distance ourselves from non-Church and local folk customs and cultural characteristics which were not embraced and utilized by the local Orthodox Church.

³ For the present study, I use the Orthodox Study Bible.

ἔθνη⁴-, and as such they did not enjoy God's favor. Thus, the Old Testament emphasizes a strong difference between the *nation* of God and Godless *nations*.

The New Testament, although a natural continuation of the Old Testament, no longer limits the true faith to a single nation. The central theme of the New Testament is the Gospel (the Good News) that God became man so that all nations may become the children of God. Thus, the New Testament completes, and at the same time fulfills the Old Testament Law, declaring that with Christ, his Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection, there is no longer only one chosen nation, but now all nations are equally God's. God wants all people to be saved and He also wants to be God to all nations. That is why Apostle Paul says: *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus* (Gal. 3:28).

However, these words of Apostle Paul are often taken out of context and hastily interpreted as a call on nations to give up their national identity within the Church. However, the message of the Scriptures is quite the opposite. The most striking example of this can be found in the book of Acts (2:5-6), which states that many *nations* (ἀπὸ παντὸς ἔθνους τῶν ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανόν) heard Peter's sermon on the Pentecost, miraculously, each in their own dialect (language). That was an unambiguous message that the Church is God's call to all nations. At the same time it was made clear that different nations should not cease to be distinct nations, each with their own language and particularities. On the contrary, it is stressed that each nation was given an opportunity to hear the sermon each in their own language – precisely in order to preserve their identity and at the same time believe in the one true God. The Gospel, then, is to be preached in all languages. God wants all nations to be saved and His Church to be universal (catholic - καθολική, ecumenical - οἰκουμενική), which means that it is open to all nations.

Yet that does not mean that people in the Church should give up or lose their identity and become an impersonal crowd. On the contrary, when Christ, after His Passion and Resurrection, sent His apostles to their mission, he gave them the commandment: *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη), baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* (Mt. 28:19).

⁴ The Greek word in the LXX translation of the Jewish word *goyim* - the nations, from which the later word *ethnos*, *ethnicity*, was derived.

Thus, not only did Christ not deny the existence of different nations or ethnic groups (ἔθνη), but he essentially implied it in His commission.

It would be wrong to say that the one who is already, or intends to become Christian must remain silent about his/her nationality and ethnicity. From Peter's sermon on the Pentecost we see just the opposite. Clearly, there were many nations gathered (παντὸς ἔθνους), and all had been given the grace of the Holy Spirit, to hear Peter's sermon, each in their own language, and they did not have to give up their ethnicity. Parthians remained Parthians, Elamites remained Elamites, Romans remained Romans, Arabs remained Arabs; yet on that day this did not prevent adding to the Church some three thousand souls, upon hearing Peter's sermon.

The essence of the New Testament is that Christ is given to *many (all) nations* to the same extent, because before God, the Creator of all and everything, all nations are equal, not simply a single nation, but all nations are equally God's. Thus, the "Jew" and "Greek" are equal in God's eyes, just as "male" and "female" are equal, but that does not mean that the Greek should stop being Greek, just as it is not expected a male to cease to be male or a female to cease to be female. In other words, whether you are Greek or Jew, male or female, slave or free, you are now invited, as you are, to know God through the Church.

Ethnicity and Church canons

Ethnic particularities of different peoples have been apparent since the earliest times. At the same time, the Church never denied the existence of various ethnic groups and peoples in the world. The Church sees itself as the Body of Christ, and as such it is holy, and therefore, according to its nature, its mission is primarily to sanctify the world, and not to socially restrict it. To ensure that our perception and interpretation of these quotations, thus far from Scripture, are in accordance with historical experience and life of the Church, we will take a look at its provisions and canons, precisely because they represent formulated tradition and express the life of the Church in its history. Let us then take a closer look at the canons that are commonly understood to be associated with our theme.

The first canon that speaks in favor of ethnicity in the church is the 34th Apostolic Canon, which says that *the bishops of each nation* (ἐκάστου ἔθνους⁵) *need to know the first among them and consider him as their head...* Consequently, the canon emphasizes that there are bishops of different nations. However, some interpreters disagree with such a view.

For example, Blagota Gardašević, in his work *Canonicity of the Acquisition of Autocephaly of the Serbian Church in 1219*, says that *at the time when this canon was written, the word ἔθνος meant province, which was analogous to a Diocese, and later Metropolis, so when this canon was repeated in the 9th canon of the Council in Antioch (341), then, instead of the word ἔθνος, the word επαρχία was used, suggesting an area, while Stephen of Ephesus, in the sixth century, replaces this word in the same canon with the word Metropolis, and Saint Sava in The Rudder (Krmčija), citing this rule, makes no mention of the folk elements, even though he would have had great reason to at least make mention of them, if this canon had that meaning.*⁶

We shall try to address each point brought up by Gardašević. Namely, if we accept Gardašević's understanding that Apostolic canons precede the Council of Antioch, we should say the following: the 34th Apostolic Canon makes a clear distinction between the words ἔθνος (associated with people) and παροικία (parish or diocese, associated with territory), while in Gardašević's reading it is unclear why the word ἔθνος is to be understood as επαρχία, since the word ἔθνος was never used to denote *an area or territory*, but was associated exclusively with people. Furthermore, it would not be untrue to say that at the time this canon was written, the mechanism for allocating jurisdictions was not yet quite clear. Thus, it may well be that some jurisdictions were determined on the basis of ethnicity, hence the wording ἐκάστου ἔθνους. This is justified further with the fact that the words επαρχία or παροικία (words that designate territory) were well known at the time. The very fact that the word ἔθνος can be associated solely with people, and not territory, indicates at least that national affiliation was not a problem for the Church. Also, ambiguous

⁵ ἔθνος - a term denoting nationality or ethnicity, hence the words "ethnos," "ethnicity," "ethnic" groups. There is an attempt to translate this word as an area or diocese. However, such a meaning cannot be true because the word in Greek has never been used in this context, and in this particular case it means the "people." Bishops Nikodim (Milaš) and later Atanasije (Jevtić) translated this word as "nation," "people."

⁶ A study published in the collected writings of Blagota Gardašević, *Избор црквено-правних радова*, Belgrade 2002, p. 135-178. Despite my disagreement with Gardašević's reading of the greek word *ethnos*, I believe that his article is an outstanding work which convincingly explains the canonicity of acquisition of the autocephaly of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

expressions in the canons were always carefully avoided. Finally, I am inclined to assert that the word *ἔθνος* was used in the Apostolic canon to denote jurisdiction, precisely in order to emphasize the primary mission of the episcopal role which implied people, the Living Church.

As for Gardašević's remarks regarding the 9th canon of Antioch (341) and St. Stephen of Ephesus in the sixth century, which makes no mention of the people, but only the diocese (territory), we shall say that indeed, at that time, St. Stephen of Ephesus perhaps had in mind the canons of Nicaea which determined jurisdictions of bishops over certain areas and territories. However, this should not be used to suggest that church jurisdictions, based on ethnicity or people, are unacceptable, or ought to be seen as contrary to the canons and the Church Tradition. This is the case, simply because in the canons we find neither explicit nor implicit objection to the jurisdictions based on ethnicity and people. For as we have seen, Apostolic Canon 34 originally defined the jurisdiction based on ethnic affiliation of peoples (*ἐκάστου ἔθνους*), and no subsequent canon explicitly contradicted that understanding.

Finally, with respect to the objection that St. Sava did not emphasize folk elements in *Krmčija*, we shall say that in fact St. Sava wrote *The Rudder* for the Serbian people. We will not exaggerate if we make the assertion that all St. Sava's efforts and undertakings were directed to the enlightenment, betterment and spiritual benefit of the people entrusted to him. Needless to say, if anyone was able to avoid the establishment of an autocephalous Church for the Serbian people, it was precisely St. Sava. Nevertheless, St. Sava granted autocephaly to the church of the Serbian people (nation), and as its first archbishop he also crowned St. Stefan the First-Crowned as the first official King of the united Serbian lands of Raška and Zeta, thus creating a unified state for the Serbian people (nation). All of this makes it clear that St. Sava's intention was quite the opposite of the one indicated by professor Gardašević. It seems that St. Sava was well aware of the importance of national elements, so much so that he utilized them to enlighten an entire nation – the Serbian nation.⁷

We may also add that a personality such as St. Sava, most certainly, would not have fallen into such a rough ecclesiological error, if by any chance the tradition of the

⁷ For more info on the topic see:

http://www.spc.rs/eng/autocephaly_serbian_church_1219_paradigm_canonical_acquisition_autocephaly

Church was against national (ethnic) autocephalous Churches. On the contrary, according to the Lord's commission, all nations may be baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. This in turn meant that each nation may freely and in its own particular way contribute to and enrich the Ecumenical (*Οικουμενική*) Orthodoxy. A vast variety of ethnic backgrounds does not limit the Church, but rather underlines the breadth and beauty of unity with diversity. Therefore, by his tireless and selfless work on bringing closer the breadth and beauty of Orthodoxy to his own people, St. Sava not only remained faithful to the Gospel and Church tradition, but he completely fulfilled Christ's commission to baptize all nations. It is recorded in the historical accounts that Demetrios Chomatianos, probably the best canonist of the time, sharply criticized the autocephaly of the Serbian Orthodox Church; however, the reasons for his criticism had been that St. Sava addressed the Patriarch of Constantinople for autocephaly, and bypassed him under whose jurisdiction the Serbian provinces were at the time. Therefore, Chomatianos' complaint had nothing to do with the ethnic and national elements in the Church, because it obviously was not a problem at that time.

This, in turn, suggests that the criticisms about ethnic elements in the Church are of a rather recent origin, most likely triggered by ever changing society, and possibly even a new tendency to redefine some key terms, which historically defined the social order. While these relatively new phenomena may cause some confusion within extra-Church circles, the Church has its Tradition and a clear vision of the terms whose arbitrary change of meaning could cause tectonic movements within political and social order.

Today we can say that in some cases, jurisdictions spread over certain territories for administrative purposes, while in other cases, ethnic and folk elements are used for a more accurate coverage of jurisdictions. For instance, it is one thing to say the *Church of Greece* and a completely different thing to say the *Greek Church*. Both titles are canonically acceptable and justified, but the first title seems to be putting an emphasis on the limitedness of a local Church within certain national/political boundaries, while the second one would highlight its openness and ability to respond to further missionary work beyond volatile state borders.

Here, we also ought to mention that a newly born nation (regardless of the political legitimacy of its proclamation), is not by definition entitled to a new (local,

independent) Church. This is for the simple reason that the Church has its own independent understanding of the sanctity of its mission in the world, and it takes universal consent to make changes in its already established order. Two consents are essential: 1) by the Mother Church, and 2) by all canonical local orthodox churches, a pan-orthodox consent. The necessity of these two consents in granting autocephaly ensures that no external factors and/or political pressures could be decisive factors in the process of granting a new autocephaly, which will have an impact on the entire established order.

Finally, it is important to mention canon 28 of the Council of Chalcedon, which will be elaborated later, stating among other things: ... *And it is arranged so that only the Metropolitans of the Pontic, Asian, and Thracian dioceses shall be ordained by the most holy throne of the most holy Church of Constantinople, and likewise the Bishops of the aforesaid dioceses which are situated in barbarian lands...* From this canon we see two important facts: 1) that ethnicities are clearly differentiated,⁸ and 2) that there are *barbaric regions* that already have their own bishops within these provinces, suggesting the possibility that, at the time when this canon was written, *lands* (regions) and jurisdictions were determined (defined) by peoples.⁹

What about the titles?

It is true that since the earliest times, the titles of bishops were defined by the city (chair) in which respective bishops resided. Nevertheless, contemporary geographic and territorial divisions are quite different from those in the early Church. In fact, since the time of ancient Greece, the basic governmental structures were city-states, or cities that have been administrative centers, and have functioned as self-sufficient units, as nation-states today. For a long time, such structures, certainly, paved the way for the Church to define its jurisdictions in a practical way. Thus, local Churches were merely using the existing socio-political order where it was deemed appropriate.

⁸ The Greeks considered barbarians all those who did not belong to the Greek people, which indicates high awareness of ethnicity. Even in the fifth century BC, Herodotus, in his famous explanation of what makes the Greek identity, refers to the kinship by blood ὁμαίμων (*homaimon*), speaking the same language ὁμόγλωσσον (*homoglosson*), and following the same lifestyle ὁμότροπον (*homotropon*).

⁹ “Barbarian lands” refers to the people, indicating in this particular case that jurisdiction could be determined by people also, even after the Council of Nicea.

Nevertheless, today's context seems to be quite different. As jurisdictions of the ancient thrones were expanded, the respective titles had to be updated as well. Thus, the title of the Patriarch of Alexandria, was corrected by the addition *and of All Africa*, for a more accurate determination of jurisdiction; the title of Patriarch of Antioch was corrected by adding *and of All the East*; the title of the Patriarch of Jerusalem was corrected by adding *and All Palestine*.¹⁰ These changes demonstrate that the basis for the title was not necessarily a city or territory, but rather the jurisdictions. While it appears that all the examples are related to the territory, it is still unclear why this is so, and a legitimate question remains: Is the territorial determinant always the most practical basis for jurisdictional allocation?

The city-states had quite a different, independent status in the past, and as such they were determinants for the official titles. However, the same model cannot be applied today. For example, title of the *Patriarch of Moscow and of All Russia*,¹¹ though of a much later date, follows the ancient model - *Patriarch of Moscow*, which of course, had to be "complemented" by adding *and of All Russia*. It appears as though the "ancient model" is maintained, but only at the expense of its practical purpose and the ability to correspond to the current socio-political order. At least two reasons come to mind as to why this model could be potentially misleading today:

1) In this model it is not clear whether the Patriarch of Moscow is the Patriarch of the city of Moscow as suggested by the title, or the Patriarch of the whole of Russia? Furthermore, does his jurisdiction imply Russian missions outside Russia, or is the Patriarch's jurisdiction strictly confined within the Russian nation-state borders? If the Patriarch is entitled to all of the above, then why not simply say the Russian Patriarch?

¹⁰ Exception is Constantinople, but its jurisdiction for historical and political reasons did not dictate a change, so its title, at least regarding its jurisdiction, remained *Archbishop of Constantinople, New Rome*. An overview of the title *Ecumenical* will be offered later in this paper.

¹¹ We refer to this example because this title is established in 1589, therefore is of a later date. It is important to note that Moscow Patriarchate in its diptychs places Georgian Patriarchate before the Serbian Patriarchate, while the Patriarchate of Constantinople mentions Serbian before Georgian. The second one is more accurate, because Moscow restored the autocephaly to the Georgian Orthodox Church in 1943, and the Serbian Patriarchate was restored in 1920. Thus, the Serbian Patriarchate should be mentioned in the diptychs before Georgia. Here we exclude the possibility that the Moscow Patriarchate refers to the antiquity of Georgian in relation to the Serbian Patriarchate, because if the diptychs would be based on antiquity, inevitably the entire order in the diptychs would have to be reconsidered: Jerusalem, Antioch and Alexandria would have to be before Constantinople, and both, Serbian and Georgian Patriarchates would have to be placed before Moscow.

2) The title Patriarch of Moscow and All of Russia makes no clear distinction between a Patriarch's function as Bishop and as a Patriarch¹². It would probably be more accurate to say: (Arch)bishop of Moscow and the Russian Patriarch (rather than adding *All of Russia*, as he holds jurisdiction over missionary territories outside of Russia, also).¹³ The title Russian Patriarch is practical because Moscow is located in Russia and is the seat of the Primate. It should go without saying that the name and the titles of a local Church can bear the features and symbols of the nation-state where the headquarters of that church is located.

At the same time, a Bishop is the Bishop not over a territory, but over people on a given territory. A Bishop is unthinkable without people as much as the Church is unthinkable without the people. Therefore, the role of the people in the office of the Bishop is equivalent to the role of the people in the Church. The Bishop is not ordained, solely, to oversee and officiate over a territory, but to specifically shepherd the people on that particular territory.¹⁴ It seems that the “national” titles most accurately cover jurisdictions today. For example, let us take a closer look at the official title of the Serbian Patriarch. If we were to change his title to Patriarch of Serbia, we would exclude the entire Diaspora¹⁵ from the Serbian Orthodox Church. In this case, one might even question the canonical jurisdiction of the centuries-old Serbian Orthodox Church in the region. The dynamics of the political turmoil in the region of the Former Yugoslavia has been such that it is difficult to keep up with the pace of the changes, but it is important to know that political divisions and turmoil do not have much significance for the internal life of the Church. The Church’s mission in the world is independent and detached from any evanescent political ambitions.

¹² Patriarch (first bishop - First Hierarch), as the guarantor, and symbol of unity of the local Church, is also a symbol of the jurisdiction of the Church. Therefore, his Patriarchal title ought to express the entire local Church jurisdiction. On the other hand, as a bishop, he also has the title of his local diocesan jurisdiction, which ought to be included in the full title.

¹³ The title *Russian Patriarch* encompasses the following: the Patriarch of all dioceses, including those missions beyond the borders of Russia, under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Moscow. Here, again, this should not be considered as an ethnic exclusivism but rather jurisdictional responsibility of a local autocephalous Church.

¹⁴ Titular (vicar) bishops are analogous to *horepiskopoi*, who possessed full episcopal honor, but were functioning as assistants by representing diocesan bishops in smaller (rural) areas. Nevertheless, vicar bishops today, just as *horepiskopoi* before, shepherd the people on behalf of the diocesan bishop.

¹⁵ Diaspora is a term that is now in the Church primarily related to the jurisdiction of an Autocephalous Church on the free missionary (non-orthodox or minority Orthodox) territory, beyond its canonical territory recognized on the Pan-Orthodox level.

The Council of Constantinople in 1872 – Ethno(phyletism)

The Council held in Constantinople in 1872, due to the uncanonical activities of the Bulgarian hierarchy on the existing and universally recognized canonical territory of the Church of Constantinople, is often cited as the main argument against nationality and ethnicity, or national and ethnic elements in the Church. This Council in fact condemned mainly phyletism (tribalism).¹⁶ If we carefully look at the circumstances that were the cause and those that followed the decisions of the Council, we shall see that the council itself sought not a general and final refutation of ethnicity and nationality in the Church but rather a condemnation of tribalism (clannishness), strife and divisions.

the Council was convened in 1872, and the decision of the Council among other things states: 1) *We reject and condemn tribal differences, national disputes, competition and strife in the Church ...* 2) *supporters of tribalism who dared to form assemblies on such principles, we exclude them from the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, and proclaim them schismatic according to the sacred canons ... Similarly, those who have separated themselves from the Orthodox Church by raising a special altar and creating tribal gatherings ... we declare them all schismatic and foreign to the Orthodox Church.*

By this decision the Council clearly and unequivocally condemns: 1) tribal (or national) disputes, competition and divisions within the Church that are based on tribal (national) differences, and 2) the supporters of tribalism who dared to create gatherings on such principles, without the consent of the Church, who are *de facto* schismatic.

Condemning schisms and any kind of dissension on tribal, national or ethnic lines is not the same as condemning national or ethnic elements within the Church. The fact that Constantinople, as the Mother Church, gave its consent for the restoration of the Bulgarian Exarchate in 1945 indicates that the problem was exclusively the clannishness, making of splits, schisms and parallel altars without the consent of the competent authority. Decisions of the Council in 1872 were, therefore, not necessarily related to national and ethnic elements in the Church, as much as they

¹⁶ Today one can hear the term *ethnophyletism*, which aims to highlight that the Council condemned the ethnic groups. However, the Council in 1872 spoke of phyletism (tribalism).

were directed against claiming the rights to build parallel altars arbitrarily, with the insistence of national and ethnic difference.

It would be contradictory to say that the Council of Constantinople in 1872 ruled against nationality in the Church, and then seventy years later 1945 revoked this decision by restoring the Bulgarian Exarchate. Not only did Constantinople restore the Exarchate in 1945, but it even sealed its national identity through its official name - Bulgarian Exarchate, and the Church - Bulgarian Orthodox Church.¹⁷ After all, if Constantinople had truly condemned national and ethnic groups or folk elements in the Church, then surely it would not have been possible for Constantinople to turn a blind eye to the fact that Orthodox Patriarchs of all ancient thrones, without exception, are Greek speaking or even of Greek origin, and equally important would be the question: why the throne of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which had the leading role in the Council in 1872, at least after the decision of the Council, is not occupied by any leader who has not been of Greek origin and who was not Greek-speaking? It is obvious, however, that the very national and ethnic differences as such, were not subject to condemnation by the Council of Constantinople in 1872, but rather “dissensions and schisms” on those grounds. The Council, in absolute accordance with the canonical tradition, condemns the acts of building parallel altars and creating confusion among the faithful on the existing universally recognized canonical territory of the Church of Constantinople, despite the appeals of the competent canonical authority, in this case the Church of Constantinople.

Episcopal titles in the Serbian Orthodox Church

As for the titles of Bishops and jurisdictions in the Serbian Orthodox Church, it is of the utmost importance that the Episcopal titles in history were largely determined by the way in which the jurisdiction of a bishop would be most fully encompassed, regardless of whether it was determined by people or territory. It was natural, at that time, that titles indicated jurisdictions and some titles were rather long. However, it is important to note that the office of a bishop, regardless of the title, has always been related solely to people, therefore it should not be considered problematic if

¹⁷ Гласник – *Official Journal of the Serbian Orthodox Church*, No. 1 (1946), pg. 1–2.

Episcopal titles carry the characteristics of a nation, especially when a title implies jurisdiction.¹⁸

Ancient names of the Churches and titles of bishops are not always in line with present day circumstances. Historical development of the title of the Head of the Serbian Orthodox Church carries particular importance and is equally interesting. The title of the Archbishops, since St. Sava until the proclamation of the Serbian Empire and Patriarchate in 1346, was the “Archbishop of All Serbian Lands and the Littoral,”¹⁹ and after 1346, Patriarch Joanikije took the title of *Patriarch of the Serbs and Greeks*. Interestingly, the first title adopted by the Serbian Patriarch determined his jurisdiction by the people rather than by the territory.²⁰ Then, after removing the anathema of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the reconciliation of the two Churches, the Serbian Patriarch took the title of the *Patriarch of Serbs and Coastal Areas*. Thus, from the earliest times, and throughout its history, the title of the Head of the Serbian Orthodox Church carried the national elements and it never caused criticisms throughout its history. However, it must be noted that the title of the Head of the Serbian Orthodox Church, despite frequent changes depending on the socio-political circumstances, always implied and expressed the jurisdiction.

Ecumenical Patriarch – jurisdiction or title?

With respect to the title *Ecumenical*, which was known in the West since the fifth century, where the Bishop of Rome bore the title *Ecumenical Archbishop and Patriarch*,²¹ one should consider a few simple, yet important points. Namely, at the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451, the bishop of Constantinople, as the bishop of the New Rome, was granted the same rights as the bishop of Old Rome. Shortly after the Council of Chalcedon in the fifth century, Patriarch Acacius was

¹⁸ If the purpose of the official Church titles is not to reflect jurisdiction, then the question is what is their purpose?

¹⁹ Prof. Miodrag Jugović in his article *Titles and Signatures of Serbian Archbishops and Patriarchs*, published in 1934 in *Bogoslovlje*, journal of the Orthodox Theological Faculty in Belgrade, says that the Archbishops were alternately referred to as *Archbishops of the Serbian Lands*, or among people as *Serbian Archbishops*. For him, both titles had the same meaning.

²⁰ It should be noted that, although Constantinople did not recognize the title of the Serbian Patriarch, this was not because the title speaks of jurisdiction based on people, but because Constantinople refused to recognize the newly established Serbian Patriarchate. If, at a later point something was disputed regarding the title, it has probably been the fact that the title, taken from the Emperor Dušan, itself included besides Serbs, also Greeks; but the problem itself was not that the title highlighted nations.

²¹ Demetrios J. Constantelos, *The Origins and Authority of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church*, looked at on 25 January 2012, published at: <http://www.goarch.org/ourfaith/ourfaith8148>.

the first to be titled as *ecumenical*. Then, Patriarchs John, Minas, and in the sixth century, John the Faster, all used the right granted to them by canon 28 of the Council of Chalcedon. This can be interpreted as an ambition by Constantinople, as the new seat of the Emperor and Senate, to stand shoulder to shoulder with Rome, which was, on the other hand, trying to retain its reputation. According to canon 28 of Chalcedon, Constantinople could claim the same jurisdiction as Rome. However, the question arose: how can there be two ecumenical patriarchs? The answer came when the Pope of Rome Gregory the Great (Dialogos) sent the sharpest criticism to John the Faster, saying that *any bishop who considers himself ecumenical is imitating the antichrist*. While this criticism was directed toward the Bishop of Constantinople by the bishop of Rome, it is unclear whether it also applied to the Bishop of Rome.

Some Roman Catholic theologians try to explain that Pope Gregory the Great did not deny the Pope's Ecumenical jurisdiction by criticizing the Bishop of Constantinople, but rather by doing so, he had in fact exercised his ecumenical authority. However, this argument is tendentious, because, most likely it deliberately ignores the fact that after the Council of Chalcedon, both the bishop of Rome and the bishop of Constantinople were raised to the same dignity, and therefore, if the Bishop of Rome is Ecumenical, then the bishop of Constantinople is also Ecumenical, and vice versa if the Pope of Rome claims that the bishop of Constantinople cannot be Ecumenical, then neither may the pope of Rome claim this title.

Similarly, some Orthodox theologians claim that the title "Ecumenical" in the orthodox interpretation never meant "Universal," but rather *Imperia* - for *Oecumene* the Roman Empire. The new center of the Empire being Constantinople meant that the bishop of the imperial city could also carry the Imperial title. This indeed would be convincing only if there was a clear explanation and universal consent, at least among the Orthodox canonists and historians, about what the title *ecumenical* means in the present context and in the contemporary world, long after the fall of the Roman Empire

One thing is clear, the title *ecumenical* from the very beginning caused very strong reactions from the Pope, and perhaps other bishops as well. Also, the objection of some orthodox theologians that Pope Gregory the Great had no knowledge of the

Greek language and that he misunderstood the title *ecumenical* would stand only if they would also say that the Patriarchs of Constantinople never had any other interpretation of the title. Furthermore, if a single bishop had the right of universal appeal, and sovereign and ecumenical authority, then the most important issues of the ecumenical significance would not have been solved at the Ecumenical Councils, with the consent of all of the bishops, but would be directed for the solution and approval exclusively to those bishops who possessed a universal and sovereign authority; however, that was not the case. Conciliarity of the Church is the permanent testimony that the Church never knew of a bishop with universal authority and jurisdiction, despite individual and arbitrary ambitions. At the same time, no ecumenical council ever granted a universal authority or jurisdiction to any one bishop. Therefore, the title *ecumenical* at best can be used as a historical and solely titular testimony of the glory of the bishop of the imperial city, and by no means to reflect a universal jurisdiction.

Canon 28 of the Council of Chalcedon

The question that is, increasingly, raised among certain canonists is the existence of the “diaspora”. Is the “diaspora” canonically an acceptable concept, or is it just a “necessary problem” until a better solution is found? With the position of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in Turkey being difficult, this question, ultimately, became significant during the tenure of Patriarch Meletios Metaksakis in the early 20th century.²² Meletios Metaksakis tried to prove that the concept of the Diaspora is unknown in Orthodox ecclesiology and that the entire Diaspora, by definition, belongs to the throne of Constantinople, justifying his claim primarily by citing canon 28 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council. However, even by a cursory reading of this canon, Metaksakis’ interpretation falls apart because of the logical inconsistencies and discrepancies, three of which are:

- 1) The Ecumenical Councils gave Rome the priority over Constantinople, and it would be contradictory to interpret that the Fathers of the Ecumenical Councils gave Constantinople prerogatives over all barbaric nations, in addition to those in the Provinces of Asia, Thrace and Pontus. If this meant

²² Meletios Metaksakis is among the most fascinating figures of the Orthodox Church history in the 20th century. He was the only man who was on the throne of three autocephalous (independent) Orthodox Churches successively: Athens, Constantinople, Alexandria, and in addition, he administered over a diocese in the Orthodox Church of Cyprus.

jurisdiction over all barbaric nations, logically, that would certainly be an honor granted first to *the throne of the old Rome*, to which the *Fathers rightly granted privileges*. In addition, the aforementioned canon makes it clear that the most holy throne of the New Rome should enjoy *the same privileges as the imperial city of the Old Rome, and should also be magnified in ecclesiastical matters as she is, ranked next after her*. Therefore, if the aforementioned canon means that indeed the ordination of bishops in all barbaric regions (if barbaric territories today are arbitrarily interpreted as the Diaspora) falls exclusively under the jurisdiction of the throne of Constantinople, as Metaksakis claimed, then it remains unclear why these prerogatives were not granted to Rome, or at least why they were not shared between Rome and Constantinople, equally. It is very striking that, according to Metaksakis' interpretation of the canon, the Fathers of the Council could be criticized for inconsistency in making such decisions.

2) The aforementioned canon clearly states that the prerogatives of the throne of Constantinople are restricted to metropolitans "*of the dioceses of Pontus, Asia and Thrace as well as the bishops of the aforementioned dioceses, who are among the barbarians*". Thus, the canon makes no mention of unlimited prerogatives of Constantinople; on the contrary, it clearly limits the jurisdiction of the throne of Constantinople to only three dioceses.

3) Finally, if canon 28 of the Council of Chalcedon is interpreted in the sense that the entire Diaspora belongs to the throne of Constantinople, that would mean that other autocephalous Churches cannot have their missions beyond their respective canonical territories, since the missions beyond canonical territories, even before they are established, would fall under the throne of Constantinople. In this case, one could question the canonicity and further expansion of missionary work of local autocephalous Churches, with the exclusive exception of the Throne of Constantinople. This would certainly set a precedent in the Canon Law and history of the Orthodox Church.

Therefore, we can safely conclude that Metaksakis' interpretation is in conflict with the traditional understanding of canon 28 of Chalcedon, and it sets an unfounded and unjustifiable, if not dangerous, precedent in the Canon Law. Thus, if the concept of

“diaspora” is called into question at all, it certainly should not be based on Chalcedon 28.

Diaspora or Church?

The “diaspora” as we know it today, is a relatively new issue in the Church. It is known in the Orthodox Church most often regarding the question of parallel jurisdictions. Parallel jurisdictions are to be found, exclusively, in territories not under the jurisdiction of a single, universally recognized autocephalous church. Such territories are commonly considered missionary territories. The Orthodox understanding is that all of the apostles, without exception, were commissioned by the Lord to teach and baptize all nations πάντα τὰ ἔθνη (Mt. 28:19). In the same way each autocephalous church, without exception, is entitled to equal rights of the apostolic mission by actively responding to the Lord’s commission. Thus, in the missionary territories, parallel jurisdictions of different autocephalous churches are naturally found. Furthermore, so-called *immigrant countries* are mostly known for parallel jurisdictions. It is worth noting that many of the orthodox faithful left their fatherland for different reasons, in many cases reluctantly, in order to find a new home in the free world. Nevertheless, their ties with what they consider “their church” were such that without it as a common place for gathering and sharing common customs, they felt lost and empty in foreign and new environments. Thus, in many cases it was the people who carried the faith, built new churches, and the clergy simply followed the faithful. This was true for virtually all existing jurisdictions in the new world (immigrant countries), and countries where the orthodox population is a minority. These territories are commonly called “diaspora”.

Nevertheless, the existence of parallel jurisdictions is not without contradictions. The Very Rev. Leonid Kishkovsky, of blessed memory, the longtime Director of External Affairs and Interchurch Relations for the Orthodox Church of America (OCA), in his work *Orthodoxy in America: Diaspora or Church?*, wrote: *the reality of Orthodoxy in America is as complex as America. Many of the histories and cultures and backgrounds which compose America also compose Orthodoxy in America. The reality of Orthodoxy in America is also as complex as Orthodoxy. Every patriarchate and church of the Middle East, Europe, and Africa is represented within American Orthodoxy. Every culture and language found in the Orthodox world is found also in North America.* Furthermore he says, *the “right way” which is needed, is readily found in the ecclesiological vision of the Orthodox Church. The*

*problem is not that new formulas or principles must be found. The problem is that the ecclesiological vision of the Orthodox Church must be affirmed theologically and applied practically.*²³

He then concludes that *the answer to the question “Diaspora or Church?” must be unequivocally “Church and not Diaspora!”*

It seems that Fr. Kishkovsky, in his work, not only reminded the readers of the ancient church order *one city - one bishop - one church*, but based on it he concluded that today's church organization in America and other “traditionally non-Orthodox territories,” is unacceptable for Orthodox ecclesiology. The issue of the church order in the “traditionally non-Orthodox territories” is a complex issue and a comprehensive analysis of the question goes beyond the scope of this article. However, it is necessary to at least mention a few challenges that should be kept in mind when thinking about this topic.

Namely, the basic and largest challenge is that Western countries, with parallel jurisdictions, represent a new phenomenon of the countries designed to be *immigrant countries* with a constant influx of large populations from virtually all countries around the world, not least from the nations-states with an already established Orthodox tradition. On the one hand, this fact is generally known, but on the other hand, the very difference between the *immigrant countries* and the nation-states, is neglected by those who try to use the ancient church order of *one city - one bishop - one church*. In fact, this ancient rule is naturally maintained in traditionally Orthodox territories (nation-states), because for them a pan-orthodox consensus was reached with respect to the jurisdiction, thus *one city - one bishop - one church* is the only sustainable arrangement. But, in the “traditionally non-Orthodox territories” (immigrant countries), maintaining this rule is virtually impossible. Today, most minority Orthodox territories with parallel jurisdictions are deliberately intended and through their multiculturalism are “designed” to be sustained as immigrant countries or territories. As already mentioned, every local Church is commissioned to the apostolic mission, thus it is not obvious which authority, if not Pan-Orthodox consensus, should assign the one bishop of one local church to govern a particular city on a missionary territory.

Furthermore, what we see in reality is that local churches are already appointing their bishops in their “diasporas” with their own authority, and in fact, this way they not only respond to the call to expand the mission, but they also respect the ancient

²³ The Very Rev. Leonid Kishkovsky, *Orthodoxy in America: Diaspora or Church?* looked at in: October of 2011 published at: <http://oca.org/holy-synod/statements/fr-kishkovsky/orthodoxy-in-america-diaspora-or-church>.

structure of *one city - one bishop - one church*. Indeed, while in the immigrant countries there may be several orthodox canonical bishops in one city, still each local church appoints only one bishop for one city. At the same time, what is today tacitly called the “diaspora” with parallel jurisdictions, since each jurisdiction has its own bishop in one city, and an orderly, full liturgical and sacramental life, it cannot be understood as anything less than the Church.

If, however, one follows the direction of a unified local church order, in the new world, there are models that would potentially incorporate parallel jurisdictions into one, if that would contribute to a stronger testimony and mission of the Church in those territories. As an example, the system of already existing diptychs could be applied to a single assembly of bishops.²⁴ However, in this case, the question remains whether such a solution is a canonical necessity, and more importantly whether it is practically and pastorally sustainable. It remains unclear why the first bishop of the local episcopal assembly in immigrant countries would *ex officio* be from the Patriarchate of Constantinople, since it would very likely mean that the pastoral needs of large numbers of the faithful would be neglected. Perhaps a careful consideration of the pastoral needs of the faithful in certain territories would shed a significant light on the profile of the clergy for those territories, rather than simply applying the order of the diptychs. Needless to say, clergy who will be capable of responding in a most comprehensive manner to the contemporary challenges, as well as to the pastoral needs of the Church, should be considered most seriously, regardless of the order of the diptychs.

However, there is another model that would, not only be practical in the case of episcopal assemblies, but could be a rather strong testimony of Orthodox ecclesiology, and that is the *Mount Athos model*. Namely, on Mount Athos the election of the “Protos” (The First Monk) of Mount Athos is an annual procedure. According to the centuries-old tradition, the four great monasteries provide their representatives, and none of the four monasteries can have their representative be the “Protos” for two years in a row. Consequently, every monastery only gives its representative the ability to be the “Protos” every fourth year. In the same manner, for example, to the already existing *SCOBA* council, it might be expedient to apply the *Mount Athos model*, according to which the first in the council would be changed every year and appointed from a different jurisdiction.

Nevertheless, pointing in that direction, renders it unclear whether the unification of the church structure in a society and environment designed to remain ethnically

²⁴ <https://www.holycouncil.org/-/diaspora>

diverse, would bring more pastoral benefit or harm? It should also be noted that the beauty and mission of Orthodoxy is not testified only through canonical order, theology and the beauty of worship, but also in the freedom that manifests itself through the unity of many and various local churches, each in its own way contributing to the beauty in diversity and unity of many which manifests itself through the Ecumenicity of the Church of Christ.

Therefore, it seems that a solution to the issue of “diaspora,” as a territory with a minority Orthodox population, should not be sought on the basis of the political-administrative arrangement of nation states. A uniform formula for all countries around the globe is virtually impossible due to their own socio-political peculiarities, especially in the immigrant countries. Perhaps, a more prudent and practical approach to the question would be through finding a more efficient mechanism for more frequent pan-Orthodox gatherings, where issues concerning the whole Church will be jointly considered and harmonized. However, the question should not be “diaspora” or Church, because the “diaspora” has all the fullness of the Church, and therefore is the Church. Rather, the question should be: are parallel jurisdictions the most pastorally justifiable and administratively practical solution for an efficient mission of the Church?

For now, such an arrangement that implies parallel jurisdictions in the so-called *immigrant countries*, designed to maintain ethnic diversity, seems necessary at the least, due to the practical pastoral needs of the constant influx of immigrants, and perhaps, it should not be even treated as a canonical anomaly.

Conclusion

The question of national symbols and national orientation in the Church is a question of more recent times. The Orthodox Church, throughout its history did not reject, properly understood, national sentiment. On the contrary, it used the national element to bring its mission close to as many people as possible, not least to entire nations. However, in recent times, the voices of the so-called “cancel” culture have a tendency to erase religious, national, cultural and historical heritage, or to reverse it completely. The Church is grounded and rests upon her own internal mechanism to maintain its independence of what seems to be evolving but most often subtle societal changes with respect to culture, morals and values, which in turn affect all aspects of the society as a whole. If the Church has gone through difficult periods countless times in history, then the Church has enormous experience facing new challenges. Thus, the Church is an inexhaustible source of Tradition and history, an

experienced and attested refuge from the challenges of worldly affairs and a rich treasury of valuable information for the contemporary generations. Perhaps, a twofold approach to the contemporary challenges, on our part, is necessary today: We ought to immerse ourselves in the Tradition of the Church, as the true and strong testimony of its life and experience. At the same time, we need to remain free and open to new creative approaches to every new challenge that may come our way, in the spirit of the early Church, aware that the Holy Spirit is ever present, steering and directing the Church.

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