

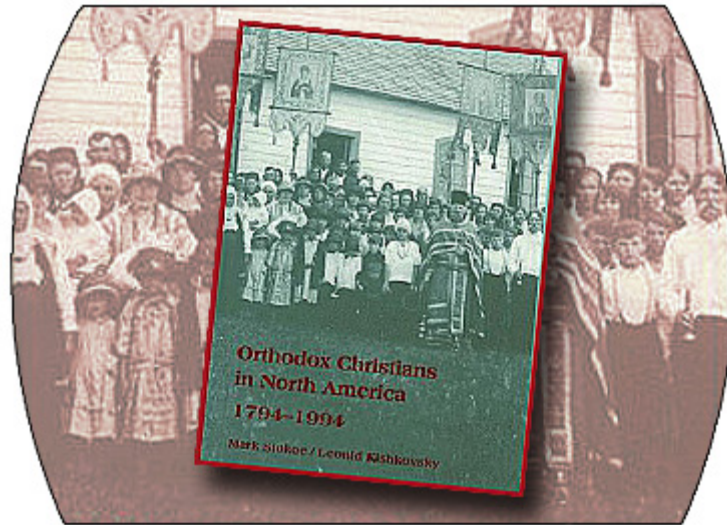


Orthodox Christians in North America (1794 - 1994)

Written by Mark Stokoe and the Very Rev. Leonid Kishkovsky.

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In a nation whose religious culture has accommodated Catholics, Protestants, and Jews, Orthodox Christian in North America have been largely overlooked and ignored. With few exceptions, their historical experiences remain unrecorded, their documents untranslated, their personalities, institutions, and activities unknown.

Contemporary American Orthodoxy is the result of the Russian missionaries to Alaska, but also of the migration of peoples from Central and Eastern Europe and the Middle East. As a result, it often presents an "ethnic" face to American society. Building on an earlier pioneering historical work, *Orthodox America* (compiled for the 1976 American Bicentennial), the present work seeks to provide the reader, both Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike, with a popular narrative account of two hundred years of Orthodox Christianity on this continent.

From its humble beginnings in 1794, when a small group of missionaries landed on Kodiak Island, Alaska, Orthodoxy in America has expanded to comprise a church of over two million faithful. Yet numerous Americans from all cultural and religious backgrounds have, particularly in recent decades, joined Orthodoxy as well. Orthodoxy does have something to say to American society. Thus, the story is told on these webpages.

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Leonid Kisbkovsky

Introduction

In a continent that speaks of Christianity in three categories—Protestant, Catholic and “Other”—Eastern Orthodoxy is clearly “Other.” Eastern Orthodox Christians have been the great exceptions in North American history and North American religion. In countries that expanded from east to west, the Orthodox entered from the west and moved east; in lands that encourage innovation, Orthodoxy in North America has remained largely unchanged; and in nations whose religious cultures have been accommodating to Catholic, Protestant and Jew, the Orthodox have remained aloof. It is no surprise, therefore, that the presence of millions of Orthodox Christians in North America has been largely overlooked, or worse, ignored. With few exceptions their historical experiences remain unrecorded, their documents untranslated, their personalities, institutions, and activities unknown.

There are an estimated 150 million Orthodox Christians throughout the world today.^[1] While more than 100 million are in the lands of the former Soviet Union (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and the Baltic States), Orthodox are also a majority in the Balkans (Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro and Cyprus), as well as the majority Christian body throughout the largely Muslim Middle East (Israel, Jordan, Palestine, Syria, Egypt and Lebanon). Orthodox Christians form significant minorities throughout much of Europe (for example, the Orthodox Church is recognized as an official State Church in Finland), in Australia and New Zealand, and in South America. The Orthodox are in East Africa—with large numbers in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Zaire—and a growing presence in West Africa, especially in Ghana and Nigeria. Orthodox churches also support missions in Asia, with growing communities in South Korea, Japan and Indonesia. United in faith, ministry and sacraments, but administered independently on a regional basis, Orthodox Christians worship in their own languages and witness to the Gospel through their unique cultures. Thus one may speak of the Orthodox Church as a whole, or of its more familiar constituent parts (“The Greek Orthodox Church,” “The Russian Orthodox Church,” “The Orthodox Church of Japan,” etc.) with equal validity.

There are two million Orthodox Christians in the United States.^[2] In externals, Orthodox Christians in North America most closely resemble Roman Catholics. They share a similar sacramental view of life; a threefold ordained ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons; liturgical forms of corporate worship; traditional forms of piety such as fasting, prayer, monasticism, etc.; highly developed forms of religious art (iconography) and sacred music (chants); and generally “conservative” positions on contemporary moral issues.

In administration the Orthodox in North America most closely resemble Protestants. Like American Lutherans of fifty years ago, the Orthodox in North America are at present splintered into 32 distinct administrative “jurisdictions,” divisions based largely on ethnic origin and politics, both secular and ecclesiastical. In self-identity, however, Orthodox Christians in North America are most like Orthodox Jews; a people apart, unable, and at times unwilling, to separate the claims of race, religion, and politics: people for whom the Greek term “diaspora” (literally, “dispersion”) has been an expression of enduring meaning.

Building on an earlier pioneering historical work, *Orthodox America* (compiled for the 1976 American Bicentennial)^[3], the present work seeks to provide the reader, both Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike, with a popular narrative account of two hundred years of Orthodox Christianity on this continent. Unfortunately, the very diversity of Orthodoxy in North America precludes, in this

brief work, a fully adequate presentation or even mention of each Orthodox jurisdiction, organization, significant personality, or major event in its 200 year history.

Rather, *Orthodox Christians in North America* focuses specific attention and reflection on the institutional, social, and theological history of the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) as the paradigm for much of the Orthodox experience in North America. The choice, however, is not arbitrary; for the OCA is the direct continuation of the efforts begun by the first Orthodox missionaries to North America in 1794. Within its two hundred years of uninterrupted existence, the OCA carries all the challenges of the Orthodox experience in North America: life on the Alaskan frontier, immigration, revolutionary upheaval, schism, struggles over cultural and linguistic identity, theological renewal, missionary outreach, ecumenical concern, and charitable endeavor. Clearly, in this bicentennial year of celebration, the story of the OCA is uniquely representative of the past and present of all Orthodox Christians in North America.

Moreover, if the cultural history of previous Orthodox missions is taken as a guide, a new and unique form of Orthodox Christianity is presently emerging: American Orthodoxy. In whatever form this nascent American Orthodoxy continues to develop, the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) will be the crucible in which this new Orthodox style is forged.

Notes:

[1] This number does not include the 30 million members of the Oriental (or pre-Chalcedonian) Orthodox Churches in Egypt, Ethiopia, Armenia, Syria, India, and North America. These Churches formally separated from the Eastern Orthodox Church in a dispute following the Fourth Ecumenical Council in AD 451. In 1992, after decades of official discussions, the theological grounds of the schism were largely resolved. A return to full unity between the two families of Orthodox Christians—Eastern and Oriental—is presently awaiting official administrative action by regional leaders. Given their generally smaller numbers and present theological diversity, discussion of the Oriental Orthodox has been omitted from the present work.

[2] With estimates as high as five, six, even as many as eight million Orthodox Christians in the United States, many might question this smaller figure. In reality the number of Orthodox Christians has been, and remains, greatly exaggerated. The regular decennial governmental Census of Religious Bodies in America reported some 250,000 Orthodox Christians in the United States in 1916. Only five years later, at the founding of the Greek Archdiocese, the Greek Archbishop inadvertently spoke of “the two millions” of Orthodox in America. This figure, perhaps based more on cultural pride than sociological fact, became widely disseminated. In 1927, an Arab archbishop increased this number to “three million”—although Orthodox immigration had effectively halted in 1924. Ethnic and religious politics encouraged the use of increasingly inflated figures, so that the Russian archbishop spoke of “five million” Orthodox in America in 1944. In fact, the last Census of Religious Bodies (1936) placed the actual figure at less than one tenth of that number (400,000). Ethnic rhetoric aside, government surveys of ethnic origins (1976), yearly national religious surveys by independent pollsters (1970-1993), and the most recent census data (1990) all suggest that less than 1% of the American population identifies itself as Orthodox Christian. Two million, therefore, may be seen as a reasonable current estimate.

[3] *Orthodox America 1794-1976: Development of the Orthodox Church in America*, Constance J. Tarasar and John H. Erickson, eds. (Syosset, NY: The Orthodox Church in America, Dept. of History and Archives, 1975).

The Alaskan Mission (1794-1870)

For almost two thousand years, Orthodox Christians have been actively spreading the Gospel.^[1] Following the gradual conversion of the Roman Empire over the first three centuries, missionaries from the Greek-speaking Church of the Eastern Roman Empire (hence the term “Eastern Orthodox”) evangelized much of the Middle East, the Balkans, Central and Eastern Europe, Russia and lands to the east. The most remarkable, and ultimately successful, missionary effort of this era was undertaken by SS. Cyril and Methodius, brothers who are credited with creating the Cyrillic alphabet and who helped to lay the foundations for Slavic culture. When in AD 988, Prince Vladimir of Kievan Rus (contemporary Ukraine) embraced Orthodoxy, monastics, following the examples of SS. Cyril and Methodius, provided Kievan Rus with living examples of Christian values. Several centuries later, two monks, Hourg and Barsanuphii, journeyed east to Kazan, capital of the Tartars, learned the Tartar language, and established a monastic community for the conversion of the Mongol peoples. St Stephen of Perm (1340-96), another monk, would in turn journey beyond Kazan, across the Ural Mountain, into the forests of Siberia to labor among the pagan Zyrians. There Stephen devised a Zyrian alphabet, translated the Gospel, and subsequently converted an entire people. This model of monastic evangelization became the pattern for other Russian Orthodox missionaries as they trekked ever eastward, eventually establishing a network of missions across Siberia and along the entire Pacific Rim: in China (1686), Alaska (1794), Japan (1861), and Korea (1898). The eight Orthodox monks who arrived in Alaska in 1794 were simply part of this centuries-old missionary heritage of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Beginnings of the Alaskan Mission

In 1648, the Russian explorer Simeon Dezhnev sailed from the Arctic Ocean, around the Chukotka Peninsula, and founded the post of Anadyr on the Bering Sea, facing Alaska. During the next several generations, Siberian entrepreneurs ventured across the straits to engage Native Americans in commerce. Rumors of these early permanent Russian settlements on Alaskan soil during this period persist among Alaskan native peoples today. Whether permanent or occasional residents, these Russian frontiersmen brought with them not only beads, blankets, pots and pans, but their religious traditions as well. Orthodox laity brought the Orthodox faith to North America, baptized the first converts (often their own native wives and Creole offspring), and even constructed the first chapels. Clergy and official missionaries came much later.

In 1728, and again in 1741, Vitus Bering and Alexis Chirikov mapped the Alaskan coast, and in the process set off a “Fur Rush”—creating a Russian “Wild East” much like the later “Gold Rushes” of the American “Wild West.” For the next forty years, Russian traders and trappers would make annual or biannual trading expeditions to the Aleutian Archipelago in search of valuable sea otter pelts. Poorly equipped, these Siberian entrepreneurs were not seasoned military men, but frontier adventurers, much like Daniel Boone. Unlike Boone, though, these adventurers were bachelors.



A totem pole in Sitka depicts historic battle between Russian settlers and a local tribe.

Inevitably they married local women who provided their Siberian husbands with the same clothing, tools, and food they would have given native Alaskan spouses. Thus, when the British Captain James Cook visited the Aleutian Islands at the end of the century (1793), he could not distinguish the Slavs from the native Alaskans. The Siberians had been completely acculturated into the material culture of the Aleuts.

This pattern of intermarriage and gradual evangelization of the indigenous people provoked some resistance. A major uprising against the Siberians—during which some 200 Siberians and an equal number of Aleut warriors were killed—took place around 1764. Despite occasional outbursts, the Aleut, Russian, and Creole communities gradually returned to a generally peaceful coexistence.

Gregory Shelikov



*Russian Double-headed Eagle
Crest used to mark Russian
territorial claims in America.*

In the 1780's a Russian trader, Gregory Shelikov, argued that sending annual trading expeditions to the New World across the Bering Strait was unnecessarily expensive and dangerous. The time had come, he argued, for the establishment of permanent trading posts in Alaska. The importation of a few hundred Russian settlers, Shelikov reasoned, could lead to the systematic exploitation of the sea otter habitats all along the Alaskan coast—and vast profits. As the natives might not be receptive to such a colonial intrusion, Shelikov suggested that the commercial adventure assume a military dimension as well. A Russian settlement in Alaska, atop the North Pacific, would extend Russian political and military influence as far as Spanish California, British Hawaii, and the Spanish Philippines.

In the summer of 1784, Shelikov set out for Kodiak Island to establish his Alaskan base. By all accounts except his own, Shelikov's expedition was greeted with hostility and armed resistance. Subduing the Kodiak islanders in a bloody encounter, Shelikov returned to St Petersburg to relate his conquest and present a request for a monopoly on the ensuing fur trade to the imperial court. He installed Alexander Baranov as company manager, governor, and virtual dictator of the small Russian colony. Shelikov did not live to see his Russian-American Trading Company receive its monopoly, nor did he ever return to Alaska. Baranov, however was to rule both the colony and the company with an iron fist for 27 years.

The Alaskan Mission

To convince the imperial court of the seriousness of his colonial scheme, Shelikov journeyed to Valaam and Konevitsa monasteries, located on the Russo-Finnish border, to recruit monastic volunteers for the new settlement in Alaska. One Archimandrite, three priestmonks, one deacon-monk, one lay monk, together with several staff members, left St Petersburg on December 21, 1793. They arrived in Kodiak on September 24, 1794, having travelled 7,300 miles in 293 days. Upon arrival, the monks were shocked at conditions in the colony.

It was not the poor living conditions, inhospitable weather, nor the strange customs and foods of the native peoples that so upset the monks, but the violent and exploitative behavior of their own Russian countrymen. Within a few weeks, the leader of the mission, Archimandrite Joasaph (Bolotov) was sending vivid reports of abuse back to Shelikov,



*Abbot Nazarius of Valaamo
Monastery blesses missionaries
leaving for America, at the direction
of the Empress Catherine the Great.*

believing that Shelikov would intervene. Receiving no reply, Joasaph, the priest-monk Makary, and the deacon Stephen returned to Russia in 1798 to report firsthand about Baranov's outrageous actions. On their return to Alaska, their ship sank, and all aboard perished (1799). In retaliation for such continuing "interference," Baranov placed the remaining monks under house arrest, forbidding them any further contact with the native peoples (1800).

St. Herman of Alaska

Despite continuing oppression by the Company, native Alaskans flocked to join the Orthodox Church. The priest-monk Juvenal reported baptizing several thousand himself. Although Juvenal would be martyred by hostile natives in 1796 [2], the more general success of the Alaskan mission can be explained only by the heroic efforts of the missionaries in defending the Alaskans from Baranov and his henchmen, as well as by the missionaries' sensitive approach to the pre-Christian spirituality of the Aleuts. The Russian monks presented Orthodox Christianity not as the abolition, but as the fulfillment, of the Aleut's ancient religious heritage. Most persuasively, the personal example of the monk Herman provided the natives with tangible evidence that the Gospel, when embraced with full dedication and commitment, produced God-like men.

To avoid harassment (and possible assassination at the hands of Baranov's men), the monk Herman left Kodiak sometime between 1808-1818, and relocated to Spruce Island, three miles to the north. He named his small hermitage "New Valaam," in honor of his former monastery, from earlier generations of Orthodox monks had set out to evangelize Karelian, Lapp, and Finnish tribespeople. At New Valaam, Herman spent the rest of his life teaching the Aleuts, nursing the sick, raising orphans, praying, and working miracles. Most importantly, through his kindness, compassion and personal holiness, Herman exemplified an ideal Christian life. The last surviving member of the original mission, Herman died in 1837. His remains repose in Holy Resurrection Orthodox Church in Kodiak. The Aleuts never forgot the humble monk nor his legacy of prayer and deeds. Largely at their insistence, Herman was canonized in 1970 by the Orthodox Church in America as the first Orthodox saint America.

St. Innocent

Following Baranov's death in 1818, social and economic life in Russian Alaska stabilized. In 1824, Fr. John Veniaminov, his wife, children, and mother-in-law arrived in Unalaska, opening a new chapter in the story of the Alaskan Mission. Quickly learning Unangan Aleut, the language of the Fox Islands, Veniaminov translated the Gospel of St Matthew with the assistance of local Aleut chief, Ivan Pan'kov. The two also collaborated on the translation of a catechism. Together they opened a parish school in Unalaska in 1828.

Traveling from village to village by sea kayak, for which he would later suffer constant pain and some crippling in his legs, Veniaminov impressed his parishioners with his fluency in their language, respect for their traditions, and pastoral concern. In 1836, he joined a Russian schooner traveling south to minister to those stationed at the most distant Russian outpost in America, Fort Ross, near San Francisco. While in Spanish California, Veniaminov visited the Franciscan missions along the coast, conversing with the Spanish monks in Latin. In a rare gesture of ecumenical



Up the street from a Sitka trading post, St. Michael's Cathedral nears completion.

goodwill for the time, Veniaminov even built small pipe organs for at least two of the Catholic missions.

Veniaminov returned to European Russia in 1839 to report on his missionary work. During this journey, his wife died in Siberia. After some hesitation, Veniaminov accepted monastic tonsure and ordination as the Bishop of Kamchatka, the Kurile and Aleutian Islands, in late 1840. Upon his return to Alaska, Veniaminov founded an All-Colonial School for the “training of native and Creole (mixed ancestry) clergy, seamen, navigators, physicians, accountants, cartographers, and artisans” in New Archangel (Sitka).^[3] He quickly learned the local Tlingit language. In 1844 he designed and began the construction of St. Michael’s Orthodox Cathedral for the capital of Russian Alaska—a structure which continues to dominate Sitka to this day.

In 1852, Veniaminov was raised to the rank of archbishop and transferred to Yakutsk, Siberia. There he learned yet another native language and continued his missionary work among the native peoples of Siberia. Veniaminov ended his days (+1879) as the Metropolitan of Moscow (the senior hierarch of the Russian Church), where among his other accomplishments he established the Imperial Missionary Society. At the request of the Orthodox Church in America, Veniaminov, who is buried at the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra in Sergiev Posad, Russia, was canonized as “St. Innocent, Enlightener of the Aleuts, Apostle to America and Siberia,” by the Russian Orthodox Church in 1977.

Father Jacob Netsvetov

In 1828, Father Jacob Netsvetov, a Creole of Aleut and Russian ancestry and graduate of the Irkutsk Seminary, was ordained to assist Veniaminov (then still a priest) in the evangelization of the Aleutian Islands. Later, when Veniaminov was ordained bishop, he assigned Netsvetov to begin missionary work in the Yukon river delta. Making his headquarters at Ikogmiut, a village today called “Russian Mission,” Netsvetov labored for nearly twenty years among the Yup’ik Eskimo. At the invitation of Athabaskan Indian tribes upstream, he preached to, converted, and baptized hundreds in the Innoko River in 1852, thereby narrowly averting a tribal war. Netsvetov described this accomplishment in his personal diaries: “What a joy to see so many joined to the Church of Christ; former enemies, now living together in peaceful coexistence.”^[3] Without the benefit of technology, without the protection or physical support of military or legal authorities, and hundreds of miles from the nearest European outpost, Father Jacob preached the Good News and brought salvation to thousands of Alaskans during his decades of service. In recognition of his outstanding work, Netsvetov was made a member of the Imperial Order of St. Anna and knighted by Tsar Nicholas I. Fr. Netsvetov was canonized by the Orthodox Church in America at St. Innocent’s Cathedral in Anchorage on October 15-16, 1994. He is venerated as “St. Jacob, Enlightener of the Peoples of Alaska.”

The Meaning of the Alaskan Mission

Through St. Herman, the Alaskan Mission was blessed by the traditional monastic example which SS. Cyril and Methodius provided to the Slavs, centuries earlier. By SS. Innocent and Jacob, the Alaskan Mission demonstrated the linguistic adaptability, cultural sensitivity, and educational outreach characteristic of Orthodox missions from Moravia to Kamchatka. Unfortunately, the heroic missionary work of the Siberian traders who married, converted, and raised their families in the Orthodox faith, and that



St. Herman moved to Spruce Island where he nursed the sick, raised orphans, and performed miracles.

of their children, the first Native American Orthodox evangelists, have received less attention. Nevertheless, through all their efforts the foundations of the Alaskan Mission had been firmly laid.

With the transfer to American rule in 1867, most ethnic Russians, including the vast majority of Orthodox priests, returned to Russia, leaving the 12,000 native Christians, 9 Orthodox parishes, 35 chapels, 17 schools, and 3 orphanages to fend largely for themselves. In 1872, the diocesan see was transferred from Sitka to San Francisco, and the bishop was able to supervise the mission only from afar. Over the next 100 years, the Alaskan mission received only sporadic assistance from the Orthodox community in the “lower 48.”



Orthodox wedding party on St. Paul Island, ca. 1898.

Nevertheless, the mission continued to grow, largely through the efforts of indigenous leaders. Despite the fact that the mission never had more than 15 priests, scores of new parishes and chapels, as well as schools and orphanages, were built. Lay leaders continued to conduct services, preach, and teach even in the absence of clergy. The Orthodox Church in Alaska was able to survive because, from its very beginning, it was envisioned, in the best tradition of Orthodox missionary spirituality, as an indigenous church, not as a “diaspora.”^[5]

Notes:

[1] This chapter was co-authored by Fr. Michael Oleksa.

[2] In 1980, the OCA Diocese of Alaska canonized Juvenal, together with other martyrs of Alaska, known and unknown.

[3] For a fuller listing of St. Innocent’s accomplishments see Paul Garrett’s biography, *St. Innocent: Apostle to America* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1979).

[4] *Orthodox America*, p. 19.

[5] For a more detailed discussion, see Richard Pierce, *The Russian Orthodox Religious Mission in America, 1794-1837* (Kingston, ON: The Limestone Press, 1978); Bishop Gregory (Afonsky), *History of the Orthodox Church in Alaska, 1774-1914* (Kodiak, AK: St. Herman’s Seminary, 1977); and Michael Oleksa, *Alaskan Missionary Spirituality* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1992).

Immigration and Conversion (1870-1920)

Between 1870-1920, Orthodoxy in America would change from a small mission in Alaska to one of the fastest-growing religions in North America. Through mass immigration and mass conversion of immigrants, the small mission to Alaska would become a continent-wide enterprise. By 1917 the Orthodox mission in North America would include more than 350 parishes and chapels, its own seminary, bank, women's college, monasteries, orphanages, schools, publications, and fraternal societies, with an annual central administrative budget of \$500,000. Over a period of two decades the Russian mission to the native peoples of Alaska had become an emerging Church composed of immigrant peoples from many nations.

From Mission to Missionary Diocese



St. Nicholas Church, Olyphant, P.A.

With the sale of Alaska to the United States in 1867, however, the future of the Alaskan Mission seemed far less secure. In the eyes of the new American authorities, the Orthodox mission was an unwelcome relic of Alaska's past. In open cooperation with proselytizing Protestant missionary groups, the new territorial government launched a campaign to "Americanize" the Orthodox native peoples. Orthodox prayers, icons, and native languages were forbidden in the new American schools and denounced from the new Protestant pulpits. Repeated protests by the Orthodox bishop to the President, Congress, and military occupation authorities were ignored.

The request of the small Orthodox immigrant community in San Francisco for a priest (1868) gave the struggling Russian mission and its new bishop (John Mitropolsky, 1870-1876) new hope and direction. As the headquarters of the Alaska occupation authorities, and the major terminus of travel to and from Alaska, San Francisco was recognized by Bishop John as the city from which the Alaskan mission could best be defended. At the same time Bishop John, who was fluent in English, saw San Francisco as the base for an Orthodox mission to the United States proper. In 1870, the bishop petitioned the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church for permission to reorganize the Alaskan Mission into a missionary diocese based in San Francisco. In 1874, the bishop, the mission school, and the diocesan administration moved into the new Orthodox Cathedral of St. Alexander Nevsky on Pierce Street, in the "Russian Hill" section of San Francisco.

Over the next twenty years, Bishop John and his successors in San Francisco, Bishop Nestor (Zakkis) (1879-1882), Bishop Vladimir (Sokolovsky) (1888-1891), and Bishop Nicholas (Ziorov) (1891-1898), laid the foundation for an expanding Orthodox presence in North America. Bishop Nestor began the translation of the Gospel into Eskimo. Unfortunately, he drowned in the Bering Sea while on a pastoral visit to Alaska in 1882. Bishop Vladimir, his successor, focused on the mission to the continental United States. He brought with him



Chapel at Fort Ross, north of San Francisco, where the Russians maintained a foothold for 29 years.

eighteen students and five faculty members from the Kholm Seminary, where he had been rector, to assist in missionary work in California. A talented musician, Vladimir translated the common chants of the Russian Church into English to help make Orthodoxy more intelligible to American audiences. He appointed Fr. Sebastian Dabovich, the first Orthodox priest to have been born in the United States, as the “English Preacher” for the cathedral. As a result of these efforts, a new, larger cathedral, dedicated to St. Nicholas, was built in 1888.^[1]

It was under Bishop Nicholas (1891-1898), however, that the missionary diocese entered its period of greatest growth. In 1891, 360 Uniates (also called “Greek Catholics”) in Minneapolis renounced Roman Catholicism and joined the Orthodox missionary diocese. In the ensuing 25 years (1892-1917), tens of thousands of Uniates would convert to Orthodoxy throughout the United States and Canada. At the same time, mass immigration, especially of Greeks, would bring hundreds of thousands of Orthodox Christians to North America. The great expansion of Orthodox Christianity across the continent had begun.

Early Orthodox Immigration to the United States

Prior to 1890, only small numbers of Orthodox Christians had immigrated to the United States. In colonial times (1768), an English land-grant settlement, populated mainly by Greeks, had been established in Florida. Quickly succumbing to disease, exploitation, and neglect, the New Smyrna plantation was forcibly disbanded by British troops on order of the English governor of Florida in 1769.

The first Orthodox Church in the continental United States was established during the Civil War in New Orleans by Greek cotton merchants (1864). This “Eastern Orthodox Church of the Holy Trinity” was typical of the earliest Orthodox parishes in America: it was multi-ethnic, composed of Greeks, Slavs, and Arabs, and multi-lingual, services being held in Greek, Slavonic, and English. Between 1868-1892, similar multi-ethnic and multi-lingual parishes were founded by diplomatic personnel, foreign businessmen, and small numbers of Orthodox immigrants in San Francisco (1868), New York (1870-1883), Chicago (1888), Portland, Oregon (1890), Galveston (ca 1890), and Seattle (1892). Following the provisions of the Council of Carthage (AD 419), wherein responsibility for Orthodox communities in a new land is given to that Orthodox Church which initiates missionary work in it, these small communities, numbering altogether some 600 faithful, received priests, financial assistance, and/or liturgical items from the missionary diocese in San Francisco.

The “New Immigration”

In 1890, the third and last great wave of European immigration to America began. Derisively labelled “new immigrants” to distinguish them from earlier Northern European immigrants, six million Catholics, Jews, and Orthodox Christians from Southern, Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and the Middle East entered the United States over the next 30 years. Most Orthodox Christians in North America are descended from one or more of these Albanian, Arab, Belarussian, Bulgarian, Cossack, Estonian, Georgian, Greek, Greek Catholic (Uniate), Gypsy, Macedonian, Montenegrin, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, or Ukrainian “new immigrants.”

The Uniates

What was to become the first large-scale immigration of future Orthodox Christians to the United States began with the mass arrival of Uniate peoples from Central and Eastern Europe. From the mountain regions of present-day Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Moldova, and Ukraine, these peoples

were known by various national, regional or linguistic designations as “Carpatho-Russians,” “Uhro-Rusyns,” “Galicians,” “Lemkos,” “Rusins,” “Bukovinians” or “Trans-Carpathian Ukrainians.” Originally Orthodox Christians, the Uniates had been maneuvered into an ambiguous communion with the Roman Catholic Church in the late 16th century. Not accepted as Orthodox by the Orthodox, nor as fully Catholic by many Latin Catholics, the married (rather than celibate) clergy of the hybrid Uniate (or “Greek-Catholic”) Church professed uneasy obedience to the Pope. To the simple Carpathian mountain villager, however, for whom the Uniate clergy continued to celebrate the ancient Orthodox liturgies in Slavonic, the distinction between “Greek Catholic” and “Greek Orthodox” was largely academic.

From the 1880’s, Uniate Slavs were sought out by Pennsylvanian coal mine operators as cheap replacement labor for striking German, Welsh, and Irish miners. As conditions throughout Eastern Europe were uniformly harsh—due to poverty, illiteracy, and lack of available land—ever-increasing numbers of Uniate men left for America. The vast majority were young peasants. More than 40% were illiterate. By 1892, more than 40,000 Uniates had reached Pennsylvania. This number doubled by 1900. By 1917 a total of 350,000 Uniates had immigrated to the coal fields of the eastern United States.

The “New Immigrant” Experience

Whether Uniate, Jewish, Orthodox, or Roman Catholic, these “new immigrants” were rarely welcomed in America. As one newspaper reported:

Their native tongue is far removed from our own, their illiteracy is great, their economic efficiency is low, and their religious and moral training is not up to the American standard. Hence the gap between these people and our people is great. The process of assimilation is difficult, and the task of changing from the old to the new is fraught with danger. (Wilkes Barre Record, 1907 Change and assimilation, however, were not foremost in the minds of the “new immigrants” from Eastern Europe. Unlike earlier generations of American immigrants, many among the “new immigrants” sought only to use the economic opportunities of the New World to create a better future in the Old. The Romanians expressed it most succinctly: “Mia si drumul” (“A thousand [dollars] and home”). As a result many Orthodox “new immigrants” neglected to learn English, and failed to establish more than passing contact with American society. They remained, for the greater part, oriented more towards events in their homelands than those in America. Alienated by nationality, language, religion, custom, and low-status occupation from the surrounding American Protestant society, “new immigrants,” whether Roman Catholic, Uniate, or Orthodox, were compelled for cultural and economic survival to band together into ethnic “fraternal societies.” These “mutual aid brotherhoods,” in turn, help build parish churches to serve as the social, cultural, linguistic, patriotic, and spiritual foci of their marginalized communities during their sojourn in America. For those who planned to stay in America, these parishes became not only repositories of ethnic heritages, but dispensaries for handing down those cultures to their American children.

The creation of “new immigrant” parishes was independent of any ecclesiastical assistance and, in many cases, even formal hierarchical approval. The experience of a New Britain (Connecticut) parish was typical:

In Russia only the Tsar builds churches. How can you build a church in America?” questioned one immigrant. So the brotherhood devised the following plan. First each of them placed \$5 on a table; then the new immigrant was asked to do the same. The new man was then asked to select one of his

own friends as treasurer for the money, holding it in trust until such time as it would be needed. Using this approach, the Brotherhood found and attracted many.^[2]

The parish churches that resulted from the efforts of these local brotherhoods were responsible only to their own “trustees,” that is, to a democratically elected parish council composed of prominent laymen. In most instances it was only after purchase (or less often, construction) of a building that the trustees turned to a bishop for a priest.

The Uniate Dilemma

Unlike other Eastern European Catholic immigrants (Poles, Hungarians, Czechs, etc.), Uniate Slavs could not easily merge into the Roman Catholic Church in America. Seeking to forestall a resurgence of “Cahenslyism”—a 19th century lay movement in American Roman Catholicism that demanded that priests and bishops be of the same ethnic background as their parishioners—the Catholic bishops in the United States openly sought to discourage the establishment of specifically Uniate (Greek Catholic) parishes. Largely ignorant of the historical, cultural, linguistic, and liturgical particularities of the Uniate Church, the Catholic bishops preferred that Uniate “new immigrants” attend instead existing Latin-Rite Hungarian, Polish, or Slovak parishes.

This general hierarchal antipathy was exacerbated by the reluctance, and often refusal, of Uniate “trustees” to sign over their new parish properties to Irish-American bishops as required by Roman Catholic canon law. Lawsuits, forced evictions, and even occasional rioting were not uncommon as “independent” Uniate parishes, led by their trustees, struggled with authoritarian, and increasingly hostile, Latin-rite Catholic bishops for control of Greek-Catholic properties and assets throughout the United States.

Alexis Toth and the Uniate Return to Orthodoxy

One such struggle was to be of more than local importance. On November 15, 1889, Father Alexis Toth, a widowed Uniate priest, arrived in America to serve the newly-established St. Mary’s Greek Catholic Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. According to custom, the new priest went to present his credentials to the local Roman Catholic Bishop, Archbishop John Ireland. Toth later described their encounter in his memoirs:

I remember that no sooner did he (Ireland) read that I was a “Uniate” than his hands began to shake. It took him fifteen minutes to read to the end, after which he asked abruptly—we spoke in Latin:

“Have you a wife?”

“No.”

“But you had one?”

“Yes, I am a widower.”

At this he threw the paper on the table and loudly exclaimed:



Fr. Alexis Toth was instrumental in returning some 20,000 Eastern-rite Catholics to the Orthodoxy of their ancestors.

“I have already written to Rome protesting against this kind of priest being sent to me.”

“What kind of priest do you mean?”

“Your kind.”

“I am a Catholic priest of the Greek Rite, I am a Uniate. I was ordained by a lawful Catholic bishop.”

“I do not consider either you or this bishop of yours Catholic. Besides, I do not need any Uniate priests here. A Polish priest in Minneapolis is sufficient. The Greek (Catholics) can also have him for their priest.”

“But he belongs to the Latin Rite. Our people do not understand him. They will hardly go to him. That is why they built a church of their own.”

“I gave them no permission to build, and I shall grant you no permission to work there.”



Fr. Alexis Toth was canonized in 1994.



Metropolitan THEODOSIUS venerates the relics of St. Alexis at St. Tikhon's Monastery where they are enshrined.

The Archbishop lost his temper, I lost mine just as much. One word brought another, (so) that the thing had gone so far that our (further) conversation is not worth putting on record.^[3]

Unable to secure recognition or assistance from Archbishop Ireland, Toth and the angry trustees of St. Mary's began to travel to other Greek Catholic parishes in America seeking help. One trustee, a layman, John Mlinar, was sent to distant San Francisco to determine if the Russian bishop could be of assistance. After being graciously received by Bishop Nicholas, an excited Mlinar returned to Minneapolis with a generous donation of

icons—a gift from the missionary diocese to the struggling parish. A correspondence between Toth and Bishop Nicholas ensued. A short time later, on March 25, 1891, Toth and his entire community of 361 parishioners were received “back” into the Orthodox Church their forefathers had left three centuries earlier.

In 1994 Fr. Alexis Toth was canonized at St. Tikhon's Monastery, South Canaan, PA.

From “Greek Catholic” to “Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic”

Toth became a tireless advocate of a general Uniate “return” to Orthodoxy among the Greek Catholic population of America. Toth's personal efforts, combined with the continuing pastoral insensitivity of Rome, led 65 independent Uniate communities with some 20,000 parishioners into Orthodoxy by the time of his death in 1909.^[4]

For many Uniates the choice between the culturally insensitive, heavy-handed demands of the Roman Catholic bishops, and Slavic sensitivities, pastoral care and generous financial assistance of the Orthodox missionary diocese was clear. Moreover, this religious re-definition from “Greek Catholic” to “Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic” led many Rusyn, Galician, Ruthenian, Uhro-

Russian and Carpatho-Russian Uniatesto accept cultural redefinition as well. Toth's own Minneapolis parish formed a "Russian Women's Society" (1904), a "Russian Brotherhood" (1907), a "Russian Library Society" (1908), and a "Russian Theatrical Society" (1911), although in the words of one immigrant, "There was not a single man from Russia in the city of Minneapolis."^[5] Critics, especially Roman Catholics, complained that pan-Slav nationalism, not religious faith, fueled the mass conversions. In an increasingly tense and emotionally charged atmosphere, critics charged that the spreading cultural and religious redefinition among the Carpatho-Russians was nothing more than "russification." Yet it was the publication of the Papal Decree Ea Semper in 1907 (requiring, among other things, celibacy of the Uniate clergy in America) that most dramatically increased conversions to Orthodoxy. By 1916 the Roman Catholic Church had lost 163 Uniate parishes, with more than 100,000 faithful, to the Russian missionary diocese.

In a manner unforeseen by its leaders when they moved the diocesan administration from Alaska to San Francisco in 1870, the mission to Protestant America achieved its first major success in the mass conversion of Greek Catholic immigrants in America. These conversions also gave the missionary diocese its largely Slavic flavor, with a Russian hierarchy, a Russian or "russified" clergy, and a Carpathian majority among a multi-ethnic laity. The membership roster in 1895 of the Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Parish of St. Alexander Nevsky in Pittsburgh is typical [6]:

476 Uhro-Rusins 1 American
162 Galicians 1 Negro
603 Serbians 1 Moldavian
150 Syro-Arabs 4 Poles
29 Greeks 118 Russians
2 Montenegrins

Services were held in Slavonic, Greek, Arabic and Serbian. Given the ethnic divisions paramount in contemporary North American Orthodoxy, the multi-cultural, multi-lingual, and multi-ethnic diversity of the missionary diocese may seem distant indeed.

The Greeks

By 1910, the largest number of Orthodox immigrants entering America were ethnic Greeks. Although most Greek immigrants came from mainland Greece, between 1890 and 1920 an immigrant of Greek nationality and Orthodox faith might enter the United States with Greek, Turkish, Italian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Russian, or British citizenship, depending on which power was currently occupying which remnant of the former Byzantine Empire. Estimates suggest that 300,000 Greeks arrived in the period 1890-1910, with the majority arriving after 1905. An additional 300,000 arrived between 1911 and 1920.

As with the Slavic Uniates, Greek immigration to the United States was based on poor economic conditions (in this case the collapse of the export currant market), exaggerated reports by the newly-immigrated of "wonderful opportunities" in the United States, and after 1897 the perpetual threat of war between Greece and her Balkan neighbors. Like the Slavs, Greeks shared a continuing link to the Old World in a way earlier immigrations had not. By 1910, the Greek economy had become so dependent on the repatriated funds of Greek immigrants in America that the Greek government could do little to slow emigration, despite continuing, massive losses of manpower. Interestingly, during the Balkan War of 1912, more than 40,000 Greek-Americans heeded the Greek government's pleas and went back to Greece to fight. Overall, between 1910 and 1930, it is estimated that more than half of all Greek immigrants to the United States returned to their countries of origin.

The Greek Immigrant Experience

There were cultural differences between the Slavic and Greek Orthodox immigrations. Upon arrival in America, Slavs quickly dispersed to the coal towns of rural Pennsylvania and the related industrial centers of the Midwest. Greek immigrants, however, remained profoundly urban. In 1920, fully 88% of all Greeks lived in urban areas, with the majority in large Greek enclaves in New York, Chicago, and in towns around Boston.

Unlike the Slavs, who relied on the poor but steady wages of industry, Greeks sought immediate economic independence through creation of small businesses. The Greek grocery, flower shop, shoeshine stand and candy store are largely things of the past, but the Greek restaurant remains an enduring feature of American cities. It is unclear why rural peasant Greeks went into business, while rural peasant Slavs did not. Nevertheless, small Greek businesses, labor intensive and requiring relatively little capital investment, became dominant and self-perpetuating in the Greek community, as one immigrant generation provided employment to the next.

This tendency to cluster, both in economic and geographical terms, made Greeks easy targets for occasional anti-immigrant, American nativist sentiment. In 1909, for example, a bill was submitted to the Rhode Island legislature to prohibit non-citizens (i.e., Greek immigrants) from offshore fishing. A more tragic incident occurred in 1912 in Omaha, Nebraska, when a Greek transient killed a policeman. Within days all Greek-owned businesses had been burned to the ground, and the entire Greek community of 1200 persons was forced to leave the city. In 1892, the Greek immigrant “Society of Athena” of New York City sought to establish a specifically “Greek Orthodox” parish church in New York City. (An earlier, “Greco-Russian Chapel” in New York, under the auspices of the missionary diocese, had closed in 1883.) Rather than request a priest or assistance from the “Russian” bishop in San Francisco, the Society’s lay trustees petitioned the more familiar Holy Synod of the Church of Greece for help. These trustees’ desire for an “ethnic” parish and their refusal to recognize the administrative or canonical authority of the missionary diocese, the missionary diocese were to set fateful precedents for later Greek immigrant parishes, and for Orthodoxy in America as a whole. Between 1892 and 1920, more than 150 new Greek parishes followed the lead of this New York community and incorporated apart from the missionary diocese. Roughly half looked to the Church of Greece for assistance, the others to the Greek-speaking Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

The Missionary Diocese and the Greeks

For its part, the missionary diocese did attempt to minister to the Greek “new immigrants.” In the western United States, Greek laity were integral members of parishes in the missionary diocese. Numerous Greek priests served in the diocese’s multi-ethnic parishes. The Greek-American Fr. Michael Andreades, dean of the western parishes of the missionary diocese, even visited the Ecumenical Patriarch in 1912 with an official request from the diocese that the Patriarchate nominate a suitable candidate to serve in the missionary diocese as a bishop for the independent Greek parishes. Fearing the anger of its Turkish oppressors, who had already warned the Patriarchate not to be involved with the anti-Turk Greek-American parishes, the Patriarchate refused.

The missionary diocese regularly provided antimensia, altar cloths necessary for the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, to new Greek parishes. Not untypically, in 1902, Fr. Vladimir Alexandrov received a letter from the Ecumenical Patriarch Joachim III thanking the Seattle priest for his “zealous missionary work among the Greek people.”^[7] In Chicago that same year, Bishop Tikhon

(Bellavin), head of the missionary diocese, even served liturgy in an “independent” Greek parish—entirely in Greek. When he attempted to serve in a Greek parish in New York City in 1904, however, the bishop, who was unaware of the parish’s “independent” status, was pointedly asked to leave by its angry trustees.

Ultimately, the growing division between the Greek “new immigrants” and the missionary diocese was due to a fundamental lack of empathy on both sides. Proud and ethnocentric Greek immigrants feared “Russian” control of their parishes, much as the Slavic Uniates had feared Latin control of theirs. The equally proud Russian bishops of the missionary diocese resented, in the sarcastic words of one, “...the traditional self-sufficiency of Greeks in all matters of religion and faith.”^[8] It is ironic that ethnic chauvinism and disputes over control of parish properties—which had led Uniate immigrants into Orthodoxy—should be the same factors that led Orthodox immigrants in America to splinter the emergent immigrant Church’s unity.

Conclusion

By 1916, the majority of the roughly 300,000 Orthodox Christians in America were no longer Alaskan native peoples, nor Slavs in the missionary diocese: they were Greeks in independent “trustee” parishes. According to the 1916 US Census of Religious Bodies, “Eastern Orthodoxy” had been the fastest growing denominational family in America in the preceding decade, showing an incredible 25,000 percent increase in number of adherents. The rapid proliferation of independent Greek parishes (more than 140 were established between 1906-1916 alone), and to a lesser extent those “independent” Romanian, Bulgarian, and Ukrainian parishes which imitated them, overwhelmed the understaffed missionary diocese’s ability or desire to deal with the canonical, legal, and administrative problems they engendered. As America entered the First World War, the Orthodox in America were separating into two distinct patterns of church administration. The older missionary diocese, which functioned on local, regional, national and international levels, was rapidly emerging as a multi-ethnic, North American immigrant church. The unorganized, suspicious, and ethnocentric trustees of the Greek parishes, however, remained resolutely parochial in their perspective. Both, however, were to be swept aside by the tumultuous events to come.

Notes:

[1] This church was severely damaged by fire the following year. It was renovated and reconsecrated in honor of the Holy Trinity. The 1906 earthquake destroyed the building and a new edifice was constructed at a new location, on Green Street, where the cathedral stands today.

[2] Orthodox America, p 122.

[3] Orthodox America, pp 50-51.

[4] In recognition of the results of his missionary work, Fr. Toth was glorified as a saint by the Orthodox Church in America during canonization ceremonies conducted May 29-30, 1994, at St. Tikhon’s Monastery in South Canaan, PA, where his relics lie enshrined.

[5] As cited in Kuropas, Ukrainian American, p 55.

[6] Orthodox America, p 59.

[7] Orthodox America, p 94.

[8] Orthodox America, p 94.

Institutions of the Immigrant Church

In 1898, the Russian Orthodox Church entrusted its rapidly expanding missionary diocese in North America to one of its youngest hierarchs, the 33-year old Bishop Tikhon (Bellavin). Tikhon served as the head of the missionary diocese for nine eventful years (1898-1907), during which time the missionary diocese grew into a multi-ethnic American diocese, and ultimately, an emerging immigrant Church.

Following his re-assignment to Russia in 1907, Tikhon became in succession the Archbishop of Jaroslavl, the Archbishop of Vilnius (Lithuania), the Metropolitan of Moscow, and in the aftermath of the October Revolution (1917), the first Patriarch of Russia in more than 200 years. Persecuted by the Communists, Patriarch Tikhon died while under house arrest in 1925. To the joy of his former flock in America, Tikhon was canonized as a saint by the Russian Orthodox Church in 1989.

From Missionary Diocese to Multi-Ethnic American Diocese

Early in his tenure in North America, Tikhon realized that the missionary diocese, as then organized, was unequal to the tasks assigned to it. The young bishop initiated a series of dramatic changes. In 1903, Tikhon consecrated an auxiliary bishop specifically for Alaska. In 1904, he consecrated a second auxiliary to administer the Arab parishes of the missionary diocese. In 1905, Tikhon moved the diocesan administration from San Francisco to New York to be closer to the centers of Uniate conversions and Orthodox immigration in the Northeast.

That same year (1905), in a report to the Holy Synod of Russia, Tikhon proposed a more fundamental reorganization of the missionary diocese. In keeping with the changes he had begun, Tikhon proposed that the Russian-supported missionary diocese evolve into a self-supporting, multi-ethnic, American diocese composed of distinct auxiliary dioceses for each Orthodox group in America. He noted that the missionary diocese

...is composed not only of different nationalities...which though one in faith, have their peculiarities in canonical order, the office ritual, and in parish life. These peculiarities are dear to each, and altogether tolerable from a general Orthodox point of view. This is why we do not consider that we have the right to interfere; on the contrary, [we should] try to preserve them, giving each a chance to be governed directly by chiefs of the same nationality.^[1]

In addition to the already existing “Russian” diocese of New York and “Arab” diocese of Brooklyn, Tikhon proposed adding a Serbian “diocese of Chicago” as well as a “Greek” diocese. In effect, Tikhon was the first to recognize that Orthodoxy in America had grown beyond a single missionary diocese, but was, in fact, an emerging immigrant church.

In keeping with the ancient practice of the Orthodox Church, and in the spirit of American democracy, Tikhon suggested that the emerging immigrant church be allowed to adopt a conciliar form of administration. This was a most radical proposal given the state-dominated, clerical and bureaucratic Orthodox churches of Europe and the Middle East. Tikhon hoped that by having clergy and laity work together, the thorny administrative and canonical issues involved with the

trustee control of immigrant parishes would find their resolution. After a series of preparatory clergy conferences in 1905 and 1906, the missionary diocese finally held its first “All-American” council, composed of clergy and lay delegates, in February 1907, in Mayfield, Pennsylvania. Tikhon reluctantly sailed for his new appointment in Russia the following month.

After Tikhon’s departure, few of his remaining plans for the immigrant church could be implemented. His plan for ethnically administered dioceses was consistently postponed. The fundamental missionary vocation of the new multi-ethnic American diocese, however, did not change. Indeed, under Tikhon’s successors, Archbishop Platon (1907-1914) and Archbishop Evdokim (1914-1917), Uniate conversions and new Orthodox immigrant parishes continued to increase.

The Vision of Archbishop Tikhon

Tikhon publicly stated his belief that the emerging immigrant church would eventually possess the institutional and spiritual maturity to develop into a truly American body. At that future time the Orthodox in America would naturally require administrative independence (autocephaly) from the Russian Church. This vision of a future, independent, and indigenous Orthodox Church in North America, first articulated by Tikhon, was given institutional substance through his leadership.

Institutional Growth

When it moved from Sitka to San Francisco in 1870, the Russian mission operated 17 parishes schools and 4 orphanages throughout native villages in Alaska. No friend of Orthodoxy, the American territorial governor would complain twenty years later (1887) that the missionary diocese, now operating 43 parish schools, was still spending more on education of native peoples in Alaska than the United States government.

Education assumed a new importance in the era of mass immigration and mass conversion. “I have decided to found a seminary for young people born in America, who intend, as most of the priests from Russia, to stay there for good,” the bishop confided in 1904 to Basil Bensin, a future professor at the seminary. “This seminary would not be like the Russian ecclesiastical seminaries,” Tikhon continued. “We must establish a school to fit the needs of the people in America.”

To assist the American-born, the newly-converted, and future Russian missionaries to America, Bishop Tikhon created an Orthodox seminary in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1905. Unlike the first Orthodox seminary in North America, created by St. Innocent in Sitka in 1840, the new seminary conducted classes in English and Russian, as well as liturgical services in both English and Slavonic. In 1912, the seminary moved east to Tenafly, New Jersey, in order to be closer to the diocesan administration in New York. From 1912-1923, St. Platon’s Seminary enrolled 78 male students. In the same period (1916), an unaccredited “Russian Women’s College” was established in Brooklyn to offer “refined, educated ladies” vocational training as nurses and teachers in the American diocese.

Many parishes also formed schools, which typically met on Saturdays or after school on weekdays (unlike the Protestant “Sunday schools”). These humble schools, conducted by the parish priest, offered instruction in religion, language, church music, and national culture. “Each row was a different grade,” remembered one immigrant:

Each desk was about six feet long with a bench attached. It would seat three large children and four smaller ones. Heat was supplied by a potbelly stove. If you had an apple you were

allowed to bake it on the stove... Classes started by singing a prayer at five o'clock and closed with a prayer at seven o'clock. Classes started two weeks before the American school opened, and lasted until two weeks after the American schools closed. These classes ran five days a week. You see, you only had an hour after the "regular" school to eat supper, relax or play. There was also choir practice twice a week, which everybody attended. There were no delinquents in those days. They were too busy. Punishment was quick and often. No one complained to their parents, because if they did, they got a double dose at home. There was tuition too. It cost twenty-five cents a month, and you paid for your own books.^[2]

Social Services

In tune with the Progressive Era (1905-1917), the American diocese established and sponsored the "Russian Orthodox Christian Immigrant Society of North America" (1908-1918). With offices on Ellis Island and in Washington, DC, the Society assisted new immigrants from Austria-Hungary and Russia with food, clothing, and shelter. A bank, the "Russian St. Vladimir's National Home Private Banking Association," (1915) was created to keep the monies of the newly arrived safe. The diocese also created an Orthodox orphanage (Brooklyn, 1914), and the first two Orthodox monasteries in the United States, "St. Tikhon's" for men in South Canaan, Pennsylvania (1905), and "Holy Virgin Protection" for women in Springfield, Vermont (1915).

Publications

The rapid growth of Orthodox Christianity in North America between 1870-1920 can be traced through a lively and expanding immigrant Orthodox press, both ecclesiastical and secular. Specific information on Orthodox Church life in North America was first available in San Francisco's Slavonian (1871), and later through the well-known Oriental Church Magazine (New York, 1878-1883) published by the convert priest Nicholas Bjerring. From 1897 on, the official bilingual missionary diocesan publication, The Russian Orthodox American Messenger, appeared regularly, usually on a monthly basis. Although the first English translation of the Orthodox liturgy was published by Dr. Orlov in London in 1870, by 1910, translations of all the basic services of the Orthodox Church were available in North America. The most famous collection of this era, the 1906 Service Book of the Holy Orthodox Church, translated and edited by the American Episcopalian, Isabel Hapgood, at the request of Bishop Tikhon, is still in use. Hapgood's ecumenical gesture was typical of the warm and friendly relations that had been created between the Orthodox missionary diocese and the Protestant Episcopal Church in America.

Finances

Although most parishes constructed their own houses of worship, the expansion of the missionary diocese (growing from 10 continental parishes in 1890 to more than 350 in 1917) was financially enabled by annual grants from the Russian Church through the Imperial (Russian) Missionary Society. In 1916, the new American diocese, now among the largest of the 65 dioceses of the Russian Orthodox Church, requested an annual allotment of \$1,000,000; it received, however, only half that amount. No small sum in its day, these monies paid for the diocesan administration, the salaries of all parish priests, aid for diocesan monasteries and schools, missionary grants to new parishes, and the diocese's expanding network of immigrant social services. In later, more troubled times this financial dependence of the American diocese on foreign sources was to prove a near-fatal weakness.

From Immigrant Church to North American Diocese

As a result of Archbishop Tikhon's vision and leadership, the missionary diocese underwent significant administration changes, institutional expansion, and spiritual growth between 1898-1920. To accomplish these goals, Tikhon recruited and relied heavily on a dedicated corps of talented missionaries: among them Fr. Vladimir Alexandrov, the first Orthodox missionary to Canada; Fr. Alexander Hotovitzky, who was to perish in a Soviet concentration camp in the 1930's; the Greek Fr. Michael Andreades; a convert American, the Rev. Dr. Nathaniel Irvine; Fr. Alexander Kukulevsky; and two other Russians who would eventually become leaders of the diocese themselves, Fr. Theodore Pashkovsky (as Metropolitan Theophilus, 1934-1950) and Fr. Leonid Turkevich (as Metropolitan Leonty, 1950-1965). Such men, inspired by Tikhon's vision of an eventual "American Church," helped transform a small missionary diocese into an American diocese. Indeed, given its size, numbers, and multi-ethnic composition, the American diocese was quickly emerging as an "immigrant church" in its own right.

Other Orthodox Immigrations

The establishment of Greek Orthodox parishes in the United States was largely independent of the Russian Church's missionary diocese. This was not the case with those parishes created by smaller, but numerically significant immigrants of other Orthodox Christians, including Arabs, Serbs, and Albanians. Each of these immigrations added to the multi-ethnic composition of the missionary diocese, and contributed outstanding personalities to its missionary endeavors. Each formed an integral part of the emerging "Immigrant Church."

In Canada, unlike the United States, Orthodox immigration was to rural rather than urban areas. The missionary diocese established the first Orthodox parishes in the Prairie Provinces, and in 1916 a vicar bishop was assigned to this auxiliary see. But the competing pressures of sectarianism, national chauvinism, and charlatans masquerading as Orthodox priests quickly fragmented Orthodoxy in Canada.

The Arabs

Known collectively as "Syrians," Arab Orthodox immigration to the United States began as early as 1878. By 1895, a sufficiently large community had been organized by the "Syrian Orthodox Benevolent Society" of New York to request that a priest be sent from the missionary diocese. In late 1895, Archimandrite Raphael (Hawaweeny), a former professor of Arabic at the Orthodox Theological Seminary in Kazan, Russia, arrived to assume his duties as the first Arab Orthodox priest in the United States. By 1905, the much-traveled Hawaweeny had established six other Arab Orthodox immigrant communities in such diverse areas as Nebraska, Quebec, and Massachusetts.

Unlike Greeks or Uniates, Orthodox Arabs often immigrated as families. Their stability, choice of occupations (many were professionals, others lower middle class entrepreneurs who became dry goods merchants), and small numbers (only 25,000 by 1917) facilitated their rapid acculturation and assimilation in America.

Arab immigration to North America increased after the 1908 imposition of compulsory military service throughout the Ottoman Empire. Under the pastoral guidance of the missionary diocese, the number of Arab parishes increased fourfold in the period from 1905-1915 (from 6 to 24). In large part this was due to the leadership of Hawaweeny, who was consecrated as an auxiliary bishop by Archbishop Tikhon of the American diocese in 1904. Following Hawaweeny's untimely death in 1915, Archimandrite Aftimios (Ofiesh) was elected and consecrated by the American diocese to replace Hawaweeny as bishop of its Arab parishes throughout North America.



Clergy seated in second row, from left to right: Archimandrite Sebastian (Dabovich), Bishop Raphael (Hawaweeny), and Archbishop Platon (Rozhdestvensky).

The Serbs

Early Serbian immigrants to America helped establish the first Orthodox parishes in the United States in New Orleans (1864) and San Francisco (1868). Their numbers were eventually supplemented by a large immigration of ethnic Serbs from Ottoman-ruled Kosovo and Macedonia (rather than Serbia proper) between 1890 and 1915. Immigration was not a new experience for Serbs. In their poverty-stricken homeland the tradition of “pecalba”—a temporary sojourn abroad to earn money—was already an established custom. The Serbian immigrant community in America before World War I was never large (40,000 by 1917). It was reduced by the return of thousands of Serbs to fight in the Balkan Wars, and later in World War I. The subsequent creation of Yugoslavia in the aftermath of the conflict, the promise of a better life in the new state, and new, restrictive American immigration laws discouraged further Serbian immigration until after World War II.

The first distinctly Serbian Orthodox parish in the United States was founded in a mining camp in Jackson, California, in 1892 by Archimandrite Sebastian (Dabovich). The son of one of the earliest known Serbian immigrants to the United States, and the “English Preacher” of the San Francisco cathedral of the missionary diocese, Dabovich established other multi-ethnic Orthodox parishes up and down the West Coast, including in Seattle and Portland. In Bishop Tikhon’s 1905 plan to ordain ethnic auxiliary bishops, the Serbian administration of the American diocese (whose parishes were located mainly in the steel centers of western Pennsylvania and the greater Chicago area), were to be united in a “Serbian” Diocese of Chicago under Dabovich. The repeated postponement, and ultimate failure, of the plan, among other concerns, led an assembly of Serbian parishes in 1913 to propose leaving the jurisdiction of the American diocese and joining the Metropolitanate of Belgrade (Serbia). Belgrade, however, did not reply. Dabovich, an American, eventually emigrated to Serbia to serve as a Serbian military chaplain during the First World War. He died in Yugoslavia in 1940.

Through good will on both sides, including a promise by the missionary diocese to reserve four pages of its monthly newspaper, *The Russian-American Messenger*, for the Serbian Administration, relations between the multi-ethnic diocese and its 19 Serbian parishes were fully restored by 1916. In 1919, the American diocese, unable as planned to consecrate Archimandrite Mardary (Uskokovich) as bishop for the Serbian parishes in America due to the Russian Revolution, sent Mardary to Belgrade for ordination. The newly-elected Serbian Patriarch Dimitriye decided to make Mardary the head of Rakovitsa Monastery instead. After repeated pleas by the Serbian-American parishes, the Patriarch sent Bishop Nicholai (Velimirovich) to America in his place. Bishop Nicholai, one of the most famous of modern Serbian bishops for his preaching, pastoral ministry, and spiritual writings (and who has been venerated as a saint in several Serbian monasteries since 1987), served for two years, until he was replaced by Bishop Mardary in 1926.

The Albanians

Although Orthodox Christianity has existed in Albania since the second century AD, and the Orthodox historically constitute 20 percent of the population of Albania, the first Orthodox liturgy in the Albanian language was celebrated not in Albania, but in Massachusetts. Subsequently, when the Orthodox Church was allowed no official existence in communist Albania, Albanian Orthodoxy survived in exile in Boston (1960-1989). It is a curious history that closely entwines Albanian Orthodoxy with the Bay State.



Metropolitan Theofan [Fan] (Noli) established the Albanian Orthodox Mission under the American diocese.

Between 1890-1920, approximately 25,000 Albanians, the majority of them Orthodox Christians from southeastern Albania, emigrated to the United States, settling in and around Boston. Like many other Orthodox immigrants, they were predominantly young, illiterate, male peasants. Like so many other Balkan immigrants, a large number (almost 10,000) returned to their homeland after World War I.

Since the second century AD, the liturgical services, schools and activities of the Orthodox Church in Albania had been conducted in Greek. Those Albanian Orthodox, who, in the fashion of nineteenth-century Balkan nationalism, sought to recreate their church as an “Albanian” rather than “Greek” body, were frequently excommunicated by the Greek-speaking hierarchy.

Nationalist fervor ran high in Albanian immigrant communities in North America. When, in 1906, a Greek priest from an independent Greek parish in Hudson, Massachusetts, refused to bury an Albanian nationalist, an outraged Albanian community petitioned the missionary diocese to assist them in establishing a separate Albanian-language parish within the missionary diocese. Theofan (Fan) S. Noli (1882-1965), an ardent Albanian nationalist and former parish cantor, was subsequently ordained in February 1908 by a sympathetic Metropolitan Platon to serve this new Albanian parish. Noli went on to organize five additional Albanian parishes, mainly in Massachusetts, as an “Albanian Orthodox Mission in America” under the auspices of the American diocese.

Noli later emigrated to Albania, served as the Albanian delegate to the League of Nations, was consecrated Bishop and Primate of the independent Orthodox Church in Albania in 1923, and even served briefly as Prime Minister of Albania until he was overthrown in a coup (1924). After years in exile in Germany, Noli returned to the United States in 1932, studied at Harvard, translated Shakespeare into Albanian and Orthodox Scriptures and services into English, and led the Albanian Orthodox community in this country until his death in 1965.

The Romanians

Although Jews from Romania arrived in the United States as early as the 1880's, Orthodox Christian Romanians began arriving in North America in large numbers only after 1895. By 1920, it was estimated that 50,000 Romanian Orthodox had arrived. In the Romanian case, religious and linguistic oppression may be added to the general Eastern European incentives for immigration. In 1867, the Hungarian rulers of Transylvania began a program of enforced “Magyarization” among the indigenous Romanian population. It is not surprising that a majority of Romanian “new immigrants” came from this area and two neighboring indigenous Romanian regions, Banat and Moldova, which were both at that time outside the borders of the Kingdom of Romania. Following the incorporation of Transylvania and Moldova into the Kingdom of Romania after World War I, more than two-thirds of these immigrants (some 30,000) returned to their newly-expanded homeland.

The exceptionally transitory nature of the Romanian immigration and its geographic dispersion throughout North America did not encourage the establishment of ethnic Romanian Orthodox parishes. Rather, in a parallel to the Methodist circuit riders of the Old West, the Romanian community's spiritual needs were met by itinerant priests from Romania who travelled throughout the American Midwest and Canadian prairie provinces, performing funerals, marriages, and baptisms.

Following the Greek pattern of requesting priests from the old country, the first Romanian Orthodox parish in the United States was established in Cleveland in 1904, with a priest from the Archdiocese of Sibiu (Transylvania). The first Romanian parish in North America had been established two years earlier in Regina, Saskatchewan.

Between 1904 and 1920, an additional twelve parishes reporting to Sibiu were founded in the Midwest, while six others reporting to the Metropolitan of Moldova were established in rural Saskatchewan. Orthodox Christian gypsies, for the most part of the “Rom” tribe, also found a tenuous home in these Romanian Orthodox parishes.

Other Slavic Immigrations

The small numbers of Belarussian, Cossack, Ukrainian, and Russian Orthodox immigrants in this period did not establish their own parishes, but were generally assimilated into the familiar Slavic parishes of the American diocese. The Bulgarians and Macedonians, the majority arriving after the Macedonian insurrection of 1903, followed the Greek pattern of establishing their own parishes with priests obtained from the old country. The first Macedonian-Bulgarian parish in the United States was established in 1907 in Madison, Illinois.

Orthodox Immigration to Canada



Fr. Panteleimon Bozhik with children in a Russian boarding school he founded in Alberta, Canada, 1916.

The Bukovinians, Ukrainians, and Russians, among others who arrived in the Prairie Provinces—Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta—in the 1890’s were quite different from the Slavic immigrants to the United States. These Canadian immigrants came as families, as settlers in search of new farmland, rather than as transient workers.

The 250,000 Slavic immigrants (Orthodox and Greek Catholic) to rural Canada between 1890 and 1914 received land and government assistance to turn the barren plains into fertile homesteads. In addition, to encourage stability, federal and provincial authorities offered up to 100 acres to every ethnic community that would erect a parish church within three years. As in the United States, though, these new immigrants received little welcome from their Protestant and Catholic neighbors.

The first Orthodox Church in Canada was erected through the efforts of the missionary diocese, in the words of its cornerstone, “on June 4, in the year of our Lord, 1898, during the reigns of the Emperor of all Russia, Nicholas II, and the Queen of Great Britain, Alexandra-Victoria.” It was built not by Orthodox immigrants, but by a community of Greek Catholics who, like their co-religionists in the United States, had converted to Orthodoxy.

Unfortunately, the missionary diocese did not have enough priests to staff these newly-converted, almost-converted, and immigrant Orthodox parishes springing up in rural Canada. In 1902, a self-styled cleric claiming to be an Orthodox bishop appeared in Winnipeg, offering to ordain priests for these communities. In two years “Metropolitan Seraphim” attracted more than 30,000 followers and ordained more than 50 “priests” in his “Independent Greek Orthodox Church.”

The confusing situation in rural Canada between Orthodox, Greek Catholics, and “Seraphimites” often led to open hostilities. Fr. Constantine Popov, a priest sent by the American diocese to deal with the chaos wrote of one incident: “The Seraphim followers threatened me many times. Once they hunted me with rifles, but by some intuition I left the hut where I had been staying two hours earlier than I had planned. When the armed pursuers broke in, I was already on my way.”^[1]

Seraphim’s “Church” eventually collapsed, and his hapless parishioners scattered to various Orthodox and non-Orthodox bodies. Though the missionary diocese went on to establish more than 50 parishes in the next decade, and appointed an auxiliary bishop to oversee them, the damage had been done. Even the fragile canonical and administrative unity achieved in the United States through the American diocese was never realized in Canada.

Notes:

[1] Orthodox America, p. 71.

The Collapse of the Immigrant Church

Like the empire upon which it depended, the multi-ethnic diocese in America collapsed as a direct result of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. From the ruins would emerge ten independent, and often antagonistic, ethnically-based “jurisdictions”: three Russian, two Arab, as well as Serbian, Albanian, Romanian, Ukrainian, and Carpatho-Russian bodies. Ironically, even as the American diocese was disintegrating, the independent Greek parishes in America were attempting to unite. These events, coupled with the passage of the racist National Origins Quota Act of 1924, which in effect closed America to all further immigration but that from Northern Europe, mark the end to an emerging “Immigrant Church,” and the beginning of a new, complicated, and confusing era of “ethnic churches” for Orthodox Christians in North America.

The Russian Revolution and the Orthodox Church



St. Tikhon, Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, under house arrest.

In February 1917, the Russian Tsar Nicholas II abdicated. The Russian Orthodox Church seized the opportunity to initiate internal reforms it had sought since 1905. An “All-Russian” Church Council, composed of clergy and laity, began deliberations in Moscow in August 1917. The North American diocese, still an official part of the Russian Church, sent its leader, Archbishop Evdokim (Mischersky), and two clergy delegates, Frs. Alexander Kukulevsky and Leonid Turkevich. The archbishop appointed one of his auxiliaries, Alexander (Nemolovsky), the Bishop of Canada, to administer the American diocese during what he believed would be a short absence. In fact, Evdokim was never to return to North America.

As the Church Council continued to meet in Moscow, the Bolsheviks seized power in the capital, Petrograd (St. Petersburg), on October 25, 1917. Ten days later, the Council chose Tikhon, former head of the American diocese (1898-1907), to be the new Patriarch of All Russia. Under the watchful eyes of unsympathetic Bolshevik guards, thousands of Orthodox believers crowded into the Kremlin’s Dormition Cathedral to celebrate Tikhon’s enthronement.

Throughout the next seventy years (1917-1989), the atheistic Bolsheviks would wage a relentless war against the Church. The Russian Orthodox Church was legally dissolved, and a radical, Soviet-controlled movement called “The Living Church” was established in its place. All Church properties and assets, including icons, were confiscated by the new Soviet government. Four-fifths of the Bishops attending the “All-Russian Council” would be executed, die in prison, or be forced into permanent exile. More than 12,000 clergy would be murdered, more than 100,000 Orthodox Christian lay leaders



Newly elected Patriarch Tikhon presides at “All-Russian” Church Council in Moscow, 1917.

killed. The majority were shot; some were beaten; more were hanged; others were drowned.

By 1939, the number of Orthodox parish churches in Russia had been forcibly reduced from 54,000 to less than 100. The few that remained were used as “show” churches, as proof of “religious freedom” in the new Soviet Union. All 1,500 Orthodox monasteries and convents were disbanded; the monks and nuns, dispersed. All 61 seminaries were closed. The Church was forbidden to publish or distribute Christian literature, to operate religious schools, or to engage in any charitable work. It was a persecution of Christians unparalleled since the days of ancient Rome.

The first clerical victim of Soviet anti-Orthodox violence was Fr. John Kochurov, a former Orthodox missionary to the United States (1895-1907). Kochurov, founder of the Orthodox parishes in Madison, Wisconsin, and Joliet, Illinois, had returned to Russia to serve a parish in St. Petersburg. On October 31/November 13, 1917, Fr. John was shot to death by Bolshevik forces who had just taken over Tsarskoe Selo. Fr. Kochurov, together with Fr. Alexander Hotovitzky, was glorified as a saint by the Russian Orthodox Church in December 1994, with Metropolitan Theodosius, Primate of the Orthodox Church in America, participating in the ceremonies.

Tensions within the Missionary Archdiocese

As early as March 1917, Russian monies for the support of the North American diocese were cut off. Inspired by the revolutionary changes in Russia, a group of “progressive” priests, led by Fr. John Kedrovsky, sought to depose Bishop Alexander (Nemolovsky) and to reorganize Orthodox church life in America “without reference to royal regimes or (episcopal) decrees.” Revolutionary fervor spread among the laity as well. The American Socialist Party began to offer political and anti-religious lectures in Russian-American communities concurrently with church services. One parish priest lamented in the winter of 1918 that of his 1,000 Russian parishioners, barely 100 still attended services.

Revolutionary fervor was matched, if not surpassed, by resurgent ethnic nationalism. In the words of Bishop Aftimios (Ofiesh): “The World War, and the triumph of the slogans of ‘democracy’ and ‘self-determination’ fanned into a destructive flame that is smoldering but ever superabundant nationalism in the Eastern Orthodox people (in America.) ... Each little group or tribe now aspired to become a distinct nation.”^[1] The earlier, unifying ideology of pan-Slavism faded as ethnic Carpatho-Russians began to distance themselves from ethnic Russians, and nationalist Ukrainians from both.

Faced with clerical and lay dissidents, political and nationalist agitation, bereft of funds, and facing a mounting debt, Bishop Alexander began to mortgage parish properties to pay the diocese’s creditors. Ultimately, the embattled Alexander was forced to resign in 1922 in favor of Metropolitan Platon (Rozhdestvensky), the former head of the American diocese (1907-1914), who had recently returned to the United States as a refugee fleeing the Communists.

Using collaborators in the “Living Church” movement, such as the defrocked American priest Kedrovsky, the Communist authorities in Russia attempted through the American courts to seize 116 Orthodox churches in the United States from the American diocese. In desperation, the Fourth “All-American” Council (1924), under Metropolitan Platon’s leadership, proclaimed the American diocese to be “temporarily self-governing,” and thus “independent” of the Russian Church. The Council justified this highly irregular move by citing a 1920 decree by Patriarch Tikhon allowing “self-governance” to those dioceses separated from the Patriarchate by shifting military or political boundaries. Yet even this drastic action did not prove to be a fully effective legal defense against

Communist-inspired depredations. In 1925, the American courts awarded the diocesan cathedral in New York to Kedrovsky and the “Living Church.”

In total panic, the American diocese began to return properties and deeds to individual parishes, recreating thereby the very “trustee” system of independent Orthodox parishes that the American diocese had so long struggled against. In the words of Fr. Alexander Schmemmann: “In reality, if not theory, [the American diocese] became a loose and essentially voluntary federation of de facto independent parishes, each caring about itself, and its ‘interests,’ and having almost entirely lost the sense of a common destiny and missionary] vocation..”^[2]

The Collapse of Orthodox Unity in America

As Russian leadership foundered, nationalist passions spread among the non-Russian parishes of the American diocese. Bishop Aftimios (Ofiesh) bitterly reflected that ...discipline, order, and unity became most difficult to preserve. Each little group of Orthodox people produced some new party or leader who wished to set up in America a Church based solely on the national or racial derivation of its adherents. The unity of Orthodoxy in America, regardless of nationality or language, was forgotten in this sudden over-emphasis upon political or tribal distinctions based upon the reorganization of the map of Europe. The true ideal of the one Orthodox Church in America for the growing thousands of Americans born and reared in Orthodoxy was lost in the over-zealous patriotic desire of the immigrant generation to parallel in America the national resurrections taking place in Europe. The situation was most favorable to ambitious and self-seeking ecclesiastical adventurers and politicians; and these appeared in every group.^[3] In the brief span of four years (1917-1921), forty years of progressive Orthodox church life in America disintegrated.

The Establishment of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese

As Russia collapsed into political chaos, so too did Greece. In 1917 the pro-German King Constantine was forced into exile by his pro-Allied Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos. Venizelos subsequently designated his nephew, Meletios Metaxakis, as Archbishop of Athens and the head of the Orthodox Church of Greece.

Metaxakis was one of the most fascinating characters in Orthodox church history. He was the only man successively to lead four autocephalous (independent) Orthodox Churches: those of Cyprus, Greece, Constantinople (Turkey), and Alexandria (Egypt). On the basis of a 1908 decree of the Ecumenical Patriarch that the independent “trustee” Greek parishes in America should receive episcopal oversight from the Church of Greece, Metaxakis journeyed to America in the summer of 1918 to survey the situation. Three months later he returned to Greece and appointed Bishop Alexander of Rodostolou as his resident American legate. Alexander was charged with the unenviable task of initiating canonical order among the independent Greek parishes throughout North America.



Ecumenical Patriarch Meletios (Metaxakis).

In the Greek elections of 1920, however, Venizelos was defeated. The king returned to power, and Metaxakis was deposed as Archbishop of Athens. Like so many other political refugees, Metaxakis fled to the United States. Still recognized as the legitimate head of the Church of Greece by his

American legate, Bishop Alexander, Metaxakis presided over the organization of some Greek parishes in North America into a formal “Greek Archdiocese” on September 15, 1921.

In yet another surprising reversal of fortune, the exiled Metaxakis was elected Ecumenical Patriarch only two months later (November 25, 1921). Meletios, however, was not about to give up his American creation. In one of his first acts as patriarch, Metaxakis repealed the 1908 Tomos, in effect transferring jurisdiction of the new Greek Archdiocese from himself (as Archbishop of Athens) to himself (as the Ecumenical Patriarch). Metaxakis justified the move by reference to canon 28 of the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451), which he claimed granted the Ecumenical Patriarchate jurisdiction over Orthodox Christians in all “barbarian lands.” Metaxakis appointed his old friend Bishop Alexander to lead the new archdiocese.

Unfortunately, the hopes of the immigrant Greek community that their long canonical disorder in America would be settled were not realized. The royalists in Greece rejected both the creation and subsequent separation of a “Venizelist” Archdiocese in America. Metropolitan Germanos (Troianos), a royalist partisan, was sent from Greece to challenge Alexander for control of the new archdiocese. Spurred on by the two New York Greek language dailies, the royalist *Atlantis*, and the Venizelist *National Herald*, the fledgling Greek Archdiocese rapidly disintegrated into violently opposed factions. It would remain bitterly divided for almost a decade (1922-1931).

The Collapse of the American Diocese

As late as 1918 the missionary diocese still sought to defend its canonical rights over the Orthodox community in North America. A formal protest to the Patriarchate of Antioch in that same year ended in the attempt of Metropolitan Germanos (Shehadi) to woo Arab parishes in the American diocese away into an “Arab Church.” The Third “All-American Council” in 1919 tried desperately to maintain canonical unity in an increasingly polarized ethnic situation by electing Archimandrite Mardary (Uskokovich), a Serb, and Fr. Fan Noli, an Albanian, to be bishops of the Serbian Administration and Albanian Mission respectively. The Council respected the wish of its Canadian parishes to be known henceforth under the name of the “Ukrainian Orthodox Church.” By 1922, however, circumstances and necessity forced the missionary diocese to abandon these efforts at maintaining any semblance of unity.

In 1922, a substantial number of Carpatho-Russian parishes, led by a disaffected auxiliary bishop, Bishop Stephen (Dzubay), unilaterally withdrew from the American diocese and formed their own nationalist jurisdiction. Given this internal turmoil, the American diocese largely ignored the creation of the Greek Archdiocese; nor were protests made when the Bulgarians erected their own jurisdiction under the Church in Bulgaria later that same year.

In short, the beleaguered multi-ethnic American diocese was so preoccupied with its internal difficulties that it tacitly accepted devolution of the Orthodox community in North America into a patchwork of ethnic jurisdictions. Soon thereafter, the American diocese’s own Ukrainian parishes in Canada joined a schismatic nationalist Ukrainian church in exile (1924); the Serbian administration became part of the Serbian Church (1926); while the Albanians formed ties with Albania (1932). As a sign of the confusion of the times, the independent Romanians placed themselves under the temporary pastoral care of the Protestant Episcopal Church until relations with Romania could be regularized (1935).

The “Syrians” divided into two groups. In 1924, a number of Arab parishes of the former American diocese were accepted into the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Antioch (Syria) through the efforts

of Bishop Victor (Abu Assaly). The rest of the Arab parishes attempted to sustain a corporate existence without reference to an old-world Patriarchate by establishing an independent “American Orthodox Catholic Church” under their leader in the former American diocese, Bishop Aftimios (Ofiesh). Despite Ofiesh’s vision and leadership, the attempt lasted only six years (1927-1933). Disillusioned, Ofiesh resigned his episcopacy and married.

The death of Abu-Assaly in 1934, a few months after Ofiesh’s resignation, seemed to offer an opportunity for the whole Arab Orthodox community to be reunited. Alas, the chance was lost. On the very same day, bishops from the old American diocese inexplicably consecrated bishops for each of the feuding Arab dioceses. Although both Arab groups, and both bishops, were ultimately accepted into the jurisdiction of the same Patriarchate of Antioch, the resultant Antiochian Archdiocese of New York and the Antiochian Diocese of Toledo remained administratively separate until 1975.

Further Divisions in the Russian-American Community



“Karlovtzy Synod” meeting in Yugoslavia, 1935. Seated (left to right): Metropolitan Theophilus and Anthony, Patriarch Varnava, Metropolitans Erlogy and Anastasy. Standing: Archbishops Theophan and Germogen, Bishop Dimitri.

Resigning itself to ethnic devolution, the former multi-ethnic American diocese became known as the Russian “Metropolia,” after the title of its then current leader, Metropolitan Platon (Rozhdestvensky). Yet even this reduced position was challenged by groups both inside and outside of the Soviet Union.

In 1921, a group of refugee Russian bishops meeting in Karlovtsy, Yugoslavia, organized the “Supreme Ecclesiastical Administration Outside of Russia.” The purpose of the “Karlovtzy Synod” (or, more commonly, “the Synod in Exile,” or “the Synod”) was to re-unite the scattered parts of the Russian Church in Europe, Asia, and North America. The Metropolia cooperated with the Karlovtsy Synod until 1926, when the Metropolia (as well as the Russian

Archdiocese in Western Europe) withdrew support in protest against the Synod’s increasingly exaggerated claims of authority. A second uneasy period of cooperation began in 1935 and lasted to 1946. Forced to flee Yugoslavia by the advance of the Red Army in the latter days of World War II, the Karlovtsy Synod ultimately left Europe and re-established itself in New York City. The explicitly pro-monarchist Synod began to establish its own “Karlovtzy” parishes in the United States in open competition with the Metropolia. Unwilling to accept this uncanonical intrusion on its own territory, the Metropolia broke all relations with the “Synod” in 1946.

Two additional challenges came from inside the Soviet Union. Although the Communist-sanctioned “Living Church” (1922-1939) ultimately failed, it attracted many sincere bishops, priests, and laypeople to its schism. In fact, one of the leaders of the “Living Church” was a former head of the American diocese, Archbishop Evdokim, who had left America to attend the 1917 Church Council in Moscow. Nevertheless, it was the moribund Russian Orthodox Church, having accommodated itself politically and administratively to the Soviet government in 1927, that was to cause the most difficulties. Officially denouncing the Metropolia as



Metropolitan Theophilus and Bishop Arseny at St. Tikhon’s Monastery in the early 1940’s.

“schismatic” in 1933, the Russian Orthodox Church, like the Karlovtsy Synod, began to organize Russian parishes throughout North America in 1946.

Although the overwhelming majority of Slavic parishes in the old American diocese remained loyal to the Metropolia, these attacks from the right and the left produced deep and lasting divisions within the Russian-American community.

Notes:

[1] Orthodox America, p. 196.

[2] Orthodox America, p. 230.

[3] Orthodox America, p. 196.

The Jurisdictional Solution

In the troubled and turbulent 1920's, an administrative pattern of ethnic jurisdictions was a practical solution in the face of overwhelming canonical, political, financial and ethnic difficulties. Subsequent events have not altered this pattern, but merely increased the number of jurisdictions.

Following the publication of a 1929 Papal Decree that further limited the freedom and independence of the Greek Catholic Church, a large number (25,000) of Uniates based in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, left the Greek Catholic Church for Orthodoxy, much as their kinsmen had done 40 years earlier. Although the "Metropolia" would have seemed to be their logical home in Orthodoxy, these Carpatho-Russians, fearing "russification," asked for, and received, their own "Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic" jurisdiction from the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1938.



Holy Virgin Protection Cathedral, NYC, which served as the cathedral of the Primate of the Metropolia/OCA, 1943-80. The cathedral building also housed the Church's chancery offices, 1943-74. The church is currently the Cathedral of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey.

The Second World War brought the Estonian Orthodox Church in Exile to America, as well as an exiled Belarussian jurisdiction. It also extended one American jurisdiction overseas. In an effort to prevent a Soviet presence in Occupied Japan through the Japanese Orthodox Church, the American military authorities encouraged the Japanese Orthodox to seek episcopal oversight not from Russia as it had in the past, but from the Metropolia. This episcopal oversight continued until 1970.

In 1949 small groups of Albanians, Ukrainians and Belarussians left their older, already-established ethnic jurisdictions in America to form competing ones under the aegis of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Like the Russians before them, the Bulgarian, Romanian and Serbian jurisdictions in America would also divide in the 1950's and 60's into hostile factions. Typically, controversy would lead a majority of these immigrant parishes to denounce their resident bishop, or the patriarchate he represented, as "tools" of the Communists. These dissident parishes would then form a new, independent (and often militantly anti-communist) jurisdiction of their own. Generally, only a minority of these American parishes remained "faithful" to the overseas patriarchates.

In the 1960's, additional jurisdictions appeared in America, reflecting further divisions in Europe. In 1967, Macedonians separated from the Serbs to form their own "Macedonian Orthodox Church." The resumption of large-scale emigration from Greece in the late 1960's brought significant numbers of "Old Calendarists," that is, Greek schismatics who continue to reject the Greek Church's 1922 adoption of the revised Julian, or "new" calendar. Although small in numbers, their presence contradicts the appearance of Greek ethnic unity, while their public and unremitting

criticisms of the larger, canonical Greek Orthodox Archdiocese remain a persistent thorn in the latter's side.

More recently the administrative trend has been not to create additional independent jurisdictions, but to create autonomous "vicariates" for new groups within established jurisdictions. The Antiochian Archdiocese includes two: a "Western Rite Vicariate" (composed of some 20 former Episcopal and Roman Catholic parishes that do not use the Byzantine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, but a revised Western "Mass"); and the "Antiochian Evangelical Orthodox Mission," composed of 2,000 former Evangelical Protestants who as a group joined the Orthodox Church in 1987.

The Effects of Jurisdictionalism

The "jurisdictional solution" was not without grave cost. Even as it attempted to preserve Orthodox communities, the development of separate ethnic jurisdictions in America warped the traditional structure and administration of the Orthodox Church. In direct contradiction to its theological teachings and canons (which mandate one, and only one, reigning Orthodox bishop in any given city), it was not uncommon for large American metropolitan areas, such as New York or Chicago, to have two, three, even as many as six resident Orthodox bishops. Similarly, it was not uncommon to see two, three, or even as many as four Orthodox parishes, all belonging to competing jurisdictions, built within walking distance of each other. Although such overlapping administrations and ethnic-based jurisdictions are officially condemned as "heretical" by all Orthodox Churches, the situation remains unchanged to this day. The result was and remains a de facto denial of the universal character of Orthodoxy.

Secondly, Orthodoxy all but abandoned its missionary vocation in America, and more pointedly, its missionary vocation to America. As parishes struggled they did not attempt to evangelize, but to preserve. Liturgical services in English, where they had since existed, were replaced by services in ancient Greek or Slavonic. The older, typically multi-ethnic parish devolved into smaller, ethnic parishes. Worse, no single jurisdiction could support the institutions created by the emerging "Immigrant Church." By 1923 all the seminaries, schools, and social agencies and services established since 1895 had closed. They would remain shut for a generation.

Administrative and financial loss was paralleled by spiritual destruction. The creation of jurisdictions extracted a terrible spiritual price on all, but none so great as that paid by the clergy. Bishop fought bishop, priest fought priest. As a result of the unending turmoil, the status of the Orthodox clergy in North America diminished in the eyes of many lay people. Anticlericalism, that is, a pervasive distrust of bishops and priests by those still faithful to the church, a prejudice still smoldering in some areas from the time of the "trustee" parishes, became a harsh reality again for many. Parish after parish passed resolutions formally reducing their bishops and priests to the status of "employees," responsible only for "spiritual advice" to otherwise "independent" parish corporations. Relations to



Bishop Arseny of Winnipeg visits a parish in Western Canada during one of his many missionary journeys.

central and diocesan administrations, whether to the Metropolia, the Greek Archdiocese, or to other ethnic jurisdictions, never strong, became nominal. The depth of this parochial mistrust is shown by the fact that a statute governing relations between parishes, dioceses, and the central administration of the Metropolia, first proposed in 1924, was not fully adopted until 1963, almost forty years later.

Finally, the collapse of the emerging “Immigrant Church” led to a far-reaching change in the theological and canonical language of Orthodoxy itself. In the North American diocese clergy spoke of “Orthodox cooperation.” In the new era, they speak of “inter-Orthodox” or “pan-Orthodox” cooperation. The emerging “Immigrant Church,” divided as it had been, possessed a consciousness of belonging to the One Church. Sadly, in the difficulties of the 1920’s that consciousness was lost. After 1921, the Orthodox in America belonged less to an emerging “Immigrant Church” than to a denominational family of “Ethnic Churches.”

The Ethnic Churches

Refocused through the narrow lens of ethnic nationalism, the 10, later 15, and ultimately 32, Orthodox “jurisdictions” in North America aimed their sights at the preservation of the Orthodox faith by means of ethnic identity, and at the preservation of ethnic values by means of religious faith.

Cultural Hibernation

Although physically in North America, these “ethnic churches” formalized a spiritual, communal and social existence of their own apart from America. Traumatized by the events of the 1920’s, the Orthodox in North America entered a period of cultural hibernation. It is a mark of the extent of this cultural hibernation that the history of the Orthodox in North America during the last 70 years may be written without significant reference to any of the major trends in modern American religion: progressivism, the Social Gospel, neo-Orthodoxy, pentecostalism, revivalism, evangelicalism, or the charismatic movement. Only rarely would America seep into this ethnic world, as when the Federated Russian Orthodox Clubs (FROC) chose “temperance” as one of their mottos during Prohibition (1927). With the seasonal exceptions of Russian Easter recipes, colorful Ukrainian eggs, Balkan line dancing, Greek parish festivals, or an occasional celebrity wedding, the ethnic churches rarely entered America.



Metropolitan Ireney (Bekish) presents relics of St. Herman of Alaska to Metropolitan Philip (Saliba), Primate of the Antiochian Archdiocese.

As all Americans, however, the Orthodox suffered through the Depression (1929-1941). One priest’s laconic remembrances summarizes all the difficulties of that dark time:

In 1930 the parish numbered about 40 families, including bachelors, but only two men had their own businesses. They told me they were not able as a parish to pay a priest \$105 a month as they had the former priest, and that they were able to give only \$75. I accepted that.

In January 1932 this was decreased to \$60, and in January 1933 it was decreased to \$40. Many in the parish were without work, and if they did work, it was for only about one or two days a week. It became necessary for the priest to visit parishioners to collect the monthly dues, but very few paid. There were only about 15 or 20 who paid their dues every month, which were \$1.

In October 1937 my salary was increased to \$50, and in 1939 it was increased to \$60. In 1942 it was increased back to \$75.^[4]

Culturally isolated, financially unstable, and administratively splintered, the Orthodox came to fear any kind of change—whether linguistic, theological, liturgical, or even musical. New members were little welcomed in these ethnic enclaves. Most parishes settled into an unbroken routine of local, regional, and national ethnic activities that, to their credit, at least provided a rich social life for participants. However, so self-contained and self-perpetuating were these events, the parishes that sponsored them, and the ethnic churches that encouraged them, that the passage of time in the ethnic churches can be marked in decades rather than years.

Self-Sufficiency

Since 1925, every Orthodox jurisdiction has struggled to become institutionally self-sufficient. That is, each has spent great effort on acquiring and maintaining its own hierarchy, diocesan headquarters, fraternal organizations, youth camps, and most prestigiously, its own seminary and monastery. Indeed the fully self-sufficient jurisdiction (and for the larger jurisdictions, self-sufficient dioceses) became the measure, means, method, goal and symbol of “success” among the ethnic Orthodox in America.

Ethnarchy

If ethnic hibernation has been the touchstone of administrative, canonical, and cultural life among Orthodox in North America, until very recently ethnarchy has been the dominant and accepted style of leadership for both parish clergy and Orthodox bishops. Ethnarchy, the combining of priestly vocation and socio-ethnic leadership, is not uncommon in the history of the Orthodox Church; but rarely has it been exercised to such great effect as in America by generations of immigrant Orthodox priests and bishops. Until 1965, with one exception, all Orthodox bishops in America were foreign-born; until the 1970’s, a majority of priests were as well.^[2] In a community that came increasingly to value its “unchanging” nature in a rapidly changing society, the change that did occur was the result of the initiative of these ethnarchs. The history of the Orthodox in North America in the era of the hibernating ethnic churches, therefore, is largely the personal stories of its foreign-born hierarchs.

Archbishop Athenagoras (Spirou)



Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras (Spirou).

Among the most successful of Orthodox ethnarchs was the Greek Archbishop Athenagoras (1886-1972). As late as 1930, the rabid feud between “royalists” and “Venizelists” continued to impoverish the Greek immigrant community in America. Recognizing the need for compromise after the death of Venezilos, the Church of Greece and the Ecumenical Patriarchate agreed to send the young, progressive Bishop of Corfu, Athenagoras (Spirou), to the United States to reconcile the two factions. Athenagoras took up this difficult task in February 1931. Centralizing the administration of the archdiocese in his own person, Athenagoras unilaterally suppressed the separate dioceses, creating one large archdiocese under his direct control. The other Greek-American bishops were induced to become his powerless auxiliaries, or forcibly retired. Athenagoras then proceeded to skillfully coerce two, sometimes even three, splintered Greek communities into a single parish again. Parishes were reestablished where political controversy had caused earlier communities to fail.

Totally new parishes in heretofore under-served areas were opened.

Parochial Greek language schools were established—a trend which continued under Athenagoras’ leadership until after the Second World War. Athenagoras created a national women’s auxiliary (the Philoptochos Society, 1932) and began a bilingual national Church publication (The Orthodox Observer, 1934). He built a national Greek orphanage (St. Basil’s) near New York City in 1944. The need for academically trained priests in America led Athenagoras to organize a Greek seminary in Pomfret, Connecticut, which later became Holy Cross School of Theology in Brookline, Massachusetts (1947). By implementing a nation-wide system of remittances to the archdiocese, Athenagoras created a solid financial base for future growth. Despite early opposition, Athenagoras

united an entire people (in Greek: *ethnos*) under his personal leadership (in Greek: *ethnarchia*) in the course of his sixteen-year archpastorate.

In 1948, Athenagoras, like Metaxakis before him, was elected Ecumenical Patriarch. It is a measure of ethnic pride that Greek Americans still recount how President Truman ordered Air Force One to fly the Archbishop to Turkey for his installation. Athenagoras' pastoral concern for America did not diminish in his new capacity. As Patriarch, Athenagoras appointed both his successors in America: the introspective Archbishop Michael of Corinth (1948-1958), and the pragmatic Archbishop Iakovos (Coucouzes) (1959-present). The latter has become America's most prominent Orthodox spokesman through participation in the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's, ecumenical activity, and highly visible appearances with national political candidates, both Democratic and Republican. While not renouncing his role as ethnarch, the natural growth of the archdiocese to include more than 600 parishes and more than a million members has led Archbishop Iakovos to gradually decentralize personal control of the archdiocese Athenagoras established. In 1975, Iakovos, with the permission of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, created ten regional dioceses, each led by its own diocesan bishop.

Archbishop Antony (Bashir)

Born in Lebanon in 1898, Antony Bashir came to America in 1922. For the next thirteen years the energetic Metropolitan Antony built churches, organized church societies, translated texts, and published original works in English. In 1936, he was chosen to lead the Antiochian Archdiocese of New York, the ethnic jurisdiction many of the Arab parishes of the former American diocese had joined. In his thirty years as archbishop (1936-1966), the gregarious Metropolitan Antony molded his archdiocese into the most administratively efficient, financially secure, and tight-knit Orthodox jurisdiction in America. Unlike many other ethnarchs, however, Metropolitan Antony recognized the pastoral need of the assimilated Arab Orthodox community for American expressions of Orthodoxy. Thus Metropolitan Antony took the lead in introducing the use of English in liturgical services throughout his archdiocese, in encouraging Sunday School programs, in accepting American converts into the Church, and being among the first to ordain many of the latter into the Orthodox priesthood. Between 1940-1965, the Antiochian Archdiocese took the lead in publishing in English more than 30 books on the Orthodox faith. Despite its significantly smaller size, the Antiochian Archdiocese became, through Metropolitan Antony's efforts, one of the three major Orthodox jurisdictions in America (together with the Greek Archdiocese and the Metropolia). Following his death in 1966, Metropolitan Antony's legacy was continued by an equally forceful Metropolitan Philip (Saliba) (1966-present). Saliba, also from Lebanon, united the feuding Antiochian Dioceses of New York and Toledo into one united archdiocese in 1975. Author, pastor, and Orthodox activist, Metropolitan Philip remains a central figure in both the Arab and Orthodox communities in America.

Bishop Polycarp (Morusca) and Archbishop Valerian (Trifa)

The history of Romanian Orthodoxy in America is intimately associated with two ethnarchs: Bishop Polycarp (Morusca) and his successor, Archbishop Valerian (Trifa). The dispersed and transitory nature of the Romanian immigration in North America hindered the establishment of specifically Romanian parishes, as well as the establishment of ecclesiastical order among them. Only in 1929—some twenty-five years after the first Romanian parish was established—was a congress of Romanian parishes throughout North America held in Detroit. There an “autonomous



Archbishop Valerian (Trifa).

missionary episcopate,” under the canonical jurisdiction of the Holy Synod of Romania, was proposed. The Romanian Church elected Polycarp, a 52-year old abbot who had previously served as an assistant to the Metropolitan of Transylvania, to serve as its first hierarch.

Upon his arrival in America in 1935 Polycarp declared: “I accept you as I found you, but from now on, we shall have order and discipline.”^[3] It was not an idle promise. Despite attacks by the immigrant Romanian press, Polycarp, in the same manner as the Greek Athenagoras, united the diocese. He visited scattered parishes, established a weekly diocesan newspaper (Solia), organized women’s and children’s auxiliaries, and purchased a diocesan center (the Vatra) near Jackson, Michigan. Having put his house in order, Polycarp returned to Romania in the summer of 1939 to report on his American ministry.

The outbreak of World War II, and the subsequent installation of a Communist government after the war, prevented Polycarp from ever returning to America. In 1947, as part of a general campaign against the church, the Communist government forcibly retired Polycarp to an isolated village in the Transylvanian mountains. It officially abolished the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate in America. The Episcopate, however, refused to disband.

Bowing to the stubborn Romanian-Americans, Bucharest then appointed a new Bishop, Antim (Nica), charging him with taking control of the rebellious diocese. The Romanian parishes wanted Polycarp to return and refused to recognize the new bishop’s authority. More significantly, they did not allow Antim into the Vatra, or to visit their parishes.

To break this stand-off, the Romanian government, again bowing to the inevitable, dismissed Antim, and secretly arranged for the consecration of a Romanian-American priest, Andrei (Moldovan), to be the bishop of a “new” diocesan structure for Romanians in America to be named “The Romanian Orthodox Missionary Episcopate in America.” A series of long and costly court cases ensued as Romanian-Americans questioned the legality, legitimacy, and loyalties of the new jurisdiction.

In 1951, all but two Romanian parishes felt compelled to openly break ties with Bucharest. Rejecting Andrei, they chose a lay theologian, Viorel Trifa, to be bishop for the continuing episcopate. A well-known and controversial political figure in pre-war Romania, Archbishop Valerian (Trifa), as he came to be known, provided the leadership that rallied the episcopate. Under his direction, the number of priests and parishes grew dramatically; the diocesan center at the Vatra was expanded; religious education flourished; summer camps and annual conferences were established. In 1960, the archbishop united the Episcopate with the largely Slavic Metropolia, thereby laying the foundations for the multi-ethnic Orthodox Church in America some ten years later.

Unfortunately, Archbishop Valerian’s very public successes were the catalyst for a campaign against him. Accused by Jewish groups of inciting anti-Semitic pogroms in pre-war Romania, a charge he always vigorously denied. Trifa was branded in the American press as the “Nazi Archbishop.” Radical Jewish groups bombed Romanian Orthodox churches in New York. The archbishop was forced to go into hiding after repeated threats on his life. After years of fruitless court battles to prove his innocence, however, the archbishop voluntarily renounced his American citizenship in 1983 to spare the episcopate further financial and public difficulty. Trifa resigned as diocesan bishop and left for exile in Portugal. He died there in 1987.

Metropolitan Leonty (Turkevich)



Fr. Leonid Turkevich as a young priest with his family.

More typical of the Russian style of ethnarchy, Metropolitan Leonty (Turkevich) guided the largely-Slavic Metropolia between 1950-1965. If the Greek Athenagoras, the Romanian Valerian, and the Arab Antony all centralized their administrations, the two former in order to unite and the latter to create, the gentle Leonty remained committed to the ideal of conciliarity. Moreover, while other ethnarchs directed their energies to building up their ethnic communities, the Russian Leonty, having come to America at the insistence of the missionary Archbishop Tikhon early in the century, remained steadfast in his belief that Orthodoxy had a vocation to reach out to a broader, American audience.

The future metropolitan arrived in North America from Russia 1906 as a young priest, newly married and newly ordained. He was appointed the first rector of the new seminary in Minneapolis. As the editor of the archdiocese's official newspaper (1914-1930), Fr. Leonid, as he was then known, was one of three American delegates to the All-Russian Council of 1917. He was intensely proud that he had been asked to officially place Archbishop Tikhon's name in nomination as Patriarch of Russia. Upon his long delayed return from war-torn Russia, through Siberia and Japan, Turkevich found the American diocese in collapse (1920). Turkevich quickly resumed his position as one of the intellectual and spiritual leaders of the now diminished Metropolia. Widowed in 1925, consecrated bishop in 1933 (with the monastic name of Leonty), Turkevich became metropolitan and head of the largest of the Slavic-American Orthodox jurisdictions in 1950. As a priest in the former American diocese, the new Metropolitan Leonty saw no contradiction in unfaltering loyalty to his Russian roots, fidelity to the Russian Church, and a commitment to an independent, multi-ethnic Orthodox Church in America.

To this end, Leonty worked to make the All-American Council an integral, rather than occasional, part of the governance of the Metropolia. In comparison with the other jurisdictions, the administrative life of the Metropolia often appeared confusing. For example, the decision of the 1937 "All-American" Council to re-establish a seminary for the training of priests in America resulted in the struggling jurisdiction's establishing not one, but two different and often competing schools. In 1938, St. Vladimir's Seminary, a graduate school of theology, opened in New York City; while in the same year St. Tikhon's, a pastoral school for the training of parish priests, was created in conjunction with St. Tikhon's Monastery in South Canaan, Pennsylvania.

In retrospect, perhaps Leonty's most enduring contribution was to encourage active lay participation in the church. Other Orthodox ethnarchs kept a tight reign on any lay (or even clergy) initiatives. To the joy of some, and the chagrin of others, it was said that the aged metropolitan "blessed everything." Such openness resulted in many creative opportunities: between 1950-1965, lay initiative opened the Metropolia to the suburbs through the creation of new, English-speaking, multi-ethnic parishes. Women were admitted to Orthodox seminaries for the first time; and women pioneered the use of English-language religious materials even as they encouraged the creation of new, formal religious instruction sessions (Sunday Schools). It is noteworthy that Leonty himself edited the first series of English language religious education materials in America back in 1935.

With Leonty's blessing inter-Orthodox cooperation across jurisdictional lines was begun on hierarchical, clergy, and lay levels. The Metropolia became a leading Orthodox ecumenical presence through membership in both the National Council of Churches (1950) and the World Council of Churches (1954). Under lay pressure, the largely Slavic jurisdiction moved steadily towards the use of English, an academically educated, American priesthood, and a new, multi-ethnic identity. In short, Metropolitan Leonty carried forward the vision that had inspired Archbishop Tikhon of North America a half-century earlier—the vision of a church that brought together and united immigrants, ethnics, and those who were just plain American.

Metropolitan Leonty's policies and approach were subsequently adopted and carried forward by his successors, Metropolitan Ireney (Bekish) (1965-1977) and Metropolitan Theodosius (Lazor) (1977-present). Both were strongly to support the conciliar system of governance that has become characteristic of the Metropolia (after 1970, the Orthodox Church in America). Both encouraged the theological and eucharistic revival being promoted by the teachers and graduates of the Metropolia's (OCA's) St Vladimir's Seminary. Both were to strive tirelessly for the creation of a united Orthodoxy in America.

The Enduring Ethnic Churches

After the multiple traumas of war, revolution and exile, nationalistic jurisdictions led by ethnarchs answered a need for identity, continuity, and purpose in the bustle of an indifferent America. For some, today, those needs remain. Thus, the ethnic churches can always count on a fundamental level of support to justify their continuing and separate existences, in direct violation of the canonical and theological traditions of Orthodoxy.

On a larger scale, however, it was decades of cultural hibernation, unbridled ethnicity and strong ethnarchs that enabled the “jurisdictional solution” to assume a life of its own beyond the immediate needs out of which the jurisdictions arose. Today, ethnic churches are no longer a “solution.” Indeed, for ever-increasing numbers of Orthodox Christians in North America, ethnic jurisdictions have become the “problem.”



Metropolitan Leonty, seated 2nd from right, and other Metropolia hierarchs (standing left to right) Archbishops John (Garklavs), John (Shahovskoy), Ireney (Bekish), and Bishop Kiprian (Borisevich) meet with (seated left to right) Bulgarian Metropolitan Andrey, Antiochian Archbishop Antony (Bashir), and Greek Metropolitan Germanos.

Notes:

[1] Archpriest Constantine Popoff in *Orthodox America*, pp 212-13.

[2] The one exception was Archbishop Benjamin (Basalyga), born in Olyphant, Pennsylvania to Russian immigrants in 1887. A devoted Pirates fan, Benjamin served as the Metropolia's Archbishop of Pittsburgh (1933-1946, 1952-1963), and as head of the Japanese Orthodox Church (1946-1952).

Challenges to the Ethnic Churches

As the decades passed, all Orthodox jurisdictions in North America began to show signs of internal strain. Canonically, the unresolved issues resulting from the devolution of the American diocese continued to cause turmoil within, and paralysis between jurisdictions. New theological understandings and liturgical reforms spread from seminaries into parishes, challenging established practices. Most importantly, both America and its Orthodox population underwent significant generational transformations between 1940-1990. As a result, religious faith and ethnic identity, once seen as inseparable, were increasingly less understood as such by the socially mobile, geographically dispersed, English-speaking second, third, and fourth generations of Orthodox in America, not to mention an ever-increasing number of converts.

Sociological Transformations (1940-1970)



Archbishop Iakovos (Cocouzes), Primate of the Greek Archdiocese since 1959, celebrates Divine Liturgy at St. Vladimir Seminary chapel, assisted by Frs. John Meyendorff and Alexander Schmemmann.

With three major exceptions—some 100,000 Eastern European refugees in the wake of World War II, a 160,000-person Greek immigration in the wake of the Cypriot crisis, and an influx of Middle Eastern Orthodox in the wake of the Lebanese civil war—Orthodoxy in the United States has grown not through immigration as much as through the birth of American children to immigrant generations. Like all American immigrant “second generations,” the Orthodox “second generations” have had ambivalent attitudes towards the religion and ethnicity of their parents. Given a natural desire to assimilate with the dominant culture, many in the second generation (regardless of whether this “second generation” arose in 1920, 1940, 1960 or 1980) drifted away from the language, customs, and faith of their immigrant parents. The losses could be dramatic: an early study (1932) estimated that 75 percent of baptized Russian Orthodox children were inactive by age 16, and of those 25 percent that were active, almost one half were active in non-Orthodox Churches.^[1]

For the most part, this generational decline was a gradual fading away rather than an explicit rejection of the Church. As one Pennsylvania parish elder described it in the late 1930’s,

There was neither church school nor Sunday School. Church attendance began to wane and the roof began to leak. Attendance picked up. The leak was repaired. Attendance waned. Attendance went from bad to worse. Lighting struck the front cross and split the beautiful stone spire from top to bottom. The next Sunday the church was filled to overflowing! Attendance remained good until the spire was repaired. Attendance fell again.^[2]

Clearly, the ethnic churches could count on ethnic solidarity in times of trouble, but Orthodox Christianity, and above all the experience of its worship, was increasingly foreign to the American generations. This trend was accelerated by the disruptions of the Second World War, ever-increasing numbers of marriages of Orthodox with non-Orthodox from the 1950’s, and the suburbanization of the 1960’s. With the exception of the Greek community, whose initial size and continuing flow of

immigration masked generational losses, the old ethnic communities, and their ethnic churches, have continued to slowly wane, both physically and psychologically, since the 1940's.

“Hyphenated Americans”

Not all in the “second generation” rejected their heritage. Many wholeheartedly accepted ethnicity. In fact, wrote sociologist Will Herberg, “They often identified themselves with the ethnic language, culture, and nationality in a manner so passionate, that it baffled, even disturbed, their fathers.”^[3] They were “hyphenated Americans” (Greek-Americans, Ukrainian-Americans, etc.), who, like their ethnic churches, identified themselves patriotically and economically with America, but spiritually, culturally, and socially with an older heritage. The initial “second generation” of Orthodox in the late 1920's established numerous ethnic organizations, such as the assimilationist American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association (AHEPA), the Federated Russian Orthodox Clubs (FROC), or the Serbian Singing Federation (SSF), to bridge the gap between their two worlds. Indeed, as Herberg points out, “Ethnic nationalism and American politics became the two great preoccupations of the second generation.”^[4] It is no wonder then that the greatest public effort of ethnic churches throughout the 1950's and early 60's was a now meaningless drive to gain local, state, and federal recognition of Orthodoxy as the “Fourth Major Faith” in the United States.

The Third Generation



Sunday school teachers at Holy Trinity Orthodox Church, Charleroi, PA, 1961.

Following Hanson's immigrant thesis (“What the son wishes to forget, the grandson wishes to remember”), the ethnic churches were revitalized by the “third generation,” which first appeared in the Orthodox churches during the general American return to religion in the 1950's. By the early 60's, the situation in the Pennsylvania parish mentioned above had greatly improved:

A Sunday School was started and grew and church attendance stabilized at an acceptable level. There were more and more young members on the church committee. They were not really young compared to the ages of our founders, but they were younger than we had before. They

dared, with the priests' permission, to have pews installed. They even dared to institute an envelope system, against vigorous objections. The Church prospered in attendance and funds.^[5]

It was the “third generation” that encouraged the institutional changes required to combat ongoing generational losses. Some changes that might seem dramatic were not: the Greek Archdiocese, for example, introduced the use of organs in their parishes with little opposition. Likewise, the inclusion of women, heretofore excluded, on parish councils caused only minimal disruption. Other changes though, such as the Metropolia's introduction of the revised Julian calendar (the “New Calendar”⁶), were seen by some as striking at the heart of ethnicity and Orthodoxy. Whatever the changes attempted, and regardless of when these changes were made—in the late 1950's or only in the late 1980's—change has remained a source of constant debate and tension in the ethnic churches.

Debates over Language

The move to reintroduce English into liturgical services was especially contentious. Debates over language arose in every Orthodox jurisdiction between 1950-1970. The largely Arab Antiochian

Archdiocese was the first to begin widespread use of English in its services; as a result, it achieved an early reputation as the most “progressive” of Orthodox jurisdictions. It also became the jurisdiction of choice for many American converts to Orthodoxy, and for many non-Arab Orthodox who sought to move Orthodoxy beyond ethnicity. The Metropolia underwent language battles from 1955 until 1975. The Greek Archdiocese, for whom the very definition of Greek identity comes from the Greek language, has undergone continuous debate on the issue since 1962. After 1970, however, even the Greek Archdiocese became officially bilingual.

Beginning in the 1950’s, an ever-increasing body of liturgical texts in English was published to supplement the limited materials which had been produced at the turn of the century. Organizations such as FROC (Federated Russian-Orthodox Clubs) prepared English-language music books. The Metropolia’s Department of Religious Education published texts for feast days and individual services. In 1967, the Metropolia issued an official English translation of the Divine Liturgy, which has become the standard text in parishes of the Orthodox Church in America. Official church agencies, seminaries, and individuals, continued to produce materials in subsequent years.

Today (1994), many Orthodox parishes offer services only in English; a greater number offer bilingual services (English with Greek, Romanian, Church Slavonic, French, or Spanish); while a small number, increasingly fewer, offer services only in Greek, Church Slavonic or other languages. (The Ukrainian Church in Canada, alone among Orthodox jurisdictions in North America, explicitly rejected liturgical use of English as late as the 1980’s.) The steady progress of English as the administrative and liturgical language among Orthodox in America, however, is indicative of the continuing generational challenges facing the ethnic churches as they minister to the fourth, and even fifth, generations of Orthodox in North America.

Theological Renewal

At the same time that the ethnic churches were undergoing rapid sociological change, new theological trends arose that called the existing situation and received practices into question. Having first established for itself a reputation as an academic center under the internationally renowned Russian theologian, Fr. Georges Florovsky, the Metropolia’s St. Vladimir’s Seminary was to have a profound effect on future developments in American church life. The seminary’s three successive deans, Fr. Florovsky (1950-1955), Fr. Alexander Schmemmann (1962-1983), and Fr. John Meyendorff (1984-1992), stood in the vanguard of 20th century Orthodox theology. They were largely responsible for a patristic revival within Orthodoxy, a return to the “sources,” a rediscovery of Orthodoxy’s own voice—so necessary if Orthodoxy in the West was to survive. They were also among the chief proponents of an eucharistic ecclesiology, a traditional understanding that the church is realized, is fulfilled in the celebration of the eucharist. Under their leadership, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press was to publish over 175 books in English, which continue to explain Orthodoxy to believers and non-believers alike.

For centuries, frequent and regular reception of the eucharist had not been common among Orthodox. Yet, as a result of a rediscovered eucharistic ecclesiology, a new generation of church leaders began to promote frequent communion, and the ecclesiology such reception inferred. This eucharistic renewal, sparked by the preaching and writings of Frs. Schmemmann and Meyendorff, marked a gradual, but profound, shift in popular Orthodox piety in the 1960’s, beginning in the Metropolia, but eventually



Layty and clergy engaged in discussions during the 8th All-American Council in Washington, DC, 1986.

reaching other jurisdictions as well. Increasingly, educated parishioners began to question jurisdictional liturgical practices and parochial traditions, while looking beyond ethnicity for a broader and deeper understanding of the Orthodox tradition.

This theological revival had a profound effect on American parish life. Use of the vernacular was encouraged and made worship more accessible. Sermons became integral parts of the liturgy, no longer optional appendages. Congregational singing made its return, and liturgical music became more varied, drawing not only on the slow, elaborate, Italianate harmonies so popular in 19th century Russia, but on quicker, simpler, melodies based on monastic chants, as well as on different ethnic traditions, and even originally-composed melodies. Through the reforms encouraged by liturgical theology, participation in Orthodox worship became less an expression of ethnic solidarity than a means of entering into a cohesive and all-embracing context that could shape individual and communal lives.

The renewed focus on ecclesiology, with its stress on conciliarity, affected all aspects of American church life. The Metropolia, in particular, came to be marked by its strong emphasis on the church as a corporate body, with bishops, clergy, and laity all having a voice. At its church councils, held every three years, and defined as the “supreme legislative authority” in the church, clergy, and laity are equally represented, and share in the decision-making process. Individual dioceses and deaneries also meet in council annually, following a similar format. Indeed, the rise of an informed and educated laity has become one of the hallmarks of Orthodoxy in America. This has naturally led to changes in church governance. It has also led to considerable tensions between clergy and laity, as well as bishops and their clergy, particularly in those jurisdictions with less open, less conciliar modes of operation.

Canonical Questions

Canonically, the jurisdictional system of ethnic churches was never stable. New jurisdictions appeared every decade with disturbing regularity, existing jurisdictions separated from their canonical authorities and joined others. The notable exception was the Metropolia. Forced to declare itself temporarily “self-governing” in 1924 to preserve itself from Communist interference, the irregular status of the Metropolia was tacitly accepted by all Orthodox in America and abroad, with the exception of the Communist-controlled Russian Orthodox Church.

Through the decades that followed, the Metropolia made repeated attempts to make peace with the Russian Church. As the price of reconciliation, the Russian Church demanded the right to confirm or veto the election of the head of the Metropolia, and that the Metropolia officially abstain “from all political activities against the Soviet Union.” In an era of continuing Communist oppression of religion, such demands were clearly unacceptable.

This unresolved dispute clouded relations between all ethnic churches in America. Jurisdictions were continually forced to choose between cooperating either with the Metropolia or with the Russian Church. For example, an innovative 1965 proposal to create a synod of Orthodox bishops in America with the Greek archbishop as its primate, a synod that would include the Metropolia bishops, was vetoed by the Russian Church, and its loyal follower, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. An attempt in 1966 by the Metropolia to circumvent the problem by appealing to the Ecumenical Patriarchate to accept the Metropolia under its aegis, much as the Russian Archdiocese in Western Europe had done in the 1930’s, also failed. “You are Russians,” the aged Patriarch Athenagoras said, “Go back to your Mother Church. No one can solve your problem except the Russian Church.”^[6] In

short, this dispute paralyzed any attempts to achieve greater cooperation or unity among the ethnic churches in North America for decades.

The Metropolia



Metropolitan Ireney (Bekish), Primate of the Metropolia/OCA, 1965-1977.

Although every ethnic church experienced these theological changes, sociological transformations, and canonical difficulties, the Metropolia was unique in the extent to which it was influenced by all three. Unlike the other Orthodox bodies, which continued to receive at least some immigrants on a yearly basis, the Metropolia did not. Alone among the ethnic churches, the Metropolia built only a handful of parishes between 1925-1950. Those Russians who immigrated to the United States after the Second World War, as “displaced persons” from Europe, or as refugees from Communist China by way of South America, by and large did not join the Metropolia, but chose instead the more vocally anti-communist Karlovtsy Synod. And whereas America generally respected expressions of ethnic heritage and culture, in the era of the Cold War all things Russian were suspect. Unique among the ethnic churches, the Metropolia became increasingly less connected to its ethnic past, and increasingly cognizant of a North American future.

As a result of these changes, the Metropolia, as well as the smaller Antiochian Archdiocese, began creating English-speaking mission parishes in the American suburbs, in the West, South, and Sunbelt states. Between 1950-1960, the Metropolia opened 20 new parishes; this number doubled to 50 between 1960-1970; and nearly doubled again to 90 between 1970-1990. Initially begun as a means of reaching out to lapsed, or lapsing Orthodox, these missions soon began to attract numerous converts to Orthodoxy. The increasing numbers of converts in the Metropolia (estimates range from 15-20 percent of the total membership in 1970) only magnified a growing sense of missionary vocation, and encouraged the trend away from ethnicity.

The combination of sociological change, theological renewal, continuing canonical uncertainty, and increasing missionary activity led many in the Metropolia to openly question its existence and future as an ethnic church. In December 1966, Metropolitan Ireney’s Christmas greeting to heads of churches made a significant call for unity in North America. In 1967, at the Metropolia’s 13th All-American Council, a proposal was made to change the official name of the church from the cumbersome “Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church of America” to the more inclusive “Orthodox Church in America.” The proposed change represented a conscious break with the past 50 years of Orthodox Church history in North America in favor of a return to the older, multi-ethnic missionary perspectives of the former North American diocese from which the Metropolia had devolved. It was, in reality, a repudiation of both the jurisdictional solution and the ethnic churches.

The twelve bishops of the Metropolia, all but two foreign-born, vetoed the proposal as “premature.” They allowed, however, for a non-binding “straw vote” to gauge the depth of feelings of the assembled delegates on the issue. The vote was overwhelmingly in favor of the change.

Notes:

[1] As quoted in Williard Sperry, *Religion in America*, p 98.

[2] *Orthodox America*, p 171.

[3] Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*, p 29.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Orthodox America*, p 171.

[6] *Orthodox America*, p 263.

The Emerging American Mission

The 1967 Metropolia straw vote was a turning point in the history of Orthodoxy in North America. In 1968, a lengthy series of public and private negotiations were begun in yet another attempt to resolve the outstanding differences between the Metropolia and the Russian Church. In 1970, during a brief period of Soviet-American detente, the Russian Church dropped its former demands. Mother and daughter churches reconciled. The Metropolia was officially given “autocephaly” (independence), while oversight of the Japanese Orthodox Church, since 1945 under the Metropolia, was returned to the Russian Church as an “autonomous” church.



The Tomos of Autocephaly is received by Bishop Theodosius of Alaska on behalf of the Orthodox Church in America from Metropolitan Pimen, locum-tenens of the Patriarchal throne, Moscow, May 18, 1970.

The Metropolia quickly changed its name to “The Orthodox Church in America” (OCA), canonized the first American Orthodox saint, Herman of Alaska, and extended an invitation to all Orthodox bodies in America to unite with it. In a “Message to all Orthodox Christians in America” the bishops, clergy and laity of the OCA asked:

How can the world accept and believe our claim to be the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, of having kept in its fullness the Orthodox faith, if we ourselves are divided? We have the same faith, the same Tradition, the same hope, the same mission. We should then constitute one Church, visibly, organically, fully ... There can be no excuse for our jurisdictional divisions, alienation from one another, and parochialism. The removal of such divisions and the organic unity of all Orthodox in America is the goal of our Church. We invite you to become part of the unity.

But we also know and fully acknowledge that we have come from different backgrounds and have been nourished by various traditions within the same and unique Orthodox Tradition. We firmly believe that this variety constitutes the richness of American Orthodoxy and that what is true, noble, inspiring, and Christian in our various customs and practices ought to be fully preserved, and if possible, shared. Therefore although we insist that the One Orthodox Church here must be the home of all, we equally stress that there must be no loss of our respective national and cultural heritages and certainly no domination of any group by any other group, but a full equality, total trust, and truly Christian brotherhood.[1]

This has remained the official position of the Orthodox Church in America to this day.

The Autocephaly Debate

One large jurisdiction, the Romanian Orthodox Missionary Episcopate, had already joined the Metropolia in the early 1960's. Soon after autocephaly the Albanian Church in America (1971), the Bulgarian Diocese in America (1976), as well as several individual parishes of the Russian Orthodox Patriarchal Church in North America petitioned to join the new body. The OCA also extended its canonical protection to scattered Orthodox parishes in Australia. The OCA's Mexican Exarchate was created through the mass conversion (some 10,000 persons) of the entire Mexican National Catholic Church to Orthodoxy in 1972.

Despite enthusiasm and initial success, the new "Orthodox Church in America" was not welcomed by all Orthodox. Orthodox Churches behind the Iron Curtain, led by the Russian Church, recognized the new status and name of the old Metropolia, while others, led by the Greek Ecumenical Patriarchate, adamantly refused to accept even the idea of an autocephalous "Orthodox Church in America." These Greek-led churches based their opposition to the OCA on the long-standing Greek claim that the Ecumenical Patriarchate alone among Orthodox Churches, as the "first among equals," has the authority to grant autocephaly. Some, such as the Antiochian and Romanian Patriarchates, continue to withhold official comment. The issue remains in dispute. In recent years, however, discussions between the OCA and the Ecumenical Patriarchate have resumed, and the resolution to the chaotic ecclesial situation in America is high on the agenda of world Orthodoxy.



First All-American Council of the autocephalous Orthodox Church in America, St. Tikhon Monastery, October 1970, at which autocephaly was ratified by delegates representing the entire Church.

This canonical debate shields a more subtle fear, shared among most jurisdictions, that the establishment of the American-based, English speaking, missionary, multi-ethnic OCA represents a catalyst for the creation of an eventual "American Orthodox Church" that would, over time, increasingly draw parishioners away from the ethnic churches. For the patriarchates abroad, the creation of an American church threatened to weaken cultural ties to the ethnic homelands, as well as diminish much-needed financial support. As such, the OCA was seen by many in North America and abroad as a challenge to the very existence of the ethnic churches.

It is ironic that the OCA reconciled with its mother Church in Russia only to find that in so doing it had alienated its sister Greek Church in North America. Only the intervention of the Greek-American Archbishop Iakovos prevented a full break between the OCA and the Ecumenical Patriarchate immediately before and after autocephaly. While relations between the OCA and the Greek Archdiocese continue to be strained at times, recent meetings between the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Metropolitan Theodosius, Primate of the Orthodox Church in America, suggest the two may be moving towards an accommodation.

The Emerging American Mission

Whatever hopes or disappointments the creation of the Orthodox Church in America engendered, its very existence changed the terms of reference for all Orthodox in North America. Since

autocephaly in 1970, the Orthodox have increasingly reflected both on the fact, and the meaning, of their continuing existence in North America. Each jurisdiction has been forced to face the future, rather than the past. As a result, an “American Mission” is emerging among the Orthodox in North America. Unity, conciliarity, spiritual renewal, evangelization, and social witness, not ethnicity, have become central concerns. Although most clearly visible in the OCA, the American Mission is an orientation increasingly evident in all the ethnic churches as well.

The American Mission: Unity

The emerging American Mission is predicated on the re-establishment of Orthodox canonical unity in North America. Such efforts have dramatically increased each decade since 1960.

In the narrow environment of ethnicity, ethnarchy, and cultural hibernation after 1925, there was little communication between Orthodox jurisdictions, and even less consciousness of Orthodox community. Attempts to reconstruct forms of inter-Orthodox community from the wreckage of the immigrant Church began only in the 1940’s at the instigation of the federal government. The wartime need for Orthodox military chaplains led to the creation in 1942 of a “Federation of Primary Jurisdictions of the Orthodox Greek Catholic Churches in America” to serve as an endorsing denominational body for the Pentagon. Fr. Vladimir Borichevsky of the Metropolia was subsequently appointed as the first Orthodox U.S. military chaplain. Once the war ended, however, the organization quickly languished.



Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA), October 1991.

The rapid increase in Sunday Schools in the ethnic churches in the 1950’s (in the Metropolia the number doubled from 76 to 141 between 1953 and 1961) created a need in all jurisdictions for English language Orthodox religious educational materials. In 1956, Sophie Koulomzin, a professor of religious education at St. Vladimir’s Seminary, in cooperation with the National Council of Churches (NCC), organized the first of a series of annual religious education conferences uniting representatives from the Carpatho-Russian, Greek, Metropolia, Serbian, Syrian (Antiochian), and Ukrainian jurisdictions. At that first meeting (October 27, 1956), the Orthodox Christian Education Commission (OCEC) was established. It was the first successful inter-Orthodox project on a national scale.

The success of the OCEC encouraged the creation (1960) of the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA). In turn, SCOBA, with the financial assistance of the Greek Archdiocese, created an inter-Orthodox Campus Commission, charged with initiating a nationwide Orthodox campus ministry. The youth organizations of most ethnic churches joined together at about the same time in creating the Council of Eastern Orthodox Youth Leaders in America (CEOYLA).

Despite initial enthusiasm and success, not one of these movements ever fulfilled the hopes attendant upon their creation. The Greeks withdrew from OCEC, citing the need to create their own Greek-language religious materials. The OCEC continues to exist on paper, but its work has been increasingly superceded by the jurisdictional departments of education. CEOYLA failed to find a common purpose beyond sponsoring ethnic festivals, and SCOBA foundered in the aftermath of

the OCA's autocephaly. By far the most successful of these early inter-Orthodox attempts was the Campus Commission. Between 1965-1972, an entire generation of Church leaders was energized by its annual student conferences as well as its national student magazine, *Concern*. In the course of the autocephaly debates, however, the Greek Archdiocese withdrew its financial support. The movement eventually collapsed. In an era of ethnic churches controlled by ethnarchs, inter-Orthodox cooperation could not thrive on an institutional level.

As a result, most attempts to promote Orthodox unity since 1970 have been para-ecclesial, issue-oriented, and led by laity. A number of such attempts came into existence or prominence in the 1970's and 80's: Orthodox Christians for Life, the Orthodox Christian Association of Medicine, Psychology, and Religion (OCAMPR), the Orthodox Theological Society of America (OTSA), the Orthodox Charismatic Renewal, the St. John of Damascus Association of Iconographers, Iconologists, and Architects, Orthodox People Together (OPT), Orthodox Christian Laity (OCL), and the North American region of the international Orthodox organization SYNDESMOS (The World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth). Continual growth of new inter-Orthodox groupings, both local, regional, and national, indicates that the jurisdictional solution is unraveling psychologically, if not administratively. Whatever their jurisdictional ties, or lack of same, the new inter-Orthodox groups have laid, and continue to lay, a broad-based, multi-ethnic, and serious foundation for the American Mission.



Orthodox People Together (OPT) - 2nd Annual Conference at Antiochian Village, Ligonier, PA, 1989. Guest speakers (in center): Mothers Alexandra and Christophora from Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Ellwood City, PA.

The Emerging American Mission: Spiritual Renewal

A second aspect of the emerging "American Mission" is increasing recognition of the need for spiritual renewal within the Church, and a parallel need for evangelical witness to those outside the Church. Whereas the ethnic churches formerly met in celebration of their heritage, such meetings have become less common, and indeed, peripheral. Spirituality, in some form, is now the central theme of all meetings of Orthodox peoples, ethnic or otherwise. Frequent and regular communion, once a novelty, is increasingly the norm. Retreats, prayer groups, Bible studies, youth gatherings, mission studies, all previously unknown, are now common. Increasing appreciation for the theological and spiritual meaning of icons has led to a recent resurgence in the number and quality of iconographers in America. Orthodox literature in English, limited to less than 10 titles in 1950 (and printed mainly in England), now numbers well over 200 titles from six Orthodox publishing houses in the United States alone.



Orthodox Christian Women of Montreal, 2nd Conference, 1993: "Orthodox Christian Women: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow." Mary Tkachuk, President, 2nd from right.

The American Mission: Monasticism

Orthodox monasticism, an integral part of any authentic Orthodox spirituality, has experienced a unique renewal in the last 25 years as well. Since 1970, an unprecedented twenty Orthodox monasteries (eight female, twelve male) have been established throughout the United States and Canada. However, these new monasteries are generally small (typically numbering only one to three monastics), and financially insecure. With the possible exception of the OCA's large New Skete communities in Cambridge, New York, none of these new monasteries plays a role in Orthodox church life beyond the boundaries of neighboring parishes in the diocese to which they belong.

In truth, Orthodox monasticism in North America has always encountered difficulties. Immigrant generations were reluctant to encourage their children to renounce the material culture of America. Likewise, ethnic Orthodox clergy encouraged monastic-minded Americans to seek their vocations not in America, but in the various homelands or on Mount Athos in Greece. Thus the Greek Archdiocese, for example, established its first (and short-lived) monastery in America only in 1961, and its second only in 1988.



New Skete Monastery, Cambridge, NY.

Some groups—the Russians, the Romanians, and the Serbs—did establish monastic communities in America. The first Orthodox monastery in the United States, St. Tikhon's Monastery in South Canaan, Pennsylvania (1905), has been an enduring spiritual center for the Metropolia, and later, the Orthodox Church in America. In 1946, the exiled Russian Monastic Brotherhood of St. Job of Pochaev (which had found refuge in Slovakia following the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution) emigrated en masse to Jordanville, New York. There the monks established a rival monastery (and seminary) under the Karlovtsy Synod, to compete with the Metropolia's St. Tikhon's.

The Romanians have been the most active in supporting female monasticism in North America. Under the leadership of Mother Alexandra, the former Princess Ileana of Romania, a large English-speaking community in Ellwood City, Pennsylvania, and a smaller Romanian-speaking community in Rives Junction, Michigan, have been established. Nevertheless, a hostile cultural environment, continuing ecclesiastical divisions, and the perpetual temptation of monastic life abroad, has clouded, and continues to cloud, the future of Orthodox monasticism in North America. Yet the very fact that monasteries are being created demonstrates a continuing profound commitment to mission in America.

Indeed, the perennial lack of monastic vocations in North America has had effects beyond the cloister. Lack of monastic vocations has led to a severe shortage of candidates for the episcopacy, since bishops have traditionally been selected from among monks or widowed clergy. From time to time, this has led to calls, on the part of priests and laity, for the restoration of a married episcopate.

The Emerging American Mission: Evangelization

Ethnic churches may be gradually losing members, or at best holding their own, but the American Mission is experiencing slow and steady growth. Since 1970, the Antiochian Archdiocese and the Orthodox Church in America have led in the effort to establish new, multi-ethnic, or non-ethnic,

Orthodox communities where none previously existed. In the past twenty years more than 150 new Orthodox parishes have been established by all jurisdictions, the majority in areas previously underserved (the South, West, and Midwest). For the first time since the turn of the century, large numbers of adult converts, and not only those resulting from mixed marriages, are entering Orthodoxy. The recent (1988) mass conversions of two disparate groups, the Protestant “Evangelical Orthodox Church,” an offshoot of the Campus Crusade for Christ with some 2,000 members in 12 communities, to the Antiochian Archdiocese; and the New Age “Holy Order of Mans” (with some 3,000 members in 20 communities) to an Old Calendarist Greek Orthodox jurisdiction, testify to Orthodoxy’s evangelical appeal when presented to an American audience in English. Through Orthodox radio programs (the OCA’s “Hour of Orthodoxy,” 1972), the larger Antiochian ACORN network (1989), or Greek participation in the VISN cable television network (1990), this audience is growing.

Foreign missionary work has also expanded since 1970, largely funded by the Greek Archdiocese through its St. Photios Mission Center in St. Augustine, Florida. The Archdiocese supports Orthodox missions in South Korea, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, and reconstruction work in the lands of the former Soviet Union. Katherine Lvov, an OCA laywoman, established Religious Books for Russia (RBR) in 1979 to publish and distribute Orthodox religious literature throughout the Soviet Union when this was still illegal. At the same time, the American-backed and European based “Voice of Orthodoxy” gathered funds to help broadcast shortwave Orthodox religious programs to the former Soviet Union. Recently (1992), the Antiochian Evangelical Orthodox Mission, at the invitation of the Romanian Orthodox Church, conducted a series of Orthodox revivals throughout Romania. Their enormous success in filling stadiums led to invitations to hold similar Orthodox evangelical revivals throughout Russia.

The Emerging American Mission: Social Witness



Archbishop Dmitri of Dallas and the South presenting Scouting Award to Christina Ozerov at St. Anthony the Great Orthodox Church, San Antonio, TX.

A third aspect of the emerging American Mission is increased Orthodox concern for a credible social witness. This includes social services, ecumenical endeavors, and Orthodox participation in the wider culture of America.

Unable to support even one seminary between 1922-1938, the Orthodox community was, by American standards slow in creating educational institutions. While the number of seminaries has grown to eight since 1938, only three, St. Vladimir’s (OCA), Holy Cross (Greek Archdiocese), and St. Tikhon’s (OCA), are fully accredited as graduate schools of theology. There exists but one very small Orthodox undergraduate institution, Hellenic College, affiliated with Holy Cross Seminary. A few, largely Greek, parochial schools have been established, the vast majority in New York; but they remain the exception rather than the rule.

It is not to education but to charity that Orthodox have turned since 1970. Although the ethnic churches have always generously collected monies to support countrymen in times of trouble, such as aid for displaced persons after World War II, Greek earthquake reconstruction efforts, Lebanese war relief, or assistance for Romanian orphans, since 1980 the trend has been towards inter-Orthodox assistance. Thus the Greek Archdiocese supports the OCA’s missions in Alaska; largely Slavic OCA parishes send aid to Lebanon; and all assisted Armenia during its recent

catastrophic earthquake. This trend culminated in 1991 with the creation by SCOBA of an inter-Orthodox relief agency, the International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) to channel aid from all Orthodox jurisdictions in America throughout the world. IOCC has generated strong support from all the Orthodox and fostered new avenues for inter-Orthodox cooperation at all levels.



Orthodox Christians are a visible presence in anti-abortion demonstration in Washington, DC, 1992.

It is on the parochial level, however, that Orthodox social services, jurisdictional and inter-Orthodox, have really blossomed since 1970. Through food banks, ministries to the elderly, homeless, and imprisoned, homes for elderly, hospital chaplaincies, etc., scores of Orthodox parishes are assuming visible roles beyond ethnic food festivals in their communities.

Orthodoxy has also been visible in the wider Christian community through its ecumenical participation. Fr. Georges Florovsky, Dean of St Vladimir's Seminary from 1950-1955, was one of the founding fathers of the World Council of Churches. Fr. John Meyendorff was active in

the WCC's Faith and Order Commission and served as its Moderator from 1967-1975. In 1988, the National Council of Churches elected its first Orthodox Christian president, Fr. Leonid Kishkovsky, an OCA priest. American Orthodox theologians, particularly faculty members from St. Vladimir's (OCA) and Holy Cross (Greek Orthodox), continue to assume leading roles in the deliberations of the World Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches, as well as various bilateral dialogues (e.g., Roman-Catholic-Orthodox; Lutheran-Orthodox; Episcopal-Orthodox). Ecumenical participation, however, has not been without controversy. A number of Orthodox, (interestingly, fewer ethnics than converts) oppose ecumenism, fearing that such participation dilutes Orthodoxy's unique ecclesiological claims and moral teachings. Proponents, on the other hand, cite evidence of the blessings ecumenical participation has brought to the Orthodox in North America, including refugee aid, educational opportunities, financial assistance, the chance to publicly explain and defend the teachings of the Church, and not least, constant encouragement for inter-jurisdictional cooperation.

On a secular level, the symbols of Orthodoxy are increasingly visible as well. Recent changes in Russia, the Lebanese Civil War, the Bosnian conflict, and presidential candidates of Greek descent have made the beards, black robes, and tall hats of Orthodox prelates favorites of photojournalists. Traditional Orthodox choral music, as well as works by contemporary Orthodox musicians and composers (such as the Estonian Arvo Pärt or John Tavener of England) are increasingly performed in concert halls throughout the USA and Canada. Inexpensive Byzantine icon reproductions may be seen in trendy American shops, while traditional iconography is increasingly collected and displayed by major art museums. Orthodoxy is still foreign and exotic to much of America, but increasingly less so in major urban areas.



Residents of SS. Cosmas and Damian Adult Home, Staten Island, NY, enjoy a special visit from children of a local parish. Affiliated with the Orthodox Church in America, the home has provided for spiritual as well as physical needs of the elderly since 1977.

The Emerging American Mission

As a result of the OCA's self-description as an American Church, rather than as a church in exile, or as an American outpost of a foreign patriarchate, the ethnic churches, as well as the OCA, have had to reflect on the meaning of their presence in North America. Although the jurisdictional solution continues and ethnicity still plays an important role in the lives of most Orthodox in North America, it is possible since 1970 to see an American Mission emerging out of the ethnic churches. This "American Mission" grows out of and is a result of the sociological, theological, and canonical changes all the ethnic churches have undergone between 1940 and 1990.

Unlike earlier periods in Orthodox history in North America, institutional developments and individual personalities are less important in this new era of an emerging American Mission than general theological, psychological, and sociological changes. The beginnings of an American Mission, signaled by the institutional creation of the Orthodox Church in America in 1970, but carried forward by laity in all the jurisdictions, is truly the most significant development for Orthodoxy in North America since the "jurisdictional solution" of the 1920's.



SYNDESMOS Camp Agape V, Presov, Czechoslovakia, 1986. Fr. Michael Oleksa (front row, 2nd from left) was one of the main speakers. Mark Stokoe (3rd from left), was General Secretary of SYNDESMOS. Bishop Nicholas of Presov (center) hosted this international gathering.

Reflections on American Orthodoxy

Leonid Kishkovsky

That the Orthodox Church has been in North America for two hundred years comes as a surprise to most people in the United States and Canada. Everyone knows, after all, that the Eastern Orthodox form immigrant communities, with their roots and identities in Central and Eastern Europe and the Middle East. In fact, the year 1994 marked the two hundredth anniversary of the Orthodox faith in North America. Those who paid any attention to the observance of this bicentennial know the story well. In 1794 Orthodox missionaries, sent by the Russian Orthodox Church, landed on Kodiak Island off the Alaskan mainland, after a long and arduous land and sea journey of 293 days. Their missionary work in what was then Russian Alaska began the evangelization of native people of Alaska. To this day, in some areas of Orthodox missionary activity in Alaska, the predominant Christian presence is that of the Orthodox Church in America's Alaskan diocese.

The Alaska of today gives evidence of another dimension of contemporary Orthodox witness. A parish community in Eagle River, near Anchorage, came to the Orthodox faith from evangelical Protestantism. A journey of several decades brought approximately two thousand people—including the Eagle River congregation—from the Campus Crusade for Christ to the Orthodox Church. The reading and study of the Bible and early Christian texts led these twentieth-century evangelical Protestant pilgrims and seekers first to call themselves the “Evangelical Orthodox Church,” and then, in 1987, to be joined to the historic Orthodox Church by the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese.

The history and staying-power, as well as the promise and possibilities, of the Orthodox Church in North America are well-represented by the Alaskan native parishes and by the former evangelical Protestants who are now Orthodox parishioners in Eagle River, Alaska. It is true that the stereotyping of the Orthodox Church as ingrown ethnic communities and of the Orthodox faith as a matter of “ancient and colorful rites” is powerful and persistent. It is also true that the Orthodox communities often enough project precisely what encourages such stereotyping. Still, all simplistic reductionisms are misleading and inaccurate. The reality of Orthodox life in North America is complex, and sometimes contradictory. Stereotyping of any kind only distorts this complex and contradictory reality.



Metropolitan Theodosius welcomes Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios at St. Nicholas Cathedral, Washington, DC, 1990.

Take, for example, the “ethnic” and “immigrant” dimension of Orthodoxy in the United States and Canada. Far from being a characteristically Orthodox phenomenon, this is an essentially American and Canadian phenomenon. After all, the predominant demographic feature and historic development of American and Canadian societies is to be found in the immigrant streams which have brought millions of people to North America. Here they have made new lives, found new homes, and forged new American and Canadian identities. Yet, they have also brought with them their old cultural, national, and religious identities. The communities they have formed reflect both the old and the new, in a living and organic interrelationship.

Furthermore, the appeal of Orthodoxy to those who do not come from Orthodox ancestry, and who do not have roots in the Middle East or Central and Eastern Europe, is not limited to such movements as the evangelical Orthodox. In virtually every Orthodox community and institution there are men and women who have become part of its life because they have consciously made a “faith decision,” and this decision has brought them into the Orthodox Church. This is true across the spectrum, from a Greek Orthodox parish on Long Island, New York, to a Romanian Orthodox monastery in Pennsylvania, to a Serbian Orthodox Cathedral in Chicago, to an Antiochian (Arabic) Orthodox parish in California. You will find this to be the case in numerous “ethnic” communities, whether Albanian or Ukrainian, Bulgarian or Carpatho-Russian.



Metropolitan Theodosius (Lazar), Primate of the Orthodox Church in America, 1977-2002.

The Orthodox Church in America is a useful case study of the present situation of Orthodoxy in North America. It is most closely identified with the history of the evangelization of the native peoples of Alaska, seeing itself in direct continuity with the missionary work done in Alaska since 1794. It dedicated itself to a church-wide celebration of the Bicentennial of Orthodoxy in North America in 1993-1994. It has evolved, during a two-hundred year history, from mission, to missionary diocese, to archdiocese (led by an archbishop and several auxiliary bishops), to a metropolitanate (with a metropolitan-archbishop as primate and several diocesan bishops), to self-governing (the technical term is autocephalous) church.

Today, the ten-member Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America includes five bishops who came to the Orthodox faith from other religious backgrounds, and seven of the bishops, including the primate of the church, are American- or Canadian-born. In each of the church's three seminaries—St. Tikhon's in Pennsylvania, St. Herman's in Alaska, and St. Vladimir's in New York—students and faculty include significant numbers of men and women from religious backgrounds other than Orthodox Christian. At St. Vladimir's Seminary for a number of years approximately one-half the students (the total student body fluctuates from 70 to 100) in any given year are relatively new members of the Orthodox Church, or in any case joined the Orthodox Church as adults.

The church-wide councils of the Orthodox Church in America provide a revealing profile of the church on a regular basis. Some four hundred clergy and lay delegates and all of the church's bishops participate. The councils are thus a true cross-section of the Church.

The 1967 council was still conducted in the Russian language; translation into English was provided. Although the council worship services and sessions took place in a church, very few people received Holy Communion. The councils of the 1960's and 1970's took up the issues of the inner organization and administration of the church, such as the Church Statute, and debates over “lay control” or “clergy control” took up much time and energy. In 1967 there were two American-born bishops, one serving in Japan, and the other serving in Alaska (both, that is, as far as possible from centers of the Church's population, education, and administration.)

Today, the councils of the Orthodox Church in America are conducted in English. Among the delegates are members of numerous ethnic groups. Albanian, Bulgarian, and Romanian dioceses are represented. Although the sessions and services take place in a hotel, virtually everyone receives Holy Communion. The councils of the 1980's concentrated on the church's calling to be apostolic,

to witness to the Gospel of Christ; the council themes were mission, evangelization, church growth. The councils of the 1990s are dealing with efforts to equip the church for its apostolic ministry and mission.

This illustrates that change has occurred and is occurring, and the direction of this change is clear. There has been a eucharistic renewal; the eucharist and liturgical worship are seen to be at the heart of the church's life and witness. There has been a conscious, and also organic, turning towards witness within the broader society. And in the Church's membership—particularly among its clergy and lay leaders—the proportion of those who came to Orthodoxy from other religious backgrounds has risen dramatically. At one of the councils, in a workshop attended by some one hundred fifty people, someone asked how many of those present had converted to the Orthodox faith. More than half of the participants raised their hands—bishops, priests, deacons, and laity alike.

This brief look at the changes which have occurred during some thirty years is important, because Orthodoxy in North America is not often seen in this light. For many members of Orthodox communities, and for the U.S. and Canadian publics, “ethnic and immigrant” is still assumed to be a fully adequate description of the Orthodox Church in North America. Some think this is good, and others think it is bad. Obviously, the reality is more complex. There is clear evidence of a certain engagement with the larger society. The Orthodox faith clearly has drawing power outside the immigrant and ethnic context. There is a dynamism and a vitality in the Orthodox community, whether within the ethnic North American context, or in the larger context of the U.S. and Canadian religious, racial, and ethnic pluralism.



Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew receives OCA delegates - (from left to right) Fr. Leonid Kishkovsky, Metropolitan Theodosius, Archbishop Peter (L'Huillier) of New York and New Jersey, Professor John Erickson - at the Phanar, December 1992.

Yet it is also true that all is not well with Orthodoxy in North America. The Orthodox view and the Orthodox voice are often not projected in a way that engages contemporary civilization, its hopes, failures, and illusions. Too often, the Orthodox witness is about Orthodoxy in its specificity—doctrinal, liturgical, iconographic, sacramental, ecclesiological—rather than about God's love, God's truth, God's salvation and judgment and mercy. In other terms, Orthodox doctrine, liturgy, iconography, sacraments, and ecclesiology ought to be expressions of the way to salvation, and are not ends in themselves.

While attracting new adherents to itself, the Orthodox faith in North America is also losing people. Young people often depart from the Church, some of them never to return. Among the millions of unchurched Americans who identify themselves as Christians, there is certainly a contingent of unchurched Orthodox. Among both laity and clergy in the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, and in other religious groups and communities, one certainly finds those who converted from Orthodoxy.

Furthermore, the turn towards the language of mission, evangelism, and church growth has not necessarily resulted in an organizational capacity to deliver on these concepts. Conversion to Orthodoxy more often than not is the result of a long and arduous personal search, a search in which the Orthodox may or may not be particularly helpful or open to seekers.

Finally, while it is true that the Orthodox churches in North America are one in faith and doctrine, in sacraments, in moral teaching, they are divided in administrative terms, existing in separate “jurisdictions” which often look to different centers of ecclesiastical authority.

Until the 1920s it was not so. The story is told in this book. The Church of Russia, extending its ministry to the whole North American continent after the sale of Alaska to the United States in 1867, provided a hierarchic structure through bishops it assigned to the North American diocese. The first bishops were Russians, then at the beginning of the 20th century an Arabic bishop was consecrated to minister to Arab Orthodox coming from the Middle East, and the plan was to provide bishops for the Serbian community, the Greek community, and so on. This pattern of development, it was anticipated, would lead to a united, culturally and linguistically pluralistic, Orthodox Church in America.

It was not to be. The communist revolution, and the subsequent establishment of the communist regime in the Soviet Union, sundered the living connections between the Church of Russia and the Orthodox of North America. Beginning in the 1920s, one by one the ethnic immigrant groups, looking to their “mother churches” in the Middle East and Eastern Europe, established their own church administrations. The church body which saw itself as part of the Russian Orthodox Church separated itself formally in 1924, pointing to the impossibility of reliable relationships and communications with a Church in Russia undergoing intense and violent persecution. Thus even the Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church of North America—the so-called “Metropolia”—had to enter new and uncharted terrain.

When in 1970 the Patriarchate of Moscow granted the status of autocephaly to this “daughter church,” there were those who feared and those who hoped for energetic movement towards a united and self-governing Orthodoxy in North America. Indeed the newly-named Orthodox Church in America did create a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic body, and invited all Orthodox churches to work together towards a full expression of Orthodox unity.

This, too, was not to be. Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras rejected the autocephaly granted by the Moscow Patriarchate to the Orthodox Church in America. But amid the tensions and controversies, eucharistic communion was not, in fact, broken, although at one point it was announced that “koinonia” with the Orthodox Church in America was interrupted. The Orthodox Church in America consistently took the position that it is self-governing, that it is fully committed to a truly united Orthodox Church in North America, in which all the “jurisdictions” come together, and that it looks to the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the other “mother churches” for leadership in bringing about a proper, united Orthodox Church order.

For twenty years there were no official contacts between the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Orthodox Church in America. In North America, not without some stress and strain, the structures of unity represented by the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA) were at least kept alive—sometimes barely so. It was in February 1990 that the first delegation of Orthodox Church in America was invited to come to the headquarters of the Ecumenical Patriarch at the Phanar, in the great city founded by Constantine the Great, Constantinople, called Istanbul in today’s Turkey. The conversations marked the beginning of a serious effort to explore and to understand the current church situation in North America, and the possibilities for mutual understanding. It was agreed that twenty years with no conversations and no official exchanges of views had been twenty years lost.

It should be noted that a visit to the Patriarchate of Constantinople is a moving and emotional experience for any Orthodox. There is a nobility and heroism to the faithful endurance of the Ecumenical Patriarch, the metropolitans of his synod, and the clergy and laity of the dwindling Greek Orthodox community in Turkey. The growing strength of Islamic fundamentalism in Turkey provides manifestations of hostility to the presence of Christians in their midst. It is particularly difficult, yet tragically inspiring, to stand in the great church of Hagia Sophia. After the Turkish conquest of Constantinople, the church was turned into a mosque. Then, in the 20th century, it became a museum, a historical monument. This was certainly a glorious setting for the liturgical worship of the Orthodox Church from its consecration on Christmas Day, 537, until the fall of Constantinople on May 29, 1453. One can imagine what the envoys of Great Prince Vladimir of Kiev meant when, according to the Primary Chronicle, they gave an account of their visit to Hagia Sophia: "They led us to the edifices where they worship their God, and we knew not whether we were in heaven, or on earth. For on earth there is no such splendour or such beauty, and we are at a loss how to describe it. We only know that there God dwells among men." Today, there is something of the quality of the witness of the "humiliated Christ" in the witness of the Orthodox Christians in contemporary Istanbul.

When Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios arrived in the United States in July of 1990 on a pastoral visit, he came from this history of Christian witness. He also came ready to articulate a vision for the future. The vitality of the Orthodox communities in the New World captured his attention and engaged his interest. His prayerful kindness and simplicity captivated everyone. In the midst of this encounter, Patriarch Dimitrios' words offered the hope of a united Orthodoxy. In his arrival address he stated that he regarded "all Orthodox as a single whole, united in one faith, one worship, one Holy Eucharist, regardless of ethnic origin or other particularity."

On July 4, 1990, the Ecumenical Patriarch made a historic visit to the Orthodox Church in America's St. Nicholas Cathedral in Washington, D.C. In his address he spoke of his ministry as Ecumenical Patriarch, stating that this ministry "includes the concern for the unity of the whole Orthodox Church, particularly as regards Orthodoxy in America." Referring to the present situation of contemporary Orthodoxy, the Patriarch said "it is truly a scandal for the unity of the Church to maintain more than one bishop in any given city; it clearly contravenes the sacred canons and Orthodox ecclesiology." He described the action taken by the Patriarchate of Moscow in granting autocephaly to the former Russian "Metropolia" as leading to "an even deeper division of Orthodoxy rather than its desired unity." He spoke of his desire to resolve this problem "in the most canonically correct way," and pointed in a positive way to the visit of an OCA delegation to the Phanar, expressing the hope that such efforts "will reach a successful conclusion for the good of Orthodox unity."

All of this Patriarch Dimitrios placed in the larger context of Orthodox responsibility in the world and in America:

The Orthodox presence in this great land has special significance and importance in our day. Orthodoxy can offer light to modern man in the dilemmas he faces due to the rapid developments in science and technology and material prosperity, unaccompanied by comparable spiritual and moral development. But it has need of deep theological introspection and spiritual life, as well as of unity. To this challenge I call all Orthodox in America, recognizing that they have a duty to discharge: to God, to the Church of Christ, to themselves and their children, and to mankind, 'for whom Christ died.'

In welcoming the Ecumenical Patriarch to St. Nicholas Cathedral, Metropolitan Theodosius, the primate of the Orthodox Church in America, spoke of Orthodox people with roots in foreign lands, and of Native American Orthodox with roots in America going back thousands of years. “We love, honor and care for the venerable Churches of the Orthodox world, and we share in the worldwide mission of the Orthodox Church. But our vision, our purpose and our identity as a Church are rooted here, in America.” For the sake of credible witness he called for an Orthodox Church in North America “truly united in common mission, common witness and common purpose.”

The visit of Patriarch Dimitrios in 1990 brought together not only the Greek Orthodox, and the others (Carpatho-Russian and Ukrainian) belonging to his Patriarchate; it served to give all Orthodox a sense of unity. Every Orthodox was able to see in this venerable figure a spiritual leader who belonged to all.

The same thing happened in November 1991, during the visit of Patriarch Aleksy II of Moscow. Coming as a guest of the Orthodox Church in America at the invitation of Metropolitan Theodosius, Patriarch Aleksy made a strong impression in his encounters with political and business leaders, with leaders of Christian churches and of other religious communities. An especially great impact of his journey to America was a growing sense among the Orthodox that they belong together in a way transcending differences in ethnic and national background and church jurisdiction. This was particularly evident in his meeting over dinner with all the Orthodox bishops, and in an open dialogue with clergy of the New York metropolitan area.

The reality of the emergence of the Orthodox faith from under the rubble of totalitarian communism was made clear to many by the message of the Patriarch of Moscow:

In no other country during this century was the Church subject to such long and terrible persecutions and so many outward limitations as it was in Russia. Millions of people were brought up without God, without faith, and often without love. ... Communism brought about a major crisis. People lost the simple habit of being good to others. ... And it is only now that our Church and society have the possibility for renewal.

Thus the message of Patriarch Aleksy was about the relevance and responsibility of the Orthodox Church in the great issues of human society.

In October 1992 the visit of Patriarch Pavle of Serbia underscored yet again that the leader of one Orthodox Church is, in a sense, a leader who belongs to all Orthodox. This was very evident in the gathering of people from all jurisdictions in Chicago to greet the Patriarch of Serbia.

In September 1993 Patriarch Aleksy of Moscow returned to the United States. This time he came from west to east, touching down first in Alaska. The purpose of this journey was symbolically to repeat the journey of the original Russian Orthodox missionaries, who started out for Alaska in 1793. In this way, the Russian Orthodox patriarch participated in the inauguration of the Bicentennial of Orthodoxy in North America observed by the Orthodox Church in America. On September 28 the patriarch broke off his visit to the Orthodox Church in America. He had decided to return to Moscow because of the confrontation between the President of Russia and its parliament, which was threatening to become violent. Upon returning to Moscow, Patriarch Aleksy was accepted as a mediator between the two opposing sides. The Patriarch was the only personality, and the Russian Orthodox Church was the only institution, acceptable to the two sides in a mediation role. Although the mediation effort failed, and violence broke out on October 3, it is highly significant that a peaceful solution to the conflict could be undertaken only by the Church of

Russia—a historic reminder of the relevance and responsibility of the Orthodox Church in the great issues of human society.

During the early 1990s, even as the leaders of the Churches of Constantinople, Moscow, and Serbia gave encouragement to a sense of common purpose among the Orthodox in America, the Orthodox jurisdictions moved forward with surprising energy to create institutions for working together on humanitarian and mission issues.

The first was International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) in 1992. In the aftermath of the collapse of the communist system in Central and Eastern Europe, the social and economic dislocation was manifestly evident. In some of the post-communist societies the Orthodox Church was the pre-eminent religious body. Indeed, in many countries the Orthodox Church is the largest non-governmental institution. (This is so in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, in Moldova and Georgia, in Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia, in Romania and Bulgaria.) With the international community, both governmental and non-governmental, trying to respond to the acute human needs in post-communist Europe, the Orthodox in America were eager to rise to the challenge, and to offer assistance and support. With energetic and visionary lay leadership in the forefront, the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA) was presented a plan for the establishment of an inter-Orthodox humanitarian organization. The organization, professional from the very beginning, hit the ground running. Offices and projects were quickly established, with the head office located in Baltimore, Maryland, and field offices opened, one by one, in Moscow, Tbilisi, and Belgrade. The projected development of the organization will take it into Albania, the Middle East, and Armenia. IOCC has entered into cooperative ecumenical partnerships with the humanitarian programs of the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., with confessional humanitarian agencies, and with the Orthodox Churches in the regions where work is established or projected. The most urgent projects, ones confronted by massive human need and suffering, are in the Caucasus region of Russia (as a result of the war in Chechnya) and in Bosnia-Herzegovina (as a result of the wars in the former Yugoslavia).

The second inter-Orthodox institution created by decision of SCOBA is the Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC). Established on the foundation of the strong and well-developed Greek Orthodox Mission Board, the OCMC is pulling together personnel and resources from the various Orthodox jurisdictions in order to serve a commonly-affirmed vision of Orthodox foreign mission. Projects and partnerships are being nourished in Africa and Asia, in Central and Eastern Europe, and in the Middle East.

In the context of the early 1990s, with visible signs and concrete actions manifesting energetic movement towards Orthodox unity in North America, two speeches at the Clergy-Laity Congress of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in July 1994 acquired a special significance and resonance. The city was Chicago. The Congress event was the concluding Grand Banquet. The representative of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to the Clergy-Laity Congress addressed some two thousand participants. “There is nothing wrong in preserving our cultural identity,” said His Eminence, Metropolitan Spyridon of Italy, but nationalism as a “destructive politics of identity” was named as a “terrible disease.” Not only was this disease named, but its results were also identified. “This disease fragments our Church, wastes our resources, and weakens our voice in the international community.” Metropolitan Spyridon went on to affirm the key element in the journey to unity. First, the sharing of the chalice of Holy Communion. Second, the building up of episcopal unity and cooperation through the Standing Conference of Canonical Bishops in the Americas. Third, coming

together and working together through such organizations as IOCC. In such ways, united, ecumenical Orthodoxy moves forward.

In his address, following the speech of Metropolitan Spyridon, Metropolitan Theodosius of the Orthodox Church in America noted with sadness that Orthodoxy in North America, even as its two hundredth anniversary is observed, is often “filled with division and manifested in weakness.” We are now compelled to stop using “worn out clichés which attempt to disguise our malady,” he said. He insisted that we are obligated by God to “ensure that word and theory are grounded and expressed in a concrete, canonical, and therefore incarnated reality, ever faithful to the Gospel of Christ.” He offered his energy to his “older brother,” Archbishop Iakovos (Primate of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, and chairman of SCOBA), to the other Orthodox bishops in America, and to all the faithful towards the “realization of one local canonical Orthodox Church which will reveal that we are truly one body having one mind and one heart.”

Those who were present bear witness that this was an electrifying and inspiring moment. The messages of the two metropolitans brought the assembled clergy and laity to their feet in a standing ovation.

A historic meeting of the Orthodox bishops in North America November 30—December 1, 1994, gathered together the movement to unity in a focused, visionary way. Twenty-nine bishops met for two days at the Antiochian Village, in Ligonier, Pennsylvania, under the chairmanship of Archbishop Iakovos. The host was Metropolitan Philip of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese. There were papers and responses, as well as active, engaged dialogue in plenary sessions dedicated to two main themes: 1) the State of the Church in North America; 2) Mission and Evangelism.

In their “Statement on the Church in North America,” the bishops asserted that Orthodoxy in North America is one Church, and not multiple “jurisdictions.” They saw themselves and their clergy and people as rooted in “two hundred years of experience ... of preaching the Gospel and living the Orthodox Faith” in America. They agreed that they “cannot accept the term ‘diaspora’ as used to describe the Church in North America.” They found this term “ecclesiological problematic,” and diminishing “the fullness of the faith that we have lived and experienced here for the past two hundred years.”

They concluded that “in convening this present Conference of Bishops, we find ourselves to be an Episcopal Assembly, a precursor to a General Synod of Bishops.” They decided to convene the Episcopal Assembly on an annual basis “to enhance the movement toward administrative ecclesial unity in North America.”

The bishops encouraged unity at regional and local levels, praising the structures, organizations, and models of unity which already exist, and offering a living foundation on which to build.

In the “Statement of Mission and Evangelism” the bishops took mission and evangelism seriously, reflecting on the subject in two contexts: 1) the re-evangelization of the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe in the post-communist situation; 2) the spiritual crisis in the United States and Canada, with millions of people unchurched and societies finding themselves today in a spiritual and moral vacuum. They saw the Orthodox missionary calling as society-wide, not limited to immigrant and ethnic communities. They confessed that the work of evangelization, or re-evangelization, should be addressed to “those many people who call themselves Orthodox, and have indeed been baptized and chrismated in our churches, but whose lives are distant from the fullness of the Orthodox faith and the fullness of the Orthodox Church’s sacramental life.”

The Ligonier conference was certainly the fruit of a two-hundred year history. It testified to decades of effort towards unity. It was also a miracle. No one could or did predict that such unity and clarity of vision would be so unapologetically articulated.

Given all the developments described above, from the visit of Patriarch Dimitrios in 1990 to the address of Metropolitan Spyridon and Metropolitan Theodosius in 1994, it was startling and puzzling that the Church of Constantinople immediately rejected the Ligonier conference and its statements. It could certainly be anticipated that Constantinople and other churches would raise some questions and ask for some authoritative interpretations. No one at Ligonier imagined that there would be a rapid achievement of administrative unity. That would have been naive. Nevertheless, the Ligonier statements represented a realistic hope that the way forward was not only envisioned, but had also been charted, and that the Orthodox of North America would walk this road purposefully and united, supported and affirmed by the patriarchates and “mother churches,” on the one hand, and challenged and corrected by them, on the other.

In the aftermath of the Ligonier conference, as the Orthodox Church in America prepared for its next Council of bishops and clergy and lay delegates in July of 1995, the thoughts of many in the OCA turned to 1970. It was in 1970 that the Russian Orthodox Church granted autocephaly to its “daughter church” in America. The year 1995 thus marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of autocephaly.

These reflections have made the following conclusions compelling for a great many of the OCA’s members:

Autocephaly in 1970 was indeed the right and necessary step, and we should be grateful for it in 1995;

The OCA is not self-sufficient, but is dedicated to Orthodox mission and unity in America;

The OCA is committed to seeking the unity of all Orthodox “jurisdictions” in an Orthodox Church in North America that is canonically and administratively one Church;

The achievement of this goal requires the understanding, affirmation, and guidance of Constantinople and the other “mother churches”; and

Such understanding, affirmation, and guidance must be sought patiently and persistently.

On May 4, 1995, the member hierarchs of the Standing Conference of Bishops met in regular session in New York City, under the chairmanship of Archbishop Iakovos. Soberly they reviewed the events of Ligonier in the light of the rejection of the conference by the Patriarchate of Constantinople. And they expressed their determination to stay together, to explain to the “mother churches” the true meaning of the Ligonier statements.

The concluding passage in the Statement on Mission and Evangelization, adopted at Ligonier, Pennsylvania, on December 1, 1994 by the Conference of Bishops, is a fitting “mission statement” for the period ahead.

We Orthodox in North America commit ourselves to bringing our household into order for the sake of the preaching of the Good News of Jesus Christ...and His Presence in the Church through the descent of the Holy Spirit.