

# The Ecumenical Patriarchate in the XX<sup>th</sup> Century

## 1. Old and New Churches

The Ottoman conquest had concentrated the Byzantine commonwealth' of diverse peoples and nations into the '*Rum millet*' led by the Ecumenical Patriarch. So it was not entirely surprising that, as the various peoples gained liberation, they should seek '**independence**' (*autocephaly*)<sup>1</sup> also from the ecclesiastical authorities in Constantinople. If Constantinople itself had been liberated, history might have been different. But what actually happened in the wake of the Greek war of independence (1821) was the establishment of national Churches in the new nation states. These included ancient patriarchates that had been suppressed (Serbia, Bulgaria), but also new independent Churches (Greece, Romania, Albania).

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<sup>1</sup> Autocephaly (from Greek: αὐτοκεφαλία, meaning "property of being self-headed") is the status of a hierarchical Christian church whose head bishop does not report to any higher-ranking bishop. The term is primarily used in Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches. In Eastern Orthodoxy, the right to grant autocephaly is nowadays a contested issue, the main opponents in the dispute being the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which claims this right as its prerogative,[4][5] and the Russian Orthodox Church (the Moscow Patriarchate), which insists that one autocephalous jurisdiction has the right to grant independence to one of its components

Country	Old Autocephaly (Imperial Times)	Falling under Turks (canceling of Autocephaly)	Gained Independence from Ottomans/Soviet Union	New Autocephaly (Modern Times)
Bulgaria	870 – Autocephaly 927 – Patriarchate	1396	1878	1872 – self-declared 1945 – recognized by Ec. Patriarchate
Serbia	1219 – Autocephaly 1346 – Patriarchate	1389	1878	1879
Georgia	1010 – Patriarchate	Beginning XIX century in the Russian Empire	1991 from Soviet Union	1943 – recognized by Moscow Patriarchate 1990 - recognized by Ec. Patriarchate
Romania	-	Walachia – 1417 Moldova – 1456 Transylvania 1804 – Austrian Empire	1878	1865 – negotiations started 1885 – recognized without Transylvania 1925 – Patriarchate + Transylvania
Greece		1456 (Athens) 1460	1832	1833 – self-declared 1850 – recognized
Albania		1388-1430	1912	1922 – self-declared 1937 – recognized
Ukraine	- Russian Empire		1991 from the Soviet Union	1992 – self-declared “Patriarchate of Kyiv” 2018 – recognized by the Ec. Patriarchate as “Orthodox Church of Ukraine”, independent but NOT granted the Patriarchal title

## 2. The Encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarch Joachim III (1902)

**The new context of the National Churches:** The emergence of national states out of the European and Ottoman empires during the 19th century was based on the ideology of the European Enlightenment, which brought forth the right of the nations for self-determination. The Followers of the European Enlightenment also projected the foundation of national Churches within the jurisdiction of the national states, completely subjected to the latter. Within that context, the formation of national states and Churches in the Balkan Peninsula contributed in

the dramatic decrease of the provinces of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in that region.

### *Ecumenism „avant la lettre”*

- The Orthodox Church was among the pioneers of the promotion of the ecumenical idea from the very beginning of the 20th century. This idea can be traced in some important Encyclicals issued by the Ecumenical Patriarchate between 1902 and 1920.

- ➔ The first was promulgated on 12 June 1902, “long before there were any major signs of those trends which we call today the ‘Ecumenical Movement’”
- ➔ This Encyclical was addressed by Patriarch Joachim III of Constantinople to the heads of sister autocephalous Orthodox Churches
- ➔ Patriarch Joachim, in this Encyclical, was first referring to the need for closer cooperation and fellowship among the Orthodox Churches. Relations were critical at that time. Caring for Orthodox unity, however, Joachim stressed also the need for Churches to think about the issue of their **present and future relations with the two great branches of Christianity, viz. the Roman Catholic Church and the Churches of the Reformation.**
- ➔ Reminding that the concern for Christian Unity was central in the life of the Orthodox Church, the Patriarch was asking whether or not the time was ripe for a **preliminary inter-Orthodox meeting which would determine the best bases and ways of working out an honest and straightforward contact with western Christendom**
- ➔ In order to respond better to the urgent need of unity within the universal Church, the Encyclical invited the Orthodox Churches to move towards more dynamic inner communion, synodality and cooperation

### 3. The Genocide of the Greek 1914-1922

- ⇒ Resulting in between 300000-900000 victims
- ➔ During the WW 1
- ➔ was the systematic killing of the Christian Ottoman Greek population of Anatolia which was carried out mainly during World War I and its aftermath (1914–1922) on the basis of their religion and ethnicity. It was perpetrated by the government of the Ottoman Empire led by the Three Pashas and by the Government of the Grand National Assembly led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, against the indigenous Greek population of the Empire. The genocide included massacres, forced deportations involving death marches through the Syrian Desert, expulsions, summary

executions, and the destruction of Eastern Orthodox cultural, historical, and religious monuments. Several hundred thousand Ottoman Greeks died during this period. Most of the refugees and survivors fled to Greece (adding over a quarter to the prior population of Greece). Some, especially those in Eastern provinces, took refuge in the neighbouring Russian Empire.

- ➔ By late 1922, most of the Greeks of Asia Minor had either fled or had been killed. Those remaining were transferred to Greece under the terms of the later 1923 population exchange between Greece and Turkey, which formalized the exodus and barred the return of the refugees. Other ethnic groups were similarly attacked by the Ottoman Empire during this period, including Assyrians and Armenians, and some scholars and organizations have recognized these events as part of the same genocidal policy

#### 4. The 1923 Pan-Orthodox Congress of Constantinople

- ➔ was a meeting of representatives of several local Eastern Orthodox Churches held in Constantinople from 10 May to 8 June 1923, convened at the initiative of Ecumenical Patriarch Meletius Metaxakis.
- ➔ The primary topic of the Council of 1923 was calendar reform. The Roman Catholic Church and almost all of Western Europe completed their switch from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian calendar, the current international standard, during the 16th century. Russia, and the rest of the Orthodox world, however, remained on the old calendar until this council. At this council, the Greek Orthodox Church, Russian Orthodox Church, and many other branches of the Eastern Orthodox Church adopted the new calendar, which they called “the new Julian calendar”.
- ➔ This council is extremely controversial within Eastern Orthodoxy—it led to many schisms in many autocephalous churches of different *Old Calendarist* groups
- ➔ The Calendar:
  - Julian (Jerusalem, Moscow, Serbia, Ukraine, Mount Athos)
  - Mixed (Ecumenical Patriarchate, Alexandria, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece)
  - Completely Revised (The Orthodox Church in Finland, some communities in Western Europe and USA)

#### 5. The Inter-Orthodox Meeting in Vatopedi (1930)

- ⇒ “the first pre-Synod/pre-Council”

A list of 17 themes:

1. The promotion of inter-Orthodox relations (items 1, 2, 6 and 17);
2. Issues in direct reference to the life and discipline of the Orthodox Church (items 3, 5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14 and 16);
3. The relations of the Orthodox Church with other Christian Churches (items 7 and 8);
4. The problem of the calendar (item 13);
5. The status of the Orthodox Church in America (item 4);
6. The activity of the Orthodox Churches among the peoples to which they belong (item 15)

## 6. Towards the Modern Orthodoxy, the *Paris* time

The Russian revolution (starting 1917) was the decisive event for modern Orthodoxy, ushering in a new '*age of martyrs*' for most of the Orthodox Church.

Furthermore, **the emigration following the revolution** meant that the heirs to the intellectual ferment of the nineteenth century were largely scattered abroad. Many Russians fled in many countries, but the centre of the emigration was Paris, where the St Sergius Institute of Orthodox Theology (founded 1926) and the Russian YMCA Press would remain key centres for the dissemination of Orthodox theological thought.

Many émigrés came to see a providential meaning in the catastrophe that had engulfed their country; indeed, this resulted in an unprecedented mutual encounter between Orthodoxy and the West, a more free and relaxed encounter of thoughts and philosophies since it was not an institutional encounter. Through the ecumenical efforts of the émigrés, Western Christians were able to hear for the first time the voices of highly articulate and thoughtful Orthodox theologians from various nationalities.

This set in train a profound **rediscovery of the Orthodox tradition**. The logic of the Orthodox émigrés' understanding of the Church and its mission required a rediscovery of the universality of Orthodoxy across national cultural boundaries, but it was ecumenical contacts that allowed this to happen.

The period between the two world wars saw a welter of meetings and conferences bringing together youth and theologians from Greece, the Balkans and the Russian emigration. These included the 1936 conference of Orthodox theologians in Athens, which agreed on the task of freeing Orthodox theology from scholastic influences and reconnecting with the Church Fathers.

Within ten years, however, almost the whole of Orthodox Europe had fallen to Communism. Yet, remarkably, this did not altogether derail the project of theological renewal. That project is well exemplified in one of the great

theologians of the twentieth century, Fr Dumitru Stăniloae (1900-93), whose continued teaching and writing transformed the character of theology in Romania. Having studied in Athens and Paris in the 1920, Stăniloae was profoundly influenced by the theology of the Russian emigration, and had a keen sense of Romania's place as meeting-point of the Greek and Slav worlds. Serbia followed a somewhat different path: the dominant figure was Iustin Popovici (1894-1979), a pioneer of patristic scholarship and spiritual renewal who reached out to the Greek and Russian traditions but was deeply suspicious of Ecumenism.

Communities outside Eastern Europe have acquired an increasingly prominent role in world Orthodoxy. In 1942, an encounter with Russian émigré theological writings inspired a group of young Orthodox Lebanese and Syrians to found the Orthodox Youth Movement, which was to make Antioch one of the foremost heirs to the **Paris renewal**.

**Paris itself continues to be an important theological centre:** the tradition of the émigré thinkers has been carried on by such figures as Olivier Clément, **Maria Skobcova** and Fr Boris Bobrinskoy, and by a younger generation of theologians from Russian, Greek and French backgrounds.

## 7. Orthodoxy in Anglo-American World

In Britain, the spirit of the renewal gained momentum after the Second World War through the ministry of Metropolitan Anthony (Bloom) at the head of the Russian diocese, and Sophrony (Sakharov), whose unconventional monastery in Essex is both a meeting place for pilgrims from all over the world and a strong presence in the Anglo-Greek community. The Orthodox presence in Britain includes such internationally known theologians as Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, who during his years as lecturer at Oxford supervised large numbers of graduate students from around the world. The journals *Sobornost*, with *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* and the *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* in America, have been an important source of theological writing in English.

In 1948, Fr Georges Florovsky and other leading theologians from Paris left for America, to be followed shortly by Alexander Schmemmann and John Meyendorff. All of these figures were to have a great impact on Orthodoxy in North America, and especially on *St Vladimir's Seminary in New York (founded 1938)*. The seminary's publishing house has become the leading source of Orthodox books in English, many of which have subsequently been translated into the languages of other Orthodox countries.

## 8. Mount Athos revival

A remarkable aspect of Orthodox renewal in the later twentieth century has been the resurgence of monasticism. Mount Athos, widely given up for dead in the 1960s, now has some 1,600 monks, many highly educated, several of the

monasteries are quite international in composition." A similar renewal can be seen in men's and women's monasticism throughout the Orthodox world. Monasticism has traditionally been a prime source of authentic theology, understood as 'praying in truth'," now we once again see the monastic experience re-invigorating theological life. The teaching of St Silouan of Mount Athos has reached a global audience through his disciple Fr Sophrony Sakharov.

## **9. The Orthodox Church and EU**

Greece 1981

Romania and Bulgaria 2007

Special status

Ukraine

Moldova

Georgia